



Words Matter: Coaching Through an Asset Lens

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A sentence can change the temperature

Think of a time feedback made you more willing to try.

What did the person say, or avoid saying?

Take thirty seconds to think. Then turn to someone near you.

Adults need to feel safe enough to try, too



Learning improves when people feel capable, seen, and safe enough to try.

Challenge still matters. So do the conditions in which people meet it.

Teachers hear more than the words

What I believe about you

- Your competence
- Your intentions
- Your capacity to grow

What happens next

- Defend
- Comply
- Reflect and decide

Deficit and asset lenses

Deficit lens

Something is wrong with your teaching.

Coaching becomes correction. The coach becomes the person sent to fix the problem.

Asset lens

Your practice already contains knowledge and strength.

Coaching makes effective choices visible, examines impact, and supports continued growth.

Same observation, different message

THE TEACHER DID MOST OF THE TALKING

The coach chooses the conclusion

"You need to ask more open-ended questions. The students were too passive."

Implied message: I saw the problem and already chose the fix.

The coach opens the reflection

"Students tracked the explanation closely. Where did you notice them doing the most thinking? Where might you want more of that?"

Implied message: You can analyze this lesson and make an informed choice.

What did you hear?

Which response would make you more honest about the lesson?

Why?

Strengths give the conversation somewhere to stand

Empty Reassurance

"That went really well."

Praise without evidence gives the teacher very little useful information.

Specific Recognition

"When you paused after the prompt, three more students entered the conversation."

The teacher can see the move, the student response, and something worth carrying forward.

Describe What Happened Before Naming What It Means

Judgment

"The directions were confusing."

"Students were disengaged."

"You lost them during the mini-lesson."

Observable Evidence

"Four students began before the directions ended. Two asked what to do next."

"During the mini-lesson, six students wrote while you modeled. What were you noticing?"

Questions that preserve agency

Notice

What did you notice students doing?

Interpret

What do you think contributed to that?

Choose

Which part feels most useful to examine?

Plan

What would you like to try next?

Two minutes with a partner: Revise the language

Keep the instructional concern. Change the way the teacher is positioned.

Statement 1

"Your students are not doing enough of the thinking."

Revision Goal: Name evidence and open reflection.

Statement 2

"You should use flexible groups for this."

Revision Goal: Preserve a meaningful teacher decision.

The Sentence Cannot Carry the Relationship Alone

Trust

The teacher knows coaching supports learning rather than evaluation.

Co-learner stance

The coach brings expertise without positioning as all-knowing.

Concrete evidence

The conversation stays connected to instruction and student response.

Time to reflect

The teacher has space to interpret feedback and decide what it means.

Language Across a Coaching Cycle:

Before, During, and After

Before

"What are you hoping students will understand?"

"What would you like me to pay attention to?"

During

Record teacher moves and student responses connected to the agreed-upon focus.

After

"What feels most important in the evidence?"

"What would you keep, change, or investigate?"

Next

"What support would make the next attempt useful?"

Directness and dignity can coexist

Clear feedback is crucial.

Too vague

"Maybe you could think about whether there might be another way to..."

The concern disappears inside the cushioning. The teacher has to guess what the coach means.

Clear and respectful

"I want to name a concern. During independent reading, nine students waited more than four minutes for support. What options do you see for changing access tomorrow?"

Language you can use tomorrow

A SHORT COACHING BANK

Start with evidence

"I noticed..."

"The student work shows..."

Invite interpretation

"What are you making of that?"

"What surprised you?"

Protect choice

"Which direction feels worth testing?"

"Where would support help?"

Stay beside the teacher

"Let's look at it together."

"What might we learn from the next attempt?"

One commitment

Before your next coaching conversation, choose one sentence you want to stop saying and one you want to try.

“Learning improves when people feel capable, seen, and safe enough to try.”