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Coaching Teachers Under Duress

Cathy A. Toll
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, tollc@uwosh.edu

Working in classrooms is more challenging than ever. Disruptions due to the pandemic, public scrutiny of accepted practices and materials, and demands to produce higher scores on inappropriate assessments are some of the significant sources of this duress (Barajas-Gonzalez, 2021; Bigras et al, 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Pressley, 2021; Strauss, 2021). Literacy coaches know that teachers are struggling, and while coaches want to help, they often don't know what to do. In many cases, the teachers they usually work with are distracted by other matters, and potential new teacher partners simply aren't interested in collaborating.

Literacy coaches are more important than ever because they provide up-close support at the point where teachers are feeling most challenged. When coaches partner with teachers to address what is occurring in their classrooms with their students, they help teachers to think deeply, address obstacles, and determine how to best move ahead for their own and their students' success.

A little about language: *Duress* refers to external forces that place pressure on a person. Many teachers are experiencing pressures of this kind, and it often leads to stress (Kraft et al., 2021). Kyriacou (2001) describes stress as "unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher (p. 28). The connection between stress and duress is elaborated by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) when they described stress as a "negative emotional experience … triggered by the teacher's perception that their work situation constituted a threat to their self-esteem or well-being" (cited in Kyriacou, 2001, p. 28). In other words, teachers' perceptions of forces outside their control – i.e., duress – lead to stress. The distinction between duress and stress seems important, in that it points to environmental conditions as well as personal responses that affect teachers.

This article provides six simple rules (Patterson et al., 2012) for literacy coaches working with teachers experiencing duress: 1) Be realistic, 2) respond to teachers, 3) adjust the scale, 4) keep eyes on the prize, 5) make a difference, and 6) stop the spiral. After providing a review of research on teacher duress and stress and a description of complex adaptive systems, I will explain each rule and provide practical strategies that literacy coaches can use starting today.

Literature Review: Teachers Experiencing Duress and Stress

The evidence is clear that teachers are experiencing increased duress and stress. A RAND Corporation survey of over 1000 teachers indicated that 78% had frequent job-related stress and 27% had symptoms of depression (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Pressley's (2021) survey of 359 teachers found increased teacher stress particularly due to "COVID-19-related anxiety, anxiety about teaching demands, parent communication, and administrative support" (p. 327). Even pre-COVID-19, many teachers reported high levels of stress (Herman et al., 2018; McCarthy, 2019). A survey of teachers by Carroll et al. (2021) identified four sources of stress: 1)

systemic stressors, referring to state and national policies, 2) organizational stressors, referring to workload, leadership, expectations, resources, and technology at the school level, 3) relational stressors, referring to interactions with peers, students, and students' parents, and 4) intrapersonal stressors, particularly an individual's methods for responding to duress and achieving work-life balance.

Researchers' recommendations for assisting teachers who are experiencing duress or stress generally fall into four overlapping categories: 1) develop teachers' self-efficacy, 2) strengthen teachers' resilience, 3) enhance supportive relationships, and 4) build internal capacity.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is described by Herman et al. (2020) as "teachers' self-belief that they can influence and control student outcomes regardless of students' backgrounds and behaviors" (p. 561). Evidence points to the positive effect of self-efficacy in helping teachers manage duress. Additionally, Ryan and Hendry (2022) suggest that greater teacher self-efficacy leads to greater effectiveness in teaching reading. In consideration of methods for strengthening teacher self-efficacy, professional development is routinely recommended to enhance teachers' sense that they can address classroom challenges (Arslan-Cansever et al., 2021; Harding, 2016; Loach, 2021; Marcolini et al., 2021).

Resiliency

Teacher resiliency has been described as "the ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one's competence in the face of adverse conditions" (Bobek, 2002, p. 202). In particular, resilience refers to one's response to adverse conditions, demonstrating an ability to persist and to maintain one's commitments in the face of challenges (Beltman, 2021, as cited in Wang, 2021). Mansfield et al. (2016) recommend building teacher resilience by strengthening trust and collaboration, providing professional learning opportunities, and sharing in decision making and problem-solving. Doney (2013) found that, contrary to some conceptualizations, resilience was not an innate quality but, rather, could be fostered by one's environment, particularly supportive relationships, a conclusion also drawn by Bobek (2002).

