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Literacy Coaching: A Research Based Coaching Guide

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LITERACY COACHING: A RESEARCH BASED RESOURCE GUIDE

by

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To my family, friends, and colleagues who supported me through the process of research and writing of my Capstone. You encouraged me, challenged me, and did not let me quit when I was discouraged. I would also like to dedicate my work to my late mother, who passed away in the midst of this two year journey. She would have been so proud of me. I learned from her that it is never too late to pursue your dreams.

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INTRODUCTION

The Journey to Instructional Coaching

"Reading should not be presented to children as a chore or duty. It should be
offered to them as a precious gift." — Kate DiCamillo

Introduction

The joy of a journey is in the voyage, not the destination. The destination is not a

place, but rather a moving target—a target that ebbs and flows with the knowledge

grasped along the way. My own literacy journey is a collection of experiences, people,

and books that have shaped my outlook on life, career, and most undeniably, my future.

The opportunity to be an instructional coach affords me the opportunity to shape the

journey of others. It is important to me that I provide teachers and teams of teachers

support that moves them forward on their own literacy journeys. To prepare for this next

step, I reflected on many steps along the way. I embraced the opportunity to increase my

effectiveness as a literacy coach and I found myself asking: What impact would a

research based coaching guide have on a coach's effectiveness with teachers,

understanding that the end goal of coaching is increased student achievement?

Literacy Memories

Curled up in my Nana's lap with a pint sized, spine-torn Beatrix Potter book

listening to her bring Peter Rabbit to life with her voice is a memory that is etched in

stone for me. My Nana, a very prim and proper English woman, would transpose herself

into the tree stump home and take on voices of mice, rabbits, and, of course, the sly Mr.

Fox. It is in that lap that I began to love reading. Long before bedtime, I would hand her

the same stack of miniature, tattered books. *Mrs. Tittlemouse* (1910) was the one that we read countless times. Each time I listened with a newfound anticipation as if I did not really know what was to happen. Each time it was read to me with the same excitement and patience so I could scour the tiny pictures for the details that were etched in stone in my four-year-old mind.

As I grew, the read alouds became less frequent. Instead, I became the receiver of books each time my Nana visited. She would always say "here is the best book ever" and hand me a classic like *Mary Poppins* (1934), *Winnie The Pooh* (1927), *My Favorite Age* (1943), and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1917). I would devour the books she bought me and be eagerly anticipating the next book long before her next visit! My mother, who was a stickler for children to express gratitude for gifts they receive, taught me that a good thank you note always started a conversation in a letter. Inevitably, that meant I had to "discuss" the book so my Nana would really know how much I loved it. This was not a hard task for me because I really did love the books. I would begin my letter by saying the obligatory thank you declarative sentence. Then I would tell her my favorite part of the book and before you know it I had retold the most important parts and elicited a response by asking her a question about the book. My mother always said that a question was an essential part of a good thank you note if you desire a response. I always got a response to my notes which made me love writing notes and letters. I learned the importance of the connection between reading and writing at a young age. My Nana always said that anything you need to learn , you can learn from reading a book. A positive attitude about reading is surely a by-product of my childhood experiences.

Path to Instructional Coaching

I have not lost that love of listening to people read aloud or talking and writing about books. Many, many, years later I sat in teacher trainings and was mesmerized listening to the district Language Arts coach read from Patricia Polacco books. *Rechenka's Egg (1988), Dear Mr. Falker (1998),* and *Babushka's Doll* (1995) had undeniable themes for all humankind. There I was a 30 something woman being transported in time listening to a children's picture book. It was a similar feeling to sitting on my Nana's lap; it had the same profound impact. The lessons and themes transcend time, place, and circumstance. I used the very same books with deep gratitude and fierceness as I taught my first class of third graders key story elements. It was the coaching I received that year that reshaped my reading instruction and sparked my interest in coaching.

As connected as I felt to books, I had not yet really ever wondered how authors' wrote all the classics I adored. And then I went to a Lucy Calkins Workshop. I listened to her with the intensity of my five-year-old self. The format of her workshop and coaching had a profound impact on me. I was introduced to the term "seed idea" (Calkins, 1994). She explained how authors often take ideas from their real life and make them into a story. It was an epiphany for me as a writing teacher that I should not only allow but encourage the students take an experience and turn it into a memoir or fiction story. I listened to kids tell their stories with much greater intensity and purpose as it could become their next piece of writing. It was her coaching that created a paradigm shift in my thinking about writing. The changes that I made that year increased the capacity of

my students as writers and me as an educator. She provided a model of differentiation in her coaching that allowed me to do the same for my students. She allowed for choice, collaboration, and offered personalized feedback in her presentation for us. My interest in coaching was reignited that year.

My informal coaching career began long before instructional coaches were in vogue. I entered into the field of education as a second career, a mother of three, and a woman who was determined to make a difference for kids and families. I took every course offered in reading, built an extensive classroom library, and read every book I could find on literacy. I spent all but one year of my 18 years teaching in the primary grades. I hosted many student teachers, taught district intervention courses, created district scope and sequences for literacy instruction, aligned standards, served on language arts committees, and spent many years on school leadership teams. I thrived on professional learning and loved connecting with many teachers in the building to support school-wide efforts in literacy. But, when asked to consider this kind of role, I said no to formal opportunities to lead. I loved the classroom; I loved every single part of it. I had serious doubts that I could have more job satisfaction than I had being in charge of a kindergarten classroom. Honestly, I thought why would I leave a job I love to be an instructional coach? Then, I took a leap of faith in my 18th year of teaching. I interviewed for the position of a literacy coach. I had several important people have more faith than I had in myself who assured me when I doubted I could do the literacy coach job. I am thankful for their advice, support, and faith in my abilities for now I am a literacy coach for the primary grades at a large elementary school.

Current Reality

In my current role as literacy coach in an elementary building, I cherish the opportunity to share my learning and experiences with my colleagues. Learning with and from my colleagues is the highlight of each day. I know that carefully crafted coaching is the perfect time to teach new concepts, solve problems, reflect on data, and build a community of adult learners. Coaching creates opportunities to learn new concepts, reflect and refine current practice, and build a "culture of learning that recognizes collaboration as an asset" (Moran, 2007, p. 6). As I supported teachers in their professional learning each day, I found myself wanting to know more about not only content knowledge but also the craft of coaching to better serve them and the work they do with students. I embraced this opportunity to deepen my understanding of instructional coaching in the primary grades. My literacy journey is not over yet.

Rationale

In addition to taking on a new role late in my career, I decided it was also time to finish the master's degree in literacy education I started a decade ago. The timing of my coursework and my new position could not be better. I was immersed in new learning, new job, new colleagues, and new expectations for myself. To say that my first year as a literacy coach was a learning curve is an understatement. My knowledge of teaching students was the only thing familiar to me that year. Nonetheless, I loved my new role as a coach. It showcased my strengths but at the same time, highlighted areas for professional growth. I had so much to learn to do this job well.

Over the years I acquired a solid base of knowledge surrounding teaching best

practice that I have shared with teachers. But, I am quite sure I did not do the best job of actually coaching them in a way that will profoundly impact their practice. Without a solid base in coaching best practice from which to build, my coaching lacked effectiveness and clarity. I was and still am energized by conversations with teachers around their practice, I enjoy modeling lessons, I appreciate stepping in to help interpret data to form instructional groups, and I thoughtfully participate on a building level to ensure good instruction for all. However, as I walked through my days, I craved more depth of knowledge around coaching effectively, coaching with purpose and promise, and a collaborative resource to guide my coaching efforts. I felt the same excitement and energy I felt when I began my career; I was astounded by my eagerness to go to a job I love each and every day- the job of a literacy coach.

In my first year as a literacy coach, I relied on my best professional judgement and years of experience in most of my interactions with staff. I felt a bit lost as there was nothing to anchor my thoughts in the form of a core resource or curriculum. There were many sleepless nights fretting over whether I said or did the right thing, asked the right questions, analyzed the data correctly, and done any of that effectively. I came from a job with a fairly full toolkit to a toolkit with nothing but homemade tools. Although the feedback from teachers was surprisingly positive that first year, it was time I do a reset and get some research based tools and frameworks to support literacy instruction. During the first year I supported teachers by finding resources, modeled lessons, facilitated whole school workshops, and supported PLC work. This was done more reactively rather than systematically or with purposeful differentiation. It was the lack of clarity for

myself in the role that precipitated my extensive study of best practice in literacy coaching.

