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No More Random Acts of Literacy Coaching

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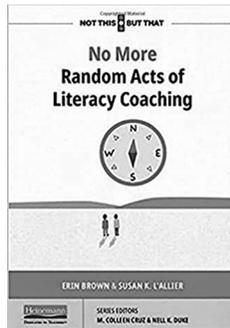
Cover Page Footnote

Note: For those readers committed to implementation and learning aligned to Michigan's GELN Literacy Essentials, there are connections throughout this book to Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy as well as system connections with the Essential School-Wide & Center-Wide Practices in Literacy. More information on the Essentials can be found at <https://literacyessentials.org/>. Optional note to include about this series: Just as all texts in this series are designed, there are three sections. In Section 1, readers are offered insight as to why an ineffective practice is present, the roots of the practice, and the negative impact the practice has. Section 2 supports the prior section by outlining the research against the problematic practice and provides ways to approach the practice more effectively. Section 3 supports Sections 1 and 2 through a practitioner lens with solutions to implement the better practices with insights for implementation. The purposeful design of this series facilitates the reading and supports ease to reference the text by offering color-coded sections with Section 1 tabbed in red, Section 2 tabbed in yellow, and Section 3 tabbed in green.

No More Random Acts of Literacy Coaching

by Annie P. Spear

Brown, E. & L'Allier, S. (2020). *No more random acts of literacy coaching*. N.K. Duke & M.C. Cruz (Series Eds). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Publishers. ISBN 978-0-325-12008-9



Erin Brown and Dr. Susan L'Allier have published a new book that is sure to inspire literacy educators and coaches in the state of Michigan and across the nation. The title of this book, *No More Random Acts of Literacy Coaching*, could not be more fitting; the successes and suggestions outlined within it are anything but random. Recently, states (including Michigan) have begun prioritizing funds to provide literacy coaching in school districts. This newly released book provides insight as to why literacy coaching is a worthy investment--not only in teachers but, ultimately, in children. If you are a literacy coach or administrator in Michigan, this book will affirm the work that our state has been doing over the past five years and will undoubtedly renew your commitment to literacy coaching. The audience for this book is intentionally and strategically crafted to be broad and inclusive in order to guide, inform, and incite action from a variety of leaders including, administrators, coaches, and educators. Those who choose to utilize this book as they create, revise, or reset coaching in their district or system will be grateful to discover explicit guidance, useful resources, and actionable steps to elevate the success of their coaching model. This artfully and purposefully crafted book does a remarkable job of tempering candor with empathy.

I found Section 1, written by Dr. Susan L'Allier, to be an engaging and authentic representation of the obstacles related to coaching. L'Allier's straightforward, candid approach in this section is to be celebrated. She



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names common “obstacles” surrounding coaching and provides examples of random acts that are less conducive to successful coaching experiences. Thereafter, she outlines the realistic (and predictable) consequences of not acknowledging or addressing such obstacles head-on. In the end, she unapologetically identifies specific ways to combat coaching obstacles. Throughout her articulate chapter, she thoughtfully leads readers along a question-and-answer-path that is both simplistic and transparent, leaving nothing left to chance. In fact, she equips readers with succinct, research-supported answers to each question she poses. The benefits of coaching for teachers and students are clearly noted, but not fully disclosed, leaving readers motivated to start Section 2.

Moving into Section 2, Dr. L'Allier begins by acknowledging the shift in education that has occurred over the years from teaching being an individual teacher's “private domain” with pure autonomy to teaching becoming a more complex and demanding practice that rests inside of a larger system with multiple directives, curricula, and protocols. Taking an assets-based approach, she portrays literacy coaching as one way to support teachers in this endeavor. In the remainder of Section 2, she reveals how one can be an ally to both teachers *and* coaches *while also* building a coaching system aligned to research and standards. This section acknowledges

Must Read Texts

the many stakeholder groups involved when creating a coaching system, underscoring how critical it is to review the available research when building it. L'Allier presents the research clearly and includes various tables throughout this section to help readers process the research and place it within the larger context of a coaching system. A highlight of this book series is the information included on the side panels that give readers authentic examples for implementation. This is especially useful for administrators reading this text who may have limited time. Included are research insights for coaching stances and practices that build collaborative relationships to impact teacher practice and lead to increased student achievement. L'Allier acknowledges that the nature of some studies do not lend themselves to providing knowledge about the extent of student learning. In response, she concludes the section by providing an invitation to those in the profession to engage in future research aimed at helping “administrators, coaches, and teachers gain more understanding about how to design an effective coaching program” (p 40). While additional research is needed, Section 2 successfully provides evidence of the positive impact coaching has on teachers’ practice and students’ learning. Readers move into Section 3 ready to receive a glimpse into authentic coaching examples.

Erin Brown eloquently begins Section 3 with a collaborative, reflective, and vulnerable tone that resonates throughout. She shares experiences that represent her work in the field of education which has evolved from leadership in a single district to leading an entire state of coaches. She divulges lessons she learned about coaching that impacted her personal practice and prompted her to change. Her vignettes from the field outline examples of effective coaching interactions but also acknowledge the challenges that teachers, coaches, and administrators face. Just as creating a classroom community requires responsiveness and dedication to maintaining relationships within and across the class while simultaneously building relationships with individual students, coaches must do the same with the teachers, administrators, and other educators they serve. Section 3 leaves no doubt about the importance of the collaborative nature of coaching. Brown’s section clearly

illustrates that coaching is not a “one-size-fits-all” package. Section 3 is perfectly consistent with and reflective of the research that Dr. L'Allier presents in Section 2; as such, purposeful connections to the coaching stances and coaching practices that have been proven effective are named in the context of coaching cycles. One especially important connection across both Sections 2 and 3 is the importance of principal support and the intentional, systematic, and reliable nature that an effective coaching system requires. Fortunately, Brown provides a goldmine of resources aligned to the research which empowers readers with tools (that the publisher has available online for download) to support any necessary change. Throughout every recommendation and reflection that Brown shares, she always circles back to students, reminding readers that each strategic action or implemented practice is always done with the intention to positively impact student learning.

Erin Brown and Dr. Susan L'Allier leave readers with the choice to continue business-as-usual practices or to pause, reflect, and change. Though presented as a choice, the content of the book makes the correct decision quite clear—random acts of coaching aren’t highly effective. By abandoning the random acts, coaches are better situated to support the ultimate goal of literacy coaching which is to impact student achievement and efficacy. The collaborative, system-wide commitment that effective literacy coaching requires is made quite evident within the pages of this book, and its promise will leave readers feeling hopeful for all students in schools throughout Michigan and beyond. This book serves as an essential resource for administrators (at every level), curriculum directors, literacy leaders, coaches, and school leadership teams. *No More Random Acts of Literacy Coaching* is both an invitation to reflect upon current coaching systems and a gift that provides structures and tools to make the desire for change actionable.

Author Biography

Annie Petrozzelli Spear has been in the field of education for over 20 years and holds a Master of Education in Reading and a Master of Arts in Elementary

Education. She has taught in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Michigan. She is an Early Literacy Coach at C.O.O.R. Intermediate School District, consultant, and co-author of *Let's Talk: Getting Your Baby Ready to Read*. Annie was a Principal Investigator and Reading Clinic Coordinator for The Literacy Center at Central Michigan University where she remains an adjunct faculty member. Annie aims to facilitate

learning around literacy development and to provide actionable ways for educators to meet children's needs through research-supported practices. She has a passion for engaging and collaborating with families in authentic ways linked to literacy research. She lives with her family in Northern Michigan and can be reached at anniespear@gmail.com.

