



# School Improvement Booster

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October 2014: Teacher Leadership for Improved Instruction

Excitement surrounds us in Iowa as educators are planning or implementing new Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) systems for the purpose of improving instruction. In this School Improvement Booster, we scan the literature and hear from experts about things to consider so we consciously structure these systems to support improved teaching and learning for both educators and students. The Iowa Department of Education has provided a [multitude of resources](#) to guide this important work.

The well-implemented TLC System will provide many benefits to your school—for parents and the community, superintendents, principals, central office staff, teachers and students.

1. Teachers have the chance to be more highly compensated for additional hours and responsibility of leadership work.
2. The district’s plan for sharing leadership among more staff focused on student learning is defined and implemented with resources to support the plan.
3. A renewed focus on quality instruction will enhance both teacher and student learning.
4. School administrators with overflowing responsibilities will have reduced stress accompanied by more support for instructional leadership.
5. Parents and the community will be reassured there is a renewed focus on improving instruction.

As confident as we are that a well implemented TLC system has great potential for our staff and students, we are equally confident that a poorly implemented unfocused TLC won’t make much difference. While of course there must always be a strong component of teacher leadership in any successful improvement effort, change is never easy, no matter who provides the leadership. Bev Showers notes, “The only people who like change are wet babies.” For us to realize the potential of increased teacher leadership, we must focus on and support the expectation of improved instruction and higher levels of student learning.

Dr. Ann Mausbach, formerly Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction in Council Bluffs, and now Professor of Education at Creighton University, has written about the importance of the relationship between the principal and teacher leaders. Additionally, Ann was interviewed in an ISFIS school improvement [Webinar](#) by Margaret Buckton on August 13.

## LESSONS FROM THE FIELD: DRIVERS FOR IMPLEMENTING INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

Dr. Ann Mausbach

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“I believe that we learn from practice. Whether it means to learn to dance from practicing dancing or learning to live by practicing living, the principles are the same.”

- Martha Graham

As the state embarks on the TLC journey we need to keep these wise words in mind. We learn by doing. We learn through practice and reflection. Like all learning, many of these lessons in how to implement an instructional coach or other leadership system that impacts student learning didn’t come from successes but came from missteps along the way. Fullan’s (2011) notion of “driver”, those policy and strategy levers that have the least and best chance of driving successful reform, echo our experiences in lessons learned:

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	<b>Right Driver: Focus on Students</b>	<b>Wrong Driver: Focus on Teachers</b>
<b>What this means</b>	Coaching should be centered on student results. "What outcomes do students need improved?" is the guiding question for teachers and coaches when they work together.	Coaching is focused on teacher needs and practices. Coaching opportunities are based on changing teacher practice or implementing a new strategy.
<b>Consequences</b>	Focusing on student results provides a focus for both the coach and teacher; improvement in student results will result in a higher likelihood that the teacher would work with coach again	Coaches may be perceived as hired to "fix" teachers, or worse help identify bad teachers so they can be fired.
<b>Practices that promote</b>	Clearly communicating the purpose and vision for coaching with all staff.  Revisit vision throughout the year so staff has a clear understanding.	Allowing relationship development/building be used as the entry point for coaching.

	<b>Right Driver: Having a Clear Structure</b>	<b>Wrong Driver: Loosely Defined Structure</b>
<b>What this Means</b>	In order to have an impact on student outcomes, a clear purpose and process for coaching cycles must be in place.	Coaches and teachers do not have a process or clearly defined structure that is articulated prior to coaching. The coach and teachers work together is defined by circumstances.
<b>Consequences</b>	Coaches and teachers know what to expect, which can build or enhance a trusting relationship.  Outcomes for students more likely to be met.	Coaching doesn't result in positive results for students; inconsistency in practice may promote suspicion among staff.
<b>Practices that promote (missing a noun here?)</b>	Defining coaching cycles; having universal forms for data collection and coaching cycles.  Communicating with staff coaching structure <i>prior</i> to any coaching cycles.	Leaving coaching practices up to chance; letting the teacher and coach determine how they want to work together.  Lack of data collection on impact of coaching partnership.

	<b>Right Driver: Principal and Coach have Distinct Roles</b>	<b>Wrong Driver: Coach and Principal Role seen as Interchangeable</b>
<b>What this Means</b>	The principal is not a coach. A principal uses coaching behaviors when working with teachers; however, they are still responsible for supervision of teaching and learning <i>throughout</i> the school. Principals are responsible for teacher evaluation. Coaches may have more content expertise than a principal. Principals will rely on coaches for this expertise; however, principals still need to have a strong instructional background.	Coach engages in principal behaviors such as evaluating staff, developing school improvement plan, and leading all professional development. Coach does many administrative duties, such as develop bus schedules, monitor paraprofessionals, etc.
<b>Consequences</b>	Coaches can be a true colleague and partner with the teacher.	Coach perceived as the principal's "spy"
<b>Practices that promote</b>	Roles clearly defined and shared with staff regarding responsibilities. Principal conducts walkthroughs and provides feedback on instruction. Principal and coach have weekly meetings with a clear agenda focusing on problems of practice, not people.	Principal not participating in PLC meetings. Principal leaves all large group professional development up to the coach. Principal uses information from coach to write up or reprimand a teacher.

Like all learning, the journey of infusing coaches into a system is developmental in nature. With time and practice, rich learning will occur for students and teachers. Best of luck on your journey.

