Chapter 5

Comprehensive Literacy Coaching: Content, Pedagogical, Political, and Professional Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Built upon the seminal work of Lee Shulman’s (1987) CPK framework for preparing teachers, the Content, Pedagogical, Political, and Professional Knowledge (CPPPK) model is designed as a tool for training literacy coaches in PK–12 settings. Whether through case review, role-play, or embedded practice, the CPPPK framework allows preservice literacy coaches to engage with problems of practice linked to content, pedagogy, policy, and professionalism. This tailored practice and ample rehearsal-based education equips literacy coaches with the flexibility in theory and interpersonal talents to address and assist in all variables linked to coaching that results in improved student achievement.

INTRODUCTION

As the field of education continues to grow, so does the role of the literacy coach. Such changes require clarification not only in policy and implementation but also in the roles and revised expectations of coaches working to support teachers during transition. This has many wondering what coaching in a high-stakes, frequently changing professional environment looks like.

During such times of change, many teacher educators turn to foundational work for support and indicators of what best practice might include. In one such seminal piece, Lee Shulman (1987) enlightened those involved in teacher preparation with the onset of his Content Pedagogical Knowledge (CPK) framework. He offered insights related to the necessity for quality educators to be well equipped as subject-matter experts and also masters of the pedagogy to support the delivery of this content.

Years later, there are further lessons to be learned in preparing teachers for the work they encounter each day. The role of educator requires not only strong content and pedagogical knowledge but also a deep

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understanding of policy and professional knowledge. These lessons can provide a framework for preparing literacy coaches in their daily work to assist inservice teachers. “Comprehensive Literacy Coaching: Content, Pedagogical, Political, and Professional Knowledge” presents an approach for literacy coaching that addresses the multiple demands of PK–12 teaching to ensure that coaches are furnished with not only content knowledge and high-leverage pedagogical practices but also a high-leverage interpersonal political and professional skill set that allows for excellence in their practice and the achievement of the teachers and students they are assigned to. Thus, the need for a revised framework that includes content, pedagogical, political, and professional knowledge (CPPPK) exists.

BACKGROUND

According to Walpole and Blamey (2008), literacy coaches view themselves as supporting change at the school level and at the mentor level (p. 228). It is this balance of serving as quasi school-level administrator and teacher mentor that truly sets apart strong literacy coaches from those less effective. Toggling between administrative work and conversations, while offering support and advice to teacher peers, demands strong ethics and interpersonal talent. A literacy coach may find themselves in a meeting with a principal who notes the struggles and concerns related to a classroom teacher’s practice, and, shortly after, that literacy coach may find themselves in that teacher’s classroom demonstrating or co-teaching a lesson designed to assist in advancing the teacher’s pedagogy or understanding of content.

This scenario presents just one of the challenges of literacy coaching in a high-stakes era. This situation also requires confidentiality on both ends—protecting the principal’s voiced concerns, while preserving the classroom teacher’s thoughts. A literacy coach graduates from a master’s program with “knowledge of practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) or the understanding of content and pedagogy to tackle this task with ease. Yet it is the application of this knowledge base coupled with political and professional dexterity that will determine the effectiveness of the literacy coach.

Application of knowledge and new skills plays a vital role in teaching development, thus including rehearsal of these interpersonal political and professional encounters described above is essential when preparing future literacy coaches. It is critical that literacy coaches are provided with models of how such complexities play out in actual professional teaching and learning settings. The realities of these settings are described as greatly varying educational contexts (Neumerski, 2013; Shulman, 1987). Literacy coach preparation, therefore, must mirror and provide what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) refer to as “knowledge in practice.” When this knowledge in practice is present, new theory or content is able to be situated in reality and in the politics and authenticity of a professional landscape. This hands-on experience becomes a tool for increased learning (Dewey, 1897). Dewey refers to these constructive activities as the center of correlation allowing for the ideal correlation of theory and practice (Dewey, 1897, p. 164).

With this in mind, this revision of the original CPK framework (Shulman, 1987), calls upon literacy coaches to grapple with challenging questions about PK–12 teaching and learning and how to best assist teachers for more productive work in alignment with setting, policy, and the negotiation of the changes that arise. The redefined work of CPPPK allows literacy coaches to reflect not only on their own practice and how it promotes or hinders growth in delivering content and pedagogy but also on policy and qualities that are characteristic of professional educators.
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