

Transcript of a Coaching Conversation

Background—Coach’s description:

Shannon is a veteran teacher. She’s primarily taught upper grades but for the last three years has been teaching 1st grade. She strongly believes that school should be fun. This school has been launching a major STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) initiative and she’s expected to teach STEM lessons daily. In her class, during STEM time, what I’ve observed is that she gives her students blocks to play with. This is all I’ve ever observed them doing during STEM time. We’ve worked together a little this fall on her guided reading program and she seems fairly receptive to that coaching.

<p style="text-align: center;">Transcript</p>	<p>Which coaching strategies does the coach use? What stances does she take? Which analytical frameworks is she applying?</p>
<p>Coach: Shannon, I’m so glad we have half an hour to check in. Thanks for making this time available. I’ve really been wanting to check in with you and hear about how guided reading has been going.</p> <p>Teacher: Yeah, it’s hard to find time for this kind of stuff. [Teacher is shuffling papers around the table].</p> <p>Coach: Could you clarify what you mean by “this kind of stuff?”</p> <p>T: Meeting with you. Coaching. I know I’m supposed to meet with you but I have a lot to do. I know people think that because I’m experienced I have it all together, but there’s always just so much to do—so many endless demands from administration. How are we ever supposed to get to teaching when we’re asked to do so much paperwork and planning and phone calls home? This isn’t what kids need and they’re not going to have good memories of first grade with this new curriculum. [Teacher puts papers away and sits down and faces me.] But anyway, let me answer your question so we can get through this. Guided reading is going fine. Yeah, I think it’s going good. I mean the small group I work with during guided reading time is good, the rest of the kids are out of control, they’re crazy, but the group that I work with does good.</p> <p>C: I’m glad to hear you feel it’s going well. Tell me more about that. What makes you feel it’s going well?</p>	

T: The kids are doing what they're supposed to do. When they're in front of me, that's what I told you already, they're doing what I tell them and they're quiet. But the rest of them are out of control. I just don't know what to do about them.

C: Is that what you'd like to talk about now—the kids who are out of control? Would that be the most helpful thing for us to think through together?

T: Yeah, I think so.

C: Ok, why don't you tell me about what you'd like to see them doing.

T: Well, I'd like to see them just being quiet and doing what they're supposed to do and I mean some of them are smart kids, they are. During STEM time a few days ago, I saw one group of advanced kids making these Bay Blades and they were really great—really big and really good. There was another group that just had little ones, but my advanced group really had good Bay Blades. I was impressed.

C: That's great. It sounds like they're creative and you'd like to see more creativity from your students. Did I get that right?

T: Yeah. Why can't they all be like that? Why do I have to teach them to be creative? Those others were just making these simple little Bay Blades like they always do.

C: So, Shannon, I'm curious about something. When you talk about that group of "advanced kids," I'm wondering—because Bay Blades seem like a thing that usually boys are into—were all of those "advanced kids" boys?

T: Um...Yeah...I guess so...Yeah, they were. [Silence for about 10 seconds]

C: Ok. Thanks for clarifying that. Could I ask you to call to mind a girl in your class who you really like, who brings a smile to your face? Perhaps a girl who is solidly performing—who doesn't have any big behavior or academic challenges?

T: Yeah, Maria. She's a good girl, always smiling and happy. A good student. [Teacher is smiling.]

C: Great—I can tell by the expression on your face that she makes you feel happy, that you care about her. Tell me, what was Maria doing during that time that the boys were building Bay Blades?

T: Oh, she was playing with blocks. Just building blocks. She was being good.

C: Ok. So, let me ask you a question, Shannon, and I want you to just say *the first thing* that comes to mind. Ok? [Teacher nods.] What do you think Maria will be doing when she's 23 years old?

T: [No hesitation.] Oh, she'll probably be a mama of 4 or 5. Yeah, probably 4 or 5 kids running around her house.

C: Ok. [A few seconds of silence.] Shannon, would you be willing to explore your thinking behind this? [Teacher nods.] I'm curious why you think that's what she'll be doing? Where does that idea come from?

T: Well, because that's what's all around here! That's what she sees! Her mama had 4 or 5 by 23, and her grandmother, and her aunts—I've got her cousin in my class too—that's just what's around. I mean she's a smart kid, but that's what's around.

C: Ok, I understand how you could come to that conclusion. So, let me ask—what do you think her life might be like if that's her situation when she's 23?

T: Well, she's not going to living in a nice place, it's not going to be easy for her. She'll probably be living around ___ neighborhood and...well, you know, it's not going to be good. That's a bad area.

C: Ok. You say she's a smart kid—can you tell me more about the strengths you see in her? Tell me about that.

T: Well, she's really good at math. And she always follows directions. She's the one who tells other kids to quiet down and pay attention when I'm trying to get their attention. I don't even have to ask her to sit quiet and on her behind, she just does it.

