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Instructional Coaching

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INTRODUCTION

Instructional Coaching, more completely described in *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* (Knight, 2007), provides intensive, differentiated support to teachers so that they are able to implement proven practices. Like other coaches using other models described in this book, Instructional Coaches (ICs) have excellent communication skills and a deep respect for teachers' professionalism. Additionally, ICs having a thorough knowledge of the teaching practices they share with teachers, and they frequently provide model lessons, observe teachers, and simplify explanations of the teaching practices they share with teachers.

When I began my career as a researcher at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, I never intended to study instructional coaching. I simply wanted to identify what professional developers had to do so that teachers would adopt scientifically proven practices and implement them effectively.

This goal grew out of my early experiences as a teacher. Working with college students who were at risk for failure in Toronto, Canada, I myself was lucky enough to work with an incredible coach, Dee LaFrance, who stood side by side with me in the classroom and helped me learn to teach using a variety of scientifically proven teaching practices, taken from the Strategic Instruction Model. With Dee's empowering assistance, I learned how to teach in ways that really made a difference for my students (Knight, 1992).

After seeing my students succeed, naturally I wanted to share my successes, and I began to provide professional development workshops on the model. Although

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most of the people attending my sessions listened respectfully, I quickly realized that they were not actually planning to implement the practices I was sharing. Thus began a 15-year journey during which I have tried to identify best practices for sharing proven practices with teachers. More and more I find myself advocating for the kinds of actions that Dee first did when she helped me start out as a teacher.

Over more than a decade, my colleagues and I have fine-tuned this approach to professional learning, which we first referred to as “Learning Consulting,” then “Instructional Collaborating,” and eventually “Instructional Coaching.” We have learned that to support quality implementation of teaching practices there are several practices coaches should use. This approach, which started out with two coaches, has come to be adopted by school districts and state organizations in more than 30 states in just 3 years since we first offered our coaching workshops and conferences at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.

This chapter provides an overview of the specific components of Instructional Coaching that grew out of our ongoing study of onsite professional development. The chapter also describes the framework we use to identify where to start with teachers—The Big Four—and several factors that we have found to be important when it comes to the success of coaching programs. The research we conducted to develop this model is described in Chapter 9.

Instructional Coaching, more completely described in *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* (Knight, 2007), provides intensive, differentiated support to teachers so that they are able to implement proven practices. Like other coaches using other models described in this book, Instructional Coaches (ICs) have excellent communication skills and a deep respect for teachers’ professionalism. Additionally, ICs have a thorough knowledge of the teaching practices they share with teachers. Unlike some other approaches, Instructional Coaches also frequently provide model lessons, observe teachers, and simplify explanations of the teaching practices they share with teachers.

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WHAT IS INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING?

ICs partner with teachers to help them incorporate research-based instructional practices into their teaching. They are skilled communicators, or relationship builders, with a repertoire of excellent communication skills that enable them to empathize, listen, and build trusting relationships. ICs

also encourage and support teachers' reflection about their classroom practices. Thus, they must be skilled at unpacking their collaborating teachers' professional goals so that they can help them create a plan for realizing those goals, all with a focus on improving instruction.

Instructional Coaches deeply understand many scientifically proven instructional practices. ICs focus on a broader range of instructional issues, which might include classroom management, content enhancement, specific teaching practices, formative assessment, or other teaching practices, such as the Strategic Instruction Model, Reading in the Content Areas, Marzano's strategies, or other proven ways to improve instruction. ICs help teachers choose appropriate approaches to teaching for the different kinds of learning students are experiencing. They frequently model practices in the classroom, observe teachers, and engage in supportive, dialogical conversations with them about what they observed. An Instructional Coach, in other words, partners with teachers so they can choose and implement research-based interventions to help students learn more effectively.

WHAT IS THE PARTNERSHIP PHILOSOPHY?

One of the most important aspects of Instructional Coaching, as I define it, is the theory behind the approach. Theory provides a foundation for all aspects of our professional and personal life. When we undertake any task, we operate from a set of taken-for-granted rules or principles of how to be effective, and these tacit rules represent the *theory* for that particular task. Theory is the gravity that holds together any systematic approach, including Instructional Coaching.

I describe the theoretical framework for Instructional Coaching as a partnership approach, seeing coaching as a partnership between coaches and teachers. This approach is articulated in seven principles, which are derived from research and theoretical writing in a variety of fields, including adult education (Friere, Knowles) cultural anthropology (Eisler,) Leadership (Block, Greenleaf), organizational theory (Senge), and epistemology (Kuhn, Bernstein, Feyerabend). The principles were also validated in a study of two approaches to professional development (a partnership approach and a traditional approach) (Knight, 1999).

The Partnership Principles

ICs use the partnership principles as touchstones for reflecting on the work they have done in the past and for planning the work they will do in the future. More information on the partnership approach is available in *Partnership Learning: Scientifically Proven Strategies for Fostering Dialogue During Workshops and Presentations* (Knight, 2009b). The seven partnership principles are as follows:

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1. Equality: Instructional Coaches and Teachers Are Equal Partners

Partnership involves relationships between equals. Thus, Instructional Coaches recognize collaborating teachers as equal partners, and they truly believe that each teacher's thoughts and beliefs are valuable. ICs listen to teachers with the intent to learn, to really understand, and then respond, rather than with the intent to persuade.

2. Choice: Teachers Should Have Choice Regarding What and How They Learn

In a partnership, one individual does not make decisions for another. Because partners are equal, they make their own individual choices and make decisions collaboratively. For ICs this means that teacher choice is implicit in every communication of content and, to the greatest extent possible, the process used to learn the content. ICs don't see it as their job to make teachers think like them; they see their goal as meeting people where they are and offering choices.

3. Voice: Professional Learning Should Empower and Respect the Voices of Teachers

All individuals in a partnership have opportunities to express their point of view. Indeed, a primary benefit of a partnership is that each individual has access to many perspectives rather than the one perspective of a leader. ICs who act on this principle encourage teachers to express their opinions about content being learned. ICs see coaching as a process that helps teachers find their voice, not a process determined to make teachers think a certain way.