Research Significance

My goal for my project was to expand my knowledge base around the topic of literacy coaching and create a common core resource for new coaches. To reach this goal, I clearly defined literacy coaching, examined underlying theory that influences coaching, investigated the role of the literacy coach in school wide professional development, and studied how to measure the effectiveness of coaching. Upon completion of my research, I created a research-based literacy coaching resource that I shared with my coaching colleagues. The resource is an interactive resource that will be added to as we gain further insight into the role of literacy coach in my district.

Summary

The profound impact of books, conversations about books, and reflections on personal experiences with my literacy learning continues to amaze me. As a classroom teacher, my impact was fairly visible for me to see on a daily basis. As a literacy coach, my impact is seen through conversations, change in teacher practice, and increased confidence in teacher problem solving. I would like to think the teachers with whom I work view their relationship with me as I viewed my Nana's lap—a place to enjoy learning, ask questions, debate topics, solve problems, take risks, and make decisions with my support. Crane (2012), well known author of *The Heart of Coaching*, said "Coaching is a healthy, positive, and enabling process that develops the capacity of people to solve today's problems" (p. 12). Therein lies the premise of my project—to create a

research-based literacy coaching resource to guide my practice and thereby increase the capacity of teachers.

In chapter two, I present the findings from research on instructional coaching and the implications of coaching on teacher practice. I define literacy coaching, present a variety of coaching models, explore underlying theories, highlight the role of literacy coaching in a school-wide professional development plan, and articulate guidelines on how to measure effectiveness.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Coaching at its essence is the way that human beings, and individuals, have always learned best." - Elena Aguilar, The Art of Coaching (2013)

Introduction

My love of learning and literacy, coupled with the inspiring educators who have shaped my thinking along the way, drew me towards the important work of literacy coaching. The need for focused, systematic coaching became quite clear to me during my 18 years teaching. My years of experience in and out of the classroom and my continued education created a base for this literature review.

The knowledge and perspective gained from this literature review helped me to deliver high quality literacy coaching to my colleagues in my elementary building. The review of the literature focused on answering the question: What impact would a research based coaching guide have on a coach's effectiveness with teachers, understanding that the end goal of coaching is increased student achievement?

During my initial review of the literature, I recognized the importance of clearly defining the role of the literacy coach. Four other focus areas evolved: coaching models, adult learning theories, literacy coaching as school-wide professional development, and the effective measuring of embedded professional development. The complex role of the literacy coach is presented in section one. In section two, a variety of coaching models that provide structure to literacy coaching are discussed. In section three, the underlying adult learning theories and some of the implications on this form of professional

development are presented. In section four, the work of the literacy coach in a school-wide professional development plan are presented. And finally, in section five, the findings on measuring the effectiveness of instructional coaching are addressed. By reviewing the literature with these five foci, I increased my knowledge base and effectiveness as a literacy coach and simultaneously created a guide for this work.

Literacy Coaching

A fundamental challenge to the effectiveness of a literacy coach is the nebulous definition of the role (Elish-Piper, L'Allier & Zwart, 2014). To confront that challenge, I defined the role for myself and others which lead to increased effectiveness of the position. As a direct result of research there was added clarity and depth to my personal working definition of literacy coaching. In this section, I provide a detailed look at many different sources as to what a literacy coach is, what they do, and the essentials of coaching.

Literacy coaching is one-way school districts currently provide professional development to teachers. Baxter and Sandvold (2008) argued that the way in which the coaching is defined and implemented is paramount to the success and sustainability of this component of professional development within districts. Therefore, I believe it is important to articulate a clear, precise definition and purpose, to define the various roles, state the characteristics of a successful coach, and explain the key principles of effective coaching.

Definition. Researchers defined literacy coaching as embedded professional development that allows teachers to receive feedback, reflect on practice, and look at

results with the support that will move them forward and thereby increase student

achievement in literacy instruction (The University of Florida Lastinger Center for

Learning Forward & Public Impact, 2016). Another group of prominent researchers,

Shearer and Vogt (2011), suggested that coaching is a unique role because it directly

links one professional development to another. The ability for the coach to link

observation, feedback, and reflection to teacher practice is different than the traditional

teacher workshop style of professional development. Leaders in literacy, McKenna and

Walpole (2013) contended that a coach is a "teacher's teacher who differentiates

instruction to meet the needs of an adult learner" (p. 1). In both definitions, the common

themes of reflection and feedback are evident.

Qualifications. In 2010, the International Literacy Association created standards

for literacy coaches. The association recommended that literacy coaches should have

previous teaching experience, master's degree with concentration in reading education, a

minimum of 24 graduate semester hours in reading and language arts and related courses,

and an additional 6 semester hours of supervised practicum experience (Literacy

Worldwide, 2017). Interestingly, the International Reading Association also

acknowledged that not all literacy coaches meet these qualifications but does recommend

that all coaches have a high level of literacy and teaching. Consequently, there will be a

variety of skill sets amongst literacy coaches across the country.

Purpose of coaching. Inherent to any coaching role is the end goal of improved

performance of the team. The team, in this case, is a group of teachers whose

performance directly affects student achievement. Researchers Baxter and Sandvold

(2008) asserted that the primary purpose of a literacy coach is to help move building and

teacher goals forward by connecting school improvement and classroom implementation.

Similarly, author and literacy leader, Moran (2007), described the end goal of coaching as

the interlacing of improved instruction to improve student learning. Likewise, Marzano

and Simms (2013) suggested the purpose of coaching is to guide teachers toward best

practice, show teachers best practice, help teachers maintain best practice, challenge and

support teachers learning, and to create a culture where taking risks to improve is the

norm. Although the researchers use a variety of words to describe the purpose of

coaching, common themes arose. The themes all pointed to increasing student

achievement through the work of the teacher.

  Coaching roles. The literacy coach as a multidimensional position is a common

thread in relevant research. Bean, Elish- Piper, and L'Allier (2010) contended that the

primary role of the literacy coach includes supporting teaching in the form of direct

coaching and many other duties. A literacy coach also supports teachers in data

collection, interpretation, and analysis. Additionally, a coach leads program initiatives,

conducts large group professional learning sessions, participates in in professional

learning communities, and facilitates teacher study groups (2010). More specifically,

literacy experts McKenna and Walpole (2013) defined six specific roles for a literacy

coach: learner, grant writer, building literacy leader, curriculum expert, researcher, and

teacher. The complexity of the role was noted in all the sources I investigated as part of

this literature review. In fact, the research suggested that literacy coaches narrow the

expectation to a few of the high yield roles to maximize effectiveness (Bryan, Clifton,

Harrison, Killion, 2012). Therefore, a literacy coach needs to be diligent about prioritizing duties so that coaching is the primary role (Bryan et al., 2012).

Key principles of literacy coaching. Much of the research indicated that effective literacy coaches have core principals to anchor their work. Moran (2007) suggested that the core work of a coach is to establish a culture of adult learning, build the capacity of individual teachers and teams of teachers, and provide differentiated professional development.

Establishing a culture that supports and encourages learning is not an easy task and requires a team of leaders. In the book *Coaching Matters (*Bryce, Clifton, Harrison, Killion, 2012) coaching experts acknowledged that it is not the job of a coach alone to be the agent of change in a school. The creation of the coaching culture is part of the overall plan built by the coach and the administrator. It is an intricate plan that weaves together a skillfully crafted relationship and professional learning opportunities. In similar fashion, McKenna and Walpole (2013) contended that a positive coaching culture is a "balancing act between the development of knowledge and the development of instructional skills within the context of a learning environment in a school" (p. 193). A culture that emphasizes teacher learning creates an arena for powerful professional development.

