Using the Reimagining Instructional Coaching Framework in the Development of Pre-K Classroom Observation Tools

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Extensive evidence indicates that participation in high-quality public pre-kindergarten (pre-K) can support development of the early learning skills children need for success in kindergarten and beyond.[1] Importantly, the positive impacts of pre-K participation — especially for long-term outcomes — are not universal across pre-K programs in the United States.[2] This is not surprising when we consider the diversity of public pre-K settings, which differ in goals, curricula, funding sources, and resources. For example, young children may use public funds to attend a federally funded Head Start program with comprehensive family support services or a state-funded pre-K program based in a public school, or they may receive subsidies to attend pre-K at a community-based child care center or family child care home.[3] Just as program types differ, so do the quality of instruction and, ultimately, the impacts of participation on children's early learning.

To improve children's early learning across all types of pre-K programs, policymakers have invested in quality improvement initiatives aimed at incentivizing and supporting programs to provide high-quality pre-K.[4] These initiatives often include classroom observation tools — such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS), or Teaching Strategies GOLD — to both measure the quality of children's pre-K classroom experiences and provide teachers with actionable information on how to improve their practices.[5] However, evidence indicates that the information provided by these tools has limitations for improving the quality of instruction for the full range of pre-K program types, even when supported by an instructional coach.[6]

In response to this need, the Gates Foundation funded the development of a new framework for the design and refinement of classroom observation tools that support the coaching of pre-K teachers. The Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework details a set of user-informed principles for developing pre-K classroom observation tools that can help improve teacher practices through instructional coaching.[7] These principles focus on content, psychometrics, user experience, usefulness, and scalability, and they were designed to

outline the features of classroom observation tools that center the experiences of Black and Latine children, children who are multilingual or dual language learners (DLLs), children with disabilities, and children from low-income backgrounds. The Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework provides a set of aligned goals, criteria, and thresholds that can be used in future investments in the development of pre-K classroom observation tools to better support instructional practice and, in turn, children's early learning outcomes.

This report describes a formative evaluation that used the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework to evaluate a pilot implementation of a new observational tool developed by Teachstone. Teachstone developed the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool using participatory design methods that engaged educators to identify key elements of instructional coaching that the tool should support, common challenge areas for teachers that the tool should address, and an ideal coaching process that would best support teacher practice. After the participatory design process and Teachstone's initial development of the tool, SRI Education conducted a rapid-cycle, formative evaluation of the tool's initial effectiveness and alignment with the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework. This report concludes with considerations for others looking to use the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework in the development of classroom observation tools.

The Coaching & Informal Observation Tool Pilot

In 2023, Teachstone and Intentional Futures engaged in a participatory co-design process with lead and assistant teachers, instructional coaches, and program administrators to review what features of a coaching tool would be most important to them and to identify a coaching process that would constitute an "ideal informal observation journey." Participants also identified the key elements of a successful coaching program as psychological safety and teacher agency; opportunities for meaningful goal-setting; integration with existing professional development; and supports for coaches' holistic understanding of teacher, classroom, and program contexts.[8] Teachers and coaches also noted that the coaching process needs to recognize the unique strengths, opportunities, and challenges for teachers in a wide range of classroom settings that serve children from a variety of racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds and with different abilities. Participants also expressed difficulties in using classroom observation assessments like the CLASS to inform teacher improvement. They voiced the need for new tools to help coaches more clearly connect observation summaries to specific strategies teachers can use in the classroom. Teachstone used this information to create the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool.

For the formative evaluation of the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool pilot, we examined four research questions designed to address the goals of the tool and related to the usefulness, scalability, user experience, and content goals described in the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework (Exhibit 1). Importantly, tool development was in the pilot stage and as such, the evaluation in this example was formative in nature and a part of the tool development process. Thus, the evaluation did not address all criteria in each of the goals. For example, the research question related to scalability focused only on the ease of using and understanding the tool, and not on integration of the tool with broader systems.

Additionally, we chose not to explore questions related to the psychometrics goal in the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework, given the early stage of tool development.

Exhibit 1. Research Questions

1	**Usefulness:** Does use of the tool align with the practices and processes identified as part of an ideal informal observation journey?
2	**Scalability:** Do coaches and teachers find the tool easy to understand and apply?
3	**User Experience:** Does having access to the tool enable teachers and coaches to incorporate key elements of the coaching process: (i) promoting psychological safety and teacher agency; (ii) including meaningful goal-setting; (iii) integrating coaching with existing professional development and improvement efforts; and (iv) building coaches' holistic understanding of teachers, children, and educational context?
4	**Content:** Do teachers and coaches find the content in the tool to be useful for incremental progress toward (i) supporting children through challenging behaviors; (ii) supporting dual language learners; and (iii) improving interactions that connect, engage, and inspire learning?

