A GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTING INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

BL BetterLesson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Schools around the world are full of teachers trying to design and deliver learning experiences that are beyond the realm of their prior training. The challenges they're facing are unique, and most training and professional development is not adaptive or personalized enough to create deep, impactful practice change. This problem is nothing new: studies dating back four decades show that new skills transfer into teacher practice 5-15% of the time after one-off workshops and 85-95% of the time when ongoing instructional coaching is provided.[1]

Coaching continues to be recognized by researchers and practitioners in education as a nimble form of on-the-job, relevant support available to teachers. The debate is no longer whether coaching is more effective than other forms of professional development. Leaders are asking: Where do I find great coaches? How do I train them? How should coaching be structured to maximize impact on teacher practice? How can coaching help me retain more teachers year over year?

These questions speak to the broad challenge of implementing instructional coaching, either on a small or system-wide scale. Instructional coaching, like other forms of coaching, is a human capital-intensive endeavor, and therefore impossible to standardize the way other forms of professional development can be. Every coach is a variable, and every teacher is a variable. This means that building and maintaining relationships are paramount -- many coaches rank interpersonal skills above pedagogical and content knowledge when reflecting on what makes them most effective.[2]

This paper offers an 8-step blueprint for implementing and scaling instructional coaching in schools and districts, as well as an overview of the role of instructional coaches and the challenges that come with implementing coaching.

DEFINING THE ROLE OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL COACH

A coach is an impact multiplier. Through the teachers she or he supports, hundreds of students should experience instruction that continuously improves and adapts to their needs. But while many leaders would agree that the primary purpose of an instructional coach is to build instructional capacity in teachers, it can be challenging to define clearly the roles and responsibilities of coaches in order to set parameters and expectations for their day-to-day work.

The first step in defining the role of a coach is articulating her or his purpose in the organization. Are you tasking coaches with facilitating whole-school improvement initiatives? Building teachers' content knowledge and content-specific skills? Changing teacher practice? Raising student achievement? Defining the growth you want to see in teachers is essential as you communicate your expectations to instructional coaches, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Once you've established why a coach is needed, you'll be able to delineate what the coach should be doing to support teachers. All coaches should clearly understand their concrete responsibilities and should also understand the tasks for which they are not responsible. As a general rule, think of coaches as continuous capacity builders who implement systems that maximize their time and efficiency. Coaches are highly skilled educators, and it can be tempting to build time into their schedules to work directly with students in small intervention groups. While this support is helpful for students, it doesn't maximize coaches' skill and expertise as impact multipliers. Coaches can affect more students and continuously grow teacher practice by spending the bulk of their time supporting teachers to reflect on and improve their teaching.

There are many things an instructional coach can do, but certain coaching activities will make far wider impact than other activities. While the following is not an exhaustive list, it includes a few examples of responsibilities that maximize and responsibilities that limit coach effectiveness.

Responsibilities that Maximize Coach Effectiveness

» Support teachers to set meaningful, attainable goals connected to data that promote student learning and growth

» Meet with teachers 1:1 regularly to plan for implementation of high-leverage systems and strategies

» Observe teachers implementing instructional strategies in service of their goals

» Provide targeted, actionable feedback related to teachers' goals

» Promote reflection as a part of teachers' planning cycles

» Build system-wide teacher capacity to analyze student work/assessment data and plan instruction based on data

» Build systems in which the coach curates and organizes resources for teachers to access asynchronously

Responsibilities that Limit Coach Effectiveness

» Administer assessments to students

» Analyze student data without teachers present

» Pull students for small-group or individual instruction

» Assess the fidelity of curriculum implementation (administrators should do this)

» Co-teach (except when using co-teaching as a gradual release from modeling)

» Substitute teach

» Perform administrative duties (cafeteria/recess/dismissal/etc.)

