

Culturally Responsive Coaching for Inclusive Schools



A Guide to Planning Your LeadScape Coaching Dialogues

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This guide is designed to provide general information for coaches to support school leaders in transforming the daily practices of schools to be inclusive of all students. Focused, cognitive coaching is an integral feature of the NIUSI-LeadScape community of inclusive schools. The models and suggested dialogue prompts presented here are intended to help coaches plan and structure coaching dialogues that support school leaders in challenging beliefs and practices so that substantive change can be implemented.

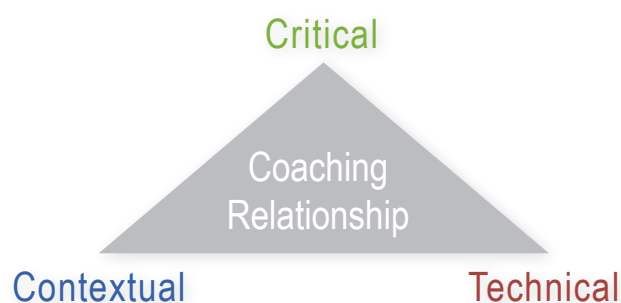
Understanding Coaching

NIUSI-LeadScape coaching consists of a series of structured, one-on-one, interactions between a coach and coachee aimed at enhancing the coachee's effectiveness in developing inclusive school practices. These interactions can be face to face, by telephone, or combined with team meetings as required. Coaching can be used to support teachers, support personnel, instructional leaders, or school principals as needed to reinforce inclusive practices. Coaching addresses multiple layers of reflection and practice.

In any coaching conversation, the first step is to address any pressing needs or issues. If a coachee is dealing with a crisis or has a "burning issue" to discuss, of course the coach must deal with that issue first before addressing her larger agenda. Often, issues that arise will lead into the dialogue that the

coach had already planned, but if not, the coach must respond to the coachee's immediate need and then guide the conversation toward the objectives she had planned.

A coaching relationship is a supportive professional interaction that provides school leaders with opportunities for reflecting on school culture, policy, and daily practices in an intentional manner. Three ways of entering a coaching relationship include technical, contextual, and critical discussions.



A coach enters into any coaching relationship with her own preferred ways of engaging in dialogue. It is important for every coach to spend some time reflecting upon the ways in which she feels most comfortable engaging in discussions in order to acknowledge those preferences and be conscious of them when coaching others. An awareness of preferred entry points will help the coach to avoid the danger of getting “stuck” in a pattern of technical “problem-solving” and to plan dialogues that address important contextual and critical factors to get to the cultural practices of schools. NIUSI-LeaScape coaches work within a cognitive framework to help coachees learn to interrogate their own practices to do the kinds of critical, reflective work that is necessary to change schools.

The next sections include more detailed explanations of the three entry points and some suggested prompts for guiding coaching conversations at each of the three entry points. Coaches should use these prompts as resources for developing their own dialogue prompts within the coaching relationships that they develop with coachees.

Our Coaching Model

In order to support transformative work toward inclusive schooling, it is essential that we are conscious of the variety of cultural influences that impact states, districts, schools, classrooms, and the practitioners, students and families involved in this change. In the NIUSI-LeaScape model of coaching, we recognize that “culture” is not a static collection of characteristics tied to specific racial, ethnic, or national identities, but rather an ongoing interaction between individuals and activities.

We draw from sociocultural-historical theory in which “the efforts of individuals are not separate from the kinds of activities in which they engage and the kinds of institutions of which they are a part”¹. As we work to transform the daily practices of schools to be inclusive and accessible for all of the students that they serve, we start with an understanding that the notion of culture is a complex, fluid process that includes the influences and perspectives of *all* of the individuals in the school community. This includes students, paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, family, and community members.