Our study used a rapid-cycle formative evaluation approach in which we collected survey, interview, focus group, and observational data from a small sample of coaches and teachers across three evaluation rounds. Following each evaluation round, we shared results with the Teachstone development team and allowed time for them to make revisions before the next round of data collection. Details on the study methods are available in the technical appendix. Below, we provide an overview of key findings along with focal criteria from the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework for the next phase of tool development. Each focal criterion starts with a criteria reference number for cross-referencing with the framework. For example, the number 4.1.3 refers to Goal 4 (Usefulness), Subgoal 1, Criterion 3 in the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework.

Key Findings for Usefulness

RQ1. Does use of the tool align with the practices and processes identified as part of an ideal informal observation journey?

Evidence from the formative evaluation suggests that the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool aligns with the practices and processes identified as part of an ideal informal observation journey. Coaches and teachers provided positive feedback on the various aspects of the process, including one coach who noted how the tool supported her throughout the informal observation journey:

> "And having gone through this first cycle of coaching, **I feel like it sort of held my hand and walked me through the process.** So I knew what was happening next."
>
> — Coach

Reimagining Instructional Coaching Framework Usefulness Goal:
Observation tool provides easy-to-understand and actionable feedback.

To achieve this goal, observation tools should provide educators with information that is clear, actionable, and applicable to improving children's experiences in pre-K classrooms.

Both coaches and teachers faced difficulty transitioning between coaching cycles during the pilot, particularly with linking reflections from one cycle to planning for the following cycle. Cycle-to-cycle transitions were smoother later in the pilot, because of either increased time coaches spent using the tool or additional guidance Teachstone staff provided in response to interim findings.

Although the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool successfully aligned with the ideal informal observation journey, the findings above raised several questions for the study team about how the tool's coaching process fits within broader coaching processes and timelines. As the use of the tool expands, both in number of users and length of time, we highlight the following usefulness goal criteria as important for tool development:

- **Usefulness 4.1.3. Observation tool findings support classroom and program staff to understand and apply the results for improvement over time.** Most teachers expressed a desire to access the tool at the beginning of the school year and to continue to use it throughout the year. Teachers also discussed using strategies with students as they transitioned to summer, and coaches raised questions about how to update tool details on classroom composition. We suggest considering how the tool fits into a school-year schedule and providing guidance to coaches and teachers about how to use the tool across school years and classrooms.
- **Usefulness 4.2.2. Observation tools produce results that can be used for program-level planning.** Coaches expressed uncertainty regarding how the tool can be integrated with the school-year schedule, such as how to best wrap up the coaching at the end of the school year. Additionally, more information may be needed on how programs could transition a teacher to a new coach if needed. Next steps for tool development should consider additional guidance for program-level planning.

Key Findings for Scalability

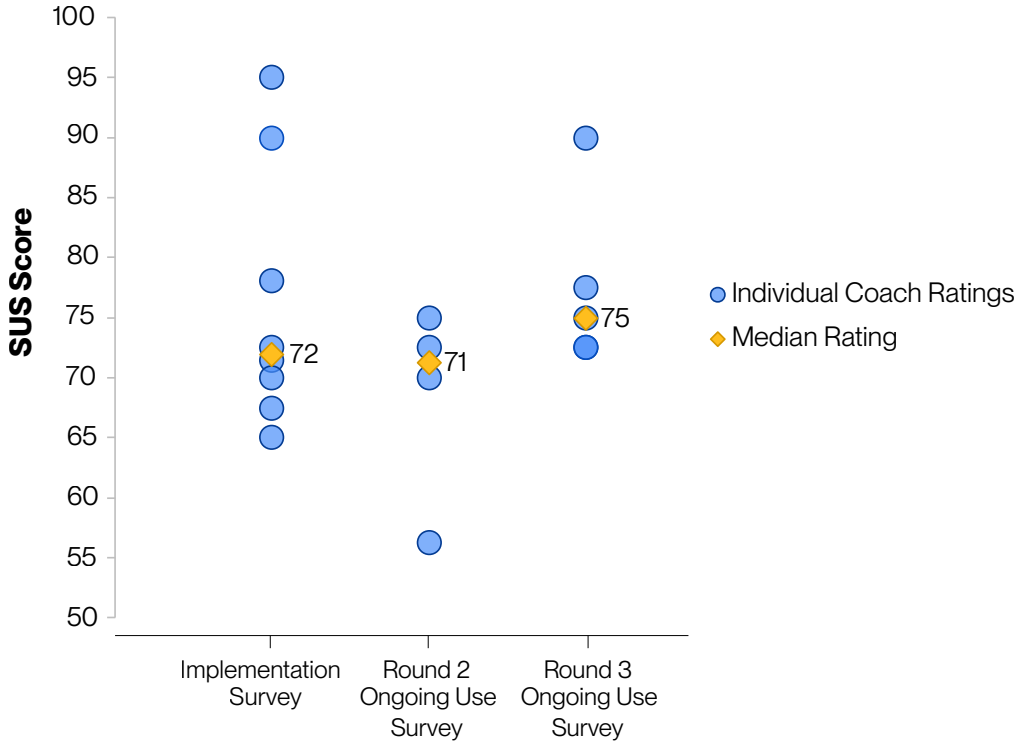
RQ2. Do coaches and teachers find the tool easy to understand and apply?