» Evaluate teachers (including teachers on improvement plans)

» Fulfill other management or administrative roles

THE THREE CHALLENGES OF EFFECTIVE COACHING IMPLEMENTATION

Coaching provides a critical bridge between learning something and actually doing it, but only when the coaching is *done well*.[3] Three factors have the greatest impact on the success or failure of coaching implementation: **time**, **talent**, and **training**.
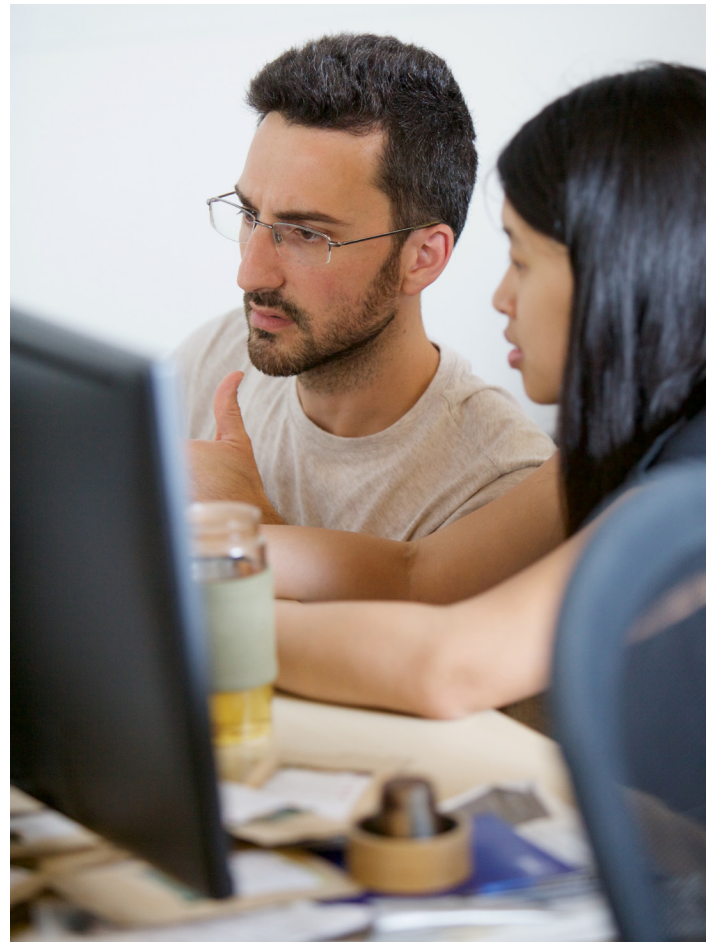
TIME

Often, insufficient time is allocated during school days for job-embedded teacher support. But frequent, direct coach-to-teacher interactions and ongoing engagement in coaching activities are strong predictors of instructional change. [4] In order for coaching to be effective, leaders must begin thinking about professional development time differently. The lines dividing time spent teaching from time spent engaging in PD must become flexible. Because coaching is nimble, personalized, and ongoing, it often happens in both structured and organic settings, such as:

» Over email at random times of day or night

» On the phone, when teacher and coach have time but aren't in the same place

» Over videoconference during a prep period, or another mutually agreed upon time

» In person, at a dedicated check-in time

» In person as the need arises

» In a teacher's classroom with students present

» Via an online library or "flipped classroom" of coach-created videos and instructional resources

» At random instances (in hallways in passing, before or after staff meetings)

At BetterLesson, we've experimented with weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, and quarterly coaching sessions. We've experimented with coaching sessions ranging from 20 minutes to over an hour in length. And while we've learned that the length of a coaching interaction can vary and still be highly effective for the teacher, we've settled on a sweet spot for frequency: our coaches meet with teachers every other week. Teachers have reported that weekly meetings don't give them enough time to implement a new strategy or protocol, and monthly

meetings are too infrequent to receive timely feedback on specific actions or data.

One factor that makes our biweekly coaching cadence impactful is that every teacher we support has the ability to email, text, or call their coach in between coaching sessions. While dedicated check-in time is important for

coach and teacher accountability and continuous growth, the many informal touch points that occur outside of this protected time are essential. Implementation of new strategies and tools is almost always messy and imperfect on the first few tries. Having a coach to turn to after moments of failure can be the difference between new practices taking root in a sustainable way or being filed away with the thought: "Nope! That didn't work."

We analyzed nearly 7,000 meeting times between participants and their BetterLesson coaches and

found that about 67% of meetings happened during the participant's school day. Around 3% of meetings happened before school started, and 30% happened after the school day ended. This data suggests that some of our school and district partners still are struggling to find ways to protect teacher time to make coaching truly job-embedded. Dedicating time during the school day for teachers to reflect on their practice is a key component of the strategy behind developing a coaching culture.

TALENT

Now that pre-Recession funding for schools is returning to many communities, school and district leaders are building back instructional support positions they had to cut during the worst of the financial crisis. District have convinced their school boards that building teams of instructional coaches is a worthwhile investment, despite the costs in salaries in benefits. But building a corps of highly effective coaches is a challenging task. Not only do coaches need to be skilled practitioners, they must also have the interpersonal skills needed to support teachers with a variety of needs and temperaments.

