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Instructional Coaching in Higher Education

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Abstract: Instructional coaching is prominent in K-12 education and was bolstered in the United States due to federal support of professional development to improve student learning. Yet, despite the rise in use of instructional coaches in K-12 education, institutions of higher education often do not utilize instructional coaching, or, if they do, it is not holistically integrated into an enterprise-wide support program that fosters continuous instructional improvement. As a result, the following proposal offers key insights into what instructional coaching entails and how it might be effectively integrated into higher education.

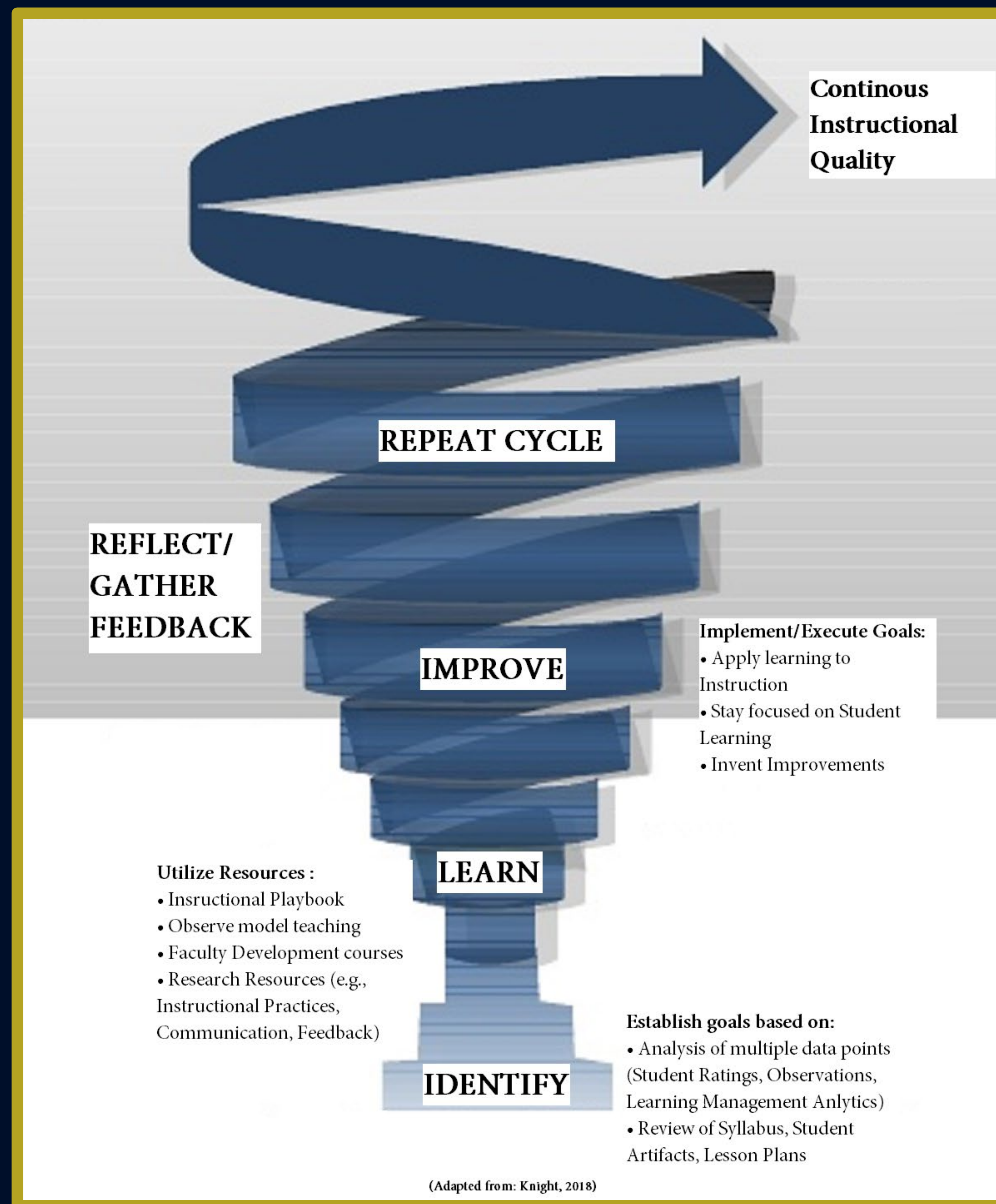
Definition: Knight (2018) defines instructional coaching as the following: “Instructional coaches partner with teachers to analyze current reality, set goals, identify and explain teaching strategies to meet goals, and provide support until the goals are met” (p. 22).

Key Skills of Instructional Coaches (Kowal & Steiner, *Instructional Coaching*, 2007):

1. Pedagogical Knowledge
2. Content Expertise
3. Interpersonal Capabilities

Coaching Vs. Mentoring (Mager, 2017): Unlike mentoring, instructional coaching is a **task-oriented, short term, performance-driven** connection that exists to fulfill a very specific need related to instruction.

Knight (2018) indicates that deeper coaching occurs when coaches serve as equal partners to help identify, learn, and improve together. Through what he calls “the impact cycle,” coaches are most effective when employing seven key principles: “equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity” (p. 22). As a modified version of Knight’s underpinning framework, I suggest the following phases for the instructional coaching spiral:



Key Elements of an Effective Coaching Program (Kowal & Steiner, *Principal as Instructional Leader*, 2007):

1. Focused on subject-matter content
2. Aligned with other reform efforts.
3. Focused on how students learn
4. Ongoing, rather than short-term, with opportunities for feedback and reflection

Opportunities in Higher Education:

1. First year experience for faculty
2. Conduct routine observations and identify opportunities
3. Utilize data and promote a culture of continues quality improvement.

Conclusion: Given that instructors are well trained in content expertise but not often trained in graduate school to learn to teach, it behooves institutions of higher education to explore the instructional coaching terrain and apply key research based best practices to improve student learning.

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