



OUR TEACHER QUALITY
PROJECT AND APPROACH
TO INSTRUCTIONAL
COACHING SUPPORT
TEACHERS AS THEY
LEARN ON THE JOB.

TEACHER QUALITY PROFILE – JANUARY 2010

TEACHER QUALITY

Kansas Coaching Project

Changing how teachers teach is a significant challenge as educators move toward adopting research-based instructional methods and materials for classroom use. A multitude of factors can inhibit teachers' ability to master new practices: limited amounts of time in teaching schedules, pressure to cover increasing amounts of content, and demands to prepare students for high-stakes tests, among others.

The Teacher Quality project studies the effectiveness of on-site professional development in the form of instructional coaching as a means of overcoming this challenge.

"I think people underestimate how hard it is to learn a new teaching practice in a workshop and then internalize it and put it into practice in a classroom without somebody helping you," says Jim Knight, co-principal investigator.

Over the last 15 years, researchers at the Center have developed a

coaching model in which coaches work one-on-one with teachers as they learn new ways of teaching. Coaches explain new methods, model them in the classroom, observe teachers, and provide feedback. The Teacher Quality project has helped us improve this widely accepted model and has allowed us to collect data to validate its effectiveness.

"We can have 30 years of research on instruction, but if it doesn't get implemented by teachers, it's not going to make a big difference," says Knight. "What we want to know is what's the most efficient way to translate those ideas into practice in the classroom."

The Teacher Quality project, now in its third year, involves multiple studies using different research approaches to identify best coaching practices. In Year 1, in partnership with the State of Florida and its Just Read Florida program, the Teacher Quality team chose five outstanding



PROJECT GOALS

The goal of the project is to develop a model of coaching that is easy and powerful to enable coaches to help teachers put quality instructional methods into practice in their classrooms.

DURATION OF PROJECT

The four-year Teacher Quality project began in the fall of 2007.

FUNDING AGENCY

Institute of Education Sciences



**Instructional
Coaching**

The Teacher Quality project grew out of several studies dating back to the mid-1990s, when the concept of “learning consultants” appeared in the Center’s work. In 1999, learning consultants became “instructional collaborators” in our first GEAR UP/Pathways to Success grant (<http://www.kucrl.org/pathways/>). By 2003, we settled on the term “instructional coaches” and began to clearly define the role of coaches in the education process and the skills required to be a coach. The Teacher Quality project and the concept of instructional coaches both also have roots in Jim Knight’s dissertation research on Partnership Learning (<http://instructionalcoach.org/tools.html>).

coaches out of the 2,600 employed in Florida for in-depth study. The team interviewed colleagues, teachers, principals, and supervisors to better understand what makes coaches effective.

They found that the best coaches are good communicators, dedicated, hard working, and so committed to learning that their attitude rubbed off on the teachers with whom they worked.

The project shifted gears in its second year from describing the characteristics that make coaches successful to comparing different models of professional development. All of the teachers in the study—from districts in Greeley, Colo., and Beaverton, Ore.—attended a workshop on the *Question Exploration Routine**. Two groups of teachers received follow-up support in the form of instructional coaching—one group using an “expert” model of coaching and the other using a “partnership” model. Another group received no coaching.

* The *Question Exploration Routine* is one component of the Center’s Strategic Instruction Model® Content Enhancement Routine Series. Teachers use the routine to help diverse student populations explore and understand important course content.

“Although we need to do a more careful analysis of the data, what we have heard from our on-site research assistants is that where there was coaching, there was better implementation than when there wasn’t coaching,” says Knight.

This year, the team’s efforts are directed toward making continual improvements in the coaching model based on a deep analysis of coaching in action. To make such an analysis possible, the project issued inexpensive, personal digital video cameras to five coaches in Beaverton. The coaches record every conversation they have and everything they do in their coaching relationship with teachers. Every planning conversation, every time coaches demonstrate an instructional method in the classroom, every time the teacher implements a new method, and every feedback session are all captured on video.

“We’ve been doing coaching for a long time, but we’ve never been able to lay it all out in front of us and see everything so precisely,” Knight says. “We can watch basically every word that passes between the coach and the teacher.”

The researchers review the video periodically, revise the coaching

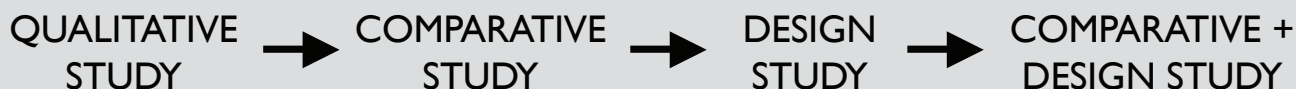
model based on what they see, and then send coaches back into the field to try out the revisions. This process has led to several adjustments to the coaching model and to further exploration of key components, such as effective questioning skills.

A second study this year is a naturalistic qualitative analysis of the activities of outstanding coaches. The team of qualitative researchers will be observing coaches who have been singled out for their influence on teaching and interviewing coaches, teachers, and administrators to find out what great coaches do.

Next year, the final year of the project, researchers will return to a study comparing professional learning that incorporates the refined model of coaching with professional learning that provides no coaching. Knight hopes to continue refining the model based on research findings, too.



RESEARCH DESIGN



NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

“To me, the biggest success this year has been just how powerful the design model approach is. It’s also consistent with our Partnership approach, where we really see the other person as someone we can learn from and not just a vessel for us to inject our good ideas into.”

—Jim Knight, director, Kansas Coaching Project

Though more than a year of grant funding remains for the Teacher Quality project, researchers already have identified several successful outcomes:

- The introduction of video to record and analyze coaching interactions has revolutionized our approach to research. “I think using video is likely going to be something we use in other forms of research here at the Center,” Knight says.
- Not only has the Teacher Quality research team learned about effective coaching, they also have expanded their repertoire of research methods. Co-principal investigator Tom Skrtic, a professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas, is a leader in the field of qualitative research and naturalistic inquiry. Methodologist Barbara Bradley, assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum & Teaching at KU, is co-author of one of the landmark books on design study. Both have shared their expertise with other members of the project team.
- Despite serious financial difficulties, the Beaverton, Ore., school district renewed its commitment to this project and to instructional coaching. “It’s a testament to the power of coaching that they’re going to keep it even though they’re really struggling financially in the district,” Knight says.
- The team has partnered with Dr. Henry Levin of Columbia University, a leading expert in the field, to analyze the cost-effectiveness of the coaching model.

PERSONNEL

KU-CRL Staff:

Jim Knight, *principal investigator*

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