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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to articulate the process and content of the coaching model developed by the staff who work in schools affiliated with the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). BASRC is a 7-year-old nonprofit grant-funding organization with the mission to transform schools in the San Francisco Bay area, California into vital places to learn and teach. Central to the BASRC support of its member schools are school coaches, who usually work with three to five individual schools in the same school district. Each coach works for 4 to 5 hours a week with formal and informal leaders in each school to enact a set of activities designed to foster and sustain a schoolwide continuous improvement process with the goal of improving the technical core of schooling. The BASRC model is a hybrid of curricular, cognitive, and principles-based coaching that also draws on traditional organizational consulting. Coaches work with school leaders in these stages: (1) introductory; (2) study; (3) plan and contracting; (4) action; and (5) reflection. Each stage is explained in detail. The paper also discusses some of the tension found in coaches' work. Coaches find that the key to addressing these tensions is to use them as teachable moments, to make sense of them for the improvement process. (Contains 27 references.) (SLD)

School Coaching in Context: A Case Study in Capacity Building

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The increasing importance placed on performance-based accountability systems for public schools, without an attendant emphasis on building the capacity of administrative and teacher leaders in those schools can - and has - created the perverse effect of widening the gap between low-performing schools and all others (Elmore, 2001). In referring to capacity, the authors of this paper mean the levels of skill, knowledge, motivation and resources needed to deal effectively with the complex demands faced by schools attempting to systematically and sustainably improve achievement. Additionally, if Hatch (2002) is right, that it takes capacity to build capacity for school change, the field of school reform faces a paradox: those schools most in need of change are those least able to do it.

While schools that are well-equipped to respond to external accountability demands often act in productive ways, those that are less prepared lose ground. They respond to external demands by becoming more and more busy and by working in chaotic and even haphazard ways. Furthermore, as policymakers have stepped up the focus on accountability nationwideⁱ, emphasizing accountability over the substantive processes and structures schools need to support a continuous improvement process, even middle-class schools, blessed by greater human and material assets have struggled with the question of how to help historically marginalized students meet the new standards. Given the lack of coherence that results when multiple school reforms are enacted simultaneously (Hatch, 2002) coupled with the often-opposing demands of contemporary standards-based accountability efforts, most schools struggle mightily to develop the capacity to sustain a focused and continuous improvement process, whether they are well-positioned to change or not. One response to this dilemma which is gaining increasing currency is school coaching (Tung and Feldman, 2001; Mims, 2000; Asera & Hamil, 1999; Williams, 1996; Fullan 1991; McDonald, 1989).

In contrast to traditional educational consultants who often know little about the specific context in which they work (Sula, 1998; Goodman, 1994) and who attempt one-size-fits-all remedies (Sula, 1998; McLaughlin, 1990), school coaches develop site-specific views. As educational professionals external to a school, coaches are concerned with building leadership capacity and improving the coherence of the school's program and leadership skills among its teachers and administrators. The site-based orientation of

school coaches also contrasts with the orientation of district-level personnel in positions of support to schools, who often focus more on district mandates and policy compliance (Massel, 2000). Additionally, although external educational consultants have been in existence for many years (Tung and Feldman, 2001; Sulla, 1998), recent research shows that the normative and cultural shifts necessitated by contemporary, inquiry-driven school reform and the attendant improvements in teacher practice are often accelerated, deepened, and sustained by coaches who work directly with school leaders on the context-specific issues that leaders face within schools (Guiney, 2001 and Kirby & Meza, 1997).

Coaches can help bring coherence to schools dizzied by a disparate array of programs and initiatives (Hatch, 2001). They can also mitigate some of the paradoxical nature of distributed leadership in schools and districts (Elmore, 2001) by helping teacher and administrative leaders balance their newly emerging roles around some core competencies, while also serving as a resource and performing triage when the required skills and knowledge sit beyond school personnel's area of specialty.

Goals of this paper and the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative

This paper seeks to articulate the process and content of the coaching model developed by the staff who work in schools affiliated with the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). BASRC is a seven-year-old, non-profit, grant-funding organization whose mission is to:

transform schools across the Bay Area into vital places to learn and to teach. [BASRC] works with education leaders in both schools and districts to develop, assess and use the knowledge needed for schools to engage in a systematic and sustainable improvement process. BASRC aims to help create a future in which all students learn to high levels and where race, class, language, gender, and culture are no longer good predictors of educational outcomes.

BASRC supports school and district reform efforts through on-going grant funding that is intended to support schools and districts in their data-based, continuous improvement processes.

Also central to BASRC's support of its member schools are its school coaches, who, on average, work with three to five individual schools in the same school district. Each coach works for four to five hours per week with formal and informal leaders of

each school. These leaders include administrators, teacher leaders, and all representative leadership committees who are collectively called “instructional leadership teams.” The coach works with an instructional leadership team to enact a set of activities designed to foster and sustain a schoolwide continuous improvement process whose goal is to improve the “technical core” (teaching and learning) of schooling (Elmore, 2001).

As a relatively new strategy in BASRC’s work (just under two years), the coaching strategy continues to evolve as the coaches and organization reflect upon the efficacy of their support. Consequently, this paper serves dual roles: (1) to contribute to the growing body of scholarly literature on school coaching and (2) to provide a vehicle for the BASRC coaching staff to reflect upon the effectiveness of their approach and the utility of their support.

BASRC’s coaching framework in context

Although coaches are increasingly prevalent in contemporary reform (Guinney, 2001; Tung and Feldman, 2001; Brunner & Davidson, 1998; Sulla, 1998), they come in many forms and BASRC’s coaches are an amalgam of those found in the field more broadly. Some of the earliest iterations and most commonly found coaches today are those who work with school personnel to build their capacity around instructional issues and “best practices.”

