



Sibme Virtual Coaching:

A Case Study by Melody S. Gee

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Executive Summary

Facing the challenges of new teacher orientation, classroom management, and disruptive student behavior, two school administrators decide to try virtual coaching—pairing a teacher with a professional coach who, through video conferencing and observing teacher-recorded videos of teaching sessions, offers six weeks of support, feedback, and collaboration.

Compared to traditional professional development and teacher training, virtual coaching provided targeted, individualized feedback with immediate and lasting results. Teachers and administrators reported increased teacher confidence, improved student behavior and engagement, more organized classrooms, and significantly decreased behavioral disruptions.

In the following case study, the two administrators share their experiences of offering virtual coaching to new and veteran teachers. Additionally, one first grade teacher shares her experience of working with a virtual coach to implement innovative classroom tools. All share their quick and dramatic results from working with Sibme, an online professional coaching platform and virtual coaching service.



Introduction: Where Teachers Really Need Help

New Teacher Orientation

Dr. Kelly Schooler, K-6 principal of Perry School in Lima, Ohio, searched for ways to help prepare brand-new teachers. Despite their enthusiasm, Dr. Schooler saw the anxieties new teachers experienced as they navigated the challenges and demands of their very first classroom. “The first six weeks,” noted Dr. Schooler, “are about getting down procedures. If we’re still struggling with procedures in October, those kinds of breakdowns lead to bigger disruptions and less learning time.”

Behavior Interventions

Brooke Nemire will enter her third year at Perry School as a first-grade teacher. She describes her first year as “rough,” with major behavior issues demanding her attention while she was learning to manage her first classroom. “I was at a loss sometimes,” she recalls. “I had one student who was kicking, screaming, and had to be carried out of the classroom. I went in just trying to get through the day without a tantrum.”

Classroom Management and Engagement

Rachel Polak, Assistant Principal at St. Clare Schools in North Palm Beach, Florida, heard her teachers’ desire to infuse classrooms with more engaging lessons, better organization, and student ownership of learning. She observed teachers struggling to “organize their classrooms, keep track of data, and simply monitor the high number of activities every day.” Additionally, teachers wanted better ways to address differentiated learning. In particular, helping struggling students “as well as the kids on grade level, so we can take them a little further.”



[Teachers are struggling to] organize their classrooms, keep track of data, and simply monitor high number of activities everyday.

Rachel Polak

Assistant Principal, St. Clare Schools

Professional
Development

GAP

Teacher
Evaluation

Background: The Need for Sustained, Evaluation-Free Professional Development

The Gap Between Professional Development and Teacher Evaluation

At the beginning of the year, teachers often attend professional development or orientation sessions designed to offer new tools, ideas, or best practices to take into the classroom. Schools often choose between paying a consultant to come on-site or paying to send teachers to conferences. However, teachers are then left to find their own ways to implement new strategies, often without support or continued engagement. “The problem,” observes Ms. Polak, “is that you get all hyped up for a couple of days, and if there’s no follow-up, nobody follows through.”

Months after the professional development ends, teachers are observed and evaluated on their classroom management and student performance, perhaps expected to demonstrate their professional development take-aways. However, without any clear bridge between their training and evaluation—no mandates, incentives, support, or time—the value of professional development is lost. By the time teachers find themselves in their evaluation cycle, explains Ms. Nemire, “it can be too late for some kids” to accept a change in routine.

Sometimes, ongoing development is offered, as in Perry Schools with year-round “full, formal mentoring programs.” Dr. Schooler describes her district’s three-level mentoring: “a state-mandated mentor, a grade-level team leader, and a counselor to work closely with our new teachers.” Teachers found this, Dr. Schooler continued, “to be overwhelming, and the pressure of having all these formal mentors—teachers found that to be too much pressure.”

The Conflict of Principal as Evaluator and Coach

Moreover, an inherent conflict exists when teachers are evaluated and coached by the same person—usually their principal or assistant principal. “It’s really difficult,” says Dr. Schooler, “for me as the principal to wear two hats: observer and coach. I was looking for something that would relieve me of that coaching role and at the same time give some relief to new teachers.” Ms. Polak found herself in a similar bind. “When you have a teacher who needs to be coached, it’s hard to be the administrator—especially in a small school. It’s hard to draw that line between giving them what they need and being the one who observes them and fills out the form that goes in their file.”





Case Study: Three Educators Try Virtual Coaching

Implementation

After hearing about virtual coaching from colleagues, Dr. Schooler and Ms. Polak contacted Sibme. The Sibme platform provides a simple, streamlined experience on any device, including iOS, Android, and on the web. Teachers can record through the app and share with their virtual coach whenever they are connected to the internet. Coaches and teachers can interact via the Sibme app, during scheduled phone calls, or through web-conferencing software.

For Dr. Schooler in Ohio, setting up virtual coaching took “a phone conversation, then setting priority goals.” No teachers, she reports, “said they had any difficulty with the technology component. It couldn’t have been any smoother.”

With their technology in place, St. Clare School in Florida had a similarly easy implementation. “It didn’t take me long at all,” Ms. Polak recalled. “I filled out the information sheet for five teachers. We had picked their top areas to focus on and we submitted those with their best day and time to be contacted. Thereon out, it was between the coach and the teacher. It was just a piece of cake.”

