



TEACHER  
REFLECTIVE  
TENDENCIES

INSTRUCTIONAL  
COACH  
WEIGHS  
3 TYPES  
OF DATA  
TO GET

STUDENT  
EVIDENCE

# TRIPLE- STRENGTH FEEDBACK

By **Monica Boehle**

**A**s an instructional coach in a large suburban, high-performing high school, I face many challenges in measuring the impact of my work with teachers on student learning. Our instructional coach model stresses teacher choice to not only work with a coach but also choose a topic on which to focus. This structure meets the needs of the teachers, but it is difficult to measure effectiveness because of the varying nature of the work.

I have tried many methods since the start of the pro-

gram five years ago and realized that, since there is not a direct line from coach to student, most measurements only attempt to capture the indirect link. Teacher surveys can be subjective, and standardized test scores often measure types of student performance that are not the focus of coaching work with teachers.

Changes in standardized test scores would reflect the cumulative impact of all professional learning, not just coaching, but, more importantly, results are not released often enough to give timely feedback to coaches.

Because coaching is unique and personal to each teacher, broad measurements do not accurately take into account the significant growth and change of both teacher



## EVIDENCE OF SUSTAINED CHANGE

learning and student learning. Additionally, coaches frequently need just-in-time feedback from evidence to continually refine practice.

Weighing three types of data over time can provide more valid program evaluation and give coaches the timely feedback they need. These data include shifts in teacher reflective tendencies, the use of student performance as an indicator of success, and the contextualization of a change into long-term habits.

Use of all three of these measures can more accurately show the coach's impact on student learning. It may seem intimidating at first to track all of this information, but it can be embedded in routine reflections on coaching.

### TEACHER REFLECTIVE TENDENCIES

Early indicators of the impact of instructional coaching are changes in a teacher's thinking over time. Reflection with a coach is central to the teacher's level of consciousness about his or her practice.

One case study is my work with Grant Jacobsen, a history teacher, which began with his wish to increase his use of formative assessment in class. As a result of our reflective conversation after the initial observation of a class, Jacobsen realized that he had only asked knowledge-level questions during the entire class, and only a handful of students responded.

When asked what he would measure on a formative assessment, he knew he didn't want it to be just on the facts. Not only did reflection change his formative assessment practice, it also raised his awareness about the need to ask more of his students.

This awareness has stayed with Jacobsen as he continues to refine his practice and has had a ripple effect in many aspects of his teaching. Jacobsen's response to coaching is typical of many people that I work with and is a testament to the power of reflection.

For a coach, it isn't important what tool is used to measure teacher reflection. It's important for the coach to use one or develop one himself. Some coaches like to use the simplicity of the four stages of competence learning model, which explains the process and stages of learning a new skill, with the understanding that teachers shift stages depending on the topic and expertise on that topic.

One tool that I found useful came from the book *Building Teachers' Capacity for Success* by Pete Hall and Alisa Simeral (2008). They created the Continuum of Self-Reflection: Coach's Model, which offers specific teacher characteristics at different stages that they called the unaware stage, conscious stage, action stage, and refinement stage.

This tool guides my thinking on actions that will help a teacher be more conscious in his or her instruction. In Jacobsen's case, he was both unaware and conscious and has shifted to action and refinement. If a coach does not move a teacher into more refinement, the changes that may or may not be made in the classroom are superficial at best.

Because each teacher is unique, there is not a set timeline for moving to the next steps. It may take weeks, or it may take years. Teachers also move up and down the continuum based on the topic. Shifts in consciousness come from the work that the coach and teacher do together.

Although many coaches think about this informally, formal tracking provides the coach more accuracy for re-



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lection and serves as a useful predictor of student learning over time. Therefore, it offers useful data on the coach’s impact, especially when working with a large staff.

### STUDENT EVIDENCE

The second type of data to measure coaching impact is student evidence. The coaching conversation must move beyond words to action. When working with a teacher on a change in the classroom, many times the focus is the planning of new activity or structure.

During this planning, evidence to indicate success of the change must be included. As coaches, we expect teachers to move beyond a casual feeling of the success or failure of a lesson to student evidence. We seek to answer the question, “How do

we know?” This evidence, in turn, provides the coach, teacher, and school with more tangible results of his or her work on student learning.

