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## **Lesson Observation and Feedback: The Practice of an Expert Reading Coach**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the practice of an expert reading coach as she provided lesson observation and feedback to an experienced kindergarten teacher. Data sources for the study included three cycles of observation of coaching sessions and guided reading instruction, as well as interviews. The report describes (a) the coach's modeling of pedagogical reasoning for the teacher and the co-constructed nature of the coaching session interaction, and (b) specific ways in which the coach expanded her understanding of learning to teach and learning to coach. The study concluded that the technical aspects of lesson observation and feedback require many areas of expertise, developed through time spent coaching, training and reflection, and the coach's maintenance of an expert stance within coaching relationships.

Literacy coaching has become an important avenue of support for instructional reform. Sturtevant (2003), for example, identified literacy coaches as key players who provide leadership for staff development programs, and emphasized that coaches must be highly regarded by content area teachers and have an intimate knowledge of the school culture and students. Recently, the International Reading Association (IRA) published descriptions of the qualifications and role of reading coaches, with emphasis on the best use of and expertise needed by reading coaches (IRA, 2004a; 2004b; 2004c). Effective reading coaches must (a) be expert classroom teachers; (b) possess in-depth knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction; (c) be excellent presenters and have experience working with teachers to improve their instructional practices; and (d) have expertise in observing, modeling, and providing feedback to teachers (IRA, 2004c).

Little is currently known regarding the effectiveness of the work of reading coaches (IRA, 2004c). Studies found that effective schools utilize increased instructional leadership and teacher-to-teacher collaboration (Johnson, 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 2002; Mosenthal, Lipson, Sortino, Russ, & Mekkelsen, 2002; Valli & Hawley, 2002), but have not specifically investigated the role of coaching within organizational reform. Studies of peer coaching have typically investigated reciprocal peer coaching (e.g., two teachers observing and providing feedback to each other) rather than expert coaching (e.g., lesson observation and feedback from an acknowledged expert; Ackland, 1991). The technical skills of lesson observation and feedback are not yet well investigated, and have been identified by coaches themselves as one of the most difficult aspects of the coaching role (Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenglum, Saunders, & Supovitz, 2003). Bean (2004) identified three levels of activity associated with the coaching role. Level one includes informal activities, such as curriculum development or the leading of study groups. Level two activities are focused on areas of need, and include co-planning lessons or analyzing student work. Bean identified level three coaching (e.g., visiting classrooms and providing feedback to teachers), however, as one of the most formal and intensive aspects of the role of coaches.

Research has identified positive effects of peer coaching across a variety of factors (Kohler, Ezell, & Paluselli, 1999). Kohler, McCullough Crilley, & Shearer (1997) utilized a multiple-baseline design, for example, to investigate the effects of four teachers' work with a peer coach with acknowledged experience in a specific model of mathematics instruction. The study found that instructional change is more likely to occur, and be sustained, collaboratively but that more work is needed to identify the specific role coaching can play within this collaboration.

There is a strong, current need for theoretically and empirically grounded, detailed information on (a) the specific ways in which literacy coaching can be expected to serve as an integral part of effective instructional reform, and (b) the actual practice of reading coaches as they provide lesson feedback to teachers. This study addressed these areas of need through case study analysis of the practice of an expert, school-based reading coach as she assisted a kindergarten teacher for guided reading instruction within a formal "level three" setting through lesson observation and feedback.

### *Pedagogical Reasoning and Guided Reading Instruction*

Teachers develop instructional expertise as they observe the interaction of their instruction with students' emerging understandings of reading processes. For guided reading, teachers work with a small, homogeneous group of students, select and introduce new books to the group, and provide support to children while they read the new text (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). In guided reading instruction children read a set of "little books" across a gradient of difficulty, so that the teacher's choice of a new book for each lesson provides varying levels of scaffolding for beginning readers. The teacher also moderates the text's level of difficulty and teaches useful reading strategies through an orientation to each new text that is specifically designed and implemented for a particular lesson and group of children (Clay, 1991).

