CHAPTER 1

Cultivating Coaching Mindsets to Support Systemwide Improvement

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Why might coaching in schools matter more now than ever before?
2. What are our own major assumptions and core beliefs about coaching?
3. What are the four mindsets that guide coach thinking and work?
4. In what ways does our framework for thinking and working like a coach depend on strong leadership, collaborative relationships, a clear mission/vision, and systems thinking?

Meeting Melinda

When her principal asked Melinda, an experienced classroom teacher, to take on an instructional coaching role to support teaching and learning in her K–5 school, Melinda began to search for resources that would help her better understand her new responsibilities. While Melinda was excited to take on coaching work, she was also quite nervous about shifting from working solely with students to working predominantly with adults. Her principal told Melinda that she would have a great deal of input in defining her coaching work. While this seemed like an amazing professional opportunity, Melinda worried that so much of her role was undefined. How might Melinda begin to think about her new role? How might she focus her thinking and work? How might she know if she is making a difference in classroom instruction and student learning?

In many ways, this book presents both the research and resources that we think can support Melinda in accomplishing her goals. While fictional, Melinda represents a compilation of the many instructional coaches and teacher leaders with whom we

have worked over the years. Having both personally walked in Melinda's shoes and mentored many teachers and coaches like Melinda, we have chosen to begin each of our chapters with a brief snapshot of the tasks that Melinda might take on and the questions that she might ask along the way. Each chapter then serves as a resource for helping all who coach to answer questions like Melinda's.

Therefore, the two main purposes of this book are to (1) provide those who coach with an understanding of how coaching requires particular *ways of thinking* about coaching adult learners in schools and (2) suggest numerous related *ways of working* with adult learners, including dozens of practical strategies and tools. In this introductory chapter, we begin by presenting several major reasons that instructional coaching in schools is now as important as ever before, if not more so, and some core beliefs and fundamental assumptions about coaching that guide our work. We end by presenting the framework at the heart of this book, which supports coaching across a wide variety of school contexts.

Why Is Coaching Still a Critical Part of School Improvement?

Coaching, although still a relatively new phenomenon in the history of public schooling, has gained momentum during the past several decades. In business, there are executive coaches; in medicine, health coaches and life coaches; and in education, instructional coaches. Educational coaches come with a variety of titles (e.g., instructional, academic, change, literacy, social-emotional, peer), and a dizzying and diverse number of roles and responsibilities. However, all those who coach, whether in business, medicine, or education, share a fundamental similarity, a desire to support the work of colleagues while continually improving their own practice.

Atul Gawande, an internationally known surgeon and writer, realizing that he had reached a plateau in his learning, worked with a coach to further develop his technical skills and his ability to work with other members of his team. Gawande (2011) makes several key points about coaching; specifically, he notes that "the allegiance of the coach is to the people they work with; their success depends on it. And the existence of a coach depends on the acknowledgement that even expert practitioners have significant room for improvement" (para. 95). Gawande continues, in his 2017 TED Talk on the same subject, by asking the fundamental questions: "How do professionals get better at what they do? How do they get great?" A big part of his answer is: "Everybody needs a coach. Everyone. The greatest in the world needs a coach" (Gawande, 2017). In other words, all of us can always improve as professionals, and coaches can play an important part in helping us get there. It is from this simple idea, the notion that everybody needs a coach to improve professionally, that we begin this book exploring the coaching mindsets that support the continual improvement work that educators and schools need to create equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students.

For teachers working in the post-COVID-19 era of education, professional learning has perhaps never been more important nor more complex. We find ourselves in the middle of a historical inflection point, in which educators must rapidly and continually adapt to think differently about how they teach. Student populations are diversifying along every continuum (race, gender, language, neurodiversity, and so on). Delivering high-quality instruction in an age where artificial intelligence, online and hybrid learning, and digital devices are pervasive requires educators to constantly question which fundamental skills students of all ages must acquire. As a result, educators must regularly update their research-based disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge in literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts, and more. Moreover, we are witnessing a revolution in terms of teachers needing to attend more than ever to students' social-emotional learning (SEL). Students in the 2020s are wrestling with global issues of climate change, poverty, food scarcity, and social unrest in ways that make school, college, and workplace demands far more complicated.

All of this points to a need for today's educators to be ready and willing to adapt their instructional practices to meet ever-shifting student and schooling needs. Traditional teacher preparation and professional learning methods simply will not be enough to meet the myriad existing and emerging demands. While we still believe that there is no silver bullet, no one idea or tool that will solve all dilemmas (Ippolito & Bean, 2024), we also know from research and experience that coaching can and should be a big part of the solution. At its best, instructional coaching is a powerful job-embedded, educator-responsive form of professional learning that can adapt to emerging student, teacher, and school needs. Coaching can be the very solution that many school leaders are seeking as they try to support teachers in this era of rapid societal change. While we fully acknowledge the many ways in which coaching may not live up to its potential in specific school contexts—in part because of the ways that school systems and structures may not fully support coaching efforts (for more on supporting larger coaching systems, see Ippolito & Bean, 2024; Woulfin et al., 2023)—in this book, we zoom in on the habits of mind and ways of working that all those who work with adult learners in schools can adopt. By thinking and working like a coach, all educators can make a difference in one another's practice.