In general, coaches rated the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool as easy to understand and apply. Coaches were asked to rate the tool using the System Usability Scale (SUS), a commonly used measure of technology usability,[9] at up to three timepoints: in a survey administered after initial training but during early use of the tool, and in two surveys administered in later phases of tool use. Median usability ratings were 72 in the first survey, 71 in the second, and 75 in the final survey (Exhibit 2). A score of 75 is considered a "good" usability score, similar to a grade of a B+.[10]

Reimagining Instructional Coaching Framework Scalability Goal:
Observation tool can be administered at scale in a variety of classroom contexts.

To achieve this goal, the observation tool should be easy to use, with convenient and affordable training.

Exhibit 2. System Usability Scale (SUS) Score Reported by Coaches Across Timepoints



Note. *SUS scores below 50 are considered unacceptable; 56 was the lowest score in this sample. Several participants responded at multiple timepoints.*

Coaches expressed satisfaction with training and ongoing support from Teachstone. However, they also offered suggestions for enhancing usability, such as creating more intuitive navigation, enabling tool functionality in multiple languages, and supporting offline use for coaches working in programs with limited Wi-Fi access. Further, Teachstone staff provided extensive ongoing support during the pilot, raising questions about tool usability at scale. As tool use expands, we highlight the following scalability goal criteria as important considerations for continued development:

- **Scalability 5.2.1. Observation tool requires a low to moderate amount of training for reliable use by persons with at least 2 years of experience in early childhood education classrooms.** Considering how coaches and teachers can use the tool with minimal ongoing support is important for scalability. This may be supported by adding more user guidance into the tool, providing supplemental documents to reduce the need for intensive ongoing support, offering opportunities for users to get support through a help desk, or supporting an intentional community of practice.
- **Scalability 5.2.3. Analyzing and summarizing observed results is easy and can be done in a reasonable amount of time.** Later stages of tool development should consider how improvements to user experience decrease the need for ongoing support. One strategy to do so is to engage with a design firm to improve user experience, especially around optimizing the user interface.

Key Findings for User Experience

RQ3. Does having access to the tool enable teachers and coaches to incorporate key elements of the coaching process: (i) promoting psychological safety and teacher agency; (ii) including meaningful goal-setting; (iii) integrating coaching with existing professional development and improvement efforts; and (iv) building coaches' holistic understanding of teachers, children, and educational context?

Teachers reported high levels of psychological safety, teacher agency, and meaningful goal-setting throughout the pilot. In the final survey of the pilot, 100% of teachers who responded said that they always felt supported by their coach, that they were on the same team as their coach, that their coach worked with them collaboratively, that their coach incorporated their points of view into the coaching, and that they and their coach agreed on the most important goals for coaching. These sentiments were echoed in the teacher focus groups, in which teachers consistently praised their coaches and expressed that they felt supported throughout the pilot:

Reimagining Instructional Coaching Framework User Experience Goal: *Observation tool implementation process is unobtrusive, equitable, and supportive.*

To achieve this goal, observation tools should be easily implemented across pre-K contexts and support teacher agency and meaningful engagement in the improvement process.

> "And I'll just say this. **If this is a pilot program, I recommend that you all go forth** because really ... we're really at our wits' end ... [our coach] is real good at what she does and just like [another teacher] said, if she sees something that's not working or if she sees something that we need to do that we are not doing, she lets us know."
>
> — Teacher

Teachers also specified that this coaching felt more supportive and effective than past coaching experiences:

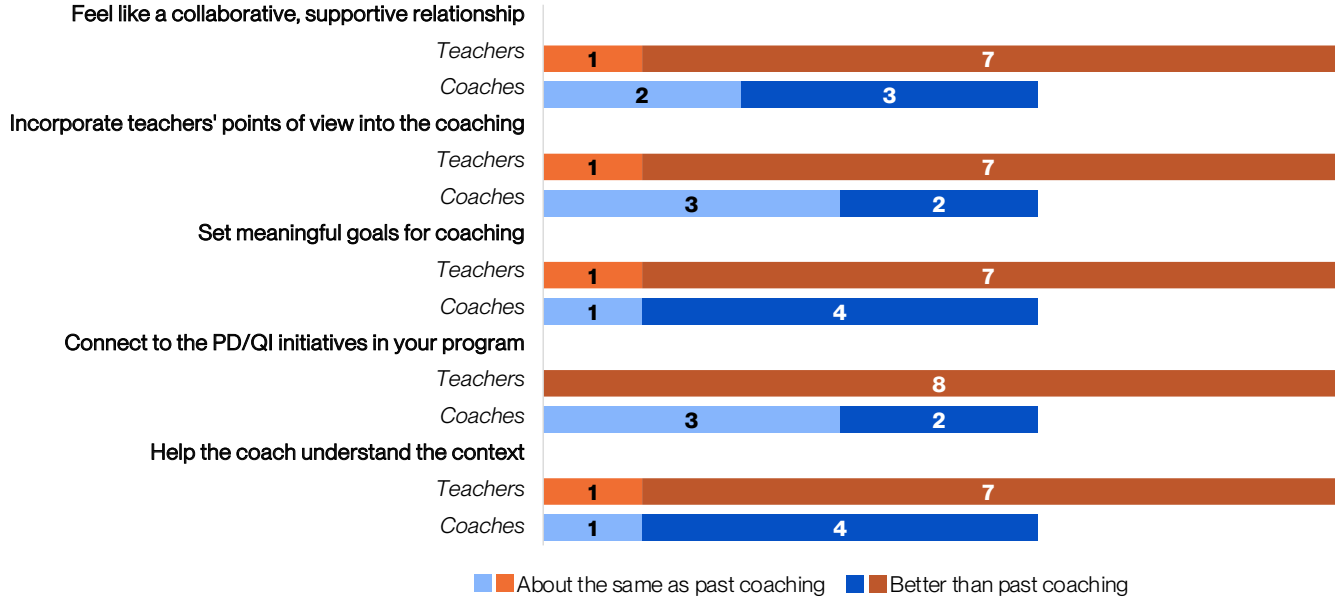
> "This tool, the coaches, this time it just seems like there's more positive things coming out of this ... And the last [coaching experience I had], to me it just didn't work ... **And then you feel like they're looking at you like you're doing something wrong. But with our coach now, it's like she's really trying to help us.** She's really trying to make this thing work in our classroom."
>
> — Teacher

After hearing teachers express these sentiments in the initial focus groups, we included a question in a later survey asking teachers and coaches how their experiences with the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool compared with their previous coaching experiences. Some coaches felt that the tool offered a comparable experience, while others believed it was an improvement (Exhibit 3). Teachers, however, consistently reported that the coaching experience with the tool was better than their past coaching experiences. Notably, in the pre-pilot survey, teachers had reported that their past experiences with coaching were positive. Thus, the feedback during the pilot indicates that the tool enhanced key elements of the coaching process, even among teachers who had reported high levels of satisfaction with their past coaching experiences.

Exhibit 3. Comparisons of Pilot Coaching With Past Coaching Experiences

Teacher survey question: Compared to your past coaching experiences, to what extent did the coaching you received through the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool pilot…

Coach survey question: Compared to your past coaching experiences, how well did the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool…



Note. *No teachers or coaches selected "Less than past coaching" for any item. PD = professional development; QI = quality improvement.*

In considering next steps for the tool, we recommend exploring how to better integrate coaching with existing professional development and improvement efforts across various educational contexts. Specifically, observations and conversations with coaches and teachers highlight several criteria from the user experience goal that are important for the next phase of development:

- **User Experience 3.1.1. Teachers receive clear information about the purpose and use of the observation for improvement prior to observation.** Identifying how the tool best aligns with teachers' understanding of the purpose and use of the observation in their programs can support the user experience. For example, coaches in one program raised questions about how to fit the coaching into their community-led learning goals, suggesting a need for more guidance on how to integrate tool use into existing professional development and quality improvement initiatives.
- **User Experience 3.2.2. Observation tool can be flexibly implemented to different pedagogical and curricular contexts.** Identifying the best approach is to supporting multiple teachers in one classroom may support use across contexts. Pilot coaches working with multiple teachers in a classroom took different approaches to providing support through the tool. Some co-teachers each set their own focus and action plan, whereas other pairs of teachers chose a common focus. Also, some co-teachers met individually with their coach, whereas others did so together. Although best practices may differ across teachers and program contexts, coaches and teachers may benefit from clearer guidance on how to approach coaching for a co-teaching team.