A common theme in much of the literature around coaching is the promise of building capacity. Moran (2007) suggested that within a coaching culture, literacy coaches can increase capacity by supporting teachers "to view teaching as a series of challenges we respond to rather than a series of challenges we react to" (p. 7). Moran contended that to build capacity in teachers, literacy coaches need to create a detailed

plan to deliver a variety of professional development options with time for reflection and

feedback within the support structure of a coaching framework. Moran finished by

arguing that ongoing, focused conversation about learning about the art of teaching is an

integral part of the coaching process (2007). On a more personal note, Aguilar (2013)

argued that a coaching culture should include conversations where teachers share

personal stories about professional learning and change. Aguilar emphatically stated that

"the way teachers tell these stories expose beliefs and feelings that increase my efficacy

as a coach" (p. 105). Being aware of and responsive to the way in which a teacher feels

about professional learning gives the coach a better informed lens to use when coaching

through specific challenges. A skilled literacy coach coupled with a school culture that

has a commitment in continuous improvement and innovation allows for many

opportunities for differentiated professional development.

Differentiated coaching is an essential component of literacy coaching.

Researchers agreed that coaches need to have a clear understanding of what teachers need

and differentiate professional development opportunities accordingly (Haag, Kissell,

Shoniker, & Stover, 2011). One way to do this is to create a continuum of learning

opportunities (Moran, 2007). A continuum of professional development opportunities

within a literacy coaching framework is covered later in this literature review.

Characteristics of effective literacy coaches. Many researchers agreed that

effective literacy coaches have a shared set of characteristics that, coupled with a culture

of learning, provide a strong case for effective professional development. Much of the

research suggested that effective coaches communicate effectively, collaborate well, are

intentional and opportunistic, believe strongly in professional learning, and possess

leadership skills (Bean, Elish-Piper, & L'Allier,2010; Bryce, Clifton, Harrison, &

Killion, 2012;Reed & Wren, 2005; Shearer & Vogt, 2011). Coaching literature defined

those characteristics in a variety of ways; the thoughts of many of them are presented in

the following paragraphs.

Communication. The ability to effectively communicate is at the heart of coaching

and is essential to the coaching process (Boatright, Gallucci, Van Lare, & Yoon, 2010).

Coaches need to have strong relationships with teachers to facilitate honest, focused,

reflective, purposeful conversations about teaching and learning. Equally important is

attentive listening in the midst of coaching conversations. Prominent author, Toll (2014)

asserted that purposeful listening is at the center of coaching conversations. It is while

listening that the coach uncovers what the next steps are for the teacher. Conversely,

Sandvold and Baxter (2008) argued that the ability to ask questions that promote

self-reflection is key to a productive coaching conversation. It is evident that both

questioning and listening are the keys to effective coaching. Additionally, Wren and Reed

(2005) stated that coaches need to provide support and give feedback that is

non-judgmental and completely confidential within all coaching conversations.

Collaboration. The strong desire to collaborate is another essential characteristic of an

effective literacy coach. Coaches should have a plan for collaboration (Toll, 2014). Toll

contended that creating and maintaining a coaching schedule lays the groundwork for

purposeful and productive collaboration with teachers. Researchers agreed that the

primary focus of coaching should be working directly with teachers in this collaborative,

not evaluative, role (Bean, Elish-Piper, & L'Allier, 2010). Furthermore, Toll (2005) suggested the coach is viewed as collaborator rather than an evaluator when the focus is on student learning rather than the effectiveness of instruction. Being viewed by the teacher as a colleague, rather than the expert who is judging performance, is crucial when collaborating with teachers.

Intentional and opportunistic. A successful coach is intentional and opportunistic in both approach and follow through when working with teachers (Bean, Elish-Piper, & L'Allier, 2010). Bean, Elish-Piper and L'Allier argued that the relationship the coach has built with the teacher and the working knowledge of what each teacher needs to grow professionally provides context to make decisions and embrace teachable moments as opportunities for learning. To truly embrace being intentional and opportunistic, a coach must have an open door policy and be ready to turn an opportunity into intentional coaching (Bean et al., 2010).

Leader in learning. An effective coach is also a leader in learning. It is important to be strong in both content and teaching knowledge. The International Literacy Association (2010) stated that the academic knowledge base of a literacy coach is so important that the association does not differentiate between reading specialist and literacy coach in its literacy professionals standards. The importance of constant learning is prevalent in literacy coaching literature; therefore, it is essential that literacy coaches have support to continue their personal professional learning to provide support for their teachers (Elish-Piper, L'Allier & Zwart, 2014). When districts are creating a coaching framework or model, this is an important point to consider.

All of these points are important to anchor my thinking as I answer the question: What impact would a research based coaching guide have on a coach's effectiveness with teachers, understanding that the end goal of coaching is increased student achievement? A clear understanding of the literacy coach role for the administration, coach, and teachers sets the stage for powerful professional development. How a coach delivers this potentially transformative professional development is another essential part of the equation. In the following section, I present a variety of coaching models and outlined the common threads amongst them.

Coaching Models

A coaching model is an overarching framework that uses a research base and a set of beliefs to anchor the work (Marzano & Sims, 2013). Although the research on the definition, roles, and key principles is consistent among most researchers, the opinions on the delivery of instructional coaching are more diverse. My literature review pointed to a wide array of mindsets and methods around instructional coaching. McKenna and Walpole (2013) claimed that increased student achievement relates to the specificity of the coaching program and professional development targets. Therefore, it was important for me to consider the models when creating a literacy coaching plan.

Cognitive coaching. Cognitive coaching is one of the most widely used coaching models in schools today. Marzano and Sims (2013) defined cognitive coaching as a "non judgmental, self-directed, developmental, reflective coaching model" (p. 12). Cognitive coaching, created by Costa and Garmston in 1985, is a process during which teachers are highly reflective and learn to think about the thinking that drives their practice

(Garmston, Linder & Whitaker, 1993). Central to this kind of coaching is the coaching conversation. The deep reflective conversations between the coach and the teacher are thought to "increase teacher efficacy by the ensuing increased independence and automaticity" (Garmston, Linder, & Whitaker, 1993,p. 57). Coaching conversations have three components: planning a conversation, observing an event, and reflecting collaboratively (Garmston,et al.1993). The coach's ability to formulate questions to enhance teacher reflection is key to this model.

Partnership model. Well known author, Knight (2007), created a model that focuses on the partnership between the teacher and the coach. The partnership approach is based on principles of equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, and reciprocity (Knight, 2007). Knight's coaching model is built around four components: behavior, content knowledge, direct instruction, and formative assessment (as cited in Marzano & Simms, 2013). The coach's role in Knight's model is supporting teachers building safe classroom climates, delivering standard based lessons, using formative assessments to guide instruction, facilitating collaboration, providing feedback to teachers about the implementation of research-based practice (2013). Although, Knight's model differs from cognitive coaching in approach, there are many similarities. Most notably, both cognitive coaching and the Knight's partnership model embrace the power of teacher reflection as the agent of change.

Differentiated coaching. The differentiated coaching model is grounded in the work of Kise (2006). The coaching delivered to teachers in this model is based on personality type as indicated by a personality inventory. Kise stated that the coach meets

the teachers' learning needs by taking into account the way in which they learn best. Differentiated coaching includes four key elements: problem/solution orientation, a common framework for reflection based on teachers' strengths and beliefs, teacher support in change in practice, and collaboration (Kise, 2006). This model differs from cognitive coaching and Knight's model in its intense focus on teachers' learning styles to improve teaching and thereby increase student achievement.

Coaching continuum model. The coaching continuum model was created as a vehicle to support teacher learning using the gradual release of responsibility (Marzano & Simms, 2013). Within the coaching cycle, the coach releases more and more responsibility to the teacher just as a classroom teacher scaffolds instruction for a student. Inherent in this model is the fact that less experienced teachers may need more guidance and coaching than a more experienced teacher (2013). In this model, the coach's role is adaptive and constantly changing as the coach works over the course of time with a teacher. The coach's role is to "serve as a consultant, a mentor, colleague, and a partner for planning, observing, and reflecting on best practice" (Marzano & Simms, 2013, p. 15). The coach's role will ebb and flow depending on the circumstances. The continuum model differs from other models in the levels of support as opposed to content, personality type, or reflective conversations.

