

REL Mid-Atlantic Teacher Effectiveness Webinar Series
Instructional Coaching and the Effective Teacher
Q&A with Jim Knight, Ph.D.
April 17, 2014

This webinar explored how instructional coaching can encourage teachers to adopt new practices and whether coaching has lasting effects. This Q&A addressed the questions participants had for Dr. Knight following the webinar. The [webinar recording](#) and [PowerPoint presentation](#) are also available.

Questions

1. How can someone who supervises instructional coaches best support the coaches' own professional development needs?

Coaches of coaches should ensure that their instructional coaches understand the coaching process, understand how to partner with adults and build relationships, use effective communication strategies, use effective leadership strategies, and understand effective instruction. It is critical that coaches understand and are able to articulate the process of coaching. The person responsible for coaches' development should reflect with coaches on their practices, including asking them about teachers' goals and what the process is to help teachers achieve these goals. For example, a coach will film an example of either positive or negative listening skills, and coaches will reflect on it together. Our team leads a workshop on coaching coaches, and we have resources (e.g., surveys, forms) on our website at www.instructionalcoaching.com.

2. What is the best way to create a coaching environment when there are no paid coaching positions? Using teacher leaders?

Schools need to prioritize their budgets. In most cases, if decision-makers claim to not have money for instructional coaches what they really mean is they value other things over instructional coaches. If the decision-makers cannot find funds, teachers can coach themselves by video recording their class, identifying goals, determining how to measure progress toward their goals, and hitting those goals. A way for teachers to support each other is to use videos and have teachers and teams of teachers watch the videos and reflect on them. However, ineffective coaching is a bad use of funds. If a school does decide to spend money on coaches, it should ensure the coaches are well trained.

3. What is your perspective on instructional coaching and teacher evaluation? Should coaching and evaluation be conducted by separate individuals?

Instructional coaching and teacher evaluating are different conversations. Teachers are often not as candid with principals as they would be with a peer, making coaching most effective in a peer-to-peer setting. Principals, when they must be coaches, should strive to be nonevaluative when they have coaching conversations. In *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy*, Amy Edmondson makes the case that people cannot learn unless they feel psychologically safe. For effective coaching to occur, it is vital that teachers feel they are in a forgiving and constructive environment.

Furthermore, teachers should feel confident that coaches will strive to keep coaching information confidential. Coaches should especially not be duplicitous— they should not report information to a principal that they promised to keep confidential.

4. How do instructional coaches use formative assessment data to improve teaching?

Coaches should ensure that teachers understand their teaching targets and understand how students are performing. For formative assessment, teachers should take their guiding questions and break them down into measurable components (called “specific proficiencies”), then develop some method of assessing those proficiencies (e.g., Checks for Understanding), then modify their teaching based on student progress.

5. How often should coaching occur?

Studies have shown that on average it takes about 6 hours from the time a coach and teacher set a goal to the time the goal is hit. Coaches and teachers should meet as frequently as possible, bearing in mind the point of meeting is to work on meeting the goal, not just to meet. It is recommended that coaches and teachers keep communication open enough that communication happens at least once a week. The most critical aspect of coaching is having and working toward a goal; coaches should do as much coaching as is necessary to hit the goal.

6. Do you know of any research that shows how coaching impacts school cultures?

Coaching can be a vehicle for creating a collaborative, trusting environment. Successful coaches should build an environment where everyone in the school is a learner and everyone feels safe to create and work toward goals. Often the best way to promote coaching as a positive tool is for the school leaders to try it first. For example, the principal could be taped teaching a class, and then the teachers could watch and reflect on the video at a staff meeting. This levels the playing field between principal and teacher and shows teachers that everyone in the school is working together to meet the same goals.

7. How can coaches effectively use videotaping to support teacher instruction?

Videotapes are powerful tools that can help coaches and teachers identify areas for improvement, set goals, and work toward those goals. Our Instructional Coaching website provides several tools to guide coaches and teachers through watching videos and evaluating how close the teacher is to meeting his/her ideal.

8. How do you help teachers who struggle to understand they need to change their practices?

Coaching may not be right for a teacher who does not want coaching. Every teacher, regardless of whether he or she wants a coach, should aim to continuously grow and improve. If teachers do not want to work with a coach, they should be given the opportunity to coach themselves or create an alternate plan for improvement. Leaders should be firm on improvement and flexible on how to get there. That being said, usually if teachers resist, it's because they don't think coaching is worth their time or don't think they can do it. If coaches illuminate the payback from coaching and emphasize that they will be working shoulder-to-shoulder with teachers on manageable goals, coaches can usually reduce resistance. If teachers feel respected and see the payback and believe they can succeed, they will.

9. How do you measure the effectiveness of coaching practices?

You can measure whether instructional coaching is working by determining whether the measurable goals that were set have been achieved. After a coach and teacher set a goal together, they can identify ways to determine if that goal is being met; then, together, they can determine whether the goal has been hit. If they hit the goal, the coaching method was effective.

