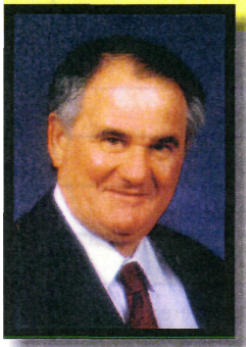# Kagan Coaching

Dr. Spencer Kagan

The research is clear: Student achievement depends, to a large extent, on teacher skills. It is the skills of the teacher that determine success or failure for many students. Some teachers consistently obtain high levels of student achievement while other teachers' students regularly fail to meet basic standards. **Kagan Coaching™** is proving to be one of the most powerful tools available for enhancing teacher skills. In every school that has adopted **Kagan Coaching™** we have seen dramatic gains in student achievement.

In 1999 as part of her efforts to get Kagan model schools "as good as they can be," Laurie Kagan developed **Kagan Coaching™.** Since then the model has been continually improved and perfected and has become one of the most powerful tools to support successful implementation of innovative instruction. It can be used to support implementation of any improvement in instruction, but, naturally, we at Kagan use it primarily to support implementation of Kagan Structures.

The essence **of Kagan Coaching™** is coaching teachers in real tune. That is, instead of waiting until after the lesson to meet with the teacher to discuss the lesson, teachers receiving in-the-moment **Kagan Coaching™** get feedback and support during the lesson, often immediately after or even while implementing a strategy.

There are many coaching models, each differing from the others in a number of ways. **Kagan Coaching™,** however, is radically different from all the other models along a number of dimensions, including unit of observation, time expended, documentation, relevance of feedback, immediacy of feedback, immediacy of correction, probability of implementation of correction, and the role of the principal and/or site-based instructional leader (see Table).

Kagan Coaching has become one of the most powerful tools to support successful implementation of Kagan Structures.

Traditional vs Kagan Coaching

	Traditional	Kagan Coaching
Unit Observation	Broad (Whole Lesson)	Focused (One Structure)
Time Expended	Hours (Pre, Ob, Post)	Minutes (Brief Visit)
Documentation	Complicated	Simple
Relevance of Feedback	Potentially Irrelevant	Relevant
Immediacy of Feedback	Delayed	Immediate
Immediacy of Correction	Delayed	Immediate
Implementation	Questionable	Assured
Principal/Site-Based Instructional Leader	Not Empowered	Empowered

Table). Although it is unfair to lump all other coaching models into one blurring many important distinctions, for purposes of comparison, that is exactly what I will do. That is, **Kagan Coaching™** is best understood in contrast to what I will call "traditional coaching." By "traditional coaching" I refer to three-step coaching models that involve 1) a pre-conference (teacher and coach meet to establish what will be observed, how it will be shared, and the role of the coach); 2) an observation session (coach observes the teacher, often taking notes on pre-determined behaviors); and 3) a post-observation session (feelings about and perception of the lesson are shared along with observations and/or coaching tips).

As seen at a glance in the table, **Kagan Coaching™** is radically different from traditional approaches to coaching along a number of dimensions. In this article I summarize those differences, providing a description of and rationale for this important innovation in education.

Kagan Coaching™ is radically different from traditional approaches to coaching along a number of dimensions.

Unit of Observation
In traditional coaching the lesson is the unit of observation. Typically the coach observes a whole lesson, with an agreement to give feedback on some aspect of instruction such as direction giving, praising, or questioning. In **Kagan Coaching™,** the unit of observation and feedback is a specific structure like **Numbered Heads Together,** Sage-N-Scribe, or **Listen Write!** For example, the agreement may be to get coaching on **Timed Pair Share.** There are a number of advantages to making the unit of observation a specific strategy rather than a lesson, including: feedback is more focused, preparation by the teacher can be more focused, anxiety is lowered for the teacher, and the time for coaching is reduced.

Time Expended
Traditional models of coaching involve three or more stages: Pre-conference, Observation, and Post-conference. That is, the teacher and coach meet before the lesson to discuss what, when, and how the observation will take place. Depending on the model, the teacher and coach may co-plan the lesson that is to be observed. An agreement is reached as to what exactly the coach will observe and give feedback on following the observation. Then the observation occurs, usually for an hour-long lesson. An additional stage is required at this point if some forms of scripting are adopted because

the coach must look over the script and code it for target behaviors such as anticipatory set, active participation, type of questions asked, reinforcement of positive behaviors, or whatever was agreed to be the target of feedback during the post-observation session. Finally, there is a post-observation meeting at which time the coach facilitates self-reflection on the part of the teacher, provides support, and, depending on the model, corrective feedback. The post-observation session may include co-planning a future lesson or modification of the observed lesson. With a minimum of a half hour for pre- and post- sessions and an hour of observation, all of this sums to as much as two hours!

The time-frame for **Kagan Coaching™** is radically different. The whole process is usually no more than fifteen minutes! In **Kagan Coaching™** there is no elaborate negotiation of what is to be observed and how it is to be observed, no pre- and post-observation sessions, no coding of scripts.

