

Key Stage 3 National Strategy

Practice

Curriculum and
Standards

Working together: coaching and assessment for learning

**Senior leaders,
subject leaders
and teachers**

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Assessment for learning

Working together: coaching and assessment for learning

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About this study guide

This study guide will help you learn to be a coach for Assessment for learning (AfL). It draws on academic research, training materials within the 'Sustaining improvement' folder (DfES 0565-2003 G), and the experiences of teachers and schools that have successfully used coaching to develop AfL.

The guide follows the 'specialist coaching' approach, in which teachers with some expertise in an aspect of teaching and learning coach others who wish to develop their skills. A good grasp of AfL is a prerequisite to using this study guide, although coaches themselves will find they will deepen their understanding of AfL as a result of coaching others.

Those involved in peer coaching, which can helpfully complement a specialist coaching approach, may also find these materials useful.

This guide is intended to support pairs or groups of teachers wishing to develop their expertise in coaching. Significant whole-school impact on the development of AfL is generally the result of senior managers ensuring that coaching becomes a central and integral part of the school's CPD programme. For this reason advice about the whole-school use of coaching to develop AfL is provided on pages 19–21 in 'Guidance for senior leaders' ('Assessment for learning' training folder, DfES 0043-2004 G).

The guide, with its accompanying DVD, includes:

- hands-on activities to help you develop your skills;
- opportunities to reflect on your own practice;
- practical tips and troubleshooting advice;
- case studies about how teachers have used coaching to develop AfL.

Using this study guide

This guide will take you, step by step, through the processes of coaching and how they can be applied to developing AfL. It has two distinct sections:

- Section 1: Introduction to coaching;
- Section 2: Specialist coaching for AfL.

If you are new to being a coach, start with the introduction in section 1, which gives some useful definitions and a set of introductory activities that provide a framework for developing the role.

If you already have experience as a coach and are intending to focus on developing your specialist coaching skills as part of a whole-school approach to AfL, go to straight to section 2.

Coaching is not an independent or one-way activity. It offers the coach at least as many learning opportunities as the person being coached. To develop your coaching skills you will also need to develop a professional learning relationship and work collaboratively. This could be with just one colleague who also wishes to develop their skills but many teachers find that working as a group enriches the learning experience. It creates opportunities to coach and be coached by different teachers, and to observe other pairs of coaches developing their skills.

Having established who you are going to work with, you should agree a planned approach and the support you and your colleague(s) will need – for example, from the senior leadership team.

What else you will need

You will also find the following publications useful:

- 'Sustaining improvement materials' (DfES 0565-2003 G);
- 'Assessment for learning whole-school training materials' (DfES 0043-2004 G);
- 'Assessment for learning whole-school training materials' DVD (DfES 1098-2005 GDVD);
- 'Subject development materials for AfL' CD-ROM (DfES 1101-2005 GCD).

Working together: coaching and assessment for learning

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Section 1: Becoming a coach

Introduction to coaching

When setting up a programme of coaching it is important to develop an understanding of what we mean by ‘coaching’. The quotations that follow provide some useful insights.

The coach believes in the ability of the individual to create insights and ideas needed to move their situation forward. The task of the coach is to use advanced skills of listening, questioning and reflection to create highly effective conversations and experiences for the individual. For the person being coached, the relationship feels more like a partnership of equals than anything parental or advisory.¹

¹ Julie Starr, 2003

Coaching is the missing link that turns theoretical knowledge acquired in training into continuously improved performance in practice.²

² John Whitmore, 2002

Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximise their performance. It’s helping them to learn rather than teaching them.³

³ W. Timothy Gallwey, 1986

Coaching is a model of professional development designed to support and accelerate teachers’ learning. It provides ongoing collaborative support for processes such as planning, trialling, reflecting on and evaluating lessons with the objective of enhancing teaching and pupils’ learning.

The focus on deepening specific skills within a supportive and challenging relationship with a professional colleague makes coaching particularly suitable for reviewing and developing established practice.

Coaching is an important way of establishing processes that connect specialist support with day-to-day practice, sustaining learning and classroom change over time. When undertaken well, coaching is effective because it enables teachers to reflect with insight on their own practice and drive their own improvements rather than simply responding to the judgements of others.

When anyone is trying to learn, feedback about the effort has three elements:

- recognition of the desired goal;
- evidence about present position;
- some understanding of a way to close the gap between the above two.

All three must be understood to some degree before action can be taken to improve learning. Coaching processes encourage teachers to carry out this ‘gap closing’ for themselves, with informed support from a colleague. It works best when:

- it follows and builds on specific, specialist input such as training or modelling by a colleague (for example, training based on materials provided as part of one of the strategy’s whole-school initiatives: AfL, ICTAC (ICT across the curriculum), Literacy and learning, Leading in learning, The pedagogical pack: teaching and learning in secondary schools);
- it meets an agreed need and shared concerns about pupils’ learning;
- it involves learning conversations that develop insight into strengths and weaknesses about which a teacher may not be fully aware;
- it extends into ongoing support which sustains a teacher through the trialling of new practice.

However powerful coaching is, it is important to recognise that it is not a ‘cure-all’ or ‘quick fix’ that can respond to every development need or be applied in every context.

Peer and specialist coaching: some definitions

Coaching, whether provided by specialists or peers, is concerned with focusing deeply on developing a specific aspect of practice. Coaching can occur in a wide range of forms and contexts. It is particularly useful in building on and extending specialist external inputs, converting the insight they provide into day-to-day practice. It is a structured and supportive form of on-the-job support. In addition to its value for individuals it can also be instrumental in developing a positive climate for adult learning across the school as a whole.

