

TOOL

The Gaps Framework



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The Gaps Framework

Purpose

To identify what might be getting in the way of change, so you can respond in a way that supports growth

When to Use The Gaps Framework

- As a thinking tool during a coaching conversation
- With a client as a tool for shared discovery
- After an observation

How to Use This Tool

Listen for what might be getting in the way.

- As you listen, consider what could be creating the gap between current ability and desired ability.

Identify the type of gap.

- You might be hearing a gap in skills, knowledge, capacity, will, cultural competence, or emotional intelligence.

Engage in shared exploration.

- Use the framework as a thinking tool. When appropriate, invite your client into the exploration. You might ask:
 - What do you think is getting in the way?
 - Is this something you know how to do, or something you'd want to learn more about?
 - What feels hardest about this right now?

Respond in a way that matches the gap.

- Different gaps call for different kinds of support. When we misidentify the gap, we often offer support that doesn't help.

Identify a next step.

- Clarify one action that can help close the gap.

A Core Orientation

Think of something you've always wanted to be able to do but right now you know you can't—riding a horse across the Mongolian plains, publishing a memoir, or being a superintendent. Let's say you want to ride a horse across Mongolia. You'll need knowledge about the Mongolian land and climate; you'll need skills to ride long distances; you'll likely need to learn a few words in Mongolian and something about communicating with people in that region. The gaps between your current abilities and where you'd need to be for your Mongolian adventure are likely quite large.

Anytime we struggle to do something or aspire to do something new or different, there are gaps between our current ability and our desired (or required) abilities. When a new teacher can't control their classroom, they likely have skill gaps (such as ensuring that all students are paying attention when they give directions) and knowledge gaps (such as effective strategies for getting students' attention). They may also feel stretched beyond capacity—working long hours, neglecting self-care and sleep, and perhaps taking care of their own children. If they're teaching students who don't share their racial background, for example, they may have cultural competency gaps. If they get frustrated when students don't pay attention and then get flustered, they may have emotional intelligence gaps.

Gaps are not deficits. They do not reveal fundamental flaws in who we are. Gaps are areas for growth. Conceptualizing these areas as gaps anchors us in a growth mindset when we're coaching. We all have gaps; we'll have gaps for as long as we live, because there's no person alive who has the ability to do everything. This framework is not about finding weaknesses. It's a tool to recognize potential and explore what lies in the way of fulfilling it. It's a way to categorize areas for growth, prioritize and sequence learning activities, and clarify next steps to close gaps.

The Gaps Framework

Identifying Learning Needs

ability to take
action, to do what
we need to do



SKILL

The ability to execute the technical elements of a task. Can be the application of knowledge.



KNOWLEDGE

The theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. Can also be information.



CAPACITY

The time and resources to do something. Can also be emotional and physical capacity.



WILL

Desire, intrinsic motivation, passion, or commitment. Usually has an emotional tone.



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

The ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own; the skill to navigate cross-cultural differences.



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The ability to be aware of, manage, and express one's emotions; the ability to recognize, empathize with, and navigate other people's emotions

The Gaps Framework

Whether when looking at your own abilities or those of others, remember to pay attention to the space between a *desired* ability and *current* ability. This framework proposes that we can parse into six groups the things interfering with our ability to do something. This helps us get clear on what we need to learn and offers insight into entry points to start that learning. *The Gaps Framework* graphically depicts this concept, and *The Gaps Defined* offers a description of each gap and an example in a school context.

The Gaps Defined

Gap	Description	Examples
Skill	The ability to execute the technical elements of a task. Can be the application of knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frontloading vocabulary• Using discussion structures• Getting the whole class quiet• Breaking down the steps to solving complex equations• Identifying a doable learning target for a lesson
Knowledge	The theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. Can also be information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding polynomials• Knowing discussion strategies• Knowing students' names• Knowing how to redirect behavior• Knowing grade-level standards
Capacity	The time and resources to do something. Can also be emotional and physical capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having time to call students' parents (may know how, may want to call, may have the skills to call, but may not have the time)• Having books to differentiate learning (may understand the need to differentiate, may know how, may want to, but may not have the material resources)• Having the emotional wherewithal to manage an irate parent• Having the physical energy to attend evening and weekend school functions

The Gaps Framework

The Gaps Defined

Gap	Description	Examples
Will	Desire, intrinsic motivation, passion, or commitment. Usually has an emotional tone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loving the work• Wanting to serve a community• Feeling a calling to interrupt educational inequities• Holding a commitment to helping kids learn
Cultural Competence	The ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own; the skill to navigate cross-cultural differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognizing assets in students who come from different cultural backgrounds• Understanding that eye contact has different meanings in different cultures• Validating students' background through selection of curriculum• Appreciating the contributions of students from different cultures
Emotional Intelligence	The ability to be aware of, manage, and express one's emotions; the ability to recognize, empathize with, and navigate other people's emotions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awareness of feeling anxious when an administrator enters the class• Ability to draw boundaries around requests for help from colleagues• Ability to manage one's irritation with a perpetually difficult student• Ability to connect with a difficult student• Ability to calm a distraught student

Using the Gaps in Conversation

If you hear this gap...	This tool might help...	Because...
Skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u><i>Celebrating Strengths</i></u> • <u><i>Principles of Adult Learning</i></u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill strengths can be transferable and recognizing strengths helps build confidence to close skill gaps. • Adult learning principles prompt us to evaluate safety, activate prior schema, name the purpose for learning something, ensure choice and practice, and to work from the assumption that people want to learn.
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u><i>Celebrating Strengths</i></u> • <u><i>Principles of Adult Learning</i></u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge can be transferable. • Adult learning principles prompt us to evaluate safety, activate prior schema, name the purpose for learning something, ensure choice and practice, and to work from the assumption that people want to learn.
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u><i>Spheres of Influence</i></u> • <u><i>Exploring Beliefs Tool</i></u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The spheres help clarify where energy is spent, and whether there's potential to redirect how energy is used. • Unpacking beliefs about capacity reveals stories and can sometimes clear unhelpful mental models.
Will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u><i>Celebrating Strengths</i></u> • <u><i>Ladder of Inference</i></u> • <u><i>ACE Emotions</i></u> • <u><i>Exploring Beliefs Tool</i></u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying strengths (especially in ways of being) can transfer into other areas for growth. • The ladder can reveal root cause of a will gap, and therefore the pathways to construct new beliefs. • <i>ACE Emotions</i> can clear emotional blocks that sometimes generate will gaps. • Sometimes unhelpful beliefs are below will gaps.
Cultural Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u><i>Exploring Beliefs Tool</i></u> • <u><i>Ladder of Inference</i></u> • <u><i>Principles of Adult Learning</i></u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpacking beliefs can help shift mental models. • The ladder can illuminate how beliefs are constructed and how to construct new beliefs. • Adult learning principles prompt us to evaluate safety, activate prior schema, name the purpose for learning something, ensure choice and practice, and to work from the assumption that people want to learn.
Emotional Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u><i>Core Human Needs</i></u> • <u><i>ACE Emotions</i></u> • <u><i>Celebrating Strengths</i></u> • <u><i>Spheres of Influence</i></u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An unmet core need can be at the root of emotional distress; recognizing that need provides perspective, insight, and relief. • <i>ACE Emotions</i> is a way to process and release emotions. • Strengths helps to reactivate a sense of competence and confidence and to counter our negativity bias. • The spheres help guide someone back to their sense of agency.

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