What Culture Means

“Culture” is a broadly used term that describes the paradigms that communities develop to make sense of physical, emotional, and social environments and to create norms for operating within these environments². Often, school personnel operate under the assumption that there is a single established culture to which all members of the school community must subscribe – the dominant culture. The dominant culture is the one that is correlated with the power structures in a society – in the U.S., this has been European-American cultural practices³. Students come from cultural backgrounds that are different from European American cultures have been considered to have “cultural deficits” and have been treated as problems in schools (Rogoff, 2003, p. 16-17). In reality, school communities are made up of at least three different cultural “models” that shape daily interactions⁴:

1 Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

2 Liston, D. P. & Zeichner, K. M. (1996). *Culture and teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

3 Hollins, E. R. (1996). *Culture in school learning: Revealing the deep meaning*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

4 Rogoff, B., Matusov, E., & White, C. (1998). Models of teaching and learning: Participation in a community of learners. In D. R. Olson & N. Torrance (Eds.) *The handbook of education and human development* (388-414). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.



Developing an Inclusive School Culture

- The many cultural experiences and practices that students and staff members bring with them (represented by the blue oval in Figure 1, next page). These include the ways of learning that both staff members and students have encountered through interactions with family members, neighbors, and community institutions such as churches and day care centers, as well as cultural practices related to communication, eating and drinking, hygiene, and other daily activities that occur both at home and school;
- School-specific cultural processes such as recess, homework, sitting at desks, etc. that are a function of the educational institution (represented by the green oval in Figure 1). These processes are grounded in the school's dominant culture and, for the past century, have been administered from an efficiency perspective as "factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life."⁵
- This metaphor of schools as factories to produce efficient and effective adults has created school practices that treat students who differ from the dominant culture as defective materials that must be "fixed" to fit the accepted mold. As educators, we must recognize and examine these cultural-historical models to identify the assumptions and expectations that are inherent in our educational cultural processes;
- The mutually negotiated practices and expectations that school leaders, teachers, staff, and students establish together to develop unique school and classroom cultures, which Rogoff calls a "community of learners" (1998, p. 396) (represented by the red oval in Figure 1 to the right).

⁵ Cubberley, E. P. (1916). *Public School Administration*. Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press.

Creating a ThirdSpace

In order to develop school cultures that are inclusive and provide equitable access for all students, they must be situated within systems that support inclusive practices. Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the beliefs that all culturally and linguistically diverse students can excel in academic endeavors when their culture, language, heritage, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate their learning and development, and they are provided access to high quality teachers, programs, and resources (Gay, 2000⁶; Nieto, 1999⁷; Valenzuela, 1999⁸). In order to create a coaching model that supports culturally responsive educational systems, we draw on the principles outlined in Lindsey, Martinez, and Lindsey's *Culturally Proficient Coaching*⁹ model. In this model, the individual coachee's frame of reference is explicitly considered as a factor in his/her perceptions of others. Coaching is an active discourse between two colleagues¹⁰ (Costa & Garmston, 1994). The coach facilitates the reflective practice of the person being coached by engaging in thoughtful, focused dialogue in order to surface issues.

Coaching to Transform Schools

Culturally Responsive Coaching (Lindsey, Martinez, & Lindsey, 2007) includes the need to include the cultural assumptions and conflicts inherent in any practice in order to facilitate effective change within a school's context. In contrast, the NIUSI-*Lead-Scape* coaching model begins with the notion that culture acknowledges the contributions of both the organization and individuals to *build culture*.

