

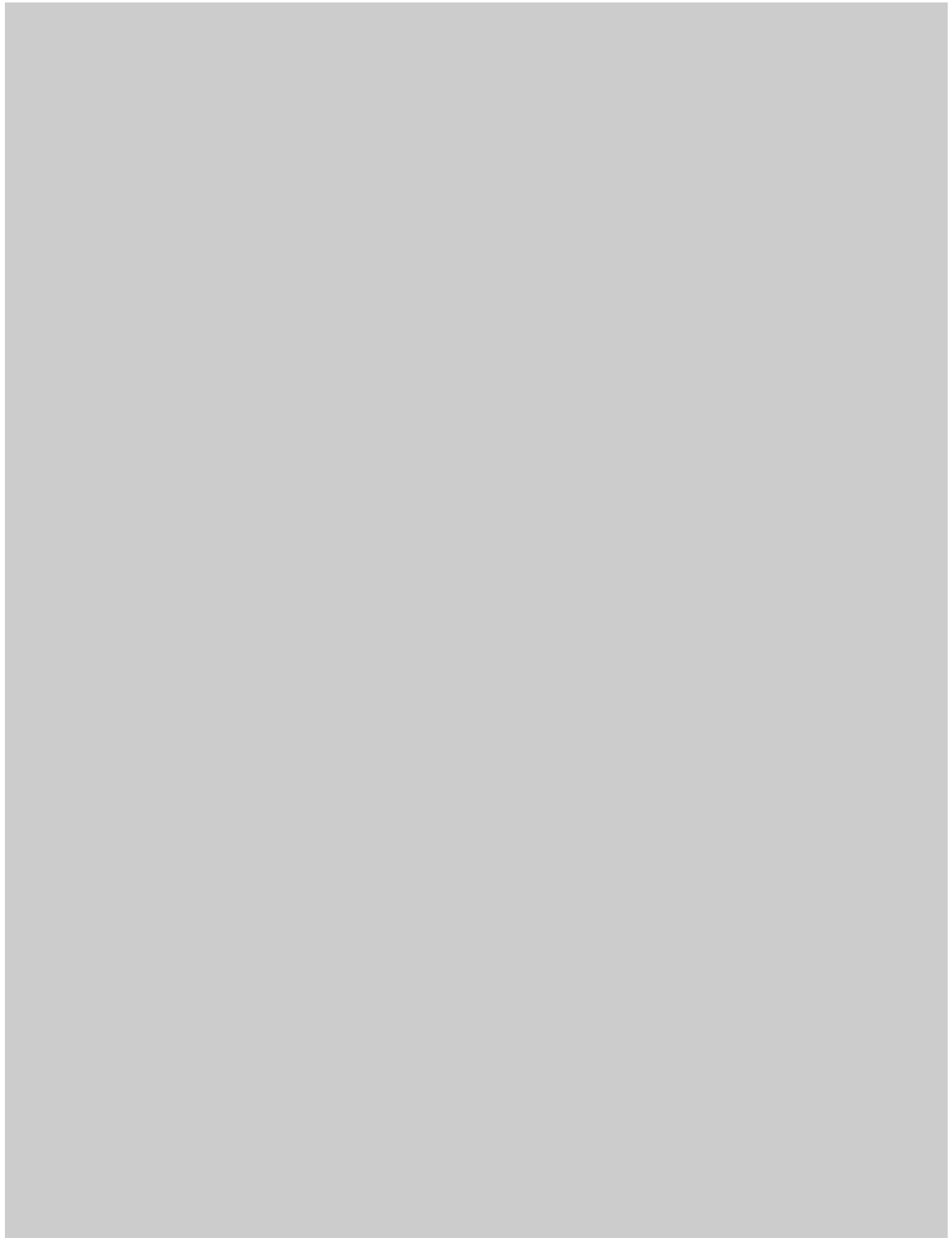
**C H A P T E R**

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# 6

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**IMPROVING  
INSTRUCTIONAL  
EFFECTIVENESS**





