

# DOINGWHATWORKS



**Video**

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Developing a Coaching Program

Syracuse City School District, New York • June 2007

**Topic:** Preschool Language and Literacy

**Practice:** Use Interactive and Dialogic Reading

### Highlights

- Value of three-year professional development plan
- Differentiation of plans by teacher experience
- Matching coaches and teachers
- Adequate time for making coaching work
- Success in coaching a reluctant teacher

### About the Site

Syracuse City School District

Syracuse, New York

### Demographics:

- 93% Children living in poverty
- 79% Non-Caucasian
- 22% Special Needs
- 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**

Karen Howard, Syracuse City School District: In order to bring about change to support our staff and the strategies and skills they may need to bring to their program, we really recognize the importance of establishing a three- year plan—a minimum of a three-year plan of professional development so that we’re able to begin with them at the level they’re at and support them, and scaffold their learning and instruction over time.

Teachers come in at various stages of their understanding. A newer teacher may really be actively engaged in monthly professional development, paired with their coach and mentor for specific strategies, and looking at where’s the basic foundation of skills that they need to begin to focus on. And then the second-year plan—looking at upping the ante, so to speak, in terms of, then, how they can raise the bar for their own learning.

Paula Ilacqua-Morales, Syracuse City School District: You have to have a knowledgeable coach. You have to have someone who is knowledgeable about the content and is a people person, is able to relate to people because that’s 90 percent of the job. To be able to relate to people and go into their classroom and develop that comfort level and that rapport that’s needed for people to truly talk about the things they want to grow in, that they don’t feel strong in. Because that’s a big deal in teaching to be able to say, “You know, I really need help with this.” Because you don’t want to feel that you can’t do your job. You need to give coaches a length of time to build that rapport.

It's not going to happen overnight. But I think if you've given time and things just aren't working between two people, I think you don't beat a dead horse. That if the relationship just isn't going to work and you have the luxury of maybe another coach, that you just make it an okay thing. That you can switch coaches and change things.

You don't want to overload the coach because you want them to be able to feel like they can really stay with somebody and give them that time that they need. And some people will need a lot of time, and some people will need very little. So they need to be able to set up flexible schedules. They definitely need to have a schedule, but they need to have flexibility within it so that if someone is coming up on something that they really need to be there two or three days or a week, that they can do that.

Howard: Another critical area I would want to emphasize is the need to provide adequate time for teachers, coach, and mentors to come together. And that's very challenging. I think when teachers are in the classroom committed to the work they're doing with their children, to go and visit other classrooms, spend time having that reflective conversation with their coach or peer, to go out for conferences, to be out of the classroom monthly for professional development, is challenging to them and difficult with all of the work that they have to do within the classroom. So a clear plan should be put into place to support those efforts.

Ilacqua-Morales: One of the teacher's the first month of this whole implementation, I sat down with her in a one-to-one conference to kind of try to do that assessment and evaluation of where she was in terms of her understanding of the content of what we were trying to change, and also her affect, if you will, her ability to change. And she sat with me and her face got very red and she was very near tears, and she said, "I can't do this and I won't do this." And so I remember saying to her, "You know, we're going to work together to kind of let go of some of the things that are bothering us. And we're just going to, one day at a time, take this change and start implementing where you feel you can take a small bite out of it."

Well, that was the first month and she took that bite. And then she eventually became one of our national presenters and I worked with her during a staff development where we were disseminating to the rest of pre-K. I really didn't need to be in the room because she was presenting the materials to her colleagues and she was able to respond to their fears and their feelings about the change. And to really give the information that her colleagues would need to think about so they could change as well.