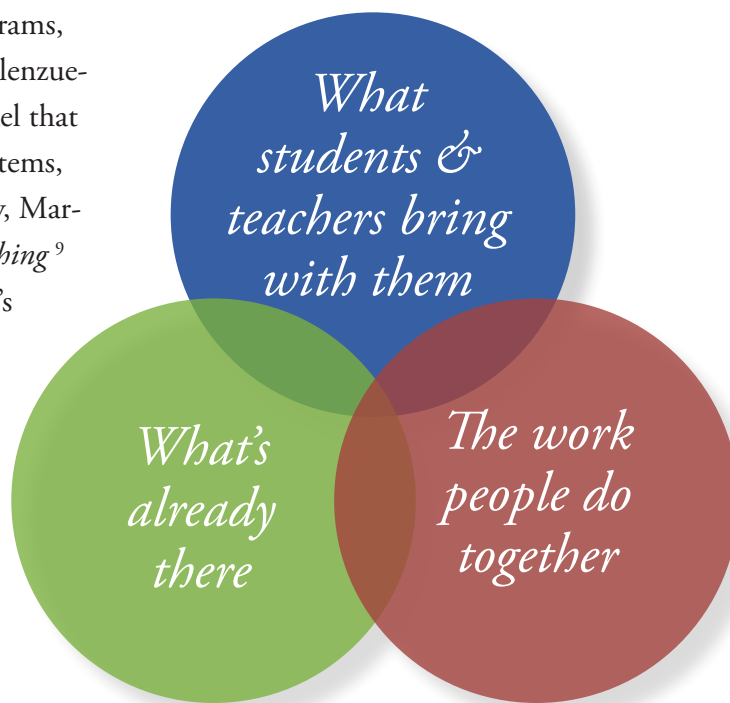


Figure 1: Cultures of Schools and Classrooms

6 Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

7 Nieto, S. (1999). *The Light In Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

8 Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive Schooling: U. S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*. Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press.

9 Lindsey, D. B., Martinez, R. S., & Lindsey, R. B. (2007). *Culturally proficient coaching: Supporting educators to create equitable schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

10 Costa, A. L., & Garmston, R. J. (1994). *Cognitive coaching: A foundation for renaissance schools*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.



In our model, coaching is a practice of engaging in ongoing dialogues that mediate and continuously co-construct understandings of culture and practice. In the coaching dialogue, the principal and the coach acknowledge and respect one another's divergent perspectives and use those perspectives to create a Thirdspace – an integrative, inclusive perspective that focuses on the complementary aspects of their two viewpoints¹¹. Edward Soja defines Thirdspace as “a creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives” (1996, p. 5). Using Thirdspace, the coach invites the principal to shift from a dualistic and exclusive perception of reality (an “either/or” perspective) to an integrative inclusive perspective that focuses on the complementary aspects of diverse values, behaviors, and beliefs¹². Thirdspace creates opportunities to leverage the existing strengths of both participants in order to develop new approaches to challenges or dilemmas. For example, if a principal has experiences that are grounded in a particular Hispanic culture that emphasizes cooperation and group identity and the coach is interested in prompting the principal to move toward integrating students from a

self-contained program, they can work together to leverage the principal's skill with managing groups to develop a team to plan for the successful integration of students from the self-contained program into general education classrooms. When coaches and principals (principals and teachers, or teachers and students . . .) work together to establish mutual understandings that respect both participants' perspectives, the results are additive or hybridized choices that draw from the strengths of both, rather than an either-or decision that devalues the contributions of one of the participants. It's important that both members of the coaching partnership are empowered as they work together to construct their understandings of school practices so that transformative ideas for equitable school practices emerge.

Finally, we target our coaching efforts on the need to transform our schools to meet the needs of students and families. Reform efforts that seemed adequate to resolve the educational problems of the past are not sufficient. Doing better and more efficient schooling work, or changing existing procedures to accommodate new circumstances will not meet the needs of the students we serve. Instead, schools must begin to engage in the activities that will change the assumptions, practices, and relationships within schools in ways that will lead to improved student learning outcomes. The NIUSI-LeadScape coaching model explicitly targets the desired outcome of inclusive school practices.

11 Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

12 Barrera, I. & Kramer, L. (2005). *Skilled dialogue: Guidelines & strategic questions for ensuring respectful, reciprocal and responsive assessment and instruction for students who are culturally/linguistically diverse*. Tempe, AZ: National Institute for Urban School Improvement.



So, in effect, the broad concept of coaching has been refined to utilize the practice of cognitive coaching through a culturally responsive lens in order to achieve the desired outcome of inclusive schools.

Coaching helps to address multiple layers of reflection and practice. With carefully planned coaching sessions, principals are able to delve beyond the day-to-day problems of practice with which they deal and examine the factors that shape those practices. Coaching can be used to address technical aspects of schools (i.e., how to structure school schedules to maximize co-planning time, effective models for integrating students with severe disabilities). Coaching can also help to reflect on contextual factors that may be shaping teachers' practices (i.e., the Science teachers have all agreed to use a lab report format that contradicts the English teachers' grammatical requirements, so that students are unsure which sentence structure is correct). Coaching may also be a principal's best opportunity to engage in a critical examination of her own practices – "What messages have I been sending to the staff about the importance of treating students with respect and dignity?"

