Instructional Coaching for English Language Arts: Practices and Outcomes

REL Northeast & Islands searched and reviewed studies to identify instructional coaching programs, components, and practices that are associated with student academic outcomes in reading/English language arts (ELA). This document is intended to support schools and districts in understanding the research and evidence that exists related to reading/ELA instructional coaching.

Characteristics of reading/ELA instructional coaching interventions

The summary included 20 studies; the following characteristics were observed:

- Sixteen studies included in this summary examined instructional coaching in reading/literacy/ELA. The other four studies examined the outcomes of instructional coaching in other core content areas in addition to reading/literacy/ELA.

- Seventeen studies were randomized controlled trials (RCT), and three were quasi-experimental design (QED) studies.¹

- Most studies reviewed instructional coaching strategies or programs targeting preschool and elementary school teachers.

What is instructional coaching?

Instructional coaches are on-site professional development providers whose main professional responsibility is to bring evidence-based practices and instructional methods into classrooms through collaborative partnerships with teachers and other school leaders (Knight, 2006; Johnson, 2016; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.).

¹ Studies using QEDs can provide useful insight into the topic of instructional coaching, but they are less rigorous overall than RCTs.
What are the outcomes of instructional coaching interventions?

Many of the studies included in the literature summary reported positive findings. The following is a summary of the key findings gleaned from the selected literature review:

• The youngest learners, preK through grade 2, demonstrated increases in skills that contribute to emergent literacy, such as letter and print knowledge, phonological awareness, and vocabulary development.2

• English learners, minority students, and low-income students whose teachers participated in instructional coaching reported larger gains in analytical writing skills and in literacy.3

• Teachers who received instructional coaching reported positive impact on at least one of the following areas: improved instructional practices, increased teacher knowledge, increased fidelity to curriculum and interventions, higher teacher engagement, and more positive teacher behaviors in the classroom.4, 5

• Some studies also reported positive impact on student social-emotional skills, including emotional understanding, social problem-solving, and social behavior, or general classroom environment.6

An overall look at the literature

Criteria used to screen the studies to review included:

- Studies published on or after 20027
- Studies conducted in the United States
- Studies that examined the relationship between programs, components of the intervention, practices, and student outcomes
- Studies that employ an experimental or quasi-experimental design
- Studies that appear in a peer-reviewed journal or an edited book volume

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3 Olsen et al. (2017).

4 The primary focus of the reviews was studies that examined the relationship between student outcomes and programs, components, and/or practices of instructional teaching. Many of these studies examined teacher outcomes as well as student outcomes.


6 Bierman et al. (2008), Parkinson et al. (2015)

7 Literature (e.g., Scott, Cortina, and Carlisle, 2012) suggests that the instructional coaching concept in education emerged with the Reading First initiative, and the Reading First grants were made available to states starting in July 2002.
What are the common features and components of coaching interventions that were more likely to report positive outcomes?

The following is a summary of the features of the instructional coaching included in this literature review. Not all studies provided detailed information about the specific strategies of or approaches to instructional coaching, including the procedures, materials, or duration of the interventions. These features are specific to the scope of information provided in these studies. Rigorous studies that would enable us to draw strong conclusions about the effects of specific strategies or components common in instructional coaching programs are not yet available.8

**Multi-modal interventions.**
Although not all studies provided exhaustive information about the various interventions used, most that reported positive outcomes included a coaching or mentoring component in addition to more general professional development such as trainings, workshops, or online modules.

**Higher dosage and sustained over a period of time.**
Programs that reported positive outcomes tended to involve coaching interventions that endured for a full school year or more. In addition, higher amounts of coaching—in terms of number and/or duration of sessions—appeared to contribute to positive outcomes.

**Regular, specific feedback to teachers.**
Many studies that reported positive outcomes incorporated regular, immediate, and specific feedback to participating teachers from the coaches assigned to mentor them.

**Specific targets in early literacy.**
Studies that reported positive outcomes of instructional coaching for young learners tended to target specific literacy-related skills for development rather than offer broad pro-literacy supports.

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8 Common features and associated studies are shown in the table on page 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Subject area</th>
<th>School level</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Primary study design</th>
<th>Outcomes examined</th>
<th>Common Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allen et al., 2015</td>
<td>MyTeachingPartner - Secondary (MTP-S)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>Higher dosage and sustained over a period of time, Regular specific feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allen et al., 2011</td>
<td>MyTeachingPartner - Secondary (MTP-S)</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>Specific targets in early literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biancarosa et al., 2010</td>
<td>Literacy Collaborative (LC)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>Multi-modal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bierman et al., 2008</td>
<td>Head Start Research-based, Developmentally Informed (REDI)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Low income</td>
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<td>X X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fisher et al., 2011</td>
<td>Peer coaches (nonspecific)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garet et al., 2008</td>
<td>School/district-level coaches (nonspecific)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landry et al., 2009</td>
<td>External facilitators (nonspecific)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landry et al., 2011</td>
<td>External mentors (nonspecific)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lockwood et al., 2010</td>
<td>Statewide coaching initiative (nonspecific)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marsh et al., 2010</td>
<td>Coaching teachers on data-based decision making</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mashburn et al., 2010</td>
<td>MyTeaching Partner (MTP)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>At risk 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matsumura et al., 2013</td>
<td>Content-Focused Coaching (CFC)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>ELs, Minority, Low income</td>
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<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olson et al., 2017</td>
<td>The Pathway Project</td>
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<td>ELs, Minority, Low income</td>
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<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 The study defined the “at-risk” status to include: poverty, homelessness; parents or guardians are school dropouts, have limited education, or are chronically ill; family stress as evidenced by poverty, episodes of violence, crime, underemployment, unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, or family instability; developmental problems; or limited English proficiency.
Overview of literature by subject area, school level, population, primary study design, and outcomes examined (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature</th>
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<th>Subject area</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parkinson et al., 2015</td>
<td>Children's Literacy Initiative Model Classroom (CLI-MC)</td>
<td>Reading / Literacy / ELA</td>
<td>Kindergarten and elementary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Student, Teacher</td>
<td>Multi-modal, Higher dosage and sustained over a period of time, Specific targets in early literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powell et al., 2010</td>
<td>Classroom Links to Early Literacy</td>
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<td>Kindergarten and elementary</td>
<td>Low income</td>
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<td>X, X, X</td>
<td>X, X, X, X</td>
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<td>Sailors et al., 2010</td>
<td>External coaches (nonspecific)</td>
<td></td>
<td>High school</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X, X, X</td>
<td>X, X, X, X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vernon-Feagans et al., 2013</td>
<td>Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wasik &amp; Hindman, 2011</td>
<td>Exceptional Coaching for Early Language and Literacy (ExCELL)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Low income</td>
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<td>X, X, X</td>
<td>X, X, X, X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wasik et al., 2006</td>
<td>External coaching (nonspecific)</td>
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<td>Low income</td>
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<td>X, X, X</td>
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</table>

| Frequency | 20 | 4  | 2  | 7  | 7  | 7  | 3  | 20 | 8  | 17 | 3  | 20 | 7  | 14 | 12 | 15 | 8  |
References


