

Research on Professional Development

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These reports are arranged starting with the most recent research and moving backwards

Instructional Coaches

Knight, J. (pending). *Instructional coaching: The art and practice of building learning partnerships*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of (a) research that has been conducted on instructional coaching, (b) the components of instructional coaching, (c) the principles supporting the instructional coaching model, (d) communication and leadership skills that support instructional coaching, (e) how coaching interfaces with professional learning communities, (f) research-based instructional practices Instructional Coaches can share with teachers, and (g) tactics coaches can employ to build school-wide support for teaching practices shared by Instructional Coaches.

Knight, J. (2005). A primer on instructional coaching. *Principal Leadership*, 5(8) 17-20.

This article provides an overview of aspects of Instructional Coaching (IC), and summarizes results from three research studies.

One study suggested that coaching can be an effective method for ensuring implementation of interventions. In this study, teachers (n= 82) were interviewed within six weeks of the start of school to determine whether they were implementing interventions that they had learned during summer workshops in their school. In total, 72 of 82 teachers were implementing, a marked contrast from Joyce and Showers finding that at best 10% of teacher implement following traditional professional development

A second study suggested rationales for coaching. In this study, the results of middle school students (n=1302) in what we refer to as “hi-fi” classrooms (where teachers used practices that were close to those outlined in instructional manuals) with middle school students (n=562) in “low-fi” classrooms (where teachers left out major components of the teaching practices outlined in instructional manuals) classrooms. Students in “hi-fi” classroom improved the number of complete sentences by 13% (from 74-87%) and students in “low-fi” classrooms improved by 4% (from 76-80%).

A third study suggested some of the methods coaches should employ in order to be effective. In this study, a survey (n=107) was completed by teachers who had watched an Instructional Coach model instructional practices in their classroom. Results suggest that teachers perceive coach’s modeling to (a) increase the ease of implementing interventions, (b) increase teacher fidelity to research-based practices, and (c) provide an opportunity for teachers to learn additional teaching practices. Results also indicate that teachers do not perceive ICs as having sufficient content knowledge to teach all content.

Knight, J. (2004). Instructional coaches make progress through partnership: Intensive support can improve teaching. *Journal of Staff Development*, 25(Spring), 32 - 37.

For the past six years, with the Pathways to Success project, we have studied the effectiveness of Instructional Coaches as a methodology for facilitating change in schools. As reported in the above mentioned article, we have been able to achieve between a 80 – 90% implementation rate with our project. This is quite superior to the 10% implementation rate reported for high quality training (Joyce & Showers).

I have am currently working on a book summarizing the many studies we've completed within the Pathways to Success project analyzing the impact of various interventions on student achievement and the importance of fidelity to research-validated practices. This work also summarizes dozens of interviews I have conducted with Instructional Coaches and my synthesis of the literature written about other forms of coaching such as Cognitive Coaching and Executive Coaching.

Using Interviews During Professional Development

Knight, J. (unpublished manuscript). *Using interviews during professional development*.

This methodology was developed at CRL and is utilized by more than 25 professional developers in several sites across the US. In this approach, interviews are conducted prior to workshops so that presenters can gain a deeper understanding of teachers' and administrators' concerns and also establish a relationship with workshop participants prior to sessions. Fifteen unstructured interviews were conducted with professional developers using this methodology, and every person reported that interviews had a significant impact on the culture of the professional development sessions.

Partnership Learning

Knight, J. (1998). *The effectiveness of partnership learning: A dialogical methodology for staff development*. University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

Knight, J. (2000) *The partnership learning fieldbook*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas. <http://www.kucrl.org/partnership/>.

This study compared two different approaches to professional development: (a) a traditional, lecture-based instructional model, and (b) Partnership Learning, a dialogical approach to professional development that employs six learning structures—stories, thinking devices, reflection learning, cooperative learning, experiential learning, and question recipes. Partnership Learning is also built upon on seven principles of human interaction: equality, choice, voice, reflection, mutual learning, dialogue, and praxis.