Peer coaching

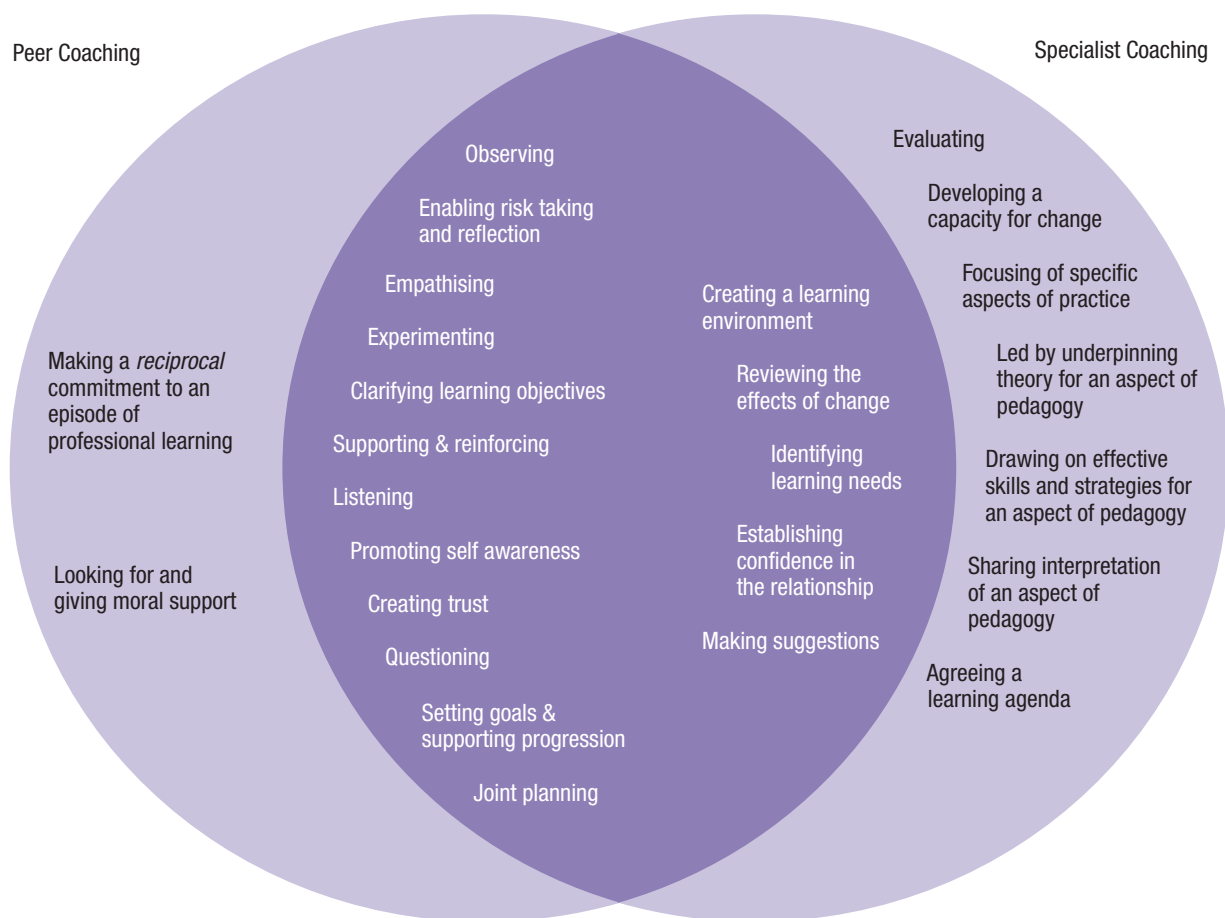
Peer coaching is reciprocal and generally involves two or three teachers investigating aspects of their teaching together. This is very helpful in creating a ‘safe-to-fail’ environment and sustaining learning in the face of everyday competing priorities; peer coaching partners don’t like to let each other down by abandoning agreed goals and plans.

Specialist coaching

In specialist coaching the coach has a greater amount of knowledge and experience in a particular aspect of teaching – for example, Assessment for learning.

Regardless of whether a school adopts a peer coaching or specialist coaching approach it is important to establish that the coaching relationship is not ‘supervisory’, ‘instructional’ or the simple transmission of knowledge from one colleague to another. Recognising that the coach is also a learner in this situation and using a collaborative enquiry stance are both helpful ways of reinforcing this.

The diagram below explores the relationship between peer coaching and specialist coaching.⁵



Task 1

Individual reflection

20 minutes

Consider figure 1, which shows the relationship between peer coaching and specialist coaching.

- Why is the specialist coaching model a useful one for accelerating teachers' application of the principles of Assessment for learning in the classroom?
- Under what circumstances might the peer coaching model support teachers' CPD in Assessment for learning?

Why coaching?

Evidence from research suggests that coaching is a highly effective and professionally motivating form of continuing professional development (CPD) for changing classroom practice. It does not replace training; it does, however, help a teacher to trial and embed ideas gained in training in their own classroom. The ultimate aim of coaching is to stimulate ongoing teacher learning to improve pupil learning and motivation, and thus to raise standards.

Task 2

Individual or group reflection

20 minutes

- Read Appendix 1, which provides research information about the effectiveness of different types of CPD.
- Use the matrix in Appendix 1 to reflect on how different types of CPD have impacted on your own teaching and the learning of your pupils.
- Think about the types of CPD most prevalent in your school and the implications of this.

Coaching can also contribute significantly to capacity building within schools and departments. It increases self-awareness, enhances teachers' confidence and belief in their ability to make a difference, taps a resource of expertise, promotes a collaborative learning culture and establishes a focus for improvement.

A framework for coaching

Coaching is more effective when you have a clear framework in mind that focuses on achieving the teacher's goals. This section provides a framework for the different stages of a coaching cycle and offers steps that might be taken to make the coaching effective. It should be remembered that to achieve significant learning goals always involves more than one coaching cycle as new practice is trialed and honed.

Making a start

Prior to the first coaching cycle it is helpful for a coach and a coached teacher to meet to reach an agreement about how they will work together. During your first meeting with a teacher you have an opportunity to begin to build a relationship of trust and establish clear understandings about the coaching cycles. This is the time to engage the teacher in the coaching process and make sure they are clear about what to expect from this model of learning – that is, that coaching is not training and that this kind of learning happens in a different way which does not simply involve the transmission of expertise from one colleague to another.

It is essential to build on what the teacher knows and can do already. This means exploring their prior experience of the specific teaching and learning strategies that the coaching might address, including information about training attended and subsequent classroom developments.

Consider together and reach agreement on the following:

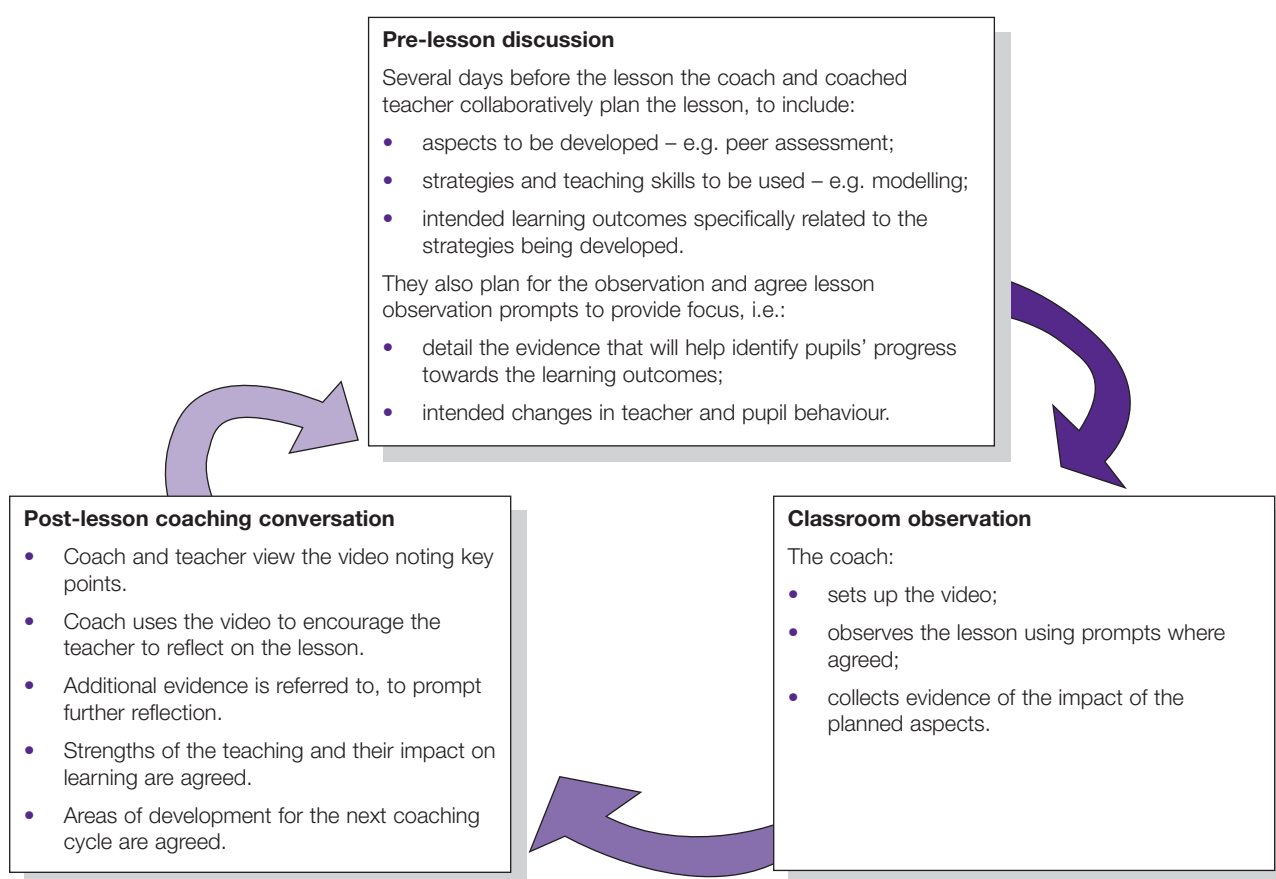
- the specific desired outcomes of the coaching partnership – What will the teacher be able to do differently as a result of the coaching?
- the aspects they want to embed into their day-to-day classroom practice – In this respect it is important for the teacher to have some theoretical understanding of the aspect they wish to develop to underpin their developmental work with the coach. This understanding should enable the teacher to be more independent in reflecting on and moving their own practice forwards. You might want to refer back to Appendix 1 for a more developed rationale for this;

- how pupils' learning should benefit – that is, what the new strategies will do for the pupils as learners and the progress they should make as a result;
- the protocols for observing and videoing lessons and agreeing who will do what and by when.

The coaching cycle

The coaching cycle suggested in this study guide and the 'Sustaining improvement' coaching modules consist of three 'events' which build on prior training and/or observed 'modelling':

- a pre-lesson discussion;
- a classroom observation, supported by videoing where possible;
- a post-lesson coaching conversation.



Each part of the cycle forms an important part of the process so plan ahead and allow plenty of time for each stage.

Research suggests that significant change in a classroom takes some time and is best encouraged and ensured by ongoing collaboration. Real change is far more likely to occur if the 'cycle' is repeated two or three times.

Task 3

Collaborative task

25 minutes

Watch the video sequence, 'Coaching B', 'Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School', 'Views from the coach and coached teacher', on the DVD that supports the 'Sustaining improvement' materials (DfES 0566-2003 GDVD). This shows a coach and a teacher reflecting on the coaching process. With a colleague try to draw out:

- the gains that resulted from their coaching partnership;
- the challenges they faced in making their coaching partnership successful.

Consider how you might overcome these challenges as part of your development as a coaching pair.

Section 2: Specialist coaching for assessment for learning

Task 4

Starter activity

20 minutes

In many ways, when you coach a teacher you are applying the principles of AfL. There are many similarities between the processes of coaching teachers and AfL in the classroom. Consider the quotes that follow alongside the ten principles of AfL (see Appendix 2), then highlight the important similarities.

The coach believes in the ability of the individual to create insights and ideas needed to move their situation forward. The task of the coach is to use advanced skills of listening, questioning and reflection to create highly effective conversations and experiences for the individual. For the person being coached, the relationship feels more like a partnership of equals than anything parental or advisory.¹

¹ Julie Starr, 2003

Coaching is the missing link that turns theoretical knowledge acquired in training into continuously improved performance in practice.²

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Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their performance. It's helping them to learn rather than teaching them.³

³ W. Timothy Gallwey, 1986

This section of the guide is designed to support those who wish to become specialist coaches, in this case in AfL. A specialist coach offers expertise to help teachers review and develop established practice or to integrate new ways of doing things. To become a coach for AfL you will, therefore, need to feel confident about your own understanding of AfL. Once you have developed and refined your coaching skills you will be better equipped to use your AfL expertise to help another teacher move forward. For the purposes of learning to become a specialist coach for AfL it will be helpful for you to work initially with other teachers who also have some expertise in AfL and for you to swap roles so that you experience both coaching and being coached.

Watch video sequence 1 (from the 'Assessment for learning whole-school training materials' DVD). It shows a teacher from a school where specialist coaches have been developing AfL over the last two years. She is reflecting on becoming a coach. Discuss:

- how she became a coach for AfL;
- the qualities she believes a coach should have;
- the major gains to both teachers and learners she has observed as an AfL coach.

Why develop AfL through coaching?

Coaching is a particularly powerful tool for developing AfL for the following reasons.

- Many teachers are unconsciously competent with regard to their current practice in aspects to AfL – that is, they don't recognise things they are doing well and therefore don't always transfer those things from one teaching context to another. Coaching can help teachers to become more aware of what it is they do well and what they are not doing so effectively.
- A coach can help to identify the impact of specific aspects of AfL on the quality of learning and standards. The link between developing pedagogy and its impact on standards is complex and difficult to pinpoint. A coach can analyse lessons to identify teacher actions and critical incidents which led to improved learning outcomes. Having another person to help collect evidence about the quality of the learning processes and outcomes can be vital when trying to learn what worked well and what didn't.
- Independent pupil learning is at the heart of AfL. The evidence of such learning is not always readily apparent to a teacher while they are busy teaching. Coaches can seek out evidence of independent learning and can help to identify how the teaching contributed to it.
- AfL is highly dependent on putting planning into action. When a teacher is developing their teaching skills – for example, in questioning or oral feedback – it is tricky for them to reflect on their practice at the point of developing it. Coaching, particularly where supported by lesson video, can facilitate this.
- Some aspects of AfL are complex and difficult to refine – for example, the sharing of learning objects with pupils so they are clearly understood. Developing an in-depth understanding of AfL takes more than time. Collaborative thinking helps move understanding forwards for both the coached teacher and the coach.
- Developing an operational understanding of AfL takes persistence. A teacher's practice and confidence may actually dip as they try to develop new skills and implement new approaches such as peer assessment. Coaching provides the supportive context that helps to nurture new practice through the initial tribulations and uncertainties.

