



The Power of Curiosity: Coach Approach to the Classroom

by Leslie Brown

As teachers, you manage so many moving parts throughout the day. You are the master of curriculum while also navigating the ever-complicated system and classroom dynamics. In a helping profession, you may feel the pressure to have all the answers. When you spend your day developing and delivering curriculum, managing behaviours, supporting well-being, and responding to individual and system needs, how do you not feel exhausted?

A coach approach to the classroom is a tool that can offer you something powerful, not as a new program or trend, but as a mindset shift. It is a tool that can help free up your capacity while also building awareness and confidence in students.

What is a Coach Approach?

Unlike many forms of coaching that we have become familiar with (imparting wisdom on the basketball court, teaching chess, supporting the drama club), a coach approach may be a little different than how you traditionally view coaching. It is not about your expertise or directing others' behaviour. It's about pausing, approaching situations with genuine curiosity, and allowing students to be experts in their own reflection and next steps. You are not the fixer, but a facilitator to awaken the potential in others.

Moving from Fixer to Facilitator

"Helping is the sunny side of control" - Anne Lamott. The first time I heard this quote, it stopped me in my tracks. Like many of you, I am a helper, a fixer. Isn't that wonderful? But have you ever considered what the negative implications of fixing everything for everyone else are?

Many teachers are natural fixers, and for good reason. When a student is struggling, the instinct is to intervene quickly, offer solutions, and restore order. Over time, however, this can unintentionally create two outcomes: (1) teacher burnout and (2) student dependency. This approach can flip the script on these issues:

1) Benefits for Teachers

One of the most significant benefits of a coach approach is what it gives to you, as the support person. While you are still a classroom leader, it relieves you from the responsibility of having the solution to every problem. This approach allows you to respond more intentionally and shifts the solution to the problem/concern to its rightful owner. This will undoubtedly reduce your own emotional fatigue.

2) Benefits for students

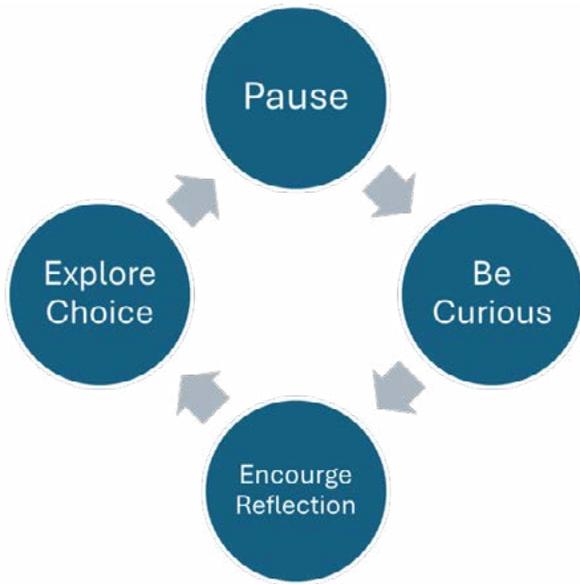
All of us, students or teachers, thrive when we feel seen, heard and understood. A coach approach supports this in several ways.

- a) Builds agency: Agency is the capability of individuals to make choices and act on those choices in ways that make a difference in their lives (Martin, 2004). By using this approach, you reduce the need for others to wait on your direction while enhancing the students' ability to articulate their emotions and needs.
- b) Supports emotional regulation: Emotions are not something to be shied away from; in fact, they are a powerful tool for learning about ourselves. Asking different questions can support others to avoid shutting down feelings and instead acknowledge them with thoughtful redirection.
- c) Develops metacognition: Metacognition is our awareness of our own thinking (Flavell, 1979). A coach approach supports people in reflection and increased awareness of their patterns and thought processes. Metacognition has been shown to help children with learning issues, support self-regulation, and quiet negative self-talk (Child Mind Institute, 2026). When students are asked to reflect not only on what they learn, but also how they learn, it develops self-awareness, resilience and confidence over time.

A Coach Approach Model for Application

A simple framework for a coach approach can be broken down into four (4) steps. These steps allow for your own reflection, but equally important, for the curiosity and reflection of others.

Below, I will break down each section and give you potential reflection questions to consider using in practice.



a) Pause

Question(s) to ask yourself:

- What am I noticing in my body right now?
- What emotions are present for me?
- What assumptions or judgments are showing up?

b) Be Curious

Question(s) to ask yourself:

- What don't I know yet?
- What story am I telling myself?
- How might this make sense from their perspective?

Question(s) to ask the person you are supporting:

- Help me understand what's most important to you here.
- What's your perspective on what's happening?
- What feels challenging about this situation?

c) Encourage Reflection

Question(s) to ask the person you are supporting:

- How has this been affecting you?
- What matters most to you in this situation?
- When this happens, how does it make you feel?

d) Explore Choice

Question(s) to ask the person you are supporting:

- What options do you see from here?
- What do you have control over in this situation?
- What support would make this easier?

Common Concerns with Adopting a Coach Approach

1) Who has time for this?

This approach isn't about long conversations or intensive interactions. It's a mindset shift. It is a way of responding that often saves time by reducing repeated issues.

2) This won't work with challenging behaviour

You may be right, and sometimes a more direct approach may be warranted. However, once you start practicing this approach, you will find it can work very well with challenging behaviour and supports relationship building with students. It addresses the thinking and emotions that are underneath the behaviour, not just the surface response.

3) It's too much to remember

Like most things, this isn't about perfection; it's a practiced skill that will evolve to feel more natural over time. This approach is not about becoming a different teacher; it's about becoming more intentional. You don't need to hit every step or ask the perfect question every time.

The next time you feel the urge to fix something for someone else, start with a pause and a curious question. When you do this, notice what happens. When we support people in this way, we are building confidence, one conversation at a time.

EAP Outreach and Education

Interested in learning more about this topic, or in other learning opportunities that support teacher well-being? We'd love to hear from you. Contact us at workshops@eapnlteachers.ca.

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References:

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<https://childmind.org/article/how-metacognition-can-help-kids/>

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