Supportive Relationships

Papatraianou & LeCornu (2014) found that professional relationships help when they provide listening, appreciation for efforts, recognition of mutual struggles, practical guidance, and encouragement to reflect upon one's thoughts and emotions. Similarly, Mansfield et al. (2016) viewed teacher-to-teacher relationships as essential for helping teachers experiencing duress and stress, noting

that peers often recognize colleagues' sources of stress and thus provide a reality check to what is occurring.

As a result of their study of teacher burnout, Fernet et al. (2012) suggest that support from both principals and coaches have the potential to lessen teachers' stress. Herman et al. (2020) also note the effect of environmental factors, recommending that educators, particularly principals, provide a positive school environment and offer professional development to ensure that teachers can do their job well.

Focusing on teacher duress during the COVID pandemic, Kraft et al. (2021) found that, "Teachers who could depend on supportive working conditions such as strong communication, fair expectations, and recognition of effort from the top, along with targeted professional development and meaningful collaboration with colleagues, were least likely to experience a dip in their sense of success (p. 750)."

Internal Capacity

Kyriacou (2001) advises that teachers experiencing stress take either direct action, such as becoming more organized or learning new instructional techniques, to minimize the source of stress, or engage in palliative techniques, such as meditation or exercise, to lessen the effects of stress-causing situations. Herman et al. (2018) group personal responses under the label "stress management" and recommend that schools provide opportunities to learn such practices. Carroll et al. (2021) found that teachers recognize the value of changed personal practices, such as meditation, exercise, better nutrition, and more sleep, but find it difficult to make such changes.

The literature on teacher duress and stress points to several conditions that can be influenced by literacy coaches when they serve as supportive colleagues, provide professional development, and build teachers' capacity to respond to challenging situations.

Theoretical Framework

An understanding of the complex adaptive systems within which they work can steer literacy coaches toward greater effectiveness. The sections below expand upon the three terms found in the phrase *complex adaptive systems,* in reverse order for ease in understanding.

System

A system is a collection of agents that interact with one another (Davis & Sumara, 2006). For example, a school classroom is a system, with many interacting agents, such as students, teachers, specialists, volunteers, classroom pets, and so on. A system has three characteristics: Something holds it together, such as a shared vision or the physical reality of working in the same space; there is diversity among the constituent elements, which provides the capacity for agents in the system to

influence one another; and there is interaction among the parts, provided by the exchange of information, energy, support, or anything else that provokes the system to evolve (Eoyang & Holladay, 2013). For instance, classrooms are held together because children are in the same physical space, identify with a label such as "grade three," have shared practices, and in myriad other ways are contained as a system. Additionally, the differences among the children and the adults working in that classroom allow for diversity that prompts growth in knowledge, skills, emotions, and perspectives as people engage with one another. And those engagements include the exchange of information as well as support from one another, communication with parents, extension of friendship, and many other ways that interactions take place.

Adaptive

Systems are adaptive, which means that the ongoing interactions of their components and with their environment leads to continual change (Waldrop, 1992). In schools, literacy coaches can observe the life of systems when they work with teacher teams. The interactions among team members alter their knowledge, behaviors, and perspectives as do the coach, administrators, students, and others. Close observation makes a coach aware that the team they worked with, say, at the start of the school year, is not the same as the team they work with mid-year, whether those changes are subtle or strong.

The term used to describe the constant variation that arises in complex adaptive systems is *emergence* (Waldrop, 1992). This term captures the continual change that takes place as the elements of complex adaptive systems interact. In many cases, you could call it learning (Davis et al., 2015).

Complex

A characteristic of complex adaptive systems is that they are a whole created of parts and also part of greater wholes (Eoyang & Holladay, 2013). For instance, a school staff is not just a conglomerate of teachers, administrators, teaching assistants, clerical staff, custodians, and so forth. Rather, the school staff itself has its own qualities, such as priorities, manners of interactions, shared visions, and disagreements, and so do the parts of the staff that form their own systems, such as teacher teams or disciplinary departments.