Curricular coaching

Content-oriented or curricular coaches, such as those specifically working on literacy or math instructional issues, consult with school leaders on a discrete academic program or element of teacher expertise (Symonds, 2002). These educators generally coach individual or small groups of teachers, aiming to impart new ideas or to follow-up on professional development that teachers have gotten elsewhere. Curricular coaches thus supply a form of on-going, site-based professional development as they support teachers’ skills in particular instructional areas through the modeling of effective strategies, by observing teachers and providing attendant feedback, or by providing other forms of instructional capacity building. (Joyce and Showers, 1988). Although curricular coaches may also analyze a schools’ literacy, math or other curricular program, their role is generally to provide school-based professional development and support in

instructional best practices rather than to analyze and integrate that discrete support into a school's larger academic program.

Cognitive coaching

In addition, several models of coaching found in the field today take a multi-person approach to building school leaders' capacity for change. Like those who espouse the "cognitive coaching" model, these coaches believe in "meeting leaders where they are" with the goal of changing behavior by making the client aware of his or her behavioral tendencies. This model assumes that school leaders, given the proper prompting, will come, almost organically, to the appropriate solutions to reform their schools. In this model, a coach is actually a *mediator*, one who figuratively stands between a person and his/her thinking to help him/her become more aware of what is going on inside his/her head. This model posits that it is not enough for a leader to behave in a certain way--what's important is the thinking that goes on behind the behavior (Costa and Garmston, 1996 & 1994). Because the client must be willing to explore and reveal her own thinking, she must develop trust and rapport with the coach; accordingly, the coach spends a significant amount of time building this in consultations. In cognitive coaching and other similar models, it is the client, rather than the coach, who evaluates what is good or poor, appropriate or inappropriate, effective or ineffective about his/her work. This approach claims greater authenticity and ownership of outcomes since it starts where the teacher or administrative leaders are—not where they should be.

Principles Coaching

In contrast to the curricular and cognitive coaching models currently being employed in the field, there are also principle-based coaches who seek to enact in schools, a particular comprehensive school reform model that is based on a set of core principles or values (Tung & Feldman, 2001; Brunner & Davidson, 1998). Coaches who work with the Accelerated Schools program and other reform organizations that articulate their programs around particular creeds are examples. These coaches are more akin to traditional educational consultants and look to facilitate "the program" that schools have agreed to enact as a consequence of affiliating with each respective reform organization.

BASRC School Coaches

BASRC coaches, whose orientation is a hybrid coaching model, that draws on elements of the three models described above, and adds elements from traditional organizational consulting,ⁱⁱ aim to equip school leaders with the analytical and facilitative skills necessary to bring about an organizational structure and culture that promotes continuous improvement of teaching and learning in a school. Predicated on a notion similar to the “gradual release of responsibility” described in the reading comprehension literature (Keene, 1994), this coaching model specifies that work starts at a developmental level appropriate to the leaders and their school. In the early stages of the consultation, as the relationship is developing, and as the coach and client are conducting a formal needs assessment, BASRC coaches are responsible for taking almost full responsibility for the clients’ learning—of both the facilitative processes of continuous improvement and curricular, student assessment, and programmatic “best practices.” As the clients develop skills and understanding, coaches seek to have the school community and its leaders take the needs assessment (and its attendant recommendations) as their own – a process that often starts even while the needs assessment is occurring. The goal is for the school’s leaders to understand how the needs they articulate can be addressed through the reforms *they* work to put in place since those same leaders are ultimately responsible for acting on the recommendations. The role of the school coach is twofold: to help school leaders figure out how to internalize, and put their own spin, on the needs that have been articulated, and to teach the leaders how to model a process of data-based inquiry for other colleagues in the school.

Thus, it is crucial for school coaches to be conscious of the process they use in the conduct of their work . They are not only teaching a process of data-based inquiry and decision-making, but also modeling it through the coaching relationship. Consequently, BASRC school coaches generally follow the following broad steps (which will be explicated in more detail later in the paper):

1. *Introductory Phase:* Upon initial entry into a school, each coach works first to build positive working relationships with school-level clients. During this *Introductory Phase*, as coaches spend time in building the

relationships crucial to the success of the coaching relationship, they also begin to understand the systems, programs, capacities of leaders, and the political map of each respective school.

2. *Study Phase:* As they continue to build positive relationships, coaches engage in a *Study Phase* during which they evaluate the readiness of the school's leaders and broader community for change and the attendant vitality of the school's systems, structures and culture. Coaches conduct a formal needs assessment related to a model of a continuously improving learning community (Senge, 1990). Implicit in this approach is the notion that coaches believe that they must build upon the strengths in a school instead of merely working from a deficit model that merely tells schools what is not working.ⁱⁱⁱ
3. *Plan & Contracting Phase:* Once BASRC school coaches have ascertained the assets and challenges presented by a school community and, more specifically, its leadership, coaches then enter a *Planning Phase* with school leaders. During this phase, they negotiate and establish the areas in which the coach will work; these areas are determined by a needs assessment developed in the previous phase. This Contracting Phase is critical because it enables the school's leaders and the BASRC coach to clearly lay out the coaches role and responsibilities and to establish the clients' expectations during the consultation. Additionally, this is an important juncture for the coach to establish and articulate important needs that must be addressed by the school's leadership if sustainable reforms are to be enacted—either through the coaches support or through an alternative means.
4. *Action Phase:* Coaches then do the work they have contracted with the school to enact. This can involve discrete facilitation modeling or instruction on meeting management with school leaders, or can involve direct instruction in data-based inquiry with teachers. Again, the action itself is intended to model and build the capacity of site leaders to lead a sustainable continuous improvement process for their school site.
5. *Reflection:* Coaches periodically review their contracts (individually or with their clients) either when new needs arise (often as a result of continued coaching) or when stated agreements are not carried out. These occasions provide coaches with an opportunity to model a process of data-based inquiry. Coaches and their clients look at the data they have collected over the course of the consultation; these may be data about the efficacy of the coach's work or the overall progress of their reform work. After reviewing and reflecting on the data and considering options, coaches then re-contract with their clients based on a new set of assessments and concomitant agreements.

