



Coaching Communication Skills

Committed Listening

When you listen to a teacher with commitment, you convey that you care about what the teacher has to say and that you are listening in order to fully understand the issue from their perspective. You are also listening to gather information that will inform your feedback and to allow the teacher to refine their thinking as they speak at length and without interruption. This last point cannot be underscored enough: most of us do not listen to others for very long before we interject with questions, advice, or “me-too” anecdotes! Committed listening requires patience and the ability to quiet our own judgement of the content being presented. The benefit of committed listening is fully understanding the specific thoughts and actions the teacher is sharing before you move toward responses and co-developed solutions.

Paraphrasing

The next communication skill, paraphrasing, is closely related to the skill of committed listening. In fact, you cannot skillfully paraphrase a teacher’s thoughts and feelings without listening deeply first. Paraphrasing is when the listener summarizes or captures the essence of what the speaker has expressed. Paraphrasing sends the message that the listener is interested in the speaker and trying to understand them. Most importantly, paraphrasing gives the speaker the opportunity to clarify their thinking in response to the paraphrase, and lays a path for thoughtful communication.

Paraphrasing is also an effective strategy to use before asking a question. Without paraphrasing, questioning may feel more like an interrogation. Your question is more likely to engage the teacher in a productive conversation when you paraphrase their concern or idea first.

Communication Skill	Examples
Committed Listening	Waiting for the speaker to finish their thoughts before responding Setting aside judgement, solution finding, or personal stories as you listen
Paraphrasing	“So, you’re feeling....” “You’re noticing that....” “It sounds like you’re wondering about....”



Coaching Communication Skills

Presuming Positive Intent and Powerful Questions

The language that we use matters as we form relationships with teachers and engage them in coaching conversations. Presuming positive intent refers to a mindset and a related communication style that effective coaches and leaders develop. Coaches who presume positive intent operate with the assumption that teachers want to be their best and do their best. Using positive language encourages positive actions. In contrast, expressing negative assumptions can lead to defensiveness and derail the conversation.

Consider the difference between these two questions:

Negative	<p>Do you have a plan for teaching math? I don't see that in your daily schedule.</p> <p><i>This question presumes that the teacher has not planned for math.</i></p>
Positive	<p>What has been helpful as you plan for math activities throughout the day?</p> <p><i>This question presumes that the teacher has already started thinking about incorporating math into their day, even if there is no evidence in their schedule yet.</i></p>

The positive question assumes that the teacher has already thought, planned, or done what is being discussed. Powerful questions based on the language of positive intent have the potential to inspire a teachers' best self and lead to greater outcomes.

Powerful Question Examples

Negative

Don't you think there's a lot of wasted instructional time in the morning as you get ready for circle time?

Did you ask inferential questions during story time today?

Have you thought about teaching your students a calm-down strategy?

Positive

How do you and your co-teacher help each other with lesson and materials preparation? In your experience, what systems work best?

What type of questions do you like to ask during story time?

What have you found to be your best strategies for supporting students' emotional regulation?



Coaching Communication Skills

Reflective Feedback

Feedback has a powerful effect on learning for both students and adult learners, including teachers. However, the type of feedback and how it is provided determines its effectiveness. Unfortunately, the most common forms of feedback that we receive are not as valuable as they could be. These include judgement (“Great lesson” or “Important information was missing”), personal observation (“I like the way...”), or questions (“Are you planning to...”).

Reflective feedback supports the teacher’s thoughtful reflection and decision making. This type of feedback flows naturally after you have spent time engaging in committed listening and paraphrasing during a conversation with a teacher. Teachers perceive reflective feedback that presumes positive intent as honest, respectful, and thoughtful. There are three main options for reflective feedback: asking for clarity, identifying value in the teacher’s idea or plan, and posing reflective questions that support teacher thinking and goal-setting.

CHALK coaching questions and prompts are examples of reflective feedback.

Reflective Feedback Types and Examples

Clarify

This type of feedback ensures that coach and teacher are talking about the same thing. It gives the teacher an opportunity to clarify their idea or thought.

“How did your students respond to the process?”

“How do you see this curriculum as different from...?”

Value Potential

A coach communicates that the teacher’s idea or action has positive elements and moves towards building on them.

“You have really thought deeply about..”

“The strength of the idea is....”

Reflective Questions for Possibilities

These types of questions create space for the coach and teacher to discuss concerns, considerations, or options toward improvement.

“What learning gaps, if any, did you notice in your students’ during that activity?”

“What next steps are you thinking will be important for you to take?”