Chapter 11
Coaching as a Grass Roots Effort for Building Leadership Capacity

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ABSTRACT

Literacy coaches fulfill many roles that enrich the lives of teachers and students. In order for coaches to successfully build leadership capacity, teachers must know the purpose and role of the coach. In this chapter a model of coaching is presented as well as how the coach can facilitate activities that transform the culture of the school. In the model presented, the coach’s agency influenced teachers to systematically inquire into their own teaching practices, regularly use data to drive instructional decisions, and reflect upon their decision making practices in ways that promoted literacy growth and success for all stakeholders. The agency included coaching roles of resource provider, data coach, demonstrator of classroom practices, observer of classroom practices, and job-embedded professional development. Additionally, the literacy coach served as a change agent and built teacher capacity taking on these roles.

INTRODUCTION

Kathy, the administrator at a K-5 school, returned to her school feeling very frustrated. She had just completed a three-hour in-service designed to introduce the new basal reading series to her teachers. The district mandated that all administrators and teachers attend this in-service. During this training, a representative from the textbook publishing company provided the presentation which consisted of a day-by-day, week-by-week plan to cover skills. Kathy previously sat through identical presentations for

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different grade levels where the presenter simply used a different teacher’s manual to read the script and replicate the content from the previous grade level. During these sessions, Kathy listened, hoping to find new ideas and concepts to help her teachers support children’s reading and writing, but she ultimately left feeling frustrated. She felt exasperated by the expectation that teachers would ask students to read and reread the same story for an entire week, teach skills in isolation, and teach students to read by filling in blanks on worksheets. Moreover, she had just read research indicating that, regardless of the adopted core reading program, 25% of the students still failed the state end of grade test (McGill-Frazen, Zmack, Solic, & Zeig, 2006). Kathy wanted a different experience for her teachers. She wanted them to understand that the answers about students’ reading problems were not found in teachers’ manuals, worksheets, or scripted lessons. She already knew from previous experience that the students in her building did not show progress using these regimented basal materials. This school year, if she asked her teachers to follow the suggested pacing guide, basal reading book, and worksheets of the past; she would continue to see stagnated results.

She decided to look elsewhere to find a better understanding about how to help her teachers understand their students’ needs. She wanted her teachers to understand what their students were doing as readers and writers, how to scaffold the knowledge students brought to the classroom, and the means by which to use that knowledge to help students become better readers and writers. She also wanted her teachers to see that reading and writing were more than mere subjects in school. She also wanted them to see reading and writing as tools to examine the world. This thinking led Kathy to explore the idea of hiring a literacy coach for her school. She envisioned the literacy coach fulfilling many roles that would enrich the lives of the teachers and students in her school. In order for this to work, Kathy knew that the purpose and role of the coach needed to be “carefully defined and systematically implemented” (Saphier & West, 2010, p. 46) in order to be successful.

This chapter describes the model of coaching implemented in Kathy’s school. Specifically, the literacy coach worked to transform the culture of the school so that teachers regularly and systematically inquired into their own teaching practices, used data to drive instructional decisions, and began to think reflectively about instructional decision making. The coach also provided resources for teachers, conducted data discussions, observed teachers in the act of teaching and provided feedback from those observations, demonstrated effective teaching practices and provided job-embedded professional development.

BACKGROUND

To design a productive coaching model, Kathy and Liz, the Literacy Coach she hired, read about a variety of coaching models (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermeulen, & Zigmond, 2010; Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003; Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007; Haager, Dhar, Moulton, & McMillian, 2008; Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2010; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008; Poglinc & Bach, 2004). They understood that a coach could influence classroom practice as well as teachers’ pedagogical moves (Couburn & Woulfin, 2012; Neuman & Wright, 2010). Therefore, they sought to implement a model of coaching that focused on building teachers’ capacity by engaging with teachers in professional development (Bean, Draper, Hall, et al., 2010; Zigmond & Bean, 2006). They also determined that the coach should observe teachers’ classroom practices, providing feedback about these observations as well as demonstration lessons. Furthermore, they felt that the coach should work with teachers to examine student achievement data (Bean et al., 2003; Deussen et al., 2007; Dole, 2004). Kathy and Liz used this literature to define what