We will now go into more detail regarding each of the discrete phases of this coaching model so as to give more detail to the various phases and articulate explicit examples of this work in practice. Subsequent to that description, the essay will conclude with a discussion and analysis of the central dilemmas and challenges that have arisen as this model has been enacted and earmark future areas of inquiry into its efficacy.

Introductory Phase

During the Introductory Phase of coaching, BASRC coaches are really introducing two aspects of how they work. First, is the technical aspect of the work. These are the coaching skills, tools and processes coaches have to bring to bear to help their school clients. Introduction to this part of the work is mostly a matter of making presentations, providing written materials describing who they are and what they do, having discussions and answering questions. The second aspect of the coach's work is harder to get at, but essential from the very beginning. It is the more affective aspect of coaching that has to do with building the kinds of positive and productive relationships they hope to foster in the school communities in which they work. From the very first meeting, BASRC coaches begin to introduce themselves as coaches by how they express themselves; respond to others; give and receive feedback.

Shared vision as a basis for a coaching relationship

As a mission-driven organization, BASRC and its coaches have definite ideas about the kinds of places schools could *and should* be. Central to the organization's work is the idea that schools – and the people who work in schools – have a responsibility to work towards an equitable and just society. This means that schools have or are actively committed to working towards a future in which all students learn to high levels and where race, class, language, gender, and culture are no longer good predictors of educational outcomes. It is clear that this is not the current state of education in California or across the nation. Indeed, the achievement gap between white students and minority students has been widening steadily since the mid 1980's (Lucas, 1999).

Because BASRC coaches bring a strong sense of what they believe they are working towards, it is necessary to be up-front with their school clients from the very beginning. This approach differs from education consultants who work with schools to

get better at what they already do. Unlike this strictly organizational development model of coaching that focuses on building the capacity of organizations to do what they do better, BASRC coaches are more specific about the kind of change they are after. As in an organizational development model, they focus on capacity building, but that focus is linked to the question, “Capacity building for what?” If schools merely get better at doing what they are doing, students may achieve at higher levels, but the insidious effects of maintaining an underclass of students broken down along racial lines will persist. Instead, coaches work to build site capacity to *accelerate* the learning of the school’s lowest performing students while increasing overall student achievement.

The first step in developing a coaching relationship at a school site, then, is to be clear about the coach’s vision of the work. BASRC coaches need to discuss the extent to which the vision of closing the achievement gap is shared with our prospective school clients. They do not seek school-wide consensus prior to formalizing a partnership with a school site. Indeed, developing a shared commitment to closing the achievement gap may be a central part of their initial work with a staff. But they do need to hear from the site leadership that they share this vision. BASRC coaches need key decision makers to be on board to move forward. As Peter Senge (1990) writes, “Without a pull toward some goal which people truly want to achieve, the forces in support of the status quo can be overwhelming.” Coaches need to be clear that without the commitment and resolve of site leaders, the prospects for success are dim.

Specifying the client

Specifying the client, the person or group of people coaches work with directly, is an important part of the introductory phase of the coaching work. In most cases, BASRC coaches work with site administrators and leadership teams (generally comprised of site administrators, teachers representatives from grade-levels or departments and a few other site leaders such as a literacy coach or reform coordinator). There are several reasons why they locate their coaching at the site leadership level. The first is obvious – school improvement needs to involve key leaders and decision makers (Fullan 1991; Newmann, 1996). In some cases, the key leaders at a school site may have the formal role authority that comes with a title. For example, a coach’s clients often include the site principal, department chairs and content specialists. However, they recognize that there are

informal leaders at a school site that often play a pivotal part in moving work forward or undermining progress. To the extent possible, BASRC coaches try to work both with formal and informal leaders at a school site.

A second reason for working at the leadership level stems from the importance of distributed leadership in implementing and sustaining a process for continuous improvement. Copeland (2002) points out that the notion of an heroic leader single-handedly taking on all challenges and overcoming all obstacles is more a myth than a reality. Rather, it takes a coordinated and concerted effort of a dedicated group of people to manage the sheer work-load that comes from undertaking a new process for improvement. The BASRC coaching model focuses on building the capacity of a core group of leaders who can then build the capacity of others in the school system.

Inquiry as an improvement process

BASRC coaches work with school leaders using a Cycle of Inquiry (COI) process to guide and frame their efforts. The Cycle of Inquiry^{iv} is a six step process to identify and focus on critical problems at a school site. First, an initial analysis of data informs the creation of a core problem statement. Second, inquiry questions focus on student achievement and teacher practice. Third, goals and measures are set to define and test for progress and success. Fourth, specific work plans detail the steps taken to address the focal problem, as well as the human and other resources involved. Fifth, the workplan guides implementation. Finally, the measures specified in step three, as well as other forms of data, are collected and analyzed to help inform a structured reflection on what went well, what needs to get better and what next steps to take as the cycle begins again.

Essentially, the COI is a rational model learning, applicable at both an organizational level (school) and an individual level (teacher). From a school-level perspective, the Cycle of Inquiry helps schools to identify and address systemic issues contributing to patterns of inequity and low achievement. This might be to examine and restructure how resources are allocated between honors courses and intervention courses; or, who has access to these courses. At a classroom perspective, a COI helps teachers to coherently examine how a specific teaching practice impacts specific groups of students. At one of the sites we work with, a second grade teacher is working with a colleagues to examine how they are using small group instruction time to provide additional support

for the lowest performing students. In schools like this with strong implementation, we see teachers examining each others practice, as well.

The COI approach places school personnel in the role of the producers of knowledge, generating for themselves the information and understanding necessary to make informed decisions about how to shape their respective improvement efforts. This is contrast to reform initiatives that are more prescriptive and standardized, where a specified reform is imported and adopted at the school site (Brunner & Davidson, 1998; c.f. Slavin, 1996). Rather, BASRC coaches' emphasis is placed on building the capacity of site personnel to understand their unique contexts and make evidence based decisions to address the needs they identify.

