COACHING TOWARD TRANSFORMATION: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THREE-SECOND-GRADE WRITING TEACHERS

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Abstract

This article captures lessons learned while coaching a team of writing teachers across a poetry writing unit of study. Because of the heightened pressure of successful implementation of curricular programs, coaching can become focused solely on implementation of resources with fidelity, which can neglect the art of teaching. This article captures coaching techniques used to shift away from conformity and towards transformation in teaching.

I really love teaching writing, like I actually love writing today! -Mrs. Meadows (pseudonym)

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Joy in teaching often disappears under the veil of mandatory curricular programs. When school districts adopt curricular resources, they often accompany the materials with mandated training and requirements to implement with fidelity. The word fidelity values compliance. Young, et al. (2002) argues against compliant teaching, explaining, "effective teaching is a dynamic process that requires agency and creativity" and teachers should "make artful shifts based on the needs of students in specific contexts" (p. i). Therefore, effective teachers draw on both the art and science of teaching.

Programs that ask to be implemented with fidelity neglect the complexity of teaching readers and writers and the myriad of decisions teachers must make to individualize and differentiate instruction in their classroom. That is, implementing programs with fidelity loses sight of the art of teaching. It is within those spaces when teachers combine what they know about effective practice and the needs of their individual students that artful teaching can occur (Young, et al., 2022). While programs should always be implemented with a level of integrity to ensure continuity, strictly adhering to a program without responsive decision-making can have negative effects on both teachers and their students.

The quote above captured from Mrs. Meadows highlights the result of artful teaching of writing, and ultimately her the newfound joy she discovered as a writing teacher. This statement came in the middle of a coaching cycle focused on supporting a second-grade poetry writing unit of study in the last grading period of the school year. From the start, Mrs. Meadows had very little confidence in her abilities for teaching writing due to prior negative experiences and misunderstandings. Instead of finding joy in the writing classroom and artfully teaching the subject, she approached it with apprehension and dread. Previous experiences with coaches and professional learning experiences that pushed for conformity and blind program implementation prevented her from seeing possibilities in herself as a writing teacher and her students as writers.

This article explores coaching strategies that move away from strict program fidelity and toward instilling a sense of joy in teachers by valuing the artful teaching that occurs within their

everyday decision making. The ideas presented in this article are grounded on the findings from a larger research study (Kerbs, 2022), as well as existing literature on effective professional learning for classroom teachers. This article illuminates my own personal coaching story and the lessons I've learned while working side-by-side with teachers, striving for joyful professional learning experiences, reflecting on the lessons learned from this study as a coach, using excerpts of conversations with three of the teacher participants.

In this article, I argue that the collaborative relationship between a coach and classroom teachers can shift away conformity and toward transformation by focusing on supporting teacher decision-making, and ultimately, student learning. This requires us, as literacy leaders, to lean into the discomfort, find our voice, and inspire change by creating systems that focuses on the art of teaching and releases decisions to the classroom teachers.

Related Literature on Coaching

Instructional coaching is a powerful type of teacher professional learning that can lead to positive changes in both teacher practice and student learning (Kraft, et al., 2018). While the models and structures for coaching has evolved in many ways across the past several decades (Ippolito et al., 2021, p. 179), coaching still remains one of the most effective job-embedded forms of professional learning for teachers. In fact, in the U.S., two in five schools are estimated to have a reading coach, one in four a math coach, and two thirds a non-subject specific coach (Hill & Paypay, 2022).

Simply defined, coaching is "an observation and feedback cycle in an ongoing instructional or clinical situation" (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p.170). While the definition of coaching varies by model, the seminal work provided by Joyce and Showers captures the essence of coaching as a cycle focused on improving practice. However, Kraft et al. (2018) constructed a revised definition of coaching that encompasses coaching as professional learning, arguing that coaching is individualized, intensive, sustained, and focused. The relationship between a coach and a teacher is one aspect that ensures that the work accomplished together is individualized and productive.

Effective coaching should address the everyday challenges teachers face in the classroom, rather than arbitrary concepts that are out of context and irrelevant to teachers (Wei et al., 2009). When coaching is grounded in everyday problems-of-practice, the practices become sustainable and transfer beyond that one coaching cycle. This form of hands-on and job-embedded learning is valuable because it asks teachers to directly connect what they are learning and apply it in the context of their own classroom (Wei et al., 2009).