Transformational coaching. In the book, *The Heart of Coaching (2012)*, Crane defined transformational coaching as "the art of assisting people to enhance their effectiveness in a way they feel helped" (p. 31). The key to this model is the relationship between the coach and teacher. Embedded in this model is the "feedback loop" (p. 44).

The feedback loop is a way for the coach to balance dialogue and feedback when conferring with teachers. The coach's role is to help teachers set data-based goals, observe and give meaningful feedback, and coach in a manner that supports and empowers teachers (Crane, 2012). Aguilar, another prominent coaching expert believes the coach's purpose is to guide the learning of another adult (2013). Teachers learn to ask and accept help with the intent of improving practice in transformational coaching. This model sets itself apart by making goal setting the anchor in addition to focusing on the emotional connection.

Moran (2007) found that much is learned from comparing and contrasting instructional coaching models when creating a coaching plan. Although the premise varies between models and the way in which the coaching is orchestrated differs, there are many common threads. All of the models referred to in this literature review included a support structure, communication plan, reflection, and an embedded framework of differentiation. In her book, *Differentiated Literacy Coaching,* Moran included an extensive list of instructional coaching models used in school districts across the country. In all of these models, there is a concrete plan for how the coaching will be delivered. Coaching models are important to consider when thinking about instructional coaching as professional development; however, a model alone is not a complete base from which to build an instructional coaching plan. It is also important to be cognizant of adult learning theories when coaching teachers. Literacy coaches need to consider the adult learning needs in the context of coaching to provide effective professional development (Hartnett-Edwards, 2011).

Adult Learning Theory

I would be remiss to not include research on how adults learn while trying to answer my question: What impact would a research based coaching guide have on a coach's effectiveness with teachers, understanding that the end goal of coaching is increased student achievement? Although there are many similarities in how children and adults learn, it is critical that literacy coaches understand the differences when coaching adults in a professional development environment (Aguilar, 2013). I present four adult learning theories and the coaching implications.

Andragogy. Knowles (1977), a pioneer in adult learning, suggested that adult learners benefit from knowing the purpose of the learning and how it directly applies to them. For the literacy coach this means planning for task-oriented learning for teachers. A product with a clear purpose that the teacher can use in the classroom the very next day provides them with a sense of accomplishment.

Self-directed learning. Self-directed learning theory contends that adults learn best when they work alone to achieve their goals (Corley, 2011). This principle implies a certain amount of self-motivation, organization, and self-reflection. Self-directed learning can be a rather isolating experience. To support a self-directed learner, a literacy coach may conduct a needs assessment to help determine objectives, identify a starting point, supply resources, and support in reflection of learning (Corley, 2011). It is within the reflection activities with a self-directed learner where a literacy coach will make an impact.

Transformative learning. This theory defines adult learning as learning that

changes the way you think about yourself and the world (Crane, 2012). This kind of

learning has the potential to shape your thinking. To support transformative learning, a

literacy coach is cognizant of creating a climate for learning which embeds constructive

feedback and time for reflection, offering differentiated learning opportunities, and

facilitating discussion that requires students to see other points of view (Crane, 2012).

The transformative learning theory fits nicely with the embedded professional

development of literacy coaching.

Constructive-developmental theory. This theory believes that much of what we

know about student learning is true of adult learning (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, &

Hensley, 2012). In their book, *Leading for Powerful Learning* (2012), it is suggested

there is a similar learning progression for adults and children. The authors contended

there are three stages in the progression: instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring.

Ideally, the coach guides a teacher through these progressions with the ultimate goal of

the teacher being a self-authoring learner. An instrumental learner learns by being given

concrete and explicit learning opportunities. The socializing learner learns by working in

collaborative teams. The self-authoring learner learns by reflecting on their own practice

in collaboration with others (2012). Understanding this theory gives the literacy coach

insight into how to guide teachers through a learning progression.

Planning highly effective coaching opportunities is dependent on a keen

awareness of how adults learn best. Aguilar (2013),pointed out that it is critical that

coaches understand the previous experiences, knowledge base, beliefs, and interests of

the coachees. The common threads in adult learning are: setting a clear purpose for

learning, giving constructive feedback, fostering reflection, and differentiating coaching style to meet the needs of the teacher. These common threads in adult learning can be embedded in the planning, implementation, and follow-up phases of professional development. There is a lot for the literacy coach to consider when planning professional development for adults. Understanding the definition and purpose of professional development is paramount in an effective school-wide professional development plan.

School-wide Professional Development

Research on school-wide professional development was critical as I looked for an answer the question: What impact would a research based coaching guide have on a coach's effectiveness with teachers, understanding that the end goal of coaching is increased student achievement? Literacy coaching is a key component of a strong professional development plan (Baxter & Sandvold, 2008). In this section, I define professional development, present professional development opportunities, and outline key elements of professional development.

Definition and purpose. Guskey (2000) defined professional development as "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they may, in turn, improve student learning." (p. 1). The International Reading Association (2010) stated that a literacy coach's purpose is to provide essential leadership for the school's literacy program by creating a long term staff development process over time. The literacy coach will have a hand in creating, facilitating, and assessing the effectiveness of literacy professional development in a school.

As presented earlier in this literature review, it is suggested that a continuum approach to professional development best meets the needs of teachers (Moran, 2007). Moran believed this approach makes it possible to support many teachers in an ongoing manner instead of in sporadic intervals. Similarly, literacy expert Bean (as cited in McKenna & Walpole, 2013 p. 205) recommended the continuum approach to professional development. Moreover, Bean suggested that a professional development continuum is based on levels of teacher support. Low support activities include resource management, assistance with assessments, and study groups. Moderate support activities include collaborative data analysis, large group presentations, and grade level meetings. High level of support activities would include lesson modeling, observing, and providing feedback to teachers. I present each of these professional learning opportunities in more detail in the following section.

Collaborative resource management. The time spent managing resources is a multi- purpose tool to build relationships with teachers in addition to a time to acquaint them with new resources (Moran, 2007). The literacy coach may help a team create a plan for implementing resources, assign reading levels to classroom libraries, or give an introduction to a new literacy manipulative.

Collaborative data analysis. Collaborative data analysis is an opportunity for the literacy coach to support individual teachers while interpreting student data together (McKenna & Walpole, 2013). Data analysis coupled with a gradual release of responsibility to meet the teacher's coaching needs builds capacity in teachers with data driven instruction (2013). The literacy coach may help a teacher interpret running

records, process comprehension interviews, analyze student work, or study anecdotal reading data.

Study groups/book clubs. The literacy coach offers to lead a focus group to study an instructional practice or topic (Moran, 2007). In a book club, the teachers and coach get to learn side by side to inform practice (McKenna & Walpole, 2013). Although the literacy coach takes on less of a leadership role, he or she guides the professional development by way of choice of topic that aligns with the school's literacy goals.

 Lesson planning/co-teaching. The teacher and coach create the lesson together in this kind of coaching. (Moran, 2007). This type of lesson planning or co-teaching is a highly cooperative learning experience as the teacher is working alongside the coach. Further research suggested that this embedded form of professional development is a natural link between the literacy coach and the teacher (McKenna & Walpole, 2013).

Large group literacy presentations. Large group presentations are the most traditional kind of professional development where all teachers gather in one place to receive what the coach is delivering. Research suggested that most important part of any large group literacy presentation is the connection between current practice and new learning (Moran, 2007). Literacy presentations are to be collaboratively planned, have a clear learning target, embed time to practice skills learned, and include a plan for next steps (Moran. 2007).

