

Coaching Cycle: Observation

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Time Frame 85–130 minutes

Essential Question(s)

How can instructional coaches effectively observe teacher and student actions to encourage growth?

Summary

The observation stage of the coaching cycle provides the instructional coach with an opportunity to observe the agreed-upon learning activity from the goal-setting stage. The coach evaluates progress made toward the goal and determines recommendations for improvement. The teacher facilitates the observation by incorporating data-driven decisions discussed in the goal-setting meeting. This allows the teacher to implement a learning activity aligned with their goals while the instructional coach assesses the impact of the strategies. These observations will be shared during the third stage of the coaching cycle: reflection.

Learning Goals

- Build a collaborative relationship by fostering respect and support for the teacher and their role before and during the observation.
- Gather and record observable evidence of teachers' progress towards established goal(s).
- Develop communication about teacher-strengths and areas for growth.

Attachments

- Access-Granting Strategies—Coaching Cycle.pdf
- FAQ—Coaching Cycle.docx
- FAQ—Coaching Cycle.pdf
- Instructional Coaching Research Brief–Coaching Cycle.pdf
- Observation (CoK)—Coaching Cycle.docx
- Observation (CoK)—Coaching Cycle.pdf
- Observation (IBL)—Coaching Cycle.docx
- Observation (IBL)—Coaching Cycle.pdf
- Observation (RWC)—Coaching Cycle.docx
- Observation (RWC)—Coaching Cycle.pdf
- Observation (SCL)—Coaching Cycle.docx
- Observation (SCL)—Coaching Cycle.pdf

Materials

- Observation (CoK) resource (attached; one per coach)
- Observation (IBL) resource (attached; one per coach)
- Observation (RWC) resource (attached; one per coach)
- Observation (SCL) resource (attached; one per coach)
- Instructional Coaching Research Brief (attached; optional)
- Access-Granting Strategies resource (attached; optional; print 2-sided)
- FAQ document (attached; optional)

Preparation

Instructional coaching is a relatively recent development in education, but research supporting its effectiveness has grown rapidly in recent decades. To prepare for this stage, consider reading the **Instructional Coaching Research Brief**, which expands on the research-based rationale behind the tools and strategies used in the coaching cycle.

30 minutes

Before

Optional Resource:

If you are struggling to get into the classroom to observe, consider using some of the strategies outlined in the attached **Access-Granting Strategies** resource.

Once the observation is scheduled, review your notes from the "Coaching Cycle: Goal-Setting" stage in preparation for the observation. Use your notes as reference of your agreed-upon role for the observation and of the necessary supplies/resources for the learning activity that need to be acquired beforehand.

- What goal do you want to set connected to this component of authenticity?
- What would you like me to be looking for during your observation?

Facilitator's Note: Attachment Per Authenticity Component

Use the attached resources for observation notes or adapt them to meet your site's needs:

- **Observation (CoK)** for Construction of Knowledge
- **Observation (IBL)** for Inquiry-Based Learning
- **Observation (RWC)** for Real-World Connections
- **Observation (SCL)** for Student-Centered Learning

If the learning activity or observation date was not confirmed during the goal-setting meeting, follow up regularly until a date is set. Consider the following email template:

Email Template 1: Confirming Observation Date

Subject Line: Q[#] Observation

Hi [TEACHER'S NAME],

I wanted to follow up with you regarding your upcoming classroom observation. Have you selected a lesson for me to observe and determined a suitable date and time for my visit? Please let me know what lesson you have selected and the date and time you would like to plan for an observation.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

Facilitator's Note: Keep Each Email Short

Teachers are often consumed with many tasks during the day. Make sure your email is short and easy for them to give a quick response.

Feel free to add your own personality to your emails.

At least one day before the scheduled observation, email your teacher to confirm the date and time using the provided confirmation email template:

Email Template 2: Confirmation

Subject Line: Q[#] Observation Confirmation

Hi, [TEACHER'S NAME],

I have our observation scheduled for [MONTH/DAY] at [TIME]. Please let me know if this still works for you.

[IF APPLICABLE, INSERT LINKS NECESSARY FOR A DIGITAL OBSERVATION SUCH AS ZOOM, GOOGLE MEETS, SWIVL, ETC.]

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

Anticipate the technology available and the teacher's preferences to determine if it would be best to print the attached materials and take handwritten notes or to create a digital copy of the attachment materials and type notes. Consider printing if you are unsure of WIFI access or are concerned with typing being a distraction to students. The benefits of typing are that your files are easier to share, store, and edit.