When vetting coaching candidates, the most important factor to consider is interpersonal skills. Coaching is relational. If a coach cannot build trust and camaraderie, it is unlikely a teacher will take their advice and implement new strategies in the classroom, undermining the potential impact of and the investment in the coach.

At BetterLesson, we seek to get a sense of how a

coaching candidate might build relationships with teachers by setting up a performance task that involves a mock coaching session. We observe how the candidate asks questions, listens to challenges, and shows empathy when offering support.

Great coaches are avid learners who continually look to build their capacity. We ask questions that give us a sense of the candidate's mindset and orientation toward personal growth. Qualities like curiosity, humility, and passion for learning are indicative of this learner stance.

Once you observe strong relational skills and a growth-oriented mindset in candidates during your interview process, begin looking at coaching candidates' content knowledge and teaching practice. Coaches should be experts with a deep foundational knowledge of the content or practices they are supporting. Ideal candidates will be able to articulate coaching strategies clearly and model them if needed. It is equally important that a coach know where to go for resources when they face unfamiliar or ambiguous circumstances.

TRAINING

Like teachers, even the best coaches still need up-front training and ongoing opportunities to improve their practice. Often, coaches have few opportunities to share challenges and reflect on what's working in their practice with peers in similar roles.

Professional learning for coaches can take place in a few

ways. First, coaches can collaborate with other coaches. Professional learning communities (PLCs), either virtual or in person, create space for coaches to grapple with shared challenges and generate solutions and processes that can be used across a school or district. PLCs give coaches opportunities to test new strategies, share teacher artifacts, and provide advice for dealing with future scenarios. Consultancy protocols help structure inquiry-based learning conversations that mirror the way coaches work with teachers. Sometimes having a sounding board is all that skillful coaches need to work through sticking points.

Mentoring is another way to support your coaches. When coaches have unique challenges, a conversation with an experienced coach can give them the time and space they need to identify a solution and develop a plan of action for implementation. This type of 1:1 relationship is great for coaches looking to improve their skills as a facilitators of conversations or to work through teacher relationships that have stalled. Mentors for coaches should have deep coaching expertise and exhibit the same curiosity and empathy you expect of your coaches for teachers.

At BetterLesson, the coaching we provide for school- and district-based coaches involves the same bi-weekly cadence of one-on-one sessions, but coaches in our partner schools and districts have the option to ask their BetterLesson coaches to model a coaching strategy or protocol with one of the teachers they support, or to shadow a coaching conversation with a teacher. Our coaches support other coaches to:

» Implement systems of frequent, low-stakes observations

» Give teachers actionable feedback on their practice

» Support teachers to try strategies in service of their goals

» Support teachers to share evidence of their growth, and

» Support teachers to reflect on their growth regularly.

When coaches want to build their knowledge of a particular content area or skill, conferences and workshops can be effective ways to supplement internal support structures. Infusing new knowledge into your coaching team can expedite practice change and bring a fresh perspective to coaches' work.

A GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTING INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

1. Clearly articulate the instructional vision for your school or district.

2. Conduct a needs assessment with key stakeholders.

3. Group your staff into tiers and determine the ideal supports for each tier.

4. Determine the coaching expertise that meets the needs you've identified and prioritized.

5. Determine the methods by which you want to recruit and develop coaches.

6. Determine the metrics you expect to see as a result of the coaching support.

7. Create a plan for feedback loops and communicate expectations to stakeholders before and during coaching implementation

8. Monitor progress and plan ahead.

Creating a culture of adult learning nurtured by coaching requires deep strategic planning. This process takes time, but the time invested in the planning stages will yield high returns at every level of the organization when coaching is up and running. Coaching implementation often takes the form of change management for schools and districts working to move away away from professional development structures that are not showing evidence of educator practice change or improved student outcomes.

STEP 1

Clearly articulate the instructional vision for your school or district. Clarity of vision is essential to laying the groundwork for coaching. The vision is the why behind the coaching, which means that the focus of coaching should directly support teachers to progress toward the vision. The following questions can support your vision-setting process and help narrow your desired focus for school-based or system-wide coaching to ensure alignment with the vision.

» What is the purpose of education in our district?

» What are our students learning and how do we know?

» What are our big instructional priorities for the year?