Resolved to secure teacher buy-in and maintain confidentiality, both were careful not to mandate virtual coaching or link it to teacher evaluation. “I met with teachers,” Ms. Polak explains, “and had them rank the areas they most wanted to work on.” Dr. Schooler added, “I let teachers decide if they even wanted to talk to me or each other about it. And I got an accomplished, veteran, lead-teacher on board so she could share her experiences with others.”

“My only apprehension was,” Dr. Schooler recalls, “could it produce the results I was reading about?” Ms. Nemire, who would participate in her very first coaching cycle, hoped “the coach wouldn’t ask me to totally change my classroom” in the middle of the year.

Virtual Coaching Results: Immediate and Lasting Benefits

All three virtual coaching participants reported noticeable results within a few weeks. “The relief came right away,” recalls Dr. Schooler, who watched her most overwhelmed and anxious teachers suddenly “put on a coat of confidence. I saw a dramatic difference in behavior, the results were dramatic. One teacher said her husband noticed a difference in the way she talked about her success at school. Every single one of my teachers appreciated the program and enjoyed it.”

Dr. Schooler continued, “The reason I like it so much and use it over and over is they honor our systems. The virtual coach works to find out what systems are in place for you. The virtual coach really teases out those systems and develops growth with the professional according to our procedures. They helped us access our system and use our system. The results came by an increase of using our own systems. That component was fantastic.”

“I don’t know what my coach said to me,” Ms. Nemire laughs, “but my confidence went crazy high as soon as we talked.” Her fears about abrupt changes were resolved as well. “I liked the way my coach told me, ‘I’m not going to try to change the way you’re doing things. I’m just going to add tools to your toolbox and give you resources.’ My coach was really awesome and easy to talk to.”



I don't know what my coach said to me, but my confidence went crazy high as soon as we talked.

Brooke Nemire
First-grade Teacher, Perry School



And her student’s kicking and screaming? “For the rest of the school year, he still had some behavior issues, but no more tantrums. My coach taught me to de-escalate and helped me see he wanted to win the battle. So, I stopped giving him the battle.”

Observing one of her teachers during her coaching cycle, Ms. Polak noticed “how she learned to be the guide on the side, not the sage on the stage, how she was circulating and working the room. You could see the excitement in the kids, and the learning. What a huge difference that made in her room.”

Compared to other forms of professional development, Dr. Schooler says, virtual coaching is “very cost effective. I’ve paid twice as much for a consultant for one day and have not gotten these results.”

And the results have been lasting. “Because it’s individual,” Ms. Polak explains, “it creates a habit. When they see the change in their classrooms—not just talk about it, but actually doing it and seeing the results—that is the most meaningful part. You’re not going to change for six weeks, see great results, then go back to being the teacher you were before.”

Moving Forward

Both Perry and St. Clare schools will be collaborating with virtual coaches next year. Ms. Polak plans to steadily increase teacher participation. "I requested it for twelve teachers next year. I want to do three a quarter."

"The first year," Dr. Schooler says, "I did two teachers, then three. I am committing to four teachers at the beginning of next year. As a small district, we don't have any type of new teacher orientation process. Virtual coaching suited that need perfectly. It's an induction."

Ms. Nemire is now looking forward to another coaching cycle, perhaps "after some years under my belt. You have all these new ideas when you first come into teaching. After a certain amount of years, I'd like to get new ideas. I don't want to settle with my teaching tools."



Conclusion: Educators Offer Recommendations

To fellow educators considering virtual coaching, our case study participants lend encouragement and experienced advice on how to bring virtual coaching to your school.



Get Teacher Buy-in

- Choose coaching goals collaboratively
- Don't make coaching mandatory or evaluative
- Allow for confidentiality between the teacher and coach
- Let teachers share their virtual coaching experiences with each other
- Recruit lead veteran teachers to encourage others

Let Virtual Coaches Work for the Teacher

- Tell your coach what you want to work on
- Be yourself in the classroom as you are filming videos for the most effective feedback
- Coaches are flexible—ask for video coaching times that work for you
- Your coach wants to learn your school's systems and help you use them effectively

Use Virtual Coaching for Your Needs

- On-boarding new teachers
- Classroom management
- Time management
- Organizing activities
- Morning routines
- Tracking data
- Staying on schedule with a mandatory reading series calendar
- Establishing behavior protocols
- De-escalating disruptive behavior
- Catching and diverting behavior before it becomes disruptive
- Preparing discussion questions to achieve higher-level thinking
- Creating engaging activities
- Designing lesson plans with good openings that engage students immediately
- Multiple ways to check for understanding
- Transitioning students into learning mode
- Initiating more group work and collaboration
- Encouraging student accountability

Find the Right Time for Your Coaching Cycle

- Beginning of the year for new teachers
- Within the first 12 weeks, to establish good classroom procedures
- Around October, after teachers get to know their students well
- Before winter break, to catch any issues in time for change
- At the end of the year, to plan for next year
- Any time you want to address a specific issue



Virtual coaching benefits reach beyond typical quick-hit, one-day professional development sessions, and relieve administrators of the conflicting role of evaluator and coach. For administrators and teachers seeking a supportive, non-judgmental, personalized, and highly-effective way to provide teacher feedback, virtual coaching can fit needs for all grade levels, experience levels, and budgets.



Sibme is a video coaching and collaboration platform designed to improve teaching and learning. Keep videos, resources, feedback and discussions organized across teams, schools, districts, teacher preparation programs, and education-related organizations.

To learn more about what Sibme can do, please visit www.sibme.com or email us at info@sibme.com.