

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Partnering with a Coach to Improve Instruction

Syracuse City School District, New York • June 2007

Topic: Preschool Language and Literacy

Practice: Use Interactive and Dialogic Reading

Highlights

- What a coach does with a new teacher, including types of conversations and recommendations
- New teacher's perspective on how the coach was helpful in differentiation of instruction
- How teacher and coach plan together
- Teacher's appreciation of learning to do dialogic reading, including picture walks and questioning techniques
- Coach's role with a more experienced teacher

About the Site

Syracuse City School District

Syracuse, New York

Demographics:

- 93% Children living in poverty
- 22% Special Needs
- 79% Non-Caucasian
- 15% English Language Learners

Site Highlights:

- Developmental continuum of phonological awareness that guides planning and differentiation of instruction based on children's skill levels
- Phonological awareness instruction integrated throughout the day into classroom activities, routines, and thematic units
- Explicit and contextualized instruction
- Teacher training in interactive and dialogic reading focused on increasing vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension
- Intensive and ongoing professional development with on-site mentoring by literacy coaches and a focus on individual class needs
- Coach-teacher partnerships that involve teachers in a feedback process focused on inquiry and improvement based on classroom observations and self-reflection

Full Transcript

Speaker 1: It's great having a coach. To have someone be able to come into the classroom and have that extra support when you're new, because you're nervous about everything as it is and doing the right thing. This has been wonderful, a wonderful experience for me.

Speaker 2: Looking at the teacher, in Donna's case, being a new teacher, at the very beginning I spent a lot of time in her classroom. Either just assisting, co-teaching in lessons, modeling lessons, but also just going in and working with groups of students. And we would have conversations about what happened that particular day when I was in the classroom. And we would look at this is how the lesson was presented. What was the strength of the lesson? What was something that might be changed?

Speaker 1: I have a bilingual classroom and that was very hard for me to—some kids totally speak Spanish, some people speak Spanish and English—and she would help me differentiate the instruction so I could reach those kids, too. And that really helped a lot.

Speaker 2: A lot of times what we looked at, too—instead of doing a whole group activity, we talked about the fact that some of the students had language barriers. So what we did was planned some small group lessons so that they could have that individual attention. And she also had some high-end students. She had one little girl by the end of pre-k was reading at a beginning first grade level. So we had to provide opportunities for that child to continue soaring in her reading. So we had to

differentiate in that classroom. And these were things that we would discuss. And also looking at the materials, you can have a classroom full of materials, but what you do with them is the next important thing. So we would take materials out and see if it fit into that particular unit or the skill that we were trying to introduce with students.

Speaker 1: And that's what I would do like every Friday before the assistants went home, before we all went home, we would go over the plans for the next week and what we were going to do and what we're going to do in our centers. And how we could help each other and ask for ideas.

Speaker 2: And what happened with a lot of the classrooms is, as people became more comfortable with me coming into their classroom, they asked me to join their team when it was lesson planning time. Because I think the biggest stumbling block was breaking off into small groups. They know how to do a whole group instruction.

Speaker 1: Mm hmm.

Speaker 2: But the small group instruction was a little more difficult. So that's when they started inviting me to join their group so that we could have those discussions.

Speaker 1: One of the things that—I mean, I never even did with my own kids in reading is, you know, how you read the book, you go the picture walk. I never did that with my kids. Never just walked through, went through the pictures. And that was a big eye opener for me because it just gets the kids so ready to get ready for the book.

Speaker 2: Building that background.

Speaker 1: Yeah. And just the dialogue you can get just walking through the pictures was amazing to me. So that was a big eye opener for me and, you know, I do it every time now.

Speaker 2: How to go about finger pointing while you're reading and questioning techniques while you're reading—those were all pieces that teachers had been used to reading stories to kids, but hadn't really been consciously aware of doing that every time they read with the student. So that was something...I would set up a time—"Geez, I want to come in. This is something I want to work on. What's a good time for me to come in?" And I carried my calendar around and I would set my time up according to their calendar. And as I said, sometimes we had to readjust, but we always, I always gave advanced notice so that it wasn't just a pop in.

Working with teachers with a little more experience, I probably didn't do as much modeling as I did co-teaching. I found that some of those teachers were a little put off by the thought of, "Geez, let me come in and model something for you." Instead it was easier and more acceptable for them for

me to say, “Can we co-teach a lesson together?” Because then they felt that I was valuing, and I do value, what they’re bringing to the instructional piece. But we learned from each other.

And also interacting with the kids, you never know from day to day how the kids are going to react to a lesson. What I found is really effective is to walk into a classroom during that instructional piece and just sit with the children and become one of the children, the students, as the teacher would be teaching. And then afterwards, having an informal conversation and mentioning certain attributes that went well during the lesson, and then questioning something that was a red flag for me. But rather than just coming right out and saying I was concerned about it, I would question, “Why did you choose that particular approach?” and that would initiate a conversation. And usually what happened was from that conversation the person would eventually say to me, “What would you suggest that I do differently?” and then that opened up the door for me to say, “I can come in and model a lesson to do that or would you like to co-teach a lesson?” Or in some cases, the person just wanted me to sit there and talk with them about it. And so we would do that, too.

But when I did a return visit, I would often times ask if they had been using that technique when I wasn’t there, and how was it working. So it kept bringing it to the front that I eventually expected to see that instructional piece when I came into the classroom. Some people, it took a little bit longer. When you have somebody that’s totally resistant, it takes a while for you to kind of chip through that. But I think overall, as the time went on, within a six-month time period, I could see a total change in attitudes when I would walk into the classroom.

And it all comes down to trust. I think that when you’re being professional and you’re there not as a critical person but as a person who wants to talk about instruction and how we can change it, people start realizing that it’s about what we’re doing in the classroom and it’s not a personality piece.

Speaker 1: And what you’re doing for the kids.

Speaker 2: Right, ultimately that’s exactly it—is, we want to see our children be successful and it requires that we all be open to suggestions to do that.