



CASE STUDY

Six Lessons from Coaches to Create Lasting Instructional Change

*What experienced instructional coaches
have learned about building trust,
strengthening instruction, and creating
better classroom culture*



Every instructional coach remembers their first coaching cycle: the excitement, the uncertainty, and the hope that one conversation might spark lasting change.

Experienced coaches know better.

Lasting change doesn't come from a single observation or a perfectly timed piece of feedback. It comes from dozens of coaching cycles, the accumulation of small adjustments, honest conversations, and repeated opportunities for teachers to practice, reflect, and grow.

When coaching is consistent and effective, the results show up in classrooms.

**Real Time Teacher Coaches
Conducted More Than**

**160 Coaching
Cycles**

**Decreased
Disengaged
classrooms by**

75%



At CT3, our data shows that coaches who reach 25 or more Real Time Teacher Coaching® cycles begin to see measurable, sustained gains in student engagement.

This case study features four Real Time Teacher Coaches who have collectively conducted more than 160 coaching cycles and decreased the number of disengaged classrooms by 75%.

Behind those results are four dynamic instructional coaches: Bridget O'Boyle in Illinois, Jakeyah Gadson in Georgia, Kendra McCullough in Tennessee, and George Kemmett in Ohio.

While their schools look different, their reflections revealed six lessons about what it takes to create lasting instructional change.



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Lesson 1: Trust Comes Before Technique

Whenever a coach enters a classroom, teachers are asked to take risks, try something new, and be open to feedback. That requires vulnerability and vulnerability requires trust.

After 12 years at her previous school, Bridget O'Boyle joined CICS West Belden in Chicago as lead instructional coach. Without established relationships, O'Boyle knew she had to build trust organically and quickly. She couldn't wait months for trust to develop. She had to be intentional about earning it from the start. So before beginning coaching cycles, she met individually with every K–5 teacher.



CICS West Belden teachers feel more confident after working with their coaches.

"I asked about their history, their challenges, and how I could support them," she says. "I had to prove that I had their best interests at heart."

That investment mattered. It wasn't just about getting to know her teachers. These meetings helped O'Boyle build trust and create the conditions for vulnerability. By understanding her teachers' strengths and challenges, she created brave spaces for teachers to take risks and learn something new.

For O'Boyle, trust starts with knowing the teacher. For George Kemmett, a K–8 Real Time Teacher Coach at Breakthrough Midtown in Cleveland, it also means making sure teachers understand the why behind the coaching.

"Make sure you always provide a why," he says. "Make sure teachers know why you're telling them a certain strategy so they can be invested in it. Because if they're not invested, you're done."

Both O'Boyle and Kemmett agree that teachers are far more willing to take risks when they know their coach is invested in their growth.





Coaching in action at CICS West Belden in Chicago

Lesson 2: Consistency Drives Growth

Sustainable growth comes from showing up week after week with intention and a plan, not from one-time observations or occasional check-ins.

For Kemmett, protecting that consistency starts with the calendar. Every Friday, he blocks out the next week's one-on-one coaching sessions first. "Coaching time is sacred, and nothing can interrupt that," he says. "I can't attend to behavioral issues, I can't cover an emergency lunch duty. I have to be with those teachers."

His school leadership respects those boundaries too, reinforcing a culture where coaching can thrive.

Consistency takes commitment from both sides: coaches have to protect the time, and teachers have to believe the time is worth it.

Kendra McCullough, numeracy coach at Jones Elementary in Metro Nashville Public Schools, found that scheduling was only part of the answer. She also had to make sure the time felt worthwhile. Working with her own CT3 coach, she committed to keeping debrief meetings to 20 minutes and set a timer to hold herself to it.

"Teachers knew coaching wasn't going to take up their entire planning period, which helped with buy-in," she says.

When coaching happens consistently, every cycle becomes another opportunity to grow.



Lesson 3: Build on What Teachers Already Know

Jakeyah Gadson, academic coach at Groves High School in Savannah, sees one challenge come up again and again. “A lot of teachers know the what. They need help with the how.”