4. Dialogue: Professional Learning Should Enable Authentic Dialogue

To arrive at mutually acceptable decisions, partners engage in dialogue. In a partnership, one individual does not impose, dominate, or control. Partners engage in conversation, learning together as they explore ideas. For ICs this means that they listen more than they talk. ICs avoid manipulation, engage participants in conversation about content, and think and learn with participants.

5. Reflection: Reflection Is an Integral Part of Professional Learning

If we are creating a learning partnership, if our partners are equal with us, if they are free to speak their own minds and free to make real, meaningful choices, it follows that one of the most important choices

our collaborating partners will make is how to make sense of whatever we are proposing they learn. Partners don't dictate to each other what to believe; they respect their partners' professionalism and provide them with enough information, so that they can make their own decisions. Thus, ICs encourage collaborating teachers to consider ideas before adopting them. Indeed, ICs recognize that reflective thinkers, by definition, have to be free to choose or reject ideas, or else they simply are not thinkers at all.

6. Praxis: Teachers Should Apply Their Learning to Their Real-Life Practice as They Are Learning

Partnership should enable individuals to have more meaningful experiences. In partnership relationships, meaning arises when people reflect on ideas and then put those actions into practice. A requirement for partnership is that each individual is free to reconstruct and use content the way he or she considers it most useful. For ICs this means that in partnership with collaborating teachers, they focus their attention on how to use ideas in the classroom as those ideas are being learned.

7. Reciprocity: Instructional Coaches Should Expect to Get as Much as They Give

In a partnership, all partners benefit from the success, learning, or experience of others—everyone is rewarded by what each individual contributes. For that reason, one of an IC's goals should be to learn along with collaborating teachers, such as learning about each teacher's classroom, the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching practices being learned when used in each teacher's classroom, various perspectives of the teaching strategy when seen through the eyes of teachers and students, and so on.

WHAT TEACHING PRACTICES DO INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES SHARE WITH TEACHERS? THE BIG FOUR

If Instructional Coaches are going to share proven teaching practices with teachers, they likely need a framework to help them identify where to start. ICs working with the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning employ a framework we refer to as "The Big Four," which includes (1) classroom management, (2) content, (3) instruction, and

The Big Four

1. Classroom Management
2. Content
3. Instruction
4. Assessment for Learning

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(4) assessment for learning. More information on The Big Four is available in *The Big Four: A Framework for Instructional Excellence* (Knight, 2009a), *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* (Knight, 2007), and *Coaching Classroom Management: A Toolkit for Coaches and Administrators* (Sprick, Knight, Reinke, & McKale, 2006).

1. Classroom Management

If a teacher's students are on task and learning, an IC and collaborating teachers can turn to a variety of other issues related to student learning. However, if student behavior is out of control, in our experience, the coach and collaborating teacher will struggle to make other practices work if they do not first address classroom management issues. More information about classroom management is available in the book *Coaching Classroom Management: A Toolkit for Coaches and Administrators* (Sprick et al., 2006). ICs can explore starting points for coaching by considering several questions that might help identify whether behavior is an issue that needs to be addressed immediately:

- Are students on task in class?
- Does the teacher make significantly more positive comments than negative comments (at least a three to one ratio)?
- Has the teacher developed clear expectations for all activities and transitions during the class?
- Has the teacher clearly communicated those expectations, and do the students understand them?
- Do students have frequent opportunities to respond during the class?

More difficult to identify, but no less important to ask, are the following questions:

- Does the teacher care about his or her students' welfare?
- Does the teacher respect his or her students?
- Does the teacher communicate high expectations?
- Does the teacher believe his or her students can achieve those expectations?

2. Content

Does the teacher understand the content, have a plan, and understand which information is most important? If a teacher's class is well managed, a second question is whether the teacher has a deep knowledge of the content. Teachers need to know which content is most important, and they also need to know how to explain that content clearly. Several questions might help a coach determine whether a teacher has mastery of his or her content. They include the following:

- Does the teacher have a complete, detailed plan for teaching the course?
- Has the teacher developed essential questions for all units?
- Do those questions align with the state standards?
- Can the teacher identify the 10 to 15 core questions that are answered by the course?
- Can the teacher identify the top 10 concepts in the course?
- Can the teacher clearly and simply explain the meaning of each of the top 10 concepts?

3. Instruction

Is the teacher using teaching practices that ensure all students master content? If teachers hold a deep understanding of their content, and if they can manage their classroom, the next big question is whether they can teach their knowledge to their students. Effective instruction involves numerous teaching practices, the need for which may be surfaced by the following questions:

- Does the teacher properly prepare students at the start of the class?
- Does the teacher effectively model thinking and other processes for students?
- Does the teacher ask questions at an appropriate variety of levels?
- Does the teacher use cooperative learning and other activities to keep students engaged?
- Does the teacher provide constructive feedback that enables students to improve?
- Does the teacher use language, analogies, examples, and stories that make it easier for students to learn and remember content?
- Does the teacher effectively sum up lessons at the end of the class?

4. Formative Assessment

Do the teacher and students know if students are mastering content? If a teacher's students are on task, if the teacher has a deep knowledge of the content, knows what's most important and can communicate that knowledge using effective instructional practices, then the final question is whether the teacher and student know how well the students are learning. Several questions will help ICs explore a teacher's understanding of formative assessment:

- Does the teacher know the target or targets the students are aiming for in the class?
- Do the students know the target they are aiming for in the class?

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- Does the teacher use formative assessments or checks for understanding to gauge how well students are learning?
- Are students involved in the development and use of formative assessments?
- Can a teacher look out into the classroom and know with some degree of accuracy how well each student is doing?

WHAT DO INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES DO? THE COMPONENTS OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

Instructional Coaching, as we define it, has very clear components that enable ICs to respond to the unique challenges of personal change. The eight components of this process (Enroll, Identify, Explain, Model, Observe, Explore, Refine, Reflect) are described as follows.

Enroll

How does an IC get people on board? We propose five methods: (1) one-to-one interviews, (2) small-group presentations, (3) large-group presentations, (4) informal conversations, and (5) administrator referral.