» What do we look for when we walk into classrooms?

» How will we know our vision is taking root?

» In addition to academic growth and achievement, what is particularly important to us?

STEP 2

Conduct a needs assessment with key stakeholders. In this stage, identify the resources and strengths within your organization (your assets) and the opportunities for growth at varying levels. As you think about instructional coaching in your school or district, take stock of quantitative metrics such as your number of early-career teachers and budgetary constraints, and other important considerations such as the state of new technology or curriculum initiatives.

Be sure to include an evaluation of mindsets and orientations towards a culture of learning, coaching,

risk-taking, and continuous improvement. To assess educators' general openness to growth, consider whether teachers regularly collaborate with one another, where there is an "open door" culture for informal observations, how teachers generally respond to feedback, and how comfortable teachers are with making mistakes.

This needs assessment will ensure that you can create a viable strategy for a tiered allocation of resources. It should be a living document as strengths and needs shift. Teachers should be involved in this process -- both experts and novice practitioners.

STEP 3

Group your staff into tiers and determine the ideal supports for each tier. Most organizations can divide their human capital into three broad groups: the highest performing individuals, the lowest performing individuals, and those in between who demonstrate proficiency or high potential for growth.

TIER 1: HIGH PERFORMERS

These educators are often innovators and early adopters of new technologies and strategies. Their students perform well and demonstrate high growth. High Performers often need coaches who can serve as thought partners and resource hubs.

When you invest in your Tier 1 educators, you are building your pipeline of teacher leaders who can begin to take on peer coaching and other leadership responsibilities. This cohort is also often comprised of self-identified "guinea pigs" who are always game to try new instructional approaches and technology tools, and can in turn support their colleagues with some of the best practices they've learned.

TIER 2: PROFICIENT PERFORMERS

These educators have all the hallmarks of great teachers, and coaching can serve as the catalyst for their transformational growth. Teachers in this middle cohort may be very early in their careers and working to build their instructional foundation, or they may be veteran educators achieving adequate student results. Proficient Performers should not be overlooked -- their continued growth is essential to your coaches' capacity-building strategy. Once they become High Performers, coaches can shift to providing them lighter-touch supports.

Proficient Performers should receive ongoing coach

QUESTIONS TO INFORM YOUR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Human Resources

» *Do you have a large pipeline of educators in their first 1-3 years in the classroom?*

» *At which schools or grade levels is retention stronger, and where is it a concern?*

Curriculum and Instruction

» *Which educators are masterfully adapting curriculum for individual student needs?*

» *Which instructional strategies are impacting student growth and achievement, and which aren't?*

Technology

» *Which educators are purposefully integrating technology into their instruction?*

» *Which are using devices, the LMS, or digital learning tools inconsistently or without a clear purpose?*

Assessment

» *Where is student academic growth strong? Where is it stagnant?*

English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities

» *Where is effective and differentiated instruction for all students happening?*

» *Where are there larger gaps in achievement for high-needs student groups?*

Budget

» *What are you currently spending on professional development, as a whole and per teacher?*

» *How are you evaluating your current return on investment for PD?*

support in specific instructional areas that they ideally identify through self-assessment. Coaches should have the capacity to meet at least monthly with these individuals, but ideally will have dedicated time to provide support and feedback every other week.

TIER 3: STRUGGLING OR WEAK PERFORMERS

These educators are not having a positive impact on student learning, and may or may not be on improvement plans. Ideally, administrators should support teachers on improvement plans, as evaluators, by providing targeted feedback via classroom observations around specific areas for growth identified in the plan. Coaches may share this responsibility for capacity building by providing non-evaluative feedback, but should not be primarily accountable for their growth.

For low-performing teachers who aren't on improvement plans, coaches should provide weekly or bi-weekly support within a specific focus area. Rather than observe instruction and give broad, multi-pronged feedback, coaches and teachers should agree upon a discrete goal for improvement, such as using formative assessment data to plan for small-group instruction or implementing routines and procedures that create a safe and supportive learning environment.

STEP 4

Determine the coaching expertise that meets the needs you've identified and prioritized.