## **CHAPTER 6: IMPROVING INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

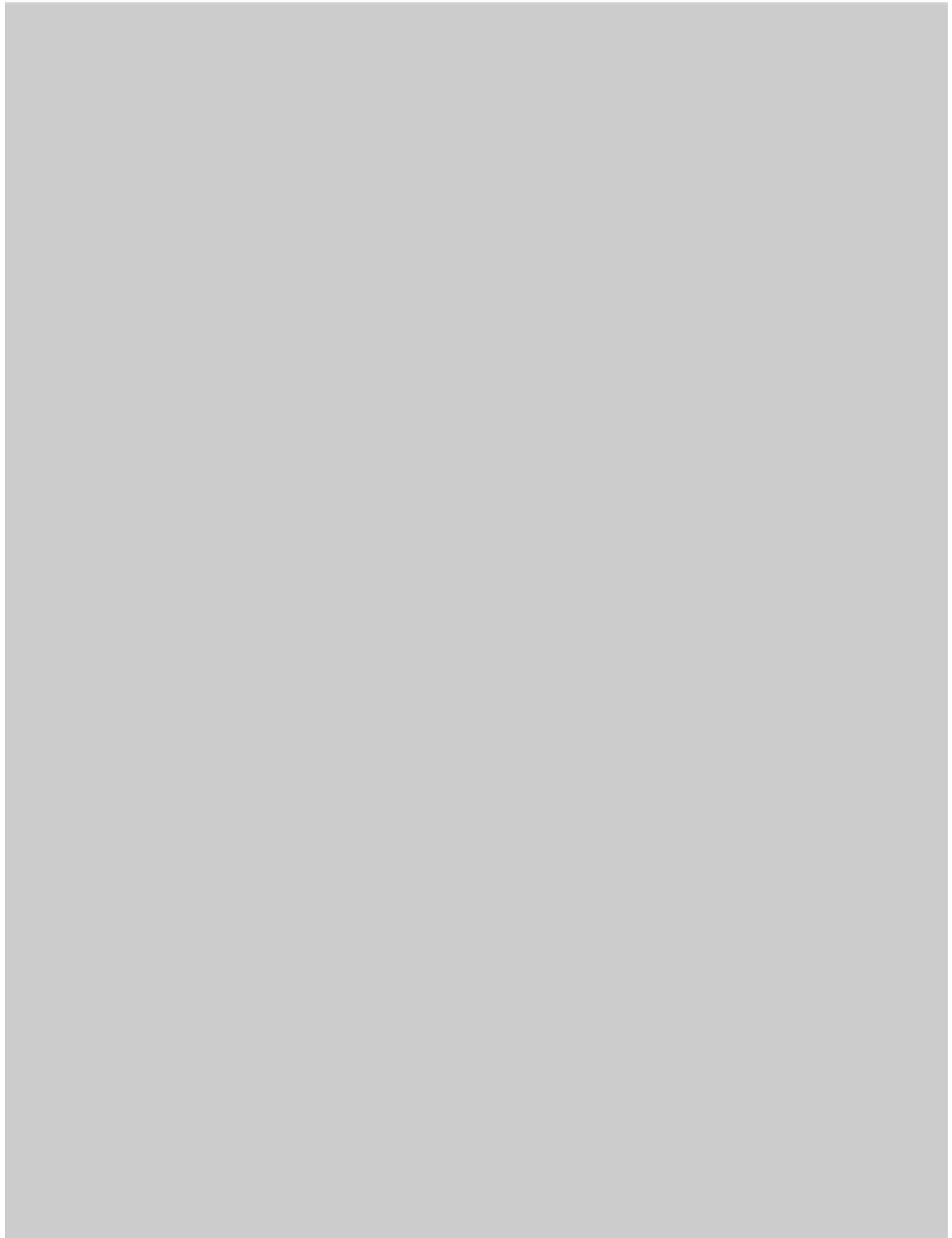
### **PG 6.5 OBJECTIVE**

- PG 6.5 Why communication?**
- PG 6.7 Can we talk?**
- PG 6.10 What are other techniques for communicating effectively with teachers?**
- PG 6.13 What are the advantages of communication in groups?**
- PG 6.15 When time is of the essence, is trust that essential?**
- PG 6.16 What can coaches do when encountering teachers who are reluctant to accept help?**
- PG 6.18 How can a coach communicate when there is conflict?**
- PG 6.20 How can a coach avert gripe sessions?**
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**OBJECTIVE**

*Reading coaches will improve their communication skills to maximize support for classroom teachers and the effectiveness of instruction for students.*

**WHY COMMUNICATION?**

It may seem strange to see a chapter on communication after such heavy content on research-based curricula, data-driven instruction, and reliable assessments. After all, communication is a part of daily life. We all learned how to converse a long time ago. Coaching, however, requires a more skillful approach to communication. For a coach, the ability to present oneself, to listen, understand, empathize, and share information effectively with colleagues is the communication skill level essential for success.

**Communication begins long before you say one word.** A coach communicates personal regard for individuals by:

- Spending time with him or her in activities unrelated to the coaching task;
- Making inquiries or statements about the other person's interests or experiences; and
- Practicing the fundamental behaviors of courtesy and respect that, as research on trust-building reveals, include proximity, appropriate touch, courteous language, and personal compliments (Good & Brophy, 1973).

Trust is belief in and reliance on another person; it is developed over time. Trust is built when the coach consistently displays professional integrity. **One of the most important values in coaching is integrity.**

A coach with integrity is honest and reliable. The teachers who work with a coach trust that he or she will display the same basic characteristics, values, and attributes from day to day. The importance of this relationship cannot be overstated. Caccia (1996) writes, "coaching exists in name only unless the coach and the person being coached share a continuing trust and sense of purpose" (pp. 18–19).

An effective coach approaches coaching genuinely, confident in his or her strengths (when in doubt, refer to the Coach's Qualities Reflection Form, Resource 1.3, on page PG 1.14). As coaches, you are candid about areas in which you want to improve. You understand the biases and perspectives you bring to coaching, teaching, and literacy instruction.

Or do you?

**PROCESS & PRACTICE****Clear the Air**

*Read each statement below and record your first response.*

1. Those who *can*, do, those who *can't*, teach.
2. Teachers aren't professionals; what lawyer or doctor do you know who has three months off every year?
3. As soon as teachers leave the classroom and become consultants, they lose all memory of what it is really like to teach.

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If you found yourself judging the statements as right or wrong, or thinking of examples to prove or disprove them, take a moment to introduce yourself to one of your biases (Logan & King, 2004). As passionate as you are, with your bias toward education, could other perspectives also influence your opinions?

Through what filter do you look at the teacher who is last to get to school? First to leave? Takes off the Friday before a holiday? Misses her own class field trip? Would your feelings affect the way you work with him or her? Since the mind and body operate as one unit, the answer is yes. Emotions and consciousness are inseparable neurologically.

Being a coach does not mean you are not allowed to have an opinion. It does mean your awareness of your bias will make you more effective. When you acknowledge this perspective, you will take extra care to prepare mentally and physically for a positive exchange with another person. Your body language should communicate openness to the other person's perspective, enabling both of you to explore new ideas.

Biases are frequently revealed through nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication can set the tone before a conversation begins. **Nearly two-thirds of meaning in any social situation is derived from nonverbal cues** (Swanson, 1995; Jenson, 1996). To get the conversation off to the best start, you should transmit positive messages about the other person's importance and how much you value what they say to you.

Tips for effective nonverbal presentation:

- Arrange to sit so there is no barrier between you and your peer;
- Sit still and erect; face the other person directly to communicate engagement and availability;
- Maintain an open posture by keeping your arms and legs uncrossed;
- Lean forward slightly as you speak and listen (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996). Leaning back can imply boredom;
- Maintain the right intensity of eye contact; and
- Practice "relaxed alertness" (Bolton, 1979) suggesting you are calm, comfortable and caring.

Costa and Garmston (2002, p. 73) observed, "When confronted with conflicting verbal and nonverbal messages, humans inevitably choose the meaning behind the nonverbal behavior." The ability to read others' facial expressions, gestures, touch, posture, and proximity is an essential skill for an effective coach. Next let's test your nonverbal fluency.

**PROCESS & PRACTICE****Nonverbal Communication**

*For three minutes, analyze the interaction between two people for their use of nonverbal communication. This interaction may be live or on a television show. In the space below, describe the scene, then the specific nonverbal messages you observe. Remember to pay attention to each person's eyes, face, head, gestures, touch, posture, and proximity.*

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**CAN WE TALK?**

Although nonverbal communication is extremely important, it is not the only communication skill an effective coach must master. **The words you speak and the way in which they are spoken can enhance or end an exchange with a teacher.**

In observing more than 5,000 classrooms, Michael Grinder found that teachers tend to use one of two voices to elicit student attention in order to achieve comprehension (Grinder, 1991). Through a credible voice, the teacher gains attention and gives direction. This voice is characterized by a limited range of modulation and a tendency to go down in intonation at the end of a sentence.

The second voice, and the one used in coaching, is an approachable voice. It has a wider range of modulation and a tendency, at times, to rise in inflection at the end of a sentence. When delivered in an approachable voice, questions like "Can you say more?" or "What are your goals?" signal safety and inquiry. The same questions offered in the credible voice feel like interrogation and lead to shut downs in thinking.

Your willingness to listen is just as important as your voice and the words you choose. **Listening is one of the most fundamental actions in the coaching process.** To listen deeply, a coach must turn off his self-talk and be completely present with the teacher being coached.