Educators tend to think of their work as hierarchical: individual teachers are ruled by school administrators, who are ruled by district or regional administrators, who are ruled by state or provincial law. However, education as a complex adaptive system is not like an old-fashioned grandfather clock, in the sense that each piece is a cog that together makes a timepiece run. Rather, the field of education is more like participants at an arena concert: individuals come together with their own ideas about the concert and their participation in it, and then they take on group

characteristics as, say, when they chant the performer's name together before the concert begins. As the performance proceeds, the artist interacts with the audience in ways that change them, leading some to sing along or wave the light on their mobile phone during a ballad or to leave feeling excited, enriched, or sometimes disappointed. Thus, an arena concert is much different from the workings of a clock; it is less predictable, and the elements combine in ways that shift during the event. Similarly, the schools in which literacy coaches work are made up of individuals who each have their own ideas, priorities, and practices. However, as they interact in myriad ways, they take on group characteristics and the school as well as individuals are changed.

The nested nature of complex adaptive systems is illustrated in Figure 1, which displays on the left a hierarchy in which each level is controlled by the level above it and on the right a scaled system in which each component influences and is influenced by other parts of the system. This distinction is important to literacy coaches because it steers them and their teacher partners away from feeling helpless, unable to address matters that are governed by those "in charge." Sometimes called the "butterfly effect," because a small change, say, stepping on a butterfly, can affect the ecology of an entire region, this phenomenon is important in a time when many educators feel helpless. It demonstrates that all parts of the system affect other parts, whether with small efforts or large ones; every part of a system has the potential to affect every other part.

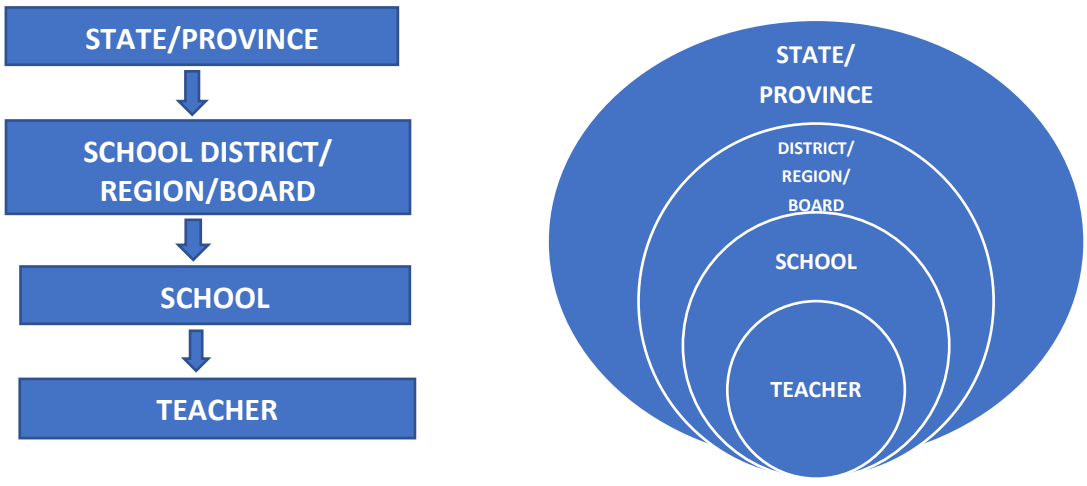

Figure 1. Comparison of hierarchical and nested perspectives on change.

Simple Rules

The notion of simple rules derives from work that computer scientist Craig Reynolds led to understand how large flocks of birds successfully fly in unison, often in patterns known as murmurations. Reynolds (2001) recognized that these complex flights can actually be reduced to three simple rules: steer to avoid crowding local flockmates, steer toward the average heading of local flockmates, and steer to move toward the average position of local flockmates. Similarly, Patterson, et al. (2012) recognize that complex phenomena in education often can be reduced to a few principles that they call simple rules. I have applied the same approach to the phenomenon of literacy coaching, using concepts about complex adaptive systems, research on teacher stress and duress, and my own experience as a coach in PK-12 settings, a school principal in two elementary schools, a consultant for coaches and school leaders throughout the United States as well as in Canada and Australia, a university instructor preparing teachers to serve as literacy leaders and coach of coaches in multiple school districts, to form the basis for the recommendations that follow. Each section below addresses one simple rule that will enable coaches to support teachers under duress.

Simple Rule: Be Realistic

When coaches work with teachers under duress, they often find teachers feeling overwhelmingly negative. Occasionally, to counteract the urge to be negative, teachers or coaches take an unrealistically optimistic view of the situation, pretending that everything is going well and will get even better. Neither is realistic and both can add to teachers' stress.