As a school leader, the principal holds primary responsibility for both the administrative and the operational aspects of running a school. The principal is the chief "problem solver" of the school, and can often so get caught up in responding to immediate needs that systemic, long-term planning and reflection activities are left unattended. When a principal

is coaching a teacher, often the teacher's immediate classroom management needs preclude spending time on exploring the teacher's identity and teaching philosophy. Similarly, a NIUSI-LeadScape coach can easily get drawn into technical problem-solving conversations with a principal and put off the deeper critical reflection that is crucial to an effective coaching relationship. The coach's responsibility is to ensure that the principal has an opportunity to reflect on the implementation of inclusive practices and how the school is working to effectively include all students in all aspects of the school's activities.

Supporting School Leaders to Facilitate Change

In order to help facilitate the change that is necessary to create inclusive schools, principals need to be supported in maintaining a "big picture" perspective on school practices. School improvement is a long-term, complex process, and ongoing reflection is an important activity for the principal to be able to review progress, identify new areas of focus, and ensure that efforts are strategic and purposeful. Administrative demands don't often allow time and support structures to support this type of reflection; the NIUSI-LeadScape coach's role is to ensure that the principal is supported and encouraged in ongoing reflection about inclusive practices.



The Need for Culturally Responsive Principal Coaching

Principals are involved in a variety of learning and collaborative activities: district trainings, principals' meetings, professional associations, and building level professional learning activities, to name just a few. In fact, it may seem at times that principals are overloaded with professional learning activities. What's missing in these activities, and what's crucial to being able to effectively implement the learning from them, is a structured process for reflecting on what's being learned and how it applies to the specific environment of the principal's school.

Leaders also need support for the difficult work that they do; it's difficult to deal with the wide variety of issues that must be addressed in the school improvement process without a process for ongoing reflection and analysis. Coaching is a way for principals to have individual support that focuses on the application of complex solutions in ways that focus the conversation on the critical and therefore cultural aspects of continuous improvement. Coaching provides a designated time and space to synthesize learning and to strategize the most effective ways to implement learning to achieve the principal's individual desired outcomes.



Critical


Critical prompts are designed to guide the coachee to examine her own beliefs and practices in supporting inclusive education. As working educators, most coachees are not often given opportunities to reflect upon their own beliefs and what they may be doing that does or does not support inclusive practices. Critical dialogues should examine power and privilege, who benefits from school practices, and how to bring students who may have been marginalized into the “center” of school culture. The coach’s role in this process is to facilitate deeper reflection, prompt for broadening awareness, then helping the coachee to identify a goal and work toward that goal:

This is the core work of school transformation, and guiding a coachee to be able to do this type of reflection is the ultimate goal of coaching. Plan these conversa-



tions very carefully, and be sure to craft critical prompts that address contextual issues that have come up in previous coaching conversations in a constructive, positive manner. Some suggested guiding prompts to identify critical issues are given in the following table, along with follow-up prompts to guide the coaching conversations to support deeper engagement and ongoing improvement.