The essential purpose of guided reading instruction is to insure that beginning readers develop the ability to utilize meaning, language, and graphophonic/visual information strategically as they read continuous text. Children who participate in guided reading instruction learn how to utilize graphophonic cues in or out of context, and produce semantically and syntactically acceptable miscues and cohesive and accurate retellings of texts (Altwerger, Arya, Jin, Jordan, Laster, Martens, Wilson, & Wiltz, 2004). The procedural steps for guided reading lessons typically consist of (a) rereading of familiar texts; (b) orientation of students to a new text; (c) reading the new text within the group, but at an individual pace; (d) presentation of a "teaching point" to the group, intended to extend the entire group's understanding of effective reading strategies; and (e) discussion of responses to the text and/or extension of students' comprehension. The teaching of decoding and sight vocabulary knowledge within guided reading lessons is often labeled as "word work," and occurs as teachers provide prompts to individual students during their reading or to the whole group before or after lessons as a teaching point.

Effective teachers are able to reflect on their instructional experiences and transform knowledge into pedagogical representations that are well connected to the current, minute-by-minute knowledge base of their students (Shulman & Quinlan, 1996). Effective guided reading instruction is based on teachers' development of a complex theory (Clay, 2001) of literacy learning and instruction, beyond a "phonics-first" approach. Teachers learn what to pay attention to within

students' thinking (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1990), translating pedagogical content knowledge into appropriate tasks for students. In order to learn how to respond to a student who has made an error while reading, for example, a teacher must be able to make on-the-run decisions based on the response history of the individual student, sources of information used or neglected, the strategic activity used or neglected, and the student's need for varying amounts of instructional scaffolding (Schwartz, 2005).

### *Pedagogical Reasoning and Expert Literacy Coaching*

Learning how to be an effective, expert reading coach is as challenging and complex a task as learning to teach is, requiring on-going professional and cognitively demanding learning (Gibson, 2005). It is likely that reading coaches must also develop richly elaborated knowledge specific to their work as coaches. In order to assist teachers' delivery of effective guided reading instruction, reading coaches must learn what to pay attention to, and how to interact with, teachers' statements, beliefs, and instructional behavior.

Effective teaching is not simply a matter of knowing what to do and being motivated to do it. Instead, student achievement depends on teachers' abilities to integrate sub skills into appropriate courses of action and then execute them well under challenging circumstances (Bandura, 1997). Teachers' knowledge and beliefs are inextricably intertwined, and can act as a filter through which new phenomena are interpreted (Pajares, 1992). Teachers' knowledge, however, is also situated within a complex and interacting variety of settings, leading to different ways of knowing: "developed in context, stored together with characteristic features of the classrooms and activities, organized around the tasks that teachers accomplish in classroom settings, and accessed for use in similar situations" (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 10). Similarly, the knowledge and beliefs of reading coaches are constructed within the contexts of their coaching activities and affect their interpretation of events and relationships.

The overall goal of the present study was to produce a detailed case study of the practice of one expert reading coach. Specifically, the study investigated the following research questions:

1. What were the specific ways in which one reading coach conceptualized her coaching practice?
2. What was the nature of the coaching session conversations conducted between an expert reading coach and a kindergarten teacher, following observation of guided reading lessons?
3. What was the relationship between coaching session interaction and a teacher's guided reading instruction?

### Method

This study was a follow-up to a larger study (Gibson, 2002) of four coach/teacher dyads. Data was collected in three cycles of interviews and observation of both guided reading instruction and coaching sessions across one school year. The sample size allowed for in-depth analysis of the details of the interaction between the reading coach and classroom teacher. The findings were also based on analysis of interviews and observation of teaching, allowing for data source triangulation.