Before sharing the framework at the heart of this book, we first wish to share some of our own core beliefs and assumptions about coaching. These beliefs have shaped our work in schools, our research, and most certainly this book; therefore, we think it important to show our cards at the outset of this book.

Core Beliefs and Major Assumptions about Coaching

In this section, we introduce a handful of core beliefs and major assumptions that we hold as central to successful coaching. We then continue to refer to these assumptions throughout the book.

Coaching Is Best Viewed as a Set of Activities, Not Just a Role

Not all who coach in schools have followed similar journeys into their roles and responsibilities. Some educators become coaches through formal graduate coursework, certification programs, or degree programs. Others take on coaching work via school and district mentoring and preparation pathways. Many others begin to coach via informal routes, much like our own experiences as coaches in which our respective school leaders tapped us and asked us to begin working with colleagues (very similar to Melinda's experience at the outset of this chapter). This diversity of coach preparation and professional support pathways has certainly shaped our own thinking about how best to make sense of coaching over time.

Therefore, one of our core beliefs mentioned throughout this book is that many educators in schools take on coaching responsibilities, from those with the formal title of "coach" to others such as specialists/interventionists, teacher leaders, cooperating and mentor teachers, team leaders and facilitators, consultant teachers, department heads, assistant principals, and even at times principals. In other words, we have come to view coaching fundamentally as an *activity* rather than only as a *role*. Many individuals, regardless of title, may assume coaching responsibilities, which run the gamut from serving as a resource or mentor to others, to co-planning and co-teaching, to observing and providing feedback, and so on. Interventionists and specialists often take on coaching responsibilities (see Shauna Magee's Voices from the Field). Teacher leaders and grade-level or content-area teachers often are tasked with coaching colleagues with a similar disciplinary focus. The notion that many educators hold coaching responsibilities in schools is consistent with current research evidence that schools with a culture of shared leadership and collaboration are well positioned to increase student learning (Bryk et al., 2015; Bryk et al., 2010; Donohoo & Katz, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018; Louis et al., 2010). Ultimately, if we limit coaching responsibilities to only those who hold the formal title of "coach," then we risk losing or undermining the wealth of experience, knowledge, and savvy of many capable teachers and leaders. Consequently, this book is written for *all who coach adults in schools*, regardless of formal title.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

In 2013–2014, the district made the decision to transition the specialists into coaches. Up until that time, the reading specialist's main role was intervention and direct service of students. When the transition was made, administration suggested a 60% coaching and 40% intervention balance; however, the coaching model has looked different at each school, and even from year to year based on budget/staffing cuts, administrative changes, etc. Currently, I spend about 50% of my day working with students and 50% coaching.

—Shauna Magee, Literacy Coach

Coaching Is Helpful for All Educators, All Grades, All Disciplines

This brings us to our second foundational belief: Coaching can be critically important to improving teaching and learning in schools, across *all* educators, grade levels, and disciplines. Certainly, coaching can be beneficial for those responsible for teaching in elementary schools—for teachers working with the youngest learners who are just beginning to learn the basics of decoding sound–symbol connections, mastering their first sight words, learning early math facts, and developing a sense of wonder about the world and how to explore it via disciplinary lenses in the humanities, sciences, and arts. However, while coaching of teachers in the earliest grades makes great sense, we must not forget how beneficial coaching can be for those educators working in upper grades, as the instructional focus shifts to more complex vocabulary and comprehension instruction, sophisticated and abstract mathematical concepts, and extremely detailed and discipline-specific learning in history, science, and arts classes. A greater emphasis on teaching disciplinary literacy strategies to students as they move into middle school, high school, and university settings only increases the need for coaching teachers within and across disciplines across all grades as a means of improving students' content learning (Burke & Kennedy, 2024; Gabriel, 2023; Ippolito et al., 2024; Moje, 2015; C. Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014; T. Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012). In other words, coaching is key to helping teachers across all grades and subjects take on the challenge of merging content goals with discipline-specific literacy teaching and learning (Botel & Paparo, 2016).

Coaching Is Fundamentally Nonevaluative

Most educators who write about coaching do not view it as an evaluative process, one in which coaches participate in the formal evaluation of teacher practices or performance. Yet, in some districts, coaches are indeed asked to assume such an evaluative role, especially with the current emphasis on teacher performance evaluation. For example, in one district, teachers identified as "exemplary" were assigned as consulting teachers or coaches to work with and then monitor the work of beginning teachers and veterans who were experiencing teaching difficulties (Goldstein, 2009). Galey-Horn and Woulfin (2021), in a study of 41 instructional coaches across five educational systems, found that coaches often served as mediators of evaluation policy. These coaches collaborated with teachers to help them develop an understanding of evaluation and to support them in thinking about how to reach the goals the teachers had set for themselves. In other words, important questions have been raised recently about how coaches might be formally included in teacher evaluation practices as part of more coherent improvement and evaluation systems in schools (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). However, in practice, coaches can struggle when asked to assume both supportive coaching roles and evaluation roles. As stated by Toll (2006), evaluation responsibilities may make it difficult for coaches to develop trusting relationships with teachers.