We know that an instructional coach positively influences both teacher practice and student outcomes (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Kraft et al., 2018), yet the implementation varies greatly between each context. Ippolito et al. (2021) says, "Coaching programs are only as successful as the degree to which they are supported" (p. 184). While there is great potential in literacy coaching as professional learning and an even greater need amidst our current educational climate, it must exist within "support systems that bolster these coaches" (Ippolito et al., 2021, p. 184). When student learning is at the heart of all stakeholders and leaders rally around meaningful professional learning experiences through literacy coaching, a culture of collaboration thrives.

Models of Coaching

A Literacy Leadership Brief from the International Literacy Association (ILA) titled, *Literacy Coaching for Change: Choices Matter,* outlined three models of coaching: coaching to conform, coaching into practice, and coaching for transformation. In this brief, the main argument is that there is a distinct difference between the three models and the choice between each model matters for intended results.

When coaching to conform, the coach is situated as an expert, supporting the implementation of a program. This tends to be a very common model of coaching across many school districts in the United States. In fact, the model of coaching to conform was born out of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy, which resulted in many coaches taking on "the role of supporting the implementation of an innovation, policing the use of the innovation as designed, or both," (ILA, 2018, p. 2).

Instead of focusing on the improvement of skills, practices, and ultimately student learning, coaching to conform asks teachers to implement a program with fidelity, which runs the risk of losing the art of teaching. When using a curricular program with fidelity, teachers are asked to adhere strictly to the pacing guide, text selections, and teaching script (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). While teachers are implementing a program as intended, oftentimes responsive decision making, which creates the artful practice of teaching, is lost due to the pressure of policing the implementation of the program.

Because of the heightened pressure of successful utilization of the program, this type of coaching and professional learning is often situated in one-shot workshops, instead of job-embedded learning experiences that researchers contend result in the most gains for teacher professional learning and student outcomes (Ball & Cohen, 1999;; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Little, 1993). In turn, coaching becomes tainted with evaluative tools and authoritative pressure to comply, which makes a culture of continuous learning nearly impossible to thrive.

So, while districts have invested time and money in programs and coaches, the policies enforcing fidelity can have negative effects. Such policies can narrow teacher discretion, limit flexible decision-making in response to individual student needs, discourage effective instructional practices, and neglect dynamic and complex contexts for many schools (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond, et al., 1999; Shelton, 2010; Shulman, 1987; Sykes, 1999). Teaching becomes more about the presentation of information without personalization to the content or delivery (Shelton, 2010). Simply put, the art and joy of teaching is stripped away.

The next model, coaching into practice, involves active reflection on instructional choices and student outcomes (ILA, 2018). This model of coaching is typically completed in a cycle involving three phases: pre-conference, observation, and post-conference. Instead of focusing on feedback from only the observation of the coach, as with the model of coaching to conform, this model values feedback collected from the students in the room using both anecdotal observations and student work. This model of coaching into practice is built on mutual trust and respect (ILA, 2018).

During this model, a coach is often asking reflective questions instead of offering solutions. By doing so, the coach positions herself as a reflective thinking partner, instead of an expert, empowering the teacher to engage in long-term, self-reflective practices. This stance

shifts away from simply offering advice, and toward helping teachers think more deeply and broadly about their instructional decisions.

Although coaches using reflective questioning is a prominent tactic in this model, they should veer away from solely asking a series of questions, and instead focus on a process of inquiry (Reynolds, 2020). In doing so, the coaching conversation elicits critical thinking and problem solving. Reynolds (2020) explains, "inquiry helps the people being coach discern gaps in their logic, evaluate their beliefs, and clarify fears and desires affecting their choices" (p. 1). When asking questions, coaches seek answers, but when using inquiry, coaches invite insight (Reynolds, 2020).

The final model, coaching for transformation, is comparable to coaching into practice in that it invites teacher reflection. However, when coaching for transformation, teachers are asked to examine their own assumptions and biases, creating fundamental shifts needed for sustained change. Instead of coming up with a solution to a problem, the coach guides the teacher in reflecting on and changing the problem itself, engaging in double-loop learning. Thus, the intent of coaching for transformation is challenging deeply held assumptions that surround common problems-of-practice (ILA, 2018).

A transformational coaching model emphasizes a coach's role in guiding the teacher in a deeper understanding of what is happening, transforming his or her interpretation to achieve greater effect. In turn, both the coach and teacher must be willing to get uncomfortable and vulnerable as challenging assumption can lead to the disruption of traditionally held roles, hierarchies, and systems.

