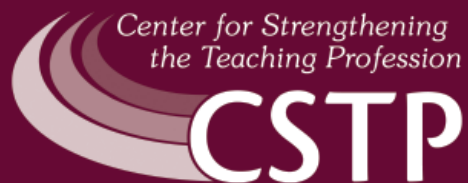




Improving Instruction through Coaching



June 2007

Maroon Background

The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP) is an independent, nonprofit organization that supports research and promotes practices and policies to ensure all students in Washington are taught by highly skilled teachers. CSTP coordinates a statewide network for National Board Certified Teachers, supports the work of Washington's teacher leaders with professional development and small grants, hosts public forums on topics related to quality teaching, and creates new information about the conditions of teaching in our state. Major funding for CSTP is provided by The Stuart Foundation.

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In collaboration with educators, students, families, local communities, business, labor, and government, the **Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction** (OSPI) leads, supports, and oversees K-12 education, ensuring the success of all learners.

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...and the dozens of other Washington educators who reviewed this work and, in doing so, improved it.

What are Mentors and Coaches?



Mentors and Coaches

For simplicity and clarity, the following definitions of “mentoring” and “coaching” are used:

“Mentoring” is to the working relationship established between new/novice teachers (mentees) and experienced teachers (mentors). The primary focus of the mentor/mentee relationship is to strengthen the new teacher’s understanding and initial application of subject area content, instructional practices, school processes and management strategies.¹ The spotlight is on the new teacher.

“Coaching” refers to the release from the classroom of exemplary teachers on a full or part-time basis to work in partnership with experienced colleagues to accelerate professional learning. The spotlight is on content development and the instructional strategies used to enhance student learning and achievement.

Coaches partner with principals, teachers, specialists and para-educators to support instructional improvement in a wide variety of professional development activities that can be categorized as Change Coaching and Instructional Coaching. Change Coaches work with the entire school organization and its resources (time, money, personnel) to support school reform. Instructional Coaches work to improve teachers’ instructional strategies within content areas. Both kinds of coaches facilitate collaborative dialogue and the application of “best practices” to increase effective instruction and student learning. In many schools, these roles overlap; coaching often begins with Change Coaching to establish the ground work and create an environment for the Instructional Coaching that follows. This is a long term process of three to five years.

Thus, coaching combines the complex skills of creating partnerships, establishing trusting relationships, and facilitating instructional growth. Coaches are partners with classroom teachers and principals in the rewarding work of teaching students.

¹ For more detailed explanations, see the CSTP/OSPI document, “Effective Support for New Teachers in Washington State: Standards for Beginning Teacher Induction.”

Why Coaching?

Coaching creates opportunities for professional development for teachers and principals modeled on the expectations of students in standards-based reform. Students need to learn content through educational activities and assignments that require higher-order thinking, critical analysis and problem solving. Teachers need to facilitate such learning by “posing questions, challenging students’ thinking, and leading them in examining ideas and relationships.”²

Typical professional development (one time, sit-and-get model) is not commonly designed for teachers to experience this type of higher-order, rigorous learning for themselves. Coaching provides authentic learning opportunities based on teachers’ daily experiences.³ Coaching facilitates learning from and with colleagues, sustained over time, where reflection, analysis, dialogue and problem solving strategies are applied. These best-practices for students are paralleled in best-practices coaching for adult lifelong learners.

Professional development through conferences, workshops, and summer institutes still offers valid learning approaches. Sessions that focus on new concepts, curriculum overview, and expertise in content and strategies can supplement job-embedded coaching opportunities.⁴

why

² *Teaching for Understanding: Challenges for Policy and Practice*, Cohen, 1993

³ “Practices that Support Teacher Development,” Lieberman, 1995

⁴ Ibid.

