

Understanding the Problem: Empathy Interviews

PROBLEM TO INVESTIGATE: *Instructional coaching has an inconsistent impact on teacher practice and student outcomes.*

Inquiry question: What contributes to impactful coaching experiences?

Your Task: Use an *Empathy Interview* to understand how another person has experienced coaching or feedback cycles in their professional life.

Activity Step	Actions
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify an <i>interviewer</i>, and <i>interviewee</i>, and an <i>observer/timekeeper</i> for your group.
1. Review the topic you are investigating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-read the problem statement (see above), and the particular aspect of the problem about which you are seeking to learn.
2. Prepare for the interview. (4 min)	<p>The goal of this interview is to get someone to tell a story. Often, empathy interviews start with “Tell me a story about a time when...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare based on your role: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviewee: Privately reflect on your experiences working with a coach or engaging in a feedback cycle in a professional context. Interviewer: Review the sample prompts on the back of this handout. Select, sequence, and modify them as you see fit. Observer: Organize to take notes as you observe the interview
3. Conduct the interview. (5-8 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The interviewer should introduce her/himself and the project, make a statement or ask a question to build rapport, and then begin the interview. Take notes, capturing key quotes as much as possible.
4. Reflect as a group. (4 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individually read through notes and organize insights into the categories below. (2 min) Observer and interviewer: Share out an insight from each category. Reflect on the process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>What was it like to be interviewed in this way?</i> <i>How was this interview different from other kinds of research interviews? How was it similar?</i> <i>How might empathy research help you see a problem in your system differently?</i>

Post-Interview Reflection Organizer

What users experience	Key outliers <i>(when organizing data from multiple interviews)</i>
What users think	What users feel

Preparing for the Interview

PROBLEM: *Instructional coaching has an inconsistent impact on teacher practice and student outcomes.*

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SAMPLE PROMPTS:

- Tell me about a time when a coach or someone offering you feedback helped you with something in your professional practice.
 - Follow up: What made the interaction helpful? How did the coaching [feedback] impact what you did next?
- What are three words to describe how you feel about working with a coach [engaging in feedback cycles] in a professional context? Why?
- Tell me about a time when you found a coaching situation [feedback cycle] frustrating or unhelpful.
 - Follow up: How did you and your coach interact? Is there something that could have made it more helpful? How did the interaction make you feel, and why?
- Think about a specific coaching [feedback cycle] experience that you felt was successful or supportive. What contributed to that success or experience of support?
 - Follow up: How did you and your coach interact? What was the context for the coaching [feedback cycle]?
- When have you found coaching feedback difficult to act on? What helps or hinders your efforts?
- Suppose you could have three wishes to make coaching [a feedback cycle] as impactful as it can be. What would your wishes be?

Tips for crafting interview questions:

- *Ask why.* The answers will sometimes surprise you.
- *Ask questions neutrally.* “How do you experience working with a coach?” is a better question than “Don’t you get anxious trying to respond to a coach’s questions?” because the first question doesn’t imply that there is a right answer.
- *Don’t ask binary questions.* Binary questions can be answered in a word; you want to host a conversation built on stories.
- *Never say “usually” when asking a question.* Instead, ask about a specific instance or occurrence, such as “tell me about the last time you ____.”

Tips for during the interview:

- Listen for inconsistencies. Sometimes what people say and what they do are different. These inconsistencies often hide interesting insights.
- Pay attention to nonverbal cues. Be aware of body language and emotions.
- Don’t be afraid of silence. If you allow for silence, a person can reflect on what they’ve just said and may reveal something deeper.