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 examined instructional coaching outcomes for the general student population, but eight studies also examined subgroups such as low-income, minority, or rural students.

- 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]
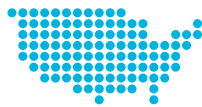

An overall look at the literature

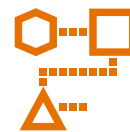**Criteria used to screen the studies to review included:**

Studies published on or **after 2002**[7]

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

---

2 Biancarosa et al. (2010), Bierman et al. (2008), Landry et al. (2009), Landry et al. (2011), Mashburn, et al. (2010), Parkinson et al. (2015), Powell et al. (2010), Vernon-Feagans et al. (2013), Wasik & Hindman (2011), Wasik at al. (2006).

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.

5 Garet et al. (2008), Landry et al. (2009 & 2011), Parkinson, et al. (2015), Sailors & Price (2010), Wasik et al. (2011).

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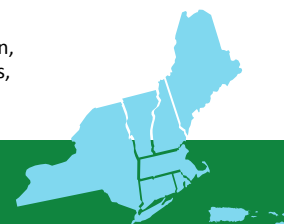
8 Common features and associated studies are shown in the table on page 4.
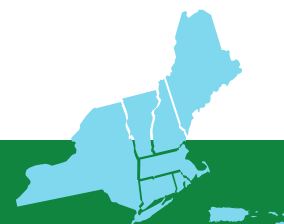
Literature	Program	Subject area			School level				Population		Primary study design		Outcomes examined		Common Features			
		Reading / Literacy / ELA	Mathematics	Other	Preschool	Kindergarten and elementary	Middle school	High school	General	Specific	RCT	QED	Student	Teacher	Multi-modal	Higher dosage and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

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)

Literature	Program	Subject area			School level				Population		Primary study design		Out comes exam ined		Common Features			
		Reading / Literacy / ELA	Mathematics	Other	Preschool	Kindergarten and elementary	Middle school	High school	General	Specific	RCT	QED	Student	Teacher	Multi-modal	Higher dosage and sustained over a period of time	Regular, specific feedback	Specific targets in early literacy
Parkinson et al., 2015	Children's Literacy Initiative Model Classroom (CLI-MC)	X				X			X		X		X		X	X		
Powell et al., 2010	Classroom Links to Early Literacy	X			X				X	Low income	X		X		X		X	X
Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014	Responsive Classroom (RC)	X	X			X			X	Low income	X		X		X			
Sailors et al., 2010	External coaches (nonspecific)	X				X	X		X		X		X	X		X	X	
Vernon-Feagans et al., 2013	Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI)	X				X			X	Rural	X		X		X	X	X	X
Wasik & Hindman, 2011	Exceptional Coaching for Early Language and Literacy (ExCELL)	X			X				X	Low income	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Wasik et al., 2006	External coaching (nonspecific)	X			X				X	Low income	X		X	X	X		X	X
	Frequency	**20**	**4**	**2**	**7**	**7**	**7**	**3**	**20**	**8**	**17**	**3**	**20**	**7**	**14**	**12**	**15**	**8**

References

Allen, J. P., Hafen, C. A., Gregory, A. C., Mikami, A. Y., & Pianta, R. (2015). Enhancing secondary school instruction and student achievement: Replication and extension of the My Teaching Partner-Secondary intervention. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, 8*(4), 475-489.

Allen, J., Pianta, R., Gregory, A., Mikami, A., & Lun, J. (2011). An interaction-based approach to enhancing secondary school instruction and student achievement. *Science, 333,* 1034-1037.

Biancarosa, G., Bryk, A. S., & Dexter, E. R. (2010). Assessing the value-added effects of literacy collaborative professional development on student learning. *Elementary School Journal, 111*(1), 7-34.

Bierman, K. L., Domitrovich, C. E., Nix, R. L., Gest, S. D., Welsh, J. A., Greenberg, M. T., Blair, C., Nelson, K. E., & Gill, S. (2008). Promoting academic and social-emotional school readiness: The Head Start REDI program. *Child Development, 79*(6), 1802-1817.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2011). Coaching middle-level teachers to think aloud improves comprehension instruction and student reading achievement. *The Teacher Educator, 46*(3), 231-243.