The observation itself is very time limited. How is this possible? In **Kagan Coaching™** a pre-established observation form has been provided to the teacher. The teacher is working on implementing something that has been shared in a workshop. The observation form reinforces the concepts taught in the workshop and includes the steps of the instructional strategy, management tips, and social skills to be taught to students, if needed. Because both the teacher and coach know what is to be observed, there is no need for a pre-observation session. Because feedback is given and correction is made in real time, there is no need for a post-observation session. Finally, since the unit of observation is a single structure, not a full lesson, the observation itself can be quite brief. The teacher is prepared to use the structure very shortly after the coach enters the room, so there is no time lost. The brevity of the coaching process has a number of advantages. Anxiety is reduced for the teacher ("the coach will be in my room for only 15 minutes and I know exactly what will be observed and coached"). The coaching session is more focused. And many more teachers can be coached. For example, in the time it would take to do a full two hour traditional pre-observation, observation, and post-observation coaching sequence, a principal or site-based instructional leader can coach and give feedback to seven or eight teachers! The schools that hire Kagan for coaching average sixteen teachers a day per coach, with each teacher having received support and corrective feedback, and with having implemented the correction during the coaching session!

Documentation

Depending on the coaching model, documentation in traditional coaching can be relatively simple or quite complex. The coach may script an entire lesson, do a focused script, tally behaviors, diagram the flow of behaviors, or enter elaborate planning with the teacher how data will be collected and shared. A great deal of energy may be extended first in learning how to script a lesson and then later in actually scripting lessons. While we do not deny that scripting lessons and getting feedback on entire lessons can be quite valuable, it can also be quite difficult and a barrier to frequent coaching.

In **Kagan Coaching™** documentation consists of filling out an observation form and at the end of the observation leaving the completed form with the teacher. The form itself is quite simple, see sample **Kagan Structure Observation Form: Timed Pair Share.** The Form includes a check sheet for elements of the structure and places to write brief positive comments on specific elements of the structure observed. An advantage of the **Structure Observation Form** is that the teacher knows exactly what the coach will be looking for and retains a written record of which elements were and were not included. The coach is sure to include supportive comments as well.

Relevance of Feedback

In many traditional coaching models, what is observed maybe of little relevance to improving instruction compared to what could be the focus of observation and feedback. Why? In many traditional models the teachers determine what they would like feedback on. For example a teacher may choose to get feedback on how equally she/he calls on students. When the coach enters the room, the class may be totally out of control, but the coach is constrained to give feedback on equality of participation. Too frequently, this leads to the absurd situation of a coach knowing the teacher needs help on something, but the coach is handcuffed by the prior agreement to give feedback on something that actually has little relevance to improving instruction. The whole coaching/feedback process can be irrelevant.

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In contrast, in **Kagan Coaching™** the essential elements of successful implementation of each structure have been pre-established, so observation and feedback are on target. If, for example, the Kagan Coach comes in to observe a structure and the room is totally out of control, the Kagan Coach will give the teacher help on management in the moment. While the students are occupied, the coach will briefly consult with the teacher suggesting what the teacher can try. The Kagan coach is never handcuffed by a prior agreement or contract to limit observation or coaching.

For example, a Kagan Coach was observing **Numbered Heads Together.** The teacher was not having the students write their own best answer before putting their heads together to improve their answers. This lead to some students not even thinking of an answer on their own, just waiting for the heads together time to take a free ride on the answers of the others. Essentially, the teacher had left out a step that creates individual accountability. When asked to insert that step, the greater engagement of the lower achieving students was obvious. The coach had given the teacher the feedback that was most relevant to improving instruction. Had the coach been constrained to observe some teacher-determined behavior, the coaching almost certainly would have been less relevant to improving instruction.

Immediacy of Feedback

In traditional coaching, feedback follows the lesson, often delayed to a time when the lesson is a somewhat vague memory, perhaps at the end of an exhausting school day, or during the teacher's prep time.

In **Kagan Coaching™** feedback is immediate. Immediate feedback is far more powerful because the feedback is associated with a very fresh, vivid memory of the performance as opposed to being associated with a vague memory. Thus the probability of remembering the feedback when the teacher next performs is greatly enhanced. In terms of brain functioning the coaching/

vivid episodic memory, easily remembered. Teachers report they vividly remember each coaching session, even years later.

The immediacy of feedback occurs at two levels: The teacher receives immediate feedback from the coach, but also receives immediate feedback from seeing the effect of her/his changed instructional strategy. For example, a teacher was being coached on **Inside/Outside Circle.** She had the students form a tight circle at the back of the room. The students were practicing using and giving the definitions of vocabulary words. The class was extremely noisy and the students were having difficulty hearing each other. The coach said, "Try having the students form the Inside/Outside circles using the perimeter of the room." The teacher did, and the there was freer movement and the students did not have to compete with a voice right next to them. The teacher commented that she had used **Inside/Outside Circle** many times, but had never thought of using the whole room and that she could not believe the improvement. The teacher was getting immediate feedback from the change in her instructional strategy.

