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“WHEN DO WE GET TO READ?” READING INSTRUCTION AND LITERACY COACHING IN A “FAILED” URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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From 2005-2009, the state determined that the Williams School had made no progress in raising its poor performance on the state English language arts test. In the fall of 2009, the state awarded literacy partnership grants to provide professional development to low-performing schools, and the Williams School partnered with our institution of higher education to 1) conduct a needs assessment to determine what teachers were doing in regard to reading comprehension instruction, 2) provide professional development to teachers in the form of literacy coaching, and 3) research the effectiveness of the professional development in changing teachers' instructional practices. The investigation sought to determine how professional development based on knowledge building, co-teaching, and coaching influences teachers' application of explicit comprehension instruction. Overall, results showed improvements in teachers' ability to engage in effective comprehension instruction. However, the qualitative evidence gathered as part of the investigation points to various challenges teachers faced in implementing specific aspects of comprehension instruction and the lack of opportunities students had for reading, some of which appear to be related to contextual factors in the school setting. The results highlight obstacles coaches, teachers, and students face in a low-performing, urban district and suggest possible directions for the future.

Keywords: Literacy coaching, professional development, reading comprehension, social inequity

Introduction

The “Williams” School was failing. From 2005-2009, the state determined that the K-5 school, located in an urban area in the northeastern United States, had made no progress in raising its poor performance on the state English language arts test. With a population of 552 students, the majority of whom are low income (91%) and speak English as a second language (78%), the school faced multiple challenges. In the fall of 2009, the state awarded literacy partnership grants to provide professional development to low-performing schools, and the Williams School partnered with our institution of higher education to 1) conduct a needs assessment to determine what teachers were doing in regard to reading

comprehension instruction, 2) provide professional development to teachers, focusing on reading comprehension, and 3) research the effectiveness of the professional development in changing teachers' instructional practices. This article reports on qualitative data from the authors' two-year research and professional development project at the Williams School in order to understand how professional development based on knowledge building, co-teaching, and coaching influences teachers' application of explicit comprehension instruction in a low-performing school.

Research Perspectives

Faced with the challenge of designing the professional development to focus on

improving the teaching of reading comprehension at the Williams school, we turned to the research on reading comprehension, studies documenting the practices of exemplary literacy teachers, and research related to the design of professional development and literacy coaching, in particular. We review this knowledge base in the following section.

Reading Instruction

Researchers investigating the effects of strategy instruction on comprehension have consistently found that when students are taught to apply strategies to text, comprehension of the text improves (Pearson, 2009). But as Harvey and Goudvis (2007) point out, “central to all of the recent research is the idea that comprehension strategies are a means to an end, not an end in themselves;” the “end” being the construction of meaning, understanding, and engagement (p. 14). Teaching students a group of strategies, rather than a single strategy, shows more promising effects (Pressley, 2002). This group of strategies, as summarized by Pressley (2002), Duke and Pearson (2002), and Harvey & Goudvis (2007) typically includes making connections, asking questions, drawing inferences, distinguishing important from less important ideas, summarizing information, visualizing, and monitoring understanding. Unfortunately, research also demonstrates that teachers find strategy teaching difficult (Allington, 2009; Duffy, 1993).

Other research has found that the decoding and vocabulary knowledge of the individual child interacts with the type of instruction provided to produce greater or lesser gains in reading achievement. For example, third graders with lower reading comprehension skills made greater gains if they were in classrooms with more explicit reading comprehension activities. But third graders with higher reading comprehension skills made greater gains when they were in classrooms with more time spent in “child managed” reading activities,

such as sustained silent reading (Morrison, Bachman & Connor, 2005). Studies such as this one emphasize the need for individualized and small group reading comprehension instruction that uses assessment as a guide.

As the research cited above suggests, what may work for one child may not work for another. But effective literacy teaching does appear to have some commonalities. The research regarding effective literacy teaching highlights that effective teachers know how to combine methods and use a variety of materials and texts (Blair, Rupley, and Nichols, 2007). Additionally, this knowledge base emphasizes that effective literacy teachers use assessment as the basis for instruction, maintain high expectations and the belief that all children can learn, use flexible grouping, actively engage their students, pose higher level thinking questions, and provide strategic help, authentic reading and writing tasks, explicit instruction, modeling, and guided practice (Allington, 2002; Blair, Rupley, and Nichols, 2007; Pressley, *et al.*, 2001, Taylor, *et al.*, 2002).

