



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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TO Catherine Truitt
FROM Terry Stoops
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SUMMARY OF RESEARCH: PRINCIPALS AND COACHES

Summary

- Authors of the 44 peer-reviewed journal articles and doctoral dissertations reviewed unanimously agree that principal effectiveness is a prerequisite to coaching effectiveness. None of the schools studied successfully employed instructional coaching without a principal that created favorable conditions and provided ongoing support.
- Reid (2019) identified three ways that principals support instructional coaches: 1) establishing clearly defined roles; 2) engaging the coaching process; and 3) cultivating trusting relationships.
- When principals endorse or reinforce the efforts of the coach, teachers are more likely to participate in coaching.
- Principals too often lack the knowledge or skills to create organizational environments that allow qualified instructional coaches to utilize their instructional expertise.

Research Excerpts: General Observations

“However, our experiences in various coaching and administrative roles as well as our research with literary coaches has shown that the relationship with and support of the administration, especially the building principal, is essential for coaches to be successful in their leadership role.” (Heineke and Polnick, 2013)

“The relationship between the principal and [instructional coach] are directly correlated to the impact the [instructional coach] will have when working with teachers.” (Norman, 2020)

“When the principal created conditions for coaching, the [instructional coach’s] work excelled with teachers.” (Norman, 2020)

“...the work of coaches is squandered if school principals are not instructional leaders.” (Fullan & Knight, 2011)

“Leadership is one of the characteristics of effective coaching and it is important for a principal to understand the role of the coach.” (Toll, 2018)

“Our results suggest that principal support is central to the successful implementation of coaching programs. In both overt and subtle ways, principals signal to teachers their support of or opposition to coaches, and these signals in turn appear to influence teachers’ coaching experiences.” (Matsumura & Resnick, 2010)

“...research indicates that successful teacher leadership [coaching] roles cannot be mechanically inserted into existing school structures; rather, teacher leaders require significant support from school principals.” (Mangin, 2007)

“A statistically significant relationship was found between [North Carolina] EOC test composite scores and frequency of meetings between the coach and the principal. More frequent meetings related positively to increase in proficiency rate as defined by [North Carolina] EOC composite score.” (Sumner, 2011)

Research Excerpts: Need to Improve Principal Preparation and Readiness

“Instructional coaching is a reality in many schools today, yet administrators often lack experience or background on how to utilize this professional development model effectively.” (Johnson, 2016)

“Overall, administrators need to know how to build, lead, and support instructional experts, like coaches, who can help conduct research-based teaching experiments, learn collaboratively, and continuously improve both teacher and student learning.” (Johnson, 2016)

“Hence, this study presents new evidence that high levels of knowledge and interaction can promote principals’ support for teacher leadership [coaching]. Increasing knowledge and interaction can be done in a number of ways. Principal preparation programs could provide information about the purpose of teacher leadership [coaching] and the principal’s relationship to the role.” (Mangin, 2007)

“School districts could exercise greater selectivity in hiring, seeking principals who demonstrate knowledge of teacher leadership initiatives or knowledge of the professional development strategies that underlie instructional teacher leadership [coaching]. Alternately, districts could develop communication structures and training opportunities that would facilitate principals’ knowledge and interaction.” (Mangin, 2007)

“Given these problems, we propose two recommendations for creating the organizational contexts in schools that might improve the implementation of coaching programs. First, and most importantly, we suggest that districts and/or program designers assess principals’ readiness for change in advance of committing coaching resources to achieve particular instructional goals.” (Matsumura and Wang, 2014)

“In assessing readiness for a coaching program, our study underscores the importance of principal “buy-in” to this effort. Other research similarly stresses the importance of principals’ and district leaders’ support of new programs and willingness to use their administrative powers to support and pressure teachers and principals respectively to take up new practices.” (Matsumura & Resnick, 2010)

“Principals who described coaching as valuable positively influenced the amount of time that coaches spent observing and providing feedback to teachers. In other analyses, when principals exhibited a “horizontal or co-equal leadership style,” instructional coaches were able to work directly with teachers on issues of instruction more frequently...” (Kane, 2019)

“Districts began training leaders partway through program implementation because of the apparent lack of administrators to understand what coaching entailed.” (Day, 2015)

Research Excerpts: Principals Create Conditions That Allow Coaches to Thrive

“A consistent finding in the research on instructional coaching has been the need for principals to create a culture that emphasizes instructional improvement by all teachers and supports both the structures and behaviors of collaborative inquiry and problem-solving.” (Helmke, 2017)

“Schools and districts could make more effective use of their coaching resources by identifying ways that principals could help new coaches more quickly establish trust and develop routines of working with teachers in their classrooms.” (Matsumura et al., 2009)

