

Webcam-Coaching for Professional Learning

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Abstract

The Targeted Reading Intervention relies on a webcam clinical coaching model for K-1 classroom teachers who work one-on-one with their at-risk readers, resulting in a significant reading improvement in targeted struggling readers. The authors describe the pivotal relationships and professional learning process and content that integrate synergistically both teacher and student learning.

Introduction

When young children struggle to access the English written code, they all-too-often step onto a train of disappointment and growing difficulty with reading that leads to disaffection for school and low achievement (Stanovich, 1986; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Notably, children from low-income, minority, urban, or rural families disproportionately demonstrate low early reading achievement (Snow et al., 1998; Lee & Burkham, 2002). Reading researchers have built a convincing case, however, that almost all children can learn to read in early elementary school, given supportive instructional conditions (e.g., Snow et al., 1998). For instance, in a review of research-based early interventions, Torgesen extrapolated that as few as two percent of children might be expected to show difficulty with reading (2000). Despite this promising finding from the research lab, currently over 33 percent of fourth-grade children in the United States fall below “basic” status while approximately 50 percent of black, Latino, and Native American students, as well as children from low-income families, perform at below basic levels (Lee, Grigg, & Donohue, 2007).

Our research has developed into an approach for professional learning designed to help reduce this gap between the ideal researchers’ laboratory schools and low-income, rural schools. We established the Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI) to provide a collaborative coaching, professional learning environment for kindergarten and first-grade teachers, enabling them to provide the supportive instructional conditions necessary for their at-risk students to thrive as readers (Ginsberg & Amendum, 2007). Given that many school communities have less access to personnel or financial resources for optimal professional development or early intervention support, we deliver the professional learning mostly at a distance through webcam coaching sessions, after beginning with a face-to-face three-day summer institute.

Our Purpose

Through a series of one-year, randomized clinical trials beginning in 2005 and continuing through 2010, we have demonstrated that the TRI collaboration yields

statistically significant and moderate effect sizes for struggling readers' outcomes (over .4 to over .7) in word reading, nonsense word decoding, and encoding sounds in words, as well as in comprehension. In addition, even non-struggling readers in experimental classrooms who did not receive one-on-one TRI instruction performed better than similar children in control classrooms (Amendum, Vernon-Feagans, & Ginsberg, 2009). Based on these encouraging findings, we propose that a university-based webcam coaching collaboration that targets a) one-on-one instruction of a struggling student, b) diagnostic teaching for instructional match, and c) streamlined, evidence-based instructional strategies, may provide a beneficial model for schools with limited personnel or financial resources. In this article, we intend to briefly describe the pivotal instructional relationships in this webcam coaching model and how the research-based process of the professional learning (PL) collaboration and instructional content for teachers and struggling readers support both teacher and student growth.

A Clinical Approach to Coaching and Teaching

The Targeted Reading Intervention adopts a clinical model of coaching for classroom teachers' PL that is inextricably linked to an individual child's learning, in this specific case, the K-1 struggling reader's acquisition of reading. This clinical coaching model forges a few key instructional relationships as the mechanisms of change for both teachers and students (see Figure 1). See issue website <http://rapidintellect.com/AEQweb/spr2010.htm> Each of these instructional relationships provides instructional and emotional support (Pianta, 2006), diagnostically matched to the classroom teacher or struggling student's most pressing needs.

After the summer institute, the TRI coach and classroom teacher develop their instructional relationship at a distance, through the technology of a webcam, a website, and email—a delivery system designed, in particular, for the remote or low-wealth school. The coach tries to cultivate the classroom teacher's diagnostic-thinking skills, as the prime aim of the one-on-one time is to meet each child's most pressing need, or to provide optimal instructional match. Similarly, the classroom teacher and each struggling reader (usually five total across the course of one year) build a strong instructional relationship through daily, one-on-one, fifteen- to twenty-minute sessions for several weeks of evidence-based, diagnostically-driven reading instruction. Additionally, teachers in each school, their on-site school consultant, and their remotely-based TRI coach work together as a school-based inquiry team toward the goal of rapidly improving each struggling student's reading abilities (e.g., Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009).