In our experience, coaches are best positioned as colleagues who work with their peers as thought partners—tackling problems of practice, collaboratively inquiring, reflecting, and partnering to make decisions about how best to improve instructional practices. Although coaches can support teachers who have been identified as needing to improve by formal school leaders, in our experience, we believe that coaches should not formally evaluate teachers. As we have written about before (Ippolito & Bean, 2024), we have found it best for principals and coaches to clarify for all educators the "evaluation role of the principal and the supportive role of the coach" (p. 198). This joint message, that coaches are supportive peers and not evaluating supervisors, truly does need to come from both principals and coaches simultaneously.

Whether informally or formally, when educators such as coaches are asked to assume any evaluative role, they can learn much from the coaching literature and from this book about how to work with teachers in positive ways, provide constructive feedback, and encourage teachers to become more reflective about their teaching and learning. We suggest, however, that individuals who hold formal evaluative positions be given titles other than "coach."

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Business flows because coaching comes with a "no judgment" guarantee.
—Linda DiMartino, Literacy Supervisor

Coaching Should Continually Develop Teacher Capacity

Many coaches with whom we have worked have indicated surprise that teachers in their schools continued to seek the same sorts of support from them, even though these teachers have participated in various coaching activities over several years. There may be many reasons for this, including that the coaching perhaps focused almost entirely on early relationship-building activities, rather than slowly nudging teachers to internalize the work and take more ownership over their own professional learning. How often have we reverted to practices with which we are familiar or comfortable when we didn't have the support (and pressure) to keep using new practices (e.g., learning a new way to grip a tennis racket or a golf club)?

Therefore, coaching initiatives must offer both support and pressure, over time, in service of continually developing teacher capacity. In other words, coaching is not meant to—nor can it—*inoculate* individuals so that eventually there is no need for coaching. Remember Atul Gawande's (2017) powerful statement: "Everybody needs a coach. Everyone. The greatest in the world needs a coach." The implications of this notion are far-ranging. There are always new students, new frameworks, and new dilemmas for coaches and teachers to discuss. At all stages of their careers, all teachers

and coaches can learn from one another. At the same time, the focus of coaching should be on helping teachers grow professionally. As stated in the Learning Policy Institute Report (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) on effective teacher professional learning, educators must be prepared to teach in ways that enable students to achieve the competencies needed to handle the complex demands required for success in the 21st century. In this review, coaching is identified as one of the important features of any professional learning effort. Coaches can provide the guidance and support that builds teachers' capacity to "use new curricula, tools, and approaches" (p. 13); they can facilitate teacher reflection about their instructional practices and how to use student data to improve instructional decision making.

Coaching Is Most Effective When Focused on Both Individuals and Systems

We always encourage those who take on coaching work to simultaneously focus on both the needs of individuals and larger systems. All too often smart, talented coaches and leaders exhaust themselves by exclusively attending to the needs of teachers one-on-one. Similarly, others fail to make inroads with teachers because they tilt exclusively toward systems-level thinking, constantly planning for larger-group and whole-school initiatives, without attending to the individual differences and needs that arise among faculty. Others get caught up in management tasks—such as organizing assessment results, ordering and arranging materials, and so forth—that reduce the time and energy for coaching.

Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) highlight what many in the field have guessed for some time: that while coaches are often asked to support systemwide instructional change, coach preparation and support more often prepares them to work with individuals, "respond[ing] to teachers' individualized needs" (p. 187). Maintaining this dual focus on individuals and systems simultaneously requires clear communication with school and district leadership about the vision and theory of action for systems-level change. Questions that coaches can ask themselves as they endeavor to adopt a dual focus on individuals and systems include:

- To what extent are the principal, coach, and district-level leaders all on the same page about the goals of instructional change efforts?
- How clearly can each of these stakeholders articulate shared goals and action steps?
- How clearly have systemwide change efforts been communicated to (and solicited from or generated by) teachers across grades and schools?
- To what degree must work with individual teachers fit within a larger framework for change versus simple support of individual teachers' interests and needs?

As Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) suggest, without clearer alignment of focus at both the system and individual levels, coaches may default to thinking that "the sum of individual changes across teachers [might be] equivalent to systemic reform" (p. 203), which we would argue is rarely the case, particularly in large schools and districts. By maintaining a dual focus on individuals and the larger system, coaches act as organizational glue, building the collective capacity of teachers and leaders to move toward common, effective instructional practices.

Differences between Elementary and Secondary Coaching Are a Matter of Degree

As we have written elsewhere (Ippolito & Lieberman, 2012, 2020), we believe that there are real differences between coaching at elementary and secondary levels, but we see those differences more as differences of *degree* rather than of fundamental distinctions. Those who coach in the early grades and in the later grades must think about both the content of instruction as well as the coaching processes they might use. They need background knowledge and preparation about disciplinary standards, curriculum, and instruction, and they need to know how to work with individuals, groups, and systems. Further, scheduling is a challenge for all coaches, with both elementary and secondary coaches struggling to find time to work with teachers (as opposed to getting bogged down in administrative work).

