Reimagining Instructional Coaching: Building Reflexive, Responsive and Relational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the nature of instructional coaching to understand how a reflexive, responsive and relational approach can enable a distributed leadership model in a private school setting in India. The study was carried out at Inventure Academy, a K-12 Cambridge school in Bengaluru, India, through a year-long engagement with 13 English teachers. Data sources included weekly meeting notes, anonymised teacher feedback, manager and senior teacher feedback and a 360° appraisal shared by the school. A qualitative analysis of these datasets was conducted using the Braun and Clarke six-step thematic analysis, followed by a cross-case triangulation of the emerging themes across the datasets. Four themes were finalised: research-informed expertise, feedback-driven reflective practice, organisation and systematisation (planning and follow-up) and relational and team practice. Findings highlight an interplay between these four themes in enabling a reflexive, responsive and relational coaching model. This study contributes to understanding the nature and effectiveness of instructional coaching in supporting distributed leadership in international school contexts in South Asia, presenting insights for adapting global models to culturally specific educational settings.

Introduction

The Coaching Imperative

Coaching bridges the gap between knowledge and practice, improving and enhancing both individual development and collective performance. Instructional coaching in educational settings is more specifically understood as a directive approach, where the coach's role is to guide and support the teacher to make powerful and lasting changes (Fletcher-Wood & Taevere, 2022). It is an impactful means to deliver professional learning because it deploys all of the characteristics of effective professional learning, which include collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, classroom-focused, and sustained (Lewis & De Santis, 2024, p. 6).

In India's competitive academic environment, where teacher performance is closely tied to student achievement, these lasting changes can be qualified as transforming isolated teacher successes into systemic approaches, adopting and adapting global best practices to local classroom contexts, and creating intentional spaces where educators can continuously learn and refine their craft through supported practice. These changes are aligned with the positioning of international schools in Indian settings, which Bianca Daw (2024) describes as sites where global and local discourses are negotiated.

At Inventure Academy, a Cambridge-certified K–12 school in Bangalore, India, a negotiation of the two discourses is evident in its core purpose of empowering learners, both teachers and students, to realise their full potential, ignite change and create positive impact and its core values of cultivating dynamism, encouraging sensitivity and compassion, building integrity and freedom with responsibility, inculcating a passion for excellence while maximising learning opportunities and developing individuality and teamwork.

In my role as an instructional coach for the Primary English Department at this school, I was tasked

with refining subject-related pedagogical practices, co-teaching and modelling classes, providing consistent and constructive feedback, and building teacher capacity. This context illustrates Daw's (2024) description of hybrid learning spaces where instructional coaching mediates between global practices and local, cultural norms and expectations.

While Indian policy bodies such as SCERT (State Council of Educational Research and Training) and NCERT (National Council for Educational Research and Training) emphasise a similar role for mentor teachers in building capacity, research that examines effective models of instructional coaching within diverse organisational settings, especially international schools, remains scant (Lakra & Soni, 2025).

Current studies on efficacious instructional coaching approaches have been conducted in Western settings, and these remain largely unexplored in international schools in India as a context. Even fewer triangulate data from the coaches' meeting notes, as well as teachers' feedback, and a 360° appraisal to form insights that cultural norms and hierarchies have on the impact of instructional coaching.

At the same time, leadership research has shown that distributed leadership, under the right conditions, strengthens collaboration, collegiality, and teacher motivation to contribute to educational change (Harris et al., 2022; Amels et al., 2020). Yet distributed leadership in South Asian schools is often constrained by hierarchical norms and accountability pressures (Dhingra, 2024; Lakra & Soni, 2025). Instructional coaching, with its emphasis on collaboration and feedback, offers a promising mechanism for enabling distributed leadership. However, research on instructional coaching models as enablers for distributed leadership in international school settings in India remains largely untouched.

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how instructional coaching as a reflexive, responsive and relational model can enable distributed leadership in an international school in India, with a focus on the cultural norms that impact it. I do this by answering three research questions: (1) How does instructional coaching influence teacher practice and autonomy? (2) How do cultural dynamics shape receptivity to feedback? (3) How can reflexive, responsive and relational coaching enable distributed leadership in an international, private school in India?

Method
Context and Participants

This study was conducted at Inventure Academy, a Cambridge-certified K–12 school in Bangalore, India, which believes in a learner-centred, experiential pedagogy. The school was founded by female leaders, and at the time of the study, the leadership in charge of the Primary English department was also all female. The participants included 15 English teachers from Grades 1-5 across two campuses of the school, as the scope of my responsibilities extended to all the teachers in the Primary English department.

