

The Main Idea's Professional Development Suggestions for Instructional Coaches

Based on the ideas from Jim Knight's *The Impact Cycle*

Below are suggestions to help instructional coaches think about and improve their work. A school leader can bring together a group of coaches for these discussions and activities, or instructional coaches can use the activities below to reflect and act on their own.

Chapter 1 - What Does it Mean to Improve?

Reflect and Discuss:

1. Take a moment to reflect on the following questions: What aspect of your personal life are you trying to improve? (E.g., read more, go the gym more, etc.) What do you find to be most useful in improving yourself? (E.g., setting a goal, having an accountability partner, etc.) How might your answers to these questions inform the work you do as an instructional coach?
2. Look at the three types of coaching described in this chapter – facilitative, directive, and dialogical (the coachee already has the expertise, the coach imparts her own expertise, and a partnership approach to expertise). Which are you most familiar with? Is any one type already occurring in your school? What do you think are the pros and cons of each one?
3. Look at Knight's definition of Instructional Coach below. Describe in your own words what you think this means, what it might look like in action, and how well it might work at your school.

“Instructional coaches partner with teachers to analyze current reality, set goals, identify and explain teaching strategies to meet goals, and provide support until the goals are met.” (p.3)

4. What does it mean for a teacher to truly be a “partner” in a coaching relationship? What does this look like and not look like? What might be some challenges for a coach who wishes to enlist a teacher as a true partner?

Chapter 2 - Stage 1: Identify – Getting a Clear Picture of Reality

Reflect and Discuss:

1. Think about times in your life when you stop to get a fuller understanding of the current reality before proceeding. For example, if your two children come to you yelling that the other one started a fight. Before choosing a course of action you might pause to ask questions to ascertain what really happened. Share examples of times you have paused to better understand reality.
2. Discuss what might happen if coach and collaborating teacher decide to skip this step (of examining the current reality)? Share any examples in your work coaching a teacher of what actually happened if you ever skipped this step.
3. Discuss what might be challenging about having this step – getting a clearer idea of reality – as the *first* step when teacher and coach have not previously worked together.

Videotape Yourself:

4. Since it may place the collaborating teacher in a vulnerable position to be videotaped, coaches may want to follow Knight's suggestion to video themselves and watch this video *first* before asking a teacher to do it. This way the coach will understand what this vulnerable position feels like. Knight suggests you can even video a conversation with a spouse - try it!

Chapter 3 - Stage 1: Identify – Setting a Goal

Reflect and Discuss:

1. Knight says that setting a goal is *essential* for coaching to work. In fact, he feels so strongly about this, he writes, “When there is no goal, there is a real danger that coaching will have no lasting impact.” (p.65) Do you agree? Why or why not?

Role Play

2. The bulk of this chapter is devoted to outlining 10 questions to use in a coaching conversation, but Knight says it's important not to robotically rattle off each question in succession. Instead, every coach needs to adapt these questions to the particular coaching situation. This takes practice and nuance. To practice, consider having pairs of coaches role play using the 10 questions. Together, the pair would watch a video of a lesson (either from online or an actual teaching video from your school). Next, one coach would role play the teacher who just taught that lesson and the other would role play the coach and facilitate a conversation with the teacher using the 10 questions in this chapter.
3. Next, debrief the coach's role in the role play using the rubric below. They can either use their memory *or* they might want to video the coaching conversation for more accuracy. Both coaches from the role play should discuss each item below:

Aspects of effective coaching	Rating (1-4)
A) The coach created a <i>welcoming environment</i> .	
B) The coach intentionally built <i>trust</i> by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrating a trustworthy character 2. Acting reliably 3. Sharing their competence (both content knowledge and coaching skills) 4. Exuding warmth 5. Exhibiting an attitude of benevolence by keeping the teacher's best interests at heart 	
C) The coach <i>listened</i> carefully by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Committing to hear what the person speaking has to say 2. Keeping the speaker at the center of the conversation 3. Pausing to affirm before responding 4. Making it a habit not to interrupt too frequently 	
D) The coach asked questions skillfully by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Giving the teacher some <i>time</i> to respond rather than bombarding her with a series of clarifying questions 2. Not interrupting, fighting the urge to give advice 3. Helping teachers clarify their <i>own</i> thinking 4. Asking open questions that get teachers to do more of the talking and thinking (such as, "And what else?") 5. Keeping their <i>judgments</i> out of questioning 	

Reflect and Discuss:

5. Compare the components of a PEERS goal to a SMART goal. What are the differences? What are the pros and cons of each?

SMART goal: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ction-oriented, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-bound

PEERS goal: **P**owerful, **E**asy, **E**motionally compelling, **R**eachable, and **S**tudent-focused

Chapter 4 - Stage 2: Learn

Collaboratively Create Your Own "Instructional Playbook"

1. Knight suggests compiling a set of high-impact strategies in what he calls an **Instructional Playbook**. While coaches could use his (and there's an entire playbook with 13 strategies at the end of this book, *The Impact Cycle*), it would be more powerful for coaches at your school to come to consensus on a set of instructional strategies to be used throughout the school. To do this:

- Collaboratively decide whether to choose your school's own four categories of instructional strategies or keep Knight's Big Four: (a) content planning, (b) formative assessment, (c) instruction, and (d) community building.
- Have coaches research top strategies in the four areas, bring those back to the group, and then conduct a consensus activity to choose your school's top 10 to 15 instructional strategies for the playbook. This will become page 1 – your list of all strategies.
- Next, have coaches do a jigsaw with each of them introducing a few of the 10 to 15 strategies to the group. They can do this by sharing a video, doing a teaching demo, sharing an article, sharing research, or discussing the strategy.
- Once coaches deeply understand these 10 to 15 strategies, divide them up so each coach is responsible for a few. Then, each coach will write an *overview* of that strategy and prepare *checklists* that outline the components of it (see the summary for descriptions of these). Next, coaches should share their *overviews* and *checklists* to get feedback from the group and revise.
- Then ask one person to put the *one-page list*, *overviews*, *checklists* into one document as the school's Instructional Playbook.

Chapter 5 - Stage 3: Improve

Refine Debriefing Questions:

1. This chapter includes a series of questions coaches can use to debrief and plan with a teacher after he has tried a new strategy. Take a look at the questions below. Discuss the following: What purpose does each question serve? What are some challenges or obstacles you might face in posing any of these questions to teachers? Now, refine and adapt the set of questions below to end up with a list that is your own – Do you want to omit any of these questions or add any new ones?

<i>Given the time we have today, what's the most important thing for us to talk about?</i> <i>What's on your mind?</i> <i>What has gone well?</i> <i>What did you learn?</i> <i>What roadblocks are you running into?</i> <i>Do you want to keep using the strategy as it is?</i>	<i>Do you want to revisit how you use the strategy?</i> <i>Do you want to choose a new strategy?</i> <i>Do you want to change the way we measure progress toward the goal or change the goal?</i> <i>When should we meet next?</i> <i>What tasks have to be done before we meet again?</i> <i>On a scale of 1-5, how committed are you to this goal now?</i>
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Conduct a Fishbowl Coaching and Debriefing Session

2. To refine coaching skills, have a group of coaches and school leaders watch a video clip of a lesson together. Next, ask two people to role play a debrief of this lesson with the finalized questions from above while the rest of the group sits around them in a circle to observe (a fishbowl). Or, ask a coach to bring in a video of an actual debriefing with a teacher (with permission). Have the observers specifically look for how *dialogical* the coaching session is using the four great questions below:

Who is doing most of the talking?

Is the teacher genuinely problem solving or just agreeing with the coach?

Who is doing most of the thinking?

Was the solution primarily made by the coach, the teacher, or both of them?