

Coaching Tips



INTRODUCTION

Coaching is one method of teacher professional development that helps educators improve their teaching. With the introduction of new instructional materials and methodologies that often accompany educational interventions, it's not enough to provide one or two trainings.¹ Coaching offers ongoing, in-class support to help educators develop their skills gradually and apply new concepts in real time.

Coaching sessions should be conducted by a teacher educator immediately after concluding a lesson observation (and in some cases, coaches may co-teach alongside the teacher). For coaching sessions that take place after a lesson, the coach should begin with dialogue on what went well during the lesson. Then, coaches and teachers should discuss 1–2 areas for improvement. Coaches may ask teachers to brainstorm solutions to arising challenges, and the coach may also provide direct advice for solving problems. Coaches should end each session with encouragement and praise for all that the teacher did well.

Coaching Tips

There are several factors that influence the effectiveness of coaching practices. Coaches in developing contexts might have varying levels of experience in teaching and mentoring. Their experience levels, skills, preparation and rapport that they build with teachers also has direct impacts on the results of the coaching.² New coaches may benefit from practical examples of how to respond to classroom scenarios.

FHI 360 has compiled a bank of sample “coaching tips” that can be used as part of coaching training or toolkits. These tips give practical examples to coaches on how to address common problems, but they should be contextualized appropriately before adoption. Since the below tips cannot possibly encompass all appropriate feedback for any given context, they should serve as a guide, but coaches should use their judgement when applying them to a specific situation and should feel free to adapt as needed.

¹ Pflapsen, A. (2018). Coaching in early grade reading programs: Evidence, experiences and recommendations. *A Global Reading Network Resource Prepared by University Research Co., LLC.(URC) under the Reading within REACH initiative for USAID's Building Evidence and Supporting Innovation to Improve Primary Grade Assistance for the Office of Education (E3/ED).*

² Bean, R. M. (2014). The power of coaching: Improving early grade reading instruction in developing countries. *Washington, DC: USAID.*



COACHING TIPS FOR GENERAL PEDAGOGY

If the teacher did not have the appropriate teaching aids for the class, then:

Ask: In this lesson, did you have all the materials you needed to teach the lesson? Are there any materials you think were missing that would have made the lesson better?

Provide a tip: Look at the lesson plan with the teacher and help the teacher identify which materials were necessary to properly teach the lesson. Point out how the materials are necessary to achieve the goals of the lesson. Help the teacher brainstorm how to obtain or create any missing materials.

If the teacher did not clearly state the objectives of the lesson at the beginning of class, then:

Ask: What was the objective of the lesson you taught? Do you think that learners understood the objective of the lesson?

Provide a tip: It's important to have a clear objective in every lesson, and to tell learners what the objective is. If learners know the objective, they will be able to focus on achieving it. A clear objective also allows the teacher to assess learning during the lesson.

If the teacher did not follow the lesson plan properly, then:

Ask: Look back at your lesson plan for today. Are there any activities that you missed? Why did you miss them?

Provide a tip: Explain that all activities are included in the lesson for a reason. Of course, sometimes a teacher might need to adapt the lesson if learners do not understand or may run out of time because pupils need substantial feedback. However, most of the time, the teacher should try to complete all activities.

If the teacher did not check for pupils' understanding, then:

Ask: How do you typically monitor learning in your class?

Provide a tip: Explain that it is very important to monitor learning in a variety of ways. This includes asking questions, examining pupils' work, and watching how pupils behave and react. Through these means, you can tell if pupils are learning. It's also very important to move away from the blackboard and walk through the classroom. This enables you to see pupils' work. Pupils will also be more likely to pay attention simply because you are standing or walking near them.

If the teacher did not provide constructive feedback on learner responses, then:

Ask: What type of feedback did you give to learners during this lesson? How did you respond to student who gave incorrect answers?

Provide a tip: If a teacher sees a learner doing something correctly, they should praise and encourage the learner and highlight what they did well. For example, they can say something like, "I like how Abba pointed to the text while he read." If the teacher sees a learner doing something incorrectly, instead of immediately sending the learner away from the board or asking another student, they should ask the learner guiding questions to help them make corrections. If the learner continues to be incorrect, the teacher can try modelling how to find the answer for them.



COACHING TIPS FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

If the class was a bit unruly during the lesson, then:

Ask: It seems that learner behaviour is a challenge in this class. What do you think is causing the behaviour challenges?

Provide a tip: Explain that classroom management requires teachers to use a variety of strategies at the same time. These strategies can include keeping aisles clear to walk through; using call-and-response chants to get pupils' attention; explaining classroom rules to learners and keeping them posted on the wall to refer to; being consistent with rules, such as only calling on learners with their hands raised; and keeping the class moving forward at a good pace so that learners do not get restless. Good behaviour should be consistently rewarded with praise.