Hargrove (1998, p. 57) describes what he terms a committed listener: "A committed listener helps people think more clearly, work through unresolved issues, and discover the solutions they have inside them. This often involves listening beyond what people are saying to the deeply held beliefs and assumptions that are shaping their actions."

A committed listener is an active listener. When you listen actively you reinforce, empathize, and accept what is being said. A coach reinforces what was said by giving short verbal signals that show interest, such as, "Yes, I understand"; "I see your point"; or "Can you tell me more?" You empathize when you show that you understand how the teacher feels. An example of an empathic listening response would be, "That must be really frustrating." Accepting the listener's responses shows you have received the information, reinforced by stating, "I understand your point of view."

**All of coaching hinges on listening.** An effective coach applies the 80/20 rule, remembering to listen 80%

of the time and speak for 20%. **Teachers who feel heard will share more.**

Learning to question rather than tell can lead to more active listening because it calls for a response from the teacher. One goal in coaching is for teachers to take responsibility for their own learning and growth. Questioning is a tool that will help them do so. **Knowing the right question to ask at the right time is the mark of a talented coach.** The chart below defines three types of questions and gives examples of each.

## Types of Questions

Type	Examples
<b>Open-ended</b> Establish rapport and elicit opinions	How do you feel about reading at our school? What do you think about this idea?
<b>Close-ended</b> Gather specific pieces of information	How long has he worked here? Do you agree with this idea?
<b>Follow-up</b> Elicit more facts, opinions, suggestions, and insights	Can you tell me more? Why do you say that?

Questioning should follow the interests and direction of thought of the teacher being coached. High-gain questions give the coach insight into the teacher's perspective while allowing the teacher to verbalize his or her point of view. The following chart examines the purpose of high-gain questions and offers examples of them.

## High-Gain Questions

Purpose	Examples
<b>Evaluate or Analyze</b>	How would you compare the learning gains of students who received small-group intervention with those who did not?  What are your three greatest frustrations in planning for reading instruction?
<b>Speculate</b>	Suppose you had no financial constraints in the next two years. How would you motivate students to read a wider variety of books outside of the school day?  If you could organize this effort in any way that you desired, how would you do it?
<b>Express feelings</b>	You said that improving students' comprehension skills will be an important goal for next year. How do other teachers feel about their ability to achieve this goal?

An effective questioning technique is to use language that reflects what the teacher said. A reflective response is nonjudgmental and concise. Skillful reflecting can verify a speaker's emotional state and help him become more aware of the feelings a situation is generating.

For instance, a coach might say, "You've really worked hard trying to help Ashley. Seeing no improvement in her understanding of the sounds that letters make must be really discouraging." Once a teacher knows her feelings have been "heard," she may be more apt to move past emotional reactions and onto a thoughtful process to resolve the problem.



In an attempt to enter the problem-solving process, a coach may wait only one or two seconds after asking a question before asking another question or answering the question. It is easy to feel that unless someone is talking, no one is learning. In actuality, silence can be an indicator of a productive conference. **If the coach waits after asking a question, or after the teacher gives an answer, the silence communicates respect for the teacher's reflection and results in a higher order response.** There is a perceptible increase in the creativity of the response, as shown by greater use of descriptive and modifying words and an increase in speculative thinking (Rowe, 1996; Rowe, 1974). Are you ready to give questioning a try?



## PROCESS & PRACTICE

### Do You Have a Question?

Read the scenario below and generate questions to practice this important communication skill.

*During a recent grade-level meeting, the 1st grade teachers noticed a large number of students in several classrooms were not meeting the benchmark for decoding words. Earlier in the year, in response to parental complaints on homework, the team adjusted the reading program and sent home one decodable book per week. The teachers are disappointed in the scores and have requested a group demonstration of instructional strategies for phonics.*

Record your questions below:

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### WHAT ARE OTHER TECHNIQUES FOR COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH TEACHERS?

Effective communication is not only posing the initial question but also crafting a response to the teacher's answer that keeps communication flowing. Here are some other communication techniques:

- **Acknowledging** the response without making judgments. The coach simply receives and recognizes what the speaker says, which communicates that he or she has heard the other person's ideas. Examples of this type of response are "Um-humm," "That's one possibility," "Could be," or "I understand."
- **Paraphrasing** the response, putting the focus on the teacher's ideas, not the coach's interpretation of them. A well-crafted paraphrase communicates your attempt to understand the teacher and value what she has to say. It also establishes a relationship between people and ideas. Paraphrasing gains permission to probe for details. For example, You're suggesting... You're proposing... So you're wondering about... Your hunch is that... are reflective stems that create a safe environment for thinking. Paraphrasing is a strong trust-builder. When people feel understood, they breathe more deeply, sending the brain more oxygen, an essential resource for thinking.
- **Clarifying** the response to supply missing data and gain more precise information. When the teacher talks about "the textbooks" the coach can ask, "Which textbooks, specifically?" When the teacher says, "I want students to understand!" the coach says, "Understand what specifically? Which students?" Another example of a clarifying response is, "Help me understand what you mean by..."
- Providing data nonjudgmentally so the teacher can infer the relationships between instructional strategies and student attainment of learning goals. To maintain trust, the data should be relevant, stated in observable terms, and allow for interpretation by the colleague, not the coach.

Now it's your turn to practice this skill. Remember to watch for your biases and use techniques to build trust and have a rich conversation.

**PROCESS & PRACTICE****Communicating through Non-Evaluative, Objective Statements (Resource 6.1)**

*Rewrite the following statements of opinion so that they are non-evaluative, objective statements. Practice using appropriate voice and body language to deliver them.*

**Example:**

*Statement of opinion:* Teacher prefers to call on girls rather than boys.

*New statement:* Teacher calls on three girls to segment the word *man*.

**1. Students looked confused during the explanation of how to sort word cards with CVC and CCVC words.**

New statement:

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**2. Three students in the back row look bored.**

New statement:

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**3. Activity was loosely structured.**

New statement:

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**4. Students' fluency rates were extremely high.**

New statement:

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**5. Teacher was unclear in explaining instructions.**

New statement:

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**6. Phonemic awareness instruction enhanced students' skills.**

New statement:

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You can help teachers move toward their goals by using an approachable voice, listening, questioning, and responding thoughtfully. In addition to helping teachers set goals, effective communication creates a relationship where a coach can help teachers stick to their goals. Rapport is established, which leads to communication at an even deeper level.

Rapport is comfort with and confidence in someone during an interaction. To maintain rapport you should ask permission before offering assistance, and assistance should take the form of options rather than solutions. For instance, a coach who has listened to a teacher express dismay over her small-group reading instruction might say, "Would you mind if I share something I read the other day?" Then, if the teacher agrees, the coach might say, "I read about some teachers who identify particular instructional needs of students rather than instructional levels, and then form reading groups according to those needs. Would that be an option you'd like to consider?"

