Coaches and PLCs Support Teacher Use of Instructional Data


Inclusive Academic Instruction

Research Summary

**What**
This study investigated whether the use of coaches or professional learning communities (PLCs) had an impact on how educators used data to change instruction. They identified coaching and PLCs as common sources of capacity building for teachers.

Their literature search found that coaching positively impacted teachers' implementation of specific reading instruction and standards and overall teacher practice. Content knowledge increased. Research on PLCs showed participants have stronger relationships with colleagues, though there was not a direct impact on instruction. Interpersonal relationships increased. The selection of these two strategies supported the researchers’ desire to study the relationship between content knowledge and interpersonal relationships and how those affect teachers’ use of data to make instructional change.

**Who**
The researchers worked with six low-performing middle schools in four districts. The participants included coaches, PLC leaders, teachers, district leaders (i.e., superintendents, assistant superintendents, and individuals overseeing literacy efforts), as well as non-case study teachers.

**How**
Over one year, data were collected via interviews, focus groups, Web-based surveys, and a final survey.

**Major Findings**
Coach and PLC support was pivotal in helping teachers review and alter how they used data to provide instruction, and coaching was found to be the more effective practice. The researchers introduced a theory to explain this outcome.

Coaching provides a unique situation where two professionals from different settings (e.g., a content specialist and a classroom teacher) expand and improve their
practices by working together to develop solutions. Though they come from different contexts, they find similar ground in their efforts. This is one type of expertise. Another expertise is the coach’s content knowledge of the sought skill or topic. The researchers suggest that successful coaching requires a positive experience of both areas of expertise. The success of the coaching relationship hinges not only on the knowledge or skill of the coach, but also the interpersonal skills of both individuals and their ability to share resources and information.

Conclusion

SWIFT educator teams and coaches use data to guide decision making and instructional changes. The findings of this article provide support for PLCs and Coaches, as well as a deeper look into the skills, knowledge, and interpersonal skills applied during PLCs and coaching relationships.

Suggested Citation