Literacy Coaching

The coaching model for professional development in schools represents the practice suggested by the most recent professional development research literature (McCombs & Marsh, 2009). Professional development courses may increase teachers’ knowledge but not necessarily change practice (Neuman & Wright, 2010). Sailors and Price (2010) compared the effects of two types of professional development on teachers’ instruction of cognitive reading strategies: A two-day workshop and the workshop plus coaching. They found that the teachers in the group that included coaching incorporated more aspects of cognitive reading strategies instruction in their teaching. Multiple studies of coaching point to coach/teacher collaboration, demonstration lessons, lesson observations, exchanging feedback on observed lessons, co-teaching,

open-ended questions in teacher/coach dialogue, and collaborative review of assessment data as critical features of coaching that bring about improvements in teachers’ instructional practices (Hough, Bryk, Pinnell, Kerbow, Fountas, & Scharer, 2008; Kennedy & Shiel, 2010; L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010; McCombs & Marsh, 2009; Sailors & Price, 2010).

A few recent studies have also found that coaching can bring about gains in student reading achievement and that the more coaching teachers and schools experience, the greater the gains (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolten & Zigmond, 2010; Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Kennedy & Shiel, 2010). Sailors & Shanklin (2010) note in their review of the research that the emerging evidence for positive effects of coaching on teachers’ practices, knowledge, and student outcomes is promising and “while coaching may be new, it is no longer unproven” (p. 5). They point out that current education reform efforts, such as Race-to-the-Top, “emphasize the role of professional development to turn around low-performing schools” and that coaching is a “viable and effective form of professional development for teachers and as such, warrants further study” (p. 5).

In designing the specific responsibilities of the literacy coach at the Williams School, previous research related to the role of the literacy coach was considered. Walpole & McKenna (2004) explain that successful coaching programs are intensive, include systems for observing teachers and providing them with feedback, and engage teachers in reflecting on their practices, “including collaboration and discussion” (p. 186). But what form should this collaboration take? Walpole and McKenna (2004) “urge literacy coaches to balance time providing support inside classrooms (through observations, feedback, and modeling) with time providing support outside the classroom (through knowledge-building sessions, data-based presentations, and book clubs)” (p.

190). Similarly, L’Allier, Elish-Piper, and Bean (2010) suggest that coaches spend time with teachers “engaged in activities such as observing, modeling, conferencing, co-teaching, and leading book study groups” (p. 546).

Other studies illustrate factors limiting the effectiveness of coaching. Smith’s (2007) case studies of three coaches in two middle schools highlight the influence of contextual factors on the role of the coach, such as negative school climate, lack of administrative support, and the limited amount of teacher preparation time. The coaches in his study assumed multiple roles that broke “the coaching process apart into a series of disjointed bits” (p. 62). Smith’s research emphasized the need to “minimize fragmentation by clearly establishing responsibilities and roles the literacy coach will be asked to assume” (p. 63). Keeping all of these lessons learned in mind, as well as the time constraints that limited the coaching to three to four meetings per teacher, the role of the coach at the Williams school focused on knowledge building sessions, demonstration/modeling, co-teaching, and observations/feedback, with co-teaching at the heart of the collaborative process.

The design of the project and the inclusion of the co-teaching aspect in the role of the coach are influenced by the Vygotskian tradition of learning theory and Rogoff’s related notion of apprenticeship (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986; Rogoff, 1990; 1995). These theories stress the importance of social interaction in learning and the significance of linking more abstract concepts with concrete or “hands-on” experiences. Guidance and collaboration with more capable peers or adults are the keys to acquiring new knowledge and skill and advancing within what Vygotsky (1978) called the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD). Rogoff suggested apprenticeship as an apt metaphor for “active individuals participating with others in culturally organized activity that has as part of its purpose the development of mature participation in the activity by

the less experienced people” (1995, p. 142). When a teacher co-teaches with a coach, this is an act of “apprenticeship,” occurring only when both parties actively participate.

Consistent with Vygotskian learning theory and Rogoff’s theory of apprenticeship is the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) involving explicit teaching and demonstration of a skill or strategy, guided practice, and independent application. Co-teaching is an aspect of “guided practice” in which some responsibility is released to the teacher as the teacher moves along the continuum of learning towards independent application. When co-teaching is absent, the teacher is asked to move immediately from the role of observer with no responsibility to the role of the instructional leader with full responsibility. Thus, co-teaching can serve as the bridge between observation and independent application.

