Support for the Improvement of Practices through Intensive Coaching (SIPIC): A model of coaching for improving reading instruction and reading achievement

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HIGHLIGHTS

- SIPIC was effective in improving teacher's instructional reading practices.
- There was increased student reading achievement in participating classes.
- There was increased reading achievement of readers who struggle with learning to read.
- Coached teachers offered more opportunities with cognitive reading strategies.
- Coach/teacher interactions were associated with improved instruction.

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we examined one model of coaching, Support for the Improvement of Practices through Intensive Coaching (SIPIC), which draws from both direct and responsive models of coaching with classroom teachers. We found the model to be effective in improving the comprehension instruction of teachers and in raising the reading achievement of students, including students who struggle with learning to read. Additionally, we found that the interactions between coaches and teachers were statistical associated with the instructional practices of the teachers, demonstrating empirically that coaches' behaviors do influence the professional practices of teachers.

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1. Background on literacy coaching

One approach to improve reading achievement (the ability of students to comprehend text) is to improve the ability of teachers to effectively teach their students. As a result, there have been vast amounts of federal, state, and local monies spent on professional development each year (Borko, 2004) even though there are no clear directives for how these activities should look (Lipson, Mosenthal, Mekkelsen, & Russ, 2004). One such professional development that is showing great promise for improving literacy instruction is literacy coaching (Sailors & Shanklin, 2010). Although literacy coaching first appeared in the literature almost 80 years ago

(Cassidy, Garrett, Maxfield, & Patchett, 2010), research on it is relatively recent.

Findings from a recent literature review of coaching studies in the USA (Sailors, Minton, & Villarreal, 2013) reveal that coaching studies center on one of three themes. First, coaching studies demonstrated that coaches have many roles (Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). Second, studies have shown that teachers appreciate their coach (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, & Zigmond, 2010; Diamond & Powell, 2011; Downer, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2009; Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2012) and find their engagement with a coach to be generally positive (Ferguson, 2011). Third, teachers report they appreciate when their coaches share ideas and help and encourage them (Armstrong, Cusumano, Todd, & Cohen, 2008). In short, coaching receives high marks from the field.

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Research has also explored the role of literacy coaching on improving the perceptions and attitudes of classroom teachers. In Malawi, for example, a team of international colleagues (Sailors et al., 2014) examined the effectiveness of an innovative complementary reading program that included coaching. Two groups participated in the study: Treatment teachers received complementary teaching and learning materials, workshops, and directive coaching, and control teachers received no intervention. After this five-month intervention, treatment teachers were significantly more comfortable with their languages of instruction (Chichewa and English) and were more positive about their teaching ability, beliefs about the learning materials in their classroom, and beliefs about the culture of reading in their communities than control teachers. The authors suggested that the implementation of coaching was an important source of support in changing teacher's beliefs and attitudes.

Other research examined the effectiveness of coaching as it influenced teacher practice. In the USA, for example, Neuman and Wright (2010) studied differences in the effects of two models of professional development for pre-kindergarten language and literacy instruction—traditional university coursework only and on-site coaching. Teachers who received coaching outperformed teachers who received only coursework and those in the control group on environmental classroom measures. Similarly, Walpole and her colleagues (Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zerain, & Lamitina, 2010) examined coaching practices linked to teacher practice. Using structural equation modeling to explore the relationships between coaching factors and instructional factors, they identified coaching factors that were significant predictors of at least one instructional factor, accounting for differences by grade level.

But not all studies have shown such positive outcomes of the impact of coaching on practice. For example, in Marsh's investigation, less than half of coached teachers (47% of reading and 40% of social studies) reported that the reading coach had influenced them to make changes to their instruction to a moderate or great extent. Similarly, 24% of reading and 34% of social studies teachers reported that their coach had no influence on changes in their instruction (Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2010). Likewise, Carlisle and Berebitsky (2010) reported that teachers who received coaching did not differ from teachers who were not coached on aspects of instruction relevant to the professional development program. Findings of Whitaker and colleagues (Whitaker, Kinzie, Kraft-Sayre, Mashburn, & Pianta, 2007) indicated no statistically significant differences existed between teachers who had a coach and those who did not on measures that captured practices related to that of the program. And, although the five-month Malawi intervention mentioned earlier was successful in changing the perceptions and beliefs of participating teachers (Sailors et al., 2014), the treatment was not effective in improving the instructional practices of those same teachers.