The introductory conversations with site leadership are an opportunity for BASRC coaches to begin Cycles of Inquiry of their own. Explaining the inquiry approach – what it is and what it takes – is the start of an ongoing process of collecting and reflecting on data. For example, after a BASRC coach described how problem statements guide inquiry, an administrator mentioned that site's reading scores have dropped over the last two years, especially among the ELL population. While the main point of this meeting was for the BASRC coach to describe the COI process, she learned about an area of concern and potential area of focus.

Study

In the Study Phase, coaches move from explaining the inquiry approach and exploring the compatibility of a potential partnership to learning about the school's context. There are four purposes to the Study Phase: 1) to understand and assess the school context by conducting a needs assessment, 2) to identify high leverage areas for improvement from the data analyzed in the needs assessment, 3) to reach consensus with the faculty on priority areas for change, and 4) to build the buy-in necessary to maintain the sustained focus required for improvement, which is accomplished through the first three purposes. The work of this phase is driven by the coach's desire to uncover multiple perspectives creating as detailed and layered a picture of the school and the community as possible because in these contrasting perspectives lie important clues about present assets and challenges and what work the school needs to do in the future.

As “outsiders,” it is important for BASRC coaches to learn about the system they are charged with assisting. As external coaches, they are positioned to compile the views of the entire school staff, a picture that might otherwise be unavailable. Although it takes concerted time and effort to learn the school’s *modus operandi*, without this knowledge the risks of coaching gaffs and missteps increase dramatically. And, each time the coach enters the school it is an opportunity for building buy-in—establishing relationships and credibility.

Assessing School Context

Coaches conduct a needs assessment in which they collect and analyze data from a variety of sources including: teacher surveys, focus groups, student achievement data, and demographics on students, teachers and the community. Teacher surveys uncover areas of agreement and confusion across the school to be explored further in focus groups facilitated by BASRC coaches. The very process of asking questions in the focus groups provides a productive forum for staff to voice opinions and share perspectives at the same time that it contributes to the coach’s credibility and the staff’s willingness to understand and buy into the coaching relationship. Although there are other ways to structure the collection of this data, coaches who missed the opportunity to facilitate focus groups had a more difficult and protracted time gaining access to people and information within the system of the school.

A short history of the school and the district in which it is situated provides more context description. Demographic trends in the school and community add detail about diversity and equity concerns that the school’s plan will need to anticipate. Teachers’ years of experience and certifications impact instruction and therefore need to be included in the description of context. Finally, many schools engage in partnerships with external organizations that provide resources, money or people. There is a limit to the capacity of any school faculty to implement varied programs and meet the needs of numerous grants, so the coach needs to be aware of the entities that vie for teachers’ time and energy. Data collected and analyzed in the needs assessment point to strengths and areas for improvement that the coach synthesizes into a form with which the school site staff can interact.

Coaches view data collection as an iterative process that is negotiated, so after creating an initial picture the coach shares it with the faculty of the school and asks, “Is this picture accurate?” Including all voices creates a more productive working relationship between the coach and the school staff, as well as among staff members. BASRC coaches learned that to marginalize difficult personalities or teams rather than seeking their perspectives and questions only served to divide the faculty. Conversely, the work was enriched when all perspectives and questions were used as stimuli for discussion.

Identifying High Leverage Areas for Improvement

A second purpose of the study phase is for coaches to identify high leverage areas for improvement—those areas that most directly impact student achievement and could narrow the achievement gap. BASRC Coaches organize the findings from the needs assessment into a framework with three interrelated components: 1) student achievement; 2) curriculum, instruction and assessment; and 3) systems and structures since research is pointing to those as areas of focus and attention in high achieving schools (Elmore, 2001). Within each area the coach outlines strengths and gaps connected to specific findings from the data.

By analyzing disaggregated student achievement data from standardized tests, coaches identify strengths and gaps in the broad areas of math, reading and language, look at specific subgroup performance and model the work that teachers and administrators will do in their own inquiry. Although standardized test results may be all that is readily available, coaches look for other school-wide, grade-level or classroom assessments that point to specific skills gaps and inform instruction because this is the level data necessary for teachers to conduct inquiry at grade-levels. Other relevant data, such as disciplinary referrals, absences, grade point averages or graduation rates may also be included in a coach’s analysis when it highlights areas of note or concern.

Assets and challenges also need to be identified in the areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment. It is important to note what curricula has been adopted by the district or state, what curricula is actually being implemented by teachers and to what extent the implementation is consistent across the school. Initially collected in surveys,

this data can be amplified through focus groups and observations or walk-throughs. Coaches look for alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment because unless the written, taught and tested curricula are aligned, assessments will not inform stakeholders on the effectiveness of instruction.

Finally, the coach needs to understand the organizing systems and structures of the school that contribute to the identity of the school and may either place barriers in the way of or provide avenues for change. Leadership and communication systems support the staff's ability to engage in and sustain reform. Other structures such as grade-level or department teams provide individual teachers the support necessary to change teaching practices to meet the needs of specific students.

Building Consensus on High Leverage Areas

The coach uses all the data and feedback from the initial discussion with the clients to formulate recommendations. But whose diagnosis drives the recommendations? A paradox exists here: the coach doesn't necessarily accept the faculty's analysis of the data, but the faculty doesn't necessarily accept the coach's view. Both parties must spend enough time in data collection and the initial presentation to understand where these differences lie. The coach then determines which recommendations are negotiable and which are not. This may portend the end of the coaching relationship. However, if agreement is reached, the coach re-contracts with the staff to establish the roles and responsibilities the coach will take on during the next stage of creating the action plan.

