

CREATING LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS: THE PRINCIPLES BEHIND INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

*From the outset, the humanist educator's efforts must coincide with those of the student to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. The educator's efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, the humanist educator **must be a partner** of the students in ... relations with them. Paulo Friere*

The Principles of Partnership

Partnership is coming to be regarded as an empowering alternative to more common patriarchal models of human interaction. Today, in disciplines as diverse as anthropology, organizational theory, philosophy of science, and educational theory, theorists are constructing a new partnership mindset as an alternative to the traditional patriarchy model. Running through the writing in numerous disciplines are principles representing the foundation of a partnership worldview. Those principles, described below, are also the foundation of the partnership approach to Instructional Coaching.

Equality

Partnership involves relationships between equals. Thus each person's thoughts and beliefs are held to be valuable, and, although each individual is different, no individual decides for another. When this principle is applied to Instructional Coaching, it means that collaborating teachers are recognized as equal partners, and consequently no one's view is more important or valuable than any one else's.

Choice

In a partnership, one individual does not make decisions for another. Because partners are equal, they make their own individual choices and make decisions collaboratively. When this principle is applied to Instructional Coaching, it means that participant choice is implicit in every communication of content and, to the greatest extent possible, the process used to learn the content.

Dialogue

To arrive at mutually acceptable decisions, partners engage in dialogue. In a partnership, one individual does not impose, dominate, or control. Partners engage in conversation, learning together as they explore ideas. When this principle is applied to Instructional Coaching, it means Instructional Coaches (ICs) listen more than they tell. ICs avoid manipulation, engage participants in conversation about content, and think and learn with participants.

Praxis

Partnership should enable individuals to have more meaningful experiences. In partnership relationships, meaning arises when people reflect on ideas and then put those actions into practice. A requirement for partnership is that each individual is free to reconstruct and use content the way he or she considers it most useful. When this principle is applied to Instructional Coaching, it means that ICs and collaborating teachers focus their attention on how to use ideas in the classroom.

Voice

Partnership is multi-vocal rather than uni-vocal, and all individuals in a partnership require opportunities to express their point of view. Indeed, a primary benefit of a partnership is that each individual has access to a many perspectives rather than the one perspective of the leader. When this principle is applied to Instructional Coaching, it means that teachers should have the freedom to express their opinions about content being learned. Furthermore, since different teachers will have different opinions, ICs should embrace conversation that encourages people to express a variety of opinions.

Reflection

If we are creating a learning partnership, if our partners are equal with us, if they are free to speak their own minds and free to make real, meaningful choices, it follows that one of the most important choices they will make is how to make sense of whatever we are proposing they learn. Partners don't dictate to each other what to believe; they respect their partners' professionalism and provide them with enough information so that they can make their own decisions. When this principle is applied to Instructional Coaching, it means that ICs encourage collaborating teachers to consider ideas before adopting them. Indeed, Instructional Coaches recognize that reflective thinkers, by definition, have to be free to choose or reject ideas, or else they simply are not thinkers at all.

Reciprocity

In a partnership, all participants benefit from the success, learning, or experience of others--all members are rewarded by what one individual contributes. When this principle is applied to Instructional Coaching, it has two major implications. First, one of the coach's goals should be learning along with collaborating teachers. Thus, the coach learns about participants' classroom, the strengths and weaknesses of the content when seen as an application for that environment, multiple perspectives on the content being presented when seen through the eyes of teachers and students, and so on. Second, ICs operating within the partnership paradigm should believe that participant knowledge and expertise are as important as their own. They should have faith in participants' abilities to invent useful new applications of the content they are exploring.