C: Oh, that's great to hear. Wow, she's good at math, that's great. Look, I know you really care about your students—you've said that so many times—I'm wondering if you would be willing to try something

that might be a little difficult, but if you'd try this—could we create an alternate reality for Maria? A different life at 23? Could we just try doing that—I know you're a creative person and you have a great imagination.

T: Well, ok.

C: Great! So what might be a different reality for Maria at 23? One where she doesn't have 4 or 5 children?

T: Well, you mean like, maybe she has a job? Or a career?

C: Uh huh.

T: I guess she could be a teacher. She's always my little helper when I have a sub—she'll tell the sub what to do. She's bossy and likes to take charge of things.

C: Great, so she has leadership skills—that's really great. There's a lot we could do with that disposition. She sounds responsible also.

T: Yeah, she is. I guess she could be an accountant also because she's good at math. And she follows rules. I guess so. [The tone of her voice is flat]

C: Ok, an accountant. Remember a couple months ago you were telling me about how she loves animals and she has stickers of puppies and kittens all over her note book? Maybe she could be a veterinarian?

T: Yeah, she could! Or a doctor. She could be a doctor. [Her voice becomes more lively here]

C: A doctor! Wow, that would be exciting. And what might her life be like then, if she becomes a doctor?

T: She'll be living in a nicer area. Maybe she'll be getting married when she's 27 or 28, and thinking about having kids.

C: That would be an easier future for her, wouldn't it?

T: [Nods]

C: So how do you want Maria to remember you? Her first grade teacher?

T: Me? How do I want her to remember *me*?

C: Yeah, when she's 26 or 27 and remembering you, what do you want her to say to her fiancé about you?

T: That I was fun. I was the fun teacher—and so she'll invite me to her wedding. Because I'll be fun!

C: Wouldn't that be amazing? If you could attend her wedding and see her, as a doctor, getting married...Ok, so if she becomes a teacher, or accountant or doctor, what might she say about you?

T: That...That....I don't know.

C: Ok, what about, if she says, "I remember that during STEM time, Ms. M gave us stuff to do that I really liked and it helped me learn some skills and get ideas about what I could be when I grow up."

T: [Smiling] That would be good. But they took away my housekeeping stuff—I can't use that any more during STEM. That's what she would like.

C: I'm not clear about what you're talking about. Can you explain?

T: I used to have housekeeping stuff that girls like her liked to play with—you know, toy vacuum cleaners and stuff like that. If Maria had those things to play with, she could learn some valuable skills. Now I can't even use that.

C: Shannon. [Tone of voice gets serious] Come on. I'm asking you to imagine a different reality for Maria—one where she becomes a doctor, as you identified as a possibility. I really want you to try this, just give it a shot. Imagine something different for her. Could you try that?

T: [Sheepishly] Ok. I can.

C: So what if when she's 27, Maria says this about you: "Ms. M gave me these challenging puzzles to figure out and I had to do math and measuring and observations and they really made me think about

how things work. That's when I first started wanting to be a doctor—because I wanted to learn how our bodies work—and Ms. M told me I could be anything I wanted to be.”

T: That would be good. That would be great if she said that about me. [Teacher's eyes drop and her shoulders hunch in. Silence for a few seconds]

C: What's going on, Shannon?

T: [Looks up, her eyes are welling with tears, she shakes her head.]

C: I can see that you're experiencing some emotions. Do you want to talk about what's going on?

T: It's just that...I don't know. I wish Maria would say that about me, but I don't know how that could happen. Your questions are just making me feel a lot right now. I don't know how to respond.

C: Ok, I appreciate you sharing that with me. Thank you for your honesty. Shannon, what if I told you that together, I think we could work towards this vision for Maria? At least the part that you can control—what happens in your classroom, what materials you give her to learn from?

T: I'm just not used to getting help from other people.

C: I hear that. I know how that can be. What's the scariest part of all of this?

T: I just...I'm...I don't know how to teach that STEM stuff. We had a two-day training on it, I was out sick for one of those days, it's really different from how I learned to teach.

C: It is, I know. How about if we start with visiting Gregorio's class at ___ school? He's been implementing some of this curriculum and his kids come from the same neighborhood as yours do. Could I set up a field trip for us?

T: That would be good.

C: Why don't we start to sketch out a plan for the supports you need in order to teach STEM? Let's brainstorm ideas, and I'll help you figure out where you'll get the support from. How does that sound?

T: Ok. But I don't think I can actually teach STEM until the kids get their behavior under control. They're wild when they come in here.

C: Is that something you feel you can have an influence on? Is there anything you can do about that or is it totally out of your control?

T: I can. I know. I can have an influence.

C: Ok, let's plan for that too. As your coach, I do want to push you like this—if it's ok with you—so that you can reach that vision for how Maria will remember you as a teacher. Is it ok if I do that? If I push you?

T: I guess so. I don't really have any choice do I?

C: How about if we try and see how it goes. Let's just give this coaching thing a shot and see what happens. I think we should start today with going through the materials you already have in your class. How about that? Can we start that right now?

T: Yes, I've been needing to clean out my closet, so let's do that....