Hawkins and Smith (2010) identified four key elements of transformational coaching. Although their work was targeted toward executive coaching in business, the framework can be applied to instructional coaching, as well. The first element is shifting the meaning scheme, which involves shifting teacher beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions, leading to perspective transformation. The next element, working on multiple levels at the same time, involves the coach leading the teacher to be able to think, feel, and do differently for the work to be truly transformational. Another element involves a shift in the room, where the coach works to move a teacher who might be stuck in a singular perspective. The final element entails a progression through four levels of engagement (facts, behaviors, personal feelings, assumptions/values/motivational roots) to shift from merely problem solving to a transformational and sustainable change.

The CLEAR model (Hawkins & Smith, 2010) is one way to approach coaching for transformation. This acronym is a process that can be applied to a coaching session, but is not intended to be a lockstep, prescriptive approach to coaching. The first phase, contracting, represents a three-way relationship between the coach, teacher, and school. This iterative process is returned to throughout the coaching relationship to ground and focus the work on the larger, more important goals. The next phase, listening, captures the process of listening to what is voiced by the teacher, but also what is not voiced, to really understand the problem-of-practice. This phase is essential for building a trusting relationship and can help create transformational change. In the explore phase, the coach uses skillful questioning to create a wider range of options and possibilities for the coaching session, "enabling the coachee to explore the situation from different standpoints, generating new perspectives and possibilities" (Hawkins & Smith, 2010, p. 239). Next, the action phase creates a space for rehearsal, roleplay, and feedback, as the coach and teacher address ways to approach the problem-of-practice. The final phase, review,

allows the coach and teacher to reflect on the coaching session, building confidence towards approaching similar problems-of-practice in the future.

Transformational coaching is multilayered and requires the coach and teacher to be attentive to what needs to change within the system. ILA (2018) specifies, "If the coach's goal is to participate in challenging the fundamental processes of schooling and literacy instruction, then the choice would be coaching for transformation" (p. 6). When transformational coaching occurs, a coach will notice a shift in a teacher's physical response, behavior, tone, and mindset (Hawkins & Smith, 2010).

In conclusion, districts and campuses have choices to make when implementing a coaching model, and the coaches within those models position themselves differently depending on the model selected. It is not that one model is better than the other, but each model serves different purposes and achieves different outcomes.

My Coaching Story

My story as a literacy coach is far too common. When I was hired as the sole district-wide coach for ten elementary campuses in a small suburban school district, my role was left undefined, and the job expectations were ever changing. I felt torn between my identity as a classroom teacher and my new leadership role. I witnessed decisions made without the voices of teachers being heard. I felt called to advocate, protect, and fight for our teachers, often serving as a liaison between school buildings and the district's central office.

Even though my role was undefined, I was mostly put in a position to coach to conform, as the district had just adopted a new writing curriculum and was implementing a new portfolio assessment system for writing. Instead of coaching cycles, I was mostly asked to train teachers on how to navigate a new curriculum resource and implement lessons according to the district-created scope and sequence. While the district invested in some meaningful professional learning for me as a coach, our model was largely unsustainable and could simply not support the needs with just one coach for all elementary school campuses.

The new district mandate was initiated with good intentions, striving to ensure all students received quality writing instruction across the district. Unfortunately, the teachers filling the classrooms in our district were left out of the process of adopting new materials, so most were not only caught by surprise from the initiative, but many were also left frustrated, confused, and distressed with one more thing add to their plate. Consequently, while teachers complied to collect the writing assessments, most just filed them away, never using them to inform instruction. The burden of analyzing and scoring writing samples was a frequent complaint of teachers. They also regularly verbalized their frustration with the lack of flexibility within the curriculum because they felt locked into the sequence of the writing curriculum. In fact, in many rooms, the writing materials were left sitting in the original shrink wrap on a shelf in their classroom.

As a teacher researcher, I strove to find a way to better position myself as a coach in a manner that would facilitate transformational and sustainable change. I wanted to spark joy, not resistance, when talking about student writing. I quickly realized that coaching for a program was part of the problem, not the solution. So, I designed and conducted a qualitative research study to closely explore the effects of implementing structures for coaching toward transformation with one second grade team during a six-week poetry writing unit.

