



COACH'S NOTEBOOK

Kathy Perret

USE SUMMERTIME REFLECTION TO RECHARGE YOUR PRACTICE

By delving deep into our experiences, successes, challenges, and methods, coaches can identify areas for growth and set meaningful goals.

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Instructional coaches and school leaders dedicate significant time to encouraging teachers' reflection, as it can be the cornerstone of improving teacher practice and student learning. But are you allocating sufficient time for your own reflective practices?

Now that it's June, you've likely completed another school year. In education, most of us have the privilege of concluding a school year and rejuvenating ourselves for the next one. Reflection is crucial to the recharging process. As authors Pete Hall and Alisa Simeral (2017) write, "The more reflective we are, the more effective we are" (p. 21).

This summer, I urge you to make time for reflection. Settle down in a cozy spot with a notebook or digital device. Clear your mind of distractions and think back on your work, goals, and learning over the past year.

I've created some questions to get you started. For each question, jot down your thoughts and expand on them. Use the AWE (And What Else?) question technique (Stanier, 2016) to seek further insights. Allow ample time to go through the process. Write down your thoughts, take breaks, and return to add more. Include your own categories and questions to make the process your own.

R - Relationships: Reflect on the relationships you built with the teachers you coached, as well as challenges or successes you experienced in building trust and rapport.

E - Effectiveness: Reflect on the effectiveness of your coaching strategies and approaches, and consider changes or improvements you can make.

F - Focus: Reflect on your coaching goals and the extent to which you were able to focus on them, and consider strategies to help you maintain focus and prioritize your coaching.

L - Learning: Reflect on your own learning as a coach, including professional learning you pursued, coaching techniques you tried, and successes or challenges you experienced.

E - Equity: Reflect on your coaching practices through an equity lens, and consider how you can continue to support all teachers and students, regardless of their backgrounds.

C - Culture: Reflect on the school culture and the ways in which your coaching impacted it, and consider ways to foster a positive and inclusive school culture.

T - Targets: Reflect on the targets you want to set for yourself, and consider strategies or action steps you can take to achieve those targets.

In addition, analyze your thoughts, identify patterns, and set goals for the next school year. Consider breaking larger goals into actionable steps with the help of a colleague, mentor, or coach.

One useful tool for continuous reflection is the ACT method that Kenny McKee and I

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Traditionally, school has been designed and driven in a way that privileges the adult perspective. Adults have determined the length of the school day and school year, what classes count as credit, and what young people should — and now, more prevalently and troublingly, should not read. Often, even large-scale youth activism efforts such as the 1964 protest of 464,000 students against school segregation in New York City or the hundreds of thousands of students who participated in the 2018 March for Our Lives movement hasn't led to the immediate changes young people demand for themselves, other young people, and their futures.

From an equity standpoint, I can't help but wonder about the role ageism — discrimination on the grounds of a person's age — plays in our unwillingness to value the voices and desires of young people for their own learning. Adultcentrism bias — the tendency to view children and their realities from an adult perspective — can unintentionally lead to inaccurate judgments, misuse of power, and undermining the strengths and abilities of our young people (Petr, 1992). We convince ourselves we are making the right decisions for young people without asking them what they think.

I even found myself engaging in this behavior with my son last summer. I

did what I thought was best for him by finding opportunities for acceleration, and it wasn't until my son resisted that I bothered to even ask him how he wanted to engage in formal and informal learning experiences over the summer. As a parent, I believe I have the responsibility to guide him, but I can also honor his personhood and engage him in dialogue about how best to prepare him and support him in the future that he wants for himself. I believe the same is true of educators.

Collectively, educators need to start thinking about school as an intergenerational endeavor, a place where there is meaningful interaction between members of different generations. This would require we learn to share power with students and invite them to the table when making decisions that impact them.

This practice can easily start in professional learning. For example, when engaging in a lesson study, in addition to reviewing student work, we can ask a few students to share their perspectives on the content or the teaching strategies, and we can use their voices in our analysis of a lesson. Another example can be to administer a student survey at the end of each semester and use the data to inform professional learning for the next semester. Finally, we can always invite a panel of students — especially

those traditionally marginalized — at any point in the year to learn about their experiences in our schools. This will take a mental shift, and I include myself in that. I would call myself a student-centered educator; however, as a facilitator, I have often fallen short on identifying opportunities to include youth voice in professional learning. I'm working to change that, and I invite others to join me.

What we lost in the past few years is incalculable, and we can't address it by simply throwing more at our students in our current systems and paradigms. What we can and should do is make the time we have now count and work with students to figure out how. Students are the ones who have to live in the systems that adults create. Therefore, they can offer an honest perspective and keen insight about how adults can transform educational systems for their benefit. When we co-design with students or follow their lead, it becomes more than advocating for them. The act of working together with students democratizes our institutions.

REFERENCE

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described in our book, *Compassionate Coaching*. We suggest using it at the end of each week during the school year.

A = What **actions** have I completed toward my goals?

C = What **changes** have I noticed?

T = What **things** do I need to do to get closer to my desired results?

By delving deep into our experiences, successes, challenges, and methods, coaches can identify areas

for growth and set meaningful goals. Through this process, we can continue to make a positive impact on the students and teachers we serve.

As you prepare for the school year, continue reflecting and growing. And never forget the impact you have on those around you.

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