Research Questions

Our review of the research on effective comprehension instruction and literacy coaching not only assisted us in designing the professional development for the Williams School, but also led us to ask two important questions that would guide the research connected to our work:

- 1) How does professional development based on knowledge building, co-teaching, and coaching increase teachers’ application of explicit comprehension instruction?
- 2) What are the challenges teachers and coaches face in implementing best practices in comprehension instruction in a low-performing school?

By investigating these questions and studying literacy coaching as part of a state sponsored school turn-around effort, this project contributes to the developing knowledge

base about the design of professional development in low-performing schools.

Method

In the fall of 2009, armed with our knowledge of what good comprehension instruction entails and our belief in the benefits of the literacy coaching model, we set out to assist teachers at the Williams School with their teaching of comprehension strategies. The project took place over a two-year period with two different groups of teachers. In the first year (AY 2009-2010, spring), 25 teachers of grades K-5 and specialists (special education, reading, and ESL) participated in the professional development. In the second year (AY 2010-2011, fall), a new group of 11 teachers and specialists in 3rd, 4th and 5th grade classrooms participated. Table 1 summarizes the number of participants involved in the study in each year and the number and type of meetings provided. Each type of meeting is described in detail in the section that follows.

[Author 1] was the literacy coach and [Author 2] was the researcher/evaluator. Both are professors involved in literacy teacher preparation at the university involved in the partnership grant with the Williams School. Given the collegial relationship between the coach and the researcher/evaluator, great care was taken to avoid bias in the post-PD observations, a problem noted by Hough, *et al.* (2008) in regard to their study in which the coaches themselves carried out the pre- and post- observations. In the current investigation, the coach did not carry out the post-professional development observations, nor did she discuss her observations or impressions of teachers with the researcher/evaluator until all post-PD data was collected and the official grant evaluation report had been submitted.

In both years of the study, the project included three phases: needs assessment, professional development, and post-PD observations. In the **needs assessment phase**,

Table 1. Participants and Type of Professional Development

Participants	Needs assessment classroom observation (45-60 minutes)	Small group, grade-level knowledge-building session with coach (45 minutes)	Teachers watch coach conduct demonstration lesson in grade level groups (45 minutes)	Planning and co-teaching 1 lesson with coach (using a lesson from The Comprehension Toolkit) (1.5 hours)	Classroom observation with feedback (using a lesson from the reading series) (1 hour)	Post PD observations (45-60 minutes)
Year 1: 25	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Year 2: 11	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

the researchers observed literacy lessons and used an expanded form of the “Classroom and Lesson Observation Checklist” (Authors, 2006) to assess comprehension instruction in the classroom (see Appendix). The introductory portion of the checklist asks for information on the general classroom literacy environment, such as selection of books for independent reading, displays of student writing or reading logs, or focus on word study and vocabulary. A second section focuses on grouping for classroom instruction (whole or small group, pairs, or individual). Of particular importance, however, was the next section, which asks the observer to note the focus of the lesson. It is in this section that the observers in this study were able to note which (if any) comprehension strategies the teacher addressed and if he/she: 1) explicitly described a comprehension strategy; 2) modeled the strategy; 3) guided students to use the strategy along with the teacher as a group or class; and 4) monitored students as they practiced using the strategy and worked independently. In the “comments” section at the end, the researchers wrote detailed notes that provided additional descriptive information about the lessons.

Lessons observed consisted of small group and whole class lessons and included classroom teachers, as well as specialists. The school and teachers used DIBELS assessment results to group students for instruction but some whole class teaching prevailed. A score

of 0-4 was noted for each teacher, indicating how many of the key components of strategy instruction noted above were present in the lesson observed. Since these initial observations revealed that few of the components were present, the professional development was designed to focus on the understanding and development of those pedagogical skills.