NEED	COACHING EXPERTISE
Developing a coaching culture from scratch (nascent stages of implementation)	Interpersonal, relationship-building skills
Support for early career teachers	Reservoirs of empathy + diverse pedagogical skills
Coaching for a grade level or content area	Content expertise with prior teacher experience in the desired grade level band
Coaching for a large staff	Experience supporting teachers to model for their peers
Paradigm shift in teacher practice (e.g. personalized learning, project-based learning)	Demonstrated track record of experience with these pedagogies
Culturally relevant teaching practices	Demonstrated track record of supporting teachers to implement CRT practices

STEP 5

Determine the methods by which you want to recruit and develop coaches. Your needs assessment should inform whether you search externally or internally for coaches, or take a hybrid approach, because you'll have an understanding of whether the expertise and your leadership team's capacity for onboarding new coaches exists within your organization.

Tips for hiring coaches internally:

» Determine which leader in your organization is responsible for finding and training coaches

» Clearly define coach roles and responsibilities

» Establish a training plan and ongoing professional learning structure for coaches

» Determine how you will measure coach effectiveness and hold coaches accountable

» Communicate the opportunity to existing teacher leaders to ensure an equitable and unbiased application process

To find excellent coaches from outside your organization, you'll still want to define the desired coach role and determine how you will vet the external coaches' skills. The benefits of external coaching include the ability to select for a high level of specific expertise, the objectivity of the coach-teacher relationship, the "purity" of focus on coaching without the risk of diverting the coach's time to other internal initiatives, and, generally, cost effectiveness. A Journal of Education Finance article estimated that internal coaching costs range from $3,300 - $5,200 per teacher due to the combination of coach salaries and benefits, while external coaching can be considerably less expensive.[6]

STEP 6

Quantify the impact you expect to see as a result of the coaching support. At the broadest level, you should expect to see changes in classrooms as a result of coaching. Changes should be happening at both the teacher and student levels. But how will you measure the degree of change, or the impact of the change on teacher and student growth? At BetterLesson, we collect the following types of data to evaluate coaching impact:

» Evidence (including student assessments) and reflections that teachers upload to our online platform that directly support their desired outcomes

» Students' self-reported assessment of growth and progress toward desired outcomes (via surveys)

» Administrator observation feedback (non-evaluative classroom visits focused on prioritized outcomes)

» Teachers' self-reported assessment of growth and progress on desired outcomes

STEP 7

Communicate expectations to stakeholders before and during coaching implementation, and create a plan for feedback loops. School and district leaders must engage teachers and coaches in expectation setting, investment building, and onboarding of teachers into coaches' workflows. Communicate what is going to happen, how it connects to the vision, and why it's important.

Expectations for coaching should be communicated to teachers, coaches, school leaders, and district administrators. At least every 8 weeks, coaches should have the opportunity to share with leaders the ways in which teachers are making growth. Coaches should communicate progress to principals, but they should focus on change over time and in the aggregate rather than emphasize incremental change in individual educator practice. To ensure that feedback flows from administrators to teachers during the coaching process, coaches should continue to communicate instructional priorities identified by administrators in response to student data and other factors. Administrators should also communicate directly with teachers regarding expectations for what they can or should be focusing on with their coaches.

STEP 8

Monitor progress and plan ahead. At this point, you'll begin to collect quantitative and qualitative data over the course of the school year. Determine what should be happening at intermittent milestones (like October, January, March, and May). School holidays and standardized testing schedules should inform your

EXPECTATIONS BETTERLESSON COMMUNICATES TO PARTNERS

TEACHERS

» Use your coach's support to try new instructional strategies

» Reflect honestly about your strengths and areas for growth, and proactively share feedback

» Play an active role in scheduling consistent conversations with your coach

» Communicate directly with your coach at least 24 hours in advance if you cannot make a coaching meeting

COACHES

» Facilitate ongoing coaching cycles to drive teacher progress and student growth

» Support teachers to monitor and assess their own and their students' progress toward mutually defined goals

» Create a safe and non-evaluative coaching space for all conversations with teachers

» Support teachers to take informed risks to try new instructional strategies

» Communicate regularly with teachers to highlight successes and solve challenges collaboratively

ADMINISTRATORS

» Ensure that teachers have a dedicated, consistent time to meet with their coaches

» Actively support teachers and coaches to ensure they are meeting their expectations

» Communicate priority outcomes to both teachers and coaches

» Play an active role in formative and summative progress conversations

» Follow up with teachers and coaches to resolve any patterns of missed coaching meetings or possible interpersonal conflicts

realistic expectations for progress over time.

Consider the following lenses as you analyze progress:

» *Changes in teacher practice.* What are your Tier 1, 2, and 3 teachers working on with their coaches? In relation to your needs assessment, are shifts happening where you want to see them? What new areas of coaching focus have been uncovered?