The Second Grade Team

This article captures a portion of a larger study that explored the professional learning experiences of writing teachers (Kerbs, 2022). The study took place at an elementary school within a suburban, fast-growing independent school district in the Southwest United States. The participants included three second-grade teachers with varying levels of experience. For the purpose of this article, the participants will be referred to as Mrs. Meadows, Mrs. Walker, and Mrs. Campbell (all names are pseudonyms). Across the study, I served the role as both the coach and the researcher. While the larger study explored the process of coaching (Kerbs, 2022), this article features my own learning as a coach through this process.

Lessons Learned as a Literacy Coach

During a three-week unit of study on poetry writing, I met with a second-grade team regularly to plan, analyze student writing, and differentiate writing instruction in response to that data. We practiced strategies together in the classroom, creating a safe space for the messy process of learning. Under the model of coaching into practice, deep reflection drove our work together as we always strived to improve our own practice as writing teachers and the learning of our students. Ultimately, I aimed to shift my coaching toward transformation to create more sustainable change. The following highlights the lessons I learned from each teacher participant in this study.

Mrs. Meadows Taught me to Linger in Stories

Relationship building is a key tenant of coaching and listening is a skill that leads to stronger relationships. Knight (2016) explains that the first step toward better conversations as a coach is listening with empathy, because when we "really understand people, we see them differently, and our broader understanding of them creates the opportunity for better conversations" (p. 46). Listening can be a gateway to building strong relationships and is a key component of transformational coaching (Hawkins & Smith, 2010). The stories teachers share about their past experiences not only reveal a lot about present decisions, but also shed light on teachers as individuals. To move teachers toward transformation, we must first create conditions that foster safety, vulnerability, and trust, and we can do that by lingering in their stories.

Mrs. Meadows had a negative experience in her teacher education program and her first three years of teaching. To put it simply, Mrs. Meadows said her teaching career "...started off kind of crummy." When she was first hired, she didn't know what else to do besides pull workbooks to teach writing. Instead of being offered support to grow professionally, she was often reprimanded for not using best practices and moved frequently between grade levels, both of which she interpreted as a form of punishment from her previous principal.

As a result, Mrs. Meadows never felt like she had the chance to develop expertise as a writing teacher because she was trying to keep her head above water learning a new team, grade level standards, and curricular resources. Mrs. Meadows was certain the grade-level changes were in an effort to get her to leave the profession altogether, but she chose to stay in a field she wanted to love.

She remained in a place of discontent, distrust, and doubt, until she met a teacher who helped her see new possibilities in teaching. She began to experience a dramatic change in her teaching career that year because of the influence of her team lead's encouragement, support, and optimistic attitude. As Mrs. Meadows told me this story, she began to cry, explaining, "No one I worked with really loved kids and loved learning like she did. She showed me how to be a good teacher. I'm just so thankful for her."

By listening to Mrs. Meadows share her story and providing a safe space during our meetings for authentic conversation, she became more vulnerable, trusting, and willing to take risks over time. Mrs. Meadows shared, "If we hadn't met, I would have just been going on, and my kids would have struggled!" She explained how uncomfortable she felt teaching writing because she just did not know what to do. Instead of asking for help, she pushed forward and often appeared resistant to change. Because we spent time across a writing unit building a genuine connection and relationship, she was able to feel safe in asking for help and taking risks. As a result, there was a noticeable shift in the room as Mrs. Meadows, who was traditionally stuck on a singular idea about writing instruction and resistant to change, began to fundamentally alter her response, attitude, behavior, tone, and mindset toward writing instruction.

When considering the elements of transformative coaching (Hawkins & Smith, 2010), this example highlights a shift in the meaning scheme, as Mrs. Meadows experienced a large shift of her beliefs, attitude, and emotional reaction toward teaching writing. Lingering in her story and validating her past experiences lead to more perspective transformation and allowed us to work on multiple levels at the same time, leading her to be able to think, do, and feel writing instruction differently (Hawkins & Smith, 2010). This transformation not only affected Mrs. Meadows as an individual teacher, but also transformed the dynamics of the team.

Lingering in stories pushed me, as a coach, away from conformity, because I focused on the person, rather than the program. Mrs. Meadows' honest reflection was supported by investing in time to listen without judgment. Lingering in her story taught me to see the individual behind the teachers. By listening, understanding, and ultimately, empathizing, we can nurture environments that foster transformation. These stories connect us together, position us as teammates, and cultivate friendships. Without taking the time to listen to stories and to move away from the programmatic goals and focus on the person, coaching for anything other than conformity is nearly impossible.