By targeting the needs of struggling readers with the support of a collaborative, problem-solving community, this PL process sparks a felt need among the classroom teachers, providing the motivation to meet the key objective. This main objective is to help the classroom teacher acquire the key reading content and pedagogical content knowledge about K-1 reading while she/he is in the process of practicing (Guskey, 2003) evidence-based, diagnostically-determined reading instruction. The practice of tutoring one child at a time, along with problem-solving about his/her needs in a supportive community, drives increasing reading content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. This, in turn, furthers the teacher's ability to provide optimal instructional match (i.e., improved practice), in an ongoing reciprocal relationship.

The TRI PL Process: Technologically-Mediated Collaborative Coaching

For at least one school year, we provide classroom teachers with a highly-skilled TRI literacy coach located at our university and help the school identify an on-site consultant to facilitate the intervention. The TRI coaches educate, question, and promote team problem-solving; they also support the on-site school consultant in taking over this role as a collaborative coach by the end of the collaboration. Three main,

school-year coaching activities are delivered with the assistance of the webcam: (1) weekly team problem-solving meetings (transitioning to bi-weekly meetings), (2) bi-weekly session visits with each teacher, and (3) quarterly professional development workshops.

First, TRI coaches meet weekly, and eventually bi-weekly, for 30 minutes with the school-based teaching team (K and 1st grade teachers, an on-site school consultant, and possibly the principal) via webcam. The coaches facilitate these problem-solving meetings at first to help teachers focus on their at-risk students' daily performance and informal assessment data, so teachers can return to the classroom with an efficient, effective plan that matches their students' most pressing literacy needs (achieving instructional match).

Second, TRI coaches also meet individually with each classroom teacher via webcam every other week for a 15-minute session with his/her struggling reader. TRI coaches are able to observe an entire teaching session and provide brief, real-time feedback to the teacher during or after the session. Across the course of the school year, coaches instruct teachers in diagnostic thinking, so that the teachers internalize a more refined understanding of reading development and diagnostic instruction. Coaches probe with oft-used questions, such as "What is your student's most pressing need?" and "What student data helped you to come to that conclusion?" Coaches often end with, "What is your plan for meeting this need in the next session?" They also email specific positive feedback to each teacher after these sessions. Third, professional learning continues in more depth every nine weeks through three-hour workshops that revolve around further reading pedagogical content.

TRI Content: Streamlined, Evidence-Based Reading Strategies and Diagnostic Thinking

The Targeted Reading Intervention content and instructional strategies (Ginsberg, Amendum, Mayer, Fedora, & Vernon-Feagans, 2006) were developed from research-based evidence for early reading instruction for all children, endorsed by the National Reading Panel (2000) and now incorporated into Reading First (2001) and by consensus reports on what is needed for struggling readers (e.g., Snow et al., 1998). The handful of efficient TRI strategies are always taught in the context of the word or text in order to facilitate the purposes of reading and to ground the strategies in the authentic world of reading.

The TRI Instructional Framework

In the context of a 15-minute one-on-one lesson, the classroom teacher leads a student through three components: Re-Reading for Fluency (about 2 minutes), Word Work (about 6 minutes), and Guided Oral Reading (about 7 minutes). We also encourage classroom teachers to adopt Extensions—opportunities for extending the student's repeated practice at instructional match outside the time he has with the teacher alone. As children begin to make rapid progress in the one-on-one sessions, teachers are able to move them to small groups and/or develop independent activities for the children to maintain progress in reading. At this point, another struggling reader is provided individualized instruction and the teacher has an additional opportunity to practice her improving pedagogical content knowledge. Each 15-minute session typically includes the following:

1. *Re-Reading for Fluency*: The teacher asks the student to re-read a selection that she/he has read at least once the previous day for the purpose of developing reading fluency. The teacher might model fluent expressive reading with some or all of the text, depending on the skill level of the child.