If the teacher had difficulty enforcing the classroom rules, then:

Ask: In your class, have you discussed the rules with your learners? Why do you think some learners might have difficulty following the rules?

Provide a tip: It is important to clearly establish rules at the beginning of the year, but if the teacher has not done so already, they should consider spending a few minutes at the beginning of each class explaining the rules. These can be simple rules such as raising hands before speaking, using quiet voices, arriving on time, and not pushing or hitting other learners. Post the rules on the wall of the classroom and remind learners consistently of the rules when needed. Understand that it may take several days and many reminders for learners to internalize the rules and follow them, but providing constant feedback will help them more quickly accept classroom expectations.

If the teacher had difficulty grabbing learners' attention at the beginning of class or during transitions, then:

Ask: It seemed like learners got distracted when they had to switch from one activity to another. Why do you think this might be? Is there anything that can be done to manage those transitions?

Provide a tip: One of the easiest ways to get learners' attention at once is to use chants and claps. Instead of calling on each learner by name to get their attention, which can be very difficult and time consuming in large classes, teachers can try to get children's attention using a fun song or chant. Chants and claps are better than yelling or beating because they do not create fear or tension in a classroom. Instead, they help learners associate learning with enjoyment. Teachers can develop a special chant or song for their classrooms or use ones that are common within their school or cultural context.

If the teacher struggled to keep all learners on task for the duration of the class, then:

Ask: Do you find it difficult to keep all learners focused on your while you are teaching? Do you have any strategies for keeping learners' attention? What is the most difficult part of ensuring that all learners are engaged throughout your demonstration of the lesson?

Provide a tip: Explain that for learners who have a hard time remaining on task, it will be important to support learners throughout the lesson in a variety of ways. This includes directing all learners' attention to the board and any supporting pictures or graphics that are on the wall as teaching occurs. When singing songs, for example, teachers should point to each of the words and any corresponding pictures as they sing them, especially when teaching a new song for the first time. When pointing to different objects



COACHING TIPS FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

on the board, have learners repeat the name of the object after the teacher. Give distracted learners a special job to do in the class or in their groups to help motivate them to stay focused. Teachers can also try pairing a younger learner with an older learner to help the younger learner stay on task.

If the teacher did not use at least two of the following: group, pair, individual, or whole class work, then:

Ask: In your lesson today, I noticed that you taught the whole class all together throughout the lesson. Have you tried other types of structures, and if so, how does that work?

Provide a tip: Although whole class teaching may seem easiest, using group, pair, and individual work provides more opportunities for learners to participate. For example, teachers can ask learners to check one another's work in pairs, or to complete a task in small groups. This way, learners can teach each other. Teachers can also give learners individual work, such as writing practice. During individual work, teachers can circulate to see how individuals are progressing.



COACHING TIPS FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHING

If the classroom is not arranged to promote good management or movement, then:

Ask: Are there any adjustments to the classroom set-up that you think might make participation easier for the learners? Are there any adjustments that you think might make teaching easier for you?

Provide a tip: Explain that the classroom should be arranged to ensure that the sitting arrangement in the class is done in such a way that there are walkways between learners to enable the teacher to walk freely to each learner in the class and monitor their work. Girls and boys should be seated equidistantly from the teacher (i.e. boys should not only sit in the front of the room and girls at the back, but instead, if culturally appropriate boys can sit on one side of the class and girls on the other) and learners with physical disabilities should be able to access their work groupings and the board via clear pathways.

If the instruction was not adjusted to promote participation from all learners, including marginalized learners or those with disabilities, then:

Ask: Did you think that some of your learners were left behind while you were teaching? What do you think was the reason for that? What do you think you could have done to take care of this?

Provide a tip: Brainstorm with the teacher to realize the importance of identifying individual differences among the learners. Encourage the teacher to ensure lessons are adjusted for learners who may need remediation, have physical disabilities, or who finish their work quickly. Some learners may be idle during assignments because they finished before others, and they may need an extra task (for example, helping other learners).

If a positive attitude was not expressed towards all girls and boys (engaging boys and girls equally) – including learners with special needs, then:

Ask: If you think back to this lesson, can you recall which learners you interacted with the most? Can you recall which learners you interacted with the least?

Provide a tip: Brainstorm with the teacher and agree that inclusive lesson delivery also involves not giving preferential treatment to a particular gender or group of learners (i.e. those with or without a disability). Instead, brainstorm ways to improve inclusiveness (for example, alternating between calling on girls and boys, not ignoring pupils with special needs).

If the entire lesson was taught from the front of the class, then:

Ask: Where is the easiest place in the room for you to teach? Do you think that place provides learners with the best, most accessible way to learn from you?