While both elementary and secondary coaches have more in common than not, there are some differences in degree that seem to matter. For instance, secondary coaches are often expected to work with much larger groups of teachers, both within and across disciplines. Secondary coaches often need deeper background knowledge and preparation in content-area curriculum to best support content-area teachers in history, math, science, and so on. Finally, we often see the biggest differences when we look at elementary versus secondary coaches' pathways into coaching: More elementary coaches come to the role as experienced general classroom teachers or specialists, while more secondary coaches come to the role with a deeper content-area instructional background (e.g., former high school English, history, math, or science teachers). We believe that differences between elementary and secondary coaching are important to consider in both initiating and sustaining coaching programs; however, we also caution readers to not overemphasize the differences, and instead to look for commonalities across all roles that include coaching responsibilities.

Content Matters

Those who coach, and the school leaders who support them, must also pay careful attention to the ways in which coaching is shaped by the focus or "content" of that coaching work. As we have argued before (Ippolito & Bean, 2024), the instructional core of students, teachers, curriculum, and the classroom tasks that connect all three

(City et al., 2009) can have a direct and dramatic effect on coaching work. Fundamentally, school leaders and coaches must be sensitive to the ways in which the target of coaching work, the "content" that coaches and teachers discuss, shapes the overall coaching initiative; otherwise, coaching work may be too generic or diffuse to make much of a difference in teaching and learning.

In general, instructional coaches who are experts in the foundational disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge associated with their coaching work (e.g., literacy, math, SEL, and so on) are better able to facilitate teacher learning and to assist in the design and implementation of teaching and learning experiences. For example, literacy coaches unfamiliar with the research about effective phonics instruction will be less able to identify specific trouble spots, or areas where a teacher might provide a series of classroom experiences more closely connected to the research on how young students' brains learn to read. Likewise, at the secondary level, a math instructional coach without an awareness of the very real differences in student outcomes when memorizing equations versus describing and understanding deep connections between mathematical operations and real-world applications will be limited in what they can share with their teacher partners.

All of this points to the need to hire and support instructional coaches who are ready and willing to continually grow their disciplinary and pedagogical content knowledge. This speaks directly to the need for collaborative, ongoing professional learning for teachers and coaches together (Woulfin et al., 2023). For example, although more and more schools acknowledge the value of collaboration among teachers, too often neither the structure (i.e., scheduling) nor the support (e.g., availability and capacity of teachers to collaborate) are available (Bryk et al., 2015; National Center for Literacy Education, 2014). According to the report *Remodeling Literacy Learning Together: Paths to Standards Implementation* (National Center for Literacy Education, 2014), American schools do many things right, but at the same time, there is a need for *remodeling* to build an even better system. This is especially true if we are to create schools in which all students have equal access to educational opportunity. Coaches with deep content knowledge and expertise are poised to lead the way.

Context Also Makes a Difference

While content undoubtedly matters in shaping coaching efforts, more attention has been given recently to the notion that context also greatly influences coaching work. Coaching programs will look different depending on the context in which they are implemented (Hannan & Russell, 2020; Ippolito & Bean, 2024; Woulfin et al., 2023). School size, leadership structures, student demographics, experiences and backgrounds of teachers, experiences and backgrounds of coaches, and the existing culture of the school all have an impact on coaching initiatives. Other factors, such as union issues or written job descriptions, also influence the ways in which coaching

initiatives function. Such factors can affect the type of coaching model implemented (e.g., more directive, responsive, or balanced), the responsibilities of the coach (e.g., working with all teachers or only those who request support), and even the workload of the coach (e.g., full-time or part-time hours). These variables, across contexts, account for some of the difficulty in evaluating the effectiveness of coaching. As we have argued before (Ippolito & Bean, 2024), we can no longer conceptualize or enact coaching work without taking seriously the context-specific needs of each school and district. Successful coaching in one school or district cannot simply be transposed, without adaptation, to another context.

Coaching Can Have an Impact

Over the past several decades, researchers have been studying various aspects of coaching, including the roles and responsibilities of coaches and the effects of coaching on teacher practices. As mentioned, given the complexities of coaching, obtaining unequivocal evidence about its impact, especially on student learning, has been difficult. However, there appears to be growing evidence that coaching, if implemented effectively, can in fact influence and change teacher practices and student learning (Bean et al., 2010; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011; Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Matsumura et al., 2013; Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015).

Coaching can also influence teachers' beliefs and attitudes (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Kinnucan-Welsch et al., 2006; Vandeburg & Stephens, 2010). However, there continues to be a need for ongoing, rigorous studies that investigate coaching's multifaceted dimensions (e.g., coach preparation and qualifications, coaching activities, and the context in which coaching appears) (Swan Dagen & Bean, 2014). There is also a need for studies in which content, coaching processes, and context are all considered simultaneously; that is, in what ways might each affect the others?