The teaching and education profile of only 13 of these 15 teachers is represented in Graph 1 (Teacher Demographic Summary), as two of them had consequently resigned and were unable to share the information represented. All the participants were female, Indian residents who had procured their educational qualifications in an English medium within the country. While all teachers have completed their undergraduate studies, I have only captured teaching or education-specific qualifications on the graph.

Data specific to the time spent at Inventure Academy teaching English was collected since the curriculum follows a balanced literacy approach with the Reading and Writing Workshop model, which is exclusive to this international school in the city. Hence, all teachers were exposed to this approach to teaching and learning literacy subsequent to joining Inventure Academy.

Figure 1
Teacher Demographic Summary
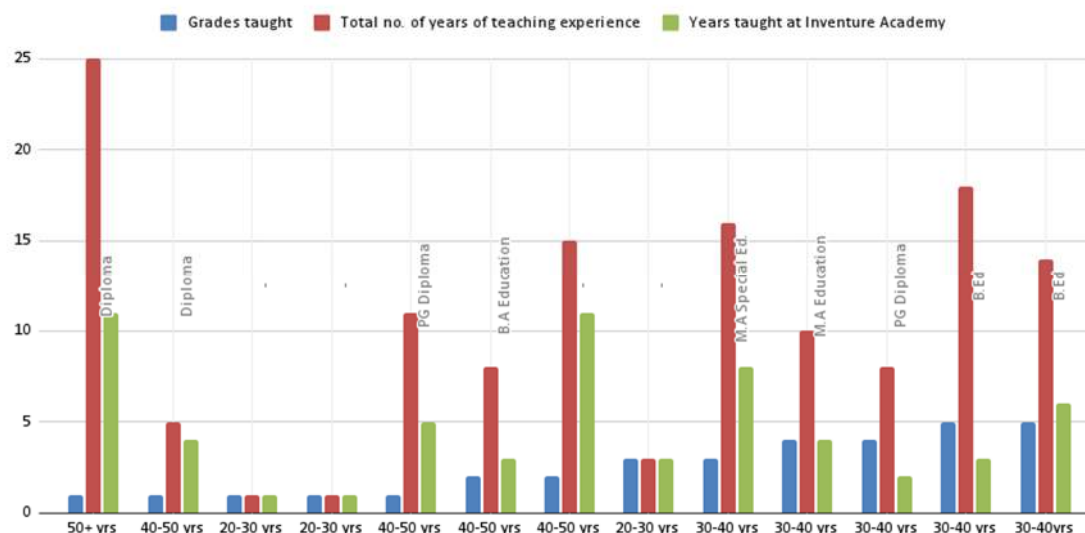
According to Willson and Falcon (2018), balanced literacy is characterised by a balance of teacher- and student-initiated activities (Spegiel, 1994, as cited in Willson & Falcon, 2018), where equal attention is given to phonics skills and whole-language approaches (Goodman, 1992, as cited in Willson & Falcon, 2018), and explicit instruction is used while engaging students in authentic learning experiences that incorporate both reading and writing activities (Tompkins, 2017, as cited in Willson & Falcon, 2018). The components of the balanced literacy approach taught at Inventure Academy include interactive read-aloud, shared reading, guided and independent reading, reading workshop, word study, and writing workshop, which includes modelled writing, guided and shared writing, and independent writing practices.

Five hours of weekly teaching time were allotted to English in the timetable, of which two hours were spent in delivering the writing workshop and one hour was dedicated to the reading workshop. The remaining two hours were divided between the other components listed above. In these workshops, "the following literacy activities happen: a mini-lesson, guided and independent practice, and closure" (Willson & Falcon, 2018).

My role as an instructional coach involved supporting the teachers through in-class modelling, lesson feedback, collaborative planning and introducing the latest research-backed subject-specific best practices and pedagogies as they taught the various components of the balanced literacy model. I spent two weeks on campus and two weeks online, working in a hybrid style. I was a part of each teacher's class weekly (twice a month). For teachers who had been teaching at the school for five years or less, I had one-on-one weekly meetings with them. I met the teachers with over five years of experience at the school once every two weeks. Each meeting was scheduled for a maximum of 30 minutes.

Data Collection

Although I worked with 15 teachers, for the purpose of this study, I analysed meeting notes of the 13 teachers whose demographics were recorded (as shown in Graph 1). The academic year extended from June 3rd 2024, to April 11, 2025. These included a total of 189 working days for Primary, of which 75% (142 days) were dedicated to curriculum delivery and 25% (47 days) to school events. Across this teaching time of 142 days, 203 meetings were documented (as shown in Graph 2). The unequal distribution of meetings was due to teacher unavailability resulting from an event or alternate school-related responsibilities, absenteeism, or differentiated needs.

