

SELF-DIRECTED EVALUATION CONVERSATIONS: A GROWTH-PRODUCING PROCESS

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As widespread reform in teacher evaluation sweeps across the United States, school districts are responding by developing new professional performance review protocols for use in the evaluation process. Experts agree (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Hammond 2013; Silverberg & Jungwirth, 2014) however, that it is not the evaluation instrument, but the evaluation process, particularly the communication between the evaluator and the teacher, that will determine whether or not evaluation supports growth and learning. As stated by Danielson and McGreal (2000):

In general, activities that engage teachers in self-assessment and reflection on practice and activities that involve collaboration, will contribute to professional learning. This suggests that, to the extent possible, the teacher (rather than the administrator) should direct evaluation activities. Evaluation should provide maximum opportunities for self-directed inquiry. The teacher, in other words, should play as active a role as possible. (p. 61)

For a system to achieve this for individuals, Linda Darling-Hammond (2013) asserts that teacher evaluation needs to be part of a “teaching and learning process that supports continuous improvement” (p. 3). She believes such a system would not only benefit individual teachers but the profession as a whole, which in turn would ensure more effective support for student learning. A new system should also focus on collaborative, not competitive, processes. Arthur Costa (email communication, July 14, 2014) adds:

Another reason for promoting self-evaluation for teachers is that it models the same value that we hold for students. We spend far too much time and resources evaluating students and thus we rob them of the opportunities to evaluate themselves.

The maps and tools of Cognitive CoachingSM offer the skill set needed for administrators and supervisors to conduct an evaluation process that supports professional development and promotes self-directedness in those they are evaluating. There is little research that indicates traditional evaluation supports growth; there is a substantial body of research indicating Cognitive CoachingSM supports growth. Integrating Cognitive CoachingSM into the evaluation process brings a growth-producing dimension often missing from traditional evaluation. We call this integrated approach *self-directed evaluation*.

Self-directed evaluation uses structures and skills to engage the thinking of the person being evaluated in conversations about his/her performance. In these conversations, the evaluator intentionally builds the capacity of the person being

evaluated for self-managing, self-monitoring and self-modifying behaviors. According to Costa and Kallick (2004, pp. 51-52), self-directed people:

- clarify outcomes and gather relevant data;
- think flexibly;
- develop alternative strategies;
- draw on past knowledge;
- think about their thinking;
- persevere in generating alternative action plans;
- know how and where to turn when perplexed;
- reflect on experience and evaluate;
- analyze and construct meaning;
- are open to continuous learning;
- readily admit they have more to learn;
- can change self.

We see these behaviors as the outcomes of self-directed evaluation conversations. When teachers display these behaviors, we believe students achieve at higher levels.

Costa (email communication, July 14, 2014) further asserts:

The categories of excellence [used in a self-directed evaluation conversations] can be derived from many sources, Hattie, Danielson, Marzano, Silver and others. Any set of criteria may be used, based on research, values and staff agreements. Involving teachers in the development and application of these practices is another way for them to assess their own performance. The purpose is for self-mastery. Teachers' self-authoring of descriptions and indicators of what they will be doing and saying if they are using the practice effectively, promotes self-managing, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating. It also provides a mental rehearsal prior to performance. The intent is for teachers to describe the categories of behaviors, hold them in their head as they apply them, (self-monitoring) and then self-evaluate their performance and make plans for improvement. Each category should be sufficiently clear so that teachers can learn from the self and other-observed feedback about their behavior and to seek ways to improve.

Costa concludes, "School leaders should, instead of adopting someone else's domains and standards, build common agreements among staff and give them time and practice as a group in translating them into observable behaviors."

School districts' professional performance review protocols offer the what of evaluation – the knowledge and skills on which performance is being evaluated; self-directed evaluation conversations offers the how – the knowledge and skills to engage in dialogue about growth.

Cognitive CoachingSM is particularly appropriate for a growth-producing evaluation process for five reasons. Cognitive CoachingSM is:

- 1) focused on the thinking that produces behavior;
- 2) procedural knowledge, in addition to declarative knowledge;
- 3) research-based and congruent with current neuroscience;
- 4) a growth mindset;
- 5) trust-based.

1) Cognitive CoachingSM is focused on the thinking that produces behavior

An evaluator who supports a teacher's thinking will have a greater impact on the teacher's performance because it is the teacher's thinking that produces the behaviors that are being evaluated. A teacher who has the opportunity to decide what is good or poor, appropriate or inappropriate, effective or ineffective, is more likely to transfer these decisions into practice. This powerful approach to improving instructional practice focuses on the intellectual skills, perceptions, and decisions that underlie effective teaching.