I advise coaches to root their collaborations in a realistic perspective about what can and cannot be done. After all, our world is neither all bad or all good, and the same is true about educators' experiences. When a person is realistic, they can see both obstacles and potentiality and can act from a clear viewpoint.

One method coaches can use to assist teachers in being realistic is to map interdependent pairs, which enables teachers to conceptualize their options. Interdependent pairs are ideas or activities that oppose one another: do more of one and you automatically do less than the other (Toll, 2022; Johnson, 2014). Teachers under duress often feel trapped in an either-or manner of thinking, perceiving only two options for action, neither of which is palatable. However, when coaches help teachers to plot those options – those interdependent pairs – on a continuum, the range of choices between the poles becomes visible. Coaches and teachers can discuss where they currently are on the continuum and then select a realistic spot to aim for.

For instance, while collaborating with Brianna, a grade six teacher, Terry, a literacy coach, learns that Brianna struggles in deciding whether to assign writing topics or allow students to choose their own. Terry draws a continuum and places

"Assign topics" on one end and "Students choose" on the other (see Figure 2). Then, Terry asks Brianna where she sees herself right now. Brianna points to a spot near the "Assign topics" end of the continuum, which is where Terry places an *X*. After further discussion, Brianna then determines that she would like to be nearer the middle between the two poles, and Terry draws a heart there on the continuum. Their collaboration then became a project to determine how Brianna could work toward that desired balance between the poles.

Figure 2. Example of interdependent pairs, with X marking current situation and "heart" indicating desired state.

Not all conversations about interdependent pairs lead to a choice near the middle. Depending upon the teacher and the context, decisions could rest anywhere along the continuum. The value of this activity is that it moves teachers to a realistic perspective about what they can accomplish in the complex system in which they work, moving them away from feeling stuck between two less-than-desirable opposing choices. Additionally, it gives the coaching partnership a desired outcome to aim for.

Simple Rule: Respond to Teachers

As illustrated in Figure 1, the nested nature of systems means that issues in education might be addressed at many levels. For example, a literacy coach who observes that students are not drawing on background knowledge as they read might work with school district leaders to adjust the curriculum, with the school principal to access new instructional materials, with teachers to collaborate in altering instruction, or by directly intervening with those students who need help. The appropriate scale for coaching is with teachers. After all, teachers are coaches' "clients" (Toll, 2018).

What's more, the evidence about teacher duress points to the value of listening as a way to support teachers (Mansfield et al., 2016; Papatraianou & LeCornu, 2014). When literacy coaches attend to what teachers have to say and respond accordingly, they show appreciation, one of the five human concerns that Fisher & Shapiro (2006) have identified as important when people are under duress. Such appreciation conveys that teachers are heard, understood, and valued.

Coaches who wish to respond to teachers have three tasks. First, ask open, honest questions. Such questions are true questions, not suggestions masked as questions, and are potentially answered in a number of ways rather than having one answer deemed correct by the coach (Palmer, 2004, cited in Toll, 2018). For

instance, “What do you think is going on when students respond that way?” is an open, honest question, whereas “Do you think the students are bored?” is not, given that it proffers the coach’s assessment of the situation.

Second, responsiveness to teachers involves paraphrasing what one hears, to demonstrate careful listening and to ensure accuracy in understanding. For instance, if a teacher tells a coach, “I’m trying to incorporate writing into my science lessons, but it is not going well,” the coach might respond with, “I hear that you are finding it hard to incorporate writing into science lessons.”

Finally, responding to teachers requires that coaches accept their teacher partners just as they are (Toll, 2018). Without such acceptance, coaches are going through the motions but not really in relationship with the person in front of them. Acceptance means that coaches turn off their judging minds, let go of personal agendas, and believe that their teacher partners want to do well and succeed.

Simple Rule: Adjust the Scale

I find adjusting the scale to be especially helpful when coaching teams. Teams sometimes strive to resolve all differences and to “get on the same page,” meaning everyone is doing the same thing. This uniformity sometimes may be helpful, but often it is not needed and may impede a team’s productivity. As illustrated in Figure 1, complex systems operate at many levels. It may be helpful for teams to move from focusing on the actions of individual team members and instead to think at the scale of the team. In that way, they attend to team concerns without necessarily requiring individuals to be identical. For instance, instead of asking, “How can we make sure that each person on this grade-level team uses the same read-aloud as the others,” a team might focus on the question, “How can we support one another in making read-alouds effective?”

