


Chapter 12

Fostering a Culture of Growth and Belonging: The Multi-Faceted Impact of Instructional Coaching in International Schools

Kim Cofino

 0000-0002-1444-5348

 <https://orcid.org/>

Eduro Learning, Thailand

ABSTRACT

In recent years, many international schools have been considering whether or not to invest in instructional coaching programs. However, discussions on both sides usually proceed from the assumption that coaching programs are mainly intended to lead to improved student learning. This chapter explains that properly implemented instructional coaching does much more than that; it creates a culture of growth and belonging which can lead to greater teacher satisfaction and retention. By demonstrating a school's commitment to personalizing teacher professional development, coaching empowers teachers to flourish and creates a humanizing community of learning. Incorporating material from over 30 interviews with coaches, teachers, and leaders who have appeared on the podcast #coachbetter, this chapter explores what instructional coaching is and isn't, what the coaching process looks like in practice, why coaching is important to schools focused on teacher retention and professional growth, and what helps coaching programs succeed, particularly in international schools.

INTRODUCTION

Successful schools spend a great deal of energy, time, and money on recruiting the best teachers possible, trying hard to make sure they're finding the right fit for their particular community. This is particularly true of international schools, where the majority of the faculty are often expatriates. After the necessary

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but time-consuming and expensive process of helping recent hires adjust to a different country, culture, and school community, most international schools naturally hope to retain teachers for several years.

International school leaders are particularly aware that the passionate, engaged, and dedicated teachers they've attracted will want to continue to grow as professionals. To support this, most schools provide professional development (PD) funds, send teachers to conferences, and/or bring in outside consultants.

However, one-off events or one-size-fits-all PD opportunities often don't effectively meet the needs of the highly engaged, globally competitive, and experienced teachers that international schools want to hire and retain. Schools end up spending money on PD that doesn't make a lasting impact.

The unexpected solution to this predicament—of how to provide meaningful, engaging, and personally fulfilling professional development for international school teachers—is instructional coaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Instructional Coaching

Instructional coaching is defined and carried out in very different ways in different educational districts and institutions, but at its heart it is a process whereby a coach “works collaboratively with a teacher to improve that teacher’s practice and content knowledge, with the ultimate goal of affecting student achievement for the purpose of learning new skills or improving current skills” (Sutton et al., 2011). Coaches usually follow a cycle that involves some combination of pre- and post-conferencing with teachers, observing classroom teaching, and modeling new practices (Neufeld & Roper, 2002). There has long been a widely-recognized shortage of empirical evidence on coaching’s efficacy. Publications on coaching tend to be descriptive, relying on qualitative case studies (Borman & Feger, 2006; Cornett & Knight, 2009). However, there is a growing body of evidence that coaching can be meaningfully linked to improvement in instructional practice, as well as to student improvements in literacy and mathematics (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018; Sailors & Shanklin, 2010; Campbell & Malkus, 2011).

Instructional Coaching as Professional Development

Looking beyond student achievement, evaluations of coaching programs have shown that coaching can help teachers effectively link their institutions’ broader standards, policies, and reform efforts to daily instructional strategies (Knight, 2009). Whereas traditional professional development models like workshops take place outside of teachers’ practice and have poor efficacy in terms of changing teachers’ beliefs and attitudes, coaching programs can be more effective, due to their more classroom-embedded and flexible nature (Kim & Viesca, 2016; Garet et al., 2001). When looked at through the lens of five identified key features of professional development (content focus, active learning, sustained duration, coherence, and collective participation), instructional coaching “presents itself as a powerful tool for improving teacher knowledge, skills, and practice” (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

Instructional Coaching and the Role of Principals

Several studies have investigated the conditions that support successful coaching, such as the role played by “school culture” in general and more specifically by principals (Gibbons, Garrison, & Cobb, 2011;

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