"The mission of Cognitive CoachingSM is to produce self-directed persons with the *cognitive capacity* for high performance both independently and as members of a community" (Costa & Garmston, 2002, p.16). According to Ellison and Hayes (2006), the phrase *cognitive capacity* differentiates Cognitive CoachingSM from other models of coaching or supervision. The unique goal of this work is to develop an individual's ability to engage in higher level thinking, such as evaluating, analyzing, and inferring.

The focus on cognition aligns with the original intention of Morris Cogan (1973) in creating the *clinical supervision model*. "Cogan envisioned the purpose of clinical supervision as 'the development of a professionally responsible teacher who is analytical of his own performance, open to help from others, and self-directing' " (Costa & Garmston, p. 8).

Costa (email communication, July 14, 2014) comments:

For insights to be useful, they need to be generated from within, not given to individuals as conclusions. This is true for several reasons. Teachers will experience the adrenaline-like rush of insight only if they go through the process of making connections themselves. Defining the practice as actions creates a more vivid picture inside the mind of the teacher as to what they will be doing, saying, or feeling if they are performing the behavior. It is more likely that we can agree on actions than on definitions, inviting teachers to envision what they would see themselves doing or hear themselves saying if they are, for example, using powerful questions.

In addition, this would be true for breaking an old habit as well. When teachers envision what a behavior looks like and sounds like, it makes possible the elimination of undesirable habits. Change requires observing the pattern that we presently have and then making a conscious decision

to break that pattern. We can put our attention to what was missing. We can begin to attend to changing our behaviors and seeing the benefit when we do so.

To that end, Cognitive CoachingSM is about self-directed learning guided by skillful application of tools for planning, reflecting, problem-resolving, and calibrating.

Pink, (2009), maintains that external rewards or punishments (what he refers to as Motivation 2.0 or “the carrot and the stick”) do not work for complex, creative tasks like they did for what Pink calls “rule-based routine tasks” (p. 206). Instead, Pink says mastery, autonomy, and purpose are the most powerful motivators. He advocates abandoning the belief that if something is rewarded, the behavior increases, and that punishment can alter or extinguish unwanted behavior. Mastery is defined as our urge to get better at what we do; autonomy is the need to direct our own lives; and purpose is the need to do something that matters (Pink, 2009). Self-directed evaluation addresses the motivators of mastery (to continually improve), autonomy (self-directedness), and purpose (to serve a greater good).

This approach represents a major shift from top down models that seek to “install” behaviors in others. As one business manager who participated in Cognitive CoachingSM training expressed it, “Tell them what and how they should go about it”, and that will more likely “create compliant resistance than the open embracing of change” (Dyer, p. 89). Rather than this directive coming from an expert/boss, Cognitive CoachingSM offers the alternative of a constructivist approach, in which one’s own thinking and understanding informs one’s behavior. Renate and Jeffrey Caine (1997), who link discoveries in the neurosciences with educational practice, offer this reflection:

Perhaps the most significant thing we have confirmed for ourselves is that, although actions are important, the thinking that influences and shapes what we do is far more critical. Changing our thinking is the first thing we have to do both individually and collectively, because without that change we cannot possibly change what we really do on a day-to-day basis. Regardless of what new “method” or latest technique is attempted, the mind/brain will always choose to reduce such practices to fit entrenched assumptions and beliefs. To really restructure anything means to restructure our thinking and shift deep connections to our psyche. (p. vi)

The evaluator’s primary role, then, is to engage thinking that results in self-modification which will sustain longer lasting change. Far more important than simply telling people what to do, are developing rapport, trust, listening, and posing questions that support thinking. Cognitive CoachingSM, provides evaluators with the conversation structures and skills to engage teachers’ thinking so they can be self-managing, self-monitoring and self-modifying.

2) Cognitive CoachingSM is procedural knowledge, in addition to declarative knowledge

An evaluator who knows all the components of the evaluation process (declarative knowledge) still needs the skills (procedural knowledge) to engage in growth-producing conversations. Cognitive CoachingSM offers the maps and tools (procedural knowledge) to structure conversations around professional standards (declarative knowledge). Cauley (1986) wrote that procedural knowledge can be the “task specific rules, skills, actions, and sequences of actions employed to reach goals.” Marzano (2007) explains that procedural knowledge is oriented toward skills, strategies, or processes, while declarative knowledge is informational in nature.

When fully developed, procedural knowledge is performed at a level of automaticity, implementing a process as a whole, without consciously thinking about the discrete parts of the process. We see this in our most skillful teachers as they appear to effortlessly re-engage an off-task student or transition from one activity to another. We also see this in our most skillful evaluators as they listen, check for understanding, offer data and pose reflective questions, resulting in improved performance.

