



INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING RESEARCH BRIEF

Introduction

Today, teachers face unprecedented challenges. They are not only required to understand their content area and how to teach it, but they also must have the ability to manage other issues.¹ From challenges in student behavior, technology issues, and an increasingly politicized climate, even veteran teachers are stretched to their limits.² Given the need for effective support for teachers, the use of instructional coaching as a professional development tool has increased.³

A growing body of research supports the use of instructional coaching as a cost-effective investment in increasing teacher quality.⁴ Individualized instructional coaching is more focused than the familiar whole-staff professional development and can fill knowledge gaps for teachers who need additional support.³ Instructional coaching is a strategy that uses goal setting, observations, and feedback to improve classroom instruction.⁵

While approaches to instructional coaching can be highly directive, the most popular models are based on a non-directive approach. Ideally, teachers create their own goals and evaluate their own progress. Instructional coaches act as guides rather than directors, facilitating teacher growth through meaningful questioning and suggestions, observation and goal setting.⁶ While instructional coaches do not work directly with students, research shows that their work with teachers leads to large gains in student achievement.⁸

Goal Setting

Goal setting is key in instructional coaching. It is the component that shapes and drives the entire process. It aligns coaching efforts with measurable outcomes and fosters a collaborative environment. Effective use of goal setting gives coaches and teachers clarity, motivation, accountability, opportunities for reflection, and structure for support.

Clarity and Focus

One of the primary advantages of goal setting is the clarity it brings to the coaching process. Coaches can identify and address specific areas of need, enhancing the effectiveness of the coaching process.

Motivation and Engagement

Setting achievable goals plays a critical role in motivating and engaging teachers. Goals that are aligned with teachers' professional aspirations and classroom needs build an amicable relationship between coach and teacher. Successful instructional coaches developed personalized strategies that work with teachers' strengths and weaknesses to help them achieve their goals.⁸ This process increases both teacher motivation and the likelihood that the goals will be met.

Measurement and Accountability

Goal setting focuses on measurable benchmarks that facilitate progress tracking and the assessment of the impact of coaching. Coaches and teachers can use data-driven evidence to review progress, make necessary adjustments, and celebrate achievements. This reinforces a culture of continuous improvement.

Reflection and Growth

Goal setting fosters reflection and self-assessment, which are integral to professional growth. A common practice in the reflection process is to revisit the goals set for teachers or students.⁹ This enables teachers to reflect on their progress, identify areas for further development, and adapt their strategies accordingly.

Collaboration and Support

Goal setting strengthens collaboration between coaches and teachers. A collaborative approach both enhances the support provided by coaches and empowers teachers to take ownership of their growth.

Observation

Scheduling an observation

When the teacher has completed a needs assessment, established a goal, and planned its execution with the coach, the two can schedule an opportunity for the coach to observe instruction.

Access to the Classroom

Coaches can successfully integrate into the classroom if they promote collaboration and take a non-judgmental approach.¹⁰ They can engage in the daily activities of their teachers and provide non-verbal support. This approach increases the teachers' personal autonomy and their desire to try new things. Meetings and observations should be scheduled during teachers' regular school schedule.



Intentional Documenting

The instructional coach should attend the classroom observation with the teacher's goals in mind. The coach is expected to observe an agreed-upon lesson activity and gather evidence associated with the goal in order to prepare and provide feedback.¹¹ The coach first observes a lesson and collects data to document strengths and weaknesses in individual teachers' current practices and then uses the data to discuss the lesson.

The Debrief: Reflection

The Process

The final and most transformative piece of the instructional coaching process is the debrief, a reflective process intended to enhance teaching approaches.¹¹ The coach and teacher discuss the effectiveness of the teaching strategies used specifically for the designated goal and analyze student outcomes.¹ This discussion between the coach and teacher identifies both strengths and opportunities for growth.

Impact on Participant

This initial phase of growth empowers participants to manage their own learning.⁶ It gives the participant the autonomy needed to direct their own growth and gives the coach and participant an opportunity to establish trust.¹³ Overall, the debrief offers an opportunity to change perceptions and actions.

Impact on School Community

The debriefing process increases participants' self-efficacy and willingness to self-assess. The process also impacts the school. Teachers' participation in self-reflection becomes a part of the school culture. Intentional discourse is recognized as the most effective practice to improve teacher instruction because it improves teacher responsibility for boosting student achievement.

Overall Effectiveness

Implementing sustainable change indicates that the teacher is willing to lead, collaborate, and question existing practices and beliefs. The debrief works as a self-analysis that enables teachers to reflect on their own practices.⁶

Conclusion

Instructional coaching supports learners at all levels and is an effective strategy that teachers use to enhance their classroom practices, leading to improved learning outcomes for students. This is especially true for those new to the profession and those who have returned to teaching after working in a different occupation. Unlike standard professional development, coaching is an ongoing process that involves coaches and teachers throughout the school year. The ideas and solutions that emerge from conversations are often catalysts for teacher growth and positive change within school communities.

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