Goals of:

Change Coaches

Change Coaches support growth and improvement across the entire school by focusing a school's leadership on instruction. Many principals do not have time to remain current in all content areas and in best-practices pedagogy. By enhancing their own classroom-based knowledge and skills through collaboration with a Change Coach, principals become better equipped to support and encourage their teachers' full implementation of new training in content and instructional strategies. Change Coaches may help principals with these large, instruction-oriented, reform-based issues:

- ◆ Developing the collective understanding and language of effective instruction to support teacher growth and implementation
- ◆ Developing trust-building strategies to maximize observation conversations
- ◆ Developing blocks of time for peer classroom observations, team meetings, common planning
- ◆ Developing creative ways to maximize limited funds for instructional improvement
- ◆ Sharing the vision by recruiting teacher leaders to collaborate and sustain full school reform
- ◆ Facilitating examination and use of assessment data to focus instruction and develop school goals

Change Coaches are facilitation specialists entirely focused on school-wide instructional growth and improvement. They interact with building/district leaders and teaching staff to address school reform by creating partnerships based on open dialogue, creative problem solving and collaborative decision-making. Change Coaches individualize their approach and work based on each building's leadership needs, teacher needs and student learning needs. Change coaches do not have the responsibilities assigned to assistant principals, deans of students, or evaluators.

goals

Instructional Coaches

The primary goal of Instructional Coaches is to develop the capacity of teachers to implement “best-practices instruction” to meet the learning needs of all students and attain the school’s academic goals. Coaches work with individuals, teams, and small professional learning communities, thereby breaking the isolation so common among classroom teachers. Through focused reflection and dialogue, and by working within the context of daily classroom practices, coaches draw out individual potential, eliciting greater growth in the individual/team than could be accomplished by the teacher alone.

In their work with teachers/teams, the guiding goals for Instructional Coaches are to:

- ◆ Build trusting relationships to open possibility for new learning
- ◆ Develop safe environments for collegial conversations on teaching practices
- ◆ Build teacher understanding and use of highly effective, research-based instructional practices⁵
- ◆ Support teachers as they implement new instructional practices
- ◆ Promote school-wide common experiences, knowledge, vision and language
- ◆ Facilitate instructional alignment to GLEs and assessment data
- ◆ Facilitate implementation of the School Improvement Plan (SIP)
- ◆ Develop leadership skills in others to sustain achievement of academic goals
- ◆ Provide professional development activities for teachers

“The Instructional Coach creates an environment where adults engage in collaborative conversations, thereby leading participants to deeper levels of reciprocal thinking and understanding with the underlying goal to improve instruction.”⁶ Coaches facilitate a culture of learning where individuals, teams and small professional learning communities regularly engage in formal and informal continuous learning activities.

goals

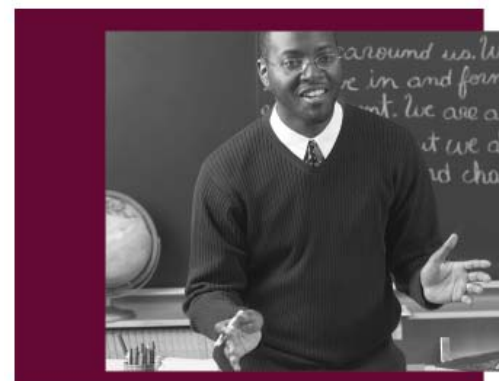
⁵ Refer to the work of Jeffrey Fouts, Marilyn Simpson, and Robert Marzano in the Reference Section of this document

⁶ *Learning to Change*, Fouts, February 2005.

Instructional Coaches (cont.)

Instructional coaching activities will vary according to teacher, school, and district needs. Across the nation, typical coaching programs include many of the following collaborative professional development activities:⁷

- ◆ Develop common understanding of student achievement data:
 - Guided analysis and interpretation of data
 - Methodical review of student learning needs as identified in data
 - Intervention strategies and lesson development to address student learning needs
- ◆ Deepen content knowledge
- ◆ Support teacher implementation of best-practices instructional strategies:
 - Reflect on and discuss their own teaching practices
 - Provide in-class demonstrations and model instructional practices
 - Create safe processes for peer observations and coaching
 - Guide the use of performance data to assess student work and daily progress
 - Develop lesson plans, analyze student performance and implement intervention strategies based on learning targets
- ◆ Support development of differentiated instruction for students of varying levels of achievement/ability
- ◆ Support culturally competent instruction and culturally relevant curriculum
- ◆ Facilitate curriculum alignment and instructional strategies within and across grade levels
- ◆ Develop common rubrics with teachers for standards-based instructional units and assessments
- ◆ Facilitate professional learning activities such as lesson study groups, literature circles, and analysis of student work teams
- ◆ Facilitate parent/community workshops on assessment, standards, curriculum and/or instruction
- ◆ Coordinate district and publisher in-services for teaching staff with new curriculum adoptions



goals

⁷ Refer to the Reference and Resource Sections at the end of this document.