#### *Participants: Lisa and Jim*

The participants in this study were a school-based reading coach, Lisa, and Jim, a kindergarten teacher for whom the coach was providing reading lesson observation and feedback (pseudonyms used). Both participants worked at an elementary school within a small urban public school district in the Midwestern United States that had implemented a district-wide, long-term professional development program for K-2 literacy instruction. This school district had established goals for instructional improvement in the area of literacy across all K-2 classrooms through intensive school-based professional development: (a) workshops for all staff; (b) study groups, in-class demonstration lessons, and coaching; and (c) intensive and on-going training for reading coaches. The coach who participated in this study had completed a training program at a local university and was responsible for supporting K-2 teachers' implementation of the district-adopted

instructional framework: interactive read aloud, shared and interactive writing, word study minilessons, content area connections, guided reading, independent language and literacy work, and writing workshop (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The coach was one of four reading coaches who agreed to participate in the larger study, following a presentation to the entire group. Lisa then selected and recruited a kindergarten teacher at her school to whom she was providing regularly occurring classroom-based, individual coaching sessions. Jim had 25 years of teaching experience, although he had not previously taught guided reading groups.

The 10 reading coaches in this district were all experienced classroom teachers who had completed seven weeks of university training over a one-year period as well as a subsequent field year in their coaching positions prior to the start of this study. The coach who participated in the study had 17 years of classroom teaching experience in first, second and third grade classrooms prior to the start of this study. The overall focus of the university training program for the coaches was on developing the ability to (a) implement the instructional framework, and (b) design and present staff development sessions and in-class coaching.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

Three cycles of data collection were conducted for this study in January, February, and April. Each cycle included (a) observation and video recording of a classroom guided reading lesson, (b) observation and audio recording of a coaching session, (c) observation and video recording of a second guided reading lesson, and (d) audio taping of an interview with the coach. Each interview was structured both as stimulated recall (Bloom, 1953; cited in Keith, 1988) and in a standardized open-ended format (Patton, 1990). A short segment of the audiotape of the coaching session was played for the coach, who was then asked to comment on her thinking and decision-making.

### *Data Analysis*

A qualitative verbal analysis (Chi, 1997) of each of the coaching session transcripts was conducted. First, each transcript was segmented using participants' presentation of ideas as the unit of analysis. In one segment, for example, Jim presented a hypothesis about his students' fluency: "And that book offers a lot of opportunities to get that fluency

because it has that repetitive phrase.” Each of these segments was then coded using a decision-tree coding scheme: (a) coach or teacher, (b) agreement, request, or statement, and (c) observation, information, conclusion, topic, course of action, clarification, hypotheses, confirmation, or analysis. Each of the coded transcripts was mapped, creating a diagram of the conversational interchange and content of the discussion (see Figure 1). These diagrams were examined for evidence of patterns and themes. Based on the determination of conversational turns leading to conclusions within each coaching session, specific questions were developed for analysis of the transcript of the subsequent guided reading lesson for each cycle of data collection (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Analysis of Guided Reading Lesson Videotapes and Transcripts*

---

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Cycle One   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways did the teacher support students' self-monitoring behavior during text reading?</li> <li>• What strategic activity did the students utilize when they encountered difficult words in text?</li> </ul>   |
| Cycle Two   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways did the teacher introduce potentially challenging concepts and vocabulary to students?</li> <li>• What concepts and vocabulary were difficult for students as they read the new text?</li> <li>• What strategic activity did the students utilize when they encountered difficult words in text?</li> </ul> |
| Cycle Three | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways did the teacher provide support for students' fluent reading?</li> <li>• What were the characteristics of the teaching of “word work” within the lesson?</li> </ul>   |



*Figure 1. Data analysis excerpt: conversational interchange and content of coaching session interaction*