Key Findings for Content

RQ4. Do teachers and coaches find the content in the tool to be useful for incremental progress toward (i) supporting children through challenging behaviors; (ii) supporting dual language learners; and (iii) improving interactions that connect, engage, and inspire learning?

Both coaches and teachers provided positive feedback on how the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool supported incremental progress toward supporting children through challenging behaviors and improving interactions. Teachers were particularly enthusiastic about how well the strategies worked in their classrooms:

> "We're just so happy that [our coach] just put all of this time into us, and through your program, we are just so thankful that your program is available to help us, and we're just thankful and appreciative, and now, we got this. **We're never going to stop using these suggestions that she's given us because we know that they actually work,** and it takes consistency and persistence to do it."
>
> — Teacher

Reimagining Instructional Coaching Framework Content Goal:
Observation tool measures the quality of 3- to 5-year-old children's experiences in pre-k classrooms in equitable and culturally responsive ways, including the experiences of children who are Black, Latine, and multilingual, and who have disabilities.

To achieve this goal, observation tools must center equity to capture the interactions and environments that support children of diverse racial, linguistic, and economic backgrounds, and directly address racism and ableism.

Suggestions for improving content primarily emphasized the need to include more content for DLLs and children with disabilities. This involves developing tool content that focuses on supporting DLLs and embedding guidance on how teachers can implement strategies from other content areas (e.g., supporting children's development of concepts) with DLLs and children with disabilities. For example, one teacher highlighted a desire for the tool to be more inclusive of children with disabilities:

> "Yo trabajo con niños con … necesidades especiales. Entonces **me gustaría ver cómo la herramienta cada vez va a ser un poco más inclusiva en relación con el despeño de estos niños**. Es decir, por ejemplo, en Concept Development … quisiera ver en particular, por ejemplo, cómo la herramienta cada vez incluye esos pequeños progresos que los niños tienen o que los niños reflejan cada vez en nuestras interacciones."
>
> "I work with children with … special needs. **So I would like to see how the tool is going to be more inclusive in relation to these children's progress**. I mean, for example, in Concept Development … I would like to see in particular, for example, how the tool will be increasingly inclusive of those little bits of progress that the children make or that the children show in our interactions each time."
>
> — Teacher

Many teachers and coaches requested additional teacher-facing resources to support the implementation of the strategies in their classrooms. For example, one teacher described how more teacher-facing resources (in this case, videos) could help her feel more confident to try new strategies in her classroom:

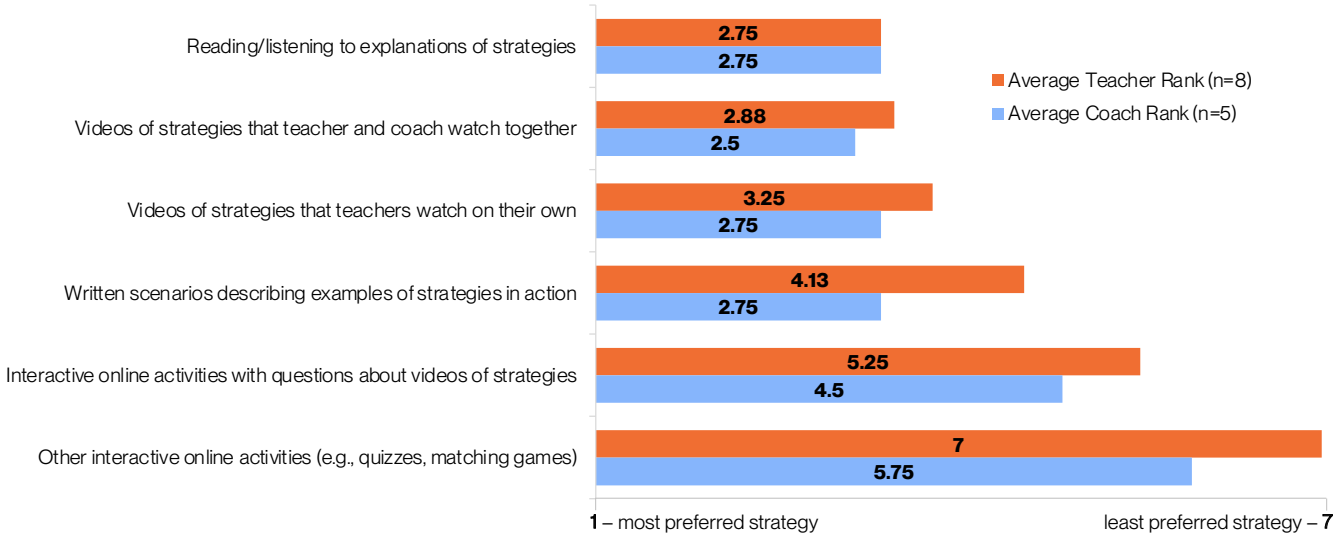
"If you guys do have like a video bank or something … that gives us some sense of like, **"I can watch somebody else do this successfully before I am thrown into the sharks,"** if I'm a new teacher especially."