Figure 2

Frequency of Meetings
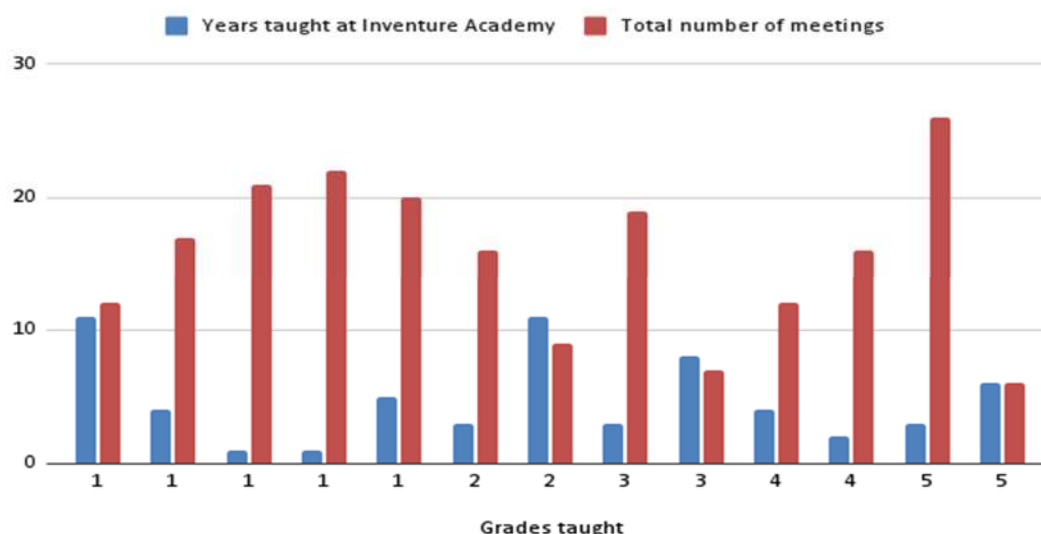
The meeting notes were documented using the template as presented in Figure 3 (Weekly Meeting Notes). The objectives of these meetings included: (a) discussing challenges and areas of support; (b) reflecting on tips, strategies, and feedback shared during walk-in or informal classroom observations or modelling lessons; (c) examining learning trends and gaps while reviewing student work and assessment data; (d) identifying ways to differentiate and meet diverse learner needs; and (e) clarifying curriculum delivery.

Figure 3
Weekly Meeting Notes Template

The second dataset consisted of anonymised teacher feedback collected at the end of the year using a Google Form. Teachers were asked to evaluate the nature of the support extended during in-class modelling, lesson feedback, collaborative planning and subject-specific best practices and pedagogies were sought. The responses were captured through a rating scale of very helpful or very effective to not at all helpful or effective. Open-ended questions invited teachers to elaborate on specific aspects of the instructional coaching model that were most or least helpful, along with any other additional comments teachers wanted to share.

The third dataset comprised feedback solicited by my manager at school from three teachers who have

been a part of the Primary English team for more than five years. The teachers responded to prompts, which were: (a) What should I start doing? (b) What should I stop doing? (c) What should I continue doing?

The final dataset used was a 360° appraisal shared by the school on six core dimensions: (a) teamwork (b) leadership (c) drive for results (d) stakeholder orientation (e) collaboration (f) inclusive workstyle. Ratings were given on a 7 point scale and scores were reported as averages across manager, peer and self assessments. The quartiles were defined as (a) $\geq$ 5.85 (b) 5.61–5.84 (c) 4.51–5.60 and (d)$\leq$ 4.50. In addition to the quantitative ratings, qualitative comments on strengths and areas for improvement were also provided.

The data collected was analysed using Braun and Clark's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. In phase 1, I familiarised myself with the data through repeated reading of meeting notes, teacher feedback, senior teacher comments, and the 360° appraisal. In phase 2, I generated initial codes to capture meaningful features across datasets, including notes on conferencing, differentiation, feedback, and relational practice. In phase 3, codes were clustered into candidate themes that reflected broader patterns in the data. In Phase 4, these themes were reviewed against the coded data and across datasets to assess both coherence and distinctiveness. In phase 5, the themes were defined and named to capture their essence and scope. Finally, in phase 6, illustrative extracts were organised and elaborated in relation to the research questions.

I also undertook a cross-case triangulation to compare the themes emerging across the four datasets. This process enabled me to identify overlaps and distinctions between datasets, and to trace patterns that shaped teacher autonomy, relational dynamics, and leadership.

Analytical Framework

I leaned into literature on instructional coaching, teacher identity, the role of feedback in teacher professional learning, predominant leadership styles in India, relational leadership theory and distributed leadership to answer the three research questions: (1) How does instructional coaching influence teacher practice and autonomy? (2) How do cultural dynamics shape receptivity to feedback? (3) How can reflexive, responsive and relational coaching enable distributed leadership in an international, private school in India?

