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Instructional Coaching

by Latisha Thomas

A coach is defined as one who instructs or trains. Also, one who instructs players in the fundamentals of a sport and directs team strategy. My team does not play a sport. My team is a team of remarkable teachers. These teachers construct standards, challenge students, and dig their heels in to find innovative ways to deliver instruction. My role is to help develop, support, and help improve instruction from a coach's perspective. My name is Latisha Thomas, and I am the instructional coach at University Preparatory Academy- Mark Murray Campus in Detroit, Michigan.



This is my second year as an instructional coach. I have taught grades one through four, and was lead teacher for eight of the ten years I taught. Mentoring, coaching, and supporting teachers allowed me to wear multiple hats, while continuing to improve my own practice. As a lead teacher I always had to think beyond the walls of my classroom to the walls of seven other classrooms. I learned, while teaching, the everyday needs of a teacher, as well as the unmet needs of a teacher. As a coach, I have the privilege of meeting some of those unmet needs. Most teachers will say one of the difficulties of their job is that they are evaluated on their teaching, but then not given support on ways to improve. This model can sometimes seem disjointed. The advantage for teachers in having an instructional coach is that they have someone who is not formally evaluating them professionally, but will assess their needs, and, along with the principal's recommendation, offer timely oral and written feedback that will ultimately help to improve instruction in all areas, and act as a "thought-partner" in ways to improve instruction. Lastly, teachers can seek additional help from the instructional coach regarding data analysis to improve instruction, student or parent concerns, or classroom culture.

One opportunity that I have had to engage with thought partners was around the guided reading framework. Teachers were puzzling through which strategies to teach their students and when

to teach them. I discussed this question with Dr. Leah van Belle, our district's literacy director, and we created a "Gradual Release Continuum" to give teachers a visual to help with their teaching. This continuum helps teachers think about the intentionality we all need to put into teaching reading skills and strategies through the gradual release model, or the "I/We/You" model. I shared the continuum with the teachers at a staff meeting and refer to it regularly when coaching. This was a great opportunity to answer a question from some teachers as well as give a concrete review to others.

I aspire to do more co-teaching in my work as an instructional coach. There is a great deal to be learned when teaching and having someone listen in during direct instruction. The instructional coach is able to whisper in and ask probing questions to help improve instruction in the moment. This for me is the ultimate realization that the "coach" is a part of the team.

Latisha Thomas is the instructional coach at University Preparatory Academy-Mark Murray Campus in Detroit, Michigan. She taught second and third graders for nine years. Latisha is passionate about teaching and learning. She believes that her greatest impact on education will be helping teachers improve their instructional practices day-by-day.

Literacy Skills & Strategies Gradual Release Continuum



- Whole group
- Mini-lesson
- Teach new skill through teacher modeling and explicit "Naming & Claiming"
- Then shared practice as a whole class with explicit Naming & Claiming
- Mentor texts used as context for practicing skill

- Small group
- Not a mini-lesson, but starts with a brief revisiting or quick teacher re-modeling of the skill already learned in strategic read-aloud
- Students practice new skill together through guided practice and explicit Naming & Claiming
- Guided reading texts used as vehicles to practice skill

- Individual work-independent reading and homework
- Students are now at the "point of release," meaning they have now constructed a rich enough understanding of the skill to use it strategically on their own
- Students can Name & Claim the *what, how, and why* of the skill.

Literacy Skills & Strategies Gradual Release Continuum



Each new comprehension strategy and reading skill should be taught across the above continuum to the point of release, at which point students can use it independently and strategically. This means that a new strategy, such as inferring, would be taught in strategic read-aloud mini-lessons to the whole class before the teacher moves it to guided reading. Therefore, the read-aloud mini-lessons for a week may not have the same focus as the guided reading lessons, as the latter will be providing an opportunity for readers to practice strategies and skills they have already practiced in read-aloud lessons.