Plan

When the recommendations are negotiated to the satisfaction of the coach and the faculty, the next stage is to create goals and an action plan that includes: a timeline, strategies to reach the goals, resources required, and persons responsible for coordinating the work. This Planning Phase serves the following purposes: 1) translating the recommendations into concrete steps for action, 2) building the capacity of the staff to become better consumers of expertise, and 3) building understanding and buy-in to the goals and objectives of the proposed work. During this phase of work the coach shifts from driving the work to more of an advisory role—asking questions and identifying issues to be addressed.

To move from the recommendations to action steps, BASRC coaches assist the administration and staff to put systems and structures in place that will support the writing of the plan and the ensuing work. In most schools this means establishing leadership teams that are representative of all grade levels/ departments as well as other programs or constituencies in the school. The coach then supports this team to lead the writing of the plan by developing skills, such as facilitation, and co-creating processes to complete the work. Where these structures are in place and functioning, planning proceeds. Putting structures in place requires additional support from the coach during the planning process.

BASRC Coaches support the school leadership team and staff to set student achievement goals that are both realistic and will result in closing the achievement gap. In the goal setting process the coach models data analysis skills which grade level or department teams will eventually use in their own inquiry. The California Department of Education sets school goals in the Academic Performance Index and school staffs can begin the discussion with these goals. When teachers translate the goals into numbers of students they must move in their classrooms it makes it more concrete so that teachers are able to determine if it is realistic. After goals have been set, the staff must determine what strategies they will use to meet the goals.

Translating the Recommendations to Actions and Building Buy-in

To build understanding and buy-in, it is important to involve as many school staff members as possible in decisions about specific strategies and action steps in the plan, so processes are designed with that outcome in mind. Depending on the structures in place at the school, it may be grade level or departments teams, the various groups take one of the recommendations and propose specific action steps with facilitation and assistance as needed. Coaches learned that existing school improvement plans or other school site plans also need to be taken into consideration as action steps are determined to be sure that resources are available and priorities are agreed upon. Otherwise, this work can become yet another plan that goes unimplemented.

The work of the individual groups is then modified through faculty input until there is agreement about the specific action steps, the person responsible for overseeing the steps, due dates, resources required and the evidence or data that will show progress

all of which is included in the plan. Ideally, the action plan will include all the work of the school providing a realistic picture of the upcoming year. Teachers engaged in action planning often experience frustration because the daily requirements of their jobs don't disappear as they take on this new task. Coaches found that the earlier analysis of student achievement data could create a sense of urgency that maintained the momentum necessary during the Planning Phase. Finally, the coach supports the leadership team to take the final plan to the staff for ratification and any final adjustments.

Becoming Better Consumers of Expertise

Because the plan will require knowledge and skills in instructional materials and strategies as well as other areas such as meeting facilitation, the coach needs to build the capacity of the staff to become better consumers of expertise. Clarifying outcomes, sharing research and assisting staff to make connections between the needs surfaced in the study phase and the actions being planned are some of the areas in which the coach can assist. Depending on the knowledge and skill of the BASRC coach, they may be able to provide some of what is needed or act as a critical friend as options are surfaced. Otherwise, it is necessary to engage external support providers with the knowledge necessary to create the plan.

After the planning phase is complete, the BASRC Coach will then re-contract to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the coach and school site staff during the next phase of implementation, the Action Phase. Re-contracting models the importance of having clarity around roles and responsibilities and provides a framework against to measure efficacy for both the coach and the school administration and staff.

Act

During the Action Phase, leadership once again shifts. This time the school staff takes 70% of the responsibility, leaving 30% to the coach. The purpose of the coaching in this phase is to support the staff, usually in the form of the leadership team, to guide changes in teacher practice that lead to improved student achievement and closing of the achievement gap. Coaching activities during this phase include: building capacity to use Cycle of Inquiry as a continuous improvement process and acting as a critical friend to the leadership team.

Building Capacity to Use Inquiry

For BASRC, meeting student instructional needs means using the Cycle of Inquiry process to answer questions about skills students need and about teacher practices to address those needs. The Cycle of Inquiry is similar to the coaching process modeled at the school: look at data to determine a problem and questions to be answered, create measurable goals, create and implement a plan and then reflect on the results and determine the next question to be addressed. The BASRC coach often provides grade level/ department teams with tools to support their inquiry, such as student work protocols, and supports the teams to use the tools.

One model of coaching support is for the BASRC Coach to work with the leadership team to develop capacity for the members to lead grade level/ department teams in the steps of inquiry. Developing this capacity requires a time commitment from both the coach and leadership team. In another model the BASRC coach works with a school-based coach who serves the intermediary role of facilitating the grade level/ department teams while the leadership team members build capacity.

With or without this intermediary, the BASRC coach monitors progress towards the goals set out in the action plan through consistent reflective practice, coaching sessions with other BASRC coaches and interactions with formative evaluators working on the project. Regularly scheduled meetings with school administrators help maintain communication and focus in addition to providing coaching opportunities outside of the leadership team setting.

Acting as a Critical Friend

The coach also helps the leadership team identify needed resources and acts as a critical friend as decisions are made about resource allocation. A distributed leadership system creates a structure for two-way communication between the staff and administration and creates a decision-making body that can prioritize the work of the school with input from the remaining staff. This change in the system requires teachers to re-examine the values and beliefs they hold about the roles of teachers and administrators as they come to realize that one administrator can not support a staff taking on this level of reform. As a critical friend, the coach often acts as a process observer making explicit the choices and trade-offs being made. During any change process the tendency is to

all of which is included in the plan. Ideally, the action plan will include all the work of the school providing a realistic picture of the upcoming year. Teachers engaged in action planning often experience frustration because the daily requirements of their jobs don't disappear as they take on this new task. Coaches found that the earlier analysis of student achievement data could create a sense of urgency that maintained the momentum necessary during the Planning Phase. Finally, the coach supports the leadership team to take the final plan to the staff for ratification and any final adjustments.