First, I built my understanding of the characteristics of instructional coaching, barriers and enablers of successful coaching and the nature of coaching that becomes a mechanism for change by reading Fletcher-Wood and Taevere's (2022) research conducted for the British Council in Estonia. The paper emphasizes the importance of coaching expertise paired with dialogic and reflective conversations that are sustained by regular visits, continuous feedback and co-construction of strategies for producing professional learning, long-term change and ownership. This understanding was supported and augmented by Lewis and DeSantis (2024), who added two other key elements to successful coaching by stating that, in addition to it being sustained, it also needs to be in the participant's classroom and personalised. It also made me realise that, much like the teachers, coaches too wear multiple hats (Lewis & DeSantis, 2024).

A further augmentation to this learning was added by the adult learning principles as proposed by Knowles (1980) who stated that modeling lessons bridges theory and practice, enabling teachers to observe and apply instructional strategies in real-time, thereby enhancing the relevance of the curriculum and supporting adult learners' preference for practical, experience-based learning and reviewing student work promotes reflective practice, allowing teachers to identify their strengths and areas for growth, which supports lifelong learning. Knowles (1980) also reconfirmed that a core aspect of adult learning was that the support was provided in class and further clarified that motivation for adult learning is directly related to their current needs and interests, and these needs change with age and learning style.

Next, I drew on Emese Bukor's (2011) exploration of teacher identity, particularly her emphasis on the interplay between personal and professional selves. Her review of "Educational Research Perspectives on Teacher Identity" helped me recognise that teachers' receptivity to feedback is shaped not only by professional norms but also by their individual histories, beliefs, and identities. This lens encouraged me to understand the teachers more holistically by locating them in a specific cultural context.

My knowledge of what influenced feedback in professional learning, apart from timing and specificity, was enhanced by Parpucu and Al-Mabuk (2023), who argue that a focus on process rather than judgement, coupled with 'next-steps' for action over an emphasis on corrections, increased the impact of feedback during coaching cycles. The paper also reported that teachers wanted the agency to be able to respond to and question

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feedback as well as co-construct the next steps for action, making a case for a dialogic environment to enhance professional learning.

To better understand how to characterise this 'environment' for international schools in Indian contexts, or these hybrid learning environments, I read Dhingra, Srivastava and Srivastava (2024), who reveal that cultural factors such as higher power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance affect leadership styles in India, which consequently impact how feedback is received and acted upon. These factors also affect decision-making and interpersonal interactions. The study also highlights how collective values promote team cohesion and shared accountability, which are foundational to distributed leadership models. Finally, the authors advocate for culturally responsive leadership practices that balance hierarchical expectations with participatory engagement, thus enabling leaders to navigate complex social dynamics effectively.

The concept of distributed leadership in educational settings is not new and continues to be debated and often critiqued for its multiple interpretations. For this study, I adopt Hickey, Flaherty, and McNamara's (2022) perspective that distributed leadership is "a practice involving the interactions between leaders, followers and their environment with an emphasis on the importance of context" (p. 2). In this view, leadership emerges through relational processes embedded in organisational routines and interactions rather than through individual authority. I also build on Harris (2013, as cited in Hickey et al., 2022), who stresses that the purpose of adopting distributed leadership is to improve the quality of leadership practice itself.

Finally, since distributed leadership relies heavily on interactions, Uhl-Bien's relational leadership theory (2006) is particularly useful. It understands leadership as ongoing, socially constructed, and embedded in relationships rather than individual traits. This perspective supports a reflexive, responsive, and relational model of instructional coaching, where both coach and teachers co-construct solutions, share responsibility, and adapt practices to their context.

Together, these theoretical anchors situate instructional coaching as not only a mechanism for teacher development but also as a practice capable of enabling distributed leadership in international school settings in India.

Results

Thematic analysis of the four datasets revealed four overarching themes that characterised how teachers perceived the instructional coaching support: (a) research-informed expertise, (b) feedback-driven reflective practice, (c) organisation and systemisation, and (d) relational and team practice

Researched-informed expertise

This theme describes teachers' perception of and reception to the subject-specific practices that were suggested during the one-to-one meetings. The data shows a positive impact of instructional coaching on the teachers' professional learning and classroom practice.

Evidence of this theme appeared consistently across all four datasets. The meeting notes recorded teachers asking for strategies to support guided reading, scaffold writing workshops, and adapt literacy practices to different learner needs. Teacher feedback confirmed this pattern, too, when ten of the thirteen teachers rated the sharing of subject-specific best practices as 'very helpful.' One teacher commented, *"New strategies shared during planning made my writing workshop classes more effective."*

Senior teacher feedback also reflected this perception, highlighting that the coaching role kept teaching and learning practices current: Bringing in new ideas aligned with research helped refine long-standing approaches. Similarly, the 360° appraisal described the research-based expertise as a key strength: Bringing a research-informed perspective to teaching and learning and demonstrating strong subject knowledge coupled with a deep understanding of pedagogy.

