

No More
Random Acts of
Literacy Coaching

Dear Readers,

Much like the diet phenomenon *Eat This, Not That*, this series aims to replace some existing practices with approaches that are more effective—healthier, if you will—for our students. We hope to draw attention to practices that have little support in research or professional wisdom and offer alternatives that have greater support. Each text is collaboratively written by authors representing research and practice. Section 1 offers practitioner perspective(s) on a practice in need of replacing and helps us understand the challenges, temptations, and misunderstandings that have led us to this ineffective approach. Section 2 provides researcher perspective(s) on the lack of research to support the ineffective practice(s), and reviews research supporting better approaches. In Section 3, the author(s) representing practitioner perspective(s) give detailed descriptions of how to implement these better practices. By the end of each book, you will understand both what not to do, and what to do, to improve student learning.

It takes courage to question one's own practice—to shift away from what you may have seen throughout your years in education and toward something new that you may have seen few, if any, colleagues use. We applaud you for demonstrating that courage and wish you the very best in your journey from this to that.

Best wishes,

— *M. Colleen Cruz* and *Nell K. Duke*, *Series Editors*

NOT THIS  BUT THAT

No More
Random Acts of
Literacy Coaching

ERIN BROWN AND SUSAN K. L'ALLIER

HEINEMANN
PORTSMOUTH, NH

For more information about this Heinemann resource,
visit <https://www.heinemann.com/products/e12008.aspx>

Heinemann

361 Hanover Street

Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912

www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

© 2020 by Erin Brown and Susan K. L’Allier

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Heinemann’s authors have devoted their entire careers to developing the unique content in their works, and their written expression is protected by copyright law. We respectfully ask that you do not adapt, reuse, or copy anything on third-party (whether for-profit or not-for-profit) lesson-sharing websites.

—Heinemann Publishers

“Dedicated to Teachers” is a trademark of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

The authors and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

Figure 2–1: Adapted from “Standards 2017 Overarching Standards” from the International Literacy Association’s website: <https://literacyworldwide.org/get-resources/standards/standards-2017>, accessed July 10, 2020. Copyright © 2017 by the International Literacy Association. Reprinted by permission of the International Literacy Association.

Credit lines continue on page x.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Brown, Erin, author. | L’Allier, Susan K., author.

Title: No more random acts of literacy coaching / Erin Brown and Susan K. L’Allier.

Description: Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann Publishing, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020015132 | ISBN 9780325120089 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Language arts teachers—In-service training—United States | Content area reading—United States. | Mentoring in education—United States. | Literacy—Study and teaching—United States.

Classification: LCC LB2844.1.R4 B76 2020 | DDC 418.0071—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020015132>

Series Editors: M. Colleen Cruz and Nell K. Duke

Acquisitions Editor: Margaret LaRaia

Production Editor: Sean Moreau

Cover Illustrator: James Yang

Cover and Interior Designer: Monica Ann Crigler

Typesetter: Valerie Levy, Drawing Board Studios

Manufacturing: Val Cooper

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 CGB 25 24 23 22 21 20

August 2020 Printing

For more information about this Heinemann resource,
visit <https://www.heinemann.com/products/e12008.aspx>

CONTENTS

Introduction M. Colleen Cruz *xi*

Section 1 Not This: *In-the-Moment, For-the-Moment Coaching* 1

Teachers: “We don’t need help; our students need help!” 4

The Obstacle: Teachers don’t see coaching as a way to support student learning. 4

What if teachers understood how the change will support their students? 4

Teachers: “Coaching is just one more thing to put on our plates.” 5

The Obstacle: Teachers view coaching as yet another initiative. 5

What if teachers knew that coaching would help them meet existing expectations? 6

Teacher: “I have to be careful and perform for my coach.” 7

The Obstacle: Teachers view coaches as evaluators. 7

What if teachers knew what the coach and principal talked about? 7

Coach: “I feel overwhelmed and distracted by competing demands.” 8

The Obstacle: Every coaching activity is given equal importance. 8

What if coaches were able to prioritize their work with teachers? 9

Principal: “After a year, the coaching program hasn’t increased student achievement.” 10

The Obstacle: Sometimes, leaders don’t realize that improvement in student learning takes time. 10

What if administrators knew a little more about the change process? 11

Section 2 *Why Not? Research Shows the Way to Intentional Coaching* 13

Who Is a Literacy Coach? Qualifications, Roles, and Responsibilities 16

What knowledge and skills should a literacy coach possess? 16

What roles should the literacy coach play in a school? 18

Developing Collaborative Relationships 19

Coaches Take on Different Stances 21

Examining Specific Aspects of Coaching Conversations 23

Coaching: An Essential Tool for School Change 24

Which Coaching Activities Impact Instruction? 29

Which Coaching Activities Impact Student Growth? 30

Conferencing 31

Modeling for Teachers 32

Observations of Teachers 32

Assessment-Related Activities 32

Principals as Partners 33

Coaches as Literacy Leaders 36

Leadership at the Teacher Level 36

Leadership at the School and/or District Level 38

A Gentle Reminder: The Majority of Coaches' Time Should Be Spent

Working Directly with Teachers 39

Invitation for Further Research 39

Section 3 *But That: Coaching Strategies to Enhance Teacher Practice and Improve Student Learning* 43