An effective coach is not attached to any one "solution" to teachers' concerns. Coaches should remain open to possibilities and help teachers reflect, analyze, and use data to continue to refine their practices and seek new directions. Goals defining a new direction must be clear, specific, and able to be assessed. Setting benchmarks along the way will help teachers gauge their progress and give you guidelines for making suggestions and asking questions.

The Goal-Setting Form, Resource 1.10 (see page PG 1.55), may be a useful tool in guiding this commitment. This written plan of action includes a timeline, steps to take, resources needed, and a realistic accountability system. **An effective coach finds the right balance between honoring a teacher's own pace and gently prodding him or her to keep moving forward toward attaining the goal.**

Feedback should relate directly to goals and will give you an idea of a teacher's appropriate pace. In other words, feedback should help teachers assess their progress toward their goals and refine their actions to better meet their goals. Teachers with similar goals or with common interests may be coached in groups. The coach's role in groups is the same as it is in individual coaching—creating relationships that expand participants' capacities to grow and produce results (Hargrove, 1998).

Before moving into group coaching, let's hear from individual teachers on their preferred approaches when asked to venture outside their comfort zones.



#### WATCH A VIDEO CLIP

### How do you prefer to be asked to do something outside your instructional comfort zone?

*In the table below, note the approaches you currently use on the left and those you would like to try on the right.*

Approach I Have Tried	Approach I Will Try

## WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF COMMUNICATION IN GROUPS?

There are several.

- **Efficiency:** In group coaching, the coach can meet with more teachers or even meet with teachers from more than one building.
- **Synergy:** When teachers are coached in a group, they develop a learning community that breaks the isolation in which they often work, and they benefit from the power of multiple perspectives as well as shared ideas and experiences.
- **Upward momentum:** As teachers in the group progress toward their goals, the momentum becomes contagious. It serves as a powerful catalyst for those who may move at a slower pace, because no one wants to be left behind.
- **Support network:** When a reading coach models good coaching skills, teachers begin to coach each other, developing a network that supports their learning and growth outside the group sessions.
- **Accountability:** Group coaching provides a safe environment in which teachers can openly discuss their goals and support each other as they monitor and refine progress toward those goals.

Most teachers have little experience in group coaching. They may see the group as a “meeting” rather than a coaching process. You may have to help the groups understand the nature of coaching, the time involved, and the kinds of discussions the group will have. Successful groups will understand that the group process is more than a conversation or the sharing of ideas for implementing reading strategies. Rather, it includes discovering barriers to learning and growth, setting and achieving goals, reflecting deeply, collecting and analyzing data, and helping participants maximize their talents.

**Confidentiality is a key concept in group coaching.** Group members must feel certain that their discussion will stay within the group. You should raise this issue at the first meeting and ask all group members to commit to it. Other ground rules for group coaching might include suggestions from Hargrove (1998):

- Be respectful of all group members, their opinions, and ideas;
- Share relevant information and experiences by giving specific examples;
- Agree on a common understanding of important concepts;
- Disagree openly but constructively with any members of the group;
- Discuss the *undiscussable*;
- Keep the discussion focused; and
- Make decisions by consensus.

Providing feedback in a group setting requires the ability to connect strands of conversation, emphasize the learning that has taken place, highlight and celebrate moments “when the light bulb comes on,” and link multiple perspectives and views. You need to be intuitive about group members’ ideas and perspectives at any moment and the kind of feedback that would help them most.

A coach sometimes works with a group in which a participant is disruptive. Disruptive behavior includes blaming, negativism, sarcasm, insults, or a know-it-all attitude. You may be tempted to overlook these behaviors, but it is in the best interest of the group to handle such situations when they arise. Addressing a disrupter requires a highly developed intuitive sense of the group and its individual participants. You should reflect on the situation or even discuss it with a trusted colleague before taking action.

**While the negative frequently commands attention, an effective coach will concentrate on the group’s positive attributes and individual strengths.** Rather than focus on what the group is not doing right, help the group see what it is doing successfully. This sets the tone for a positive learning environment and movement from group communication to team-building.

**PROCESS & PRACTICE**

The chart below helps distinguish between a group of teachers and a team. *In the narrow space below each box, circle the mark that indicates where your school is currently on the continuum from group to team.*

Groups	Teams
Members think they are grouped together for administrative reasons only.	Members recognize their interdependence and understand both personal and team goals are best accomplished with mutual support. Time is not wasted struggling over turf or seeking personal gain at the expense of others.
Members tend to focus on themselves because they are not sufficiently involved in planning the group's objectives and work. They approach their jobs simply as "hired hands."	Members feel a sense of ownership of their jobs and the unit because they are committed to goals they helped to establish.
Members are told what to do rather than asked what the best approach would be. Suggestions are not encouraged.	Members contribute to the organization's success by applying their unique talents and knowledge to team objectives.
Members distrust colleagues' motives because they don't understand their role. Expressions of opinion or disagreement are considered divisive and non-supportive.	Members work in a climate of trust and are encouraged to express ideas, opinions, disagreements, and feelings. Questions are welcomed.
Members are cautious about what they say, so real understanding is not possible. Members may play games and set communication traps.	Members practice open and honest communication. They make an effort to understand each other's point of view.
Members may receive good training but feel limited in applying it to their jobs either by a supervisor, other group members, or conditions in the workplace.	Members are encouraged to develop skills and apply what they learn for the benefit of the team. They receive support from their team as they are learning.
Members find themselves in conflicts they don't know how to resolve. Their supervisors may delay or other members may resist intervention until severe damage is done.	Members recognize that conflict is a normal aspect of human interaction and view such situations as opportunities for new ideas and creativity. They work to resolve conflict quickly and constructively.
Members may or may not participate in decisions affecting the group. Conformity often appears more important than positive results.	Members participate in decisions that affect the team, but understand that their leader must make final ruling in an emergency or when the team cannot decide. Positive results are the goal.

**PROCESS & PRACTICE****Group Coaching Scenario**

Read the scenario below and record how you would respond to this group coaching situation.

*Rita Lerner, the reading coach, has arranged to accompany a teacher on observations and to facilitate the conversation that follows. She says,*

*"By accompanying Mia, I can observe what the other teachers are working on and am able to give them feedback while I facilitate the discussion. I have trouble scheduling time for feedback with the other teachers because their planning period occurs when I conduct observations of Mia's class. Mia has more needs than some of the other teachers, so she has received the bulk of my attention. I'm thinking that I may need to change my emphasis and find additional ways to support the other teachers because they are ready to move ahead and refine skills in additional areas. I also learn a lot from them, so it is good for me, too."*

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**6****WHEN TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE, IS TRUST THAT ESSENTIAL?**

**Coaching success depends on creating a favorable environment** (Crane and Lerissa, 2002). In such an environment, participants feel safe to make mistakes and experiment without fear of reprisal, understanding that innovation is encouraged and supported. Creating an overall school environment that is safe requires active support from administrators, a topic that will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

Building rapport and trust is key in this environment. **Without trust, the relationship will not support the changes teachers attempt to make.** This is not to imply that every coach must have a deep personal relationship or even fondness for every teacher. However, it does imply that the teachers must have a strong foundation of professional trust and openness. This takes time—more time in some situations than others.