» *Teachers' self-reported growth.* Coaches should be supporting teachers to assess periodically their own skill level in relation to their coaching focus area. If a teacher is working on differentiating instruction, for example, he might rate himself as "novice" if he occasionally provides differentiated activities to address varying student abilities and "intermediate" if he regularly uses data and student feedback to align activities and instruction to varying student abilities and interest.

» *Student surveys.* Are students reporting growth toward desired outcomes? If a teacher is working on differentiation, for example, do students feel they have greater opportunities for choice in the classroom? Do they feel that what they are working on is not too easy or too hard?

A culture of coaching is a culture of continuous improvement, and as an education leader, you can powerfully model the behaviors you want to see across your learning community by holding yourself equally accountable for maintaining such an ethos. Once you've collected a full school year's worth of data, revisit your instructional vision and needs assessment as you plan to scale the impact of your coaches. The following questions can help guide this process:

» What trends have you noticed regarding sustained growth and progress for teachers and students? What has led to that progress, and what does that suggest you should continue into next year when it comes to focus areas for coaching?

» What cohorts of teachers/classrooms have made the most progress from coaching (e.g., by grade/subject or by experience level)?

» What new initiatives are you planning going into the next school year? How will you support teachers with respect to those initiatives?

COMMON PITFALLS IN IMPLEMENTING COACHING

» Launching coaching without a clear instructional vision

» Having unclear expectations for how coaching should occur and what success should look like

» Hiring a coach based on his or her content expertise without vetting interpersonal skills, pedagogical expertise, and adult learning expertise

» Promoting teachers to coaching positions without putting a training structure in place

» Deploying coaches without clearly connecting the focus of coaching to the district/school vision

» Focusing coaching only on your highest and lowest performers

» Failing to communicate expectations, process, and coach responsibilities to teachers

CONCLUSION

While ineffective professional learning structures do still exist in many schools and districts around the world, instructional coaching is rapidly becoming the solution of choice to help teachers create new, dynamically responsive, and technologically enhanced learning experiences for their students. Often though, coaches are brought into schools and districts without adequate vision setting or clearly communicated criteria for coaching effectiveness.

Before coaching can be implemented, the roles and responsibilities for coaches must be clearly defined. The three Ts -- **time**, **talent**, and **training** -- should help inform whether your leadership team has the capacity to find and train coaches as full-time staff members, or should look externally for coaching expertise, or should deploy a strategic hybrid of external and internal coaching.

At BetterLesson, we've learned that coaching implementation will be as smooth as the strategy and planning that goes into it. We have a team dedicated entirely to helping our school and district partners implement effective coaching practices because we understand the importance of aligning the support to both district and teacher needs. This team meets with administrators prior to launching coaching, even for just one teacher, and monitors progress over the full life cycle of the coaching relationship. We believe the time and energy we invest in coaching implementation for each of our partners is a critical component in supporting a professional culture shift toward continuous learning, data-driven risk taking, and powerful reflection.

REFERENCES

1. Cornett, J. & Knight, J. (2008). Research on Coaching. *Coaching Approaches and Perspectives*. Corwin: 2009. Retrieved from https://resources.corwin.com/sites/default/files/Cornett_Knight_2008.pdf

2. Ertmer, P. et al. (2005). Professional Development Coaches: Perceptions of Critical Characteristics. *Journal of School Leadership*, Vol. 15. January 2005. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234617774_Professional_Development_Coaches_Perceptions_of_Critical_Characteristics

3. Wei, R. C., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., Orphanos, S. (2009). Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad. National Staff Development Council. Retrieved from https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/pdf/nsdcstudytechnicalreport2009.pdf

4. Rivera, N., Burley, K., & Sass, J. (February, 2004). Evaluation of school-based professional development (2002-03). Los Angeles Unified School District, Planning, Assessment and Research Division Publication No. 187

5. Kemp, C. & Dominguez, J. (March 21, 2018). Using a nine-box matrix to understand IDEA's talent pipeline. Charter School Growth Fund. Retrieved from https://stories.chartergrowthfund.org/using-a-nine-box-matrix-to-understand-ideas-talent-pipeline-dec764f30d11

6. Knight, D. (2012). Assessing the Cost of Instructional Coaching. *Journal of Education Finance*, 38(1), p. 52 - 80. Retrieved from http://muse.jhu.edu/article/483949