Mrs. Walker Taught Me How to Simplify the Complicated

Teaching is an incredibly hard job filled with many, never-ending demands. Each year, teachers are handed more and more initiatives to juggle and expected to implement flawlessly. Many times, resources are placed in the teacher's classroom with limited training and the use, no matter how well intentioned, becomes a burden to those charged with implementation. For effective professional learning, collaboration between colleagues should be focused on student improvement, provide support to daily practice, and include accountability for change (Hill & Paypay, 2022; Patrick, 2022).

Research shows that professional learning is focused on curriculum materials produces higher student outcomes than the alternative (Hill & Paypay, 2022). That is, when professional learning is merely focused on just student work and not the resources, student achievement is not as greatly affected. That is not to say that all professional learning should be about the

implementation of curricular programs but should be grounded in the day-to-day practice of a teacher in navigating those resources to make instructional decisions.

After initial interviews with each teacher, it was clear that two obstacles were interfering in their confidence for teaching writing: the curriculum resource and the genre of poetry. Mrs. Walker shared that she spent multiple hours every night reading each page of the curriculum resource but when it came time to teach during writing, she could not remember or implement the lesson in the way it was designed. In fact, in one teaching observation, Mrs. Walker's lesson extended nearly triple the designated time, reflecting her lack of clarity on the goals of the lesson.

While this initial observation could have led me to choose the model of coaching into practice, I embraced the model of transformative coaching to really listen to the barriers the teachers were facing with curricular resources to help co-create a wider range of possibilities for planning and instructional decisions.

The way Mrs. Walker felt chained to the script of the curricular resources and unsure of how to adapt and modify the plans to meet the varying needs of students in a classroom is a common challenge not only across this team, but also across most campuses I served as a coach. To address this challenge, I leaned into the iterative phase of contracting (Hawkins & Smith, 2010) to better demystify the process of implementing curriculum by providing clarity around the goals and objectives according to the state standards. Then, in the explore phase of transformational coaching (Hawkins & Smith, 2010), we used the curricular resources to consider a wider range of possibilities for instruction in response to individual student need.

To do this, we dove into the action phase (Hawkins & Smith, 2010) by both rehearsing lessons and applying the work directly into classroom context, working with real students. As a second-grade team, we collaboratively planned the unit by meeting before to explore the student expectations according to the state standards, analyzing student writing samples to take a pulse on where our students were coming into the unit, and looking to the curricular resource to make a road map of the unit. This collaborative planning session allowed us to spend time breaking down both the resource and the genre demands, which empowered teachers to make their own decisions about pacing and differentiation, building on the understanding that successful collaboration in schools leads teachers to find their work more valuable (Patrick, 2022). This collaborative process grounded also our work in important, overarching goals, which is a vital part of the contracting phase in the CLEAR model to coach toward transformation (Hawkins & Smith, 2010).

Because team collaboration has the biggest effect when centered on shared goals (Little 1990) and embedded in daily practice (Patrick, 2022), we took time to practice teaching lessons together inside of the classroom, leaning on each other's feedback to reflect, improve, and grow as a writing teacher. Multiple times throughout the unit, we met to co-plan and rehearse a lesson, then implemented the lesson collaboratively inside of a classroom, and debriefed together to modify and adapt future lessons accordingly. This rehearsal served as an important component for coaching toward transformation, as it captured the important action and review phases of the CLEAR model (Hawkins & Smith, 2010). Additionally, on the days when I was not on campus, the teachers continued to do this work together, often swapping students, combining classrooms to practice teaching together, and analyzing student work as a team. They assumed collective responsibility for all students, reflecting both in and on their practices across the unit. Thus, coaching toward transformation, was beginning to create sustainable change across the grade level team, even without the presence of a coach.

Before our first session together, the teachers viewed the curriculum in a way that restricted their autonomy, creativity, and professionalism. However, after collaboratively approaching planning in a way that simplified the complicated and directly applied to the classroom context, the team began to see the resources as just that: a resource. Before, the teachers were merely teaching the curriculum. Eventually, as the teachers gained confidence, they began using the curriculum to teach their students with intentionality. They were no longer delivering lessons but using the lessons to grow writers. They created transformative change within their reactions, behaviors, tone, and mindset toward teaching writing.