1. One-to-One Interviews

Perhaps the most effective way for coaches to enroll teachers is through the use of one-to-one interviews. One-to-one interviews help ICs achieve at least three goals. First, they are a way to gather specific information about teacher and administrative challenges, student needs, and cultural norms specific to a school. Coaches can use this information to tailor coaching sessions and other Professional Learning to the unique needs of teachers and students. Second, interviews enable ICs to educate participants about the partnership philosophy, methods, and opportunities offered by Instructional Coaching. During interviews, ICs can explain their partnership approach to coaching, listen to teachers' concerns, and explain that as coaches they are there to help, not to evaluate.

Finally, interviews provide an opportunity for ICs to develop one-to-one relationships with teachers.

How Should One-to-One Interviews Be Conducted? Interviews are most effective when they last at least 30 minutes, and more effective when they are 45 minutes to one hour long (generally, one planning period per interview). While a longer interview allows more time to learn about each person's particular burning issues, and provides more time to build a

relationship, a great deal of information can be gathered from 15-minute interviews.

Whenever possible, interviews should be conducted one-to-one. In a group, people tend to comment in ways that are consistent with the cultural norms of their organization (Schein, 1992). One-to-one, on the other hand, allows people to speak much more candidly. Since effective Instructional Coaching may involve overcoming negative or even toxic cultural norms, creating a setting where teachers feel safe stepping outside their culture and speaking frankly is important.

During the Interviews. In most cases, your goals during an interview will be the same regardless of the amount of time available. We have found that it is most valuable to seek answers to at least four general questions:

1. What are the rewards you experience as a teacher?
2. What obstacles interfere with you achieving your professional goals?
3. What are your students' strengths and weaknesses?
4. What kinds of Professional Learning are most or least effective for you?

When you have more time to conduct interviews, you can broaden or focus the scope of your questions depending on the nature of the professional development session you are planning to lead. (A fairly extensive list of interview questions from which you might draw in structuring your interview can be found in Knight, 2007.)

How to Build Relationships During Interviews. Using interviews as a way to build an emotional connection with collaborating teachers can make it easier for coaches to communicate their message. By positioning themselves as listeners during the interviews, ICs have a chance to make many bids for emotional connection with participants (Gottman, 2001). During an interview, ICs can share stories, laugh and empathize, offer positive comments, discuss personal issues, and listen with great care.

If done well, enrolling interviews provide ICs with many opportunities to listen with empathy, offer encouragement, and reveal themselves as real, caring people.

Asking Teachers to Commit: Contracting. As important as the interview process is for providing you with information about teachers, students, and your school, the most important outcome of the interview process is to obtain commitment from teachers to the coaching process. Many coaches in business and education refer to this as contracting. ICs must find time during the interview to tactfully explain how Instructional Coaching works and what benefits it might offer for the teacher being interviewed. An IC should search for appropriate times in the middle of

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the interview to explain aspects of Instructional Coaching in response to the teacher's comments.

The goal is to ensure that the teacher knows enough about coaching so that he or she can make an intelligent choice about whether to work with the coach. For that reason, ICs should see the interview as their first chance to demonstrate the respectful, partnering relationship that is at the heart of Instructional Coaching. At the end of the one-to-one interview, ICs should know whether a teacher is ready to collaborate with them, and in most cases the interview is an IC's best strategy for enrolling teachers. As Lucy West (whose chapter appears later in this book) has said, a coach's goal is to meet teachers where they are and offer them resources that uniquely respond to their particular needs.

2. Small-Group Presentations

In some cases, one-to-one interviews are not practical or necessary. One alternative to one-to-one interviews is small group meetings. Usually an IC meets with the teachers during a team meeting, a grade-level meeting, or whatever small group meeting is available.

During the get-together, an IC's goals are quite simple: (a) to explain the opportunities that exist for teachers' professional growth, (b) to clarify the partnership perspective that underlies the coaching relationship, (c) to explain other "nuts and bolts" issues related to Instructional Coaching, and, most important, (d) to sign up teachers who want to work with a coach.

The presentation during small-group meetings should be short, clear, and respectful. In many cases, this initial conversation is the IC's first opportunity to communicate an authentic respect and admiration for the important activity of teaching. If ICs honestly communicate their genuine respect for teachers, that may go a long way toward opening doors. On the other hand, if an IC appears to communicate a lack of respect for teachers, that may put the IC into a hole that will be very difficult to climb out of.

We suggest that ICs plan for about 20 minutes during small-group meetings. Following the informal presentation, ICs should answer any questions teachers raise. ICs can also provide a one-page summary of the teaching practices teachers can learn as a result of Instructional Coaching, such as classroom management, curriculum planning, teaching to mastery, or formative assessment.

At the close of the small-group presentation, after teachers have heard about the IC's partnership philosophy, the way the IC works, and the teaching practices that the IC can share, ICs should hand out a short form asking teachers to note whether they are interested in collaborating with their IC at this time. The form provides an opportunity for teachers to communicate their interest privately.

3. Large-Group Presentations

In some cases, ICs enroll teachers through a single presentation to a large group, possibly the entire staff. Such a presentation is usually held at the start of the school year, ideally before classes begin, or at the end of the year, to enroll teachers for the following year. A large-group presentation is a good idea when an IC wants to ensure that all teachers hear the same message. Large-group presentations are also effective when an IC is confident that teachers are interested in collaborating with them. As a general rule, the greater the resistance an IC expects to experience with teachers, the smaller the group should be, and when there is any concern that teachers will resist collaborating with ICs, one-to-one interviews are recommended.

ICs can enhance large-group presentations by employing partnership learning structures (Knight, 2009b), learning activities that foster dialogue in the middle of the presentation. For example, ICs might ask teachers to work in groups to identify the top needs of students and then match possible interventions to the identified needs.