“For procedural knowledge to develop,” Marzano (2007) asserts, “it must be practiced” (p. 61). Learning and practicing Cognitive CoachingSM provides evaluators with the procedural knowledge they need to conduct conversations around performance criteria. Cognitive CoachingSM supports informed teacher decision-making through strategies that not only enhance teachers’ intellectual capacities, but also increases their capacity to modify themselves (e.g., behaviors, thinking, mindsets, knowledge, skills).

3) Cognitive CoachingSM is research-based and congruent with neuroscience

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of Cognitive CoachingSM since it was first developed in 1984, making it one of the most researched models of coaching in education. A clearinghouse of these studies is maintained by Jenny Edwards. Her *Cognitive CoachingSM: A Synthesis of the Research* (2014) includes benefits of Cognitive CoachingSM such as improved student test scores, growth in teacher efficacy, increased teacher reflection, and development of more professional school cultures.

Relevant research is being conducted by Richard Boyatzis (Kropko, 2010), distinguished university professor, and professor of organizational behavior, cognitive science and psychology at Case Western Reserve University. Dr. Boyatzis has used fMRI to track the diametrically opposed reactions in the human brain to both compassionate and critical coaching methods. If the individual being coached focuses on options, goals, and desired states—

hallmarks of the Cognitive CoachingSM model—instead of weaknesses, shortcomings, or criticizing, positive areas in the brain light up and stay lit for five to seven days. Even more importantly, the research showed that by “trying to fix a person,” or by pointing out shortcomings in the person, the brain sends out messages to defend itself from the perceived attack. People start to shut down and resist change.

Research is emerging in the neurosciences that has retrospectively supported the fundamental principles and approach of Cognitive CoachingSM. Rock (2009), offers such support. He asked us to imagine “what it is like when you interact with someone who makes you notice what’s good about yourself, who is clear with his expectations, who lets you make decisions, who connects with you on a human level, and who treats you fairly” (pp. 196-197). Rock asserts that the brain has social needs that must be met to function at its best. He developed the acronym, S.C.A.R.F., to assist us in remembering and understanding the critical social needs of the human brain. The social needs are *Status*, *Certainty*, *Autonomy*, *Relatedness* and *Fairness*:

- An individual seeks **status** in an organization. In an evaluation system where feedback includes answers and solutions, the evaluator’s status is raised and the teacher’s status is lowered. Providing feedback in the form of data and questions allows teachers to find their own solutions and increases the personal sense of status.
- We are hardwired for **certainty**. Many people find personal or institutional change to be extremely difficult and stressful; the implementation of new evaluation systems with high visibility and high stakes is radical change. Evaluators who build trusting relationships with staff members increase feelings of certainty and decrease feelings of ambiguity.
- **Autonomy** is the need to feel in control of one’s life and to have choices. When evaluators provide teachers with choices for self-improvement and self-direction, rather than micro-manage, they are supporting the brain’s need for autonomy.
- **Relatedness** is the need is to feel connected to others and to collaborate. It is supported by the mirror neurons in the brain that allow us to feel empathy for others. By establishing and sustaining professional learning communities, evaluators support the brain’s need for relatedness.
- Finally, humans have a strong sense of **fairness**, which is as critical to well-being as food and shelter. When a sense of fairness is present, there is an increase in positive brain activity in the prefrontal cortex. Implementing an evaluation system grounded in shared standards and processes significantly contributes to a sense of fairness.

An evaluation process that is grounded in both research and neuroscience results in reduced anxiety, increased positive perceptions about the process of evaluation, and improved student learning. This is especially critical, given the sweeping changes that are taking place in teacher evaluation across the country.

4) Cognitive CoachingSM promotes a growth mindset

Presupposing that people are not broken, and do not need to be fixed is a basic tenet of Cognitive CoachingSM. Holding the positive presuppositions that people are essentially good, that they think, and that they act with positive intentions, supports their growth.

According to Dweck (2006), when people have a “growth mind-set” they believe that intelligence can be developed through education and hard work; that slipups are based on lack of effort and can be remedied; and that challenges are energizing. On the other hand, when people have a “fixed mind-set” they believe that intelligence is a fixed trait, and that human beings are powerless to change. Having to work hard means a person is dumb, and challenges just make mistakes more likely, causing a person to look less smart.

Dweck (2006) suggested that the “fixed” mind-set can be recognized when someone says that “I feel smart when I don’t make mistakes,” or “When I finish something first and it’s perfect,” or “When something is easy for me, but others can’t do it.” People with a “growth” mind-set might say that they feel smart “When it’s really hard, and I try really hard and I can do something I couldn’t do before.” For two years, Dweck (2006) followed two groups of students of similar academic standing who were transitioning to junior high school. The “fixed” mind-set students showed an immediate drop off in grades and did worse over the two years. The “growth” mind-set students showed an increase in their grades over the two years.