In the **professional development phase** of the project, teachers received a copy of *The Comprehension Toolkit* (grades 3-6) or *The Primary Comprehension Toolkit* (grades K-2) (Harvey & Goudvis, 2005; 2008). This resource was developed to help teachers implement strategic instruction of research-based comprehension strategies with authentic texts. This seemed an ideal resource for this situation as the teachers in this investigation were not used to creating their own lessons and had previously relied on plans provided in their commercial reading series. The *Toolkit* provided them with model lessons and texts to support the lessons, thereby scaffolding the teachers’ learning and use of the desired strategies. The coach met once with teachers in small grade-level teams (four to seven teachers in each group) to discuss guiding principles for comprehension instruction and introduce the resources. These 45 minute meetings served as the context for “knowledge-building” (Walpole & McKenna, 2004) with the coach emphasizing the following points: 1) Teachers need to explain and model comprehension strategies, 2) teachers need to

support students while they try out the strategies, and 3) students need to practice applying the strategies independently. Furthermore, the coach stressed that reading comprehension is thinking that occurs as we read and that instruction should center on the kinds of thinking that proficient readers use, such as monitoring comprehension, connecting, asking questions, inferring and visualizing, determining importance, summarizing, and synthesizing.

The coach also reviewed principles of effective vocabulary instruction. She pointed out that some words involve simple clarification and others require extended instruction. If a word's meaning is essential to understanding a text, its meaning should be clarified before or during reading with any pre-teaching of vocabulary being brief. Extended instruction and practice with vocabulary should take place after reading so that students can connect the word to its context in the text. The coach also emphasized that extended instruction should focus on those words defined by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2008) as Tier II words – high utility words that appear in written text and are not so common in everyday conversation. She stressed the importance of active vocabulary teaching in which students use and think about words in discussion, writing, and games. Specific recommended strategies included providing student-friendly definitions and examples of how to use a word in a variety of contexts and sentences; using movements, gestures, and facial expressions to dramatize word meanings; semantic mapping; providing opportunities to see, as well as hear a word; and follow-up activities to provide repeated exposure, such as charades and weaving a word into conversations throughout a week.

The teachers, in grade level teams, watched the coach conduct one demonstration lesson focusing on comprehension and viewed a video lesson that accompanies *The Primary*

Comprehension Toolkit. They discussed the lessons in regard to the principles and guidelines for comprehension and vocabulary instruction that had been introduced prior to the demonstration. Participants then selected a lesson from one of the kits to co-teach with the coach in the teacher's own classroom, and they planned the lesson together. During the planning meetings, the coach clarified any questions the teacher had about the lesson, any modifications needed for the specific students who would participate, and discussed which components of the lesson the teacher wanted to try.

In the second year, based on findings from the first year, the focus of the PD was on integrating the teaching of comprehension strategies into the core reading series required by the district. Therefore, the 11 teachers participated in a 2nd round of lessons observed by the coach. In the 2nd round, the teachers were responsible for conducting the entire lesson. The lesson was from the required reading series but had to have the structure of a *Toolkit* lesson (introduction, modeling, guided practice, collaboration/independent practice) and integrate a comprehension strategy from the *Toolkit* and explicit vocabulary teaching. Since the lessons in the required reading series did not follow this format, the teachers had to modify the lessons. The coach also provided each teacher with a "reading lesson observation guide" (a simplified form of the "Classroom Observation Checklist") in advance of the observation and used this guide to give feedback to the teacher.

After the co-teaching sessions in both years, the coach met with and prompted the teacher to reflect on the lesson using open-ended questions, such as: What did you notice? Did any of the children surprise you? How is this lesson different from the lessons you usually teach? What kinds of follow-up would you like to do in regard to the lesson? How might you integrate the ideas from the

Toolkit with your required reading curriculum? The coach shifted from “responsive questions” such as these to “directive suggestions,” applying “a combination of pressure and support” as described by Ippolito (2010) as a characteristic of balanced coaching (pp. 184-185). The coach’s directive suggestions emerged from the teachers’ responses to the questions, from observations made during the co-teaching experience, and from reviewing students’ work samples from the lessons.

In the **post-PD observation phase** that followed the coaching, teachers were observed again by the researcher/evaluator using the “Classroom and Lesson Observation Checklist.” Depending upon when the teachers co-taught with the coach, time between co-teaching and the follow-up observation ranged from four to thirteen weeks. In the post-PD observations, the researcher/evaluator paid particular attention to the aspects of instruction that had previously been missing and again assigned a rating of 0 to 4 for each participant according to how many of the four key aspects of comprehension instruction were observed: 1) explicitly describing a comprehension strategy, 2) modeling a strategy, 3) guiding students to use the strategy along with the teacher as a group or class, or 4) monitoring students as they practice using the strategy and think independently. Teachers chose their own lesson materials for these observations. The researcher/evaluator again recorded detailed descriptive notes about the lesson in the “comments” section for each observation.

