

Preface

If you are a district administrator, principal, or school leader and want to improve the quality of instruction in each and every classroom, where do you begin? You begin with this book. This book will provide you and your Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) with a step-by-step guide to improve each and every one of your teachers by using the talent and expertise from within your own learning community. Imagine improving the academic achievement of your students at no additional expense! All you have to do is recognize and identify the endless amount of talent and expertise you already have in your building through the use of instructional coaches.

Each chapter of this book not only provides school leaders with important information on how to go about implementing instructional coaching but also provides materials to help with the step-by-step implementation process. At the end of each chapter you will find Self-Study Activities and data collection forms and instruments to be used by school leaders and instructional coaches. These forms have already been field-tested and will allow you and your staff to seamlessly collect the vital data and conduct the day-to-day activities to maximize the effect of your building's instructional coaches.

In addition to end-of-chapter materials, you will also find a wide variety of materials and instruments at the end of the book. These too have been field-tested and designed by instructional coaches for collecting various forms of formative and summative data to improve classroom practice and student achievement. In a time when school buildings are being closed and teachers terminated for poor student performance, the need for high-quality classroom instruction has never been greater. However, how a school goes about improving instruction is an entirely different matter altogether. Traditionally, improving classroom instruction has been left up to the building principal. Principals have typically addressed this need by conducting classroom observations, giving staff formative feedback, and providing professional development opportunities; however, a principal's ability to visit classrooms is quickly diminished by the vast numbers of noninstructional

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issues he or she has to deal with on a daily basis. These noninstructional issues severely limit the amount of time and impact a principal can have on instruction in the classroom. In many cases, this lack of administrative presence has created a gap in trying to improve classroom instruction, particularly in low-performing schools. In order to address this gap, many schools have turned to employing instructional coaches.

WHAT IS AN INSTRUCTIONAL COACH?

An instructional coach (IC) is an on-site professional developer who works directly with teachers and staff on how to go about implementing research or evidence-based strategies and techniques into their everyday classrooms. While instructional coaches may sound similar to literacy coaches, the instructional coach takes a more “generalist” approach, many times working with teachers one-on-one on a wide variety of content from mathematics to science. A successful instructional coach is a unique individual. They must be skilled in a variety of roles. They have to be a public relations guru, a communicator extraordinaire, a master organizer, and, of course, an expert educator.

USING AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM APPROACH

Even though they may have an IC in the building, many schools find that they don't necessarily make the gains in student achievement they were expecting. Research suggests that when it comes to using an IC, many ICs unfortunately fall victim to the same distractions that keep many principals out of the classrooms. In order to gain the most impact from having an IC in your building, a larger team effort has been recommended. The role of the school principal and teaching staff is critical in providing the ideal environment for instructional coaches to work and be successful. This team approach is often referred to as the Instructional Leadership Team or ILT. The purpose of this book is to provide a guide or framework for the school principal, staff, and the instructional coach to create a more effective environment for the instructional coach to work in and be successful.

OUR RESEARCH WITH INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

For the last fifteen years, we have been working with ICs in one form or another. Many of our research and evaluation projects incorporate some aspect of ICs to improve classroom instruction and ultimately increase

student achievement. Most recently, we have conducted a study of 13 instructional coaches in low-performing elementary school buildings and worked with the ICs to provide technical assistance as well as to document day-to-day progression and professional growth of these instructional coaches and the teachers they worked with. All of this research has formed the foundation for this book, allowing it to take on a unique approach that separates it from other instructional coaching books currently on the market. This book is different from other books on the market because it recognizes the importance of the school community: the building principal, the school staff, and the instructional coach. Using a “journaling approach,” the book provides the point-of-view of all three of these stakeholders and therefore can be read and enjoyed by all members of the school community. This dialogue is critical in showing the different perspectives, their views of instructional coaching, and how such a good idea can oftentimes be derailed.

In our research, journaling and interviewing instructional coaches as they worked through the day-to-day challenges in their buildings became a staple for trying to get a better insider’s view of the life of an instructional coach. We learned so much from this process that we felt it was an essential component to our work and needed to be represented in the book. In order to maintain confidentiality, the journal entries have been fictionalized; however, they still focus on a critical seed or kernel for which they were written. In addition, we think the journal entries provide a realistic perspective that could not be captured through any other method. They provide a unique backdrop against the chapter’s narrative.

When we started working with our instructional coaches, we wished we had a book like this to hand out on our first day. We spent weeks—months, in some cases—navigating the choppy waters, trying to guide our new instructional coaches through the many challenges they faced on a daily basis. We were also there to celebrate the successes. Don’t forget about that! It is very important to stop and take a minute to congratulate oneself when some action yields an unexpected success. We often think about how much more support we could have given our instructional coaches and how much further they could have gone improving the instruction in their buildings. While this book may be intended for instructional leadership teams (ILT) or coaches who are relatively new to the idea of instructional coaching (or are just exploring the idea), it also is intended for those instructional coaches who have been in the position for some time. They, too, will be interested in exploring new ideas and avenues to take their work to the next level. We wish you all great success.