Guidelines for Selecting Effective Instructional Coaches

The two most important factors for recruiting and selecting teachers as potential instructional coaches are highly effective teaching experiences and widespread recognition of their leadership skills. However, not all experienced or highly effective teachers are prepared to serve as coaches.

As the starting point, Instructional Coaches must be knowledgeable about current and past research in “best practices” pedagogy for specific content fields such as literacy, science and/or mathematics. To serve in this leadership role, teachers should demonstrate certain professional qualities and characteristics, have strong interpersonal communication skills and show evidence of specific effective practices essential to successful coaching.

Professional Qualities and Characteristics:

- ◆ Dedicated to lifelong learning and continued personal, professional growth
- ◆ Believes all staff seek to make positive differences in their students’ education
- ◆ Believes everyone has the capacity and desire for growth
- ◆ Acts as a facilitative growth agent and an equal partner in learning
- ◆ Respects others’ professionalism and ability to make decisions
- ◆ Holds high expectations for self and others
- ◆ Maintains focus on “positive” and on “potential”
- ◆ Recognizes that all learners benefit from reflection and feedback
- ◆ Seeks feedback on own practice, is reflective and coachable
- ◆ Accepts responsibility to effect change
- ◆ Manages time effectively

Effective Interpersonal Communication Skills:

- ◆ Builds rapport and trusting relationships
- ◆ Uses language and physical presence to develop a safe environment for learning
- ◆ Listens with compassion and empathy
- ◆ Demonstrates positive, open, honest and sensitive communications with administrators, teachers, para-educators, parents and students
- ◆ Develops a coaching partnership with individuals and teams
- ◆ Engages in collaborative conversations, actively listening and employing reflective responses to draw out learning
- ◆ Employs appropriate communication tools (pause, paraphrase, probe, inquire, nonverbal, etc.)
- ◆ Develops thinking, reflection and analysis skills in others by employing a wide repertoire of questioning strategies
- ◆ Builds upon the shared expertise of colleagues to facilitate improved instruction
- ◆ Understands the use of data, feedback, and goal setting to apply new knowledge and commit to next steps
- ◆ Recognizes differences in learning styles and needs
- ◆ Values diversity and the uniqueness of various school cultures
- ◆ Understands the challenges of organizational change
- ◆ Works through resistance to effect change with positive outcomes
- ◆ Manages conflict effectively
- ◆ Respects confidentiality and maintains a non-evaluative role

guidelines

guidelines

Effective Practices and Technical Expertise:

- ◆ Understands standards-based education, integrating EALRs and GLEs with own instructional practice
- ◆ Has experience aligning instruction to school, district, state and federal learning goals
- ◆ Has documented successful teaching experience using effective instructional practices and management strategies
- ◆ Demonstrates application of research/theory into practice
- ◆ Demonstrates knowledge of the state assessment system
- ◆ Demonstrates use of assessment to inform and improve instruction, analyze and develop programs
- ◆ Has successful experience presenting to and instructing adult learners
- ◆ Takes a leadership role in the building, school district, or state-level organization
- ◆ Applies knowledge of research-based, “best practices” instruction for specific content fields such as literacy, science and math
- ◆ Continues research to “stay on the cutting edge”
- ◆ Develops personalized, differentiated learning experiences based on knowledge of diverse student needs
- ◆ Provides student-centered, highly engaged instruction across subject areas
- ◆ Analyzes instructional strengths of self and others, recognizing strengths and tapping into resources to support learning
- ◆ Supports and implements school policies, procedures and initiatives
- ◆ Sets realistic, attainable goals while maintaining program integrity
- ◆ Builds leadership capacity through gradual transfer of responsibility to teachers/teams

Knowledge and Skills of Effective Instructional Coaches

With continuing practice, on-going training, and a multi-year commitment to the process, Instructional Coaches' knowledge and skills will develop and grow. Evidence of effective coaching will be demonstrated in the continued expansion of best practices instruction among the coached teachers. An effective coach possesses knowledge and skills in research-based practices of coaching.