- AfL is rich in strategies that can easily be transferred from one teacher's classroom to another – for example, no hands up questioning and wait time. Specialist coaches can suggest approaches to inform future practice.

Developing good practice in AfL takes time, but coaching offers a powerful way of accelerating the process and generating real change in classrooms.

Task 6

Collaborative task

40 minutes

Appendix 3 shows transcripts for two science lessons taught by the same teacher (from 'Assessment for learning: putting it into practice').⁴ They illustrate some changes in the teacher's questioning practice that resulted from successful coaching. Extract 1 is from a lesson before the teacher was coached. Extract 2 is from a lesson after two coaching cycles. Read these extracts, then discuss:

- the differences between the two lessons (consider the length and quality of the pupil responses and balance between pupil and teacher talk);
- how the teacher uses assessment for learning to improve the learning outcomes;
- how this has impacted on pupil motivation and standards.

⁴ Paul Black, Christine Harrison, Clare Lee, Bethan Marshall, Dylan William
Assessment for learning: Putting it into practice.

Task 7

Group reflection

10 minutes

As a coach you will need to develop your capacity to be reflective because this is a key skill you will be helping the teachers you coach to develop.

Having considered the first section in this guide, list your reasons for wanting to become a specialist coach for AfL. Share these with other colleagues who are already skilled coaches or who are currently developing their coaching skills.

The stages of the coaching cycle

Task 8

Collaborative task in coaching pairs

45 minutes

The tasks in this section ask you to work through the processes of the coaching cycle in coaching pairs. Ideally, each task should be carried out twice to allow you to experience and practise both coaching and being coached.

- Photocopy the coaching agreement template on page 24 of the 'Sustaining improvement' folder.
- Use the 'Development planning' template to guide a discussion and to record agreed actions for a coaching cycle that you intend to follow.
- Refer to the AfL training unit and subject development materials that relate to the aspect of AfL to be developed and use this to sharpen your agreed focus, expectations and the details of the classroom work.
- Reflect on the 'fitness for purpose' of this document. Are there any additions to the template that might enhance your coaching for AfL?

Pre-lesson discussion

The purpose of the pre-lesson discussion is for the coach to assist the teacher in identifying a specific aspect of AfL they want to focus on developing. The coach would then support the teacher in incorporating that aspect of AfL into a lesson, drawing on and trialling ideas from training they have participated in. Another important purpose is to agree how the coach will gather information to inform reflection about the lesson.

The pre-lesson discussion is an important part of the coaching cycle and can require as much planning and preparation as the post-lesson discussion.

Practical tips

The coach should bring the following things:

- a copy of the seven AfL key characteristics as a reminder of the 'big picture' for AfL (see slide 1.3 in 'Assessment for learning in everyday lessons' in the AfL whole-school training materials);
- copies of any AfL training units and subject development materials relevant to the focus of the coaching.

The teacher should bring these things:

- the medium-term plan or scheme of work from which the lesson will be drawn;
- any resources or textbooks that will be used in the lesson;
- ideas from the AfL training materials they want to try;
- samples of pupil work from the group may also be helpful depending on the area of focus.

Preparing for the pre-lesson discussion: the coach

It is impossible to plan all of the detail of the pre-lesson discussion since a key role of a coach is to listen and respond to the needs of the teacher. However, it is possible to plan to scaffold the discussion using frameworks for questioning. Handout 1.6 on page 29 of the 'Sustaining improvement' folder provides one generic framework for planning questions in a pre-lesson discussion.

The GROW model (see Appendix 4) provides a helpful and easily remembered alternative which can be used to frame coaching discussions, particularly the pre-lesson discussion. The stages described in the model are not necessarily sequential and may be revisited or repeated during a conversation. The framework is not meant to serve as a script or formula and once used a few times is likely to become second nature.

The model often features the use of the word 'we' in the questions. Use the pre-lesson discussion to let the teacher know you are working together, creating a sense of joint ownership to encourage confidence and risk taking.

Other considerations

- **The need for a theoretical foundation to build on.** Remember that coaching should help teachers to apply what they have learned in training to their classroom practice. Ideally the teacher to be coached will have participated in relevant AfL training prior to the coaching cycle. Where a teacher has not received the necessary training, your role as coach may involve more information giving at this stage.
- **The stage of the coaching relationship.** Your first pre-lesson discussion is unique as you may not know the teacher well and almost certainly will not have seen them teach. Take the opportunity to get to know what aspects of practice particularly interest them. Ask the teacher to share with you their perceived strengths in teaching and recent successes. They may also wish to share some disasters! In future pre-lesson discussions you will have more to draw on by reflecting back on previous coaching cycles.
- **The teacher's readiness for change.** Early conversations with the teacher should enable you to gain insight about their readiness for reflection and change. Clearly some teachers are already more self-aware and may, therefore, be eager to trial new ideas and develop their practice. Others may be less consciously competent and might be less aware of the need for, or potential gains arising from, change. Some teachers will be more ready to respond positively to constructive discussion. You will need to draw on your skills of providing effective oral feedback. Coaches always need to listen carefully to the clues provided in conversation and formulate strategies which will respond to the stances and awareness levels of the teacher.

A good coach is clear about a teacher's goals but shows patience and flexibility in the way they seek to reach those goals. Be wary of moving to a more judgemental, challenging or directive style because you perceive the teacher is less immediately inclined to reflect on and change their practice or because the process of change seems to be taking too long. The role of the coach is rather like 'creating an itch' by helping a teacher to reflect on their effectiveness and thereby develop an internal thirst for change. That process cannot be hurriedly short-circuited.

Task 9**Collaborative task in coaching pairs****30 minutes**

Video sequence 2 (from the 'Assessment for learning whole-school training materials' DVD) shows a pre-lesson discussion involving a coach, Ian (a history teacher) and Rachel (a mathematics teacher from the same school). This is the start of their second coaching cycle together.

Watch the video and consider the following questions.

- How does the coaching session build on the whole-school AfL training Rachel has participated in ahead of the session?
- How does Ian use the 'GROW' model (see Appendix 4) to structure his questioning?
- Where and how does Ian question or challenge Rachel in ways that encourage her to reflect more carefully on her practice?

Having considered these questions, evaluate the GROW model as an approach you might use a pre-lesson discussions.

Task 10**Collaborative task in coaching pairs****20 minutes**

In preparation for the coaching cycle you planned with your colleague in task 8, work as a pair to identify three questions you might ask for each stage of the GROW model.

You should use the relevant AfL training unit(s) to frame your questions sharply so they encourage the coached teacher to focus on planning for both the AfL strategies that will help them to achieve their goals as well as the teaching skills that will enable them to most effectively impact on pupils' learning.

At the end of the pre-lesson discussion it is important to agree with the teacher on your role during the classroom observation. Apart from the focus for the observation, you will also need to agree the practicalities. For example, would they prefer you to:

- be 'a fly on the wall';
- collect evidence by talking to the pupils;
- collect evidence by looking at pupils' work;
- complete a lesson observation schedule to aid subsequent discussions (see the example in Appendix 5 on page 31).