Analysis

Data collection produced the following sources: a “Classroom Observation Checklist” for both pre- and post-PD observations, including 0-4 ratings for desired elements of comprehension instruction and detailed notes in the “comments” section that provided descriptive information about the lessons.

Data on pre- and post-PD teacher performance from the observation checklist was analyzed using descriptive statistics to show the changes in teachers’ inclusion of the four desired aspects of comprehension – explaining, modeling, guiding practice, and monitoring of use of a strategy. Both the number of teachers whose instruction had changed and the number of aspects (0 to 4) that they demonstrated in their post-PD teaching were tallied and reported.

Qualitative data in the “comments” section of the observation checklist were examined for themes related to challenges, in order to present a broader understanding of the reasons behind some of the difficulties teachers faced.

Results

Overall, results showed improvements in teachers’ ability to engage in effective comprehension instruction. Nonetheless, findings also pointed to various challenges teachers faced in implementing specific aspects of comprehension instruction, some of which appear to be related to contextual factors in the school setting. The results also pointed to limited opportunities for students to actually read.

Pre- and Post-observations of Comprehension Strategy Instruction

The needs assessment phase of the PD had revealed that in their regular classroom literacy instruction, few of the teachers were: 1) explicitly describing a comprehension strategy, 2) modeling a strategy, 3) guiding students to use the strategy along with the teacher as a group or class, or 4) monitoring students as they practiced using the strategy and worked independently. For most teachers, the gradual release of responsibility model was not evident in their instruction. In the first year, only two of the 25 participants were demonstrating any aspects of comprehension strategy

instruction; these two teachers were guiding students in using a strategy with the aid of a graphic organizer but not describing, modeling, or allowing for monitored independent practice. In the second year, one participant showed all four aspects of comprehension instruction from the beginning; two others demonstrated three of the four. But these participants were the exception overall. Most teachers' practice was showing little to no evidence of effective comprehension strategy instruction in their classrooms at the beginning of both years, leaving much room for growth.

In the post-PD lesson observations, there was indeed improvement. All but one of the 36 participating teachers improved their teaching of comprehension strategies, with 20 out of 36 demonstrating all four of the desired aspects of instruction. Among those who received ratings under 4, challenges were of several types. The successes and challenges of each phase of the strategy instruction during the participants' post-PD lessons are each presented in the sections below with representative examples of what occurred in the course of their teaching.

Explaining and describing the strategy. Thirty-four of the 36 participants had no trouble with the aspect of instruction that involved explaining and describing a particular strategy. Successful participants began their lessons by explicitly describing the strategy and discussing why and how we use it when reading. For example, "Ben" noted that "good readers ask questions while they read and wonder things." "Sherry," a special education teacher, gave particularly good examples of the sometimes difficult concept of inferring by using real-life examples to aid students' understanding: "If someone is coughing or sneezing, what might we infer even though they don't tell us directly?" Students clearly got the concept, as one child pointed to her stomach and said, "Like you didn't tell us you were pregnant but we could tell from looking

at your belly!" Indeed, an excellent inference! Sherry then moved to the text, noting how we use a similar kind of "guessing from clues" when reading.

In only two cases, the description of the strategy was completely missing from the lesson. In those cases, teachers simply skipped right to modeling, and students therefore did not have a chance to understand why or how the strategy might be useful.

(Over)Modeling and the gradual release of responsibility. The two middle phases of comprehension instruction – teacher modeling and collaboration with students to practice using the strategy together – are very important ones, particularly since these aspects were missing in the lessons observed prior to the PD.

In only two post-PD cases was the modeling of a strategy by the teacher absent from the lesson. In one 1st-grade classroom, "Belinda" did an excellent job of explaining the importance of using text features such as bold print, labels, and headings to understand an informational text; she had also chosen a very appropriate text on symbols of freedom in the United States for the lesson. However, following the explanation of text features, she then gave students an "I Learned" and "I Wonder" chart to complete without modeling her own thinking or providing examples of what students might write on their own charts. This was also problematic given that the activity in which students were asked to participate did not clearly connect to the strategy she had described and was more focused on the generating of questions. Students had their own copies of the text but were not easily able to practice any strategy on their own due to the lack of clarity and modeling.

