

The Coaching Wheel: Improving Educator Practice



Coaching Is Complex Work

Before coaching begins, the coach must know how to meet the teacher's needs. The coach must listen and focus on ways to empower the teacher through the coaching cycle process. There are times when coaches will find that they need tools to help focus a teacher on a specific goal for growth. Coaches must focus teachers in subtle and empowering ways to accomplish the following:



Maintain
trusting relationships



Protect
teacher autonomy



Honor teacher
self-efficacy

The Coaching Wheel

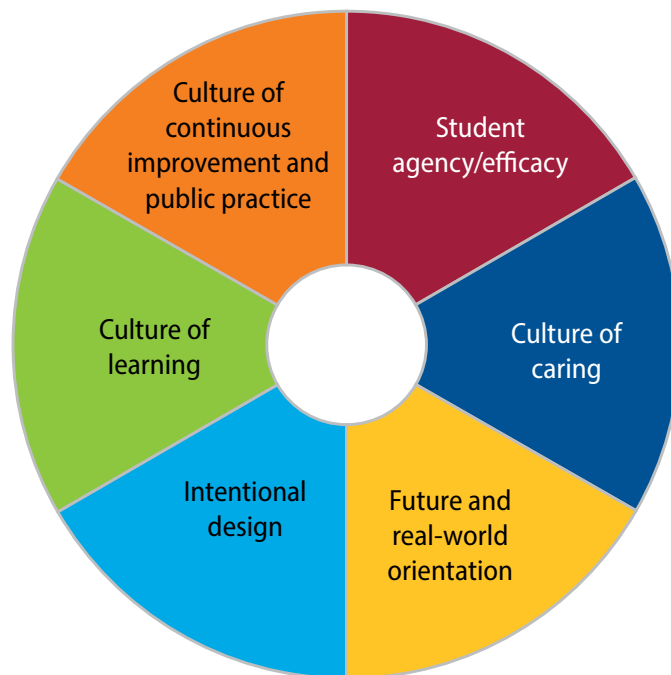
The coaching wheel is a tool used in many approaches to coaching, including in sectors such as health and wellness, business, finance, and life coaching. The tool

- Allows coaches to begin a coaching partnership by privileging the voices of teachers through their own self-assessment
- Reinforces **instructional coaching** practices
- Supports teachers in identifying areas of growth **within a given context**
- Provides a **concrete way to make meaning** of teachers' goals
- Adapts to **any coaching context**
- Helps coaches **explore issues of motivation and confidence** regarding teachers' goals
- Ensures that coaches **begin with teacher self-assessment** for growth
- Emphasizes teacher empowerment.

The wheel provides a concrete way to make meaning of, and take action toward, a teacher's goal(s).



The key to creating the wheel is to populate the wedges with elements of teaching and learning related to a larger initiative within which a teacher can choose a specific element.



Building the Wheel

Populating the sections of the wheel can happen in different ways. Elements can be completed by focusing on school- or district-wide initiatives, **using frameworks from related research**. For example, if the initiative is about increasing high-quality teaching and learning strategies throughout the school or district, the coach may want to complete the wheel with the elements of RTI's High-Quality Teaching and Learning framework. These include student agency/efficacy, culture of caring, future and real-world orientation, intentional design, culture of learning, and culture of continuous improvement and public practice. Another example might be if a school is implementing project-based learning (PBL). In this case, the coach may populate the wheel with elements of PBL, such as "giving students voice and choice" and "building a culture of inquiry in the classroom." Using the wheel in this way ensures that teachers have choice about how they approach implementation of school- or district-wide initiatives. If there is no required school- or district-wide initiative, sections of the wheel can instead be populated with elements of teaching and learning in which the teacher is personally interested.

Motivational interviewing techniques support teachers' self-efficacy and autonomy, which increase the likelihood of change.

Using the Wheel

Once a coaching wheel has been built, a coach uses the wheel to engage in conversations with a teacher using rating scales (or rulers) to explore the teacher's readiness and internal motivation for change. The teacher begins by rating all of the components on the wheel in response to a coaching prompt such as, "On a scale of 1–10 (1 is low, 10 high), rate your ability to effectively implement each element in the wheel."

Two specific rulers from Motivational Interviewing are the Importance Ruler and the Confidence Ruler.^{1,2} The Importance Ruler begins, "On a scale of 1–10, how important is each element of the wheel to you?" The Confidence Ruler begins, "On a scale of 1–10, how confident are you that you can make a change in each element?"

After the teacher independently rates each element of the wheel in response to a prompt (only one prompt is used at a time), a follow-up coaching conversation may look like this:



Coach: How did you rate Culture of Caring in terms of your confidence to make a change in your classroom?

Teacher: I'd say a 5.

Coach: What does that 5 mean to you?

[Teacher replies with an explanation of rating.]

Coach: And why didn't you rate yourself a 4?

Beginning by asking teachers to explain the numerical representation ensures that coaches do not make assumptions about what teachers are thinking or feeling. The second question—"Why not a *lower* number?"—encourages teachers to **focus on assets instead of deficits** in their explanations. Following up with questions about what it might take to increase confidence or motivation to an even higher number can move teachers towards action.

Steps of the Process

If you are a coach and want to use a wheel for instructional coaching, follow these steps:

- **Engage** in initial conversations with the teacher, school, or district to learn more about teaching practices and goals that might populate the wheel.
- **Build** the sections of the wheel with elements of teaching and learning related to the district, school, or teacher's goal(s). Remember that depending on the coaching context, these might be research-based elements of a school- or district-wide initiative, like social and emotional learning or PBL—or they may be teaching and learning practices in which the teacher is personally interested. The wheel should also include descriptors for each section to support the teacher's reflective thinking. The descriptors should be written so that there are clear distinctions among all elements. It may be important or helpful to **have another coach read the descriptors** prior to using the wheel with teachers to ensure clarity.
- **Allow** time for the teacher to be left alone with the wheel (can be 10–15 minutes prior to the start of the coaching session or this time can be incorporated into the session). During this time, the teacher will consider each wedge of the wheel and will use scaling questions to rate the importance of each section.
- **Use** the completed wheel to guide the follow-up coaching conversation after the teacher has self-assessed. Ask the teacher about strengths and opportunities for growth based on the completed self-assessment. Additional conversations may revolve around individual ratings for specific wedges of the wheel, including ratings for confidence and motivation.
- **Remember** to be an active listener who is focused on the teacher's assets and preferences for change and not to tell the teacher what they should work on or how they should begin to grow in their practice.

Contact

Catherine Hart

Education Consultant, Education Services
chart@rti.org
919.949.9555

Fredrica Nash

Education Consultant, Education Services
fnash@rti.org
919.423.0611

References

1. Rollnick, S., Miller, W. R., & Butler, C. C. (2008). *Motivational interviewing in health care: Helping patients change behavior*. New York: The Guilford Press
2. Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change*. New York: The Guilford Press.

www.rti.org/centers/education-services

RTI International is an independent, nonprofit research institute dedicated to improving the human condition. Clients rely on us to answer questions that demand an objective and multidisciplinary approach—one that integrates expertise across the social and laboratory sciences, engineering, and international development. We believe in the promise of science, and we are inspired every day to deliver on that promise for the good of people, communities, and businesses around the world. For more information, visit www.rti.org.