A worry people have when first hearing about **Kagan Coaching™** is that having the coach give corrective feedback during a lesson, in front of the class, will publicly embarrass the teacher. Because, however, the structures we give coaching on

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4

involve student-student interaction, the coach has the luxury of giving the teacher private feedback during a lesson. The coach gives the teacher feedback while the students are occupied. The student interaction time gives the Kagan coach the opportunity to acknowledge the positives and provide a correction while students are working. Thus no one is ever put on the spot; the needed corrections are made and everyone wins!

Immediacy of Implementing Correction

In the traditional model of coaching, the teacher does not have the opportunity to practice improved implementation until long after the initial implementation. An observation is made. Then, there is a delay until the teacher receives feedback. Following that, there is an additional delay until the teacher has the opportunity to implement the correction. These delays allow memory of the correction to fade, so too often the correction is poorly implemented.

In contrast, the correction is made immediately in **Kagan Coaching™**. For example, a teacher leaves out a response gambit during Timed Pair Share. While students are engaged in the second half of Timed Pair Share, the coach whispers to the teacher, *"After they share this time, have the B partner respond. Give them a sentence starter: I appreciated listening to you because...."* The teacher immediately improves implementation, sees the positive effect, is reinforced for the improvement, and is far more likely to continue using the unproved implementation.

Probability of Implementation

It is quite questionable if the improved implementation suggested in traditional coaching ever occurs. Usually there is no follow-up, and because of the delay between corrective feedback and the subsequent implementation, there is considerable probability that a weak or even no correction will occur.

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In **Kagan Coaching™** quality correction is assured. The coach gives the corrective feedback and the teachers implements in-the-moment. During **Sage-N-Scribe**, for example, the teacher forgets to instruct the Scribes how to check for accuracy and completeness. While the students are doing the next problem the coach simply whispers to the teacher, *"Before the next round, remind students how to check for completeness and accuracy."* The correction is implemented immediately.

Principal's Role

It is often joked that the second most private act a person performs is teaching. If that is true, the third most private act is coaching! Only the teacher and the coach know what has occurred in the coaching process. It is often explicitly agreed that the coach will not share with anyone, including the principal, his or her observations and feedback. With the expert coaching model, the expert most often is someone from outside the school, and so disappears after the post-observation coaching session.

Change occurs, however, as a function of ongoing support and accountability. Drive-by coaching will never add up. How can we ensure that teachers get ongoing support and corrective feedback? One answer is to empower the principal or

other instructional leader with the knowledge and skills of coaching, and to build commitment to make frequent classroom visits.

In Laurie Kagan's Kagan Coaching™ the problem of providing ongoing support and accountability and building site-based coaching skills is solved in a unique way: the principal or site-based instructional leader accompanies the coach during Kagan Coaching™. In this capacity-building model, the principal observes the coaching process for the first number of visits by a coach. Following each coaching session on each visit, the coach and the principal discuss what the teacher needs to work on and how the principal can continue to provide support and guidance to that teacher. Thus, whereas the principal may not at first see why the coach is focusing on specific areas of concern, over time that becomes quite clear. At some point then, after a number of visits, the coach steps back allowing the principal to step into the role of coach. The coach at that point no longer coaches teachers on structures, instead shifting into the role of coaching the principal on the skills of Kagan Coaching™. The results: an empowered site-based instructional leader who can support and guide teachers on an ongoing basis.

> **Kagan Coaching™ is a very powerful model which is less time consuming, creates safety, provides more immediate feedback, ensures correction, and fuels a site-based process so the site is empowered to become a continual improvement school.**

To work well, this model depends on an understanding among everyone involved: Coaching is not Evaluation. The participants assume different roles at different times. Coaching is designed to improve instruction — a formative process. Evaluation is a much broader, summative process. During coaching, the principal wears a very different hat than during evaluation. During coaching the teacher sees the principal as a partner, someone on the same side, a true instructional leader helping the teacher become as skilled as possible. Both the teacher and the principal are empowered through the **Kagan Coaching™** process, learning new skills.

In Sum

Think of a football coach. Does the coach sit down with the players before they perform, ask them what they want feedback on, watch them perform, and then wait until after the practice or game to give them feedback, and give them feedback only on what they asked for. The model is absurd when applied to football. The model is equally absurd when applied to coaching any skill, including teaching skills. The football coach gives feedback in the moment to ensure immediate correction. If a music group is singing a rhythm incorrectly, the teacher stops the group immediately to provide corrective feedback. The teacher does not let them practice the skill wrong. That is what Kagan Coaching™ is all about. Teachers learning a new skill need to know immediately what they are, and are not, doing correctly.

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Author's Note:
I am deeply appreciative of Laurie Kagan, who created **Kagan Coaching™** in her continual attempts to "get teachers as good as they can be." I am appreciative also of her input to this article as well as the input of Dr. Jacqueline Minor, and the formative comments of the team of Kagan full-time trainers who have been using **Kagan Coaching™.**

Editor's Note:
Kagan Australia offers **Kagan Coaching™** for schools and districts. To find out more email Yvonne on training@**kaganaustralia.com.au or call Kagan Professional Development on 02 4982 4511**