At the end of the session, the IC asks participants to complete a form to indicate whether they are interested in collaborating with them. The form might be the same as the one proposed for the small-group session, or the IC might have participants complete a form throughout the presentation. When they employ this presentation tactic, ICs provide a brief explanation of a few teaching practices or interventions, and then they pause to provide time for the audience to write down their thoughts or comments about the practices or interventions that are described. In this way, the teachers have an opportunity to express their thoughts about what they are hearing, and ICs get a lot of helpful feedback. What is essential is that at the end of the session, teachers have a chance to write down whether they are ready to work with the coach, and the IC will have a list of people with whom to start coaching.

4. One-to-One Informal Conversations

Frequently, ICs enroll teachers through casual conversations around the school. ICs who are skilled at getting teachers to commit to collaboration usually are highly skilled relationship builders. An IC shouldn't feel compelled to get every teacher on board immediately; a better tactic is to win over a few teachers with high-quality Professional Learning on an intervention that really makes a difference for students. In most cases, the IC should seek out a highly effective solution for a troubling problem a teacher is facing. If you respond to a real challenge a teacher is facing with a real solution, word will travel through the school, and teachers will commit to working with their coach.

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5. Administrator Referral

When an IC and a principal work together in a school, inevitably there will be occasions when the principal or other administrators identify teachers who need to work with the IC. Principal referral can be a powerful way to accelerate the impact of coaching in a school, but it must be handled with care. If the partnership principles are ignored and struggling teachers are told they must work with a coach (or else!), the IC can be seen as a punishment, not a support, and teachers may come to resent the coach's help.

We suggest a different approach for principal referral, one consistent with the partnership principles. Rather than telling teachers they must work with coaches, we suggest principals focus on the teaching practice that must change, and offer the coach as one way the teacher can bring about the needed change. Thus, a principal might say, "John, when I observed your class I noticed that 10 of your 24 students were off task during your lesson. You need to implement ways to keep those kids on task. Our Instructional Coach Tamika is great at time on task. You might want to talk with her about this, but if you can find another way, that's fine, too. What matters is that more kids are learning. I'll check back in a few weeks, and I expect to see a difference."

In this way, the principal can apply pressure on the teacher while at the same time leaving the IC as one option. Thus, the coach isn't a punishment forced on the teacher, but a lifeline, someone who provides a meaningful support for teachers doing this important and complex work in the classroom. When led to the coach in this way, many teachers are grateful for their coach's support and assistance. If other teachers are able to address the problem in the class in other ways, that is fine too, and it provides ICs with more time to work with teachers who want to work with their coach.

Identify

After enrolling teachers (either through interviews, one-to-one meetings, in small groups, in large groups, or through administrator referral), the IC will have a list of potential collaborating teachers. It is important that ICs reply promptly to every teacher expressing an interest in working with them. If the coach waits too long, the teachers may run out of time to collaborate, become focused on other priorities, or lose their desire to collaborate with the coach.

ICs shouldn't worry too much if their starting list of potential collaborating teachers is short. The list could include most of the school's teachers, but frequently it consists of fewer than 25% of the staff. The length of the list is not that important initially. What really matters is that the experiences of the first few teachers the IC collaborates with are successful because the first teachers will start the word-of-mouth process that should eventually lead to widespread implementation of the teaching practices provided by the coach.

The First Meeting

A lot can be accomplished during the first conversation after a teacher has enrolled in the coaching process. Both parties share the goal of identifying which of the teaching practices the coach has to offer might be most helpful to the teacher. On many occasions, the first conversation is all that is needed for the teacher and coach to identify the teaching practices to be implemented in the teacher's classroom. On other occasions, the first conversation, what some call a preconference, does not always provide enough data to identify where the coach and teacher start. In some cases, the collaborating teacher might not know where to start. Many ICs prefer to observe teachers before identifying a teaching practice. What counts is that the IC and teacher *together* identify a particular best practice that has the greatest chance of making a difference for students and naturally teachers' lives.

Explain

Once the IC and teacher have identified a proven practice to be implemented, the IC has to explain the teaching practice. This is not as easy as it seems. Many teachers' instructional manuals are more than 100 pages long, filled with fairly abstract language and concepts. Add to this, the reality that the amount of time a coach and teacher might spend together can be quite short, and no doubt, will occur in a context of competing priorities. Clearly coaches have their work cut out for them. Nonetheless, to be effective, an IC must translate research into practice. We suggest five tactics that enhance an IC's ability to do this.

1. Clarify

One of the most important and most frequently overlooked practices that ICs can employ is the simple task of reading, writing, and synthesizing what they plan to tell teachers. ICs need to read, reread, take notes, and reread the manuals and research articles that describe the instructional practices they are sharing. A simple overview of a manual is not sufficient. Coaches need to mark up their books, highlight key passages, write in the margins, and cover their manuals with sticky notes. They should have read these materials so frequently that they know the page numbers for key sections and recognize most pages in a manual the way one recognizes an old friend. During and after reading, ICs should write out their understanding of the materials they have read. This activity might take the form of writing outlines of documents, creating semantic maps or webs, or paraphrasing what has been read into simple language.

Five Tactics for Translating Research Into Practice

1. Clarify: Read, write, talk
2. Synthesize
3. Break it down
4. See it through teachers' (and students') eyes
5. Simplify

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Once they have read and written about the materials they've been studying, ICs should seek out opportunities to explain, clarify, modify, and expand their understandings by communicating with others who are knowledgeable about the same interventions. Some ICs use e-mail or the telephone to share ideas with other ICs who are sharing the same practices. Others even contact the authors of the research articles and manuals to ask for their insights. In the best-case scenario, ICs set up informal or formal Professional Learning communities so they can meet with other ICs to discuss and deepen their knowledge of teaching practices.

2. Synthesize

After clarifying the meaning of research articles and manuals, ICs need to synthesize what they have learned and describe the essential features of the teaching practices they've studied. For some this is accomplished by writing one-to-two sentence statements that capture the essence of the interventions they are sharing with teachers. What matters is that coaches are able to identify and summarize what is most important about the teaching practices they are sharing.

ICs can develop short checklists that summarize the vital teaching behaviors that are essential components of the teaching practices they're sharing. Checklists can provide focus to conversations with teachers and shape the modeling and observing practices used to enable teachers to master successful teaching new practices.