— Teacher

This finding mirrors survey results indicating that interactive online activities were the least preferred by both teachers and coaches. Instead, teachers and coaches felt that explanations and videos of strategies were more effective for sharing information with teachers (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4. Average Ranking of Preferred Ways to Present Key Strategies to Teachers

Survey question: The following list includes different possible ways to present strategies as part of the coaching tool. Please drag and rank each of the following by level of helpfulness, listing first the method that would be most helpful for supporting teachers' learning.



As tool content development continues, we highlight the following content goal criteria, as well as a usefulness goal criterion in the context of delivering tool content:

- **Content 1.1.5 & 1.1.6. Teachers provide evidence-based supports for multilingual children and children with disabilities.** Coaches and teachers were clear on the need for additional resources to support multilingual children and children with disabilities. This includes developing additional content in the DLL focus area, as well as considering how strategies for other focus areas can be designed to be inclusive for diverse learners. To do this, developers may consider adding specific strategies and examples tailored to different student needs. Developers may also consider how they can encourage teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of these strategies for DLLs and children with disabilities during the informal observation and action planning process.
- **Usefulness 4.1.3. Observation tool findings support classroom and program staff to understand and apply the results for improvement over time.** Next steps for tool development may include identifying the best way to share information with teachers. Teachers and coaches

alike frequently requested additional teacher-facing resources. Suggestions included a variety of resource types—for example, videos of teachers trying the strategies in a classroom, additional written examples, printouts for teachers to post in their classrooms, and a teacher-facing version of the tool.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The formative evaluation of the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool pilot found evidence that the tool is useful for both coaches and teachers. Evidence shows that the tool incorporates many of the key elements of the coaching process identified in the co-design phase of tool development as well as the user-informed principles described in the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework. The formative evaluation also revealed potential issues that should be addressed to support the usefulness and scalability of the tool. First, the scalability of the tool is limited by user-experience challenges and, relatedly, by the intensive expert support needed for implementation. Second, further exploration is needed to understand how the tool will effectively integrate information on the broader program and classroom contexts or how it will support teachers over a longer period of time. Exhibit 5 summarizes the evaluation conclusions, including recommendations for continued development of different components of the tool and coaching process and considerations for next steps.

Exhibit 5. Summary of Formative Evaluation Findings

RQ1. Usefulness: Does use of the tool align with the practices and processes identified as part of an ideal informal observation journey?

Yes, but we recommend improvements to better support coaches' and teachers' holistic understanding of the coaching process and consideration of how the informal observation journey fits in coaches' and teachers' broader timelines.

Recommendations for improvement

- Ensure coaches understand the entire informal observation journey as part of the initial training to support transitions across cycles.
- Provide guidance on best practices for timing the observations and reflections.
- Support coach and teacher transitions.
- Consider how to better orient teachers to the tool and coaching process prior to or during the kickoff meeting.

Related Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework criteria

- Usefulness 4.1.3. Observation tool findings support classroom and program staff to understand and apply the results for improvement over time.
- Usefulness 4.2.2. Observation tools produce results that can be used for program-level planning.

RQ2. Scalability: Do coaches and teachers find the tool easy to understand and apply?

Somewhat, but we recommend improvements to tool functionality and further exploration of user-experience improvements that could streamline use and minimize the need for intensive ongoing support.

Recommendations for improvement

- Embed ongoing supports into the tool to support sustainability and scalability.
- Streamline the process of choosing a focus and developing an action plan across cycles.
- Improve functionality for note-taking during the informal observations.

Related Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework criteria

- Scalability 5.2.1. Observation tool requires a low to moderate amount of training for reliable use by persons with at least 2 years of experience in early childhood education classrooms.
- Scalability 5.2.3. Analyzing and summarizing observed results is easy and can be done in a reasonable amount of time.

RQ3. User Experience: Does having access to the tool enable teachers and coaches to incorporate key elements of the coaching process: (i) promoting psychological safety and teacher agency; (ii) including meaningful goal-setting; (iii) integrating coaching with existing professional development and improvement efforts; and (iv) building coaches' holistic understanding of teachers, children, and educational context?

Yes, but we recommend expanded support for teacher agency through the provision of teacher-facing resources and consideration of how to better integrate the tool in the broader classroom and school context at scale.

Recommendations for improvement

- Provide teacher-facing resources.
- Consider how the informal observation and reflection process can better involve teachers.
- Continue to encourage a kickoff meeting even for coach-teacher pairs with existing relationships.

