

SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

At a Glance

Dedicated educators strive to enhance teaching and learning, but the method of change matters. This case reveals how Educate's coaching approach drives short-term shifts aligned with long-term vision. Coach Reggie collaborated with Principal Ms. Qualls to set near-term goals, leveraging metacognition. Their partnership fosters collaboration, overcomes isolation, and aligns practices for sustained growth. Strategies like number talks promote metacognitive skills, preparing students for inquiry-based learning.

Challenges

- Enhanced Collaboration
- Unified Vision
- Metacognitive Growth

Key Metrics

- **Participation:** Measure increased collaboration among educators, noting active engagement in reflective sessions.
- **Curricular Alignment:** Track successful integration of short-term goals with long-term educational vision.
- **Metacognitive Development:** Assess students' enhanced metacognitive skills through improved problem-solving and reflective abilities.

Solutions

Educate's coaching model presents a solution to the challenge of isolation in education. Coaches like Reggie act as thought partners, breaking down isolation barriers by fostering collaboration between educators and principals. This collaborative approach cultivates shared insights and professional growth, laying the groundwork for impactful changes that extend beyond individual classrooms. Additionally, the collaborative vision between Reggie and Principal Ms. Qualls addresses the alignment challenge. By connecting short-term goals with the broader educational direction, they ensure a seamless transition towards sustained growth. Lastly, through targeted strategies such as number talks, Reggie nurtures metacognitive skills, preparing students for an inquiry-based curriculum and a lifelong journey of adaptable learning.

■ **Setting the Table for School-Wide Change**

Dedicated educators strive to make teaching and learning better to meet their students' needs. How we go about change and improvement matters. Is change haphazard with a trendy educational topic setting a new goal for each year? Or instead, are there people and processes in place to support sustained long-term change? This case shows how Educate's approach to coaching can advance near-term changes that build towards a longer-term vision. Educate coach, Reggie, helped the school's principal, Ms. Qualls,* set near-term goals for improving teaching and learning that equipped the community for further change. Leaning into the skill of metacognition found on Educate's Innovation Spectrum, Reggie provided space for monitoring understanding and, "Metacognitive self-questions [that] help us connect what we're learning with our prior knowledge," (Goodwin & Hein, 2015, p. 76). He co-constructed with the principal and teachers ways of adapting teaching and learning, utilizing intentional reflection and a personalized approach with each individual. As a result, students throughout the school experienced learning opportunities that fostered metacognition, developing "thinking muscles" necessary for life-long learning.

■ **Disrupting the Status Quo of Isolation: Partnering with Principals**

Educators often work in silos within the US education system. A coach can be a thought-partner who provides space for reflection for both teachers and principals. Darling-Hammond et. al (2022) noted that the principal is possibly the most isolated individual in a school, with limited access to mentoring or coaching. Principals themselves point to the importance of educational networks to interrupt isolation and provide opportunities for shared reflection (Lazenby et. al, 2022). Educate's coaches bring hard-won experience in various educator roles. Reggie's previous experience as a principal allowed him to empathize and speak authentically to Ms. Qualls* needs and develop strong rapport: "I really like the spirit of the principal. She has a big vision for what she wants to see in the school...for her students... [and] she also has a staff with high capacity."



Thinking Together with Principals and Teachers

Ms. Qualls and Reggie discussed working to increase teachers' leadership capacity and agency since, "Right now they are looking at the school through the silo of their classes and don't see how it fits together with the larger vision of the direction they're going and how each of them has an important thing to contribute." This expanded vision was crucial as the school would soon transition to the International Baccalaureate curriculum, which is known for its inquiry focus. Understanding this long-term vision guided them to set an achievable near-term goal of helping teachers design learning opportunities to support metacognition with supportive and equitable curriculum practices, a key segment of Educate's theoretical framework.

When Reggie met with teachers, they echoed Ms. Qualls' assessment of students' needs. Researchers note that evidence of a successful metacognitive classroom include, "Creating a classroom without fear of failure in front of the eyes of their peers or teacher...allowing plenty of time for discussion of strategies...a lot of talk going on...self-assessing what they have done...students verbalizing 'Oh that isn't working, so I am going to try this instead,'" (Summerville et al., n.d.). Reggie worked with teachers to examine the math curriculum and leverage a specific approach, number-talks, currently used to develop students' numerical fluency and metacognition. This approach would equip students with the skill to reflect on their process and thinking and help develop a mindset to explore ideas not just seek an answer, essential for the upcoming inquiry-based curriculum and beyond. The initial coaching cycle would center on helping students gain confidence to talk about math and be willing to share their thinking even if it may turn out to be wrong.

Making Students' Thinking Visible

Reggie connected with almost every teacher at the school in K-5 during the coaching cycle. While the goal to use number talks to improve metacognition was universal, Reggie personalized coaching with the teachers, giving them agency over the implementation of the strategy. In some classrooms Reggie modeled a number talk and worked with the teacher to create a classroom climate where students felt comfortable taking risks. In other classrooms, the culture already supported risk-taking by students and the teachers preferred Reggie to observe them implementing the approach discussed during their coaching session. Areas of focus included teachers controlling their impulse to correct students, clearly introducing silent signals of understanding so everyone had time to think, telling students we are really interested in hearing what you are thinking and finally, sharing and modeling that it is ok to be wrong – it's part of learning.

Reggie emphasized that teachers did multiple rounds of number talks, listening to audio recordings and debriefing with him. Teachers jotted notes to reteach concepts students did not yet understand or circle back to some foundational work to better scaffold the new learning. Teachers also recounted how they wanted to jump in and correct students and strategies used to keep the students driving the learning by asking the class, "Well, what do we think about that? Does everyone agree? Oh, you disagree. Ok, why do you disagree?" Often the student who disagreed was introducing the correct approach, something the teacher would have typically done. Reggie specifically mentioned his work with the kindergarten teacher who excelled at communicating and questioning, "Really probing, making sure she heard from new language learners in her class...helping them find their voice." By students owning the conversation around learning and meaning making, they developed metacognitive skills. The number talks encouraged more participation in each classroom beyond just one student giving an answer.

■ A School Ready for the Next Step

Student success in verbalizing thinking and problem-solving together was an important first step in a longer journey. Starting the coaching relationship listening with empathy, Reggie helped teachers design learning to improve students' metacognition, a skill vital to success in school and life. Significantly, Reggie also provided space for Principal Qualls to engage in reflection, share a long-term vision, and connect current work with him to future work. This amplified the coaching cycle with teachers beyond a one-time intervention into building skills and expanding perspectives, setting the table for sustained coherent change. Their work together exemplifies Educate's purpose: activating communities to spark meaningful change.

■ *Pseudonyms

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