STOP AND REFLECT

With a small group of professional colleagues, reread this section on core beliefs about coaching work. Use the Four A's protocol from the Center for Leadership & Educational Equity and the School Reform Initiative (see Web Resources at the end of this chapter) to discuss the beliefs. What **a**ssumptions are being made? What do you **a**gree with? What do you want to **a**rgue with? What, if anything, do you want to **a**spire to or **a**ct upon? Compare notes with colleagues and use this opportunity to clarify your own initial beliefs and assumptions about coaching. It may be worth keeping notes or recording these for yourself, to see if any of your beliefs shift or sharpen as you continue to read this book.

Having shared some of our core beliefs related to coaching, we now share the conceptual framework that will shape the rest of the book. We have come to use this framework with both coaches and school leaders to describe the larger enterprise of coaching work (including the effects of content and context on coaching) and to articulate and explore the habits of mind and ways of working that lead to effective coaching.

A Conceptual Framework to Support Coaching and School Improvement

We view coaching as a process of *facilitated* inquiry that enables teachers to make decisions, solve problems, and set or achieve both individual goals as well as the goals of the organization, specifically to improve classroom instructional practices and student learning. Further, such *collaborative* inquiry contributes to cultural and organizational changes necessary for improving the learning of all students.

We see effective coaching as being guided by an underlying set of coaching mindsets, that is, an established set of attitudes, beliefs/values, and feelings that influence coach behavior and support the ways in which coaches lead adult learning and collaboration, all in service of the continual improvement of teaching and learning. Such coaching mindsets ultimately guide the wide array of coaching activities that take place weekly in schools (e.g., holding conversations with teachers designed to increase awareness and reflection about instructional issues, modeling various interventions or strategies, observing, facilitating meetings about instruction or data, and so on) and can focus on individuals or groups. Although the stance of the coach, or how the coach approaches interactions with teachers, may differ depending upon teacher knowledge, experience, and receptivity to professional learning, coaching must always be built upon a foundation of respect for the goals and beliefs of individual teachers about teaching, learning, and content. Beyond the mindsets that influence the work of individual coaches, and to help coaches and the schools they serve to achieve their improvement goals, our framework also includes ideas related to the context in which coaches work, the subject-area content they're addressing, and the coaching processes they might choose to use. We believe this framework helps explain the ways in which coaching can become a powerful lever for supporting school improvement.

Over the years, given our own work as instructional coaches and subsequent research into the roles, responsibilities, and effects of coaching, we now often think about coaching from a systems perspective. In our most recent book, *The Power of Instructional Coaching in Context* (Ippolito & Bean, 2024), we introduced the Content and Coaching in Context (CCIC) Framework (see Figure 1.1). The CCIC Framework suggests that successful coaching is not just the result of expert coaches with good intentions and quality coaching processes, working with individual teachers.

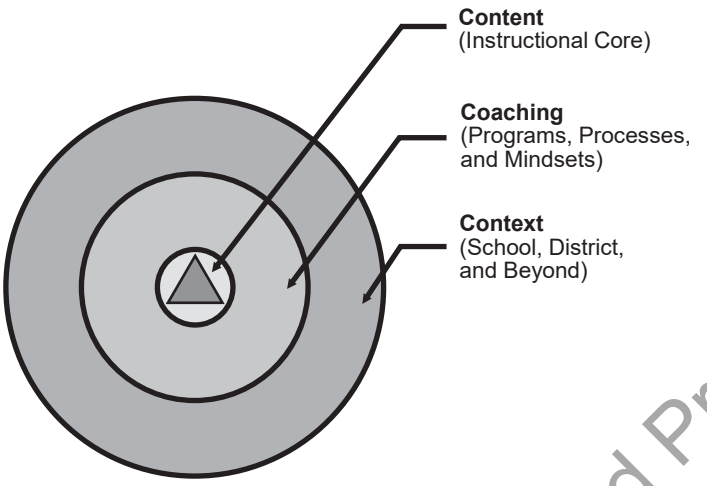

FIGURE 1.1. The Content and Coaching in Context (CCIC) Framework. Adapted from Ippolito and Bean (2024, p. 13). Copyright © 2024 The Guilford Press.

Instead, successful coaching also requires and may be more accurately described as the *alignment* of content (a clearly articulated instructional core or target for coaching work) with coaching programs and processes, all embedded within a supportive school and district context. Alignment of these domains (content, coaching, and context) can ultimately produce improved teaching and learning, as well as equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students.

In this current second edition of *Cultivating Coaching Mindsets*, we update and expand upon our previous work (Bean & Ippolito, 2016; Ippolito & Bean, 2018, 2024) by adding a layer of detail and complexity to our CCIC Framework, now detailing the mindsets that drive coaching work within the middle ring of our framework. We view these mindsets as those that instructional coaches must adopt to successfully influence the instructional core *and* the larger school or district context that shapes all coaching, teaching, and learning work. Therefore, we have embedded the mindsets within the coaching ring of our CCIC bullseye heuristic. While the four broad coaching mindsets we present in this second edition are not an exhaustive list of the ways in which coaches think and work, they do form a foundation for excellent job-embedded professional learning within and across disciplines, grade levels, and schools.