Dweck (2006) offered another study, in which those praised for intelligence became discouraged when given hard problems. Their performance declined, even on easier problems. Those praised for effort showed greater persistence, and their performance improved.

In still another study, researchers found that managers who had a fixed mind-set were less likely to seek or welcome feedback from their employees than were managers with a growth mind-set, who saw themselves as works-in-progress. After supervisors learned more about the value and principles of a growth mind-set, they became more willing to coach their employees (Dweck, 2006). Cognitive CoachingSM supports evaluators in presuming positive intentions and believing that humans continue to grow cognitively. This growth mindset results in generative professional conversations.

5) Cognitive CoachingSM is trust-based

“Trust is the glue that binds community members to one another” (Garmston & Wellman, 2009, p. 17). Tschannen-Moran (2004) defined trust as “the willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (p. 17).

This is equally true for teacher communities, classroom communities, and parent communities. When all three parties hold the above expectations for their relationships, and these expectations are grounded in shared goals and values, trust is a powerful resource for learning.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) in their seminal work in Chicago schools, named four criteria for discernment of trust: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity.

- **Respect** comes in the form of basic civility and a willingness to listen deeply to what each person has to say. Parents, students, and teachers need opportunities to talk with and influence each other and to believe that they can positively affect educational outcomes.
- **Competence** is the sense that each party has the ability to carry out its appropriate roles and produce desired outcomes. This applies to both academic results and teacher-student relationships. When incompetence goes unchecked, it erodes trust and undermines shared efforts toward improving learning.
- **Personal regard for others** means that we treat each other with mutual support and caring, as people rather than roles. We are a social species, wired for relationships and reciprocity. Extending ourselves to and for others is like making a deposit in a bank account; the interest in this account compounds with each deposit.
- **Integrity** is the congruence between saying and doing. In trusting relationships, this means we believe that a sense of morality and ethical behavior is operating in others and in the ways we are interacting. Following through with agreements and commitments is a key aspect of integrity.

What is the result of having these four elements of trust present? Bryk and Schneider (2002) concluded “...schools performing in the top quartile on standardized tests were more often schools with high levels of trust than those performing in the bottom quartile” (p. 111). They also examined the 100 schools that had made the greatest and least annual gains on standardized tests and analyzed each school’s survey results on trusting relationships. They found that schools reporting strong trust links in 1994 were three times more likely to report eventual improvements in reading and mathematics scores than those where trust levels were low. By 1997, schools with high levels of trust had a one-in-two chance of being in the “improving” category, compared with school with low levels of trust, which had only a one-in-seven chance.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) concluded, "Schools that reported low levels of trust both in 1994 and 1997 had virtually no chance of showing improvement in either reading or mathematics" (p. 111). Cognitive CoachingSM supports evaluators in building trusting relationships. As Margaret Wheatley (1992) reminds us, "Relationships are all there is" (p.19).

Conclusion

If we are to make a difference in the current achievement and future lives of students, it is imperative that we do all we can to support the growth and development of teachers and leaders. Educational leaders (Costa & Garmston, 2013 Rev; Fullan, 1993; Garmston & Wellman, 2013 Rev) believe that to make a difference in our schools, we must create cultures of collaboration and inquiry. Self-directed evaluation conversations have a fractal quality in which self-directedness pervades the culture of the system and becomes a norm for everyone.

Others (Bryk & Schneider 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004) emphasized the role of trust in developing such cultures. Trusted leaders who are skilled collaborators and inquirers, are more likely to establish and maintain such school cultures. As part of the culture, trust, collaboration and inquiry are nowhere more important than in the evaluation process.

In their recent review of evaluation models across the United States, Silverberg and Jungwirth (2014) concluded:

A huge cultural shift for many teachers and administrators is making the shift to an evaluation system built on reflection, self-assessment, accountability, and collaborative goal-setting. This new way of being is supported by dialogue, collaborative analysis of data, and coaching. Collaboration and coaching require a whole new identity as an 'evaluator' and a new set of skills to nurture and grow effective teachers." (pp. xvi-xvii)

Self-directed evaluation supports this shift and reflects the knowledge, skills and perceptions needed to develop a new identity as an evaluator. Leaders who use structures and skills to engage in growth-producing conversations as the evaluator, build the capacity of the person being evaluated. It is this capacity that will ensure that change is intrinsic, intentional, and sustainable. The future is in our schools and classrooms today; only with such change can we have a positive influence on the future.

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