—D.T.S. & G.S.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Chapter 1: “I’m So Glad You’re Here!” The First Day as an Instructional Coach

Every instructional coach has a first day. Some first days, however, are better than others. Chapter One focuses on the first day of being an instructional coach and the challenges instructional coaches often face when taking this position. This chapter provides an overview as to the different perspectives the building principal, teachers, staff, and the instructional coaches themselves can have about the role and responsibilities of the instructional coach. Early on in their careers, many instructional coaches are often derailed by the misperceptions those in their building have about their position. As in the case described in the chapter’s journal entries, the building principal, pressed for time and resources, may be the biggest culprit. This chapter provides a framework for four key steps that need to be conducted in order for an instructional coach to be successful: establishing an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), establishing a job description for the instructional coach (IC), establishing the role and responsibilities for the IC, and establishing an action plan for the IC.

Chapter 2: The Instructional Coach and the Instructional Leadership Team: A Unique Approach

In this chapter, you will learn more about the inner workings of the ILT and how the IC works with the team. You also will read about the two sets of priorities in a school building and how a school principal cannot address all of these priorities at once. This inability to address everything creates a gap, particularly in the area of working with teachers and providing feedback, and is filled by the role of the instructional coach. You also will learn about how the ILT works and some strategies the team can use to identify areas in need of improvement within the school building.

Chapter 3: Refocus and Start Again! The Instructional Leadership Team Supporting the Instructional Coach

Unfortunately, instructional coaches’ best efforts might not necessarily yield the desired results. While it may seem logical for an instructional coach to first work with the lowest-performing teachers in the building, research has shown that this is not the most strategic move for an instructional coach. Information from this chapter comes directly from our work with instructional coaches, documenting their challenges and

how they worked to overcome them and be successful. The chapter also provides ideas and information for how the IC can serve as an extension of the ILT, working in classrooms and with teachers to improve classroom instruction. This chapter also provides the IC and the ILT a framework for analyzing data and making data-based decisions.

Chapter 4: The Day-to-Day Work of the Instructional Coach

One of the unique features of being an instructional coach is that one rarely has the same day twice. Because of the complex set of roles and responsibilities of the IC, even though one may plan the day, lots of obstacles stand in the way. This chapter provides the IC with strategies for identifying promising teaching practices in the building and establishing a network for teachers' exemplary practices that can be shared and observed by others in a nonjudgmental manner.

Chapter 5: An Idea for the Day: Strategies and Ideas to Encourage Engagement Between Teachers and the ILT

After the initial work has been completed, there is still much to do. This chapter provides guidance to the instructional coach about ways to work with teachers in the building and contains over 40 different ideas used by ICs to engage and work with teachers.

Chapter 6: Assessing Individual and Group Strengths: Strategies for Working With the Resistant Teacher

Unfortunately, not every teacher in the building will greet the instructional coach with open arms. In fact, some might even be resistant to learning about new evidence-based instructional strategies or introducing these strategies into their classrooms. Working with resistant teachers is a real challenge for today's instructional coaches. This chapter focuses on presenting ideas and activities for the IC to follow when working with the resistant teacher.

Chapter 7: Changing Teacher Practices Through Classroom Field-Testing: The ILT's Role

In this chapter, the IC learns how to work with all types of teachers through field-testing practices in their classrooms. This chapter is dedicated to providing instructional coaches with a framework to help the IC

assist teachers in investigating various instructional strategies and practices in their classroom and then reflecting on whether those practices were effective for increasing student learning.

Chapter 8: The ILT's Role in Changing Teacher Practices Buildingwide

This chapter focuses on how instructional coaches can combine the professional development and action research to create a powerful new way to improve teacher practices. Based on the work of Guskey (2002), this approach provides a model as well as technical information to instructional coaches in order to create a learning community where instructional coaches introduce and demonstrate evidence-based practices and teachers research the effectiveness of these practices in their classroom. Then instructional coaches and teachers come together for in-depth discussion and dialogue.

Chapter 9: A New Coach in Town! The ILT's Role in Training New Instructional Coaches

With the success of an instructional coach comes a need for more coaches in the district. This chapter focuses on the techniques and strategies that can be used to cultivate talent and develop the next cohort of instructional coaches.

Chapter 10: Toolbox for the Instructional Coach: Examples of Surveys, Protocols, and Tools

This chapter contains materials and supplements developed on-the-job by the instructional coaches we worked with.