

This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast “Building Partnerships for Learning: A Conversation with Jim Knight”.

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]

Fritz GEISSLER: Well I would like to thank Dr. Jim Knight for joining us today. And having just delivered the symposium keynote presentation here at Williamsburg for The College of William & Mary T/TAC. Thank you so much for joining us.

Jim KNIGHT: It is my pleasure.

GEISSLER: We were talking before about some of the big picture of coaching and some of the principals involved with that. You talked about taking it from the top.

KNIGHT: One thing I would say is that my life's work has been for the last 20 years almost, certainly more than 10, is figuring out what is the best way to translate proven practices into teaching practices. How do you translate research into practice? One thing I have learned, and we started to use a lot of video this year were we videotaped teachers, look at what they do, one thing I have learned is that it is a lot harder to learn new practices than people think. It's just not that easy. It is probably naïve to think that you can explain something in a workshop, and a person can just pick it up and do it. And so we learned it takes pretty intensive support to make that happen. And that intensive support usual involves a very clear explanation, the teacher having a coach model how to do it in the classroom, then an observation of the teachers while the teacher tries to do it, and then respectful interchange about the observations - we call it Direct Specific Non-Attributive Praise and Non-Judgmental Feedback. You sit down and you say: "Well here is what I saw, what do you make of what I saw?" All down the line, the coach has to be very precise, understand their materials, and then share them in a way that's respectful teacher's choices.

FRITZ: Thank you. We were also talking about the process of moving forward is that a teacher might identify something that wanted to learn or to be better at.

KNIGHT: Yeah, we think it is really important that ... these things seem obvious to me, but they are often not done. But if the person is being coached, then they need to want to be coached. It's an expensive resource to have a coach in the school, you do not want to waste trying to talk somebody into it. So you need to have people who want to learn different things to do it. Now the principal can do a lot to support that, and the admin team of the school - if they do observations and they set clear destination of where they want the school to go - they might say: "We are really focused on engaging instruction that involves this things. We are going to be doing walkthroughs for this or drop-in observations. We are going to focus on these things." And then they offer the coaches one way to help people get there. A lot more people will probably work with the coach. In our experience though, if you have proven practices that really work and you make it easy for teachers to implement them, most teachers want to do them. Like 90% of teachers. Most teachers really do want to reach kids, make a difference, and have an impact. And if they are convinced that it is going to be worth it and that they can do it, they are going to probably try it out.

GEISSLER: And so I am sure there is some power too in that collaborative relationship. And you have principles, as well, around that collaborative relationship, and in a way that the coach and the teacher work together.

KNIGHT: Well there is a book called "Authentic Conversations", and the authors of the book talk about what do you want? Do you want an adult-to-adult conversation? Or an adult-to-child conversation? An adult-to-child conversation is one where the leader, so to speaks, says: "I am going to hold you accountable. You have to do these things. You don't have a choice. Let me tell you exactly what you have to do. If you don't do it you are going to be punished. If you do do it, you will be rewarded." An adult-to-adult conversation is one where you see the person you are working with as an individual, who has professional discretion, who can make choices, who can make good decisions, and who is an equal in the relationship. We call that a partnership. We see coaching as a partnership between peers. Where it's an adult-to-adult conversation, were there is reflection. Reflection is at the heart of the conversation, and reflection at its basics is making choices. Do I want to do it or not? And if you do not have choice, you do not have that happening. So for us, coaching is a relationship between partners.

GEISSLER: Alright, and where you've seen success, what takes place between the coach and the teacher? Maybe if you could take us through what happens from beginning to end, and where the changes happen, and what needs to be in place for that to happen?

KNIGHT: Well first off, it would be good to have a school that is focused on a few key teaching practices. We have a thing called the Big 4. You can get to it on the website. There are all these tools you can download for free. But the Big 4 is classroom management, content planning, engaging instruction, and assessment for learning. And there are a whole bunch of pieces in there, for example, part of classroom management is being clear on your expectations. So the first thing would be is that a school has identified what their framework for looking at instruction. It could be something else, it could be Marzanos's Big 9 strategies, and it can be Charlotte Daniel's framework for teaching. But we use the Big 4, but it could be something else. But the whole school, maybe the whole district, knows this is our focus. And maybe the principal is doing drop in observations and evaluations, and looking for these kinds of things. The workshops are focusing on these kind of things, the PLC's are focusing on these kinds of things. And what the coach does, my phrase is, they provide awesome support for those kinds of things. The teacher knows we are focused on engaging instructions and all these things, and the coach provides support. So the coach ... there are any number of ways of getting started, it could be the person is referred as one way to work with the coach. It could be through an enrolling interview, but somehow the coach and the teacher decide they want to work on something. They decided they are going to do this, and so then the coach and teacher identify what they want to work on. But it should be responding to real concern of the teachers, something they want to do or some way they want to reach the students. It could be derived from the data from the classroom. But the teachers really want to learn this thing. Then the coach says: "Okay let us get together and then I will explain to you how it works. I will go give you a really precise explanation." That might even involve even something as specific as a checklist, but the coach sits down and says: "Okay let's walk through this thing, and I will explain it to you very clearly and then you tell me how we need to modify it to make it work for you, because not everything is going to fit with you." So the coach gives, what I call, precise provisional explanation. Then after the explanation