3. Break It Down

As a translator of teaching practices, ICs break down teaching practices into manageable components related to the specific teaching practices to be implemented. There is much coaches can do to make teacher manuals more accessible. Some literally tear apart manuals and divide them into easy-to-understand sections that they put into binders. ICs can also highlight important passages or put sticky notes beside especially important sections of a manual. When breaking down materials, ICs should ensure that teachers know exactly what needs to be done next. As personal productivity guru David Allen (2001) has observed, "It never fails to greatly improve both the productivity and the peace of mind of the user to determine what the next physical action is that will move something forward" (p. 237).

4. See It Through Teachers' (and Students') Eyes

ICs must plan their explanations by thinking carefully about what the new practice will look like in the classroom. In this way, ICs can address the practical concerns that teachers might have. For example,

they might think through a number of classroom management issues, such as handing out papers, organizing grading assignments, or handling movement in the classroom. ICs might also discuss how to incorporate formative assessments into a lesson or explain what expectations should be taught when a certain teaching practice is introduced. Throughout the explanation, the IC should be intent on removing teachers' anxiety and making it easier for them to understand and eventually use a new teaching practice.

5. Simplify

ICs should not dumb down complex ideas and make them simplistic. As Bill Jensen said in his book *Simplicity: The New Competitive Advantage in a World of More, Better, Faster* (2000), we should not confuse "simplistic" with simplicity. Simplicity, Jensen explains, is "the art of making the complex clear" (p. 2). And "making the complex clear always helps people work smarter. Because it is a lot easier to figure out what's important and ignore what isn't" (Jensen, 2000, p. i).

There are many things coaches can do to attain simpler explanations. Jensen (2000) proposes storytelling as a communication strategy that "easily creates common meaning and purpose for everyone" (p. 88). ICs can use stories to help teachers see what a teaching practice might look like in the classroom. Additionally, ICs should look for analogies, anecdotes, or simple explanations and comparisons that bring the materials to life.

Model: You Watch Me

ICs, as we define them, spend a great deal of their time in classrooms modeling lessons, watching teachers teach, and having conversations about what teachers saw when they watched the IC, or what the IC saw when he or she watched the teachers. Since some teachers find the business of observation somewhat intimidating, ICs try to keep the experience as informal as possible: "You watch me; I watch you."

The Observation Form

Before conducting a model lesson, an IC must ensure that the collaborating teachers are prepared to get the most out of it—that they know what to watch for and, in fact, are actually watching the model lesson. ICs can develop a shared understanding of the purpose of the model lesson by coconstructing with the teacher an observation form to help focus the attention of both the teacher and the IC. The observation form is a simple chart on which the IC, in partnership with the collaborating teacher, lists the critical teaching behaviors that a teacher should be watching for when watching a model lesson.

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The observation form includes a column for listing these behaviors, one where teachers can put a check mark every time they observe a critical teaching behavior, and a column where they can include comments, questions, or thoughts about what they observe during a model lesson. By coconstructing the form with teachers prior to the model lesson, ICs can check for teachers' understanding of critical teaching behaviors. Later, by having teachers fill out the form during a model lesson, they can focus the teachers' attention on what matters most in the model. Of course, a coach and IC don't need a preconstructed form; they can simply create one on a sheet of paper.

Checklists of critical teaching behaviors can help coaches clarify and synthesize their understanding of teaching practices. However, we have found that giving a ready-made checklist to teachers is not as effective as coconstructing an observation form. Although the IC ensures that the coconstructed form includes most of the critical teaching behaviors on the original checklist, by involving the teacher in creating the form, a coach gets better buy-in to the form and can be more certain that the collaborating teacher understands all of the items listed on it. Also, teachers frequently suggest teaching behaviors for the form that the coach might not have considered but that are important. Thus, by involving teachers in the process as partners, we actually get a better product.

Giving a Model Lesson

Before providing model lessons, ICs must ensure that they have a deep understanding of the lesson they are modeling. Prior to the lesson, the IC and collaborating teacher also need to clarify their roles with respect to behavior management in the classroom. In some cases, teachers want to retain their role as manager of classroom behavior. In other situations, teachers are very comfortable with the IC taking primary responsibility for managing behavior during the model lesson. Both the teacher and IC must know how behavior will be managed. As every experienced teacher knows, students seem to have a sixth sense that makes them very sensitive to any vacuum in leadership with respect to classroom management, and if no one is in control, students can be off task in minutes, possibly seconds.

We have found that it is most effective for coaches to model only the specific practice that is described on an observation form, rather than model an entire lesson. During the model, the teacher observes the coach, using the observation form to focus his or her attention, checking off behaviors when the teacher sees them modeled by the coach. ICs need to be careful to include the teacher in the lesson and ensure that students know that they, the ICs, are just visitors in the teacher's classroom. Additionally, the coach should defer to the experience of the teacher throughout the lesson.

Observe: I Watch You

After the collaborating teacher has watched the coach provide a model lesson and then discussed his or her thoughts and questions about it with the IC, it is time for the IC to observe the teacher. While watching the teacher, the IC does the same as the teacher did while watching the model lesson: the IC watches for the critical teaching behaviors they identified using a copy of the coconstructed observation form that the teacher used to observe the coach when he or she did the model lesson. And, as the teacher did earlier, the IC watches the teacher carefully and checks off the form every time he or she sees the teacher perform one of the identified critical teaching behaviors.

Since teachers have already used the form to watch the IC's model lesson, they are usually quite comfortable with their IC using the form in the classroom. However, ICs need to be careful to stress the informality of the observation, which is why we emphasize the idea of simply saying, "You watch me, and I watch you." For some teachers, the very notion of "observation" is intimidating, and some ICs avoid using that term, choosing to say instead that they'll "visit" the classroom. If an IC is careful to watch for and record the many good aspects of the lesson that is observed, however, teachers will become much less reticent about inviting the IC to watch lessons.