Whether the lesson will be videoed will be an important variable here. Video is frequently identified as a very powerful element of successful coaching. However, it should always be done by agreement and with shared understandings about ownership and use of the recorded lesson.

Having planned your questions for the pre-lesson discussion you should carry this out. Afterwards you should discuss both the effectiveness of the meeting and whether it met its aims.

Try videoing the discussion, then watching it together to boost your learning.

The classroom observation

The purpose of the classroom observation is to gather information about the aspect of AfL that the teacher is developing to inform the post-lesson coaching conversation. Evidence should enable them to later reflect, in detail, on what worked well, what didn't and why.

The Coaching part A module in the 'Sustaining improvement' folder provides generic advice about classroom observations.

The purpose of coaching is to improve teaching so that pupils' learning improves. It therefore follows that, although the coach should consider both the *teaching* and the *learning*, the primary focus should be on the learning. Remember that you are not trying to look at every aspect of the lesson. Your purpose is to seek out evidence relating to the AfL focus that was agreed in the pre-lesson discussion.

The presence of an observer automatically influences the lesson and the trick is to be as unobtrusive and invisible as possible. There are a number of simple rules to follow – for example, never talking to a pupil while the teacher is talking to the class. Classroom observation requires awareness of class dynamics, sensitivity towards teacher–pupil relationships and practice.

An observation schedule can be useful in focusing your observation. The AfL training units may prove a useful starting point for designing well-focused lesson observation schedules. An example that focuses on 'Objective led lessons' (based on handout 3.4 from the AfL training folder) is provided in Appendix 5. Other examples of handouts that could be adapted include:

- 'Assessment for learning in everyday lessons', handout 1.1;
- 'Oral feedback', handout 4.1.1 or handout 4.1.4;
- 'Securing progression', handout 6.2.7;
- 'Questioning and dialogue', handout 7.5.

A coach can see, hear and identify things the teacher may be unaware of. The following approaches can yield useful evidence about the degree to which AfL impacts on learning in the classroom.

- **Eavesdropping.** Avoid direct eye contact with the pupils you are listening to. Try to write down snippets of their conversation. Look for positives such as examples of where they have really understood, but also listen out for common misconceptions or difficulties with undertaking the lesson's tasks.
- **Helicoptering.** Get an overall feel for the class, the relationship between teacher and pupils and between pupils. The learning climate can change during a lesson, so stand back to get an overview of the engagement of the pupils and pace of learning every ten minutes or so, and note what you see. Look for links between teacher behaviours and pupil responses.

- **Sampling pupils' work.** Consider the quality of the work being produced. Does it match or exceed expectations? Note down pupils who seemed to struggle or not do what they were asked. You could ask the teacher to bring work samples to inform the post-lesson discussion.
- **Talking to pupils.** On page 2 of each of the AfL subject development materials there is a self-review grid for the relevant unit. This can provide useful prompts for questions relating to the quality of AfL in practice. For example, the statements provided in unit 3 could prompt the questions 'Can you tell me what you're trying to learn and how it fits in with what you learned last week?' and 'How could you improve this and what would you need to do here to do really well in this?'
- **Videoing the lesson.** A video recording of the lesson is invaluable for coaching because it provides an objective record of the lesson and is the most productive way to stimulate reflection. It lets the teacher study the pupils' responses during the different episodes of the lesson. The recording does not need to be an elaborate or intrusive process. You can use a camera on a tripod at the back of the room and leave it running without interrupting the lesson. If your video skills are up to it you might move round and zoom in on groups, but this can be quite obtrusive and should only be done with prior agreement. Some coaches find it useful to watch and listen to the pupils during the lesson and then to complete an observation schedule while watching the video afterwards. Others find it helpful to view the video for the first time with the teacher, as it can create an atmosphere of mutual learning about the lesson.

Recommendations regarding obtaining parental permission for pupils to be videoed to support the coaching process are provided on page 20 of the AfL Guidance for senior leaders in the 'Assessment for learning whole-school training materials'.

Handout 1.7 on page 30 of the 'Sustaining improvement' folder provides a useful summary of advice on classroom observations.

Task 12

Collaborative task in coaching pairs

12 minutes

Watch the video clip of Ian observing the Year 8 mathematics lesson, which you saw him and Rachel planning in task 9.

- Identify which strategies Ian uses to collect evidence of learning in the lesson.
- Discuss the pros and cons of each of the strategies – for example, *'helicoptering' is unobtrusive and allows the coach to make judgements about overall levels of pupil engagement and the climate for learning but it is limited as a means of checking the quality of learning for individual pupils.*
- For the aspect(s) of AfL that is the focus of your coaching cycle(s) identify which methods for collecting evidence are likely to be most appropriate.

Post-lesson coaching conversation

The purpose of the post-lesson conversation is to enable the coached teacher to reflect in detail on the aspect of AfL they have been developing in the observed lesson. The role of the coach here is to help the teacher to reflect on their developing practice

with the intention that they become more self-aware and the process becomes internalised. The coach draws on evidence they have collected during the lesson to support this process. A successful post-lesson discussion will create momentum for further change, improvement and, most significantly, trialling of new practice.

The Coaching part B module in the 'Sustaining improvement' folder provides useful generic advice about post-lesson coaching conversations.

It is neither possible nor advisable to plan every detail of the coaching conversation as you need to respond to the teacher, as far as possible encouraging them to do most of the reflecting, thinking and talking. It is, however, important to plan key questions that will trigger constructive critical thinking about the lesson's effectiveness. These questions should clearly relate to the specific teaching skills and strategies that the teacher is trying to develop. They should focus on the expectations that you and the teacher agreed on and be framed in the light of the evidence you gained from the observation. You might think of this as a plenary revisiting the planned objectives and outcomes.

In the post-lesson discussion the coach requires many different skills but questioning is often the most important. The following types of questions can enable the coach to prompt and steer the conversation without dominating it.

Questions to trigger and sustain reflection

These can be planned after the video has been viewed and in advance of the coaching conversation. They include questions for:

- metacognition – for example, *'What was going through your mind when Jasmin gave that obscure answer?'*
- analysis – for example, *'How far do you think you came to meeting the expectations we agreed for this coaching cycle?'*
- synthesis – for example, *'What do you think contributed to the penny finally dropping for that group of pupils?'*
- evaluation – for example, *'On reflection, what do you feel worked best?'*

Controlling versus neutral questions

The way you frame your questions can have a positive or negative effect on a teacher. Think carefully about the stems and phrases you use. Appendix 6 explores the effects that controlling questions may have compared to those that are more neutral.