| Interchange          | Types of Response |             | Transcript   |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------|--|
| New topic:           | C Request         | Analysis    | You said you were going to work with fluency and phrasing and getting them to use some intonation. How do you think they did?  |
| Fluency and phrasing | T Statement       | Conclusion  | Well, I feel like they understood what I was saying.   |
|                      | T Statement       | Hypothesis  | But I think that, first of all it just so happened, and I mean I haven't had them reading together. But they're so evenly matched in their abilities that they did stay [read] together throughout the whole book. |
|                      | T Statement       | Observation | So it turned into almost more of a choral reading.   |
|                      | T Statement       | Conclusion  | But they didn't depend on each other.  |
|                      | C Agreement       | Conclusion  | No, they didn't. I picked up on that.  |
|                      | C Request         | Analysis    | Do you think that's what caused them to sound just a little bit choppy?  |
|                      | T Agreement       | Conclusion  | Maybe a little bit.  |
|                      | T Statement       | Hypothesis  | But I think too, it's still that they're, where they are in their development, they're just still, I suppose young enough in their reading expertise that they are still real careful about reading each word.     |
|                      | Sub topic:        | C Statement | Hypothesis   |
| Finger pointing      |                   |             |  |

The coach's interview transcripts were coded using grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), beginning with open coding. Results of initial coding were examined for categories and patterns both within each interview and across the three interviews, and a visual representation of the themes and propositions emerging from this analysis was constructed for each transcript.

### *Limitations*

The choice to study the practice of one reading coach allowed for in-depth analysis, and strengthened the triangulation of results across interviews, guided reading lessons, and coaching sessions. Findings were based on multiple observations of actual instruction, lesson observation, and feedback. The findings were also, however, influenced by a wide variety of specific individual, school, district, and sociocultural contexts within which these two participants worked. Further, the coach who participated in this study was self-selected along with three of her colleagues out of the group of 10 literacy coordinators for the larger study. All reading coaches, however, must put their expertise into practice within their own specific contexts, and these factors were also strengths of this study. This study analyzed the relationship between coaching and the instruction presented within guided reading lessons. It was not the intention of this study to determine the relationship between coaching and student achievement.

## **Results**

The results of this study are presented in two sections. The first section directly addresses research question one by describing the specific ways in which Lisa conceptualized her coaching practice. The second section addresses research questions two and three by describing the characteristics of the coaching session conversations and the relationship between these interactions and the guided reading instruction that immediately followed each coaching session.

### *Lisa's Evolving Understanding of Coaching*

Three general themes permeated Lisa's talk about coaching in the first interview: (a) her concern for the risky nature of lesson feedback, (b) her belief that coaching would become more comfortable

over time, and (c) Lisa's perceived need to become more focused and specific as she provided lesson feedback. Lisa described a degree of resistance to coaching from teachers at her school site that she ascribed to the personal nature of coaching: "opening yourself up." Lisa wanted to learn how to move beyond her established routines as a coach and "be comfortable just conversing" with teachers. She articulated a set of propositions that reflected her need to be nonthreatening to teachers: (a) praise teachers first and listen carefully to their concerns; (b) request, rather than demand, teachers' acquiescence to a coaching observation; and (c) focus the teacher's attention on the needs of students. Lisa expressed a strong interest in being able to zero in on these types of coaching skills, subsequent to her one and a half years of coaching experience:

*I think it might help if I could watch other people coach because I would look at it differently now than during the training year. In the training year I didn't... But now I'm going to focus in on, "What does she say? What does the coach say? How does she open up?" Listen to what the teacher says, and "How does she respond? What would I have done?" So I would look at it, the whole thing, in a whole different light.*

Lisa also expressed her belief that teachers would come to view her lesson observation and feedback in a more collaborative, non-evaluative light based solely on their real-time experience with coaching.

By February, Lisa stated that she had not realized the extent of the challenges of coaching. Rather than emphasizing the risky nature of coaching or the belief that coaching would simply get easier over time, Lisa focused on the need to "step back:" Provide materials and modeling, and find ways to get teachers to analyze their own teaching decisions.

*I think he's looking to me to have all the answers. For everything. And I don't know all the answers, because I want him to be self-reflective. I want him to look at his own teaching decisions. And think about, was it a good choice and if it wasn't, why? And what can I do better?*

Lisa emphasized the need to analyze Jim's progress: "Back up. Teach this, and then move him forward the way I'm trying to move guided reading kids forward. It's the same thing. It's a process." Lisa appeared, then, to be developing a context-based, realistic concept of the nature of lesson observation and feedback.