Together, the recurrence of this theme across all the datasets indicates that teachers valued the inputs they received from the coach and directly correlated these global best practices to growth in their practice and classrooms.

Feedback-driven reflective practice

This theme explains how feedback was a central mechanism for change in teachers' practices. The

teachers acted upon the feedback received, and their effectiveness was gauged in the subsequent meetings. This theme also captures how its nature shifted from directive to dialogic and reflective, enabling teachers to take greater ownership of their learning.

Evidence for this theme recurred strongly in the meeting notes, especially with regard to supporting learners through reading and writing conferences. Teachers clarified the goals they had set for their students, attempted the new strategies and reflected on practice in action to share insights in later meetings. At the beginning of the year, the teachers sought direction on the nature of the conferences to conduct, but towards the end of the year, there was a gradual shift towards co-constructing focus areas for learners.

Larger shifts were noted with teachers who had spent less than 5 years at the school. These differences are evident in the nature of the meeting objectives, where the tone was directive, capturing what I had shared (see Figure 4), while a gradual shift to more exploratory and dialogic language is reflected in the coaching cycle towards the end of the year (see Figure 5). On the other hand, with teachers who had been at the school for more than five years, the starting point was already more dialogic (see Figure 6). Conversations here mostly pertained to exploring areas of interest to carry out action research in their classrooms.

Anonymised teacher feedback indicated a similar pattern where the majority of teachers rated feedback and conferencing as very helpful in improving their classroom practice. One teacher shared, "The detailed feedback after my lesson helped me notice what I usually miss and gave me concrete steps to try the next day", while another contrasted, "Documented feedback is too detailed - maybe a shorter version with a few points to focus on would be more effective." Other teachers noted, "Practical and multiple solutions to make the teaching time more effective", and "Walk-in observations provide real-time feedback, which was most beneficial."

Senior teacher feedback also highlighted this aspect of the coaching cycle, with one teacher stating that the most valuable support came from "consistent, constructive feedback that pushed me to think differently about my lessons." The 360° appraisal shows feedback-related dimensions were rated mostly in quartile 1 (above 5.85), such as expertise and multiple options, or in quartile 2 (between 5.61 and 5.85), like constructive inputs in meetings and clear priorities and communication (see Figure 7).

The repetition of this theme across the datasets shows that immediate and actionable feedback provided the scope for change in practice to occur efficiently and in real-time, leading to meaningful learning. However, there were some teacher preferences in the feedback that was shared. The shift from directive to dialogic, from following concrete steps to providing to eliciting, describes the progress in the nature of coaching conversations and is indicative of growing teacher autonomy with the coaching relationship.

Figure 4

Meeting Notes: Start of the Year- Less Than Five Years

MEETING AGENDA			
Date: 24.9.2024	Time: 9:30-10:30	Topic:	
Meeting Objectives: 1. Setting the objectives of these meetings 2. Identifying goals 3. Discussing student work			
Review objectives of this meeting and how they connect to previous meetings			
Review next steps from our previous meeting:			
Review from the previous meeting: Plus: Work required:			
Objective 1: Focus on constructed learners: noticing above and idea of student levels, information and organisation is missing. Focus on bringing in organisation and then elaboration			
Objective 2: Setting goals for a child who agonise well but struggles with reading and writing- support material to give him to get in basic sentence structure in place- repeat the story in simpler words for him to write it with ease. Meeting with **parent** to see what other support can be offered.			
Objective 3: Next meeting to look at student work for acceleration and come prepared with resources to support the same.			
Review next steps:			
Assess this meeting: Plus: Work required:			

Figure 5

Meeting Notes: End of the Year- Less Than Five Years

MEETING AGENDA			
Date: 24.2.2025	Time: 9:30 am	Topic:	
Meeting Objectives: 1. Feedback on the unit 2. Student work			
Review objectives of this meeting and how they connect to previous meeting			
Review next steps from our previous meeting			
Review from the previous meeting Plus: Work required:			
Objective 1: • The EAL are able to do because of the guided questions asked, hence much of the information is from their own experience • Elaboration strategies have worked out really well in the unit • Setting organisation over content as expectation, that has helped to another in the unit - hence the way the information came was appreciated • Enable well moving forward • Organisation is the only struggle			
Objective 2: Above goals t004 writer • Choose topic more focused hence struggling • Will try another topic of experience			
Objective 3: Feedback from class			
Review next steps:			
Assess this meeting: Plus: Work required:			