Personal learning communities. DuFour (2014), a pioneer in the widespread use of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in schools, defined three crucial questions in an effective PLC (2014, p. 6): What do we want each student to learn? How will we

know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning? In this unique professional development arena, the literacy coach supports teachers' discussions about data, standards, instructional strategies, and student work (McKenna & Walpole, 2013). A coach does not have the ability to make a great team but can purposefully create a climate for collaboration by asking guiding questions to promote effective teaching and learning. In the book, *The Art of Coaching Teams* (2016), Aguilar suggested coaches use a framework to help teams build trust, develop healthy communication, and manage conflict. To do this effectively, the coach needs to be a viewed as a collaborator not an outsider. Dufour believed that coaches must challenge, support, have clear vision, and serve as role models (2014). It is essential that the coach takes time to reflect on his or her role within a PLC. The importance of PLCs cannot be underestimated in the coach's world. It is through the work of a team, in which a coach is an integral part, schools can be transformed (Aguilar, 2016). This is a challenging task, but one worth taking to increase the effectiveness of a PLC and thereby increase teacher efficacy and student achievement.

Modeling. Modeling is an effective way to embed literacy professional development in the classrooms. Accordingly, McKenna and Walpole (2013) argued that "outside the classroom professional development is not enough therefore literacy coaches must move inside the classroom" (p. 206). Modeling can be a good way to not only demonstrate best practice in literacy but also build relationships with teachers. Modeling is often coupled with a reflective coaching conversation (2013). The coach would model a lesson, reflect with the teacher, then set up a time to observe that same teacher do a

similar lesson. McKenna and Walpole (2013) reported that literacy coaches make different choices for how and why they use this form of professional development. For example, a coach may model a lesson for a highly skilled teacher who is interested in seeing a strategy in action. Conversely, a coach may model for a teacher who is struggling.

Observation and feedback. The literacy coach and the teacher plan a time for the observation and a time for a follow up conversation. This type of professional development is pivotal in teacher learning because observations drive the coaching cycle (McKenna & Walpole, 2013). Most researchers agreed that targeted, formative feedback for the teacher is instrumental in professional development (2013). Additionally, the observations give the literacy coach the opportunity to collect data about the effectiveness of the coaching. Based on the observation and teacher feedback the coach creates the next steps to in this personalized professional development (2013).

In *The Literacy Coach's Handbook* (McKenna & Walpole, 2013)*,* a five-point observation and feedback cycle is presented as the framework for coaching conversations. The components include pre-observation, observation, coach's reflection, feedback to the teacher, and next steps for coaching. In the pre-observation, a conversation takes place about the ensuing lesson. During the observation, the coach spends his or her time watching and learning about teacher practice. The coach is careful to reflect following the observation not during the observation (2013). The final step is introspective as the coach determines what the next step is for that particular teacher. Feedback is a crucial step in the cycle where the coaches shares honestly and openly with

a supportive stance (2013). This cycle allows the coach to measure the effectiveness of coaching efforts thus far and plan for further coaching in addition to formulating feedback for the teacher.

In an extensive study in Kansas there were similar findings regarding observation and feedback. The Kansas Coaching Project Researchers studied instructional coaches for five years to determine what effective coaching looks like in a school setting (Bradley, Deshler, Dunekack, Elford, Hock, Knight, and Knight, 2015). The result was an instructional coaching cycle that Knight (2007) described as "a very simple but powerful way to conduct instructional coaching" (p. 12). The instructional coaching cycle has three main steps: identify, learn, improve. In the first step, the coach supports the teacher in identifying an instructional change the teacher would like to make and a measurable learning target. In the second step of the cycle, the coach explains and models teaching strategies. In the third and final step, the coach monitors the implementation and whether the goal was met and makes a plan for the next action (2007).

The common thread in the research on literacy professional development is that instructional improvement is a long multistage process that involves awareness, planning, implementation, and reflection (Moran, 2007). The literacy coach's role in professional development is to serve as consultant, mentor, support network, and as a colleague (Marzano, 2013). It is important for a literacy coach have a plan to measure their effectiveness in all of those roles.

Measuring Effectiveness

Of the researchers I studied, many agreed that there needs to be a plan for measuring the effectiveness of all professional development including the work of the literacy coach despite its difficulty. Moran (2007) contended it is critical that literacy coaches measure the effectiveness of the coaching process. Killion (2003) argued that if you "cannot measure success of your coaching, you need a new plan" (p. 26). Toll (2016) suggested that a detailed plan of who, how, and when literacy coaching will take place is a key component to an effective plan. Just as assessments are embedded into student learning, evaluative tools to measure coaching effectiveness need to be embedded in professional development (Guskey, 2000). McKenna and Walpole (2013) argued that "if teachers are not implementing the professional development, then the professional development has not been successful and must be redesigned" (p. 206). If we are to affect student achievement, we must measure the effectiveness by observing teacher practice. McKenna and Walpole (2013) professed that the "road from professional development to achievement is indirect and winding" (p. 194). The indirect link between student achievement and professional development makes definitive data collection difficult.

Guskey (2002) acknowledged there are many variables in directly measuring the impact of professional development but argues that "in the absence of proof, you *can* collect good evidence about whether a professional development program has contributed to specific gains in student learning" (p. 48). Guskey further suggested that effectiveness is best measured when clear goals are set and aligned with building literacy goals, a plan is then made for how to assess, plan is in place for what kind of data will be collected,

and how it will be collected. Guskey contended there are five critical levels that should be considered when planning and evaluating professional development: participants' reaction, participants' learning, organization support and change, participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes. Guskey stated that backward planning will lead to more effective professional development (2002). In this section, I present some strategies to collect and measure data. It is important to use a multi-measure approach when evaluating coaching efforts.

Teacher survey. A survey is a widely used evaluative tool after professional development has occurred. A survey to measure the effectiveness of professional development is valid only if the teacher gives honest responses. According to the National Reading Technical Assistance Center (2010) in a study on the effectiveness of K-3 literacy coaches, researchers Bright and Hensley found that the perceived effectiveness outweighed the measured effectiveness in teacher surveys. Additionally, McKenna and Walpole (2013) reported that self-reported data may falsely increase the positive impact of the coaching efforts than is supported by data. The National Reading Center report and the work of McKenna and Walpole highlighted the importance of the validity of the tool so the data gathered accurately reflects the impact of the coaching.

Walkthroughs. A walkthrough is an unscheduled, short observation that provides an opportunity for a coach to see evidence of professional learning. (Breidenstein, Fahey , Glickman, & Hensley, 2012). This informal check-in is widely used in schools. It is further suggested that for the walkthrough to support learning and measure the impact of the coaching, there must be a clear purpose and process. The

non-evaluative feedback that is given to teachers after the walkthrough can have a positive impact on learning and guide the next steps for the coach by measuring the effectiveness of the previous coaching (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, & Hensley, 2012). Additionally, the non- evaluative feedback could, in turn, lead to goal setting between the coach and teacher. Thus, creating another opportunity for coaching.

Periodic formative assessment. A periodic formative assessment after a coaching cycle is complete is another evaluative tool for a literacy coach. Blachowicz, Buhle, and Frost (2009) suggested that "once a coaching cycle in complete, a thoughtful coach will evaluate its effectiveness" (p. 62). A coaching periodic assessment is similar to the periodic formative assessments teachers do with students; however, in this context it helps guide the next steps for coaching. Doing frequent formative assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching efforts is best practice in coaching as it is in classroom instruction (2009). It is the reflection of the literacy coach after a coaching conversation or after a series of observations that has the potential to teach the coach something about his or her work with that teacher and in future work (Breidenstein et al., 2009).

Professional development checklist. The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (2008) suggested the literacy coach use a carefully designed checklist as a tool to guide both the planning and assessing of professional development. The tool the clearinghouse created for literacy coaches aligns the planning and evaluating of the professional development. Feldman and Rosemary (2009) asserted that intentional planning and assessing is "key to achieving the desired outcomes" (p. 2).

Anecdotal data. The importance of anecdotal data is often overlooked by coaches. Guskey (2002) suggested that when measuring the effectiveness of staff development over time, anecdotal notes can hold evidence in change in teacher practice. Well known coaching expert, Aguilar (2013), recommended coaches thoughtfully plan coaching conversations and also take judicious notes. A carefully kept journal of coaching conversations and observations can lead to reflection about the effectiveness of coaching efforts. Consequently, adjustments a coach makes because of anecdotal data can improve the coaching and ultimately improve the teaching. When using a multiple measure approach to measure effectiveness, anecdotal notes can play an important role (Guskey, 2002).

