Does Literacy Coaching Make a Difference? The Effects of Literacy Coaching on Reading Achievement in Grades K-3 in a Reading First District

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Background

Literacy coaches provide on-going, job embedded professional development for teachers. Literacy coaching has been identified as a promising approach for improving teacher instructional competence and, in turn, student reading achievement. This study explored the relationship between literacy coaching and student reading achievement in grades K-3 in a Reading First school district. Specifically, the study investigated the effects of the amount, type, and content of literacy coaching on student reading achievement at the teacher level.

Participants in the study included 12 literacy coaches, 121 classroom teachers in grades K -3, and 3,029 students in grades K-3. The district enrollment was 97% minority, 79% low income, and 44% English Language Learners. The district was in the initial year of the Reading First Grant during the year this study was conducted.

Data were collected from the literacy coaches in the form of weekly Coaching Logs which contained data about the amount of time and number of interactions (frequency) coaches spent (a) with each teacher, (b) on each type of coaching activity, and (c) on the content of each coaching activity. The Coaching Logs were collected each week from January through June. Classroom teachers collected student pre-test and post-test data by administering the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS) to all students in the fall and spring.

Frequency distributions were completed to provide an initial summary of the coaching and assessment data at the teacher, grade, coach, and across-coach levels. Then hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) using two levels of analysis (student level and teacher level) examined the impact of literacy coaching on students' reading achievement.

Key Findings

Student Gain and Teacher Variance

On average, the total gains on the *DIBELS* by students at the kindergarten, first-grade, second-grade, and third-grade levels were statistically significant (at the < .0001 level).

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The percentage of variance of student gain due to teacher differences was significant for each grade level: kindergarten 35.98%; first grade 19.79%; second grade 33.28%, and third grade 26.99%.

How Coaches Spent Their Time

On average, the coaches spent 48% of their time working directly with teachers, engaging in activities such as observing, conferencing, modeling lessons, and co-teaching. Fifty-two percent (52%) of the coaches' time was spent on other activities such as inputting assessment data into the district's assessment management system and writing Reading First reports. Over the five-month data collection period, coaches spent the most time with third grade teachers (an average of 20.69 hours per teacher) and the least time with kindergarten teachers (an average of 13.39 hours per teacher).

Total Number of Coaching Hours as a Predictor of Student Reading Achievement

At the kindergarten and second grade levels, the total number of coaching hours that the teacher received was a predictor of student reading achievement.

Specific Coaching Activities that Predicted Student Reading Achievement

Four specific coaching activities predicted student reading achievement at one or more grade levels.

- Conferencing with the Teacher – Kindergarten, First Grade, Second Grade
- Administering and Discussing Assessments – First Grade, Second Grade
- Modeling Lessons for the Teacher – Second Grade
- Observing in the Classroom – Second Grade

For More Information

Elish-Piper, L., & L'Allier, S.K. (2007, November). *Does literacy coaching make a difference? The effects of literacy coaching on reading achievement in grades K-3 in a Reading First district*. Paper presented at the 57th annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Austin, TX.