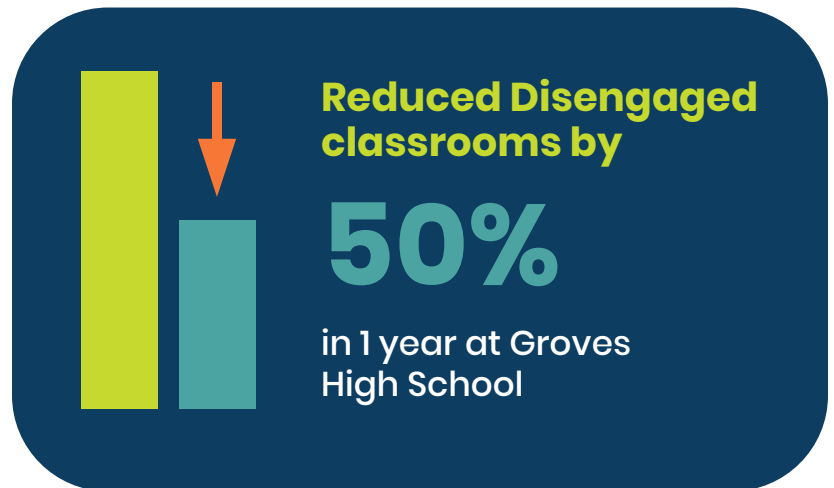
O’Boyle often assumed that her teachers already knew how to use Exit Tickets to gauge student understanding. What she found was that, “Teachers really needed direct training on what the strategy is, how to use it, and what can come from it.”

She saw the same thing when CICS West Belden introduced Think/Pair/Share school-wide. Teachers knew the strategy, but that didn’t always translate into meaningful use.

“It was, ‘Oh, the coach is walking in, I’ll use Think/Pair/Share right now to show student engagement,’” she says.

O’Boyle coaches teachers to think about when and why to use Think/Pair/Share, how it supports learning objectives, and what to look for in student responses.

Effective coaching isn’t about giving teachers more strategies. It’s about building on what they already know and helping them use it more intentionally to strengthen instruction and improve student outcomes.



Lesson 4: The Most Powerful Coaching Happens in Real Time

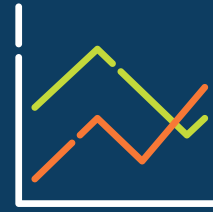
Most coaching follows a familiar pattern: a coach observes instruction, provides feedback afterward, and the teacher has to wait until the next lesson to try it. By that time, the momentum is gone and the details are fuzzy. Real time coaching closes that gap.

CT3's Real Time Teacher Coaching® model works differently. Using a wireless headset and walkie-talkie, a coach provides immediate, nondisruptive feedback to a teacher during live instruction. The teacher stays in front of the class, in charge, and in the moment. The coach stays in the background, invisible to students but present for the teacher exactly when it matters most.

For O'Boyle, this was the piece that had been missing from coaching for years. "Before, we couldn't figure out how to keep teachers in charge of their classroom and not lose that ownership. So many times in the past I had to step in and stop a lesson or model on the spot. This method puts everything on the teacher so students see them as the leader in the classroom."

Kemmett, who experienced the model first as a teacher before becoming a coach, describes what it feels like from both sides. "At first, it's intimidating. You've got to think about the scholars and listen to what your coach is saying at the same time." But that discomfort fades quickly, and what replaces it is something no workshop can replicate. "How can you recreate a classroom?" he asks. "To actually coach you with the folks you're working with, there's nothing better than that."

Real change happens in real classrooms. Coaching should too.



Coach O'Boyle was able to track student engagement data in real time





Lesson 5: When the Coach Gets Coached, Everyone Improves

One of the most distinctive elements of CT3's model happens largely behind the scenes: the coach is being coached too.