The literature on professional development clearly acknowledged the complexity of measuring the effectiveness of professional development (Guskey, 2002). Researchers recognized the indirect link between professional development and student achievement but still contend that effectiveness needs to be measured to guide the next steps in providing targeted coaching but also to evaluate the impact of coaching (Guskey, 2002). The tools suggested in the literature provide some opportunities for literacy coaches to embed evaluation into their plan.

Reflection on the Literature

Key understandings. As I reflected on all that I read and thought about how to best create a resource guide for new coaches, there were four key understandings that guided my work.

1. Literacy coaching has the potential to positively impact student learning if, and

only if, it is done well.

2. Genuine coaching conversations must occur and should include the feedback cycle.

3. Research/theory based literacy coaching strategies provide a base for effective coaching.

4. Professional learning via coaching is key to building capacity in teachers.

Connecting the research and the plan. In many districts, there is little training for new literacy coaches. Like me, many coaches depend on years of teaching experience and a good sixth sense of how to support teachers. I have learned that knowledge and good sense by themselves do not always equate to effective coaching. This is precisely why I was excited to be able to create an product that would allow me to positively answer the question I asked when I began my research: What impact would a research based coaching guide have on a coach's effectiveness with teachers, understanding that the end goal of coaching is increased student achievement?

The literature review afforded me the opportunity to learn from many prominent literacy coaching experts. The synthesis of my research created a solid base for my project in response to research question. I created an electronic resource guide which will give literacy coaches access to planning resources, coaching best practices, professional development frameworks, and tools to measure effectiveness.

Summary

Chapter two provided a detailed summary of a wide array of literature on literacy coaching. My research taught me that there are many things to consider as a literacy

coach. First, it is critical that the coaching role is clearly defined for coaching to be successful. Second, it is important to understand the varied roles and characteristics of a literacy coach. Third, it is important that the literacy coach be aware of a variety of models and frameworks of instructional coaching. Fourth, it is essential that the literacy coach understand and appreciate how adults learn to effectively coach them. Finally, it is critical that the literacy coach delivers targeted coaching and knows how to measure its effectiveness.

My review of the literature was intentionally wide and expansive as my district does not use one specific coaching model or have specific resources for literacy coaches. Reviewing a wide variety of coaching literature allowed me to build a broad base of knowledge to build a core coaching resource. As I explain later on, the literacy coaching resource was shared with coaching colleagues and continues to afford them ongoing access to research based coaching strategies and tools to measure effectiveness. It is a collaborative resource to support the work of district literacy coaches.

Chapter three provides provides a plan for creating a core literacy coaching resource. After careful review and synthesis of all the literature reviewed, I had a plan for how I would answer my guiding question. The resource has four sections that align with my key findings: planning resources, coaching best practice resources, coaching differentiation, and evaluative resources.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Capstone Project

"Coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance." - Atul Gawande

Introduction

The literature review afforded me the opportunity to learn, digest, and synthesize an abundance of information about literacy coaching in preparation for the creation of a coaching guide. I acquired a bank of knowledge based on the work of many prominent literacy experts and adult learning theorists to anchor my project. When I began my capstone research, I found myself continually asking how I would retain, use, and integrate all that I learned? In response, I created a product that would allow me to positively answer the question that has been the driving force behind my research: What impact would a research based coaching guide have on a coach's effectiveness with teachers, understanding that the end goal of coaching is increased student achievement?

The resource created is a synthesis of all that I have learned in the form of a research based coaching "tool kit" for my district. Because the audience for this guide is adults, I had to consider a format that would be easily accessed, digested, and provide an arena for learning. Knowles (1977), a pioneer in adult learning, suggested that adult learners benefit from knowing the purpose of the learning and how it directly applies to them. In reference to this guide, it meant planning for purpose driven task-oriented

learning for coaches. Ideas that can guide the work of the coach the very next day provide a sense of accomplishment and clear purpose. However, before presenting the plan for my resource guide, I feel it is important to communicate the context for the project.

Setting/context. Currently, the role of literacy coaching is in its second year in my large suburban school district. Prior to that, we had one literacy coach for our entire district which consists of six elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. Currently, we have four literacy coaches to serve our six elementary schools. I share the literacy coaching role with another coach in my elementary building. Although we share large group literacy presentations, we divide our coaching duties by grade level. I support teachers in grades one and two where my colleague supports grades three, four, and five.

History. The literacy coach position was added after completion of an in depth study by the District Management Council in 2015. The primary objective of the study was to improve reading practices through a custom tailored plan that will ensure all students are receiving the most effective literacy instruction. The study revealed many inconsistencies within our district wide literacy framework. The study also revealed an opportunity for school-based literacy coaches as an effective strategy to help teachers craft individual approaches to meet standards. Consequently, the district hired 3 literacy coaches to oversee a "re-set" of our balanced literacy model at the elementary level. The role of the literacy coach in the district was defined at the district level but had some room for each building to use the coach to meet the needs to of the teachers in each building. Our literacy coaches were kept very busy supporting teachers with the new

initiative while simultaneously searching for core resources for teachers the first year. The new common resources were an essential part of the renovated balanced literacy framework. This was a year of learning for everyone. The first year was a year of relationship building for the coaches in addition to managing system-wide changes. The reality was that coaches were learning to coach and teachers were learning to be coached. Aguilar defined a "new coach" as someone coaching five years or less (2013). Therefore all of our coaching staff fits Aguilar's definition of a "new" coach.

In all of our elementary buildings, the literacy coach role is still evolving in year two of the balanced literacy re-set. In the second year, my elementary building decided to change its instructional model to better meet the needs of the students in addition to adopting a few new core resources. The shift from homogeneous grouping for language arts to a heterogeneous language arts model where homeroom teachers differentiated the literacy block within their classrooms was the plan in my building. This new model required more support for teachers. The change in the instructional model is what precipitated the additional literacy coach role in my building. I entered into the literacy coaching role in year two to support teachers in grades one and two in my building as they implement balanced literacy in their classrooms.

Rationale. The literacy coaches in my district meet weekly in a PLC group. While there is power in these coaching meetings, there is a missing anchor for our work with teachers. Many of the conversations I had with my coaching colleagues centered around not having enough training or resources and new coaches having to learn "on the fly". This practice contradicts what research stated about the importance of a research

based knowledge base for all literacy coaches (McKenna & Walpole, 2013). The purpose

of the coaching resource is to add clarity, depth, and impact to our coaching efforts. I

designed a plan to create a resource that is anchored in research and theory to share with

my new coaching colleagues. The goal was twofold–increase coaching efficacy and

consequently increase student achievement. The resource is a compilation of a resources

that reflect research based best coaching practice. Many prominent coaching experts are

referenced as many of the tools are components of their work. The common themes

revealed in the literature review are the driving force for the selection of topics in the

resource guide. The project is in an electronic format easily accessed and added to by all

instructional coaches in the district. The completed resource electronic resource includes

five sections: introduction, planning resources, best practice for coaches, differentiated

coaching opportunities, and tools to measure coaching effectiveness. Each section

includes research, recommendations, and resources. The outline of the project is

presented in the following sections.

The Project

     Planning resources. The creation of a plan to guide the work of a literacy coach

is essential to effective coaching (Sandvold & Baxter, 2008). Planning for coaching is not

only a matter of time management but also people management. Toll (2016) insisted that

to increase effectiveness of coaching, a plan for who, how, when coaching will be

delivered should be in place regardless of the coaching model being used. The resources

in this section are anchored in the work of Crane (2012), Knight (2007), McKenna and

Walpole (2013), Marzano and Simms (2013), Aguilar (2013), Toll (2016), and Bryce,

Clifton, Harrison, and Killion (2012), The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (n.d.), and Elish-Piper, L'Allier, & Zwart (2014). This section includes the following:

- Research and recommendations: a synopsis of prominent research and subsequent recommendations for planning for coaching
- Coaching models: an overview of transformative, partnership, and cognitive coaching models
- Coaching roles: an overview of the many roles of a literacy coach
- Confronting common coaching challenges: a proactive approach to handling common challenges

Beginning the school year with a strong understanding around prominent coaching models and a plan for communication, collaboration, reflection, and thoughtful creation of a schedule is vital to all instructional coaching models. Just as a classroom teacher creates a year long plan for teaching and learning, an effective literacy coach creates a similar plan for coaching. Within the plan, it is important to carefully consider the best way to deliver the instructional coaching. This is what I refer to coaching best practices in the next section.