Our four revised and updated mindsets include thinking and working like a change agent, facilitator, designer, and advocate (see Figure 1.2). As change agents, coaches continually work to refine and improve teaching and learning processes in schools. As facilitators, coaches guide adult learning for individuals and groups. As designers, coaches work with teachers and leaders to reframe instructional dilemmas as design challenges to be solved. Finally, as advocates, coaches regularly lobby

for the needs of students, teachers, parents, and the community. We see these four mindsets as interwoven throughout all work within an effective coaching program, guiding the work of all those who coach and interacting with the content and context of schooling.

Inspired by the work of Jim Collins (2001, 2005) in his descriptions of "good to great" companies and schools, we also see our coaching mindsets as deeply connected to larger notions of leadership, adult relationships, mission/vision, and systems thinking within schools. We have seen these four interrelated notions act as drivers of coaching and school improvement, or what Collins (n.d., 2019) refers to as the "flywheel effect" for organizations. The term *flywheel* "comes from mechanics, where it refers to a very heavy wheel that is used to generate and transfer energy to other parts of a machine" (Adisa, 2020). The flywheel effect in education refers to many individual and early efforts that serve to build momentum and generate a cycle of ongoing improvement. In other words, coaching is incredibly difficult to enact successfully without the presence of strong leadership, collaborative relationships, a clear mission/vision, and a focus on systems thinking in a school. Over time, these four elements can support both coaching and rich learning for educators and students alike. Therefore, in addition to highlighting the four primary coaching mindsets across this book, you will also see many references to and connections with issues of leadership, relationships, mission/vision, and systems thinking.

Thus, our four coaching mindsets influence and are influenced by the beliefs and actions of coaches, teachers, leaders, and systems within schools. Coaches who adopt and model these mindsets—change agent, facilitator, designer, and advocate—are

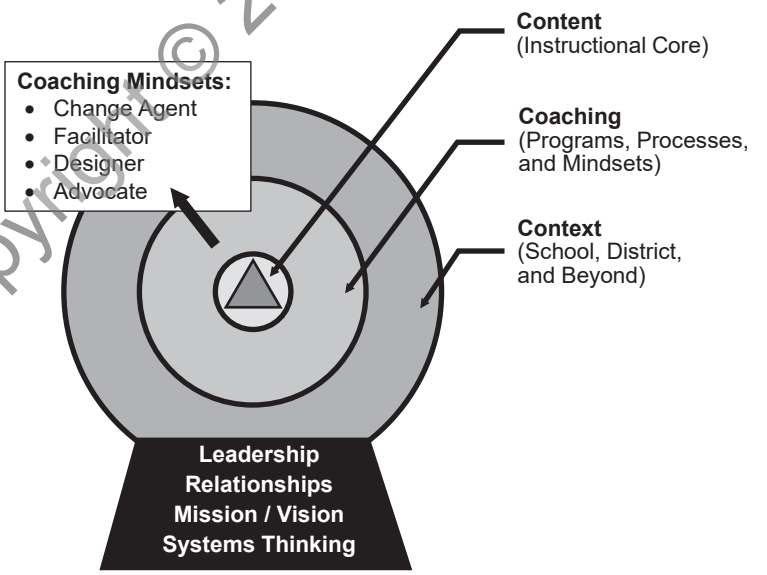

FIGURE 1.2. Framework for thinking and working like a coach.

well positioned to make a significant impact in their schools. Furthermore, as you may have surmised by now, we view these mindsets as adoptable by more than just formal instructional coaches. Teacher leaders, specialists/interventionists, special educators, librarians, principals, assistant principals, directors/coordinators, and more can adopt these mindsets as they go about their own work as leaders of adult and professional learning in schools.

Across this second edition, we zoom in on the various ways in which these four coaching mindsets can guide and shape the work of all who coach within schools. While each chapter may focus more on one or two mindsets, we have endeavored to make a connection to each mindset to some extent in each chapter.

Why Mindsets Matter

How you *think* about the process of improving teaching and learning matters a great deal as you strive to make changes in individual classrooms as well as in entire schools and districts. As scholars of organizational learning have written about extensively (see McDonald & Cities and Schools Research Group, 2024; Schein, 2010; Schön & Rein, 1994), the *mental models* or *frames* that we hold, and through which we view the world, matter enormously. Our mental models and frames shape how we think about our work and how we think about change processes. This is why we have chosen to highlight four critical coaching mindsets, or frames, and related actions across this book. To briefly illustrate, let's discuss the simple but powerful mental shift from thinking about change as a technical process versus an adaptive one. This is perhaps the first step in thinking like a change agent (discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2).

Much of coaching work is about helping colleagues to become more reflective practitioners and shift their instruction slowly to improve outcomes for students. However, if the work of coaching is viewed through a purely technical lens (Heifetz et al., 2009), or as single-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1996)—in other words, learning that simply requires detection of a problem and implementation of a known solution—then this frame for coaching will likely not produce the deep, systemic changes that most leadership work is meant to provoke. Instead, if coaching work is to result in deep changes in teachers' beliefs and instructional practices, then coaches must push toward adaptive (Heifetz et al., 2009) or double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1996)—in other words, the kind of learning that results in a fundamental questioning of beliefs, assumptions, and practices as steps toward transforming teaching and learning (rather than simply tinkering around the edges). Adaptive learning processes involve not just the analysis of current dilemmas but the analysis and shifting of an organization's fundamental beliefs, assumptions, and ways of operating as a result of the learning process.