According to Flaherty (1999), common mistakes coaches make when trying to build trust include:

- Presuming a level of commitment that the teacher does not have;
- Acting as if no commitment is necessary from the coach; and
- Failing to state in a mutually clear way the intended outcomes and the potential obstacles to their realization.

**Once lost, trust is even more difficult to cultivate.** Teachers need to be assured that the coach is not a supervisor but rather an academic advocate. To avoid a frustrating experience you should clarify your approach from the start. At the beginning of the coaching relationship, the coach might consider having a dialogue both with the teachers in a large-group setting and with individual teachers on role clarification as discussed in Chapter 1. The Role Clarification Form, Resource 1.2, (see page PG 1.39) may be useful in this endeavor.

## WHAT CAN COACHES DO WHEN ENCOUNTERING TEACHERS WHO ARE RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT HELP?

Some teachers do not fully understand instructional reform and its links to standards, and will appear to be quite comfortable using practices they have always used. Some teachers are considered experts by their colleagues, and their students' achievement scores, on average, may be good, but they do not use the evidence-based strategies to guide their instruction. Encouraging these two groups of teachers to use evidence-based approaches can be challenging.

Some teachers are not only uninterested in coaching, they are actively hostile to the practice. They might, for example, leave the room while you are modeling a lesson. More commonly, teachers simply ignore a coach's suggestions. **School and district administrators must play an important role in supporting a coach by making clear that the new instructional strategies are a priority for all teachers.**

Let's hear from other coaches to see how they handle this challenge.



## WATCH A VIDEO CLIP

## How do you handle teachers who resist implementing required components of your school's reading program?

*Reflect on situations at your school where these strategies may be beneficial.*

[illegible]

A coach can start by working with those teachers who will accept assistance. Positive experiences will help you gain access to teachers who are initially uncooperative. Including reluctant teachers in large-group activities such as grade-level meetings, study groups, or in-service sessions may also help. You should check in with these teachers informally at least once a week. A coach can encourage participation by inquiring about how things are going and asking if there is anything you can do to assist.

**To coach without manipulation, you must change the way in which you see a reluctant teacher.**

This may be difficult, but it is even more necessary when you have been working for a time with someone whose performance is problematic, who seems to be making limited growth, or who is resisting your assistance. At times like these, remind yourself that the other person perceives his or her behavior as positively intended.

The form below may help you prepare for a meeting with a teacher who is reluctant to change.



## Meeting Preparation Form (Resource 6.2)

*Before the meeting, review each question below. Reflect on the best strategies to communicate your purpose and result in a win-win situation for the exchange.*

Review	Reflect
What do you want from the teacher?	Essential wants:  Desirable wants:
What are you offering the teacher?	Technically:  Personally:
What do you think the teacher might want?	Technically:  Personally:
What resistance do you expect?	
What strategies could you use to promote a win-win outcome for the conversation?	

## HOW CAN A COACH COMMUNICATE WHEN THERE IS CONFLICT?

Conflict is not a contest. Winning and losing are goals for games, not for conflicts. Learning, growing, and cooperating are goals for resolving conflicts. Resolving conflict is rarely about who is right. It is about acknowledging and appreciating differences.

One of the most challenging parts of coaching is in recognizing a problem and redirecting the conflict. The left column of the chart below gives examples of people's responses when they don't feel comfortable. The right column offers suggestions for the coach to restore a more positive learning environment. Practice the redirect statements in your approachable voice.

### Resolving Conflict Chart

Response	Redirect
Flooding you with detail	"I know you are very busy and giving me this amount of detail keeps you from your class. How would you describe this situation in a short sentence?"
One-word answers	"I really need more information. Please give me more details."
Changing the subject	"We seem to be jumping around a lot. It would be very helpful if we could focus on one area at a time."
Compliance	"I appreciate your openness to the overall suggestion. Are there any concerns that you have about the implementation of this suggestion in your classroom?"
Silence	Silence is usually a good sign that someone is processing information. "Before we leave this topic though, is there anything else you would like to say?"
Press for solutions	"It is too early to tell. I'm still trying to find out..."
Attack	Asking questions and expressing concern is a great way to learn about the issue and each other. "How are you feeling right now? What are your concerns?"

Other manifestations of conflict may include avoiding responsibility, a sudden change in body language during a conversation, nervousness, and defensiveness. Trust what you see more than what you hear. Identify the resistance using neutral, everyday language. Be quiet, let your colleague respond, and do not take his or her discomfort personally.

Remember, when a person experiences stress, both the body's blood flow and the brain's activity change. Survival patterns override problem solving. A person under stress is less flexible and more reactive.

Now it's your turn to apply your conflict resolution skills by starting at the top. As a coach, the Meeting Preparation Form (Resource 6.2) on page PG 6.37 may help you prepare for the following role-play.

**PROCESS & PRACTICE****Coaching Role-Play**

*Divide into groups of three. Select a principal, a coach, and an observer. During the first five minutes, review and prepare your role. The principal and coach should role-play for 10 minutes while the observer takes notes. The observer should deliver feedback and the group should then discuss.*

**Role-Play: Principal**

The coach has asked to meet with you to discuss how things are going. You are tired of attending meetings and wish the coach would simply do what you have asked so that you can focus on more pressing matters. The district office is not pleased with your school's performance on the statewide assessments. A parent group is forming over the cleanliness of the bathrooms. You've just been notified that the librarian is not allowing kindergarteners to check out books. The school secretary has cried for two weeks over the implementation of electronic attendance.

**Role-Play: Coach**

You are working with a principal who is resistant to forming a real relationship. The principal misses meetings, treats you as a pair of hands, and is interested only in implementation details. Your coaching position predates this principal. You have heard through the grapevine that he or she has remarked that a teaching position would be a better use of funds. You have scheduled a meeting to review your contract, provide the principal with feedback, and get the project back on track.

**Role-Play: Observer**

Observe how effectively the coach uses the following communication skills to assess the existing contract.

1. Is the coach actively listening?

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2. Is the coach providing direct verbal support to generate rapport?

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3. Is the coach asking direct questions that elicit the principal's expectations?

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4. Is the coach probing for the principal's underlying concerns?

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5. Is the coach providing direct and honest feedback?