Coaching best practice. As I reviewed the instructional coaching literature, I discovered many common threads in effective coaching models. As I reflected and synthesized this information, I compiled a set of the most effective coaching strategies. Because an instructional coach needs to be cognizant of the needs of adult learners when delivering any kind of professional development, much of the work in this section is anchored in various adult learning theories. (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, & Hensley,

2012).

More specifically, the resources in this section are strategic tools for coaches to consider as guideposts for instructional coaching. I drew upon many prominent coaching experts to compile a set of best practices. The tools in this section were rooted in the work of coaching experts, Crane (2007), Aguilar (2013), Knight (2007), Moran (2007), Sandvold and Baxter (2008), Toll (2016), Blachowicz, Buhle, & Frost (2009), Bryan, Clifton, Harrison, & Killion, (2012), Bean, Elish-Piper, & L'Allier,(2010), McKenna & Walpole (2013), and The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (n.d.). This section includes the following:

- Research and recommendations: a synopsis of prominent research and subsequent recommendations of coaching best practice

- Relationship building: suggestions for building strong coaching relationships

- School literacy/professional learning culture: research and recommendations for assessing and building strong professional learning culture

- Coaching conversations/cycles: suggestions for effective communication

- Coach's journal: suggestions for documenting the work of a coach

- Coach's schedule: suggestions for effective scheduling

In addition to best practice and a plan for coaching, it is important for literacy coaches to have access to resources about specific coaching opportunities.

Differentiated coaching opportunities. The review of the literature prompted me to think about the many ways to differentiate coaching to meet the varied needs of the teachers in a building. Just as students benefit from choice in the way in which they

engage with content, so do teachers. The information represented in this section of the

resource guide is based on the work of coaching experts Moran (2007), Marzano (2013),

McKenna & Walpole (2013), Sandvold and Baxter (2008), Crane (2007), Aguilar

(2013), and Toll (2014) . This section includes the following:

- Research and recommendations: a synopsis of prominent research and subsequent

  recommendations for coaching differentiation

- Collaborative resource management: professional learning while working with

  teachers to understand core resources

- Collaborative data analysis: professional learning while collaboratively analyzing

  student data

- Study group/book club: professional learning in book club format

- Lesson planning/co-teaching: professional learning by collaborative lesson

  planning

- Large group presentations/workshops: professional learning in large group setting

- PLC work: support professional learning within a team structure

- Modeling lessons: professional learning by modeling best practice in lesson

  delivery

- Observation/feedback: professional learning facilitated within a coaching

  conversation

Regardless of the coaching vehicle, it is important that instructional coaches have a plan

for measuring effectiveness. The final section in the resource guide presents a variety of

methods to measure effectiveness of literacy coaching as a form of professional

development.

Measuring effectiveness. It is important for instructional coaches to be diligent in their effort to connect coaching efforts, teacher practice, and student achievement (Guskey, 2000). Guskey reminded us that the real indicator of coaching effectiveness is increased student achievement (2000). In the final section of the research based resource, I present a variety of methods to measure coaching effectiveness. The suggestions are anchored in the work of Thomas Guskey (2000), Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, & Hensley (2012), Moran (2007), Toll (2016), Aguilar (2013), Feldman and Rosemary (2009), and Walpole and McKenna (2013). This section includes the following:

- Research and recommendations: a synopsis of prominent research and subsequent recommendations for measuring coaching effectiveness
- Evaluation of a coaching cycle tool: measuring the effectiveness of a coaching cycle
- Coaching conversation analysis tool: measuring the effectiveness of specific coaching conversations
- Professional development checklist: measuring the effectiveness of professional development as whole

Implementation. The implementation of the research based coaching guide occured in the 2017-18 school year. I simultaneously planned and used some of the components of the guide in my work with teachers this year. I created and studied the planning resources in August for use in long range planning and pre-emptive problem solving with new coaches. Next, I utilized some coaching frameworks that reflect best

practice in September and October. Concurrently, I implemented a variety of coaching opportunities to best meet the needs of the teachers. As a culminating activity I evaluated the contents of the guide, presented the finished product at one of the coaching meetings, and requested feedback before the final revision.

Summary

The research was complete, the plan was in place, and at this point only the project remained. The creation of the research based literacy coaching guide is the culmination of another leg of my educational journey. The resource I created will not only guide my own work with teachers but that of other new coaches. The four components of the resource guide are key topics for literacy coaches: coaching plans, coaching best practice, differentiated coaching opportunities, and tools to measure coaching effectiveness. Within the guide you find research, recommendations, resources, and additional professional learning opportunities. McKenna and Walpole (2013) asserted that coaches need to be ready to "build a coaching toolbox" (p.26). Upon completion, my literacy coaching toolbox is no longer homemade but rather a research based toolkit to build teacher capacity for myself and my colleagues. The artifact for this project is an electronic version of the research guide I share with colleagues.

Chapter four provides a reflective synthesis of the creation and use of the coaching guide. I highlight areas of learning and areas of growth that occurred in the research, design, and partial implementation of the guide. Within this chapter I share some overarching new understandings about literacy coaching and implications for my practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Reflection on The Journey

"Writing and learning and thinking are the same process." - William Zinsser

Conclusion

I begin this chapter with the same sentence I used to set the stage for my capstone in chapter one: "The joy of a journey is in the voyage, not the destination." Although this is just one short sentence, it perfectly describes the process of writing, researching, and creating the project for my capstone. Although I was focused on the end, I recognized and appreciated the value in the steps in the process. In chapter one I shared the personal and professional journey that led me to an instructional coaching role. Within chapter four you find my reflections on this most recent leg of my literacy journey, which focused on increasing my capacity in the role of literacy coach. Although I began this particular leg of a lifelong learning journey with many years of teaching experience, I embraced the opportunity to deepen my understanding of coaching adult learners with the end goal of increasing student achievement through the use of research based coaching strategies found in the coaching guide.

In this final chapter, I share some key learnings about the process, product, and future possibilities of my findings. I begin by discussing my perspective as a researcher, writer, and learner along the way. Next, I present reflections about the research around literacy coaching and highlight what became the most significant components in my

work. Then, you find implications and next steps in the research and project. This is followed by some coaching recommendations in response to the research. Finally, I present a vision for some subsequent steps in the future in response to the question that began this invigorating journey: What impact would a research based coaching guide have on a coach's effectiveness understanding that the end goal of coaching is increased student achievement?

The Perspective of Researcher, Writer, and Learner

Upon reflection, I discovered the intertwined nature of researcher, writer, and learner and how they contributed to the intricate process, which helped me to create a resource for literacy coaches. I begin with a look into my work as a researcher. My research began as most things do for me with an "all in" type of sprint. I found this to not be an effective way to deal with such huge volumes of information. I had to first create a system for gathering, recording, organizing, and synthesizing what I was learning. It has always been hard for me to let things evolve; this was no exception. I wanted an outline to follow, a set of steps to follow, and an end in sight. Although I thought not having any of those things was a curse, it proved to be a blessing. Hidden in the blessing was my newfound ability to let the outline evolve over time because of what I was learning while researching. My initial research question changed many times in the process, major sections of research findings were deleted and added, and my focus narrowed. I loved all that I was learning about literacy coaching and found myself profoundly impacted by much of what I learned. My work as a literacy coach was being shaped by the research long before I began formulating a rough draft.

I found myself wanting to begin writing before I was done researching for fear of forgetting key elements I knew I wanted to include. Once again, I wanted to sprint to the finish without stopping to really savor the journey. After many false starts, I finally began writing after organizing my notes into categories that made sense. Once I began, it was hard to stop. I enjoyed the thought processes of creating a unique plan for presenting research in way that was engaging, authentic, and thought provoking. This surprised me for I never thought of myself as much of a writer nor did I particularly enjoy writing. Near the end of the literature review, I found myself wondering how I could share this process with others who have yet to begin. This wondering highlighted for me how natural the coaching role has become for me over the last year.