Becoming Better Consumers of Expertise

Because the plan will require knowledge and skills in instructional materials and strategies as well as other areas such as meeting facilitation, the coach needs to build the capacity of the staff to become better consumers of expertise. Clarifying outcomes, sharing research and assisting staff to make connections between the needs surfaced in the study phase and the actions being planned are some of the areas in which the coach can assist. Depending on the knowledge and skill of the BASRC coach, they may be able to provide some of what is needed or act as a critical friend as options are surfaced. Otherwise, it is necessary to engage external support providers with the knowledge necessary to create the plan.

After the planning phase is complete, the BASRC Coach will then re-contract to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the coach and school site staff during the next phase of implementation, the Action Phase. Re-contracting models the importance of having clarity around roles and responsibilities and provides a framework against to measure efficacy for both the coach and the school administration and staff.

Act

During the Action Phase, leadership once again shifts. This time the school staff takes 70% of the responsibility, leaving 30% to the coach. The purpose of the coaching in this phase is to support the staff, usually in the form of the leadership team, to guide changes in teacher practice that lead to improved student achievement and closing of the achievement gap. Coaching activities during this phase include: building capacity to use Cycle of Inquiry as a continuous improvement process and acting as a critical friend to the leadership team.

Building Capacity to Use Inquiry

For BASRC, meeting student instructional needs means using the Cycle of Inquiry process to answer questions about skills students need and about teacher practices to address those needs. The Cycle of Inquiry is similar to the coaching process modeled at the school: look at data to determine a problem and questions to be answered, create measurable goals, create and implement a plan and then reflect on the results and determine the next question to be addressed. The BASRC coach often provides grade level/ department teams with tools to support their inquiry, such as student work protocols, and supports the teams to use the tools.

One model of coaching support is for the BASRC Coach to work with the leadership team to develop capacity for the members to lead grade level/ department teams in the steps of inquiry. Developing this capacity requires a time commitment from both the coach and leadership team. In another model the BASRC coach works with a school-based coach who serves the intermediary role of facilitating the grade level/ department teams while the leadership team members build capacity.

With or without this intermediary, the BASRC coach monitors progress towards the goals set out in the action plan through consistent reflective practice, coaching sessions with other BASRC coaches and interactions with formative evaluators working on the project. Regularly scheduled meetings with school administrators help maintain communication and focus in addition to providing coaching opportunities outside of the leadership team setting.

Acting as a Critical Friend

The coach also helps the leadership team identify needed resources and acts as a critical friend as decisions are made about resource allocation. A distributed leadership system creates a structure for two-way communication between the staff and administration and creates a decision-making body that can prioritize the work of the school with input from the remaining staff. This change in the system requires teachers to re-examine the values and beliefs they hold about the roles of teachers and administrators as they come to realize that one administrator can not support a staff taking on this level of reform. As a critical friend, the coach often acts as a process observer making explicit the choices and trade-offs being made. During any change process the tendency is to

revert to work as usual, so the coach's ability to surface questions about the work as it progresses is key to staying on track.

During the Action Phase accountability often becomes an issue. Who decides how collaboration time is spent? As mentioned earlier it is key to have a structure in place to surface issues raised by the teams as they work together, clear decision-making structures understood by all staff and communication systems to ensure everyone has input into and understands decisions. Without these systems and structures, the reform work often becomes mired in power struggles and the needs of students are ignored. A similar issue that surfaces is the demands of other grants or programs being implemented. The BASRC coach can be helpful by surfacing questions about priorities and surfacing conflicts that might remain below the surface.

Reflection

The final phase in this recursive coaching cycle is periodic collaborative reflection by the coach and school level leaders on the efficacy of their coaching consultations. These occasions provide coaches with an opportunity to, again, model a process of data-based inquiry. Coaches and their clients look at the data they have collected over the course of the consultation: these may be data about the efficacy of the coach's work, or the overall progress of the reform work at the school site, or a combination of the two. These reviews result in a new and/or modified contract on which the coaches continue their work with school leaders. The critical outcomes of this period are for coaches to both model data-based decision-making regarding the new scope of work for themselves and the school, and increased involvement by the coach in supporting and coaching around issues that promote better teaching and learning at the school site—the school's "technical core." (see Fig. 2) It is this phase of the coaching process that differentiates coaching as a continuous improvement tool from work as usual.

BASRC coaches engage in the reflection through a case study protocol shared with the team of coaches. In this way, they build their own capacity to coach as well as build consensus about what high leverage coaching looks like.

Tensions in Coaching

As BASRC coaches have worked with school personnel over the past two years, various tensions have arisen in the process of delivering their support. These tensions have emerged as a direct result of the sense of urgency coaches feel and schools experience (from external accountability demands and community members) around the persistence of the achievement gap and coaches orientation to their clients—as an inquiry-based, organic form of coaching support. Coaches constantly find themselves torn between providing “answers” they have regarding systems and structures that promote a continuous improvement process, and the need to build the understanding and capacity of their clients to enact those very systems, structures and curricular programs for themselves. This section of the paper explores these tensions and points to potential sources of resolution to them.

Whole school change and/or strategic program implementation

BASRC coaches have found a tension in their work between working on whole school change and working on implementation of a specific and strategic program. On the one hand, coaches are persuaded by research suggesting that for school improvement efforts to be systemic and sustainable, the unit of change must be at the school-level (Fullan, 1993^v).

On the other hand, they know that there are specific programmatic improvements that have great potential for positively impacting students on the wrong side of the achievement gap. For example, there is ample evidence of the importance of implementing an intensive intervention program for students reading two or more grades below grade-level (OERI, 2000; Peterson et al, 2000)^{vi}. A year’s worth of coaching can go into helping a school site to organize the time and resources necessary for getting this kind of program up and running. While this work may signal an important step in closing the achievement gap, it is not whole-school change.

What complicates their jobs is that there is no pat answer when facing this kind of choice. Finding an appropriate balance between working on whole-school change and working on a specific program is context dependent. If the momentum for school improvement is located with a core group of people with interested in a specific program, the strategic choice may be to begin with them with an eye towards broadening the sphere of change down the road. However, if there is evidence that working with a

particular group may alienate other potential stakeholders, then a more inclusive approach might be the call.

The use of inquiry to continuously reflect on the context in which BASRC coaches are working is an essential part of making choices about what level of change they should be working on. Through data collection and analysis they are better able to make informed decisions about where their coaching support might have the most impact helping schools to close the achievement gap. The tension still persists, but using inquiry helps them to be intentional about how they use their coaching resources.

Advocacy and/or facilitation

BASRC coaches have certain tenets that set the foundation for what they do. They believe that working to close the achievement gap is absolutely crucial. They believe that systematic inquiry helps schools and teachers to not only make better decisions, but interact in ways indicative of vibrant professional learning communities (Wenger, 1998; Zarrow, 2001). Also, coaches think that school leadership can make or break a reform effort. There are other areas essential in developing schools into better learning organizations, but equity, inquiry and leadership provide a core to guide the coaching work at BASRC. Coaches have opinions about the importance of equity, inquiry and leadership and are charged with advocating for these positions.

However, other beliefs about what they consider to be good coaching tempers this advocacy role with a role that is more facilitative. BASRC coaching is grounded in the belief that building strong relationships with our clients is fundamental to our efficacy. As discussed earlier in the paper, the initial study phase of our coaching work is largely about getting to know the people at the school site and the issues that concern them. Facilitating schools to make progress on issues that are most immediately relevant to them, even if we consider these issues to be only tangentially related to closing the achievement gap, is a way to foster the kind of productive communication and trust essential in building a good coaching relationship. In turn, building a good coaching relationship is a means to enhancing the receptivity of our clients and strengthening coach's capacity to act as effective advocates.

BASRC coaches have seen the balance between taking a more advocacy stance and a more facilitative stance to coaching shift as the school improvement work develops.

At first, the balance weighs more heavily towards a facilitative approach as the coach and school client learn to work with each other and build relationships. As productive relationships develop, the coach is better positioned to be more of an advocate and is better able to encourage the use of inquiry to close the achievement gap. Once the use of inquiry to focus on closing the achievement gap is embedded in a school, the BASRC coach once again takes a more facilitative approach to moving the work forward.

An ever-present challenge coaches face has to do with how much to push their organizational interests and how much to follow a school site's lead. They do not want to alienate the people they need to work with to close the achievement gap by being overly directive about the work that needs to get done. Yet, they simultaneously see the presence of an achievement gap as a profound inequity and a true moral imperative. There is a rub between their sense of urgency and the slow pace of organizational change.

Focus on content and process

Additionally, and related to the challenge coaches face in choosing to support whole-school, systemic reforms while simultaneously encouraging schools to utilize programmatic "best practices," is a third tension coaches encounter—modeling and advocacy of the inquiry process while also urging implementation of research-based instructional "best-practices" and programs. As BASRC coaches work closely with school leaders on *how* they engage their communities in continuous improvement (inclusion of multiple stakeholders, use of data to support decisions, and thoughtful, skilled facilitation), they also have a significant amount curricular knowledge (especially in the area of literacy) that they can and do impart when relevant to teacher and administrative leaders. This often happens when school leaders are floundering in their attempts to inquire their way to the "right answers." This creates an obvious tension since a process of data-based inquiry would likely produce improvement-in the long-run. Coaches have to balance the urgency of need (especially for students on the wrong side of the achievement gap—who do not have time to waste) against a process whose end is collective ownership of the reforms—which are potentially more likely to be enacted as a consequence of their being developed and agreed to by the school's leaders and their respective constituents.

One particular anecdote that illustrates this tension was when a coach was working with a secondary school on selection of a school-wide reading diagnostic assessment that could be administered to all students. The BASRC coach had received some professional development and done subsequent research into literacy assessments and knew some particular assessments that would likely be appropriate for their selection. However, he also knew that the school had not even reached full agreement that administration of such an assessment should be done at all. He was in a position of both consulting with the school's leaders around the reading diagnostic itself, but also, simultaneously worked with the school's leaders on development of a process intended to foster support of the school's staff for administration of the assessment (whose purpose was to ascertain the lower-level reading needs of students who were struggling throughout the student body, and then come up with appropriate interventions and structures to support those interventions).

Top-Down Vs. Bottom-up Change

A final tension that coaches face is in advocacy with leaders with whom they work in schools to take a leader-driven ("top-down") approach to reform or a more democratic and inclusive ("bottom-up") approach. BASRC coaches struggle to advocate balance around this tension, as do many of leaders in schools today. Sometimes collective decision-making is too slow for the kinds of quick decisions that need to be made in reforming schools. Worse yet, democratic decision-making can enable the masking of school community members' purposeful foot-dragging, since some may not want to eliminate a non-functional programmatic or pedagogical sacred cow, or, worse yet, address the race-based educational inequality that their school is implicated in reproducing. Meanwhile, coaches know that decisions that are imposed on school communities—no matter how laudable their goals, are not likely to be fully implemented without the consent of key stakeholders. Coaches struggle to hold and navigate this challenging and sometimes contradictory tension.

One field-based example of this was an instance where a coach, in working with a particular teacher leader, encountered a great deal of resentment on the part of the teacher leader because her principal was consistently making independent decisions that had an impact on the collective work of the school, and recently, a broad set of sweeping

decisions that impacted much of the school's academic program. The BASRC coach felt that the decisions that the principal was making were appropriate decisions, given their timing and need for immediate action to rectify the inequitable staffing and curricular issues the principal was attempting to address by acting unilaterally. However, the coach simultaneously knew that implementation of the principal's mandates would likely be incomplete, if at all, given the school-wide scope and impact of the decisions and lack of collective ownership. This ultimately led the coach to facilitate a conversation between the teacher leader and principal that led to an airing of the concern, explanation by the principal of the background and need for expedient decision to be made. The coach used the tension as an opportunity for greater dialogue and understanding among the key leaders and this led to a more thoughtful solution being advanced in the end.