Two tools may help coaches in leading teams to consider scale. One, the Landscape Diagram (Patterson et al., 2012) assists team members in considering the level of looseness or tightness that is optimal for decisions and practices. Figure 3 illustrates a diagram created by Patti, a coach working with a kindergarten team. The teachers were exploring options for instruction in phonemic awareness (PA) and found that they differed in preferred practices, with some using music and rhymes to draw attention to phonemes and others using a packaged program. Patti invited team members to look at the diagram in Figure 3 and determine the degree to which they needed to teach phonemic awareness identically. (Note: All examples in this article are composites of real-life situations, with names and details changed to honor confidentiality.)

On a landscape diagram, the bottom-left corner represents actions that are identical for everyone and the top-right represents a “do-your-own-thing” situation. There are situations in which either corner could be productive, and often a space somewhere in the middle seems most helpful. In discussing the diagram, the

kindergarten team decided that it was important that everyone was clear on the expectations for phonemic awareness instruction, as found in the district curriculum, but that the methods for bringing the curriculum to life might vary. The team identified their "sweet spot" on the diagram, which Patti marked with an "X," and they then collaborated in being clear about the district's expectations for phonemic awareness instruction while also sharing – but not requiring – the various instructional practices they used.

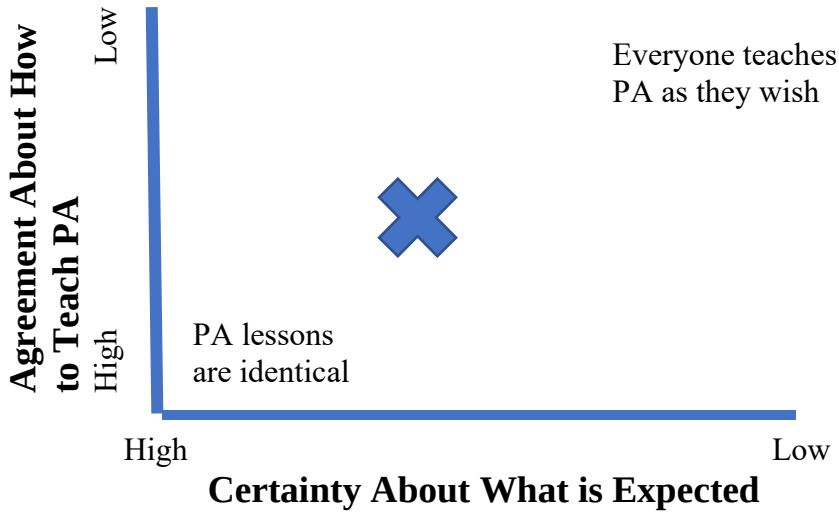

Figure 3. Landscape Diagram (Patterson et al., 2012) to determine the degree to which teachers must engage children in phonemic awareness activities.

Another useful tool is a visual display of similarities and differences among group members, which teams can use to determine which differences really matter (Human Systems Dynamics Institute, 2016). For instance, Alonzo, a middle school literacy coach, worked with a team made up of four language arts teachers and two special educators. When they found themselves struggling to agree on the place for standardized conventions of English in writing instruction, Alonzo facilitated the group's development of the chart in Figure 4, which lists members' similarities and differences in regard to the issue.