CT3 calls it the triple layer. While a teacher receives real-time feedback through a headset, a CT3 associate stands alongside the coach, offering expert guidance and an outside perspective. All three layers of growth happen simultaneously, during the same lesson.

For Kemmett, the value was immediate. "They let me coach, but they made sure I noticed everything," he says. "It takes a moment to get used to, but once you do, it's incredibly helpful." The real payoff came in the debrief. "I got to experience it from a teacher's perspective and see what they're looking for. When we go back the next day into that same classroom, I hear a little bit less from them."

What it requires of him personally is what he finds most meaningful. "I still miss things sometimes," he says. "And I'm asking teachers who have taught for a long time to be open to feedback. So I can't not be open myself."



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Lesson 6: When Teachers Grow, Students Follow

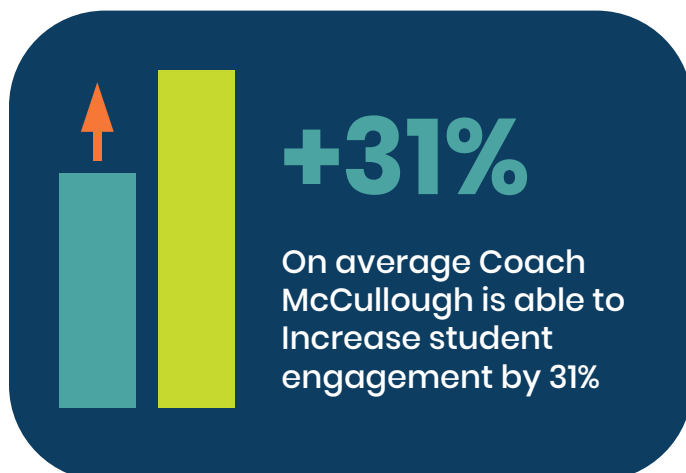
When teachers implement CT3's strategies consistently and with intention, the impact on students is unmistakable.

McCullough saw it show up in the data. She used Exit Tickets with a third-grade math teacher to identify fraction misconceptions in real time and adjust the next day's lesson accordingly. "It helped her be more intentional about addressing student misunderstandings quickly," she says. "We're not waiting until the test to see if they've mastered it." Over time, that cycle of teach, assess, and adjust became the teacher's default.

O'Boyle noticed something similar when Think/Pair/Share took hold across multiple classrooms at once. For students moving between classes throughout the day, encountering the same structures and routines in every room removed a layer of anxiety. "When the systems are the same in every classroom, they know what's coming. It takes away the fear of what's next."

Increased classrooms with 90–95% or more of their students actively engaged in scholar-to-scholar talk and collaborative assignments, and more complex from

19% → 44%



Gadson saw it most clearly in the teachers who kept using the strategies even when she wasn't in the room. "The teachers who put their best foot forward and practiced the strategies even when they weren't on a cycle that week are the ones where I saw an increase in learner agency, an increase in confidence, and an increase in buy-in from students."

When teachers grow with consistent coaching, students don't just participate more. They achieve more.



What This Means for Your District

The coaches in this piece came to CT3's model through different paths but arrived at the same place: classrooms where teachers are growing, students are engaged, and coaching has become part of the culture.

Some Final Thoughts from the Coaches:

“Trust the process. Be consistent. Keep doing it, even though it’s hard.”

—George Kemmett, Breakthrough Midtown, Cleveland, OH

“Have a clear vision and don’t waver until you’ve given something a fair shot. If you have a strong system and vision, it can be successful.”

—Bridget O’Boyle, CICS West Belden, Chicago, IL

“Leverage your teacher leaders. And make sure you have consistent messaging from leadership. If you’re trying to make a school-wide change, everyone needs to be on the same page.”

—Kendra McCullough, Jones Elementary, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Nashville, TN

“Make sure your coach is very familiar with the data and needs of your school, and make clear connections for how CT3 can help improve that data.”

—Jakeyah Gadson, Groves High School, Savannah, GA





For more than a decade, CT3 has partnered with hundreds of schools nationwide to increase student engagement and achievement.

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