Provide a tip: Explain to the teacher that remaining in one place, specifically at the front of the room, for the entire lesson does not provide an equal opportunity for learning to everyone in the class. Teachers can center different tasks around different locations or learners in the room. Songs, for example, can be led by learners at their seats, all around the classroom. Teachers should try to move around the classroom frequently when teaching. Even though the board is located at the front, not all demonstrations need to occur there. This will allow learners in all corners of the room to experience learning up close.



COACHING TIPS FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHING

If the teacher has a hard time engaging learners who cannot see from the back of the classroom or cannot hear their instructions clearly, then:

Ask: Do you have learners in your classroom who have difficulty seeing or hearing? What are some ways that you might be able to provide extra supports for them?

Provide a tip: Teachers can always move learners who have difficulty seeing to the front of the classroom. For learners with visual impairments, allow for tactile experiences while singing songs. For example, allow them to feel the pictures that are used to highlight certain words or model numbers while teaching. Assign learners with these special needs learning buddies in small groups or provide additional time for them to understand the instructions before beginning their independent work. If learners have difficulty hearing, teachers should ensure that they face learners while singing songs and try to avoid turning their back on learners. Ask learners to face the teacher and watch their lips as they sing. Teachers should use photos and diagrams posted on walls to depict the action of the song or instructions and point to those pictures or images while speaking, so that learners are better able to understand the meaning of words.



COACHING TIPS FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY

If learners have difficulty writing their letters or numbers, then:

Ask: Did you find that many of your learners struggled to write their letters or numbers? Do you think there are more comprehensive instructions or modelling you can do ahead of time, so that learners are better set-up for success?

Provide a tip: When learners are just learning how to write, many of them, especially in the younger grades, will still need individual supports to write their letters or numbers. However, providing more modelling at the beginning of the task, can help the many learners conceptualize what they are about to do. After the teacher models letter writing on the board, they should stand with their back to learners and hold their finger in the air. They can make the letter in the air and ask learners to follow the movement to ensure they understand the correct pattern and shape. Then, teachers can ask learners to pick up their pencils, raise them in the air, and immediately put their pencil on the page to write. This will help teachers know which learners are ready to begin without further instructions. Teachers can also try breaking down the process into smaller steps. First, they should show learners how to hold a pencil. Then, demonstrate how to draw a straight line. Ask learners to follow the teacher's example. Repeat with curved lines. Place a sample sheet with pre-drawn straight and curved lines at the centre of each desk to aid in comprehension.

If learners have difficulty reading words, then:

Ask: How many of your learners do you think can read words? How do you know? When a learner cannot read a word, what do you do?

Provide a tip: If learners have trouble reading a word, teachers can help the learner break down the word. Teachers can ask learners to identify the first letter or syllable, or if there are any letters in the word they recognize. If it is a long word, teachers can cover part of the word with their hand and ask the learner to read the word bit by bit. If a picture is available near the word, the teacher can also guide the child to look at the picture and guess the word.

If learners have difficulty reading aloud a passage or story, then:

Ask: How many of your learners can read aloud a short story? What do you do when children get stuck?

Provide a tip: When children are first learning how to read, teachers should ask learners to put their finger in the air and point at the first word, so that they track with the text they are reading. Teachers can ask learners to follow along by pointing to each word as they read. Learners should practice reading individually, in pairs, and in as a whole class. The teacher should also provide one-on-one assistance to children who are struggling. When working one-on-one, the teacher should tailor instruction to the child's level, such as focusing on just one sentence or phrase.



COACHING TIPS FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY

If learners have difficulty counting numbers, then:

Ask: Do many of the learners in your classroom have difficulty counting? Since you want to ensure that learners understand numbers and their meaning without just memorizing them in order, what are some strategies that you can use to support their learning?

Provide a tip: Teachers should allow learners to count with a friend first in their small groups before asking them do so individually or aloud in front of the class. Teachers can represent all numbers with tangible objects such as seeds, sticks, bottle caps, or stones that learners can pick up and touch while counting. Teachers can ask learners to demonstrate counting in different ways using objects, their fingers, or their body parts, for example. Learners should count in fun and interactive ways such as through blinking the set number of times, completing the correct number of jumps or hops, or stomping or clapping a certain number of times according to their abilities.

If the teacher has difficulty teaching addition or subtraction in ways that best meet the needs of the learners in their classroom, then:

Ask: Do you think that learners in your classroom understand the basics of addition and subtraction? Are there ways that you can think to break down the process step-by-step to help them think through little pieces of information at a time?

Provide a tip: Teachers should encourage learners to use manipulatives to help them in solving the problems. These can be bands of ten, number lines, number charts, or bundles of ten. Creating visual representations of charts and number lines that can be placed for all learners to see at the front of the room can be very helpful. Teachers can model and show learners different ways to think about a problem, such as through concrete objects, a picture, or a story. Learners can come to the front of the room to actively participate in demonstrations, so that learning becomes more tangible, especially at first.