



**Instructional Coach**

## Overview

Become an Instructional Coach and work with colleagues improving their practice in this high leverage and impactful way.

### **What is instructional coaching?**

The terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring' are often used interchangeably, and can also be used to describe a very wide range of different practices. It is worth reflecting on these briefly here.

On a very simple level, mentoring relationships are often seen as 'expert-novice' relationships, where an expert mentor shares their experience, knowledge and skills with a less experienced 'apprentice'; trainee teachers and NQTs are allocated mentors of course, but new school leaders, for example, may also be allocated mentors to support them in taking on their new role. Mentoring therefore requires context-specific expertise.

Coaching, meanwhile, is often thought of in terms of executive coaching models, which focus on someone who already has expertise being enabled to draw out their own thinking and reflection and decide on their own actions. In some cases, coaching is seen as requiring less context-specific expertise, and is more about asking effective questions.

Instructional coaching meanwhile, is a distinctive and very specific approach. It has more in common with sports coaching – where a coachee sets goals and then is provided with specific, detailed feedback on a narrow area of practice as they practise, refine and improve this multiple times – than it does with executive coaching. In an instructional coaching relationship, the coach requires expert

knowledge of teaching to be able to provide useful feedback and guidance which pushes participants beyond their comfort zone (Deans for Impact 2016).

## **The Coaching relationship**

The nature of the relationship in instructional coaching is that whilst the coach is acting as an expert, they are also a supportive partner, with the coachee setting and taking ownership of their own targets and action steps, with the coach 'honouring the autonomy of the person being worked with' (Knight 2007). With that in mind, effective coaches will embark on a collective dialogue where ideas and guidance will be offered but always in the interests of supporting the coachee to achieve their goal.

In the video, from Instructional Coaching.com, Jim Knight helps to articulate this notion by introducing a spectrum of three different coaching approaches – from 'facilitative', where the coach is a sounding board, to 'directive', where the relationship is that of master and apprentice. In the middle is the dialogical approach, which a number of instructional coaching models are based upon.

## **Deliberate practice**

An important element of instructional coaching is the notion of it being combined with 'deliberate practice' – where the coachee engages in sustained, intentional practice of a narrow and clearly-defined skill area they want to develop. Three key steps highlighted by 'Deans for Impact' (2016) in the process of deliberate practice include:

1. Having well-defined, specific goals
2. Focusing intently on practice activities
3. Receiving and responding to high-quality feedback.

An important notion is that the coachee will go through a cycle of practice, feedback and reflection of the same set of skills multiple times to enable them to refine these.

Within an instructional coaching model, you will work with your coachee to help them set clearly-defined goals and areas of skill to develop based on programme content; plan how to practice and develop the skills aligned with these goals; and provide them with high-quality feedback on their progress against their goals, before repeating these steps. The notion of deliberate practice is explored further in 'Deans for Impact's' 2016 publication [Practice with Purpose](#).

## **Why instructional coaching?**

The expert support a teacher receives in the first years of their career are of vital importance to their effectiveness and eagerness to continue contributing to the profession.

Where teacher learning opportunities are underpinned by robust evidence and expertise, sustained over time, focused on improving and evaluating pupil outcomes, include collaboration and expert challenge and are prioritised by school leadership, they are more likely to be effective ([DfE](#) 2016).

The features of instructional coaching as described by (Papay et al, 2017) include that it is:

- Individualised – Coaching sessions are one-on-one.
- Intensive – Coaches and teachers interact at least every couple of weeks.
- Sustained – Teachers receive coaching over an extended period of time.
- Context-specific – Teachers are coached on their practices within the context of their own classroom.
- Focused – coaches work with teachers to engage in deliberate practice of specific skills.

It is an approach that may meet much of what research evidence has to tell us about effective teacher learning.

CPD workshops and training are often insufficient in achieving change to classroom practice – They may change teachers' knowledge, but actually changing established habits or introducing new practices in a classroom environment is challenging. One-off sessions with little personalisation or follow-up are therefore unlikely to be terribly effective. Instructional coaching, meanwhile, helps to support teachers in translating knowledge and skills into actual classroom practice (Joyce and Showers, 2002). This can effectively be combined with training sessions or courses in which teachers are taught new skills or content knowledge (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010) for maximum impact on practice.

***If you are interested in finding more out about this role, please do not hesitate to ask your Line Manager or Headteacher.***