Cognitive Coaching

Definition
Cognitive coaching is based on the idea that metacognition--or being aware of one's own thinking processes--fosters independence in learning. By providing personal insights into the learner's own thinking processes, cognitive coaching builds flexible, confident problem-solving skills. Plus, it encourages self-efficacy and pride.

Basic Elements
Coaching involves the modeling of self-appraisal and the self-management of cognition by an expert. It also involves learner performance and reflection, internalizing, and generalizing.

In modeling, the instructor explains thinking, reading, and calculating strategies by naming the strategy (such as "eliminating alternatives" or "finding the main idea"), then explaining why it should be learned. The instructor also provides explicit steps for using a particular strategy, deciding when it's appropriate, and evaluating it.

Dialogue, both on the part of instructor and student, is another prominent aspect of coaching. For example, in the "scaffolded instruction" technique, teachers and students take turns leading dialogues about texts, asking each other to predict, question, clarify, summarize, and self-appraise.

Scott Paris, in his 1990 article "Promoting Metacognition and Motivation of Exceptional Children" in Remedial and Special Education, lists the following fundamentals of building effective metacognitive skills:

1. Common goals held by teachers and students
2. Ongoing assessment of performance, in order to adjust difficulty levels
3. Mutual regulation--in other words, teachers benefit from the students' misconceptions and observations of the strategies, while students learn from their instructor's previous experience using the strategies

Adult learning principles greatly support cognitive coaching and predict its success. For example, adult coaching is often used as an alternative to clinical supervision in developing the teaching and management skills of school administrators. However, cognitive coaching is also being developed in K-12 instructional programs for special needs and whole language students. Apparently, the same principles apply for both adults and children...imagine that!

Reading
Farmer, James A., New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education.

Marzano, R.J. et al., Dimensions of Thinking. Alexandria: ASCD.