If the observation is in-person and if time allows, give yourself 15 minutes before the observation prepare yourself mentally in order to be focused on the meeting. Consider the goals of the teacher, what they want you to look for, what you are hoping to see, and what your job is as an instructional coach.

If the observation is virtual, make sure all links that are necessary are shared between the teacher and instructional coach. Be sure to log in early to the virtual meeting room or platform to ensure everything is "good to go." If applicable, give yourself 15 minutes before the observation to prepare yourself mentally in order to be focused on the meeting. Consider the goals of the teacher, what they want you to look for, what you are looking to see, and what your job is as an instructional coach.

45 minutes

During

Facilitator's Note: Be Mindful

Keep the following in mind to maintain a comfortable working relationship with the teacher. Plan to stay in the classroom for the entire session. Use the attached Observation resource or adapt it to align with your school's mission, vision, and the teacher's goals. Keep the following in mind:

- **Respect their space:** You are a guest in the classroom. Greet the teacher, ask where they would like you to sit, and avoid touching anything that does not belong to you.
- **Respect their authority:** Let the teacher lead without interruptions. Make a note of any discussion points for the reflection meeting.
- **Honor prior agreement:** Only plan on modeling a strategy or co-teaching with the teacher if that was agreed upon in the goal-setting meeting.
- **Be prepared:** Use the attached **FAQ** document for more information.

In the *Observation Notes* section of the attached Observation resource, write down everything the teacher is doing in the left column (under *Teacher Actions*) and everything the students are doing in the right column (under *Student Actions*). Only record what you actually observe.

As you find time during the observation (when students are reading, writing, etc.), review your observation notes and write any strengths and weaknesses you observed that align to the goal in the *Other Notes* section. Write any quantitative data that you observed, such as how student-centered vs. teacher-centered the observed activity was, how many students were engaged, how many students were participating, how many different students were called on, the level of depth-of-knowledge questions asked, or the number teacher-student and/or student-student interactions.

Before leaving the classroom, review the notes from the observation and use the 3-2-1 strategy to determine:

- Three things that went well
- Two things that could be improved
- One part of the lesson that aligned with the goal

Facilitator's Note: Document Special Circumstances

Be flexible and document any special circumstances (e.g., behavior issues, school-wide drills) that may have affected the lesson or the teacher's goal.

10 minutes

After

Thank the teacher, either in person or via email, for allowing you to observe. Recognizing their effort boosts confidence and encourages future observations.

If a reflection meeting isn't scheduled, use the following email template:

Email Template 3: Post-Observation

Subject Line: Q[#] Reflection Meeting

Hi, [TEACHER'S NAME]!

Thank you again for letting me observe your classroom today! [INCLUDE ONE POSITIVE ASPECT WITNESSED DURING THE OBSERVATION.] When you get a chance, please let me know a day and time that works with your schedule for us to reflect on your observation.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

Use your notes from the Observation resource to inform your conversation with the teacher during the reflection meeting.

Research Rationale

Research indicates that coaching has the largest and most immediate impact on developing teachers (Walsh et al., 2020). Coaching benefits extend to experienced teachers as well, increasing their likelihood of adopting new, research-based strategies (Walsh et al., 2020). Studies also show that coaching supports student learning, particularly through practices that promote deep conceptual understanding and active involvement in knowledge construction (Witherspoon et al., 2021). Coaching work leads to significant gains in student achievement (Knight & Skrtic, 2021).

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). 3-2-1. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/117
- Knight, D. S., & Skrtic, T. M. (2021). Cost-effectiveness of instructional coaching: Implementing a design-based, continuous improvement model. *Journal of School Leadership, 31*(4), 318–342. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684620972048
- Munson, J., & Saclarides, E. S. (2022). Gaining access to classrooms: Examining content-focused coaches' strategies. *The Elementary School Journal, 123*(1), 128–154.
- Walsh, N. R., Ginger, K., & Akhavan, N. (2020). Benefits of instructional coaching for teacher efficacy: A mixed-methods study. *Issues in Educational Research, 30*(1), 1143–1161.
- Witherspoon, E. B., Ferrer, N. B., Correnti, R. R., Stein, M. K., & Schunn, C. D. (2021). Coaching that supports teachers' learning to enact ambitious instruction. *Instructional Science*, *49*(6), 877-898.