A troublesome finding across both years of the study was that even after the PD, there were six teachers who could explain and model a strategy but had difficulty "releasing" the students to use the strategy and think on their own. For example, "Stephanie" very

adeptly explained the importance of monitoring comprehension and then began to share her own “Questions” and “Connections” on easel paper for her 4th-grade class. Her examples were outstanding, with connections made to what she knows about depression as an emotional problem in relation to “The Great Depression” and her thinking about a salary of \$28 a week in relation to how much a Wii costs today. However, she wrote nine questions and two connections of her own (not generated by students) on the easel, which left students with little time or inclination to formulate their own questions; she had lost their interest after the first few examples.

Another example of the phenomenon of “over-modeling” - offering too many responses before students have a chance to generate their own - was noted in “Janice’s” lesson. When she asked students to infer on their own and write down what might have happened to the sandhouse at the end of Eloise Greenfield’s poem *Things*, she had already given them all the reasonable possibilities in her own modeling. Understandably, students ended up writing down something she had already said, which did not indicate whether or not they could infer on their own.

Finally, in one especially memorable moment in a 5th-grade class where modeling and the teacher’s soliciting of responses from students had taken up most of the time in the literacy block, a youngster raised her hand and pointedly asked, “*When do we get to read?*” Indeed, this student ended up with only 15 minutes to work with her partner reading in the anthology and only read two pages of text.

Independent use of the strategy. It is in this phase, where students should be given the opportunity to practice using a strategy on their own through independent practice, where we noted significant challenges for 16 of the teachers. We have already noted some teachers’ reluctance to “let go,” and that time actually reading was sometimes cut short, but even teachers who were willing to release

students faced a very real obstacle – the lack of reading materials for independent practice. The 5th-grade SEI instructor, for example, used a very culturally relevant trade book, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, to explain and model the use of monitoring comprehension and “leaving tracks of our thinking.” However, students in the class never actually saw any text. They were asked to write questions on post-it notes as the teacher read aloud, but did not get a chance to see any of the words in print. This was the case in all nine of the classes in which teachers opted to use a single copy of a trade book as a focus of the lesson.

Discussion

Kinucan-Welsch, Rosemary, and Grogan (2006) point out that “as we continue to develop descriptions of the interactions between literacy coach and teacher, we will begin to construct a model of coaching that can guide practice in the evolving role of the literacy coach” (p. 434). The work reported here provides such a description and, when contextual factors are also taken into account, contributes to our understanding of the role and work of the coach and the design of professional development. It should be noted that any conclusions from the study are limited due to the fact that variables other than the coaching and professional development may have influenced the teachers’ instruction and the number of coaching sessions was limited by the constraints of the grant. However, to the best of our knowledge, no other professional development related to reading comprehension instruction took place during the time of the study. Any conclusions from the research are also limited by the fact that only one post-PD observation was conducted. We do not know if improvements to instruction were sustained over time or to what degree the process of being observed influenced the teaching.

However, most teachers *did* improve their teaching of comprehension strategies in the post-PD observation, suggesting that even

a relatively brief professional development cycle consisting of knowledge-building sessions, demonstration teaching, co-planning and co-teaching, and observation/feedback sessions influenced instructional practices. Some of the challenges teachers experienced, such as over- or under- modeling, can be addressed through additional coaching. But some of the other challenges that surfaced during this research project, such as the amount of time devoted to actual reading and the amount of authentic texts available (two related issues), require attention from the school leadership.

Students need individual copies of text they are able to read and interested in reading to practice using strategies. Since the Williams School classrooms were lacking in authentic reading materials, students had very little exposure to any text other than that in the reading series. When the *Toolkit* trade books were used for the lessons that took place during the professional development project, any independent practice involved responding to the teacher's read-aloud. While responding to text read aloud is certainly beneficial, it is not sufficient on a regular basis for allowing students to practice comprehension strategies for independent reading. Even when the reading series was used and children had individual copies of stories in the anthology, problems arose. Teachers were required to use the grade level anthologies and all of the stories in them, despite the fact that the anthology story might not match the reading levels of the students (often it was above the level of the students). The SEI (structured English immersion) teachers had a particular problem with this requirement even though they were able to use an anthology below grade level; it was too hard for the majority of the students in the SEI classes. The leveled books that came with the program offered some opportunity to differentiate instruction in small groups based on reading levels. However, the stories were sometimes unengaging and the language

contrived in order to utilize the same vocabulary as that found in the core anthology story. It is difficult to apply comprehension strategies if the text is too hard or not engaging. The coach had to provide her own materials for the demonstration lessons (copies of articles for children from the *Toolkit* or individual copies of children's magazines from her own collection) in order for students to have texts to read on their own.