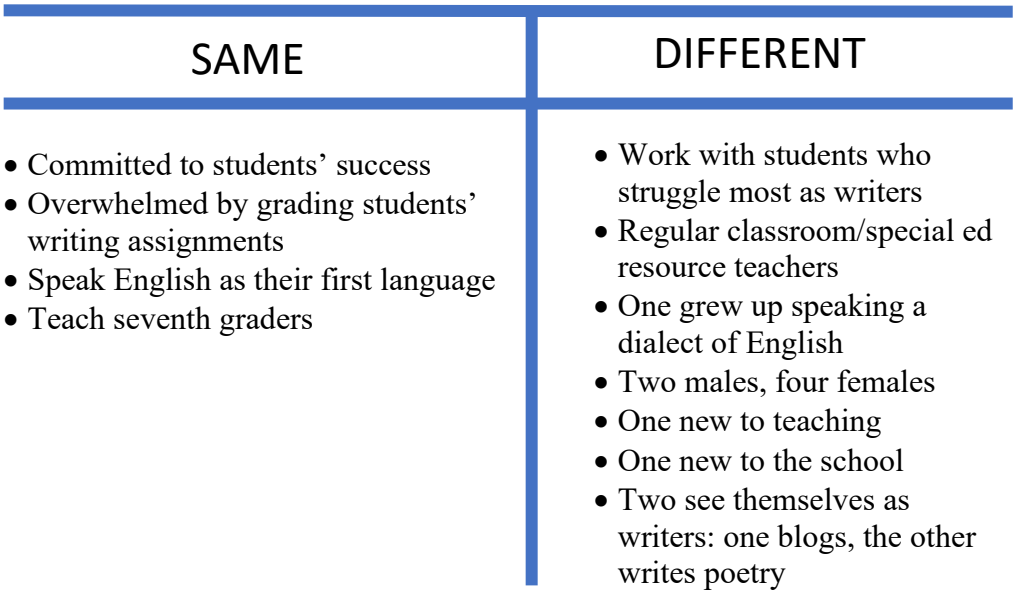

Figure 4. Team members' identification of similarities and differences among them in relation to teaching writing. Adapted with permission from the Human Systems Dynamics Institute.

As team members considered the column labeled "Same," they concluded that what mattered was that they were all committed to student success – an important reminder of shared values – and that they were all overwhelmed by grading student writing, leading to a shared focus on responding to writing in a way that was most helpful but without unnecessary demands on teachers' time. Then, as the team discussed differences, they concluded that, in relation to the topic, the differences that mattered most were the reality that special educators worked with students who struggle most as writers and that one teacher learned to write as a child while speaking a dialect of standardized English, which offered a perspective possibly shared by several of their students. Additionally, the team saw as important the fact that there were two teachers among them who write for non-teaching purposes, which provided insights from authentic writing processes. With their attention focused on similarities and differences that mattered most, the team's conversation become richer, as they leaned more on one another to listen and learn, and problem-solving became more productive.

Adjusting scale by putting the focus on the team, not individuals, enables teams to consider two important aspects of complex systems: what holds them together – i.e., what contains them -- and what differences matter most (Patterson et al., 2012).

Simple Rule: Keep Eyes on the Prize

The simple rule of keeping eyes on the prize means that coaches and teachers stay focused on what matters. Complex systems have many components and are in constant flux as they adapt to their environment and external interventions (Eoyang & Holladay, 2013). It is easy for coaches and their teacher partners to get lost in the morass of issues facing teachers under duress and, even when they think they are moving forward, to get distracted by new or more pressing matters. A service coaches provide is helping teachers to think about what really matters and remain focused upon it.

Coaches assist in developing a focus when they learn about their teacher partners' priorities. I find it helpful to ask questions that indirectly get at matters of importance for teachers, such as:

- If you wore a t-shirt with your teaching motto on it, what would it say?
- If we could bottle your teaching talent and sell it, what would be on the ingredients label?
- What is a peak experience you have had as a teacher?

Coaches can use teachers' responses to one of these questions as a springboard to probe further, using good questioning and paraphrasing to understand teachers' priorities. Then, the follow-up question becomes, "What obstacles prevent you from fully bringing your priorities to life in your classroom?" The responses to this question likely will provide a list of items that might be addressed in the coaching partnership. As the work continues, coaches and teachers can remember the priorities identified by teachers to help them address obstacles in a productive manner.

For instance, Kurt, a grade one teacher, identified the ingredients on an imaginary bottle of his teaching talent to read, "Chock full of care, wants every student to be excited about learning, understands child development, musical, artistic, and with a dash of humor." The subsequent conversation led his coach, Valentina, to understand the value Kurt placed on music and art in his classroom, both because he liked to share with children the songs he wrote and performed on guitar and because he wanted to use the arts to help students grow as readers and writers. When asked about obstacles to fully bringing these priorities to life, Kurt felt the required reading instructional program prevented him from using music and art to enhance children's engagement and understanding of what they read. This prompted Kurt and Valentina to delve into a project of incorporating the arts into literacy instruction. Several times along the way, though, they benefited from reminding themselves why they were doing what they were doing – that is, remembering the proverbial "prize." They were having so much fun being creative that, without returning to Kurt's focus on enhancing children's engagement and

understanding of what they read, they easily could have veered in a different direction.