Related Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework criteria

- User Experience 3.1.1. Teachers receive clear information about the purpose and use of the observation for improvement prior to observation
- User Experience 3.2.2. Observation tool can be flexibly implemented to different pedagogical and curricular contexts.

RQ4. Content: Do teachers and coaches find the content in the tool to be useful for incremental progress toward (i) supporting children through challenging behaviors; (ii) supporting dual language learners; and (iii) improving interactions that connect, engage, and inspire learning?

Yes, but we recommend the expansion of embedded content related to diverse learners and consideration of how to best deliver content to teachers in ways that meet their needs.

Recommendations for improvement

- Continue to develop content using the improving interactions and supporting children through challenging behaviors content as a model.
- Consider embedding strategies for supporting dual language learners and children with disabilities in all content areas.

Related Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework criteria

- Content 1.1.5. & 1.1.6. Teachers provide evidence-based supports for multilingual children and children with disabilities.
- Usefulness 4.1.3. Observation tool findings support classroom and program staff to understand and apply the results for improvement over time.

Considerations for Using the Reimagining Instructional Coaching Framework

The Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework outlines user-informed principles for developing new pre-K classroom observation tools, but it is not intended to be overly prescriptive. Rather, users should consider features of their specific development contexts when applying the framework to their observation and coaching tools. Exhibit 6 provides a list of four key considerations for using the framework.

Exhibit 6. Considerations for Reimagining Instructional Coaching

1	**What is the goal of your observation tool?** Consider whether there is anything else the tool was designed for that is not captured as part of the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework. This may include specific learning outcomes for teachers or children, populations or contexts that the tool focuses on, or other goals of the tool. For example, educators in the participatory design process for the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool identified *teacher psychological safety* and *meaningful goal-setting* as key elements of the coaching process. Although these elements were not explicitly mentioned in the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework, we included them as a focus of our formative evaluation.
2	**In what stage of development is your observation tool?** Consider which parts of the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework are appropriate for your observation tool's stage of development. You may decide that some goals, like psychometrics or scalability, are more appropriate at a later phase. For example, because the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool was at an early pilot stage of development, we determined that criteria related to psychometrics were not yet appropriate and chose to prioritize content, user experience, usefulness, and some aspects of scalability for the formative evaluation of a tool in the pilot stage.
3	**What information do you have already?** Consider whether data or other information exists that you can leverage to evaluate alignment of your observation tool with the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework. This may include data from earlier studies of the tool or materials used to develop the tool. For example, the initial evaluation of the alignment between the Coaching & Informal Observation Tool and the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework relied on findings from the participatory design process, documentation of the tool's content architecture, and example materials that the Teachstone team had developed.
4	**What new information do you need?** Consider what else you need to know to evaluate alignment of your observation tool with the Reimagining Instructional Coaching framework, as well as the best way to get that information. Likely, you will need to engage with users to gather information on the user experience and usefulness of the tool. For example, we opted to use a rapid-cycle formative evaluation approach to collect data about the pilot Coaching & Informal Observation Tool. The rapid-cycle evaluation allowed us to collect data and share findings with Teachstone, leave time for the Teachstone development team to revise the tool, and then collect additional data. Additionally, we decided to collect a lot of information from a few people. From our sample of 17 teachers and 9 coaches, we administered 3–4 surveys, conducted 1–2 interviews or focus groups, and observed 1–2 teacher and coach meetings.

Technical Appendix

Study Design

The SRI team used a rapid-cycle evaluation approach to evaluate Teachstone's pilot Coaching & Informal Observation Tool. Specifically, we used a staggered cohort design to gather information from users and report findings to Teachstone to inform tool revisions. The pilot included two cohorts: Cohort 1 started training and implementation in January 2024 and continued through June 2024, and Cohort 2 began in mid-March 2024 and continued through June 2024. This design was selected to allow for targeted, frequent feedback from SRI to Teachstone to support tool revisions. For example, Round 1 focused on training and implementation to allow Teachstone to revise before Cohort 2 training. Round 2 and Round 3 focused on ongoing use of the tool, including perspectives of newer and more experienced users.

Sample

The sample included nine coaches and 17 teachers from 10 early childhood centers across five programs. Participating sites were located in five states (California, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina) and reflected a variety of pre-K program types, including a Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program, public charter school, and community-based child care programs.

Nearly half of participating teachers spoke Spanish and English (35%; 6 teachers) or only Spanish (12%; 2 teachers) in their classrooms; 53% (9 teachers) spoke only English. Both the coach and teacher samples were diverse in terms of race/ethnicity. Three coaches identified as Black/African American, three identified as Hispanic/Latine, and three identified as White. Nearly half of teachers (8 teachers; 47%) identified as Black/African American, six (35%) identified as Hispanic/Latine, two (12%) identified as White, and one (6%) identified as Asian. All participating coaches and teachers were women.