Positive Curiosity Leads to Relationships and Impact 45

Communication That Clarifies and Creates Commitment 46

Responsive Coaching in Individual and Small- and Large-Group Settings 50

Coaching Cycles to Enhance Teacher Practice and Student Learning 54

Coaching Cycles Are Predictable Yet Flexible 55

Tools That Support Clear Communication 58

Not All Coaching Cycles Look Alike 60

Short Coaching Cycles When Coaching Is New to a School 65

Goal Setting 66

Co-Planning 66

Implementation 66

Moving from Light Coaching to Deeper Coaching Cycles 69

Goal Setting and Co-Planning 69

Implementation 69

Coaching Cycles Around District Initiatives or School-Wide Goals 70***Matching Goals and Priorities to Coaching Cycles 72***

Coaching Schedules Reveal Priorities 72

Mining Intentional Coaching Out of Randomness 73

Controlling Our Coaching Schedules 74

Helping Others Become Literacy Leaders 78

Co-Facilitating Professional Learning 78

Grade-Level Facilitation 79

Teachers Sharing Their Practice 79

Collaboration Between Coaches and Principals 80

Clear Coaching Responsibilities 80

What Teachers Want to Know About the Coach-Principal
Relationship 81

Coach and Principal Meetings 82

Enhancing Principal Knowledge 83

Ongoing Professional Learning for Coaches 86***Belief in Continuous Improvement 87***

Afterword Nell K. Duke 89

References 91

Continued credit lines from page vi.

Figure 2–4: “Literacy Coaching Stances” from *The Common Core Coaching Book: Strategies to Help Teachers Address the K–5 ELA Standards*” by Laurie Elish-Piper and Susan K. L’Allier. Copyright © 2014 by the Guilford Press. Reprinted by permission of CCC on behalf of Guilford Publishing, Inc.

Figure 3–11: “Modeling Planning Template” from *The Common Core Coaching Book: Strategies to Help Teachers Address the K–5 ELA Standards*” by Laurie Elish-Piper and Susan K. L’Allier. Copyright © 2014 by the Guilford Press. Reprinted by permission of CCC on behalf of Guilford Publishing, Inc.

Figure 3–12: “Co-Planning Template” from *The Common Core Coaching Book: Strategies to Help Teachers Address the K–5 ELA Standards*” by Laurie Elish-Piper and Susan K. L’Allier. Copyright © 2014 by the Guilford Press. Reprinted by permission of CCC on behalf of Guilford Publishing, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

M. Colleen Cruz

Take a few seconds to think of a great coach. This could be a famous athletic coach or one you had while playing sports growing up. If you, like me, are not really involved in traditional athletics, you might choose a coach from the field of dance, speech, or chess. What were these coaches' characteristics? How did they manage to be so successful at what they did?


Literacy coaches are often pulled in many directions, and there may be few opportunities to hone their craft. It is understandable that the work can feel random. But the best coaches think on both the macro and micro level. When I think of famously great coaches from fields other than education, I think of the meticulous, strategic planning that no doubt goes into their decisions. These coaches spend hours watching and studying videos and live practices of plays, speeches, and pirouettes. They then take those observations and produce pages upon pages of notes, diagrams, and lists to help create a cohesive plan. Everything from the warm-ups to the drills to the locker room pep talk is planned in a big picture, long-term way. Everything is planned out, from sequence of strategies and knowledge introduced to the best ways to share these ideas. Yes, of course, there is room for coaches to respond to the needs of those they are coaching and the unexpected moments that come up in the game, debate, or performance. However, there is still very much a long-term view to things so that even those seemingly spontaneous acts of coaching fall into line and are part of a larger vision.

Coaching, whether it involves basketball or literacy, can feel and look at times like it is 100 percent responsive and in the moment. Erin Brown and Susan K. L'Allier help us understand that the best coaching is not just random good luck, but rather the

product of careful and expert planning and preparation. In many schools, there is a feeling that coaching is something that can be employed as a stopgap measure when and if you need it. If a teacher is new or encountering a difficult patch, we hope we can just fly a literacy coach in from the wings to save the day. This ambulance model of coaching rarely, if ever, leads to the legacy-style growth and excellence we see in longtime championship sports teams, let alone in schools.

This book challenges the notion that great coaching can't be taught. Erin and Susan don't pull any punches. They walk us through the real-world challenges and sometimes poor choices that schools can make when it comes to literacy coaching. Then they show us what studies can teach us about successful school-level literacy coaching, and then they go on to break it down into concrete, accessible steps. After spending time with hundreds of coaches in countless classrooms, I can say with confidence that the work suggested by Erin and Susan can, and does, make an impactful difference, both in literacy instructional practices and the literacy growth of students.