This study utilized a counterbalanced design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). In such a design, experimental control is achieved by giving all subjects (n=74) all treatments. To achieve control, two groups of participants (Group A and Group B) were given training

in two similar learning strategies, the Visual Imagery Strategy and the Self-questioning Strategy. Both groups received training that followed the same sequence: (a) Visual Imagery and (b) Self-Questioning. However, Group A received Visual Imagery professional development delivered utilizing the Partnership Learning model and Self-Questioning training using the Traditional Training Model. Group B received Visual Imagery training utilizing the Traditional Training Model and Self-Questioning professional development using the Partnership Learning Model.

Measures of engagement, enjoyment, comprehension, and expectation of implementation were given, and the results suggested quite clearly that Partnership Learning was superior in all four areas. For example, each participant was asked an implementation question (“Now that you have learned about two strategies, which of the two do you believe you are most likely to teach?”) to obtain a measure of participants’ expectation for implementation. Teachers chose a strategy trained through Partnership Learning over a strategy trained by Traditional Training by more than a 4:1 ratio. Similarly, on a measure of engagement, the chi square statistic comparing the engagement scores was 46.90. For 6 degrees of freedom this showed a statistically significant difference [$p < 0.00$] between Partnership Learning engagement scores and Traditional Training engagement scores. 89.3% of median scores for Partnership Learning were in the engaged range (numbers 5, 6, & 7 on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with 1 named as “not engaging” and 7 named as “very engaging”); whereas only 40.1% of median scores for Traditional Training were in this range.

These results suggest two at least two things. First, the way professional development is delivered does have an impact on an audience’s expectations about implementation, and profession development that is delivered in a traditional format may not engage an audience’s attention.

Personal Vision

Knight, J. (unpublished manuscript). *A study of the role of personal vision and teacher efficacy.*

I developed a program that teachers could complete to develop and refine personal vision. The program involved a series of questions, activities that surfaced teacher’s assumptions, and some guided writing activities that all were designed to help teachers clarify their personal vision. Then, I led five language arts teachers through the program, and later observed and interviewed them to see if their writing a personal vision had an impact on their personal or professional lives.

Results:

Teacher One: An experienced Language Arts teacher, after completing the personal vision program, she concluded that she had to adapt her teaching style to be more inclusive. She decided to plan her instruction so that she always considered the needs of high, average, low, and other achieving students.

Teacher Two: The Language Arts department chair, she decided that she could not complete her vision because the gap between her ideals and her experiences was too great. She said she simply found it too painful to confront that gap and preferred to keep working without articulating her vision.

Teacher Three: A middle school Language Arts teacher with less than five years experience decided that she had to have more balance in her life after she completed her personal vision. She decided to have a baby and indeed was pregnant before the end of the observation period for the study.

Teacher Four: A first-year Language Arts teacher found her first year teaching to be very difficult because she was unprepared for the behavior challenges she faced in the classroom. She said that writing her personal vision was a great support as she dealt with the day-to-day challenges of classroom experience.

Teacher Five: A highly skilled Language Arts teachers, winner of state teacher of the year, wrote a beautiful, rich vision in less than one hour. She said that she knew exactly vision statement.

My conclusion at the end of this was that vision is very important, but it is important in ways that may extend far beyond the classroom. Writing a vision was important in some cases, and the act of writing a vision statement did provoke meaningful reflection, but there was really only one case where that reflection had an obvious impact on classroom behavior.

Qualitative Study of Teachers' Perceptions of a Professional Development Session

Knight, J. (2000). *Another damn thing we've got to do: Teacher perceptions of professional development*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans--currently under review for publication.

This was an ethnographic study following a professional development session that was offered to the secondary school language arts department of an urban school district. I interviewed everyone who attended the session to surface the personal concerns they brought to the session, transcribed all interviews, and then used a qualitative data analysis computer program to help me untangle common themes. What I discovered is that professional development sessions are highly complicated experiences, and that that complexity makes it very difficult for professional developers to be successful if they have not developed a relationship with participants. I suggest that professional developers can be more successful if they take time to interview their participants prior to workshop sessions.