

## If Coaching Is So Powerful, Why Aren't Principals Being Coached?

By [Peter DeWitt](#) on [October 16, 2016 8:05 AM](#)



*If instructional coaching is beneficial to teachers, shouldn't leadership coaching be beneficial to principals?*

In most instructional coaching philosophies the teacher wants to be coached. Instructional coaching expert Jim Knight, someone I work with as an instructional coaching trainer, says that teachers should be the ones to choose to enroll with the coach. Additionally to that, those teachers should be able to choose the goal they want to work on. This initial aspect to the coaching cycle takes a lot of dialogue to get to the heart of why the goal is the best goal for them.

In those cases where a teacher doesn't know what goal to choose, but wants to do a full instructional coaching cycle, the teacher and coach co-construct the goals together. This may take a baseline observation or a teacher video-taping themselves to look at whether their engagement is authentic or compliant.

According to Knight's research, coaching is an effective way to provide individualized professional development to teachers because those teachers who choose to be a part of the coaching program are an eager participant in the process. Coaching will help teachers retain up to 90% of what they learned, as opposed to lose 90% when they go to the typical sit-and-get professional development. Knight's research certainly fits into the research of others who have studied professional development.

---

See also: [Does Your Coach Have Credibility?](#)

---

For example, Timperley et al (2007) found that the most effective professional development had the following elements.

- *Over a long period of time (three to five years)*
- *Involves external experts*
- *Teachers are deeply engaged*
- *It challenges teachers' existing beliefs*
- *Teachers talk to each other about teaching*
- *School leadership supports teachers' opportunities to learn and provides opportunities within the school structure for this to happen*

Leadership support can happen in different ways. In the best case scenario involving school leadership and teachers, a principal would suggest coaching as a way to help any teacher improve. That means teachers who may have a low level of self-efficacy (Bandura) and need assistance or a teacher who is a high flyer and can benefit from a keen eye and effective feedback.

### **What about principals?**

If principals believe that teachers can benefit from high quality coaching, doesn't that mean that principals can as well? I wonder how many would engage in that type of professional development? Many times the school leader believes that they are supposed to know it all, which is quite possibly why they moved to the principalship. And some principals may believe coaching is for teaching and not for them, which is an interesting dilemma when it comes to who values coaching and why. If coaches are good for teachers, shouldn't coaching be valuable for leaders too?

There are leaders who believe that coaching can be just as important for them as it is for teachers. This is the collaborative, growth and innovative mindset leaders should have. If leaders truly believe in being collaborative, they also understand that they have a blind spot (Scharmer) which they lead from on a daily basis, and they may need outside guidance on how to get through that blind spot. For example, a possible blind spot is that they may enter into a situation with a confirmation bias that prevents them from seeing what is really happening in the classroom.

*Let's use this scenario:*

A principal may enter into a classroom of a teacher that they don't necessarily believe is a strong teacher and look for the reasons to support their bias. A coach could help principals understand that they have a bias because that coach is entering without the same confirmation bias.

Additionally, leadership coaches may help leaders understand how they can communicate better with staff, students and parents. They can even help leaders understand how to build collective

teacher efficacy, which John Hattie, someone I work with as a Visible Learning trainer, has found to have an effect size of 1.57.

### **Practice What We Preach?**

Coaching can be very beneficial. I've seen the benefits more now than I ever did as a principal because I have had the luxury to work with highly effective coaches around the country. They don't want the position for status or power, but they do want to coach because they have a goal of helping their peers (build collective efficacy) at the same time they learn from those peers they work with.

The same can be done at the leadership level. Building synergy among leaders and getting them to try new strategies to build collective efficacy among their staff is something coaches can help do, and they often offer an outside perspective because they have worked with many other leaders.

We know from Knight's research and the research of others including Timperley that professional development, and that's what coaching is, is a lot stronger when both parties want to be a part of it. If coaching is beneficial to teachers, we can make it better for leaders as well. We just have to have the proper collaborative, growth and innovative mindset to get there.

**Peter DeWitt, Ed.D. is the author of several books including [Coach It Further: Using the Art of Coaching to Improve School Leadership](#) (Corwin Press. 2018).**