Open and closed questions

Closed questions can be answered with a short answer, often 'yes' or 'no', whereas open questions invite longer responses and trigger deeper thinking and reflection. A successful coach encourages the teacher to reflect on the lesson for themselves and is therefore likely to ask more open questions. However, closed questions can be particularly useful for:

- confirming information – for example, *'Do you agree that the peer assessment in pairs went particularly well?'*
- moving the conversation along – for example, *'Shall we move on to how you provided whole-class feedback?'*
- ending the conversation – for example, *'Have we covered all the areas we agreed to?'*

Task 13**Collaborative task in coaching pairs****20 minutes**

With a colleague consider the 13 questions listed below and for each decide:

- whether it is controlling or neutral;
- whether it is open or closed;
- whether it is likely to trigger teacher reflection and deep thinking.

- 1 Are you pleased with the lesson?
- 2 Overall are you pleased with the way the activities went?
- 3 Why did you share the learning objectives then?
- 4 Is there anything you would change if you were to repeat the lesson?
- 5 Are you satisfied with part of the lesson?
- 6 What do you think was happening here?
- 7 What happened there... do you think it worked?
- 8 How could you improve or adapt that activity?
- 9 Was the language pitched at the right level?
- 10 Did the pupils understand the objectives and outcomes for the lesson?
- 11 Why was that episode of the lesson so successful?
- 12 You must be really pleased about the plenary, are you?
- 13 That would translate to other groups, wouldn't it?

Select the two questions you believe would be most productive in a coaching conversation and explain why.

Choose two questions you feel might be less productive and reword them. Appendix 6 might help you with this.

Task 14**Collaborative task in coaching pairs****30 minutes**

Watch the third video clip, which shows Rachel (the mathematics teacher) who featured in video sequence 2 (task 9) teaching a Year 8 lesson. Remember that in this coaching cycle, Rachel is in the early stages of developing objective led lessons.

- Identify the positive aspects of her use of 'Objective led lessons' and the impact of this on the pupils' learning.
- Identify an aspect of the lesson you think she might reflect on and develop.
- Generate a list of key questions you might ask as part of a post-lesson discussion with her.

Remember that Rachel is a real teacher who is in the early stages of developing objective led lessons. The questions you generate should be manageable and reflect the current stage of her practice. As a coach you would be responsible for ensuring the discussion about the lesson is well balanced and her confidence and willingness to continue developing are maintained.

Task 15

Collaborative task in coaching pairs

30 minutes

Watch video clip 4, which shows the coach Ian with Rachel engaging in a post-lesson coaching conversation. Then discuss the following questions.

- Which positive aspects of Rachel's AfL practice does Ian pick up on?
- Which aspects of the lesson does Ian encourage Rachel to reflect on with a view to developing her practice in AfL further?
- How does Ian use the evidence he has collected to inform the conversation?
- How does Ian frame his key questions to make the conversation a positive and productive experience for Rachel?

If time permits consider what other factors contribute to the success of this coaching conversation.

During your post-lesson discussion you should use the coaching agreement (see task 8) to remind the teacher about their goals and expectations and to consider the progress made so far towards these. The essence of success lies in the trialling and refinement of new practice. Encourage the teacher to talk about what more they would like to achieve in the next cycle and how they will go about it.

Ask for feedback from the teacher on your role as coach – for example, *'Was that a useful discussion to have?'* and *'How might I improve the way I collected evidence in the classroom in the next cycle?'*

You should leave the teacher feeling successful and encourage ongoing learning; the teacher should assume ultimate responsibility for themselves. They will then continue to develop and refine the AfL strategies they are using to make them more effective. You can maintain a sense of support by identifying ways in which the teacher may continue to learn once the coaching sessions end – for example, by using the AfL subject development materials with department colleagues.

Task 16

Collaborative task in coaching pairs

This is the point at which you start to put everything together by completing the coaching cycle you began in tasks 8, 10 and 11 with your colleague. Ideally you should work through both your own and your partner's coaching cycle so you experience both coaching and being coached. If possible, video your post-lesson conversation making a note of the key questions you asked and discussing what you hoped to achieve at these points in the conversation. Consider whether you would change any of your questions in hindsight.

Photocopy the 'Coaching agreement – evaluation and reflection' template on page 25 of the 'Sustaining improvement' folder.

- Use it to guide a discussion, and to record the outcomes of the coaching cycle and the focus for the next cycle.
- Reflect on the 'fitness for purpose' of this document. Are there any additions to the template that might enhance your coaching for AfL?

Troubleshooting

Following a first coaching cycle many coaches have commented that coaching is more difficult than it first seems. Their early experiences may raise some issues and doubts about their expertise. These can usually be overcome by discussions with colleagues who are also learning coaching processes. Issues commonly voiced include the following.

- Feeling that you can't think of your next question.
 - *Perhaps you lost concentration – admit it. Ask the teacher to repeat what they said.*
 - *It is easy to get distracted – again be honest. Say you were thinking about something they said earlier and ask them to go over that point again.*
- The conversations can get stuck.
 - *Ask if they are happy with where the conversation is going. Perhaps suggest starting with the next section of the lesson.*
 - *Suggest you both summarise the learning from the conversation so far.*
- Progress can feel slow and direct impact can feel limited.
 - *It can be frustrating when the teacher does not see what you want them to see or draw the conclusions you draw – try replaying the lesson video or quoting a comment from a pupil. You may not need to say anything more.*
- Progress within the coaching conversation is less significant than changes in the classroom.
 - *Avoid being directive.*
 - *Be prepared to revisit ideas and thinking in the second or third cycle.*

The video clips for the 'Sustaining improvement' coaching modules illustrate a range of strategies which you might incorporate in your coaching practice.

Reflecting on the coaching cycle

Task 18

Reflecting on the coaching cycle

30–45 minutes

If other teachers in your school are currently developing their coaching skills for AfL, try to meet to discuss your experiences having completed one cycle each.

- Ask each person to briefly present their experiences of coaching and being coached.
- Allow time to raise questions and, most importantly, look for solutions to common problems that arise.

The following questions are from teachers who were about to start their coaching training.

- Can you be an effective coach if you think you don't know much about AfL?
- If you're coaching someone who is more skilled in some aspects of AfL than you, how might this affect the process?
- Does success depend on the quality of the coach and their skills?
- What if I can't coach effectively because I'm working outside my subject area?

In pairs or as a group, discuss your responses to each question now you have experienced working as a coach.

Are any of the questions still an issue for you? Reflect on how you might resolve your concerns.

Tailoring coaching to support other AfL developments

Effective schools recognise there are several models or approaches to coaching and that it is helpful to adjust the way coaching is operated or organised, to tailor it to support particular development needs – for example:

- teachers who are unused to having their lessons video-recorded may find it less threatening to begin coaching using a lesson observation schedule because it offers greater familiarity during initial periods of uncertainty;
- an audio recording may prove effective in supporting and stimulating a coaching discussion about a teacher's oral feedback;
- the early stages of a coaching programme might sometimes be based on work samples or lesson plans rather than on lesson observations, especially if the focus for development is not on teaching skills or classroom interactions.