In the ideal scenario, students could practice a comprehension strategy with the teacher using the reading series required by the district, leveled books, or a teacher-led, trade-book read-aloud, and then select trade books with which they could practice applying the strategy on their own. Students at the Williams School will have difficulty practicing the use of strategies independently without a significant investment in authentic reading materials for their classrooms and time to read them.

In viewing our results, we are reminded of Allington's (2009) comment that "reading is like every other human activity in that the amount of practice really matters, especially the amount of reading done while reading proficiency is being developed" (p. 60). We are not alone in noting the lack of time spent reading in a school. As Kuhn *et al.* (2006) stated in their review of the research on fluency development, "it may be the case that, in general, the amount of reading carried out in typical classrooms is not extensive enough to support the development of fluent and automatic reading for many students" (p. 362). Kuhn *et al.* (2006) compared two approaches designed to increase reading fluency: repeated reading (1 additional book per week) and wide reading (3 additional books per week). Students in both conditions spent more time reading and made greater gains than students in the control group; however, the gains emerged earlier for the wide-reading group. Furthermore, there is strong correlational evidence that time spent reading is one of the

best predictors of reading achievement (e.g., Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Brozo, 2011). Additionally, access to a lot of interesting texts appears to be a key factor in reading achievement (Allington, 2009). Our research at the Williams School leads us to agree with Allington (2009) that

The first aspect of redesigning current interventions to be reading intensive interventions is assuring that you have an adequate supply of texts that students find interesting and that they can read accurately, fluently, and with good understanding. Lots of books is not enough, however. But it is the beginning step—an absolutely necessary beginning (p. 69).

The investment in authentic reading materials and time for sustained reading is not likely to occur without the support of the school principal. Results from a school study such as this one can have the very practical result of educating a school leader and thereby leveraging change. Research by Overhort and Szabocsik (2011) suggests it may be effective to focus school leaders' attention on literacy content knowledge that will help them with decision-making related to teachers' instructional practices and professional development. The researchers designed and evaluated a series of four professional development meetings for 18 principals. Each three hour meeting focused on topics related to reading comprehension, engagement in literacy, and the design of balanced literacy programs. The principals took pre- and post-surveys measuring their content knowledge, as well as their ability to provide feedback to hypothetical teachers on literacy instruction. Not surprisingly, those scoring low on content knowledge also scored low on their ability to provide specific feedback to teachers about literacy instruction and did not appear to understand the relationship of resources, such as time spent reading and classroom

libraries, to improved literacy outcomes for students. However, the professional development sessions did improve principals' scores on the post-PD surveys, suggesting "that lack of knowledge is a remediable situation. At least among volunteers, a relatively weak intervention--only twelve hours--can promote a measurable increase in leaders' understandings of how to support literacy instruction" (p. 34). Overhort and Szabocsik's (2011) work suggests that any future iteration of our professional development model at the Williams School should include knowledge building sessions with the school principal.

Models of successful coaching are emerging and researchers are beginning to tease out the relationships between specific coaching activities, changes in teaching, and student learning (Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, Lamitina, 2010). Our work suggests that a comprehensive model of successful coaching should include those aspects included in years one and two of our project, with the addition of explicitly coaching and involving the school leader, particularly in regard to resources for literacy instruction, such as time spent reading and the use of authentic and varied texts for instruction. Our work also suggests that teachers need to understand how their instructional practices and decisions expand or limit students' opportunities to read. Feedback from observations needs to include this information explicitly. We have revised our classroom observation form with this in mind and in its new form, it may be useful to school principals and coaches in the process of teacher observations, evaluations, goal-setting, and feedback.

