Why
Coaching?

is about

explaining why
instructional
coaching may
be a better option
than other forms
of professional
development

the failure of
traditional
professional
development

through a
discussion

by
previewing

what's in
the book

by describing the
event that gave birth
to this approach

by summarizing

the October
Session

by reviewing other

the research on
instructional
coaching

common forms
of coaching

Why Coaching?

Quick fixes never last and teachers resent them; they resent going to inservices where someone is going to tell them what to do but not help them follow up. Teachers want someone that's going to be there, that's going to help them for the duration, not a fly-by-night program that's here today gone tomorrow.

—Lynn Barnes, instructional coach, Pathways to Success

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The pressure to improve instruction in schools may be greater today than at any other time in the history of American education. Instructional coaching, the topic of this book, can help schools respond to the pressure. This chapter provides an introduction to instructional coaching, discussing (a) why traditional professional development fails, (b) the session that prompted the development of this model of instructional coaching, (c) various forms of coaching, (d) the research conducted on instructional coaching, and (e) the topics that will be discussed in future chapters.

THE FAILURE OF TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For better or worse, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has turned the nation's attention to the way teachers teach and students learn, and schools everywhere are searching for proven ways to improve students' scores and to help their schools achieve Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Feeling the heat of NCLB, educational leaders are paying unprecedented attention to how students and teachers learn in their schools and classrooms. With their magnifying glasses focused on instructional practices, many school leaders are discovering that traditional training methods simply do not get the job done.
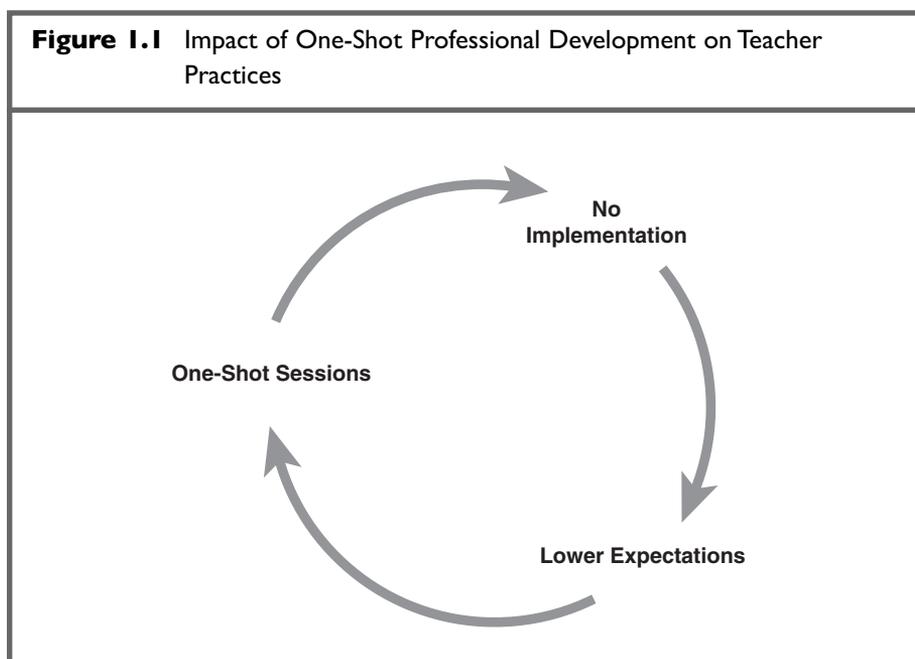
The unprecedented interest in instructional improvement has also heightened decision makers' interest in effective professional development practices. As research has shown for years, traditional forms of professional development are not effective, usually getting no better
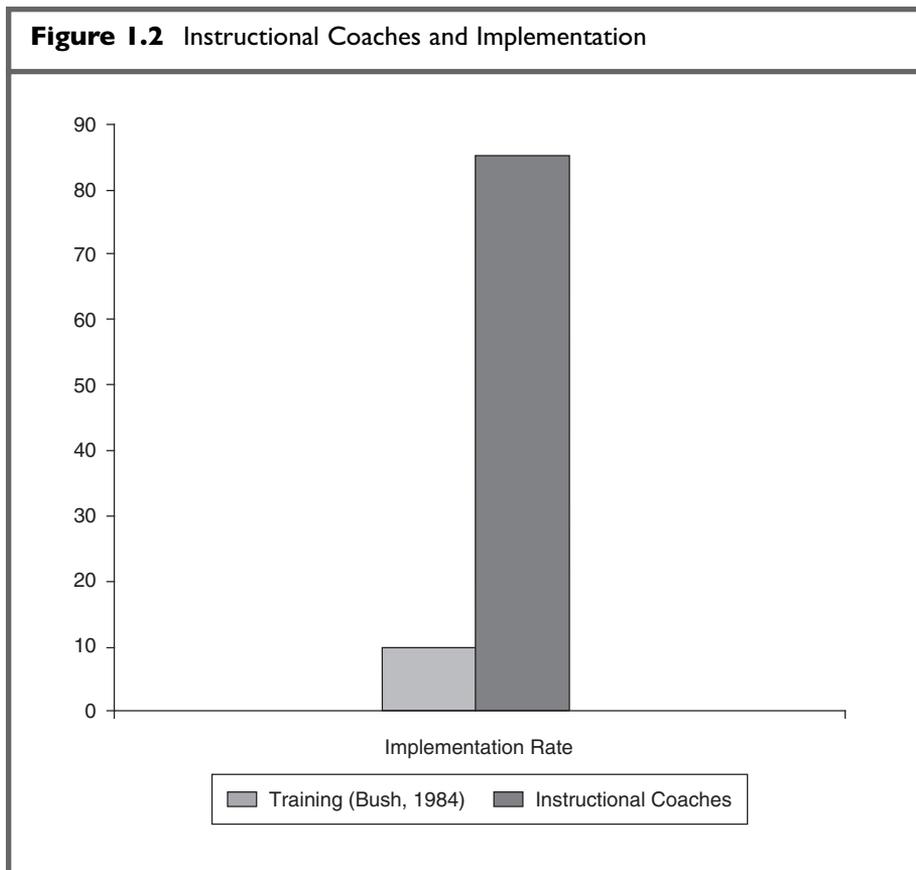
than a 10% implementation rate (Bush, 1984). Teachers' stories reinforce what research suggests. During hundreds of interviews I've conducted across the United States, teachers are unanimously critical of one-shot programs that fail to address practical concerns. Teachers criticize training that lacks follow-up and that fails to recognize their expertise.