10. Do you know of any research that ties instructional coaching to student growth?

The goals that coaches and teachers set usually lead to more instructional time or greater student engagement, and these are linked to student growth.

11. What is a realistic coach-to-teacher ratio for planning?

This question is difficult to answer. It is important that teachers hit their goals. If teachers are not hitting their goals, then coaching is not working. A coach should not work with so many teachers that goals are not met. Ideally, there is one coach at every school because if a coach travels to multiple schools, the coach is not as much of a part of the school culture as he or she can be if working at one school full time. If a coach has many teachers, the coach might want to set up self-coaching where teachers videotape themselves and set their own goals.

12. How do we convince administrators/decision-makers/school boards that putting money into coaching is worthwhile?

Student outcomes speak to people. Video is a very powerful, persuasive tool. If you can videotape the teacher's instruction before and after coaching and look at, for example, how many disruptions there were at the start versus how many there are at the end, decision-makers are more likely to be persuaded by the visual evidence. The most powerful way to sell coaching is to make sure that coaching is good and that coaches and teachers are setting and hitting goals.

13. Should coaches and principals who are doing evaluation speak the same language with regards to teacher/student improvement?

Principals, coaches, and teachers should all have the same vocabulary and the same goals. Evaluation is often not very successful because it feels like dissection. When evaluation is collaborative, with teachers involved in assessing a video of their instruction, the conversations are more fruitful because both teachers and principals share an understanding of what's happened and both know that the observations are reliable. Teachers must have a clear understanding of what teaching practices can be addressed through evaluation. It is not enough for an evaluator to say "fix it"—the evaluator must give ways to fix it.

14. How might a coaching experience differ in an elementary school versus a high school?

Every coaching practice will not apply in all circumstances, but several practices should be in place at every level of instruction. Our work has shown that middle school teachers respond better to middle school coaches, and high school teachers respond better to high

school coaches. Furthermore, it can be tough for coaches to move into an instructional level they are not familiar with. This doesn't mean it can't be done. As long as coaches are able to help teachers and students improve by setting and hitting measurable goals, they have achieved their purpose. Do you need to be an English teacher to coach English teachers? If you're coaching *instructional practices*, not *content*, then the answer is no. A study my team did in Beaverton, Oregon, showed that not knowing the subject content actually improved the coaching of instructional practices.

15. Are the Big Four intended to be sequential?

The Big Four do not necessarily need to be enacted sequentially. Coaches should start where the teacher is.

16. How can I become certified as an instructional coach?

Our team offers several trainings on instructional coaching (which can be found at instructionalcoaching.com), though we do not offer certification.

Action Steps

Participants responded to the question “As a result of today’s webinar, what action steps do you plan to take?” and some of their responses are listed below.

- *I need to figure out how to sell coaching to my future district. My goal is to be a literacy coach, but that position doesn't exist.*
- *I want to start using video, which I haven't done yet.*
- *Make my thought process more transparent and offer teachers more choice. Set goals, ask teachers more, listen to teachers more!*
- *Review goal setting.*
- *I will share this with my group and have them formulate ways to incorporate the information into our services to beginning teachers.*
- *Meet with the New Teacher Center and talk about coaching as one option toward professional development (i.e., insistence brings resistance).*
- *Ask more questions and set goals with teachers.*
- *Share great information and tools described with my colleagues. Thanks!*
- *Will talk more with principals to get on the same page with a "plan."*
- *I am excited to dig into the new book, Focus on Teaching, and utilize it with our ICs.*
- *Gather resources and look for coaching pockets and interested partners.*
- *I will share this information with fellow coaches, and implement setting specific goals and utilizing the big four in coaching.*

Additional Resources

- *Focus on Teaching: Using Video for High-Impact Instruction* by Jim Knight

- *High-Impact Instruction: A Framework for Great Teaching* by Jim Knight
- Jim Knight's Instructional Coaching website: www.instructionalcoaching.com
- Jim Knight's Twitter site: <https://twitter.com/jimknight99>
- *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen
- *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy* by Amy Edmondson
- *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change* by Joseph Grenny, Kerry Patterson, David Maxfield, and Ron McMillan
- *Instructional Coaching with the End in Mind* by Stephen Barkley with Terri Bianco
- *The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction* by Robert Marzano
- *Teach Like a Champion: 62 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College (K–12)* by Doug Lemov and Norman Atkins
- Hoot Education (new technology for coaching coaches and teachers): www.hooteducation.com
- Teachers College at Columbia University Coaching Institute: <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/coachingcertification/>
- National Center for Literacy Education's Capacity Building Framework: <http://www.literacyinlearningexchange.org/framework-capacity-building>
- Reference for implementing instructional coaching and mentoring in rural schools in Kansas: <https://sites.google.com/site/mnuperk/>