Conclusion

Is the Williams School still failing? By the state's measures, the answer is "no." Students at the school showed improvement on the state tests of English language arts and math in 2011, earning the school an "on

target” rating for a school in “restructuring” mode. For the first time since 2004, the school earned “adequate yearly progress” status in both English language arts and math. But our evaluation shows a more nuanced view of success. In our two years working with Williams School teachers, we were heartened by the teacher participants’ willingness to learn and ability to improve their instruction of comprehension strategies after relatively few knowledge-building and coaching sessions. However, what teachers *can* do is not always what they *will* do, given that myriad contextual factors may influence their classroom practice. Teachers need more than just professional development in order to help their students succeed; they also need adequate resources, supportive and engaged leadership, and help in fitting all the pieces of good instruction together in their daily classroom routines. A comprehensive model of successful coaching will build knowledge and help teachers to implement what they know about comprehension strategy instruction, or other best practices, while addressing contextual factors that may serve as barriers to the most effective instruction.

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APPENDIX

Classroom and Lesson Observation Checklist

Person observed _____ Grade level _____

Observer _____ Date _____

<i>Section 1 - Classroom environment shows evidence of:</i>	Yes	No	Comments
Student response to literature through:			
• Open-ended questions			
• Discussion			
• Writing			
• Art			
Independent reading			
Choice of books for independent reading			
Encouragement of reading at home			
Assessment of student progress to plan instruction			
Student interaction and discussion			
Vocabulary and/or word study			
A well organized and comfortable reading area			
A trade book library with variety of levels and genres			
<i>Section 2 - Lesson observation</i>			
Grouping for observed literacy instruction includes:			
• Whole class			
• Small groups			
• Pairs			
• Individual			
Lesson observed focused on:			
• Reading			
• Listening			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary 		<p>Did vocabulary instruction include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitional AND contextual information about each word’s meaning? Does teacher model use of word? Are definitions student friendly? • Involving children ACTIVELY in word learning? If so, how? (e.g., games, movements, drawing, charades, discussion, writing, word mapping) • Providing children with multiple encounters? If so, how? (e.g., word wizard, woven into discussions, vocabulary word wall) • Instruction on Tier II and Tier III words? These are words that warrant instruction because they are central to lesson content (Tier II and III) or words that appear frequently in written text but are not common in everyday conversation (Tier II). <p>What is the number of words taught in the lesson?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning of text (indicate literal level or higher level in comment box) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehension strategy 		<p>Check which strategy(ies) was/were addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> identifying a purpose for reading <input type="checkbox"/> previewing text before reading <input type="checkbox"/> making predictions before and during reading <input type="checkbox"/> activating relevant background knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> thinking aloud while reading <input type="checkbox"/> using text structure to support comprehension <input type="checkbox"/> creating visual representations to aid comprehension <input type="checkbox"/> determining the important ideas in the text <input type="checkbox"/> summarizing <input type="checkbox"/> generating questions <input type="checkbox"/> handling unfamiliar words during reading <input type="checkbox"/> monitoring comprehension while reading <input type="checkbox"/> inferring <input type="checkbox"/> making connections <p><i>For each strategy checked above, did instruction include:</i></p> <p>A text that was well-suited to teaching the strategy?</p> <p>_____ 1) An explicit description of the strategy and when and how to use it?</p> <p>_____ 2) Teacher modeling of the strategy in action?</p> <p>_____ 3) Guided practice using the strategy in collaboration with the teacher (and classmates)?</p> <p>_____ 4) Monitoring students’ independent use of the strategy?</p>

116 / Reading Improvement

• Word identification (indicate sight words, phonics, word recognition strategies)			
• Phonemic awareness			
• Letter identification			
• Spelling			
• Writing			
• Other			
Materials used:			
• Basal			
• Leveled books			
• Trade book			
• Board/chart			
• Worksheet and/or written materials (describe how they are used)			
• Oral presentation			
• Video			
• Other			
Teacher interaction:			
• Telling, lecturing (lesson content)			
• Giving procedural information			
• Modeling			
• Recitation			
• Discussion			
• Coaching			
• Reading aloud			
• Observing			
• Assessing			
• Other (explain in comment box)			
Expected pupil response:			
• Reading silently			
• Reading with partner			
• Reading round-robin			
• Discussing			
• Orally responding			
• Listening			
• Writing			
• Drawing			
• Manipulating			
• Constructing			
• Other			

Number of students on-task	x	x	# 100% time____ #most of time____ # some of time____ #none of time____
Total number of students			

Collect any materials used in the lesson and attach.

Comments: