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A K20 Center Research Brief

Data-Driven Coaching That Boosts Praise, Instructional Quality, and Student Engagement

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Introduction

High-poverty urban schools face persistent challenges related to instructional quality, classroom behavior, and teacher stress. Prior research cited by the authors indicates that traditional professional development formats – such as stand-alone workshops – rarely lead to meaningful changes in classroom practice or sustained improvements in student outcomes. These approaches often lack opportunities for practice, feedback, and application within teachers' real instructional contexts.

The authors position instructional coaching as a promising alternative because it is job-embedded, individualized, and focused on teacher goals. However, the literature had limited rigorous evidence examining whether coaching models could improve both instructional and behavioral practices and lead to measurable student benefits specifically within high-poverty urban elementary schools.

The purpose of this study is to address this gap by testing the effectiveness of the Classroom Strategies Coaching (CSC) Model, a data-driven, observation-based coaching intervention designed to strengthen teachers' use of evidence-based instructional and behavior management practices and improve classwide student engagement.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study used a randomized controlled trial with a waitlist control group. Teachers were randomly assigned within schools to receive either coaching through the CSC Model or serve as controls who did not receive coaching during the study period. This design allowed the researchers to compare outcomes between coached and non-coached teachers while accounting for school-level influences.

Sample:

Participants included:

- 106 elementary school teachers (53 coaching, 53 waitlist control)
- 2,195 students taught by participating teachers
- Grade levels: Kindergarten through 5th grade



- Schools: 14 high-poverty urban elementary schools in one northeastern U.S. school district
- Student context: Approximately 80% of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch
- Teachers: Both general and special education teachers participated

Coaching was delivered by trained master's-level practitioners and doctoral students with experience in high-poverty urban schools.

Intervention Descriptions:

The Classroom Strategies Coaching (CSC) Model is a structured, data-driven instructional coaching intervention focused on improving universal instructional and behavior management practices.

During the intervention:

- Teachers participated in one-on-one coaching sessions conducted face-to-face.
- Coaching decisions were guided by direct classroom observation data from the Classroom Strategies Assessment System (CSAS).

Coaches and teachers collaboratively:

- Reviewed observation data.
- Identified instructional and behavioral strengths and needs.
- Set 2-3 individualized professional development goals.
- Developed implementation plans.
- Engaged in modeling, practice, and reflection.
- Reviewed visual performance feedback graphs.

Targeted practices included strategies such as:

- Academic praise.
- Behavior praise.
- Clear directives.
- Opportunities for student response.
- Instructional quality (e.g., promoting student thinking).

The intervention followed five structured phases:

1. Identify practice needs.
2. Formulate practice goals.
3. Design plans and prepare for implementation.
4. Support implementation through coaching cycles.
5. Evaluate implementation and plan for generalization.



Coaching was implemented by trained coaches rather than classroom administrators or peers.

Dosage:

Dosage information was clearly reported in the study:

- Number of sessions: 8 coaching sessions per teacher
- Session length: 30 minutes per session
- Frequency: Approximately weekly
- Duration: Average of 12.5 weeks (SD = 3.5 weeks)

Calculated total dosage:

- Total sessions: 8
- Total instructional time: Approximately 240 minutes (4 hours) of direct coaching per teacher

In addition, coaches conducted two 30-minute classroom observations between sessions, which informed coaching but were not counted as coaching sessions themselves.

Data Analysis:

Researchers analyzed outcomes using multilevel statistical models to account for teachers being nested within schools. Classroom observations and teacher ratings were collected before and after the intervention and compared between coached and control teachers to determine whether coaching led to meaningful improvements in practices and student outcomes.

Results

Key findings included:

Improvements in teacher practices:

- Coached teachers used academic praise and behavior praise significantly more often.
- Instructional quality and behavior management improved at moderate levels.

Improved student outcomes

- Classwide student academic engagement increased by approximately 7% in coached classrooms.

Teacher perceptions

- Teachers reported stronger student academic and behavioral functioning.
- Teachers perceived greater instructional and emotional support.
- No significant reduction in teacher stress was observed.

Acceptability

- Teachers rated the coaching model as highly acceptable and supportive.



These findings suggest that relatively brief, data-driven coaching can meaningfully improve classroom practice and student engagement in high-poverty urban schools.

Application into Practice

The CSC Model can be applied as a job-embedded professional learning approach for elementary educators in high-poverty school contexts.

Schools seeking to implement this intervention should:

- Adopt a data-driven coaching framework
 - a. Use validated classroom observation tools to guide feedback.
- Provide trained instructional coaches
 - a. Coaches need expertise in instruction, behavior management, and relationship-based coaching.
- Schedule regular coaching sessions
 - a. Plan for approximately 8 sessions over 12-13 weeks.
- Focus on universal classroom practices
 - a. Target instructional quality and proactive behavior supports.
- Use visual performance feedback
 - a. Graphs and concrete data help teachers track progress.
- Plan for sustainability
 - a. Include generalization strategies after coaching ends.

Replication limitations:

The intervention relied on trained external coaches and validated assessment tools. The study does not provide sufficient detail on how schools might adapt the model using existing staff without additional training.

Work Cited

Reddy, L. A., Shernoff, E. S., & Lekwa, A. (2021). A randomized controlled trial of instructional coaching in high-poverty urban schools: Examining teacher practices and student outcomes. *Journal of School Psychology*, 86, 151-168.
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