“As with other educational reforms, research indicates that principals’ actions and their beliefs with regard to the roles and responsibilities of a coach play an important role in implementing coaching in schools.” (Matsumura & Resnick, 2010)

“Although little empirical evidence directly links the quality of principal leadership to the amount and type of coaching received by teachers, researchers suggest that coaching may be more effective in schools where principals actively support their coaches, share leadership, and engage more directly in reform activities.” (Matsumura & Resnick, 2010)

“Finally, coaches work in schools, complex organizations that require extensive organization, alignment, and management. Principals will need to create school-based systems to organize and support coaches’ work to ensure alignment with the school’s goals and conditions. These systems need to attend to structural entailments of instruction, such as goals for students’ learning, instructional materials, assessments, teacher professional learning, and instructional oversight, as well as to the ways in which they are implemented and integrated with one another. In addition, research indicates that principals must take other leadership actions to ensure coaches’ success, including motivating teachers to implement the strategies they work on with their coaches and attending to school power dynamics when structuring coaches’ work.” (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017)

“When principals work with their staff to develop a shared vision and purpose for coaching, instructional coaches feel more equipped to impact teacher effectiveness. A principal who develops a shared vision and purpose for coaching engages collaboratively with his staff, identifying the needs of the students and the teachers. Together, they align this work with the research so that a change in practice is likely to result in increased achievement. Once this work is done, the deployment of the instructional coaching naturally falls into place.” (Lauer, 2013)

“Connecting the vision and the plan for change is like fitting the pieces of a puzzle together. When that work is complete, the principal, the coach, and the faculty understand their personal responsibilities. However, when the school vision is unclear and the purpose for coaching is not set by the principal, the instructional coaches felt less confident in their abilities to impact teacher effectiveness. They don’t understand what the goal and they don’t understand the pathway. They do their best to support teachers where they can, but they are using their instincts to lead them.” (Lauer, 2013)

“Principals’ active participation in the CFC [Content-Focused Coaching] program also emerged as a potentially important dimension of instructional leadership for supporting coaches in their beginning work with teachers. ... Active participation may be yet another way that principals signal to teachers that coaching is a worthy use of the teachers’ professional time.” (Matsumura et al., 2009)

Principals Can Sabotage Coaching Initiatives

“One coach was asked to leave her coaching work to do a lot of things, including ‘making travel arrangements for the principal, going to school board meetings to get the community involved, providing direct interventions, subbing, doing all the progress monitoring, and organizing family fun night.’ These demands tended to be a source of frustration for some managerial coaches.” (Deussen et al., 2007)

“In their evaluation of a district-wide literacy coach initiative, for example, Camburn and colleagues (2008) found that coaches and district administrators overseeing the work of coaches reported that principals’ demands on coaches to perform administrative and managerial tasks were a significant impediment to their work with teachers.” (Matsumura & Resnick, 2010)

“Staff members at the Kansas Coaching Project at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning have visited more than 100 schools around the world in the past three years. They’ve found that coaches are often placed in impossible situations. Too often, they collaborate poorly with administrators. In many schools no one—including the coach and the principal—understands school improvement plans. Other schools exhibit a kind of organizational attention deficit disorder, jumping from one intervention to another before achieving meaningful change. As the following examples show, in far too many settings, coaches are unable to do their work.” (Fullan & Knight, 2011)

“Many coaches explained that because their roles and responsibilities were poorly defined—and because their principals weren’t clear how best to employ them—they ended up doing quasi-administrative or clerical work rather than improving instruction. Instead of helping teachers reach out to more students, they photocopied papers, filed documents, or ordered supplies.” (Fullan & Knight, 2011)

“In addition, the [unidentified] district provided no professional learning for principals, so they were unable to provide the coaches with either clarity or support. In some schools, the principals directed their coaches to take a top-down, assertive approach to their work that left little room for the professional discretion of individual teachers. Not surprisingly, the coaches’ efforts prompted resistance, with little change occurring in classrooms.” (Fullan & Knight, 2011)

“Without the explicit support of their principals, coaches may be undermined by the teachers they attempt to support due to a prevailing culture that allows for continuous personal growth to be considered optional as opposed to an expectation (Donaldson et al., 2008; McKenna & Walpole, 2008). This study found that principal’s attitudes and actions greatly impact the work of the instructional coach. When principals demonstrate certain attitudes and actions, instructional coaches feel better able to increase teacher effectiveness. When these attitudes and actions are not present, instructional coaches feel their efforts in raising teacher quality are diminished.” (Lauer, 2013)

“Work by Matsumura et al. (2010), Fullan & Knight (2011), and Neumerski (2012) all indicated that principals’ actions can undermine the work of instructional coaches, resulting in no noticeable impact from their efforts—or even worse, a dysfunctional faculty which itself works to impede the efforts of the coach and to ostracize those teachers who do partner with the coach.” (Helmke, 2017)

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