There is a range of contexts in which specialist coaching can be adapted to promote development. For AfL these include:

Context	Examples of adaptations to the coaching process
Unit 4.2 Written feedback	<p>Coaching based on written feedback analysis.</p> <p>The AfL coach and teacher work together to sample pupils' exercise books, scrutinising the teacher's written comments. They discuss ways in which existing practice might be improved using the headings in handout 4.2.1 (AfL unit 4.2) as prompts. They carry out a follow-up sample two months later to collect evidence of improvements in pupils' work, as a result of changes to the written feedback, and to focus further developments.</p>
Unit 6.1 Curricular target setting	<p>Coaching based on pupil assessment and curricular target setting.</p> <p>The AfL coach supports the head of department in planning, and then observing, a departmental meeting where the teachers will analyse a set of pupil assessments for a year group to seek out common weaknesses and misconceptions. The team will then develop a set of curricular targets and suggest strategies that might best address them. Following the meeting the coach works with the head of department and uses the self-review grid on pages 2 and 3 of the relevant subject development materials for 'Developing curricular target setting' to trigger reflection, identify the current state of play and potential next steps for the department.</p> <p><i>Classroom-based coaching may later support these developments by helping teachers to become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in providing oral feedback to pupils about making progress towards curricular targets.</i></p>
Unit 6.2 Securing progression	<p>Coaching based on a departmental meeting and curricular target setting.</p> <p>The AfL coach supports the head of department in planning, and then observing, a departmental meeting focusing on developing curricular targets. The aim is for the department to select a curricular target their pupils experience difficulty in progressing towards and then to produce 'staged success criteria' for it in 'pupil-friendly' language. The coach might:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as a non-specialist in the subject, play the role of the pupil by commenting on the clarity of the progression towards the curricular target described by the department; • provide informed support to the head of department, following the meeting, to assist reflection on the process. The self-review grid on pages 2 and 3 of the relevant subject development materials for 'Developing securing progression' in Assessment for learning can be used to identify the current state of play and next steps for the department. <p><i>Again classroom-based coaching may later support these developments by helping teachers use the scaffold they have developed with pupils to inform peer and self assessment.</i></p>

Appendix 1

Coaching research

The most effective design for staff development is based on the evolutionary model of teacher learning founded on the ideas of B. Joyce and B. Showers.⁶ Whether we teach ourselves or we learn from a training agent, the outcomes of training can be classified into the following levels of impact.

- **Awareness.** At the awareness level we realise the importance of an area and begin to focus on it. The road to competence begins with awareness of the nature of a particular teaching strategy, its probable uses and how it may fit into the curriculum.
- **Concepts and organised knowledge.** Concepts provide intellectual control over relevant content. Essential to the application of a new teaching strategy is a deeper conceptual understanding – for example, about how the new strategy supports learning. This moves the teacher's learning beyond simply the acquisition of 'tips for teachers'.
- **Principles and skills.** These are tools for action. At this level we learn the skills of implementing the teaching strategy. We also acquire the skills for adapting it for students with varying levels of ability to respond to the new mode of teaching perhaps by teaching them the skills they lack. At this level there is potential for action – we are aware of the area, can think effectively about it and possess the skills to act.
- **Application and problem-solving.** Finally, we transfer the concepts, principles and skills of the new teaching strategy to the classroom. We begin to use the strategy, combine it with others in our repertoire and integrate it into our style. Only after this fourth level has been reached can we expect to impact on the pupil learning.

The matrix that follows relates these phases to the research of Joyce and Showers (X denotes evidence).

Level of impact Training method	A General awareness of new skills	B Organised knowledge of underlying concepts and theory	C Learning of new skills	D Application on the job
1 Presentation/description (e.g. lecture) on new skills	X			
2 Modelling the new skills (e.g. live or video demonstrations)	X	X		
3 Practice in simulated settings	X	X	X	
4 Feedback on performance in simulated or real settings	X	X	X	X
5 Coaching on the job	X	X	X	X

A key element in achieving such effects is the provision of in-classroom support. We have found in our own school improvement work that it is the facilitation of coaching that enables teachers to extend their repertoire of teaching skills and to transfer them from different classroom settings to others.

From our experience, coaching contributes to transfer of training in five ways. In particular, teachers who are coached:

- generally practise new strategies more frequently and develop greater skill;
- use their newly-learned strategies more appropriately than ‘uncoached’ teachers;
- exhibit greater long-term knowledge retention and skill regarding those strategies in which they have been coached;
- are much more likely than ‘uncoached’ teachers to teach new models of learning to their students;
- exhibit clearer understanding with regard to the purposes and uses of the new strategies.

Although peer coaching is an essential component of staff development, it also needs to be connected to other elements in order to form an effective school improvement strategy.

Appendix 2

Ten research-based principles of assessment for learning

Assessment for learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there. Assessment for learning should:

- be part of effective planning of teaching and learning;
- focus on how students learn;
- be recognised as central to classroom practice;
- be regarded as a key professional skill for all teachers;
- be sensitive and constructive because any assessment has an emotional impact;
- take account of the importance of learner motivation;
- promote commitment to learning goals and a shared understanding of the criteria by which they are assessed;
- provide learners with constructive guidance about how to improve;
- develop learners' capacity for self-assessment so they can become reflective and self managing;
- recognise the full range of achievement for all learners.

Appendix 3

Science lesson transcript 1

Extract 1 from a lesson about electricity

Teacher = T; students listed by pseudonym names.

- T: Right. I want everyone to concentrate now, because you need some information before you start today's experiment. Okay, today we are going to find out about these...
Holds up an ammeter.
Anyone know what we call these and where you might find one?
Starts to walk round and show groups the ammeter.
Two hands go up in the class.
- T: Look carefully. Where have you seen something like this? You might have seen something like it before. What is it involved with? It's got a special name...
Three more hands go up. T. selects one of these students.
- T: Yes... Jay?
- Jay: In electricity, sir.
- T: That's right. You can use these in electric circuits. Anyone know what it is called? This word here helps. Can you read what it says? Carolyn?
- Carolyn: Amps.
- T: And what is this instrument called that measures in amps?
Pause of two seconds. No hands go up.
No? No one? Well, it's an ammeter because it measures in Amps. What's it called, Jamie?
- Jamie: A clock, sir.
- T: You weren't listening Jamie. It might look like a clock but it is called an... ?
T. pauses and looks round class. Six hands shoot up.
Richard?
- Richard: An Ampmeter sir.
- T: Nearly. Carolyn?
- Carolyn: An ammeter.
- T: Thank you. What's it called Jamie?
- Jamie: An ammeter.
- T: That's right. An ammeter. And where do we find these ammeters? Monica?
Monica shrugs her shoulders. Six pupils have their hands raised.
- T: No idea. Tell her Rebecca.
- Rebecca: In electric circuits.
- T: Good. I am starting to spot which of you are sleeping today. Are we with it now, Monica?
Monica nods.
Right. Now we are going to use these ammeters in our practical today. So gather round and I will show you how it works. Quietly please.