Figure 6

Meeting Notes: Start of the Year-More Than Five Years

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MEETING AGENDA			
Date: 16.5.2024	Time: 8:00am	Topic:	
Meeting objectives: 1. Discussing the current work progressed 2. Planning the next steps and strategies that can be implemented 3.			
Review objectives of this meeting and how they connect to previous meeting:			
Review next steps from our previous meeting.			
Review from the previous meeting: Plus: Work required:			
Objective 1:Pre work - Read Artful read aloud page 32-32 Keep the book away during think aloud Use language purposefully :----Example: Let us pause and think..(Use sentence starters)			
Objective 2: Book club-Read children's book-Make a note where children need to pause and think. Share the pic. Use spin wheel to make notes of what children say during a grand conversation/circle time. Share read aloud readiness whenever needed . Record 2-3 minutes Think aloud moment or when student share			
Objective 3:			
Review next steps:			
Assess this meeting: Plus: Work required:			

Figure 7

360° Appraisal Indicating Feedback Related Quartile Scores

Drive for Results	Overall Inventure
Demonstrates Resilience and a growth mindset	5.60
Delivers meaningful results	5.53
Demonstrates Expertise and experience	5.86
Generate multiple options to achieve objective	5.53
Overall Drive for Results	5.63

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Team Work	Overall Inventure
Constructive inputs in meetings	5.59
Empathizes with colleagues	5.76
Embraces a collaboration within team	5.73
Overall Drive for Team Work	5.69

Organisation and systemisation

This theme underscores the importance of organisational and systematic processes, such as planning, follow-ups, and documentation, which are integral to the success of coaching cycles. This structured continuity and regularity gave teachers the support required to make small or significant changes to their practice.

Evidence of this theme was prominent in the meeting notes, where each session was documented with objectives and action points. The predictability of the meeting agenda template and the calendared meetings, through repetition, provided a framework for professional learning to occur. This systematisation reduced ambiguity, particularly for newer teachers, through regular cycles of planning and reflection. Teacher feedback also pointed to this perspective of regularity when one teacher wrote, "Constant observations and feedback on my teaching practice helped me improve."

Moreover, as one of the senior teachers stated in the feedback shared, it was the consistency of the feedback, rather than a one-off intervention, along with its constructive nature, that supported the shift in her thinking about her lessons. Another senior teacher remarked, "Delays in receiving feedback can lead to dissatisfaction", to express that despite her time spent teaching this curriculum, she still valued feedback that she could implement immediately. The 360° appraisal reinforced this theme, noting "organised and goal-oriented" as a strength and adding the timeliness of the formal, recorded feedback as an area to focus on: Maintaining timelines for feedback and observations to support faculty.

Taken together, these datasets validate the importance of systemisation and organisation as a crucial aspect for coaching success. Structured and planned cycles of meetings and observations created stability, enabling both immediate and long-term learning. Any delay in communication led to dissatisfaction among the teachers.

Relational and team practice

This theme illustrates how the coach's role was explicitly outlined as a part of a larger design of the school's professional learning, but it leaned heavily on collaboration and building trust with the team for its success. The latter aspect weighed on relational strength and conditions for teachers to feel safe in reflecting on challenges, while the former ensured that coaching was not perceived as optional but as a deliberate part of each teacher's professional learning.

Evidence of this delicate balance is prevalent across datasets. The meeting notes indicate varied levels of dependency on the coach, with teachers openly sharing challenges they faced or clarifications they sought. In many cases, coaching began with directive input and gradually shifted to co-constructive dialogue, showing growing trust and teacher autonomy. Feedback was also sought on the effectiveness of the strategies and support provided (see Figure 8) and the teachers' overall experience with a specific unit (see Figure 5) to

communicate the importance of the teachers' practical expertise in further consolidating the coaches' research-based suggestions.

Teacher feedback shows that all respondents felt 'very supported' in implementing the subject-specific pedagogy. One teacher remarked, "I appreciate the ongoing encouragement to experiment with different methods, which enhances my teaching practice", while another highlighted, "Openness to understanding the struggle on the ground." A third teacher commented, "I like the way she steps in when she needs to add something to the lesson. She does it naturally without making it obvious to the students."

Senior teacher feedback reinforced the importance of continuing with the coach's role, with comments like "Continue offering hands-on support and feedback as that was most useful" and "Continue to help and guide the teachers."

The 360° appraisal corroborated both the relational and the positional aspects of the role. It was evident when it noted, "Exploring multiple avenues to celebrate team's work to build growth mindset" as an area to focus on in the future whereas "Contributes to an equitable work environment", "Treats all colleagues with respect", "Creates a space where team members feel heard", "Builds and maintains positive relationships" shows how teachers felt about their interactions with the coach. The appraisal also highlighted how the relational dynamic stood to get affected when the leadership aspect outweighed the relationship by noting, "Eliciting feedback during curriculum development to include multiple perspectives" as an area for future attention.