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6. Is the coach recognizing and resolving conflict?

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From your notes above, summarize what the coach did especially well and what he could do to improve. Make sure to follow the guidelines for delivering feedback when you share your comments with the coach.

What did the coach do especially well?

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What could the coach improve?

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## HOW CAN A COACH AVERT GRIPE SESSIONS?

Complaining is a nonproductive behavior stemming from negative thinking habits. It is also contagious; when one person in a group starts complaining, others often join in, resulting in a gripe session. **A coach should disrupt patterns of negative thinking as soon as they become apparent.**

Often, this can be done by asking the group to do or to discuss something completely unexpected (Robbins, 1991). Negative thinking can also be disrupted by asking a key question that steers the group toward productive thinking. For instance, if a group of teachers is complaining that children come to school hungry and therefore cannot concentrate, the coach might say, "Clearly, we can't control what the children eat before they get to school. What can we do after they get here?"

When you want to redirect the complaining, celebrate the disagreement. **When open and productive disagreements take place, the coach has been successful in creating a safe environment.** Disagreements arise when participants see things from different perspectives or have different interpretations based on past experience and knowledge. All group participants, including the reading coach, see the world through their own filters. Acknowledging that we all have filters helps deflect potentially heated disagreements from escalating.

You must be conscious and clear about your values and beliefs. These core values shape your perception about leadership responsibilities, the meaning of learning, the potential for your school, and what motivates your peers. Gender, race, culture, religion, geographical region, childhood experiences, and family history also predispose you to draw certain inferences and to attend to certain stimuli while blocking out others. None of us leaves our emotions on the doorstep when we go to work. An effective coach recognizes the negative influence of his or her emotions, and respects the fact that colleagues also experience emotional shifts that distort their attention.

Establishing and practicing group norms will lead to more productive discussions when emotions run high (Harrison & Killion, 2003). The following Conversation Starter may help you prompt groups to reach consensus when they become locked in disagreement.

### Conversation Starter (Resource 6.3)

*Disagreements are ideal learning opportunities but can make a work environment uncomfortable. Please complete the form below and plan to attend the following meeting to discuss the best solution for our students.*

My perception of the disagreement is:

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During the discussion on this topic I agree to:

- Listen and hear everyone's viewpoints—one's perspective is one's truth;
- Say what I need to say here in the room, not in the parking lot. If I don't say it here, I will forever hold my peace;
- Accept responsibility to make sure my idea is expressed in the room;
- Ensure equal air time;
- Address issues, not personalities; and
- Speak directly to the person with whom I have an issue.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Team Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Meeting Date, Time, Location

**When disagreements become heated, participants are usually frustrated because no one seems to understand their perspective.** Coaching skills that prevent such frustration include allowing individuals to voice their views and concerns completely, asking leading questions (e.g., “What else?”), and providing feedback to indicate that participants have been heard.

In order to decide how to move the group forward during disagreements you might ask yourself these questions:

- What is the larger goal?
- What do the dissenters want from the conversation?
- Are they willing to be influenced?
- What led them to that view?
- Is their meaning clear?
- What are they really saying?
- Is there something more behind the words?
- What are the dissenters feeling?
- What do they want in this moment?
- On what do participants in an impasse agree?
- On what do they disagree? (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994)

**Disagreements are ideal opportunities for learning.** A person's viewpoint or perspective often changes as a result of listening to another's point of view. However, this happens only when group participants remain open, putting aside defensiveness, and when they understand that disagreement does not mean there has to be a winner or loser. Such attitudes toward disagreement do not occur by chance, and they don't occur easily.

You may have to employ all of your best strategies—listening, developing trust, creating a safe environment, using nonjudgmental observation, asking productive questions, and providing feedback—and model those strategies for group members to help the group solve problems.

## WHAT IS AN EFFECTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS?

The ultimate goal of coaching is self-directed learning, which means to self-manage, self-monitor, and self-modify. Rather than give advice to or solve problems for another person, a coach helps the colleague to analyze a problem and develop his or her problem solving strategies.

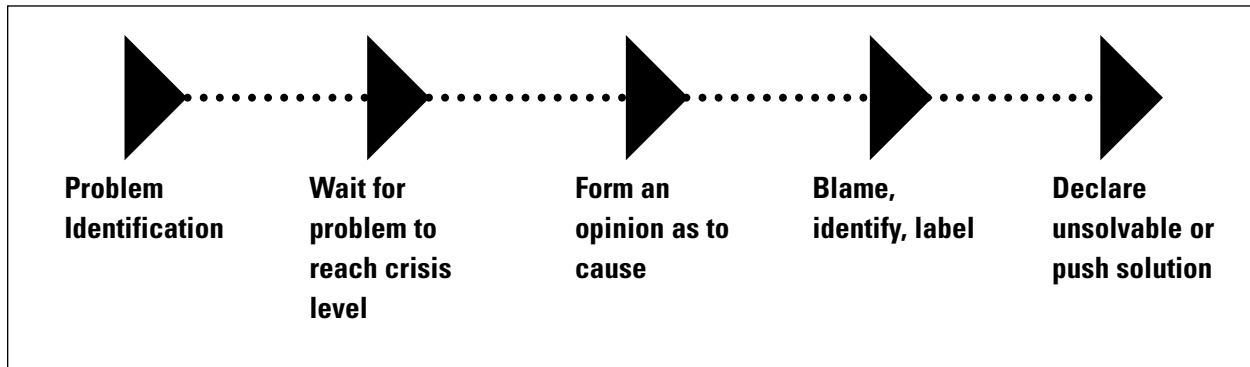
In *The Reading Coach* (2005), Hasbrouck and Denton describe a generic process that has long been used to solve problems in academia, architecture, and business. The four step process includes:

- Identify the problem to be solved;
- Develop a solution;
- Implement the solution; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented action.

An effective coach is alert to the moment a teacher is faced with a complex task. As discussed previously, the teacher may exhibit tension and anxiety if the problem's solution is not immediately apparent. At this time you can facilitate use of the problem-solving process. Invite the teacher to reflect on and learn from the problem-solving process and use it in future problematic situations.

The model below illustrates the ineffective (reactive) problem-solving model; when finally applied, it leads to the saying, "Too little, too late."