Science lesson transcript 2

Extract 2 from a lesson about photosynthesis

T: We are going to look at the way plants feed today. I know you've done some work on this in your primary school and I am going to give you time to think that over and to tell your neighbour about what you know, or think you know already.

Pupils start looking at one another and a few whispers start.

Hang on. Not yet. I want to give you something to think about.

T. produces two geranium plants from behind his desk. One is healthy and large and the other is quite spindly.

Now when Mrs James potted up these two plants last spring, they were about the same size but look at them now. I think they might have been growing in different places in her prep room. I also think it's got something to do with the way that plants feed. So have a think then talk to your partner. Why do you think these plants have grown differently?

Class erupts into loud discussion in pairs. T. goes over to sidebench and checks apparatus. After four minutes, T. goes back to front and stops the class discussion.

Okay. Ideas?

About half the class put up their hands. Teacher waits for three seconds.

A few more hands go up.

Monica – your group? Pair?

Monica: That one's grown bigger because it was on the window. *Pointing.*

T: On the window? Mmm. What do you think Jamie?

Jamie: We thought that.

T: You thought... ?

Jamie: That the big 'un had eaten up more light.

T: I think I know what Monica and Jamie are getting at, but can anyone put the ideas together? Window – light – plants?

Again about half the class put up their hands. The teacher chooses a child who has not put up their hand.

T: Richard.

Richard: Err, yes. We thought, me and Dean, that it had grown bigger because it was getting more food.

Some pupils stretch their hand up higher. T. points to Susan and nods.

Susan: No, it grows where there's a lot of light and that's near the window.

T: Mmmm. Richard and Dean think the plant's getting more food. Susan... and Stacey as well? Yes. Susan thinks it's because this plant is getting more light. What do others think? Tariq?

Tariq: It's the light 'cos its photosynthesis. Plants feed by photosynthesis.
T. writes photosynthesis on the board.

T: Who else has heard this word before?

Points to board.

Almost all hands go up.

Okay. Well can anyone put Plant, Light, Window and Photosynthesis together and tell me why these two plants have grown differently?

T. waits 12 seconds. Ten hands went up immediately he stopped speaking. Five more go up in the pause.

Okay. Carolyn?

Carolyn: The plant. The big plant has been getting more light by the window and 'cos plants make their own food by photosynthesis, it's...

Jamie: Bigger.

T: Thanks Jamie. What do others think about Carolyn's idea?
Many students nod.
Yes, it's bigger because it has more light and can photosynthesise more.
So Richard and Dean, how does your idea fit in with this?

Dean: It was wrong sir.

Richard: No, it wasn't. We meant that. Photosynthesis. Plant food.

Dean: Yeah.

T: So. Can you tell us your idea again but use the word *photosynthesis* as well this time?

Richard: Photosynthesis is what plants do when they feed and get bigger.

T: Not bad. Remember that when we come to look at explaining the experiment that we are going to do today.

Appendix 4

The GROW model

The GROW model	Sample coaching questions
<p>G = Goal</p> <p>Ask the teacher what they hope to achieve in the lesson. Allow them to think aloud. Try to clarify exactly what they hope to achieve and how.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the learning objectives? How will we know if pupils have met these? • What should the pupil outcomes be for this lesson? • Have you chosen the aspects of AfL you want to focus on? • What made you choose this one? What do you hope the pupils will gain from this?
<p>R = Reality</p> <p>Here try to listen as much as possible. Avoid any input and hold back your AfL expertise. Allow the teacher to talk you through the lesson plan. Use questions to help them reflect on the lesson plan and the choices they have made for themselves.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the lesson fit in with the scheme of work? • Do you usually share learning objectives with the group? • Have you used this technique before? • Are the class used to using this technique? • What difficulties might there be in using this strategy with this group? • Will pupils be familiar with this information/these key words, etc.? • Tell me more about the issues you found last time.
<p>O = Options (What could you do?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having talked through the overall plan for the lesson help them to look at options at each stage. • Use the AfL key characteristics or training materials as prompts. • Cover a range of options. • Invite suggestions from the teacher. • Ensure choices are made. • The teacher may want to write down ideas as they are discussed. Wait until the teacher has exhausted their suggestions before you jump in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were there things from the training you wanted to build in to the lesson? • You said you wanted to include peer assessment; shall we look at handout 5.4 and choose one of the strategies suggested? • What are the advantages and disadvantages of asking pupils to generate the learning outcomes? • Will there be an opportunity for you to give feedback to pupils? How shall we structure this – pairs, groups or whole class? • How will individual pupils know whether they have met the outcomes? • Let's recap: can you talk me through the ideas we've discussed?
<p>W = What will you do?</p> <p>Encourage the teacher to commit to the strategies they identify. Make a mental note of what they chose to do and why. (Write this down later to inform planning for the post-lesson discussion.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of these ideas do you like the most? • Have you thought about exactly how you will do this? • Are there any bits you feel uncertain about? • Of the ideas we've discussed are there any that you definitely want/don't want to include? • What should I be looking out for in the lesson?

Appendix 5

Lesson observation

Class _____

Date of observation _____

What was the **medium-term objective** [from the teaching framework or unit of study] and the **'big picture'** for the lesson?

How far were the pupils clear about how today's lesson fitted into the 'big picture'?

What were the **learning objectives** in 'pupil-speak' for the lesson?

How far were these understood by the pupils? How do I know?

What were the **activities** or **tasks** used in the lesson?

What were the **expected learning outcomes** for the lesson?

How far were these understood by the pupils? How do I know?

What were the **actual learning outcomes** for the lesson?

What evidence did I find for what the pupils actually learned?

Appendix 6

Controlling versus neutral questions

Controlling questions	Problem/issue	Neutral questions	Benefit
You must have felt disappointed by the pupils' answers here, were you?	Narrows down options of what the teacher may have felt, and assumes they 'should' have felt disappointed.	What did you learn from the pupils' responses here?	Open question enables the teacher to diagnose a situation, e.g. relating to pupils' understanding or their skills in providing answers.
You planned to give pupils 30 seconds to talk. Why didn't you do it?	Implies both criticism and a requirement for the teacher to justify their actions.	You planned to give pupils 30 seconds to talk. How well did your change of plan work?	Invites the teacher to identify both positive and negative outcomes.
What made you ask that question then?	Implies disagreement and requests justification.	How did the pupils respond to that question?	Concentrates on the impact on learning rather than the actions of the teacher.
What could you do to make sure they all understand the objectives next time?	Places pressure on the teacher to get the question 'right' while implying subtle blame.	What might help pupils better understand the objectives next time?	Allows the teacher to consider various ways of sharing the objectives.
What is it about giving helpful feedback that you're finding difficult?	Assumes the teacher has a fault in their teaching.	What are the important things about giving helpful feedback?	Encourages the teacher to reflect back on training and to apply it.

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- ⁶ Source: The work of B. Joyce and B. Showers was adapted from *Creating the conditions for teaching and learning* by David Hopkins and Alma Harris (et al), David Fulton Publishers, 2000.

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