Collectively, the four datasets show that while the positional aspect of the role gave it weight and validity, its effectiveness relied on maintaining a fine balance between leading and responding, and collaboration and expertise.

An added variable that influenced the success of the coaching cycles was contextual constraints, like additional school-related responsibilities and workload, event schedules and class compositions, and professional constraints like fragile practice, lack of confidence or improvement needs. This reflected in the increasing or decreasing number of meetings (see Graph 2) with individual teachers, a senior teacher noting that she valued constructive feedback that was responsive to real pressures rather than generic advice, another teacher complimenting "Tips on addressing particular student concerns" as helpful and the 360° appraisal appreciating the ability to apply problem solving strategies to address challenges effectively. These constraints were not limitations but opportunities to tailor the coaching style to each teacher's needs.

Figure 8
Eliciting feedback on support provided

MEETING AGENDA			
Date: 21.10.2024	Time: 8:30 am	Topic:	

Meeting Objectives:
1. Looking at Term 1 marksheet and addressing 'at risk' learners
2. Planning for Term 2 PLG
3. Feedback on mentoring

Review objectives of this meeting and how they connect to previous meeting:

Review next steps from our previous meeting:

Review from the previous meeting:
Plus:
Work required:

Objective 1: Carry to another class

Objective 2: Plan put in place for Literary Essay

Objective 3:
What went well:
A lot learning with the resources and the feedback provided, technical help is useful, provided at the right time.

Review next steps:

Assess this meeting:
Plus:
Work required:

Discussion

Influence of instructional coaching on teacher practice and autonomy

The theme of research-informed expertise illustrates that teachers highly valued the coach's subject-specific knowledge and the practical strategies shared during coaching sessions, consistent with Fletcher-Wood and Taevere's (2022) emphasis on expertise paired with sustained coaching. Its absence or insufficiency can become a barrier to successful coaching (Fletcher-Wood & Taevere, 2022). In international schools like Inventure, where striving for excellence is a core value, research-informed coaching becomes uncompromisable, especially if coaching cycles need to build towards teacher autonomy. When expertise is embedded in practice and personalised to contextual needs, teachers report a stronger sense of agency in making instructional decisions (Fletcher-Wood & Taevere, 2022; Lewis & DeSantis, 2024).

This sense of agency was reinforced by the theme of feedback-driven reflective practice. Constant and iterative feedback cycles, which gradually grew dialogic from directive in nature, showed greater collaboration and shared decision-making. Such a shift reflects Knowles's (1980) principles of adult learning, which highlight that motivation increases when learning is tied to immediate, practical relevance. Additionally, Parpucu and Al-Mabuk's (2023) argument suggests that process-oriented, next-step feedback enhances ownership. Together, research-informed expertise and reflective, dialogic feedback created conditions for teachers to integrate new strategies with confidence and increasing autonomy.

These findings suggest that, in this context, autonomy did not emerge from reducing support, but rather from the quality of the support provided. Teachers' growing independence was fostered through cycles of research-informed modelling, personalised strategies, and dialogic feedback that considered individual needs and styles. Reflexive, responsive coaching thus enabled autonomy not by withdrawing guidance but by progressively shifting and sharing responsibility with the teachers.

Cultural dynamics and receptivity to feedback

Receptivity to feedback emerged as a culturally nuanced process, shaped by India's higher power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance (Dhingra, Srivastava, & Srivastava, 2024). While organisation and systemisation enabled sustained and successful coaching cycles, they also inadvertently neutralised cultural aspects of uncertainty avoidance and high power distance. The routinisation of the coach's presence and participation built predictability and, through it, familiarisation, stability, and trust. Delays or gaps were readily flagged, indicating that uncertainty avoidance could not be overlooked in developing a culturally responsive coaching model. This suggests that personal learning styles are layered with professional expectations (Bukor, 2011), many of which are culturally located.

Systematic scheduling also meant teachers could anticipate when and how feedback would come, reducing defensiveness and opening space for reflection and collective problem-solving. Relational conditions reinforced this: feedback was framed in ways that foregrounded encouragement, collaboration, and trust. Teacher feedback included comments about feeling "supported" in trying new methods, while senior teachers explicitly requested to "continue providing hands-on guidance." The 360° appraisal further emphasised relational qualities such as treating colleagues with respect, building positive relationships, and creating a space where team members felt heard. At the same time, it flagged moments where the leadership positioning risked outweighing relationality, such as during curriculum planning, when broader perspectives needed to be elicited.