Consider this example of the difference between a technical and adaptive change agent focus when coaching a fifth-grade math team. After identifying fifth graders'

poor math homework performance, the fifth-grade team of teachers assign a modified homework packet, simply reducing the number of problems and increasing the number of points assigned. In other words, they adopt a technical change mindset. The team is then surprised two weeks later that student performance has not shifted. At this point, the elementary math instructional coach begins to work with the team to take a more adaptive approach to the dilemma. The coach facilitates two separate "looking at student work" protocol-based discussions, encouraging the team to delve more deeply into the types of problems students are completing and those that are causing frustration. A number of insights emerge, about both the types of problems being assigned for homework and the relationship between direct instruction, students' independent practice in class, and success on the homework. The group of teachers begins to question the purpose of the homework assignments, and they quickly reconsider and reinvent the homework tasks, with the coach's assistance, to present students with menus of homework options to better practice the conceptual, computational, and communication skills and knowledge each student needs.

This shift, from a technical approach to a more adaptive and collaborative approach to change, may not occur without direct support from an instructional coach who has adopted the "change agent" mindset. Such adaptive learning requires educators (both teachers and coaches) to analyze their own assumptions about teaching and learning as part of the problem-solving process. While instructional coaches may be eager to help teachers solve current teaching and learning dilemmas quickly, the work of Argyris and Schön (1974, 1996), and Heifetz et al. (2009) reminds us that to effectively solve both current and future dilemmas, coaches need to think about their own adult learning and work habits.

In Chapter 2, we further review the four mindsets, or mental models, that we have found effective instructional coaches to hold over time. These mindsets, when applied consistently by dedicated coaches and informal leaders, produce the longest-lasting and biggest changes in teaching and learning. Most importantly, these frames are most successful when they align with the content, coaching practices, and context of each specific school. The alignment between espoused theory (i.e., what we *say* we do) and theories-in-use (i.e., what we *actually* do) (Argyris & Schön, 1974) is of utmost importance as instructional coaches talk the talk *and* walk the walk of organizational learning.

Why Leadership, Relationships, Mission/Vision, and Systems Thinking Matter

We end this chapter with a brief discussion of leadership, relationships, mission/vision, and systems thinking as key drivers and supports of instructional coaching. As research continues to investigate the ways in which school culture and context shape instructional coaching work (Woulfin et al., 2023), our own thinking about the deeply contextualized nature of coaching has evolved (Ippolito & Bean, 2024).

Over time, and as systems-focused research on school change has emerged (e.g., Bryk et al., 2015), we have found that the most effective coaching programs are those that pay great attention to the interdependent nature of these four factors and how they relate to the work of instructional coaches.

- **Leadership** is the foundation upon which all successful instructional coaching work rests. Principals, assistant principals, curriculum directors/coordinators, and other formal school and district-based leaders who deeply understand and support coaching efforts can make all the difference in fostering a schoolwide culture of collaborative inquiry and ongoing adult professional learning. Leaders can promote the work of coaches, encourage teachers to connect with coaches frequently, and release leadership responsibilities to both coaches and teachers (those closest to students). By promoting an environment in which teachers and coaches have real authority to make critical decisions about teaching and learning, school leaders pave the way for coaching success.

- **Relationships** are the well-researched, strong conduits for professional growth in schools. We are hard-pressed to find any successful coaching initiative that does not have strong relationships at its very core. Research on social networks in schools (Daly & Little, 2010), collective efficacy (Donohoo & Katz, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018), and collaborative school improvement processes (Bryk et al., 2015) provide us with a rich understanding of the ways that strong interpersonal relationships in schools can support positive shifts in teaching and learning. Moreover, coaching is an inherently relational activity, with a growing body of evidence suggesting that coaches are successful not just because of *what* they share with teachers but because of *how* they collaborate (Ippolito, 2010; Robertson et al., 2020b). Without a fundamental focus on building and sustaining strong relationships among adults in schools, coaching may never realize its true potential.

- **Mission and vision** guide the work of not just coaches but also the entire school community. We like to think of *mission* as the essential reasons for any organization to exist, tied closely to a school's core beliefs and values. In the case of many schools, the mission is to provide equitable and rich learning opportunities to all students, in service of promoting lifelong learning and robust opportunities for all. Mission-driven work includes all the nuts and bolts and the day-to-day work that helps a school achieve its goals. Meanwhile, we think of *vision* as the ability of an organization to paint a clear picture of the future, and to steer adult professional work carefully (adhering to mission) to eventually realize the goals of the organization. Schools with clearly articulated mission/vision statements, and lots of adult and student work to demonstrate how the mission and vision are being enacted every day, are fertile environments in which coaching initiatives can thrive. Schools in which mission/vision is muddy or constantly shifting struggle to support healthy coaching work.