Simple Rule: Make a Difference

The simple rule of making a difference comes from evidence that teachers' stress is often reduced when they increase their effectiveness and therefore their self-efficacy (Arslan-Cansever et al., 2021; Loach, 2021; Marcolini et al., 2021). When coaches help their partners overcome obstacles to the success of their students, teachers become more optimistic that they can address challenges and increasingly see themselves as effective. Simply put, nothing succeeds like success!

Having a road map – a problem-solving process – is essential for literacy coaches who want to make a difference. The Student Success Cycle (Toll, 2023), seen in Figure 5, provides such a plan.

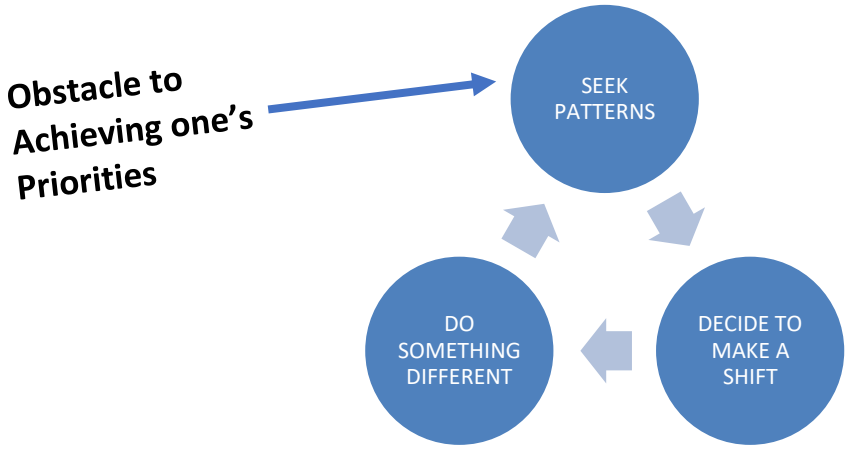

Figure 5. The Student Success Cycle (adapted from Toll, 2023).

Literacy coaches begin the Student Success Cycle by focusing on teachers and keeping eyes on the prize, as outlined above. Coaches do this by learning about teachers' priorities and obstacles that prevent them from fully realizing those priorities and selecting one obstacle upon which to focus. Then, coaches and teachers together explore that obstacle, using descriptive conversation and relevant data, and seek patterns.

Eoyang & Holladay (2013) define patterns as "similarities, differences, and connections that have meaning across space and time" (p. 43) and suggest that those seeking patterns might look for generalizations, exceptions, contradictions, surprises, and puzzles. Pattern-seeking is a valuable practice in literacy coaching because patterns help teachers to see the workings of the complex systems in which they teach. For instance, Warrin, a grade four teacher, was collaborating with Naya, a literacy coach, to think about why a small group of his students were not succeeding in small group reading instruction. Naya asked a series of questions,

found in Figure 6, and together they identified several patterns: 1) students approach the small group with a negative attitude, 2) one student often begins productively and then his attention wanes, 3) two students' formative assessments indicate more success than is seen on standardized assessments, 4) Warrin seems less-relaxed with this group because he is anxious about helping them succeed, and 5) the students do enjoy listening when Warrin reads aloud during other parts of the workshop. This pattern-seeking took place over two coaching conversations, with time in between for Warrin to pay closer attention to the small group and for Naya to gather data.

After identifying patterns, coaches help teachers to select one pattern they wish to shift. A shift indicates that the system will change in one or more of these ways:

- The system is held together more tightly or loosely. For instance, a school leader creates a committee to enable each grade level to be represented when decisions are made about library purchases or a literacy coach determines that it will be more helpful to meet with a group of teachers individually rather than as a team.
- Differences in the system are enhanced or reduced. For instance, a teacher gives students more options for how to do a project or a teacher creates a rubric to ensure that all students' projects have the same criteria for success.
- Interactions among parts of the system are increased or decreased. For instance, a teacher team decides to meet weekly rather than biweekly, or a teacher eliminates a group inquiry project because students' interactions are unproductive.