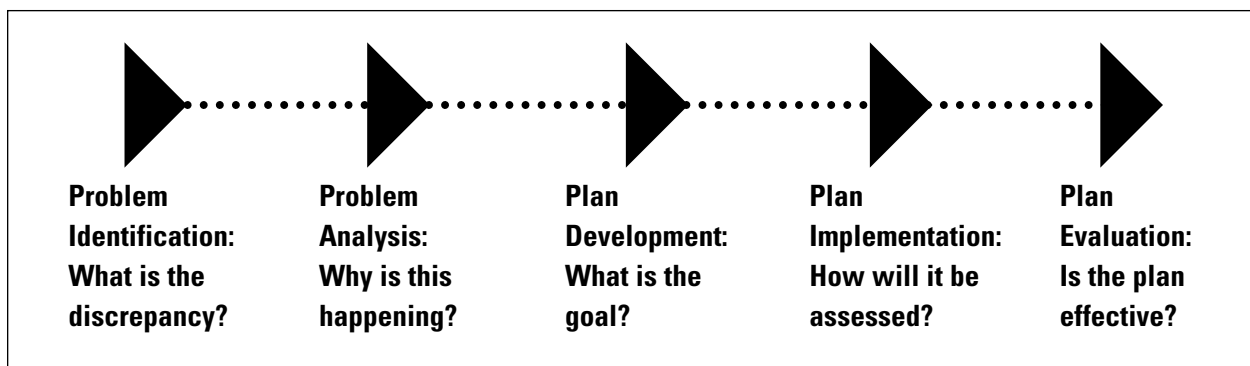
### Ineffective (Reactive) Problem Solving



This model (below) shows how an effective coach shares in the process (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005). You teach strategic problem solving the same way as you do the five reading components and research-based instructional strategies—by modeling. Make the process overt by talking through each step. Be collaborative and encourage your peers who are proficient in the problem-solving strategy to lead the process. Use data, not emotions or hunches, to establish the discrepancy between where you are and where you'd like to be in the problem identification. Maintain professional language as you analyze what is happening. Prompt dialogue as you develop the plan to resolve the issue. Look objectively at the plan's success by reviewing your assessment data.

6

### Effective (Proactive) Problem Solving



On what kinds of problems will this work? Any problem you can think of! Apply the problem-solving strategies with educational problems ranging from assessments, behavior management, the coaching model, and interventions posed in each of the following conversations.



**PROCESS & PRACTICE**

**Problem-Solving: Coaching Role-Play**

*Combine the problem-solving process with effective communication skills to address each problem below. Consider how you might respond to each teacher's concerns in the following scenarios and complete the conversations.*

**Conversation 1**

Teacher: "I just don't have time to assess each child individually. What am I supposed to do with the rest of my class?"

Coach:

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**Conversation 2**

Teacher: "Kindergartners need social time. It's not developmentally appropriate for them to work so hard."

Coach:

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**Conversation 3**

Teacher: "My kids work fine for you when you're demonstrating a lesson, but when you observe me they don't cooperate or behave."

Coach:

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**Conversation 4**

Teacher: "My students get distracted when you come into my classroom."

Coach:

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### Conversation 5

Teacher: "What should I do to engage the rest of my class while I conduct small-group reading instruction?"

Coach:

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### Conversation 6

Teacher: "I can't hold the other students back to review and reteach just because some of my students haven't 'gotten it' yet."

Coach:

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### Conversation 7

Teacher: "I don't understand why I can't do letter-of-the-week."

Coach:

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### Conversation 8

Teacher: "Why do I have to use these assessments with my students? I work with them every day. I know what they can do!"

Coach:

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As an effective coach you are committed to learning. Effective communication is essential in the learning process. You continually resist complacency, and share both the humility and the pride of admitting that there is more to learn. This approach leads to a safe working environment where learning thrives.

## LEARNING CENTERS

### Make and Take Center

Coaching involves providing resources to assist teachers in effective reading instruction. Use this learning center time to create materials to add to your coaching collection.

**Option A:** Decorate a learning journal to coincide with your school's academic theme or to remind you of what you want to promote as a coach. Coaches often use learning journals to record thoughts and feelings. By making quick and frequent notes, your ideas don't get lost. Ideally you should take a few minutes of quiet time each day to jot down how things are going. Make notes whenever you have a significant experience—good, bad, clear, or confusing—for sorting out later. Don't skip hurt feelings, vague hunches, and wild ideas. Writing quickly and without editing can offer insights you might otherwise ignore.

**Option B:** Design the pages for your learning journal. Question prompts may include:

- What happened? Describe the event as objectively as possible.
- How did you react? Thoughts? Feelings? Desires? Actions?
- What have you learned by examining this?

Notes to self on Make and Take ideas for teachers:

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### Reflection Center

As you coach, you will ask many teachers to reflect on their instructional practices. Review each reflection prompt below. Record a response to the question prompts suggested by Flaherty (1999, p. 148).

- What am I learning about myself and others in coaching?
- What makes my coaching most potent?
- What in coaching makes me most uncomfortable? (The most growth probably can happen here.)
- What am I discovering about the relationships I form with people?
- What ideas of mine are being challenged in the coaching program?
- What mood of mine seems to work best in the coaching program?
- Am I modeling what I am coaching? If not, how am I justifying this?

Notes to self on reflection prompts:

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## Technology Center

Websites offer information not covered in the *Leading for Reading Participant's Guide*. Visit the websites below to explore your interests in each of these topics. Make a note to bookmark these sites on your personal computer as future references.

**Option A:** The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools explores the 30 years of research, suggesting it makes a difference for students when schools, families, and communities connect their efforts. Family involvement can make a positive difference in school attendance, student behavior, and academic achievement. <http://www.sedl.org/connections/>

**Option B:** The International Dyslexia Association promotes literacy through research, education, and advocacy. <http://www.interdys.org>

Note to self on resources found at these websites:

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## Research Center

How many times have you wished for just a few quiet moments to review the latest reading research? The options below provide information on recent research since the National Reading Panel's *Teaching Children to Read* and a study on Teacher Study Groups.

**Option A:** For a bird's-eye view of recent research since the National Reading Panel's publication visit: <http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/reading/projects/garf/ResearchUpdate.doc>

**Option B:** Review the research study "Reading Lives: Creating and Sustaining Learning about Culture and Literacy Education in Teacher Study Groups" by Susan Florio-Ruane, Michigan State University and Taffy E. Raphael, Oakland University. [www.ciera.org/library/archive/2000-08/art-online-00-08.html](http://www.ciera.org/library/archive/2000-08/art-online-00-08.html)

Notes to self on what these findings mean for our school:

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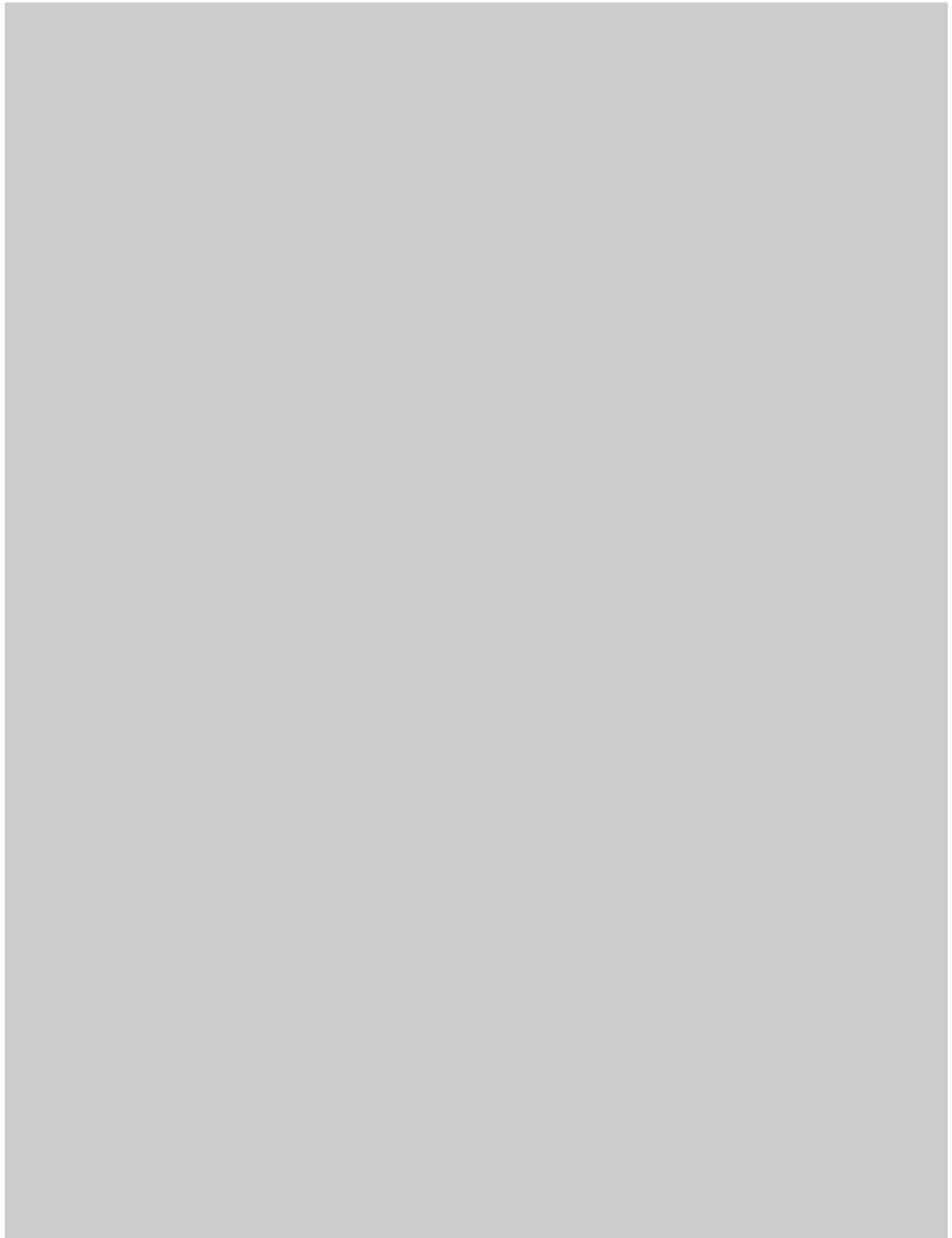
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## **CHAPTER 6: REPRODUCIBLE MASTERS**

***Resource 6.1    Communicating through Non-Evaluative,  
Objective Statements (with Answers)***

***Resource 6.2    Meeting Preparation Form***

***Resource 6.3    Conversation Starter***

Master copies of the forms used in Chapter 6 follow.

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## Communicating through Non-Evaluative, Objective Statements (Resource 6.1)

*Rewrite the following statements of opinion so that they are non-evaluative, objective statements. Practice using appropriate voice and body language to deliver these statements.*

### Example:

*Statement of opinion:* Teacher prefers to call on girls rather than boys.

*New statement:* Teacher calls on three girls to segment the word *man*.

### 1. Students looked confused during the explanation of how to sort word cards with CVC and CCVC words.

New Statement:

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### 2. Three students in the back row look bored.

New statement:

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### 3. Activity was loosely structured.

New statement:

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### 4. Students' fluency rates were extremely high.

New statement:

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### 5. Teacher was unclear in explaining instructions.

New statement:

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### 6. Phonemic awareness instruction enhanced students' skills.

New statement:

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## **Answers: Communicating through Non-Evaluative, Objective Statements (Resource 6.1)**

*Rewrite the following statements of opinion so that they are non-evaluative, objective statements. Practice using appropriate voice and body language to deliver these statements.*

### **Example:**

*Statement of opinion:* Teacher prefers to call on girls rather than boys.

*New statement:* Teacher calls on three girls to segment the word *man*.

### **1. Students looked confused during the explanation of how to sort word cards with CVC and CCVC words.**

*New statement:* Ten students out of the 18 students in the class did not sort the word cards with CVC and CCVC words as directed.

### **2. Three students in the back row look bored.**

*New statement:* Three students seated in the row farthest from the big book were observed picking the yarn in the carpet, looking around the room, tying a shoe, and yawning.

### **3. Activity was loosely structured.**

*New statement:* The teacher stopped the whole group discussion to locate the hula hoops and cards used to illustrate a Venn diagram. Three students were reading independently at their desks. Two students completed math worksheets.

### **4. Students' fluency rates were extremely high.**

*New statement:* 95% of the students had fluency rates that were 10 words per minute above their grade level benchmarks.

### **5. Teacher was unclear in explaining instructions.**

*New statement:* The teacher's instructions were, "Get out your reading book, but first clear off your desk and nobody move until I'm finished."

### **6. Phonemic awareness instruction enhanced students' skills.**

*New statement:* Students pronounced the new word created on the magnet board with 100% accuracy when only the first letter had been changed.

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## Meeting Preparation Form (Resource 6.2)

*Before your meeting, review each question below. Reflect on the best strategies to communicate your purpose and result in a win-win situation for the exchange.*

Review	Reflect
What do you want from the person?	Essential wants:  Desirable wants:
What are you offering the person?	Technically:  Personally:
What do you think the person might want?	Technically:  Personally:
What resistance do you expect?	
What strategies could you use to promote a win-win outcome for the conversation?	

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### Conversation Starter (Resource 6.3)

*Disagreements are ideal learning opportunities but can make a work environment uncomfortable. Please complete the form below and plan to attend the following meeting to discuss the best solution for our students.*

My perception of the disagreement is:

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During the discussion on this topic I agree to:

- Listen and hear everyone's viewpoints—one's perspective is one's truth;
- Say what I need to say here in the room, not in the parking lot. If I don't say it here, I will forever hold my peace;
- Accept responsibility to make sure my idea is expressed in the room;
- Ensure equal air time;
- Address issues, not personalities; and
- Speak directly to the person with whom I have an issue.

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Team Member

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Date

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Meeting Date, Time, Location

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