of whatever the teaching practice is, and they have gone through it sort of step by step, the coach says: "Would you like for me to come in and show it to you in your classroom? I can try it out with your kids. I can give you a quick demonstration." Usually the teacher says: "Yeah, that would be great!", because they want to learn it. Now if the coach just grabs somebody in the hall and says: "Do you want me to do a model lesson for you?" the teacher is probably not going to be too excited. But if they really want to learn it, what the teachers have told us, it isn't until they have seen the coach do it that they realize that they can do it too. Especially do it with their kids. So the coach does a model lesson and then the teacher does a model lesson after that, and then the coach observes and in our studies now we are really looking at power of using micro cameras like flip cameras. So the coach would videotape what's happening, and then show the videotape to the teacher or gather data while in the classroom and sit down with the teacher and talk about what they saw. Then after that, they keep it going and sometimes they do more explanations, sometimes they do more observations, sometimes they do more modeling, but they keep it going until the teacher is fluent in their use of whatever their practice is.

GEISSLER: So they get a chance to learn and then see how it's done, practice it, receive feedback, until they feel comfortable. And then so the teachers waking out of there feel much more confident about implementing...

KNIGHT: Well you just provide whatever scaffolding or support necessary for the teacher to get fluent in their use of it. It is kind of like if a teacher is at a workshop. She doesn't have to sit there and worry about: How do I find the papers I need, what's this going to look like in my classroom, and how do I plan it. She knows I just have to get together with the coach and the coach will take care of all of that for me. She will help me implement, she just has to sit in the workshop and say do I or do not want to do this.

GEISSLER: I was reading in your book that in Topeka Middle and High Schools that you all had some great success there. Was wondering if you might speak just briefly on some of that as well.

KNIGHT: Probably the best thing to look at, and there is this study that is on the website - we did a research study two years ago, we wanted to look at what was the impact of coaching after the workshop, so we did a workshop on what is called Unit Organizer. It is a unit planning tool. And then we had like 53 teachers come to the workshop, and then we randomly assigned them to two groups. One group got coaches, one group didn't get coaches. And then we followed up, I do not have the numbers in mind right now but you can find it online under the research section, and we said okay what happens. So we had research assistants watch almost every class, at least every other class, of both groups. We had something like 20 research assistants. They went and observed the classrooms and they said: "What's happening with respect to implementation? What's happening in respect to the quality of implementation?" What we found was: Without coaching, there wasn't very much implementation and if there was implementation the quality wasn't very good. When we did have coaching, implementation was way higher and the ongoing implementation was way higher, and the explanation that they would stick with was way higher and the quality was way higher. And of course, people do not stick with it if they do not implement it well, because they do not see the results. So with the random assigned groups, with observations looking for particular teaching practices, a pretty rigorous study, it seems pretty

clear from that study that if you don't have coaching you do not get that much implementation and if you do you are going to have much more implementation. It looks like 86% seems to be the number that ... that number seems for some reason to come up couple different time.

GEISSLER: Great, thank you so much. And then you spoke this morning a lot about the communication that takes place within that relationship.

KNIGHT: We think it is awfully hard to be an effective coach if you don't have healthy relationships with the people you work with. If they don't like you it's going to be tough. Not that you have to be super likeable but you really need to be able to communicate in a way that the other person can hear what you are about to say. That requires things like being a skillful listener, being able to make connections with other people, suspending your assumptions about other people, not quickly judging them but meaning them as a real person they are. You have to be really skillful the way you praise others. Be able to redirect conversations in a skillful way. There is a number... about eight different ones I talk about in the book. Partnership communication strategies. Along with that is you have to have certain leadership skills. You have to be able to engage people, but not be so engaged with people that everything they do tears you up. You have to be detached and engaged at the same time. You have to have a clear sense of where you are going to go. Very aware of your moral purpose at work.

GEISSLER: Are there some other aspects of this that you wanted to share about the coaching relationship.

KNIGHT: Well there is one more thing I say about this whole business. Roger Martin is a Dean of Business at the business faculty at the University of Toronto. He wrote a book called the disposable mind. And in the book he summarizes an old idea that great leaders are able to combine... they are not "either" "or" thinkers both "and." And I have come to believe that is a core idea with respect to coaching. It's not about fidelity, or choice, it's about choice and fidelity. That is I want high quality of implementation but I want teachers to be able to reflect on what it is going to look like. And I think we make the mistake of saying that those teachers have to teach exactly like the book thinks and they don't have any choice of it. As chances are, it won't be implemented. What we need to say is I am going to give them a very precise explanation of what it looks like and then they are going to have a voice in how they can modify it to make it work in their classroom. Its choice and high quality implementation. It's not about being respectful of teachers, or being driven and ambitious, its I am going to be both humble and ambitious. It's not about either its top-down or bottom-up. Its top-down and bottom-up. And so all of these things, these integrative thinking stands at the heart of it. I think coaches have to be careful of falling into the trap of either this or this. It's both. Going back to fidelity, Lucy West says: "I don't want mindless fidelity, I want mindful engagement. And that's what we really want. We want we high-quality implementation. It comes from both this and thinking opposed to either or."

GEISSLER: Great. Well thank you so much for joining us and for sharing that information with us. We all benefit from it and really appreciate your keynote this morning as well.

KNIGHT: Thank you so much.

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]