Fullan, M. (2011). *Choosing the wrong drivers for school reform*. Centre for Strategic Education Seminar Series Paper No. 204.

## TEN ROLES FOR TEACHER LEADERS

Joellen Killion and Nancy Harrison provide a sampling of the various roles teacher leaders might play. We thought this article, [Ten Roles for Teacher Leaders](#) from Educational Leadership might be helpful either as you develop your TLC plan or reflect on the plan you already have in place. A caution – be sure not to expect all things from these coaches. Other literature warns that too many duties dilute the coaches' abilities to do anything well. We would add Implementer of new classroom instructional practice to this list. While it is implicit in many of the roles, we think it's worthy of being highlighted.

- Resource provider
- Instructional specialist
- Curriculum specialist
- Classroom supporter
- Learning facilitator
- Mentor
- School leader
- Data coach
- Catalyst for change
- Learner

## COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER LEADERS

Sebastian Wren and Diane Vallejo write in [Effective Collaboration Between Instructional Coaches and Principals](#) about the structure and support coaches need to achieve the goal of improved instruction and therefore improved outcomes for students.

1. **Be careful coaches' job descriptions aren't too broad, so they can actually do it!** "It is appropriate to expect coaches to take on a few different roles and responsibilities as instructional leaders, but those roles should be relatively few, very clear, and highly prioritized."
2. **Provide ongoing support for the coaches.** We are asking new teacher leaders to take on newly defined roles that will lead to improved student learning - lead change, support instruction, introduce new instructional models and strategies, analyze data, etc. In order for these teacher leaders to be successful with their new responsibilities they will need systems of support for the various elements they will work to improve - collaboration, pedagogy, assessment, and all of the other areas in which they will need to continue to develop expertise. Should we fail to provide this support, it is likely students won't fully realize the improvements possible.
3. **Expect the principal and coach to have a supportive, ongoing, communication rich relationship.** While many are warning that the principal and the coach should be wary of each other's roles, these writers suggest that while it is good to be cognizant of the evaluative role of the principal and the non-evaluative role of the coach, these two positions should be in constant on-going communication. "... (W)e feel strongly that the principal and the coach must work shoulder to shoulder with a shared vision for the school. Based on our experience, we would argue that communication, peer coaching (coach to principal and principal to coach), and collaboration are essential to the sustained health of the school culture."

## JOYCE AND SHOWERS ON COACHING

Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, seminal researchers in improving instruction through effective professional development, noted in this article, "[Student Achievement Through Staff Development](#)," for the National College for School Leadership in 2002, that coaching appeared to contribute to the transfer of training into classroom practice in these ways.

Coached teachers:

- practiced new strategies more often and with greater skill than uncoached educators with identical initial training
- adapted the strategies more appropriately to their own goals and contexts than did uncoached teachers who tended to practice observed or demonstrated lessons
- retained and increased their skill over time – uncoached teachers did not
- were more likely to explain the new models of teaching to their students, ensuring that students understood the purpose of their strategy and the behaviors expected of them
- demonstrated a clearer understanding of the purposes and use of the new strategies. The frequent peer discussions about them, including lessons' and materials' design, seemed to enable them to 'think' with the strategies in ways which uncoached teachers never showed.

## INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

[In Studying the Impact of Professional Coaching](#), Jim Knight studied implementation of new instruction using two groups of teachers. Both groups attended the same workshop, but only one group received follow up instructional coaching. He noted, "Teachers who were supported by an instructional coach used the teaching routine more than teachers who only attended a professional development workshop." This is certainly in tandem with the Joyce and Showers research findings.

## RESEARCH ON TEACHER LEADERSHIP, HARRIS AND MUIJS

Alma Harris and Daniel Muijs of the Institute for Education at the University of Warwick compiled extensive research about the power of teacher leadership in their article, *Teacher leadership: principles and practices*. This work, linked on the Department of Education website, is a "must read" as you develop your TLC plan or reflect on how things are going as the plan is implemented this school year. "The literature emphasizes that teacher leadership is not just concerned with teachers developing individually but a central role of teacher leaders is one of helping colleagues to try out new ideas and to encourage them to adopt leadership roles (Lieberman, et al, 2000). Research has consistently underlined the contribution of strong collegial relationships to school improvement and change. Little (1990) suggests that collegial interaction at least lays the groundwork for developing shared ideas and for generating forms of leadership. Rosenholtz (1989) argues even more forcibly for teacher collegiality and collaboration as means of generating positive change in schools. Collaboration is at the heart of teacher leadership, as it is premised upon change that is enacted collectively."

## QUOTES

“It is a good idea for schools to hire and support instructional coaches to provide full-time, site-based, high-quality professional development for classroom teachers, but only when the coach is properly supported and situated into the school community.”

Wren and Vallejo

“Empowering teachers . . . and providing them with opportunities to lead is based on the simple but profound idea that if schools are to become better at providing learning for students then they must also become better at providing opportunities for teachers to innovate, develop, and learn together.”

Harris and Muijs

“Many times what we perceive as an error or failure is actually a gift. And eventually we find that lessons learned from that discouraging experience prove to be of great worth.”

Richelle E. Goodrich, *Smile Anyway: Quotes, Verse, & Grumblings for Every Day of the Year*

“We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.”

John Dewey

*If you have any questions about the School Improvement Booster or suggested future topics,  
please contact Susie Olesen at [susie.olesen@isfis.net](mailto:susie.olesen@isfis.net).*

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