Garet, M. S., Cronen, S., Eaton, M., Kurki, A., Ludwig, M., Jones, W., et al. (2008). *The impact of two professional development interventions on early reading instruction and achievement.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Johnson, K. G. (2016). Instructional coaching implementation: Considerations for K-12 administrators. Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 2, 37-40.

Knight, J. (2006). Instructional coaching: Eight factors for realizing better classroom teaching through support, feedback and intensive, individualized professional learning. The School Administrator, 63, 36-40.

Landry, S. H., Anthony, J. L., Swank, P. R., & Monseque-Bailey, P. (2009). Effectiveness of comprehensive professional development for teachers of at-risk preschoolers. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(2), 448.

Landry, S., Swank, P., Anthony, J., & Assel, M. (2011). An experimental study evaluating professional development activities within a state funded pre-kindergarten program. *Reading & Writing, 24*(8), 971-1010.

Lockwood, J. R., McCombs, J. S., & Marsh, J. (2010). Linking reading coaches and student achievement: Evidence from Florida middle schools. *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis, 32*(3), 372-388.

Marsh, J. A., McCombs, J. S., Martorell, F. (2010). How instructional coaches support data-driven decision making: Policy implementation and effects in Florida middle schools. *Educational Policy, 24*(6), 872–907.

Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., & Hamre, B. K. (2010). Consultation for teachers and children's language and literacy development during pre-kindergarten. *Applied Developmental Science, 14*(4), 179-196.

Matsumura, L. C., Garnier, H. E., & Spybrook, J. (2013). Literacy coaching to improve student reading achievement: A multi-level mediation model. *Learning and Instruction, 25*, 35-48.

Olson, C. B., Matuchniak, T., Chung, H. Q., Stumpf, R., & Farkas, G. (2017). Reducing achievement gaps in academic writing for Latinos and English learners in Grades 7–12. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*(1), 1-21.

Parkinson, J., Meakin, J., & Salinger, T. (2015). *Longitudinal impacts of the children's literacy initiative professional development, coaching, and model classroom intervention on early literacy achievement.* Washington, DC, American Institutes for Research.

Pennsylvania Department of Education (n.d). What is an instructional coach? Retrieved from http://piic.pacoaching.org/index.php/piic-coaching/what-is-an-instructional-coach.

Powell, D. R., Diamond, K. E., Burchinal, M. R., & Koehler, M. J. (2010). Effects of an early literacy professional development intervention on Head Start teachers and children. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102*(2), 299-312.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Baroody, A. E., Curby, T. W., Ko, M., Thomas, J. B., Merritt, E. G., Abry, T., & DeCoster, J. (2014). Efficacy of the Responsive Classroom Approach: Results from a 3-year, longitudinal randomized controlled trial. *American Educational Research Journal, 51*(3), 567-603.

Sailors, M., & Price, L. R. (2010). Professional development that supports the teaching of cognitive reading strategy instruction. *The Elementary School Journal, 110*(3), 301-322.

Scott, S. E., Cortina, K. S., & Carlisle, J. F. (2012). Understanding coach-based professional development in Reading First: How do coaches spend their time and how do teachers perceive coaches' work. Literacy Research & Instruction, 51(1),68-85.

Vernon-Feagans, L., Kainz, K., Hedrick, A., Ginsberg, M., & Amendum, S. (2013). Live webcam coaching to help early elementary classroom teachers provide effective literacy instruction for struggling readers: The Targeted Reading Intervention. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 105*(4), 1175-1187.

Wasik, B. A., & Hindman, A. H. (2011). Improving vocabulary and pre-literacy skills of at-risk preschoolers through teacher professional development. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 103*(2), 455-469.

Wasik, B. A., Bond, M. A., & Hindman, A. (2006). The effects of a language and literacy intervention on Head Start children and teachers. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(1), 63-74.

ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast

@REL_NEI