A skillful coach:

Skills

Creates Relationships

- Understands elements of organizational change and effects instructional growth through role of coach
- Develops collaborative partnerships among teachers and facilitates shared expertise
- Adjusts coaching approach to value diversity of school cultures and climates
- Manages resistance and conflict skillfully
- Communicates effectively with administrators, teachers, parents, para-educators and other school personnel
- Partners with principals to achieve school improvement goals
- Honors appropriate confidentiality while promoting teacher growth
- Maintains a coaching, non-evaluative relationship with teachers as determined by district bargaining groups

Promotes Dialogue

- Develops trust and a safe environment for all teachers to apply new knowledge/skills
- Actively listens and employs reflective questioning strategies
- Promotes improved instructional practices through coaching strategies
- Uses knowledge of resources and teaching experiences to encourage professional growth

Understands Content and Pedagogy

- Applies adult learning theory to practice
- Deepens content expertise, understanding of theory and instructional practice
- Models effective pedagogy with students in all level/subject classrooms being served
- Facilitates analysis of assessment data to inform instruction
- Sets realistic timeline/goals for professional development with teachers

Provides Teacher Support

- Assists teachers in team building (i.e., professional learning communities, literature circles, lesson study groups, multi-age teams, etc.)
- Develops collective understanding and language of effective instruction
- Deepens pedagogical content knowledge
- Facilitates analysis of instructional strengths and areas for growth
- Assists with professional resources and current research to support instructional growth
- Models effective instructional practices with adult learners
- Promotes achievement of academic goals
- Develops leadership skills in others
- Accesses the expertise of educational professionals as resources and as consultants

skills

Supporting Instructional Coaches

Whether preparing for initial entry or continuing in an already established role, Instructional Coaches themselves need sustained, job-embedded, formal and informal professional development opportunities. Coaches need ongoing opportunities to refine and sustain their coaching skills through practice, reflection, peer observations and dialogue with other coaches. Coaches need time to learn from and with colleagues performing similar duties. Developing and maintaining effectiveness as an Instructional Coach also requires administrative support at the building and the district levels, and through the local Education Service District. Elements that build efficacy and sustain capacity in coaches include:

- ◆ Access to and positive reinforcement from building and district administration
- ◆ Work balanced between the needs of the building and the district
- ◆ Open communication
- ◆ Multi-year commitment (3-5 years) to maintain trust relationships for continued teacher growth
- ◆ Respect and protection of coach's time and focus
- ◆ Reasonable caseload and supportive work space in a given assignment (grade level, content focus, region)
- ◆ Coaching role totally separated from teacher evaluation
- ◆ Coaching tightly coordinated with mentoring to support new teachers
- ◆ Opportunities to meet with new teacher mentors and other district coaches to provide coordinated, seamless service
- ◆ On-going commitment of financial and time resources to sustain multi-year program
- ◆ Acknowledgement and expectation that teacher/team growth takes time
- ◆ Professional development and time for collaboration among coaches focused on building capacity
 - Enhance coaching skills, remain current with content reform, and acquire collegial support
 - Peer observations of coaching practices with reflection for personal growth

support

Administrative Support for Coaches

Principals, district administrators, and local Educational Service District professionals must play an important role in supporting coaches.

School-wide change takes time and sustained commitment. Deep changes in teacher practice occur through experience, reflection, collaboration, and continued learning. This requires sustained support for teachers and coaches. Success cannot be measured within a single school year, but over time the academic performance of students should improve as teachers refine their instructional practices. Setting school and district goals with reasonable benchmarks will help coaches and teachers measure progress throughout the year. Goal setting and reflecting together on progress “can foster rich collegial conversations around instruction, deep analysis of student- and school-level data, a renewed sense of commitment to the work with a clear sense of direction regarding next steps.”⁸



A clear, fair and rigorous process for hiring coaches is important to guarantee that coaches are credible to the teachers and the administrators with whom they will be working.

Determining well-defined roles and responsibilities from the outset will support coaches' work by ensuring additional responsibilities are not included that would dilute the instructional focus and collaborative time.

Last, all education leaders must clearly and frequently communicate to staff that new instructional strategies are a priority for all teachers in their collaborative work towards school-wide reform.

support

⁸ Coaching: A Strategy for Developing Instructional Capacity, Neufeld and Roper, 2003, p. 23

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