SECTION 1

NOT  THIS

*In-the-Moment,
For-the-Moment
Coaching*

SUSAN K. L'ALLIER

The role of a coach is to support teachers in meeting the needs of students. Eager to provide that support, coaches often find themselves reacting to teacher requests, such as:

“What lesson will help me teach this specific skill?”

“Can you share a good resource for phonemic awareness instruction?”

“I am supposed to give this assessment to my students this week. Can you go over the administration procedures with me?”

“Can you help me find some books that my below-grade-level readers would like?”

These random acts of support may result in one-time successes; however, they rarely have an impact on long-term student growth. We sometimes forget the research-established fact that when teachers, principals, and coaches work together to create a climate of intentional, ongoing professional learning, the likelihood of student literacy growth increases! Let's look at some of the common obstacles that can inhibit this collaborative climate.

When teachers, principals, and coaches work together to create a climate of intentional, ongoing professional learning, the likelihood of student literacy growth increases!

Teachers: “We don’t need help; our students need help!”

The Obstacle: Teachers don’t see coaching as a way to support student learning.

Carlotta and Elissa, two third-grade teachers, have just heard that the principal has hired a literacy coach whose main focus will be working with teachers. Carlotta and Elissa would have preferred that another reading specialist be hired to assist Paula, their current reading specialist, in providing interventions to more of their struggling readers. In sharing her thoughts with Elissa, Carlotta says, “We have so many students who need help.” Carlotta agrees and adds, “I wish the principal had asked us what was needed instead of just hiring a literacy coach.”

What if teachers understood how the change will support their students?

Coaching will improve core literacy instruction.

Literacy coaching is job-embedded professional development with the goal of improving core literacy instruction and student learning. When fewer than 80 percent of the students in a school are meeting or exceeding proficiency on critical literacy assessments (as is the case in Carlotta and Elissa’s school), simply adding intervention time is not the answer. Core literacy instruction needs attention and support. Teaching practices and/or curricular materials used for core instruction may not be aligned to one or more of the following:

For different coaching strategies to achieve different goals, see Section 3, pages 69–73.

- learning standards,
- research-supported instructional practices,
- findings from literacy assessments, and
- areas of urgent student need.

Even when there are sufficient personnel to provide interventions, students who receive their prescribed minutes of intervention per day and then return to classrooms with misaligned core literacy instruction are unlikely to become proficient readers and writers. It will help teachers like Carlotta and Elissa to realize that when coaches, teachers, and principals work together to strengthen and differentiate core literacy instruction, the result will be improved student learning—increasing the percentage of proficient readers and reducing the number of students needing intervention.

Students who receive their prescribed minutes of intervention per day and then return to classrooms with misaligned core literacy instruction are unlikely to become proficient readers and writers.

Clear communication creates teacher buy-in for coaching.

The problem in this case isn't just with Carlotta and Elissa's perceptions, but in a lack of communication between administration and teachers. When leaders put plans in place without making their intentions clear and without inviting teachers into the thinking behind such plans, resentment and resistance are common obstacles to the necessary work of improving instruction. In their communications, administrators need to acknowledge that improving core instruction is not easy; however, achieving that goal will be possible if everyone works together to delineate the issues and develop an intentional plan to address those issues.

For strategies to increase collaboration between principals and coaches, see Section 3, pages 80–85.

Teachers: “Coaching is just one more thing to put on our plates.”

The Obstacle: Teachers view coaching as yet another initiative.

Second-grade teachers Malcolm and Deidre are discussing their principal's expectations for the upcoming year: “OK, first we have our school improvement plan that has a focus on conferring with students

about their progress in reading, writing, and math. Then, we are just in the second year of using a new word study program and still have a lot of learning to do about what works best for our students. And we can't forget the new social and emotional learning curriculum; we'll be attending workshops about it and then we'll need to start implementing it. Now, our principal is encouraging us to participate in the coaching program that's starting this year. There's no way we can do that, too!"

What if teachers knew that coaching would help them meet existing expectations?

A coach is someone with whom to think and problem-solve.

Coaching is not an initiative or a new program. It is a method of providing ongoing support to teachers as they navigate the daily challenges of their work. Coaches help teachers think through solutions to problems that are inhibiting student success. These problems are often associated with school-wide areas of student need and with new curricular initiatives but can also be unique to a specific teacher. When coaches think and problem-solve with a grade-level team or individual teacher, they help teachers deal with some of the numerous tasks on their instructional plates.

Coaches can support teachers in many ways.

Coaches know that adults learn best when they are involved in the planning and implementation of their learning experiences. Thus, teachers must be codesigners of the work they do with coaches. Their work together is intentional, which includes setting a goal for their collaboration and selecting the most appropriate ways to achieve that goal. For example, coaches often provide resources, co-plan and co-teach lessons, and observe specific student behaviors during lessons taught by the teacher. Coaches are sincere when they ask, "How can I best support you?" Teachers who carefully consider their responses to this question feel in control of their work with coaches—work that often helps them tackle those school-wide objectives and new initiatives.