On the following page is a possible planning model for teaching reading comprehension strategies, such as inferring. However, with simpler strategies or skills, such as looking for chunks in words or using "skip it and come back," the teacher may decide to have students work with the skill across the gradual release continuum during the week. This would mean that the class would be working on the skill during the strategic read-aloud mini-lessons for the week, as well as in guided reading, and/or independent reading.

Literacy Skills & Strategies Gradual Release Continuum



Week 1: **Connecting**
(new skill)

Week 1: Using decoding bookmark for new words
(skill from previous weeks)

Week 1: Choosing a just right book and drawing/
writing a response
(skill from previous weeks)

Week 2: **Predicting**
(new skill)

Week 2: **Connecting**
(skill from previous week)

Week 2: Choosing a just right book and drawing/
writing a response
(learned previous weeks)

Week 3: **Inferring**
(new skill)

Week 3: **Predicting**
(skill from previous week)

Week 3: **Connecting**
(learned previous weeks)

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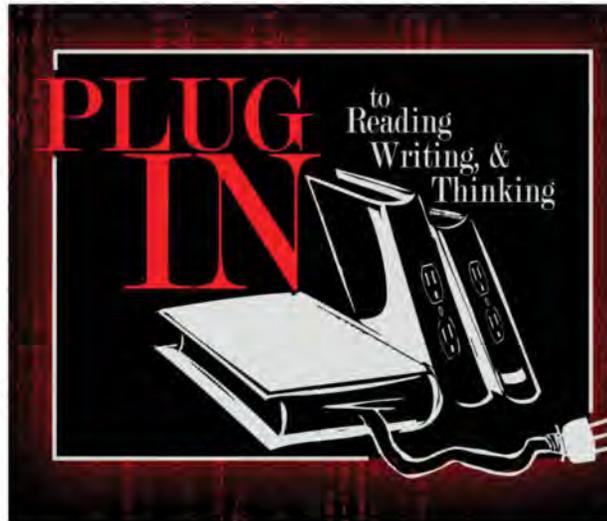
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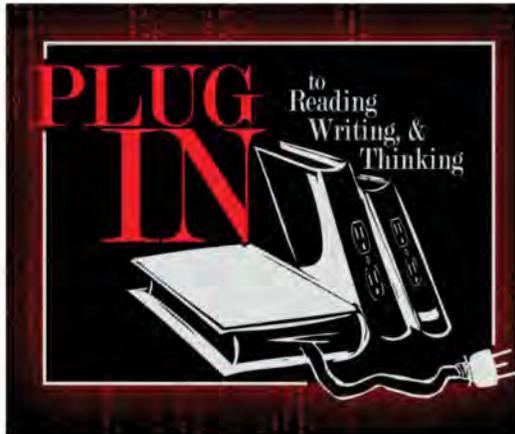
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Dr. Michael DeSchryver, *Creative Reading of Informational Texts on the Internet*

Dr. Kathy Moxley, *Teachers' Views of Literacy*

Dr. Marcy Taylor & Dr. Elizabeth Brockman, *What Do Professors Really Say about College Writing?*

Dr. Meghan Block, *The Effects of Audience on Students' Writing Performance*

Dr. Xiaoping Li & Dr. Ming Zhang, *Exploration of Performance Tasks in Smarter Balance Assessments*

Dr. Betsy VanDeusen-MacLeod & Christine Russell, *Understanding the Work of Technical Assistance Providers*

Dr. Tamara Jetton, *Disciplinary Literacy and Text Structures*

General Session

Dr. Kylene Beers



Kylene Beers, Ed.D., is a former middle school teacher who has turned her commitment to adolescent literacy and struggling readers into the major focus of her research, writing, speaking, and teaching. She is the author of the best-selling *When Kids Can't Read/What Teachers Can Do*, co-editor (with Bob Probst and Linda Rief) of *Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice*, and co-author (with Bob Probst) of *Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading*, all published by Heinemann. She taught in the College of Education at the University of Houston, served as Senior Reading Researcher at the Comer School Development Program at Yale University, and most recently acted as the Senior Reading Advisor to Secondary Schools for the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College.

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