The old model of an expert talking to a room full of strangers is in some cases literally worse that nothing, leaving teachers frustrated, disappointed, insulted—feeling worse off than before the session. One teacher I interviewed a few years ago summed up the view of many teachers I've spoken with over the years: "It's not like we are undergraduates. There are many people on our staff who are bright and who do read what's going on in the field, who do take classes on their own time, not because they have to but because they love to teach. And I do think it's kind of demeaning [when a presenter appears not to] know about that."

The worst consequence of an overreliance on traditional forms of professional development may be that poorly designed training can erode teachers' willingness to embrace *any* new ideas. After attending several unsuccessful training sessions, teachers often lose their enthusiasm for new interventions, and each additional ineffective session makes it more and more difficult for them to embrace new ideas. Increasingly, as the diagram below indicates, it looks like the chances are slim that any one-shot program, no matter how well presented, will have any positive impact on teaching.

Figure 1.1   Impact of One-Shot Professional Development on Teacher Practices

One-Shot Sessions → No Implementation → Lower Expectations → One-Shot Sessions

Figure 1.2 Instructional Coaches and Implementation

Implementation Rate

Training (Bush, 1984)   Instructional Coaches

When educational leaders see their one-shot programs failing to catch fire, they start searching for reasons for that failure. Not surprisingly, teachers are often blamed for "resisting change." In turn, teachers, feeling slighted by their leaders, tell each other "this too will pass" whenever a new innovation is introduced. Ultimately, both educational leaders and teachers get caught in a vicious cycle of blame and resistance. That is, educational leaders increasingly express their frustration with teachers who resist change, and teachers who experience poorly designed program after program adopt apathy as a cultural norm.

After interviewing more than 150 teachers across the United States about their views on professional development, I have concluded that teachers do not resist change so much as *they resist poorly designed change initiatives*. Teachers engage in professional development every day—they just don't do it with professional developers. Teachers learn from each other all the time, sharing lesson plans, assessments, activities, and ideas about individual students. Our experience has shown that when teachers receive an appropriate amount of support for professional learning, more than 90% of them embrace and implement programs that improve students' experiences in the classroom. The chal-

EMPLOYING SELF-ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE-BUILDING PRACTICES TO GO SCHOOLWIDE WITH INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

Our belief that ideas proliferate through word of mouth and the collective power of individual teachers has challenged us to rethink how interventions are implemented across teams and schools. We recognize that the most powerful professional development brings teams and schools together to pursue specific targets and goals. Stephanie Hirsch, Director of the National Staff Development Council, who has studied several effective coaching programs, has made the point to me in conversation that "the coach's job is to get [each learning team] to a point where it is a high-functioning team without the coach, and then . . . move on to another team." She adds, "you have greater impact when you're very deliberate about what the coaches will do and the role they will serve within the school, and how their time will be used."

While ICs and other change agents must be deliberate about what they do, they also have to let go of the notion that they can arrive at a school with preconceived, tidy, inflexible, five-year plans for school reform. Real life in schools has shown us for a long time that, as Michael Fullan has observed, "the direct approach of naming the goal and mobilizing to achieve it does not, and cannot work in something as complex as change agentry" (2001, p. 1). You need to "resist controlling the uncontrollable . . . you need to tweak and trust the process of change while knowing that it is unpredictable" (Fullan, 2003, p. 21).

The challenge, then, is "to be deliberate" at the same time as you resist "controlling the uncontrollable," but is that possible? Educational leaders can meet this challenge by utilizing a self-organizing approach to organizational learning. What we mean by self-organization can be illustrated by a simple example.

In the 1960s, when architect Ronald J. Thom was drawing up the designs for the beautiful Trent University campus in Peterborough, Ontario, he wanted to create a campus that, among other things, allowed pedestrians to move from building to building in the easiest and most natural manner. Mr. Thom came up with a design plan that was as innovative as it was obvious. He first had grass planted all over campus, and waited to put in the sidewalks and pathways. After a few weeks, students walking around the university had created paths in the grass along all of the easiest walking routes. Once students' footprints had marked the most natural routes, the builders constructed the sidewalks right there.

This story exemplifies the self-organizing approach to sharing ideas taken by some educational leaders and their ICs. They do not come to school with inflexible, preconceived notions of exactly what their school needs. Rather, they engage in a process of building coherence after they arrive at the school, maybe starting with only a few interested teachers. Each IC's goal is to build