By the third cycle of data collection, Lisa expressed some frustration based on her perception of a lack of consistent improvement in effective teaching as a result of her coaching. When asked what she would tell others about the role of an expert reading coach, Lisa replied:

*I would have to say there will be days that you'll absolutely love it and there will be days that you absolutely hate it. Because as with any job, and with working with children as well as adults, when things go well and people are, you're seeing shifts in learning and seeing shifts in teacher behaviors, that's wonderful. And yet when you don't see things up and running the way you want to, that's frustrating. Frustrating.*

Lisa's comments demonstrated a tension between her expectations for immediate improvement in teaching behavior and need to work collaboratively with teachers. Lisa stated that she "eased into" topics and attempted to insure that she did not give teachers the impression that they did anything "wrong."

*I guess I feel like I was scared to coach. I was scared to go in there. I think it's really important to keep good rapport with your teachers. To make it a coaching situation and not an evaluation. You know, focus on the children. "What did the children do? How did you help to make that happen?" As opposed to, "This is right, this is wrong."*

### *Coaching Session Interaction and Instruction*

*January.* A consistent pattern emerged in the interaction between coach and teacher during this first coaching session, one that was maintained and expanded within the two subsequent coaching sessions. This pattern included a sequence of conversational moves for

each specific topic, from the coach's request for Jim to analyze his students' behavior, to a course of action proposed by Jim that was expanded and clarified by the coach (see Table 2). Lisa's actions evidenced her theories-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1985) for coaching:

- A reading coach should act within a leadership role, by establishing a focus and insuring that the conversation culminated in a plan of action for future lessons.
- Teachers can and should be trusted and empowered to analyze students' responses to lessons in accurate and useful ways.

Jim appeared to understand Lisa's questions during coaching as opportunities to engage in collaborative problem solving through analysis of his students' reading behavior.

Table 2

*Coaching Session Interaction Pattern*

|   |  |
|---|--|
| The coach opened a topic by restating a concern the teacher had previously raised.                              | C: And something else you had talked about is you were wondering about these children being able to begin to use beginning visual clues when they were stuck.  |
| The coach then immediately asked the teacher for his observation of his students' responses.                    | C: Did you see any evidence of that during this lesson?<br>T: Bits and pieces. But I'm not sure they put it together.<br>C: What did you see them just beginning to do?  |
| The teacher then described his observation of students' responses, with input and clarification from the coach. | T: Well, I saw, I think I saw each one of them when they got to the word, <i>they</i> , I mean it was very obvious that they did check the pictures. So that's good. They're using some cross checking there. In the case of [the word] <i>resting</i> , some of them said, looked back and forth and said <i>sleeping</i> , and [the children said] "I can live with that" and they closed the book.<br>C: Because it made sense. |
| The teacher proposed a course of action to take based upon these observations.                                  | T: I think I'll probably try to reiterate, "Okay, you know this but that didn't fit, that didn't match. Your finger ran out of words. What can you do about that?" And try to get them to say, "Well, I'll stop, go back, look at the picture, get your mouth ready [by saying the first sound of a difficult word]."  |
| The coach clarified and expanded on this plan of action.  | C: And those [prompts] are [used] all through the week. They hear that, they see that, when we're working in [the] whole group. Maybe if you have the book and kept the book in your hand? And modeled that? And when they make a mistake, say "Oh, boys and girls, what do you notice? I said too much. I ran out of words."  |

Three general topics were addressed within this first coaching session between Lisa and Jim: (a) the choice of an appropriate book level for his students, (b) teaching students how to use initial consonant information on difficult words in text reading, and (c) the choice of a teaching focus for the next guided reading lesson. When Jim asked Lisa to comment on whether his book choice for the lesson had been at an appropriate level of difficulty, Lisa immediately requested that he describe his observation of students' self-monitoring behavior. Lisa's coaching served to clarify the evidence or parameters that would support a conclusion regarding the choice of books for guided reading lessons. Similarly, when Jim asked whether or not his students would be able to learn how to use initial consonants when they became stuck on difficult words, Lisa asked Jim to describe the strategic behavior he observed his students using during their reading of the new book. Lisa then brought the conversation to a conclusion by asking Jim to state what he would do in the next lesson when his students noticed an error but did not take action to solve the problem for themselves:

*I think I'll probably try to reiterate, "Okay, you know this. But that didn't fit, that didn't match. Your finger ran out of words. What can you do about that?" And try to get them to say, "Well, I'll stop, go back, look at the picture, and get your mouth ready [to say the first sound in the difficult word]."*

Within his teaching of the subsequent guided reading lesson, however, Jim's students read through the text confidently and independently, and made few word identification errors. His students did not appear to notice their substitution errors (probably because these errors fit the language structure of the text well: *under* for *in*, *table* for *kitchen*, and *pond* for *garden*) and did not appeal for assistance from the teacher. Although Jim did provide an orientation to the new text that introduced students to the main idea of the story as well as to the sight word *she*, he did not prompt his students during their reading to self-monitor or correct their errors. Following the reading of the text by students, Jim did provide two teaching points regarding the use of letter-sound information:

- T: Now let's look at this page. Just read this.
- S: [reading] Is she in the *pond*? [substituted for *garden*]
- T: Pond makes really good sense, because I see a pond. But what [letter] would pond begin with?
- S: P
- T: Okay. Do you see a P here?
- S: Go
- T: It starts like a word you know, doesn't it? What does it start like?
- S: G
- T: So, we have to get our mouth ready. You guys, watch what I'm going to do. /g/. Now watch. Let's go back. [reading] Is she in the /g/? So something in this picture...
- S: Gone
- T: Is she in the gone? Does that make sense? What's this thing here where the flowers are? [pointing to a picture in the text]
- S: Garden.
- T: Let's check that. Gar...den. Could that [word] be garden?

Jim introduced his students to new and useful ways of thinking about text, but did not overtly extend this new learning to his students' strategic self-monitoring. His teaching for students' strategic activity was delivered exclusively to the whole group, rather than to individual students as they independently read a new text.

*February.* During the second coaching session, Lisa and Jim built upon their previously established interaction pattern (i.e., coach request for description of student behavior, course of action proposed, and expanded and clarified by the coach) with the addition of two new elements: (a) the teacher's explicit analysis of his own teaching



decisions, and (b) formal, action-oriented propositions presented directly by the coach.

In contrast to the first coaching session, Jim included overt analyses of his own teaching decisions in response to Lisa's requests for information to assist in their collaborative problem solving. In the second coaching session, for example, Jim commented on students' difficulty with the word *wading*:

C: What was it you noticed?

T: I did not go through and explain the vocabulary that I should have. I should have gone over, at least mention, "Oh, look, he's wading at the pool"... I intentionally didn't want to say anything because I wanted to see if they could put in a word.

Jim appeared to understand Lisa's questions and responses throughout the coaching session as opportunities to engage in collaborative problem solving through analysis of the relationship between his students' reading behavior and his own teaching decisions.

Lisa also began to present formal propositions to Jim regarding their topics of conversation. In their discussion of teacher prompting for students' strategic word identification, for example, Lisa concluded with a direct propositional statement:

"Just think, 'Okay, they're stuck. They're not doing anything. I'd better teach them what to do.'"

These statements were typically well integrated within the conversational segment, and constituted direct advice to the teacher.

In this coaching session, Lisa and Jim discussed two broad topics: (a) introducing new vocabulary and concepts to students for the new book, and (b) prompting students during text reading for effective word identification strategies. Lisa continued to utilize her coaching conversation to demonstrate effective pedagogical reasoning based on the needs of students. As Jim commented, for example, that he felt he should have introduced vocabulary more thoroughly, Lisa asked him to reflect on points in the text that were "really difficult for the children." Within the subsequent discussion of students' specific reading behavior, Lisa and Jim agreed that his students had "handled [the book] pretty well." Lisa then recommended that Jim work on relating the concepts

and vocabulary in a new text to students' prior experience: "Try to relate everything back to, 'Have you ever done this?' To bring in that previous knowledge and those experiences that they may or may not have."