In addition, recent research has examined the impact of coaching on student reading achievement. Biancarosa and her colleagues (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010) measured the effects of one literacy program, Literacy Collaborative, on long-term student learning. Using a value-added model, the research team found positive effects for the model on improvements in literacy learning. Similarly, Matsumura and her colleagues (Matsumara, Garnier, Correnti, Junker, & Bickel, 2010) investigated the effects of Content-Focused Coaching on new teachers recruited in a district that suffered from a high-turnover rate among its teaching staff. Their findings indicated that the program predicted significantly higher school-level gains by English language learners on the state standardized test.

Likewise, Sailors & Price (2010) explored the role of coaching as a means of professional development in improving comprehension instruction in elementary and middle school classrooms. They tested two models of professional development on the effects of improving the reading comprehension instruction of teachers and increasing the reading achievement of students in low-income schools. Using a random-effects, multilevel, pretest–posttest comparison group design to explore the effectiveness of the two models, the full intervention group (workshop plus coached) outperformed the partial intervention group (workshop only) across teacher observation and student achievement measures.

Other studies have reported mixed findings related to coaching and student achievement. In Belgium, for example, Van Keer & Verhaeghe (2005) compared year-round intensive coaching (35 contact hours) to a more "restrictive" model (15 professional development contact hours) for second and fifth grade teachers. They found that both treatments were equally effective in changing students' reading comprehension, fluency, strategy use, and self-efficacy. The authors hypothesized that the lack of differences could have been due to a small sample size, and that the teachers in the restricted group had already worked with the researchers in another professional development context, thus potentially convoluting the findings, and/or there was little data on the fidelity of implementation of the intervention by the teachers.

In a more recent study in the US, Lovett et al. (2008) implemented a coaching model to prepare high school teachers to remediate reading instruction for students with reading disabilities. In their longitudinal study, the authors worked with 23 teachers, teaching them to develop metacognitive models of literacy instruction, to become more reflective about their teaching practices, and to master effective multiple component approaches to reading interventions. Observations, feedback, modeling, and support were "integral" components in this intervention. Student outcome data indicated that there were greater gains in classrooms where teachers had an additional year of coaching support.

In summary, literacy coaching is a growing field and, although teachers appreciate and value their coaches, there are no definitive conclusions as to the effectiveness of coaching on teachers or student reading achievement (Sailors et al., 2013). To that end, we had two goals in this study: (a) to examine one model of coaching, Support for the Improvement of Practices through Intensive Coaching (SIPIC), testing its effectiveness on the instructional reading practices of elementary and middle school teachers and the reading achievement of their students and (b) to contribute to the general literature on coaching as a means of professional development for classroom teachers. Our research questions included, (a) What are the associated effects of the SIPIC model on the instructional reading practices of participating teachers? (b) What are the associated effects of the SIPIC model on the reading achievement within participating classrooms? (c) How often and in what ways do coaches support teachers when using the SIPIC model? (d) What aspects of the SIPIC model can be attributed to the improved instruction of participating teachers?

2. Directive and responsive coaching

The SIPIC model was designed to be classroom-based, embedded in the school day, and sustained over time with qualified coaches interacting with teachers and integrating promising practices into existing practices within a teacher's own classroom (Sailors & Shanklin, 2010). The model followed the belief that if teachers are to learn new practices and incorporate them effectively into their classroom, they must understand the theory, see the practices modeled, and have opportunities to discuss the practices with a knowledgeable other.

The SIPIC model is grounded in the "situative perspective" of knowledge, thinking, and learning (Greeno, 1997, 1998), which