Once a shift is selected, teachers enact it in their classroom and collect evidence to determine its effect. Based upon that evidence, teachers may decide to continue with the shift, tweak the shift, or try something else. And, as suggested by Figure 5, the Student Success Cycle continues indefinitely, with ongoing identification of obstacles, pattern seeking, and enactments of shifts. In this way, teachers and coaches address obstacles to their success, look at patterns rather than isolated incidents, and think carefully about the changes they are making. By enacting a process such as the Student Success Cycle, coaches help teachers to be more effective and thereby reduce stress.

Generalizations

- What do you notice when this group is together?
- How do the students come into the small group space?
- What are your goals for the group right now?
- How do you form your small groups?
- What is the structure of your small group time?
- What materials are you using?
- What kinds of behaviors do you notice in the students?

Exceptions

- Do any of the students ever participate more actively? Who? When?
- Has there been a time when the students did make progress?
- Do you see more success for these students in other parts of the reading workshop?

Contradictions

- When you look at standardized assessment data and your formative assessments for these students, what do you notice?
- Is there a difference between the students' behavior in this small group and their behaviors at other times in the day?
- How does your success with this group differ from your success with other groups?

Surprises

- When you start a day's lesson, what do you hope will happen? What does happen?

Puzzles

- What do the data from running records tell you?
- What might explain these students' lack of interest in reading?
- Why does Warrin feel anxious about this group?

Figure 6. Questions a literacy coach asked a teacher whose students were not progressing in small group instruction.

Simple Rule: Stop the Spiral

The study of complex adaptive systems makes clear that individual agents in a system make a difference in how the system functions. This means that literacy coaches have the potential to add to or decrease the duress and stress being experienced by teachers not only in their one-to-one interactions but also in their work with teams and the entire staff. What's more, the components of a system are networked, meaning they are connected in various ways, depending upon the

structure of the system (David & Sumara, 2008). In schools, coaches are often "hubs" in the network that comprises the school staff, meaning that they are better connected to more people and are central points through which information and resources pass, making their words and actions even more significant when considering teacher duress. I have four recommendations for coaches who wish to disrupt the spiral of negativity that may be occurring in their school.

- Don't add to the duress. Coaches might reduce external demands on teachers through actions such as scheduling one fewer meeting per month or avoiding in-class observations that feel judgmental.
- Don't make it about you. Sometimes coaches add to conversations by talking about their own duress or stress, which fails to help their teacher partners.
- Do manage your own duress and stress. Coaches need their own support system, which is often best comprised of other coaches who truly understand the role, and their own internal methods for handling stress. Additionally, adding to their own success by learning additional coaching practices and perspectives will increase coaches' self-efficacy.
- Seek joy. Joy is different from happiness. It is the ability to be optimistic and to see the good in the world even when faced with difficult situations. This should not be interpreted as a Pollyanna-like perspective that ignores challenges or pretends that obstacles don't exist. Rather, it is the ability to trust oneself and find goodness in one's world even while addressing difficulties. For many, practices such as yoga, meditation, qigong, or prayer help (see Cunningham & Falk, 2020, for their findings that a focus on joy enhances teacher professional development).

Conclusion

The six simple rules in this article point to the importance of paying attention. As Patterson et al. (2012) state,

> The more we understand about what is happening, the more likely it is that we can identify options for action that can set the conditions for patterns we want to see. And the more we watch the system closely, the more we are learning. (p. 37)

Paying attention helps coaches to respond especially well when teachers are under duress. Additionally, understanding the manner in which classrooms, teacher teams, school staffs, and others in education function enables literacy coaches to bring the science of complex adaptive systems to their work.

When literacy coaches address situations realistically, they help teachers to feel seen and understood. When coaches respond to teachers' concerns and interests, they increase teachers' perceptions of a supportive environment. When literacy coaches adjust the scale of the work, they make collaborations manageable in challenging times. When coaches keep their focus on desired outcomes, they help teachers to see the results of their efforts. When coaches help teachers to make a difference, they increase self-efficacy and feelings of success. And when coaches stop the spiral of stress and frustration, they increase teachers' agency in achieving student success.

These six simple rules will increase coaches' experiences of success, self-efficacy, and agency as well. After all, when teachers are under duress, coaches often are as well. There are methods for moving through difficult times and maintaining one's ability to function well. These simple rules will help.

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