

Tailoring Coaching Cycles to Teachers: **Learning About Teachers' Current Practices and Perspectives**

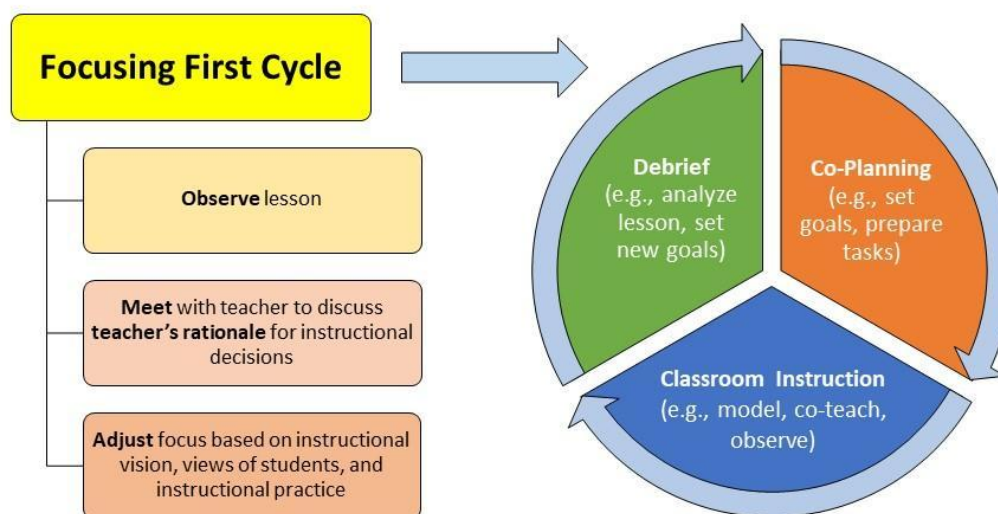
What should a coach do prior to the first cycle with a teacher? Why?

Overview

This is the second protocol in the series of seven one-on-one coaching protocols. Each protocol in the sequence focuses on a specific aspect of one-on-one coaching that is important in supporting teachers' to better support their students' learning. [In the first protocol](#) we described the components of one-on-one coaching cycles. This protocol highlights how coaches can tailor one-on-one coaching cycles to teachers' current practices and perspectives, and thus focus their work with teachers on issues that are the most beneficial for enhancing students' learning.

Why Tailor Coaching Cycles to Teachers?

A key strength of one-on-one coaching is that it enables coaches to tailor their support to individual teachers. It is therefore important for coaches to learn about individual teachers' current instructional practices and perspectives on high-quality teaching and students' current capabilities prior to conducting a first cycle. A coach can then use this information to adjust the focus of each coaching cycle so that it is most beneficial for the teacher's learning, and thus most beneficial for students. It is also important for coaches to continue to learn about teachers' practices and perspectives as they work with individual teachers over time. This enables coaches to adjust the focus of their coaching work in response to teachers' developments.



Tailoring the Work of the Three-Phase Coaching Cycle

To learn about a teacher's current practices and perspectives, a coach can observe a lesson. This can happen prior to conducting the first full coaching cycle and also as part of subsequent cycles. After the lesson, the coach can meet with the teacher to discuss what happened in the lesson and ask the teacher to share the rationale for instructional decisions in the lesson. The lesson observation provides a window into the teacher's current practices. The purpose of asking



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questions about the teacher's rationale is to gain insight into the teacher's instructional vision (i.e., the kind of instruction to which the teacher aspires) and the teacher's views of students' current mathematical capabilities. For example, a coach might ask, "If students do not learn as you hoped, what do you think are the reasons?"

Adjusting the Focus of Coaching Cycles to Individual Teachers

We outline three ways coaches often adjust the focus of their cycles based on what they learn about a teacher's practices and perspectives. We provide some initial guidance regarding when coaches might choose to focus on these issues, and how they might adapt the cycles.

Supporting the teacher to develop a more productive view of students' mathematical capabilities

- **When to focus here** — It is extremely unlikely that teachers will develop ambitious instructional practices unless they believe that such instruction is appropriate for their students. Therefore, if the coach determines that the teacher does not believe students are capable of learning from ambitious mathematics lessons that aim at rigorous learning goals, then it is reasonable for the first cycle to focus on developing more productive views of what students are capable of doing mathematically.
- **What this means for the cycle** — A coach might frame the goal of the cycle as providing an opportunity to learn more about students' thinking during the co-plan, after which the coach would then model the co-planned lesson and ask the teacher to document students' thinking while the coach teaches. During the debrief, the coach and teacher can discuss students' capabilities.

Supporting the teacher to develop a more ambitious vision of high-quality mathematics instruction

- **When to focus here** — It is all but impossible for teachers to enact instructional practices if they do not know what those practices look like. If teachers view students as capable of learning from ambitious lessons but are unsure what such lessons look like in practice, then it makes sense to focus on developing a clearer instructional vision.
- **What this means for the cycle** — In the co-plan, a coach might frame the purpose of the cycle as learning more about a specific instructional practice or learning about a particular lesson structure. A coach might model the co-planned lesson and ask the teacher to attend to the structure of the lesson and what the coach did when leading the lesson. During the debrief, the coach and teacher can discuss what it takes to implement a specific practice or an ambitious lesson that aims at rigorous learning goals.



Supporting the teacher's development of specific instructional practices

- **When to focus here** – Sometimes, it makes sense to focus the first cycle on supporting the teacher's development of specific instructional practices (e.g., launching tasks, supporting small group work, facilitating whole-class discussions).
- **What this means for the cycle** – A coach might plan a lesson with a teacher, and, in doing so, discuss how the teacher might enact a new practice. Then, the coach might co-teach the lesson *with* the teacher, in the process supporting the teacher to try out a new practice. During the debrief, the coach and teacher can discuss whether and how the new practice or strategy benefitted students.

Appendix I: Sequence of Protocols

The one-on-one coaching protocols are intended to parallel a sequence of coach professional development (PD) sessions that have proven effective in supporting mathematics coaches to enact one-on-one coaching cycles effectively with teachers.

In the PD, coaches are introduced to the ideas in the protocols in the following order:



1. [Overview of One-on-one Coaching Cycles](#)
2. **Tailoring Coaching Cycles to Teachers: Learning about Teachers' Current Practices and Perspectives**
3. [Debriefing After a Lesson](#)
4. [Preparing for Debriefing Conversations: Identifying Productive Instructional Improvement Goals](#)
5. [Deep Dive on Debriefing Conversations: Negotiating Productive Instructional Improvement Goals](#)
6. [Co-Planning a Lesson](#)
7. [Incorporating Practical Measures into One-on-one Coaching Cycles](#)