As an observer, the IC should try to remove personal judgments from the activity of observing. Rather than seeing themselves as evaluating teachers, coaches should see themselves as a second set of eyes in the room, using the observation form or other data-gathering methods as tools for recording relevant data about how the lesson proceeds. While observing, the IC should especially attend to the collaborating teacher's efforts to use the critical teaching practices. Whenever the teacher uses one of the critical behaviors, the IC should check the appropriate column of the observation form, and write down specific data about how the teacher used the behavior. For example, if a critical teaching behavior is to explain expectations to students, the IC might jot down a quick summary of exactly what the teacher said when he or she clarified expectations.

What data the coach records during the observation vary, depending on what intervention teachers are learning to use. In many cases, the IC will only need to use the observation form to gather the necessary data. Other interventions require other kinds of data gathering. For example, ICs who are coaching teachers to increase the number of high-level questions used might simply write down each question posed by the teacher so that the coach and teacher can review them later. ICs who are coaching teachers with respect to "opportunities to respond" (the number of times students are invited to speak or interact during a lesson) might simply keep a tally of the number of opportunities to respond provided during a lesson. Thus, ICs may use the observation forms or other data-gathering methods depending on the teaching practice being learned.

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While observing the lesson and gathering data, an IC has to be especially careful to note positive actions taking place in the class, such as effective interventional practices or positive student responses. While intuitively an IC might think that the most important part of observing a lesson is to find areas of weakness that need to be improved, in reality, the most important part of the observation may be to look for things the teacher does well. Seeing what needs to be improved is often quite easy; seeing, recording, and communicating what went well sometimes requires extra effort.

ICs who are highly sensitive to the positive things that take place in the classroom can provide a great service to the teachers and the school. Too often the challenges of being an educator, and the emotional exhaustion that comes with trying to reach every child every day, makes it difficult for teachers to fully comprehend the good they are doing. Furthermore, conversations in schools sometimes have a tendency to turn negative, perhaps as a defense mechanism for teachers who are frustrated that they cannot reach more students. Thus, ICs should consider it one of their goals to change the kind of conversations that take place in schools, one conversation at a time.

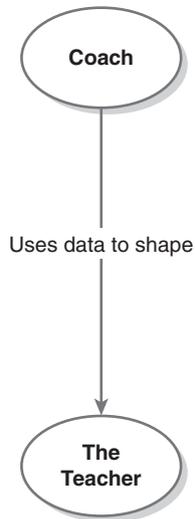
Explore: The Collaborative Exploration of Data

As soon as possible after observing a lesson, an IC should schedule a follow-up meeting with the collaborating teacher to discuss the data that was collected. This meeting, like other aspects of the Instructional Coaching process, is based on the mutual respect between professionals inherent in the partnership principles. The collaborative exploration of data taking place during this meeting is *not* an opportunity for the IC to share his or her “expert” opinion on what the teacher did right or wrong. More than anything else it is a learning conversation where both parties use data as a point of departure for dialogue.

This meeting is not an opportunity for top-down feedback. Top-down feedback, as Figure 2.1 suggests, occurs when one person, an expert, watches a novice and provides feedback until the novice masters a skill. This might be a great way to teach some skills, but it is problematic as a model for interaction between professionals who are peers.

The problem with top-down feedback is that it is based on the assumption that there is only one right way to see things, and that right way is the view held by the feedback giver. Kegan and Lahey (2001) explain the assumptions of this approach:

The first [assumption] is that the perspective of the feedback giver (let’s call him the supervisor)—what he sees and thinks, his feedback—is right, is correct. An accompanying assumption is that there is only one correct answer. When you put these two assumptions together, they amount to this: the supervisor has the one and only correct view of the situation. (We call this “the supervision assumption”; that is, the supervisor has *super* vision). (p. 128)

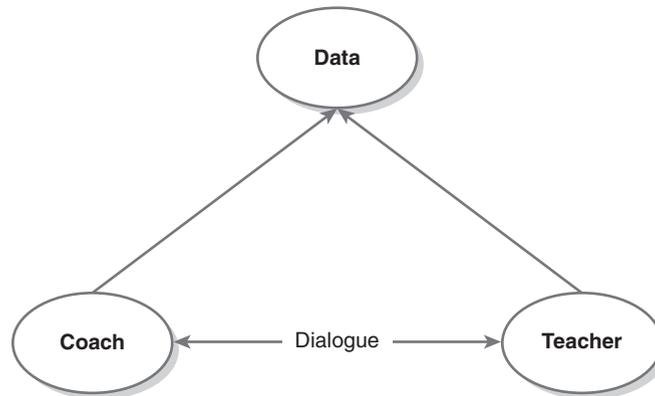
Figure 2.1 Top-Down Feedback

During top-down feedback, the feedback giver is prepared to “(1) say exactly what the person is doing wrong, (2) give the sense the criticism is meant to help, (3) suggest a solution, and (4) give a timely message” (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, p. 128). The person giving top-down feedback, in other words, working from the assumption that he or she is right, does all of the thinking for the person receiving the feedback. That is hardly the partnership approach, and the reason why Kegan and Lahey (2001) say, “many a relationship has been damaged and a work setting poisoned by *perfectly delivered* constructive feedback!” (p. 128).

An alternative to top-down feedback is the partnership approach or the collaborative exploration of data. As depicted in the Figure 2.2, during the partnership approach, the IC and teacher sit side by side as partners and review the data that the IC has gathered. The IC does not withhold his or her opinion, but offers it in a provisional way, communicating that he or she is open to other points of view.

A Language of Ongoing Regard

One important goal ICs should hold during the collaborative exploration of data is to communicate clearly the genuinely positive aspects of the lesson that was observed. I do not mean that they should be promoting thoughtless, vague, or empty happy words or phrases. A “language of ongoing regard” has specific characteristics. Kegan and Lahey (2001) stress that authentic, appreciative, or admiring feedback needs to be (a) direct, (b) specific, and (c) nonattributive. Most ICs recognize the importance of

Figure 2.2 Collaborative Exploration of Data

direct, specific feedback. Direct comments are spoken to a person in the first person, not about a person in the third person. Thus, it is preferable to tell someone directly, “I appreciate your help,” rather than saying publicly, “I appreciate Jean’s help.” Specific comments clearly explain the details of what we are praising, rather than offering general statements. Thus, it is preferable to say, “You asked 42 questions today during your class,” in contrast to “you asked a lot of questions today in your class.”