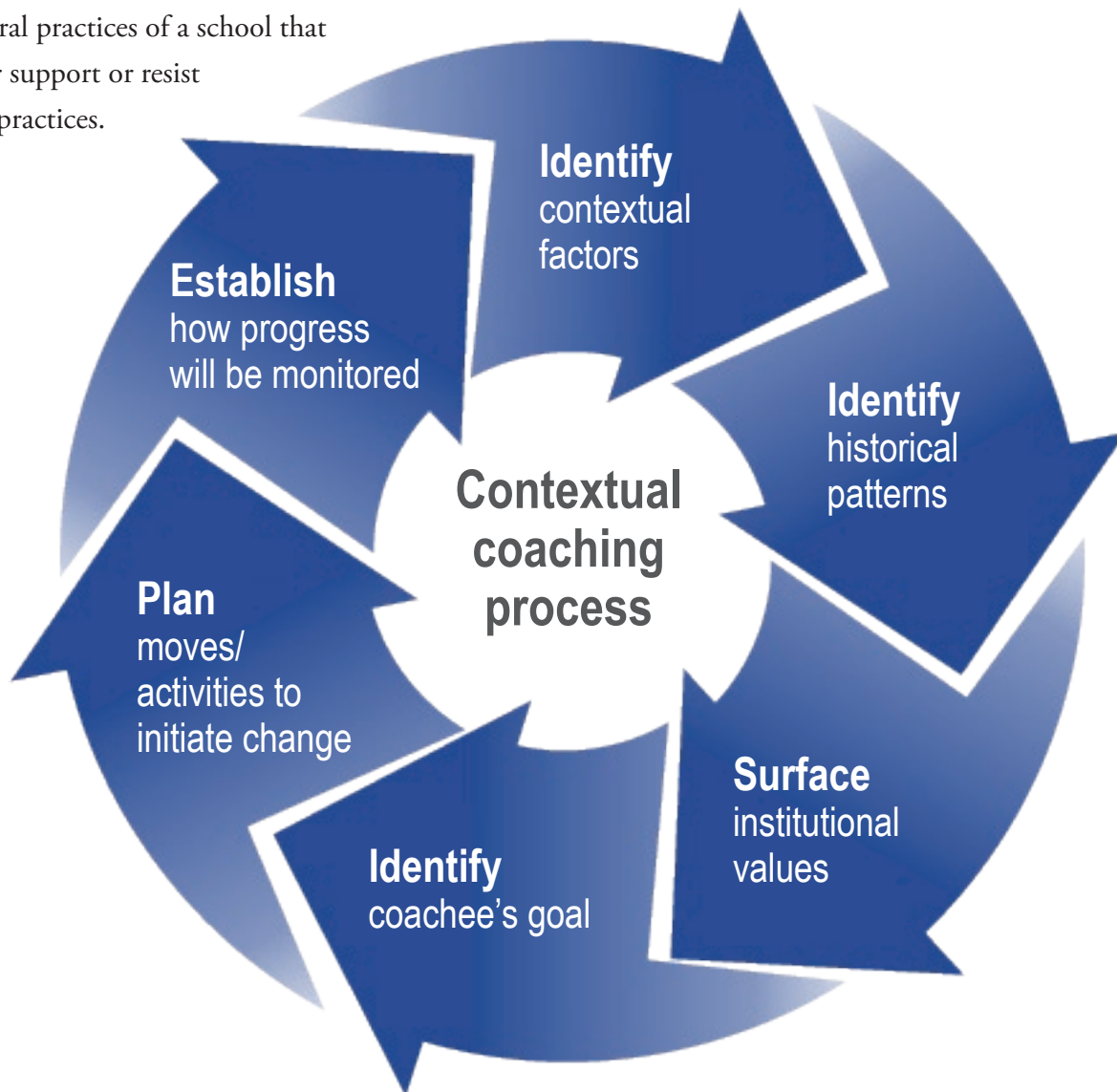
Suggested prompts for critical approaches:

 Focus	Guiding prompts	Probe for deeper reflection	Expand awareness	Identify goal	Plan moves	Evaluate progress
Leadership for change	How do you think your leadership style helps to move your staff forward in the process of transforming inclusive practices?	What are some specific strategies you use to promote progress with difficult team members?	What are some different approaches that might be effective with staff members who are less responsive to your approaches?	Which approaches do you want to try using to engage all staff members in inclusive practices?	What are the steps to learning or implementing those new approaches?	How will you know if the new approach is effective?
Building consensus	In what ways are you working to establish team-based decision making?	How have you included key staff members in setting goals and priorities?	What might lead some people to feel that their input is or is not valued in the decision-making process?	What are some ways you might empower staff members to be more involved in leadership?	What are the actions that you will need to take to do that?	How will you assess whether staff members feel that they are partners in leadership?
Building consensus	Are you at the point where divergent viewpoints are honored and valued in decision making processes?	How do you respond when staff members disagree with your viewpoint?	In what ways are you honoring and valuing divergent viewpoints in decision making?	How will you respond when staff members agree or disagree with your viewpoints?	When and how will you have an opportunity to practice this?	How will you know if your new approaches are effective?
Building consensus	How do you use the ThirdSpace to bring staff beliefs & ideas together with your own to build school culture?	What is your conscious process for creating the ThirdSpace with a staff member?	If you were the other person, what would you think about this process?	Are there things you'd like to do differently in this process?	When and how will you be able to practice this?	How will you know if your new approaches are more effective in creating a ThirdSpace?