In his teaching of the subsequent guided reading lesson, Jim did introduce his students to such key concepts as *treasure hunt* and *clues*. The new text for this lesson was difficult for students to read independently, however. There were frequent instances when students simply sat and waited for assistance as they encountered such difficult-for-them words as *come*, *shouted*, *plane*, and *television*. Jim's prompting to individual students as they encountered difficulty revealed a consistent pattern. Jim first asked each student what parts of the word he/she knew, assisted the student in identifying those parts of the difficult word, discussed the meaning of that part of the story, and then told the difficult word to the student. In the sense that his students were not able to utilize his prompting to solve the word, Jim's prompting was unsuccessful. This challenge to Jim's teaching appeared to be caused at least in large part by students' lack of familiarity with the sentence structure of the new text: "A clue, he shouted." Although Jim had introduced the main idea of the new text to his students, he had not modeled the associated language structures for them. Similarly, Lisa and Jim had discussed the need to introduce new concepts to students, connected to their prior experiences, without reference to language structure.

*April.* In the third coaching session, Lisa and Jim continued to utilize the same interaction pattern that was evident in the previous two sessions, with the inclusion of even more salient and pronounced analysis and discussion of Jim's teaching decisions. Lisa's theories-in-action for her coaching practice supported the co-constructed nature of coaching conversations; both she and Jim were "in charge" of providing the evidence needed to decide upon needed instructional improvement. Although Jim certainly found discussions with Lisa to be stressful and/or threatening to some degree, he also appeared to feel empowered to co-direct the conversation in order to meet his own perception of his needs as a literacy teacher.

During this third coaching session, Lisa and Jim discussed teaching for reading fluency and "word work" within guided reading lessons. As was typical of their coaching interaction, Lisa asked Jim to

comment on the quality of his students' reading fluency. They then decided that Jim's next course of action would include an emphasis on rereading of familiar texts plus a careful new book selection that would support his students' fluent reading. Lisa did not respond directly, however, to Jim's tentative suggestion that his students may have been too young to be expected to read fluently. Similarly, Lisa did not respond directly to Jim's statement that he had placed word work at the beginning of the lesson in order to facilitate his students' opportunity to reread at the end of the lesson. In the conclusion of this coaching session, Lisa presented a procedural proposition:

*Well, you might want to try to think about putting your word work at the end of the lesson. Because you've got your before, where you introduce the book, the reading, and then after is your word work, and then your running record.*

Within his guided reading instruction on the day following this coaching session, Jim provided consistent and overt support for his students' reading fluency. Throughout the rereading of familiar texts, Jim praised students for their phrasing and expression:

"That sounds really good, Sarah. I like the way you said that all together."

Following Jim's introduction of the new text to students, each student read with confidence and few hesitations or errors but in a word-by-word fashion. Jim did not prompt individual students during their reading for this lesson, but did provide a teaching point following the reading that supported his students' use of language knowledge:

T: Have you ever heard somebody say, "He was fast asleep?"

S: Like a baby's fast asleep.

T: Yeah. Can't even wake him up. And that's what Peter was. He was fast asleep.

Jim taught for word work at the end of this lesson (as requested by Lisa) by having his students practice writing a set of words with the rime *ill*: *will, fill, pill, silly, and Billy*.

T: Billy. Can you underline the parts of all those words that match? They all say *ill*. Do you know what *ill* means?

S: Sick.

T: Yeah.

S: Illustrate.

T: Yeah. Illustrate. You could try to write that word, too.

Jim did move his teaching of word work to the end of the lesson as requested, but did not explicitly connect this teaching to his students' strategic problem solving during text reading.

Lisa and Jim's conversations about effective guided reading instruction were interwoven with Jim's efforts to put his expertise into practice across different texts as well as students' prior knowledge and expectations. Learning to teach well did not turn out to be a linear proposition but an iterative one centered on propositional, procedural, and conceptual knowledge. Working together, Lisa and Jim made pedagogical reasoning come alive; real books, real students, and real teaching and coaching.