2. *Word Work*: This innovative approach provides the teacher with a variety of diagnostically-driven instructional strategies for helping the child manipulate, say, and write words (e.g., Dwyer, 2004; McCandliss, Beck, Sandak, & Perfetti, 2003; McGuinness, 1997; Moats, 1998; Montessori, 1912). These strategies demonstrate the alphabetic principle, help students learn phoneme-grapheme (sound-symbol) relationships, develop students' segmenting and blending abilities (key phonemic awareness tasks), help students recognize sight words, and, finally, how to chunk and read multi-syllable words.

For example, a child with partial alphabetic knowledge and limited phonemic awareness would try Read, Write, & Say. The teacher would use a dry erase board, write a three-sound, short vowel word on it, such as "mop," and ask the child to read the word. If he needed help, she would ask him to say the first two sounds (i.e., /m/ and /o/) and "blend as you go," as she covers up the final letter-sound in the word (i.e., "p"). If he still struggled, she might model blending as you go by saying the first two sounds in the word (i.e., /mmoooo/) and holding the vowel sound as she lifts up her hand to silently reveal the final sound in the word (i.e., /p/). The student would copy her and try to add the final sound, enabling him likely to "hear" the word (i.e., "mop"). Then he would write each sound on the dry erase board as he said each sound individually (phonemic segmentation). These kinds of activities and contingent responses are repeated with different words and with progressive difficulty until the child succeeds with minimal teacher support.

3. *Guided Oral Reading (GOR)*: Guided Oral Reading is included in each one-on-one session from the very beginning, even when it initially may look like a teacher-led, interactive read aloud. Generally, Guided Oral Reading involves the student reading aloud a text at his/her instructional reading level with the teacher providing word identification, vocabulary and comprehension coaching. Within the comprehension domain, teachers pay particular attention to scaffolding children's abilities to summarize, predict, make connections, and make inferences before, during, and after the reading. Teachers also focus on moment-by-moment word-level feedback. Diagnostic thinking and instructional match. The core of the PL change process is in the diagnostic-thinking teachers employ as they offer instructional match with each struggling reader. Skilled, enacted practice of these diagnostic skills is our main means for enhancing pedagogical content knowledge. A coach will guide a teacher to note what her student already knows, what his next developmental step is, and what activity would best meet his need. During this diagnostic-thinking process, the coach relies on the TRI reading models as visual representations of evidence-based understandings of children's reading development.

We also try to cultivate teachers' ability to provide instructional match in each interaction by offering expert responses to children's errors. Through the summer institute, video examples, strategy descriptions, website visits, and coach and peer feedback, teachers learn how to respond expertly to the student's errors by drawing his attention to the one spot of confusion so the precise diagnosis of reading error leads to the most applicable instructional match in each interaction. We believe great efficiencies are realized by this type of diagnostic instruction. Instead of accepting a child's response and simply supplying the correct response, scaffolding leads a student to discover the better response on his own through phonemic, phonic, or meaning-based cues (in the context of a word identification error). In this example, the student learns not only how to read a particular word, he, more importantly, moves forward in his

ability to decode phonologically. The significance of this contingent scaffolding may be taken for granted by some reading this article, but, unfortunately, scientists observing contemporary early elementary practice are describing a movement away from classroom dynamics that allow for sensitive responding to individual students' needs (McGill-Franzen, 2009; Morrison & Connor, 2009).

The clinical coaching and teaching relationships (the consultant/teacher/struggling student triad) provide an optimal, focused professional learning environment for the teacher. New information, observations, and diagnostic decisions have a clear purpose or end and are immediately practiced and assessed, thus continuing the cycle of PL and inquiry. Within these relationships, not only do at-risk students accelerate their reading acquisition, classroom teachers acknowledge their enhanced abilities to teach at-risk readers as well as their enhanced professional relationships with their peers. After this process, one highly experienced teacher with her doctorate noted that she now knew for the first time how to teach anyone how to read. She, like many of her Targeted Reading Intervention peers, had to endure technical difficulties in trying to learn a new communication system (webcams) and occasional technical failures. Nevertheless, nearly all TRI teachers emphasize the value of the PL process—a process that targets and addresses a felt need in teachers' daily lives. We suspect others may find this type of focused, clinical 1:1 coaching via webcam, with an emphasis on enhancing diagnostic-thinking practice and knowledge, to be an intriguing, cost-effective approach to professional learning.

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