Contextual

In order to transform educational practices, one must be keenly aware of the context of the school. School cultures are complex environments, encompassing all of the experiences, beliefs, and behaviors of teachers, support staff, students, and administrators. These factors are strong influences in supporting or opposing inclusive practices. Contextual prompts are designed to reveal the underlying beliefs and cultural practices of a school that can either support or resist inclusive practices.


Prompts begin with identifying contextual factors, looking at historical patterns, surfacing the values of the school or community, and working with the coachee to determine goals and actions.



Suggested prompts for technical approaches:

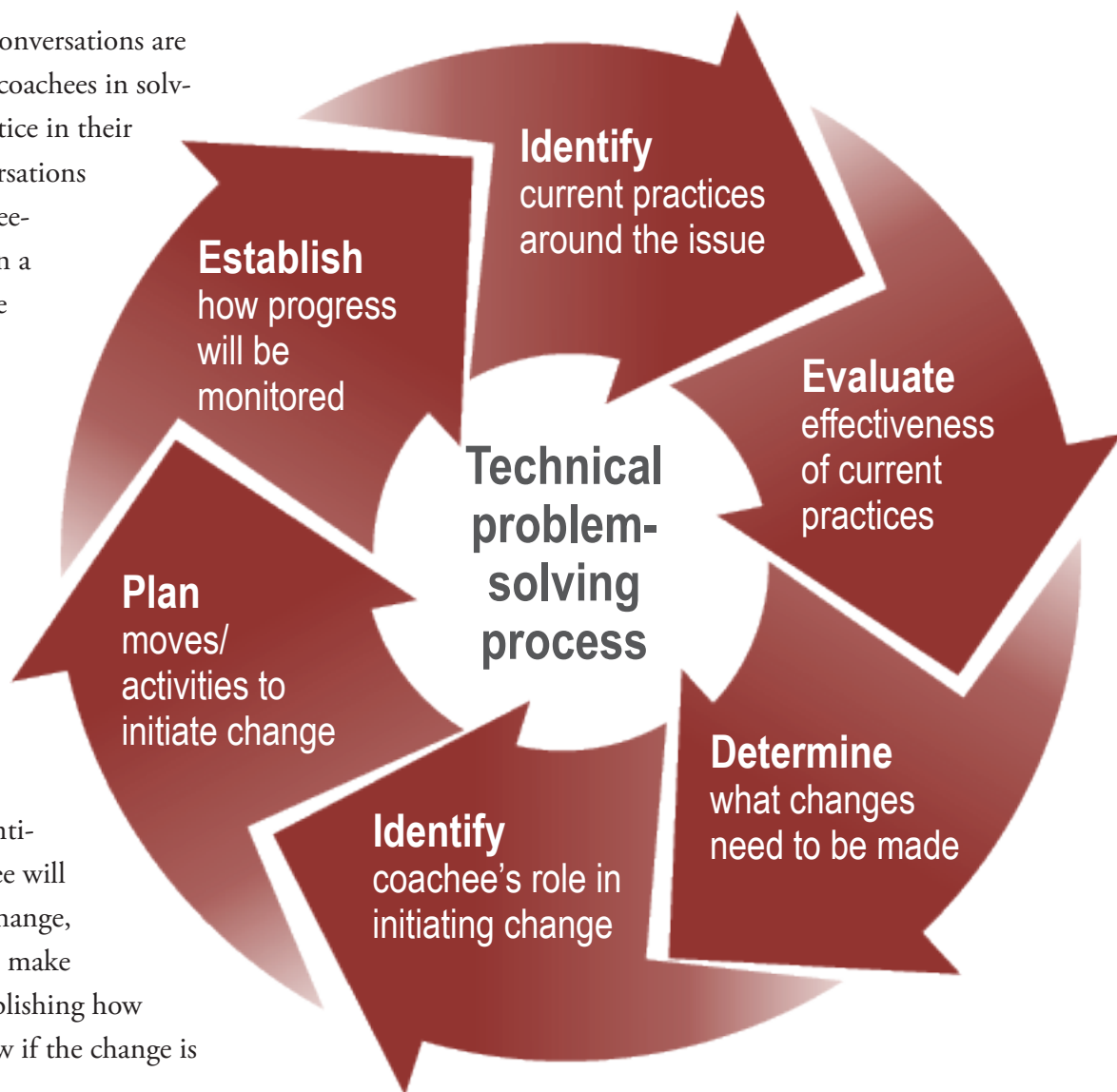
 Focus	Guiding prompts	Identity patterns	Surface institutional values	Identity goal for change	Plan moves	Evaluate progress
Professional learning	How have teacher leaders selected topics for professional learning?	What are some of the recurring topics that pop up each year?	What do the topic selections tell you about what's important to your staff?	What kinds of topics would you hope the staff would choose?	What are some strategic actions you could take to bring these topics up?	How will you know if teacher leaders are truly interested in your ideas?
Professional learning	What are the types of activities that your staff members seem to engage in best? Why do you think they prefer those activities?	What types of activities are effective for teams who are working well together in your school?	Identify what you see as the norms for professional learning in your building?	How would you like to influence the norms that seem to be in place?	What are some actions that you can take to model or instill these changes?	How will you know the impact of your work?
Professional learning	When you perceive that more than a few members are not engaged in the professional learning activity, why do you think they choose not to engage?	What are some of the behaviors that those teachers demonstrate – what are they doing (or saying) instead of the planned activity?	What do their preferred activities tell you about what they believe is important to spend their time doing?	In what ways can you use their priorities to improve engagement in the professional learning activities?	What are some steps that you can take to improve engagement?	What evidences will demonstrate that members are more engaged in activities?

