A Protocol for Developmental Faculty Coaching at the University Level

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses short-term developmental faculty coaching, which can be categorized as ongoing and personal professional development. This coaching is distinct from faculty evaluation. The developmental faculty coaching protocol discussed here is a novel one developed by the author. It was developed through direct observation of over 400 in-person and online classes of over 100 new and returning adjunct faculty at a small higher education institution in New York State, USA. The protocol was generally used with new faculty, who know an academic area, but they lack training in andragogy and have had no or little experience teaching university students. A pre-observation, during-observation, and post-observation protocol is outlined for the faculty coach and the instructor being coached. It is suggested that developmental faculty coaching be made available to all new higher education instructors and to those more experienced instructors who request it. Recommendations for future study include collecting data on individual instructors or a cohort of new instructors through quantitative and/or qualitative research, which would yield insights into how new instructors grow into excellent classroom teachers at the university level.

Keywords: Faculty coaching, developmental coaching for academic professionals, higher education professional development, protocol for developmental faculty coaching

INTRODUCTION

Farghaly and Abdelaziz (2017) define faculty coaching as "a form of supervision targeting unlocking a person's potential to maximize his performance" (p. 46). A faculty coach, then, is not unlike an athletic coach. Imagine if you wanted to run a long-distance race, such as a marathon, but were only an occasional jogger. You would want to hire a coach, presumably a long-distance runner, who would advise on an achievable plan and provide benchmark strength and conditioning goals. In addition, the coach would advise about diet, competition, and sports psychology. As athletes benefit from coaching, faculty describe feelings of increased confidence and motivation from developmental faculty coaching (Bedford et al., 2019)

Perhaps the idea of developmental faculty coaching can be best situated in Vygotsky's (1978) 'Zone of Proximal Development.' Vygotsky, a psychologist, posited that children learn more effectively through interactions with a sympathetic person, such as a parent or teacher, than on their own. If there were no developmental faculty coaches, new instructors would learn how to teach more effectively through a 'trial and error' method and by getting feedback from students in a variety of ways, such as end-of-semester evaluations. Using a coach extends the reach of what a faculty member can learn on their own. Much of the research on faculty coaching deals with coaching in an online environment. Dana et al. (2010) put faculty coaching under the umbrella of quality assurance. They studied how to improve the teaching performance of online faculty through screen recording technology. Their results showed that faculty were open to and appreciative of positive feedback and constructive criticism. Bedford et al. (2014) also considered faculty coaching in the online context but emphasized peer relationships as the source of feedback with the goal of increased collaboration. Garrison et al. (2000) developed the Community of Inquiry framework to look at three distinct ways – teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence – that faculty can create community in online classrooms. Their framework serves as an effective rubric for coaches to evaluate faculty. Other researchers have looked at coaching in a variety of contexts in higher and professional education. Huston and Weaver (2008) considered peer coaching as a form of professional development for mid- and late-career faculty. One interesting study looked at developmental coaching not from the perspective of

improving faculty performance, but that of improving student performance. Hunt and Weintraub (2004) examined the effects of coaching on undergraduate business students. Judson et al. (2018) found that coaching had positive effects on engineering faculty. Orr and Sonnadara (2019) note that faculty coaches are needed in medical education as the curriculum shifts from learning based on time to learning based on competency. Developmental faculty coaching can be done in person or through an online platform. The benefits of in-person coaching are that the faculty member can share their thoughts and get feedback immediately after a class. While developmental faculty coaches take a seat in the back of the classroom and work as unobtrusively as possible, a couple of downsides are that some new instructors find the coach's presence intimidating and that students may wonder who the visitor is at the back of the room and why they are taking notes. The benefits of coaching through an online platform are that it can be done without disrupting the class or it can be recorded for future analysis. Faculty skilled at online instruction can share their desktops and teaching materials to allow coaches to see all that they do in class. A drawback of online coaching is that the coach does not get a complete sense of the classroom dynamic as the camera is generally pointed toward the wall behind the instructor's station.

Methodology

Developmental faculty coaching is an understudied area. While coaching is common in primary and secondary schools, few scholarly articles address creating coaching protocols in higher education (Czajka & McConnell, 2016). The protocol presented here was developed by the author for use at three campuses of a single higher education institution in the United States. The novel protocol was developed because the institution gave some direction on how to coach but left it up to each coach to develop their style. The protocol that was developed here fit the criteria of being evidence-based, centered on faculty growth, tied to a rubric, and timely. That is, feedback was given to coaches soon after each observation as opposed to a summary given at the end of the semester.

Description of Novel Protocol for Faculty Coaching
Pre-Observation Protocol

All faculty coaching visits should be arranged at least a week in advance and there should not be unannounced visits. An email or an online calendar invitation is a way that both parties can agree on and remember when the visit will be. It is not uncommon for a faculty member to postpone (or "prepone") a coaching visit for many reasons. Among the most common reasons for putting off a coaching visit are sickness, absence from class, testing and student presentations for most of a class period, or a change in the lesson such as an instructor providing individual tutoring, such as writing conferences, instead of instruction. Before the observation, the coach shares the rubric they will use and the instructor shares any materials (lesson plan, handouts, videos, etc.) they will use to make the lesson effective.

During the Observation Protocol

If the observation takes place in a physical classroom, the coach arrives 15 minutes or so before class begins to secure a place at the back of the room and to answer any last-minute questions the instructor might have. If the observation is in a virtual classroom, the coach still attempts to be the first one in the meeting. This provides time for a one-on-one chat with the instructor to answer questions, remind the instructor about upcoming deadlines or university-wide announcements, or give last-minute advice about the lesson. There are many ways for a coach to note what a faculty member is doing well and what needs to be improved upon. One suggested method of notetaking by the coach is to use a three-column approach, a familiar technique to the high school student as well as the cultural anthropologist. A time stamp goes in the first column, noting each event in class that is remarked upon. The centre column is used to describe what is happening in class and important things being said by the instructor and students. The third column is a space where the coach can make shorthand notes of points to address, both of praise and constructive criticism, with the instructor. An example of what a three-column notetaking system looks like is in Table 1.

Table 1: Example of Three-Column Notes for Faculty Coaching

Time	Activity	Comment
11:45	T. directs students to open up a notebook and use a pencil, not a pen, for accounting problems	Good advice
11:45	T. writes key accounting formula, 'Assets = Liability + Owner's Equity' on whiteboard	Ask students what 'Assets' are equal to. Let Ss tell you the formula in their own words
11:47	T. "Did you read the textbook?"	Avoid 'Yes/No questions' and putting adult Ss on the spot

Post-observation Protocol

After each coaching session, getting written or oral feedback is suggested from the faculty member. Written feedback has a couple of advantages. First, the instructor may be teaching back-to-back classes and may not have time to debrief or collect their thoughts immediately after a lesson. Also, an instructor may want to wait for a period, say 1-2 days, to think deeply about their class. The process of writing helps the faculty to coalesce their thoughts. If the feedback is oral, it can be done as soon as the students have left the classroom or over the phone shortly after the coaching visit.

The feedback faculty provides can be from open-ended or structured questions. The purpose of this part of the coaching process is to align what the instructor saw and what the coach saw. Faculty regularly identify what was done well and what were missed opportunities in the lesson but are often too harsh in their self-assessment of how well they taught. The coach's role is to structure a short discussion, between 5-10 minutes, to listen to the instructor's view of how the class went, to provide constructive criticism and give teaching tips. There are several questions a coach may ask to structure the dialogue, as noted in Table 2.

Table 2: Post-observation Questions and Rationale

Number	Question	Rationale
1.	What went well and what did not in today's class?	This provides a framework for both faculty members and coaches to share feedback.
2.	How well did your teaching match your lesson plan?	This speaks to preparation. While K-12 educators must regularly submit lesson plans to an assistant principal, there is no hard and fast rule about how professors should prepare for a class.
3.	How do you know there was good teaching, learning and assessment in this class?	This question gets at the heart of the matter – education is completely focused on teaching, learning and assessment. Evidence of all three should be present in each class.
4.	What percentage of time did you speak as opposed to the students in class?	There is no correct answer for this question; rather, it is a measuring stick to help the faculty member consider how students' voices may be more involved in class. This leads to the shift away from lectures to more active learning and student-centred learning.
5.	Would you say that the students were getting what they paid for from this class?	This focuses on the value of the class in the larger framework of a student's education. If, for example, an instructor spent large parts of class reading from a textbook or sharing anecdotes that were not germane to the lesson, then that does not provide educational value.
6.	Did the class reflect the values the institution prizes?	This speaks to the alignment of the institution's values with those of the instructor

Any question that generates a reflective discussion is a good one. It is suggested that the coach sticks with no more than three questions so as not to overwhelm the faculty member being coached. New faculty members may

not be able to answer post-observation reflection questions well right away, so a suggested practice is for the coach to ask and answer the questions after the first observation, and, if three observations are done during a semester, the coach can follow the "I do/We do/You do" protocol, gradually allowing the faculty member to get practice in answering the questions. Through this method, the coach will ask and answer the post-observation questions after the first observation. After the second observation, both the coach and the instructor answer the questions. After the third and final observation, the instructor answers the questions. Oftentimes, faculty members are harsher critics of themselves than a coach is, so it comes as a surprise and a relief when a coach can point out several positives in a lesson along with constructive criticism. After that first session, the faculty member knows what the coach is looking for, can answer the questions using the language of educators, such as formative assessment and checks for understanding, and can focus on improving in those areas.