7. Borman, J. & Feger, S. (2006). Instructional Coaching: Key Themes from the Literature. The Education Alliance at Brown University. Winter 2006. Retrieved from https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/sites/brown.edu.academics.education-alliance/files/publications/TL_Coaching_Lit_Review.pdf

8. Kowal, J. & Steiner, L. (2007). Instructional Coaching. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED499253.pdf

AUTHORS

KATYA RUCKER
Strategic Manager of Research and Development

MORGAN JOSEPH
Manager, Product Marketing

CONTRIBUTORS

JENNA KEANEY
Vice President of Coaching

JEFF LIBERTY
Vice President of Personalized Learning and lead author
of *Blended and Personalized Learning: Insights from the
Master Teacher Project.*

SETH COHEN
Head of Partner Success

MARTHA BUCK
Senior Manager of Data Insights

BEN LEDDY
Director of Content

GET IN TOUCH

Sign up for a free consultation about BetterLesson's approach to coaching implementation.

www.pd.betterlesson.com

BL BetterLesson

APPENDIX

ABOUT BETTERLESSON

BetterLesson's mission is to empower schools and districts to develop and retain innovative, student-centered educators by providing personalized instructional coaching to each teacher or instructional leader we support. Since our founding in 2009 as a platform for teachers to share their lesson plans, we have been steadfastly committed to "sharing what works." With over a million teacher-generated resources on our Community site and 20,000 freely available additional resources created by Master Teachers in Science, Math, ELA, and Blended Learning,

BetterLesson has become one of the most reliable sources of high-quality Open Education Resources for the 500,000 teachers who use our online materials every month.

BetterLesson's focus over the last three school years has been to develop, launch, and refine **PersonalizedPD**, an innovative professional learning platform that supports nearly 1,000 K-12 teachers, coaches, and administrators in North America to design and implement personalized learning (PL) strategies that solve their most pressing teaching challenges.

DEFINING THE ROLE OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL COACH

A coach is an impact multiplier. Through the teachers she or he supports, hundreds of students should experience instruction that continuously improves and adapts to their needs. But while many leaders would agree that the primary purpose of an instructional coach is to build instructional capacity in teachers, it can be challenging to define clearly the roles and responsibilities of coaches in order to set parameters and expectations for their day-to-day work.

The first step in defining the role of a coach is articulating her or his purpose in the organization. Are you tasking coaches with facilitating whole-school improvement initiatives? Building teachers' content knowledge and content-specific skills? Changing teacher practice? Raising student achievement? Defining the growth you want to see in teachers is essential as you communicate your expectations to instructional coaches, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Once you've established why a coach is needed, you'll be able to delineate what the coach should be doing to support teachers. All coaches should clearly understand their concrete responsibilities and should also understand the tasks for which they are not responsible. As a general rule, think of coaches as continuous capacity builders who implement systems that maximize their time and efficiency. Coaches are highly skilled educators, and it can be tempting to build time into their schedules to work directly with students in small intervention groups. While this support is helpful for students, it doesn't maximize coaches' skill and expertise as impact multipliers. Coaches can affect more students and continuously grow teacher practice by spending the bulk of their time supporting teachers to reflect on and improve their teaching.

There are many things an instructional coach can do, but certain coaching activities will make far wider impact than other activities. While the following is not an exhaustive list, it includes a few examples of responsibilities that maximize and responsibilities that limit coach effectiveness.

Responsibilities that Maximize Coach Effectiveness

Support teachers to set meaningful, attainable goals connected to data that promote student learning and growth

Meet with teachers 1:1 regularly to plan for implementation of high-leverage systems and strategies

Observe teachers implementing instructional strategies in service of their goals

Provide targeted, actionable feedback related to teachers' goals

Promote reflection as a part of teachers' planning cycles

Build system-wide teacher capacity to analyze student work/assessment data and plan instruction based on data

Build systems in which the coach curates and organizes resources for teachers to access asynchronously

Responsibilities that Limit Coach Effectiveness

Administer assessments to students

Analyze student data without teachers present

Pull students for small-group or individual instruction

Assess the fidelity of curriculum implementation (administrators should do this)

Co-teach (except when using co-teaching as a gradual release from modeling)

Substitute teach

Perform administrative duties (cafeteria/recess/dismissal/etc.)

Evaluate teachers (including teachers on improvement plans)

Fulfill other management or administrative roles