These findings align with Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory, which conceptualises leadership as an emergent process of interaction rather than positional authority. They also echo Dhingra et al.'s (2024) argument that in Indian contexts, high power distance needs to be kept in check with dialogic feedback. By cultivating trust-based and collaborative conversations, the coaching model helped balance hierarchical expectations with inclusivity.

Together, this shows that cultural dynamics influenced receptivity to feedback in two key ways: Organisationally, by embedding systematisation that reduced ambiguity, and relationally, by creating trust-based conditions that counterbalanced hierarchical norms. In this context, coaching feedback was accepted not only because it was expert-informed but also because it was consistent, collaborative, and sensitive to socio-cultural expectations. This suggests that in high power-distance environments, teachers' openness to feedback

is less about the content of feedback itself and more about how it is framed, delivered, and relationally negotiated.

Additionally, contextual and professional constraints served as an important lens to understand how feedback was received and acted upon. Heavy workloads, event schedules, challenging class compositions and professional learning gaps intersected with cultural tendencies of uncertainty avoidance and power distances. Here, the responsiveness of the coaching model of providing targeted strategies, differentiated pacing, and flexible intensity of support acted as a form of remediation to consider the cultural expectations and sustain trust. Rather than being barriers, these constraints became opportunities to co-construct solutions, reinforcing the relational and responsive qualities of the coaching process.

Enabling Distributed Leadership Through Reflexive, Responsive, and Relational Coaching

The findings suggest that reflexive, responsive, and relational coaching created the conditions for distributed leadership to emerge in the international school context by linking expertise, feedback, structure, and relational trust. Rather than operating as isolated functions, the four themes worked together to shift leadership practice from positional authority to shared responsibility.

Research-informed expertise provided the credibility and pedagogical foundation that gave teachers confidence to trust and engage in instructional improvement. When expertise was contextualised and personalised, it positioned teachers not only as implementers but also as contributors of knowledge, extending leadership into the classroom. This resonates with Harris's (2013, as cited in Hickey, Flaherty, & McNamara, 2022) argument that the purpose of distributed leadership is to enhance the quality of leadership practice itself. Expertise thus acted as a carrier for collective improvement, illustrating how leadership quality can be enhanced through interactional processes rather than positional authority.

Feedback-driven reflective practice complemented this by gradually shifting the nature of conversations from directive to dialogic, fostering co-construction of practical knowledge about the taught curriculum. In line with Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory, these reflective exchanges distributed authority across interactions, as teachers assumed greater ownership of both identifying problems and shaping solutions.

Organisation and systematisation added a structural backbone, embedding predictability through cycles of observation, planning, and feedback. In India's high power-distance, uncertainty-avoidant context (Dhingra, Srivastava, & Srivastava, 2024), this systematisation neutralised cultural hierarchies by making feedback regular, expected, and safe. In this way, routines and structures acted as mediums for distributing leadership across the team.

I, as coach, also had to negotiate my own frustrations and expectations when meetings were cancelled or when teachers required more support in delivering curriculum or when agreed upon objectives were not followed through in subsequent meetings or when teachers wanted to dedicate the meeting time towards other teaching responsibilities. These experiences reframed my understanding that coaching relationships were linear or uniform but fluid, differentiated, and relational.

Finally, relational and team practice underscored that distributed leadership depended not only on expertise and structure but on trust, collaboration, and psychological safety. Relational ties reduced defensiveness, encouraged risk-taking, and enabled teachers to step into leadership roles within their professional learning community. When the leadership aspect risked outweighing relationality, tension was evident. At the same time, the positional visibility of the coach gave weight to the role, but its effectiveness relied on balancing authority with responsiveness to teachers' views and inputs. As a coach who was younger than 6 of the 15 teachers, and matched in age to 3, negotiating authority with respect and trust required reflexivity on my part.

Taken together, the four themes show that distributed leadership was not imposed but emerged through the interplay of expert knowledge, dialogic reflection, structured organisation, and relational trust.

Conclusion

This study highlights the potential of a reflexive, responsive, and relational model of instructional

coaching to enable distributed leadership in an international school in India. Findings show how research-informed expertise, feedback-driven reflective practice, structured organisation, and relational trust foster teacher autonomy and leadership capacity. This was possible within a school culture like Inventure Academy, which is committed to excellence, dynamism, openness to feedback and collaboration, which created fertile ground for trust and shared responsibility.

While valuable, these insights are limited by the study's context, that is a single international school with a fully female sample of English teachers. The reliance on qualitative thematic analysis further limits generalisability. Future research should test these factors across multiple schools and cultural contexts, use longitudinal designs to trace sustained leadership outcomes, and integrate mixed-methods approaches to strengthen scalability.

By extending these lines of inquiry, coaching models can be refined to remain globally informed yet locally grounded, cultivating empowered, collaborative educational communities.

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