The importance of making nonattributive comments may be less obvious. Kegan and Lahey (2001) explain that our positive comments about others are more effective when we describe our experience of others rather than the attributes of others. For example, it is less effective to say to someone, “You’re very patient” (describing an attribute that we judge them to have), than it is to say, “You waited 10 seconds for Alison to give her answer, and when she got it right, she lit up like a Christmas tree.” Kegan and Lahey explain why nonattribute feedback is more effective:

It may seem odd to you that we’re urging you not to make statements of this sort: “Carlos, I just want you to know how much I appreciate how generous you are” (or: “what a good sense of humor you have” or “that you always know the right thing to say”), or “Alice, you are so patient” (or, “so prompt,” “so never-say-die,” “always there when you are needed,”), and so on. . . . These seem like such nice things to say to someone. . . . The problem we see is this: the person, inevitably and quite properly, relates what you say to how she knows herself to be. You can tell Carlos he is generous, but he knows how generous he actually is. You can tell Alice she is very patient, but she knows her side of how patient she is being with you. (p. 99)

Learning how to give direct, specific, nonattributive feedback is a skill that every IC should develop and one that can be practiced and developed daily until it becomes a habit of thought. ICs can practice developing this “language of ongoing regard” at their workplace, but they can also practice it with their children, parents, spouse, or other people in their life. There is great benefit in practicing such feedback until it becomes a habitual way of communicating. Indeed, it seems strange that we often feel uncomfortable telling people directly and specifically why we appreciate them. Perhaps we’re afraid our comments will seem insincere or self-serving flattery. Nothing could be further from the truth. As Kegan and Lahey (2001) state, “Ongoing regard is not about praising, stroking, or positively defining a person to herself or to others. We say again: it is about enhancing the quality of a precious kind of information. It is about informing the person about *our* experience of him or her” (p. 101).

Dialogue

Frequently, during the collaborative exploration of data, the IC and teacher swiftly move toward identifying next steps that they both agree will have the most positive impact on teaching. On other occasions, however, the IC and teacher hold different opinions about the significance of the data or what the teachers’ next steps should be. The best route for ICs to take here is not to withhold their perspective or push for their perspective. Partnership involves two equals sharing ideas, and this doesn’t require one person to suppress or promote his or her ideas for another’s. Rather, when the IC and the collaborating teacher see the data differently, the coach, acting on one of the partnership principles, can employ the tools of dialogue to foster an authentic learning conversation. When skillfully handled, a dialogue about differing perceptions of data can help both the IC and the teacher learn a great deal.

Refine

The components of coaching discussed in this chapter are the primary activities carried out by ICs. Usually, ICs use most or all of these components, but the sequence in which the components have been described is not always followed. Sometimes the IC opens the door to a teacher’s classroom by offering to model a lesson. Sometimes coaching begins with the IC observing. Sometimes the IC provides several model lessons. Each coaching sequence must be tailored to the unique needs of each individual teacher.

During coaching, the IC provides as much support as necessary, but no more. In most cases, after a teacher has mastered a new teaching practice, the coach and teacher choose to move on to some other intervention. What matters is that the teacher and the IC keep learning together, working as partners to ensure that students receive excellent instruction.

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Reflect

When an IC moves through the components of coaching with a teacher, both the teacher and the coach should be learning. The teacher is learning a new teaching practice. At the same time, the coach could be learning any number of new skills or insights related to working with students, providing model lessons, enrolling teachers in the Instructional Coaching process, building relationships, addressing teachers' core concerns, or any other aspect of Instructional Coaching. Every day provides numerous learning experiences for even the most experienced coaches.

To ensure that they do not forget what they learn along the way, many coaches keep journals, either on their computers or in hand-written notebooks, to record the important things they learn. ICs can also use a reflective practice developed by the U.S. Army—After-Action Review (AAR). According to *The U.S. Army Leadership Field Manual* (U.S. Army, 2004), "An AAR is a professional discussion of an event, focused on performance standards, that allow participants to discover for themselves what happened, why it happened, and how to sustain strengths and improve on weaknesses" (p. 6). Put another way, the AAR structures reflection on (a) what was supposed to happen, (b) what really happened, (c) why there's a difference between (a) and (b), and (c) what should be done differently next time.

WHAT FACTORS INCREASE THE SUCCESS OF COACHING PROGRAMS?

If ICs are going to be successful, they must work in a context that supports their focus on instruction. A few simple factors can make all the difference in the effectiveness of any coaching program.

Time

The simplest way to improve the effectiveness of a coaching program is to increase the amount of time coaches are actually coaching. This seems obvious, but the most frequent concern raised by the more than 2,000 Instructional Coaches we have worked with in the past four years was that they are asked to complete so many noninstructional tasks they have little time left to work with teachers. Because Instructional Coaches' job descriptions are often vague or nonexistent and because their schedules are more flexible than the schedules of others, they often are asked to do many clerical or noninstructional tasks. Paying ICs to copy and bind standards documents or shop for math lab furniture or serve as substitute teachers is a poor way to spend money and perhaps an even poorer way to improve teaching practices in schools.

In Cecil County, Maryland, ICs and administrators address this issue by drawing up a pie chart that depicts exactly how much time they agree coaches should spend on various tasks. Then, each week the coaches report to their principals how their time was spent. If necessary, this allows the coach and principal to adjust the time allocations so they can focus their efforts on improving instruction.

Proven Research-Based Interventions

If ICs are going to make a difference in the way teachers teach, they need to have scientifically proven practices to share. Hiring coaches but not ensuring they have proven practices is a bit like trying to paint a beautiful painting without any art supplies. ICs need to have a repertoire of tools to help them assist teachers in addressing their most pressing concerns.

ICs working with the Center for Research on Learning discover interventions that address The Big Four areas of behavior, content knowledge, instruction, and formative assessment. The coaches develop a deep understanding of scientifically proven practices they can share with teachers to help them improve in any or all of the four areas.