In addition to the post-observation feedback, a written summary of the effectiveness of the instructor and the lesson should be provided shortly after the class, but certainly no later than five days after the lesson so that the instructor can incorporate the feedback into their next lesson. Generally, this summary tells the faculty member what was observed, evidence of good teaching and missed opportunities, and teaching tips. Faculty do not have to reply to this summary, but coaches are impressed by those who do take the time to note action steps, they will take to improve their teaching. The written summaries have a couple of benefits besides the obvious one of providing evidence of good aspects of an instructor's teaching and where they have room to grow. If the summary is kept in a central database, deans and other administrators can quickly read a report to get an understanding of a new faculty member's strengths and challenges. A second use of these reports are that new faculty often need evidence of their teaching ability to apply for other jobs. These reports also provide the basis for letters of recommendation as the person being coached often develops a strong bond with their coach.

How to Choose a Faculty Coaching Rubric

If an institution has thought deeply about its teaching, it will have developed guidelines and rubrics. Faculty coaches can work with these guidelines or rubrics to ensure that the institution's value is being conveyed in the classroom. Rubrics are suggested frameworks for feedback, but if one is not handy, a rubric can be created by moulding the educational philosophy of a department, school, or university to specific criteria. Rubrics can also be created using the Community of Inquiry model (Garrison et al. 1999) and the 'Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education' (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) as guides.

Table 3: Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education Rubric

Principle	Description	Evidence
Encourages Contact between Students and Faculty	Knowing each other promotes involvement in the course	Instructor use of students' names or nicknames and knowledge of their interests
Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation among Students	The instructor designs classroom activities that are collaborative and social	Student-to-student reviews at the end of class or role-plays to apply learning
Uses Active Learning Techniques	Students are actively engaged in learning and not passive recipients of information	Flipped classroom method or project-based learning
Gives Prompt Feedback	Keeping students regularly informed of their progress in class	Setting a date to return homework, usually within a week, or using a learning management system so that students can track their course grade
Emphasizes Time on Task	Time + Energy = Learning	Providing time management tips for studying and links to resources, such as tutors in learning centers
Communicates High Expectations	Expect a level of student achievement and you will get it	Linking the importance of mastering course content to success in a career

Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning	Students learn in different ways	Students can learn the material from lectures, reading or videos

Discussion

Developmental faculty coaching is important to show new faculty how to effectively teach and assess their students, but experienced faculty could also gain from coaching, as teaching demands that faculty members have the mindset of lifelong learners (Gipe & Richards, 2019). In addition, Orr and Sonnadara (2019) found that medical doctors could be trained to be coaches as medical education switches from knowledge-based to competency-based learning standards. A secondary focus of developmental faculty coaching, therefore, is to instill an institution's philosophy of teaching in its instructors. This can either be taught to new hires through an explicit set of values or something inferred from an institution's mission. Some several audiences or constituencies benefit from faculty coaching. The first group is the faculty. Faculty, while experts in their fields of study or practice, may not have taken any courses on educational philosophy or on methods of teaching adults, and they can benefit from coaching from a trained classroom teacher.

The faculty coach can let them build on what they know about teaching, learn what they do not know, and help the instructor transform into a more effective educator. Next, students benefit because, through coaching, classroom instruction becomes more focused, with a wider variety of activities, and a closer link to course objectives. Finally, administrators are always concerned about the quality of the education they provide. Faculty coaching allows them to gain direct feedback about an instructor's performance. There are several limitations to this protocol. First, data on the effectiveness of the protocol was not obtained because the host institution did not allow research on the efficacy of the coaching or coaches. Both quantitative and qualitative data could be obtained to either validate the effectiveness of the protocol or give feedback on effective coaching techniques. This research would give insight into how coaches can help faculty progress from novice to expert classroom instructors. Also, because a faculty member cannot be simultaneously observed and not observed, one wonders if the lesson observed by the faculty

coach would be the same one delivered if the coach was not there. The Hawthorne Effect, or Observer-Expectancy Effect, which occurs when a research subject alters their behaviour because of knowledge of the presence of an observer (Merrett, 2006), is something which needs to be considered here. While developmental faculty coaching is not a part of a systematic research study, both instructors and students may consciously or unconsciously change their behaviours in the presence of a coach. The coach may increase levels of anxiety in the instructor or students, contributing to a decreased level of performance. On the other hand, the instructor may use more effective teaching techniques, or the students may make a greater effort in class in the presence of the coach.

Conclusion
The novel coaching protocol outlined here is designed to help new faculty develop teaching proficiency quickly by working with a developmental faculty coach. The main goal is to improve teaching, learning and assessment in a classroom and at an institution by having a coach work closely with a new instructor for an entire semester. There are parts to the coaching process that happen before, during and after the coaching visit. After a visit, the coach should spend time with the faculty member pointing out strengths and growth opportunities.

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