Part of a results-based coaching tool developed by the coaches in my district, adapted from the work of Diane Sweeney (2011), asks teachers to identify the current student actions or performance that they wish to change. This is best discussed with actual student evidence present in the conversation as well.

The student evidence grounds the work in reality — not just the perception of the teacher — allowing teachers to see students as individuals and removing some of the emotion teachers may be feeling. This evidence does not need to be limited to traditional data such as test or quiz performance.

In my work with Jacobsen, we have used student interviews, videotaped lessons, classroom observation notes focused on various topics, exit slips, student reflection, and student surveys to provide evidence of student growth. Once the initial evidence has been collected, Jacobsen and I ask: What instructional strategies or practices would move the students from the current state to the desired state?

Together, the coach and teacher plan the implementation of a new strategy, clearly articulate a specific goal, and plan how they will collect evidence of success. The use of pre- and post-student evidence increases the specificity of teacher reflection. It also helps the teacher see immediate impact of a change. If the goal is more long-term, these checks help show progress toward a larger goal, a key to motivating teachers to keep working on it.

### EVIDENCE OF SUSTAINED CHANGE

Working with teachers on specific goals using student evidence is central. However, to measure long-term impact of coaching work, the change must be sustained, not just implemented once.

There is much data that could indicate that coaching impacts student learning when taken in isolated incidents. However, the work of a coach is to help a teacher make habitual changes over the long term, not quick fixes. This is also not something a coach should assume or simply hope will happen. As with any change, there is an initial period of focus and attention that declines over time. How do coaches help teachers make a change, then make it a habit?

During the reflective conversation with the student evidence, the coach asks questions that help teachers generalize their knowledge. By generalizing, teachers find the same concept echoed in different situations in the classroom. This, in turn, increases the teacher’s reflective tendencies when he or she sees the connections between ideas, not a series of isolated topics.

In Jacobsen’s case, he first jumped from topic to topic: formative assessment, classroom management, learning targets, engagement, small-group learning, and so on, not necessarily seeing the links between them. Working together, we created a vision of his dream classroom, deconstructed this vision into smaller action steps, and brainstormed the evidence of success.

By doing this, we kept the momentum going. We selected dates when more student evidence was collected, and reflected on, to show the sustained change. Together, we decided when to declare one change a habit in order to move on to the next piece.

Expanding the traditional coaching cycle of planning, action, and reflection kept us focused on the vision, and we celebrated the steps to achieving it. These conversations, anchored in student evidence collected over time, change habits into thoughtful practice.

It is difficult to find a simple documentation system, but through experimentation, I am working to refine my process. I modified the results-based coaching tool to include information about meetings, actions, and evidence to show growth on a particular focus (see p. 33). I keep a separate document for each person so that I can find continuity over time, even though there are often gaps between meeting dates. We provide background at the start of the coaching cycle to help us remember the context. As the cycle progresses, we include evidence of longitudinal data with agreed-upon collection dates. Using this organizer reminds me to purposefully seek evidence of impact on student learning whenever action is taken.

### A COMPREHENSIVE PICTURE

It is challenging to measure a coach’s individual impact on student learning because the coach is part of the whole team of sustained professional learning. However, data on teacher reflective tendencies, student evidence, and evidence of sustained change provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact of a coach’s work. As a coach, I get an accurate, timely measure of my effectiveness from this structure of evaluation in order to self-reflect. My next step will be to find ways to share reports of success and change with other stakeholders within my school

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**RESULTS-BASED COACHING TOOL**

Teacher:	Coach:
Focus or goal of coaching cycle:	Level of background knowledge or reflective tendency on this topic:
Why this focus?	
Observed student actions and other baseline data:	Current teacher actions or behaviors:

Date started	• Based on student actions, what instructional practices or strategies were determined by the coach and teacher to most likely impact student learning? • Next steps and meeting dates.	What coaching actions were implemented during the coaching work?	What is the evidence of change in teaching behaviors?	What is the evidence of student learning?

As a result of the coaching work, what instructional practices is the teacher using now on a consistent basis? (Include evidence and dates collected, agreed upon by coach and educator.)	What are the changes in reflective tendency on this topic? Evidence?

Adapted from Sweeney, D. (2011). *Student-centered coaching: A guide for K-8 coaches and principals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Used with permission.

district. The effort to meaningfully capture this information is challenging, rewarding, and significant as I continually seek to improve my work.

**REFERENCES**

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