One way to address this concern is for the coach, principal, and other school leaders to come to a shared understanding of excellent instruction. Then, the team should identify what tools are necessary for all teachers to become excellent. Finally, the coach and team should identify how the coach can develop proficiency in those practices so that they can be shared with others in the school. Tools such as *The Big Four: A Framework for Instructional Excellence* (Knight, 2009a) or Charlotte Danielson's (1996) *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* can be very helpful when doing this task.

Professional Development for Instructional Coaches

Coaches need to understand the interventions they are sharing, and they need to understand how to productively employ the coaching process. Without their own professional development, ICs run the risk of being ineffective, wasting time and money, or even misinforming teachers. Therefore, the coaches need to participate in their own professional development to ensure that they know how to coach and what to share when they coach teachers.

Professional development for coaches should address at least two subjects. First, coaches should engage in various Professional Learning activities designed to improve their coaching practices. Specifically, ICs affiliated with our center learn how to employ powerful, proven practices to (a) enroll teachers in coaching, (b) identify appropriate interventions for teachers to learn, (c) model and gather data in the classroom, and (d) engage in dialogue about classroom and other data. Additionally, they

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improve their professional skills in areas such as communication, relationship building, change management, and leadership.

Second, professional development for coaches should deepen ICs knowledge about the teaching practices they are sharing with teachers. Obviously, if coaches have a superficial knowledge of the information they share with teachers, they will not know what to emphasize when they discuss, model, or observe during Professional Learning with teachers. Indeed, coaches who do not deeply understand what they are sharing with teachers could misinform teachers and actually make things worse, not better, for students.

Protecting the Coaching Relationship

Many, perhaps most, teachers see their profession as an integral part of their self-identity. Consequently, if coaches or others are careless with their comments or suggestions about teachers' practices in the classroom, they run the risk of offending teachers, damaging relationships, or at the very least not being heard. Because teaching is such a personal activity, coaches need to win teachers' trust. Trust is an essential component of an open coaching relationship.

To make it easier for coaches to maintain trusting partnerships with teachers, educational leaders must protect the coaching relationship. If leaders ask coaches to hold the dual role of administrator and coach, they put their coaches in a difficult situation. Administrators, by definition, are not peers. Usually people are more guarded when they talk with their bosses than when they talk with their peers. Coaches will find it easier to have open conversations about teaching practices if their collaborating teachers do not view them as bosses and, therefore, do not have to worry about how their comments might affect the way they will be evaluated.

Ensuring That Principals and Coaches Work Together

The IC can be and should be the right-hand person of the principal when it comes to Instructional Leadership in schools, but the principal must remain the instructional leader. No matter how much a coach knows, and no matter how effective a coach is, the principal's voice is ultimately the voice most important to teachers. For that reason, coaches must understand fully what their principal's vision is for school improvement, and principals need to understand fully the interventions that their coach has to offer teachers.

One way to ensure that principals get the most out of their ICs is to provide them with sufficient training. Principals who do not understand the importance of protecting the coaching relationship may act in ways that make it difficult for a coach to be successful. Also, a principal who is unaware of the tools that an IC can offer will be unable to suggest them to teachers who might benefit from learning them. District administrators

around the country are addressing these issues by providing coaching professional development for principals. Another way to ensure that principals are on the same page as their coaches is for coaches and principals to meet frequently.

Hiring the Right Instructional Coaches

All the factors described here will not yield success if the wrong people are hired to be coaches. Indeed, the most critical factor related to the success or failure of a coaching program may be the skills and attributes of the IC.

Over the past 10 years, we have found that ICs must be excellent teachers, particularly because they will likely provide model lessons in other teachers' classrooms. They also need to be flexible since their job requires them to change their plans almost daily to meet the changing needs of teachers.

Coaches should be highly skilled at building relationships. In our experience, whether a teacher adopts a new teaching practice has as much to do with the IC's communication skills as with whatever intervention the coach has to share. Simply put, if teachers like a coach, they usually will try out what the coach suggests. If they don't like the coach, they'll resist even good teaching practices.

Jim Collins' study of great organizations offers additional insight into the desirable attributes of effective coaches. Great leaders, Collins (2005) writes, "are ambitious first and foremost for the cause, the movement, the mission, the work—not themselves—and they have the will to do whatever it takes to . . . make good on that ambition" (p. 11).

The attributes Collins identifies in great leaders are also found in the best ICs. They need to be ambitious for change in their schools and willing to do, as Collins emphasizes, "whatever it takes" to improve teaching practices. If a coach is too passive about change, chances are that little will happen in the school. At the same time, if a coach is too self-centered or aggressive, there is a good chance the coach will push teachers away.

Effective coaches embody what Collins (2001) describes as a "compelling combination of personal humility and professional will" (p. 13). They are affirmative, humble, and deeply respectful of teachers, but they are unwilling to rest unless they achieve significant improvements in teaching and learning in their schools.

Evaluating Coaches

Evaluation is a major mechanism for continuous improvement of any coaching program. Evaluating ICs can offer unique challenges because no one in a district, including the principal, may ever have been a coach before, and there may be no guidelines for evaluating coaches.

One way to address this challenge is to involve coaches in the process of creating guidelines, standards, and tools to be used for their evaluation.

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Involving coaches in the process of writing their evaluation guidelines accomplishes at least three goals. First, it enables school districts to develop a rubric for evaluating coaches that is especially designed for coaches. Second, it increases coaches' buy-in to the guidelines and the process of being evaluated since they created them. Third, the dialogue coaches have while creating the guidelines is an excellent form of Professional Learning.

CONCLUSION

ICs make a very important contribution to school improvement by partnering with teachers to help them find better ways to reach more students. ICs who work from the partnership perspective can employ the components of coaching as a methodology for sharing proven practices with teachers. In some cases, they might focus on The Big Four practices of (1) classroom management, (2) content enhancement, (3) instruction, and (4) assessment for learning. When coaches understand effective tools to address The Big Four, when they know how to work with teachers, and when they work in schools that embody the success factors listed earlier, there is every reason to assume that they will have an unmistakable positive impact on how teachers teach and how students learn in schools.

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