Suggested prompts for critical approaches:

 Focus	Guiding prompts	Identity patterns	Surface institutional values	Identity goal for change	Plan moves	Evaluate progress
Professional learning	When you perceive that more than a few members are not engaged in the professional learning activity, how do you respond?	How do you see your responses being perceived by staff members?	What do your responses communicate to the staff members about what is important to spend time doing?	What are some different strategies you could use to improve engagement in the professional learning activities?	Which strategies will you try in your next professional learning session to increase engagement?	What evidences will demonstrate that members are more engaged in activities?
Support for including students with severe disabilities	In what ways do general and special educators communicate with each other around planning for student support?	In what ways do team meeting times and agendas allow for communication between general and special educators?	What do the communication practices indicate about the importance of shared planning for student support?	In what ways do you want planning practices to change?	What are some things that you can do to facilitate improved co-planning?	What evidences will tell you that planning practices have improved?
Building inclusive culture	How are divergent viewpoints honored and shared in your staff culture?	How do staff members respond to agreement and disagreement?	What are the apparent norms about disagreeing with others in public?	What would you like those norms to be?	What are some actions you can take to influence the staff norms?	How will you know if your actions are effective?
Building inclusive culture	How might past experiences with inclusion of students w/ severe disabilities be influencing staff members' current beliefs and practices?	What are the "stories" that staff members share about students with severe disabilities?	What do their words and expressions tell you about their expectations for students with severe disabilities?	What would you hope that their expectations would be for these students?	What actions can you take to influence others' beliefs and expectations for these students?	How will you know if your actions are impacting staff members' expectations?

Technical


Technical coaching conversations are intended to support coachees in solving problems of practice in their schools. These conversations will usually be coachee-initiated and focus on a problem that they are encountering in their school. The technical coaching conversation will then follow a pattern of identifying practices related to the issue, evaluating how those practices are working, determining what needs to change, identifying how the coachee will be involved in that change, planning activities to make the change, and establishing how the coachee will know if the change is effective:



In the NIUSI-LeadScape coaching model, we are supporting systemic change. If you find yourself continually engaging in dialogue that is purely technical, contextual and critical factors are not being addressed. Therefore, when you are working on a technical issue, be sure you follow up by planning a later coaching call to talk about the contextual and critical factors that led to the technical issue.