In terms of past experiences with teaching and coaching, the sample primarily included highly experienced teachers and less experienced coaches. Most teachers (76%) and coaches (55%) had more than 10 years of experience as an early childhood teacher. However, the majority of coaches (67%) only had 2 or fewer years of experience as an instructional coach. Most teachers (71%) had previously received coaching, often with their current coach.

Measures

Data collection measures include coach and teacher surveys, coach interviews, teacher focus groups, observations and data from the training, and implementation and ongoing use of the tool.

Surveys

Pre-pilot survey. Prior to initial coach training and each teacher's kickoff meeting, participating coaches and teachers completed a pre-pilot survey (February–March 2024 for Cohort 1; March–June 2024 for Cohort 2). The pre-pilot survey asked about the extent of their experience with coaching; professional experience and demographic information (e.g., years of experience, gender, race/ethnicity); the extent to which they had an existing relationship with their coach/teacher counterpart; their past experiences with key elements of the coaching process (e.g., support for psychological safety and teacher agency, integration with existing professional development); and the usefulness of information they had received from previous coaching experiences regarding common challenge areas (e.g., integrating the CLASS results into their own teaching or classrooms).

Implementation survey. Following their initial training and kickoff meetings, coaches and teachers completed an implementation survey (February–March 2024 for Cohort 1; June 2024 for Cohort 2). The implementation survey solicited feedback on the training (coaches only) and implementation process, as well as initial reactions to the usability of the tool. The survey focused on whether coaches and teachers completed each component of the kickoff meetings and, for coaches, included questions about the quality, relevance, and usefulness of different aspects of the training.

Ongoing use surveys. During both Round 2 and Round 3 of the pilot, coaches and teachers completed ongoing use surveys. (Cohort 1 completed Round 2 ongoing use surveys between March and April 2024; both cohorts completed Round 3 ongoing use surveys between June and July 2024.) The ongoing use surveys included similar items as the pre-pilot survey related to the key elements of the coaching process and usefulness of the tool in supporting common challenge areas but focused on the coaching experienced during the pilot. The ongoing use surveys also included items about the ease of completing (for coaches) and helpfulness of (for teachers) different components of the coaching process, usability of the tool, and usefulness of specific tool features (e.g., discussion prompts). The Round 3 ongoing use surveys included additional questions about how coaching with the tool compared with past coaching experiences and about preferences for the best ways to provide resources to teachers.

Observations

The SRI team conducted in-person site visits to observe coaches using the tool with teachers. Observers informally visited the classroom for 30–60 minutes before the coaching meeting to gain a more holistic understanding of the context for the coaching conversation. Then, observers sat in on the coaching meeting and took notes using a standard observation protocol developed by the SRI team. The protocol logged the setup of the coaching session (e.g., one-on-one or small group), how the tool was used in the session (e.g., what device was used, whether the coach and teacher were co-viewing the tool), and any technical issues that arose. Observers also noted the coaching cycle focus area and key strategies discussed in the meeting and indicated if they observed various coaching activities (categorized as Getting Started, Reflection, or Focus/Action Planning for the Next Cycle activities), and whether these activities were completed by the coach, teacher, or neither.

Additionally, observers completed an assessment of Teachstone coaching competencies and whether there was limited/no evidence, some evidence, or strong evidence of each competency. Competencies include inclusive community; teacher-centered; purposeful experience; meaningful engagement; depth of understanding; intentional scaffolding; and reflective application. Observers concluded by rating the evidence for each of the key elements of the coaching process, using items that mirrored the items in the pre-pilot and ongoing use surveys.

Interviews and Focus Groups

In Rounds 2 and 3, the SRI team conducted brief interviews with coaches and focus groups with teachers. The interviews were conducted either in-person during site visits or virtually. Both interviews and focus groups followed a semi-structured interview format wherein interviewers used a protocol but allowed the conversation to move in directions of interest to participants. Protocols included open-ended questions that prompted participants to describe their experiences using the tool for coaching or using the strategies in their classrooms, followed by discussion of what was helpful and what could be improved.

Analysis

This study used a mixed-methods approach, relying on descriptive quantitative analysis of implementation and ongoing use survey and observation data, as well as qualitative analysis from coach interviews, teacher focus groups, and observation notes. Quantitative analyses were conducted in Stata, and data visualizations were used to support interpretation. Qualitative coding was done in Dedoose using both inductive and deductive methods. Deductive coding was used to apply predetermined codes for each research question and tool component. Inductive coding was used to identify themes that emerged in the interview and focus groups.

Endnotes

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