### Discussion

The overall intent of this study was to provide a detailed description of the actual practice of one reading coach as she provided lesson feedback. The findings addressed (a) the specific ways in which the coach conceptualized her coaching practice, (b) the nature of the coaching session conversations, and (c) the relationship between coaching session interaction and guided reading instruction. These findings are crucial in developing an understanding of the nature of "level three" lesson observation and feedback, and the expertise and on-going support needed by reading coaches.

This study identified (a) Lisa's development of more realistic and context-based understandings regarding the nature of learning to teach and learning to coach, (b) an interaction pattern for coaching sessions that exemplified pedagogical reasoning and co-construction, and (c) the difficulties associated with Jim's shifts in teaching behavior in relationship to coaching. In January, Lisa emphasized the risky nature of coaching conversations and specific ways to tone down her approach during coaching interactions. In February, Lisa stated that she had underestimated the extent of the challenges and that she needed to re-evaluate the needs of teachers. By April, Lisa articulated tension between expectations for immediate improvement in instruction and a collaborative context.

Lisa also demonstrated an impressive expertise, however, in her implementation of coaching sessions. Throughout the coaching session interaction, Lisa demonstrated the use of pedagogical reasoning in support of improved instruction. Lisa consistently requested Jim's analysis of his students' responses to instruction. As Jim proposed a course of action to improve his delivery of instruction, Lisa worked to clarify and expand these understandings. Lisa also maintained an expert stance during coaching sessions, however. She directed the coaching conversations with a confident demeanor, and provided specific information and advice on effective instruction.

The guided reading instruction delivered by Jim in each succeeding lesson, however, evidenced on-going and complex difficulties. In February, for example, Jim introduced new concepts to students prior to reading, but did not teach the language structure associated with these same concepts. The frustration expressed by Lisa regarding the perceived lack of consistent improvement in Jim's instructional behavior may have been related to her own struggle to learn what to pay attention to in teachers' thinking (as well as to the multifaceted, nonlinear nature of learning to teach). This study, then, identified specific challenges faced by one reading coach as she transformed her coaching knowledge into andragogical representations connected to the current, lesson-by-lesson knowledge base of one teacher. These findings argue against any conceptualization of reading coaching as an easy, or quick, route to instructional reform.

It was not within the scope of this study to demonstrate whether the reading coach's specific ways of providing feedback during coaching sessions were the result of such factors as innate ability, time

spent coaching, successful classroom teaching experience, the university-level training program, and/or the willingness and ability of the teacher to participate fully. Lisa, herself, emphasized an on-going need for further training and support for her role as a second-year reading coach, as well as the collaborative and challenging nature of becoming an effective reading coach. Longitudinal research on the effects of these factors would be highly useful, as would studies of other examples of expert, level three coaching practices.

If classroom-based literacy coaching is to be relied on as a necessary component of instructional reform, then those who hire and support coaches must be knowledgeable regarding the demands of the role. The technical aspects of lesson observation and feedback are a challenging endeavor requiring multiple areas of expertise developed through time spent coaching as well as training and reflection. Further, it is likely that coaches will experience a set of tensions focused on the collaborative nature of coaching relationships versus the need to establish immediate and positive instructional improvement.

Although Lisa was able to establish a coaching relationship with Jim that emphasized co-construction of pedagogical knowledge, she also consistently maintained her stance as an expert. These two goals are not contradictory when reading coaches possess high amounts of expertise in reading processes *and* are knowledgeable and experienced in staff development and teacher support. The relationship between reading coach and classroom teacher should empower both coach and teacher to address and investigate important questions about effective instruction. Reading coaches should also, however, maintain a strong focus on instructional improvement and increased student achievement. Effective teaching is not simply a matter of knowing what to do and being motivated to do it. Literacy coaching is not just a matter of answering teachers' questions about instruction; it is about helping teachers improve their teaching.

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