Conclusion

This paper has articulated the philosophical approach and attendant process employed by the coaches who work for the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. The coaches use an inquiry-based model with leaders in their schools that is intended to have coaches understand the context in which they work, so as to best position themselves to build the capacity of those leaders to address educational inequity in teaching and learning at their respective schools. Although the model locates coaches in high-leverage situations to impact teaching and learning targeted at closing the "achievement gap," coaches often find themselves caught in a challenging set of tensions that often mirror those that educational leaders face in reforming schools in general. The key to addressing these tensions is for coaches to use them as "teachable moments" with their clients and be as transparent as possible in attempting to reconcile them. The ways that coaches make sense of and address the tensions inherent to changing intractable

educational norms and stasis that exist in challenging times, will do much to assist schools attempting similar improvements.

This need for coaches to be conscious of the tensions in their work and the need to continually reconcile or be explicit about addressing them is an important area for further inquiry into the process and efficacy of school-based coaching in general. Those working in the field and those investigating their work must continue to articulate and refine the tensions that they discover and investigate the core causes of those tensions and how they are resolved. Inquiry in this area will do much to improve a strategy that is gaining in currency, but needs greater clarity if it is to realize its potential benefits.

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ⁱⁱ The No Child Left Behind (reissue of the ESSA) is the latest and first federal foray into accountability without much attention to site-based capacity building, but states and local school districts have been enacting these reforms for the last five to ten years across the country.

ⁱⁱ Explain what this means in 15 words or less!

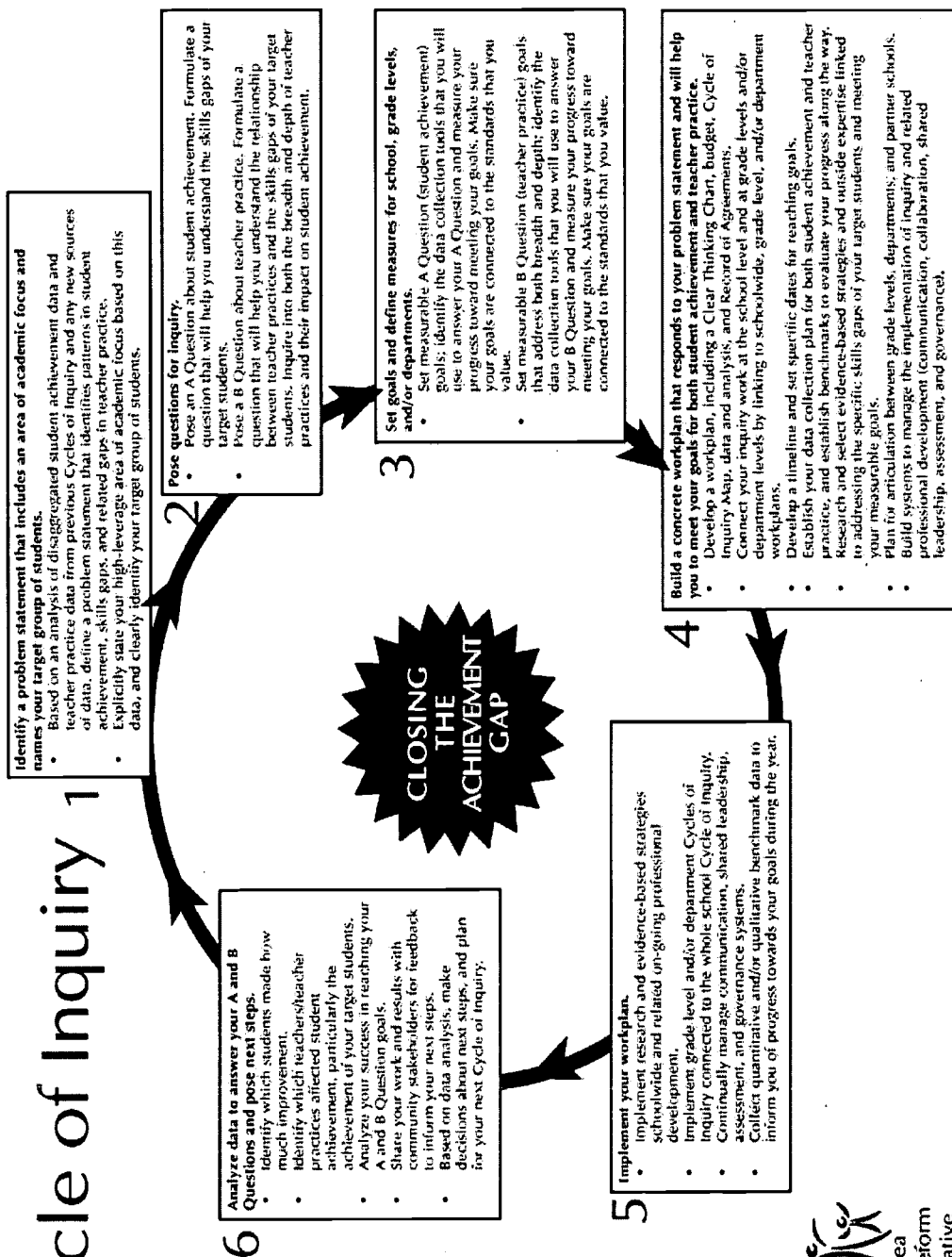
ⁱⁱⁱ The state CA's IIUSP external evaluators have this problem!

^{iv} See appendix # for details on the Cycle of Inquiry

^v Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: Falmer Press.

^{vi} U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). (2000). *National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students*.

Cycle of Inquiry 1





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