Perhaps the most significant thing I discovered about myself as a learner in the course of this project is the importance of reflection as a teacher, coach, and learner. When life is a constant sprint to meet deadlines, attend meetings, teach skills, write papers, or coach teachers, we often do not take the time to reflect. Without the time to reflect, we miss opportunities to grow ourselves and help others grow. This is particularly important for me to remember as I guide teachers in next steps for their professional learning knowing that reflection and feedback are key elements of any coaching cycle (Moran, 2007). The capstone project afforded me the chance to learn about coaching while I simultaneously practiced the steps of reflection and feedback within the course structures as researcher and writer.

Reflection on Significance of Research

As I worked my way through the literature review, I found myself profoundly influenced by the work of several coaching experts. As my knowledge base grew, each new encounter provided a new look at the work of a literacy coach. After finding a system in which to gather and record my notes, I began to see common threads in the research such as the observation/feedback cycle and the importance of measuring effectiveness. The common threads became the most important parts of the review as evidenced by the amount of detail provided. In addition to common threads I began to see the prominent coaching experts influence on literacy coaching. These common threads became the descriptors and guided the composition of my capstone. I referenced the work of many researchers in my literature review, but the work of a few authors anchored the work in my coaching guide.The components of my guide include: planning for coaching, coaching cycles, differentiation of coaching, and measuring effectiveness.

Aguilar and Crane were two of the researchers whose work profoundly shaped my thinking and work around the theory of coaching. They both believe that the role of the coach is to guide the learning of another adult in a way in which will transform practice (Aguilar, 2013; Crane, 2012). This belief aligns with my thinking as a coach and an educator; the best learning comes from reflective conversations. The contents of my resource guide reflect this belief. Many of the resources around planning for coaching and coaching cycle are the work of Aguilar and Crane.

There were others who influenced me and consequently my work with teachers. To be effective as a literacy coach, one needs to be able to differentiate coaching to meet

teacher needs. I was positively influenced by Mary Catherine Moran (2007) and her work in differentiation. Her continuum model scaffolded the learning for the teacher and suggested many points of entry for a coach. I appreciated her idea of teachers' needing levels of support and incorporated this into my recommendations in my guide.

As I researched how to measure effectiveness, the work of Guskey (2002) and Toll (2016) became anchors for my work with teachers. Both Toll and Guskey argued that there needs to be a plan for measuring effectiveness albeit difficult to collect at times. I included many of the suggestions found in the work of Toll and Guskey in both the recommendations and resources of my guide. They were important to my work because they highlighted the seeming ambiguous nature of coaching and made data collection seem quantifiable.

Other researchers who had an overarching impact on my practice as a coach and consequently the creation of the resource guide are McKenna and Walpole. McKenna and Walpole's book, *A Literacy Coach's Handbook (2014)* provided a plethora of background knowledge about literacy coaching that provided a firm foundation from which to build my review. They offered a very practical look at a very complex job.

At the end of chapter two, I articulate some key understandings as I completed the literature review. Those key understandings helped me create a research-based vision for effective literacy coaching. From the vision, I created a guide which would allow myself and others to orchestrate that vision while working with teachers. All of this has created a new understanding of the role, influence, impact, and goals for my coaching. For that I am very grateful.

Implications of Capstone

The effects of this guide will be realized on a variety of levels. There will be a change in teacher practice as seen in classroom observations, increased coaching effectiveness as experienced in reflective conversations, and increased teacher efficacy as evidenced by student achievement. In other words, this increase in student achievement will be the result of a similar increase in teacher effectiveness, which, in turn, results from effective coaching. Guskey (2002) acknowledged there are many variables that directly measure the impact of professional development but argues that "in the absence of proof, you *can* collect good evidence about whether a professional development program has contributed to specific gains in student learning" (p. 48). Therefore, documentation in the form of coaching notes is imperative as a way to measure effectiveness along the way. As I move forward in the role of literacy coach, I plan to continually refine this resource guide in response to my reflections about coaching, classroom practice, and student data. This guide will demonstrate a growing mindset, and I will not only continue to learn more about instructional coaching but also continue to realize its impact on student achievement.

Next Steps in Research

Embedded in a growth mindset is the hard work of purposely looking for areas of growth. A possible next step in my learning around instructional coaching is that of school culture. I would like to do some additional research on the impact of coaching on school culture. Specifically, I would like to learn some key coaching moves that would precipitate change from a fixed to a growth mindset amongst the teaching staff.

Although, I know the powerful difference a coach can make in school culture, I would be remiss if I did not consider the possibility of losing the funding necessary to provide this kind of professional development. If coaching positions go unfunded, classroom teachers may become stagnant in their learning. Coaches provide the scaffold and support needed to move teachers forward in their practice. I argue that the loss of coaches would affect student learning negatively. This is a very real possibility in our current political atmosphere and would certainly be a limitation for the use of the research guide. Regardless of whether I am back in a classroom setting or in a coaching role, I have gained knowledge and strategies that make me a more well rounded educator in this process.

Recommendations

Despite the possibility of the elimination of coaching positions in many districts, I recommend new coaches do a few things to increase the impact on instruction and thereby increase student achievement. First, it is important that a coach defines his or her role. To be effective, the role needs to be clearly defined for administration and for teaching staff. Teachers need to understand the role and the coaching process in order to ensure a positive coaching culture (Toll, 2016). Second, a coach needs to plan for time to build relationships with staff. To be effective, a coach needs to build relationships built on trust. The conversation between a coach and a coachee needs to mirror the conversations had amongst trusted colleagues. During these conversations, the coach needs to suspend judgement and use language that fosters honest reflection by the coachee (Knight, 2007). Third, a coach needs have an awareness for the both coaching

theory and adult learning. To be effective, a coach needs to have his or her actions anchored in research based theory. Coaches who embed supportive feedback, specific language, and a task oriented objective in their work with teachers will significantly impact teacher actions and therefore affect positively impact student achievement (Corley, 2011). Fourth, a coach needs to deliver coaching that meets individual teacher needs. To have widespread effectiveness, a coach must differentiate learning for teachers just as we do with students. This means that coaching is not a one size fits all type of professional development; it gives each teacher what they need to increase self efficacy (Aguilar, 2013). Finally, a coach needs to measure the effectiveness of his or her efforts with teachers. An effective coach uses a variety of observational techniques to measure change in teacher practice knowing the end goal is increased student achievement .The importance of measuring the effectiveness of the coach is often overlooked because it is thought it cannot be directly measured. However, the evidence can be tracked through observable actions of the teacher and should be measured as closely as we measure student data (Guskey, 2000). All of these recommendations are based on research found in the literature review and consequently anchored much of the work in my coaching guide.

The Future

As I reflect on all that I have learned from the research and creation of the coaching guide, I am pleasantly surprised at my new-found confidence in the coaching role. I find myself leaning on the research based recommendations and the reference materials in the project in my daily work. Upon completion, the resource was shared with

current coaches and will subsequently be offered to coaches who may join us in the future. My hope is that my coaching colleagues will not only use the resource but contribute to it and make it a core resource for themselves too. The coaching guide fills a void I saw as a new coach—no core resource. By filling this void, I believe I made a contribution to the professional development of new coaches. I am honored to contribute to the profession while I gained so much knowledge about coaching and myself in the process.

Summary

This fourth and final chapter is much like looking at photographs of a significant journey in my life as I reflect on the process, product, and perspectives discovered along the way. I synthesize learnings from large overarching ideas to significant key elements gleaned from the capstone process. I make recommendations for effective coaching and look forward to the future of instructional coaching, which now includes a contribution from me.

This journey has been one with many twists and turns and much self discovery along the way. It was truly a journey of a lifetime which included blood, sweat, and tears. My love of learning was sparked by my grandmother, rekindled by my mother, and kept burning by many influential colleagues and coaches along the way. It is such a privilege to be in education where I can perhaps spark the love of learning in many students and colleagues through my work with them.

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