- **Systems thinking** refers to the notion that coaches, as well as teachers and leaders, must not only deeply consider the efficacy of their own roles and work, but they must also consider how their work fits into the larger systems in operation in a school and district. As we discuss in the following chapters, shared goals and collective efforts across roles are what ultimately make coaching effective. As we have written about before (Ippolito & Bean, 2024), alignment across content, coaching, and context—or, alignment across systems of teaching, learning, coaching, and leading—is where success lies.

Increasingly, as we work not just with instructional coaches and coaching programs but also the teachers, leaders, and systems impacted by coaching, we find ourselves returning again and again to these domains of leadership, relationships, mission/vision, and systems thinking as important foundations for all effective coaching initiatives. We return to these ideas, interwoven with our coaching mindsets and related coaching practices, across the remainder of this book.

Summary

In this chapter we began by introducing Melinda as a focal figure who will be learning and thinking about coaching alongside us across this book. We then summarized some of the reasons why coaching matters more today than ever before. We shared nine core beliefs and major assumptions about coaching that we have developed over the years. Ultimately, we ended the chapter by introducing the framework that guides the remainder of this book, followed by brief discussions of why coaching mindsets matter and how leadership, relationships, mission/vision, and systems thinking undergird all good coaching work in schools. We now turn to Chapter 2, in which we further explore and articulate the four coaching mindsets at the heart of this book.

Reflections

- Which of the core beliefs and assumptions about coaching from this chapter do you most agree with? Disagree with? Which additional beliefs and assumptions do you bring to coaching work, given your own professional experiences?
- Look again at Figure 1.2 and consider the ways in which our four coaching mindsets—change agent, facilitator, designer, and advocate—connect to your work. Which mindset(s) do you already adopt in your own work? Which mindset(s) may be an area of growth for you? Which elements of the framework prompt questions or even confusion? Talk with colleagues about your thinking. Record questions that arise, in service of finding and composing answers as you read further in the book.

Activities

1. Read the *Kappan* article "How Coaches Get In" (see Web Resources at the end of this chapter). This article details a variety of ways that instructional coaches across content areas "gained access to teachers' classrooms" to best support teaching and learning work. Consider the ways in which the coaches highlighted in this article may have employed the coaching mindsets outlined in this chapter. Note the ways in which leadership, relationships, mission/vision, and systems thinking may have been drivers to support this coaching work.
2. Talk with two different individuals with coaching responsibilities. Use the following questions to guide the discussion (note: the questions could also easily be turned into a short questionnaire or an interview protocol, depending on your context and purposes). Be prepared to discuss the similarities and differences in how individuals respond to your questions and how their responses connect to the content of this chapter.
   a. How do you and your school district define coaching? Are your definitions similar? Different? In what ways?
   b. What do you see as the major focus or foci of your role(s): working with students, teachers, leaders, systems (e.g., school, district)?
   c. What are your major coaching activities? (That is, how do you spend your days?) Do you spend more time with individuals or groups of teachers?
   d. Which coaching mindsets do you think guide your work? How might the larger leadership, relationships, mission/vision, and systems thinking present in your school influence how you think about and carry out your work?
   e. To what extent do teachers understand your coaching role? (That is, how would other teachers define your role?)
   f. What are the stated goals that you are trying to achieve as a result of your coaching work (e.g., increased student achievement, changes in literacy practices)? To what extent are these goals related to the learning goals in your school? What supports your coaching work? What supports would you like to see put into place?

FURTHER READINGS AND RESOURCES

Print Resources

Aguilar, E. (2024). *Arise: The art of transformational coaching*. Jossey-Bass.

Costa, A., & Garmston, R. (2015). *Cognitive coaching: Developing self-directed leaders and learners* (3rd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Gibbons, L. K., & Cobb, P. (2016). Content-focused coaching: Five key practices. *The Elementary School Journal, 117*(2), 237–260.

Gibbons, L. K., & Cobb, P. (2017). Focusing on teacher learning opportunities to identify potentially productive coaching activities. *Journal of Teacher Education, 68*(4), 411–425.

Ippolito, J., & Bean, R. M. (2024). *The power of instructional coaching in context: A systems view for aligning content and coaching*. Guilford Press.

Woulfin, S. L., & Rigby, J. G. (2017). Coaching for coherence: How instructional coaches lead change in the evaluation era. *Educational Researcher, 46*(6), 323–328.

Woulfin, S. L., Stevenson, I., & Lord, K. (2023). *Making coaching matter: Leading continuous improvement in schools*. Teachers College Press.

Web Resources (see *www.guilford.com/bean3-materials* for live links)

Center for Leadership & Educational Equity and the School Reform Initiative. (2024). Four "A's" text protocol. *www.clee.org/resources/four-as-text-protocol*

Knight, J. (Host). (2024). Art Costa & Bob Garmston. *Coaching conversations with Jim Knight* [Audio podcast]. Apple Podcasts. *http://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/art-costa-bob-garmston/id1649791348?i=1000638305772*

Munson, J., & Saclarides, S. (2023). How coaches get in. *Kappan*. *http://kappanonline.org/how-academic-coaches-get-access-munson*