Suggested prompts for technical approaches:

 Focus	Identify practices	Evaluate	Determine changes	Identify role	Plan moves	Evaluate progress
Difficulty implementing co-teaching practices	In what ways have you ensured that teaching teams have shared planning time?	How are the planning sessions helping with differentiating lessons for students?	What procedures need to be established to make these sessions more effective?	What will your role be in establishing these procedures?	What actions are needed?	When and how will you determine if the new procedures are effective?
Difficulty implementing co-teaching practices	What professional learning has been provided to BOTH the general and special educators to help them understand your co-teaching model?	How has each group responded to the training?	What additional support is needed to help teachers understand the model?	How will you be involved in this additional support?	What steps need to be taken to put this into place?	When will it be appropriate to evaluate if the new supports are working? How will you know?
Support teachers' reluctance to relinquish "control" of SWD learning.	How have you worked to build shared high expectations for ALL students?	In what ways do IEPs integrate grade level standards?	How can support teachers' practices more clearly promote high expectations?	What can you do to initiate these changes?	What steps will you take?	How will you know if support teachers' behaviors and practices are communicating high expectations?
Special educators' rigidity in designing service delivery	In what ways are your IEP meetings structured to encourage team discussion and sharing of ideas?	What is the general process for establishing objectives and support structures? What voices are heard in these conversations?	How should practices in these meetings change to promote more participation by all team members?	What can you do to initiate these changes?	What steps will you take to implement new practices?	How will you know if team member participation has increased in IEP meetings?

Suggested prompts for technical approaches:

★★★ Focus	Identify practices	Evaluate	Determine changes	Identify role	Plan moves	Evaluate progress
Special educators' rigidity in designing service delivery options	What directives from district special education leadership are guiding your special educators' practices? How might this be contradicting your model for coordinating services?	What are the recurring tensions between district policies and your school's agenda for inclusive practices?	What are the factors that are within your locus of control to help alleviate these tensions?	What influence do you have to encourage creative problem solving with your staff?	What steps can you take to support your staff's critical thinking about these policies and their implications?	What evidences will indicate that you are establishing practices that work for students within the constraints of your district?

Conclusion

NIUSI-*LeadScape* coaching is designed to support educational leaders and practitioners in developing inclusive practices in schools through ongoing interactions between a coach and coachee. Because inclusive schools coaching addresses multiple layers of reflection and practice, coaching conversations should be carefully planned to facilitate engagement in examination of complex issues.

Coaching conversations may be entered at any of three access points: critical analysis, contextual examination, or technical need. This document provides some suggested prompts for topics that may arise in the coaching relationship and ways in which to develop those conversations to support ongoing improvement of understanding and practice.

These guiding prompts are not meant to be used as set scripts, but as tools to help you plan your coaching conversations to address critical, contextual, and technical factors of creating inclusive schools.

An example of a Coaching Notes format is included as Appendix A. This document may be used to help the coach to maintain data on coaching conversations, as well as to plan some strategic prompts to guide your coaching dialogues.



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Appendix A: Coaching Notes Form

Coach:	Date:	Coachee:	School:		
1. Items Discussed		2. Status/Progress	Next Steps		
Hot Topic:					
Focus topic:					
Prompts (Plan questions to lead dialogue):		Access Points: (Circle one)			
		CRITICAL			
		Identify issue	Probe for reflection		
		Expand awareness	Identify goal		
		Plan moves	Establish progress		
		CONTEXTUAL			
		Identify context	Find patterns		
		Surface values	Identify goal		
		Plan moves	Establish progress		
		TECHNICAL			
		Identify practice	Evaluate effectiveness		
		Determine need	Identify role		
		Plan moves	Establish progress		
				CRITICAL	
				Identify issue	Probe for reflection
				Expand awareness	Identify goal
Plan moves	Establish progress				
CONTEXTUAL					
Identify context	Find patterns				
Surface values	Identify goal				
Plan moves	Establish progress				
TECHNICAL					
Identify practice	Evaluate effectiveness				
Determine need	Identify role				
Plan moves	Establish progress				
				CRITICAL	
				Identify issue	Probe for reflection
				Expand awareness	Identify goal
		Plan moves	Establish progress		
		CONTEXTUAL			
		Identify context	Find patterns		
		Surface values	Identify goal		
		Plan moves	Establish progress		
		TECHNICAL			
		Identify practice	Evaluate effectiveness		
		Determine need	Identify role		
		Plan moves	Establish progress		

Appendix A: Coaching Notes Form

After Coaching: Please take some time to reflect on the following items in order to track progress and plan for future sessions.

1). The development of inclusive practices in this school:

2). Progress toward establishing a shared ThirdSpace:

3). The development of the coachee's understanding of inclusive practices:

Next Steps



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