Additionally, in my final observation of Mrs. Walker's classroom, her instruction was explicit, focused, and within the expected time parameters, showing transformation in both her planning and delivery of writing lessons. When teachers are positioned as agents of their own learning and collaborative structures are embedded within the school day, they become more invested in transforming their practice. As a coach, I learned that the first step in helping teachers who are feeling overwhelmed and burdened by the curriculum, like Mrs. Walker, is by breaking down the planning process in a way that positions them as the decision-maker, and immediately translating that planning into the classroom context.

The following conversation is an excerpt from a transcript taken during a team meeting:

> **Mrs. Campbell:** Planning-wise, this is all we need! ...Being able to sift through the curriculum, see what our writers' need based on the pre-assessment, then adjust the pacing.
>
> **Mrs. Walker:** And looking at the second-grade standards and knowing exactly what they need to be able to do.
>
> **Mrs. Meadows:** And I think watching each other...that's been really helpful, too!
>
> **Mrs. Walker:** Yeah, I was going to say that, too...talking and collaborating with each other makes me feel more confident doing it.

By situating the professional learning around a common goal and within the parameters of a brief writing unit, there were multiple opportunities to collect, analyze, and interpret student work in order to reflect on instructional practices. This shifted the focus away from an individual teacher's practice, and onto the student learning occurring as a result of instructional practices.

Because the professional learning experience was also situated around student learning, the teachers were able to directly witness the results of their efforts and develop a shared responsibility for all students. Collaboration around student work increases teacher confidence because they see the direct result of their instructional decisions on student products. Not only do teachers need to meet to analyze student work, but they also need to design plans to implement targeted instruction based on their findings. Unfortunately, this work is often overshadowed by the expectation for teachers to commit to teaching the adopted program within the designated pacing and sequence, instead of teaching in response to student data.

Coaches play an important role in guiding this transformation with grade level teams. When we shift our focus toward the students and away from the idea of implementing a resource, we simplify a process that can feel too complex and time-consuming.

Mrs. Campbell Taught Me How to Build Capacity in Teacher Leaders

At the start of this study, Mrs. Campbell assumed the role as team lead for writing, thus independently studying the district curricular documents, reading the instructional resources, making decisions about pacing and scoping of lessons, and entering daily lesson plans into a shared document for the team. The other team members were expected to execute the plans that were housed in the shared document.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argued, "teachers learn by challenging their assumptions, identifying salient issues of practice, posing problems, studying their own students, classrooms, and schools, constructing and reconstructing curriculum, and taking on roles of leadership" (p. 278). As the coach, I had the goal to help Mrs. Campbell share the load with her team by inviting contributions and empowering her teammates to be a part of the planning process. To do so, I leaned into transformational coaching, working to question, and even disrupt, the previously accepted process for planning writing.

It's important to note that Mrs. Campbell was enthusiastic and eager to teach writing, harboring no negative assumptions or attitudes toward the subject. As a coach working toward transformation, I knew that my goal would not be to shift through the key elements of transformational coaching for writing instruction (Hawkins & Smith, 2010), as with the other two teachers.

In my initial interview with Mrs. Campbell, it was clear that she was already embracing multiple perspectives and open to ideas for teaching writing. Instead, my work with her needed to focus on building capacity in her as a leader. I approached this relationship to help her begin shifting her ideas about what it means to lead a team, moving from doing all the work herself to working collaboratively as a team to accomplish tasks together. When considering the four levels of engagement (Hawkins & Smith, 2010), I identified that, as a leader, Mrs. Campbell had a pattern of behavior that led her to do the work and tell her team what was going to be done in writing that week. My goal was to first identify and uncover the personal feelings influencing those decisions, so that we could shift toward questioning her assumptions driving those behaviors.

While in the contracting phase (Hawkins & Smith, 2010), we established norms that positioned all members as learners as we collaboratively inquired into the complexities of teaching poetry writing. This process resulted in a shared collective responsibility for student learning for the team ultimately, a shift from each teacher participant as an individual unit to the teacher participants as a collective whole. The decisions the teachers made throughout the planning process for this unit generated from within and did not show a distinction between novice and expert teacher, because all members held equal value within the community. The leadership by Mrs. Campbell was instrumental in this transformation as she began positioning herself in ways that allowed the other teachers to rely less on her expertise and trust themselves as writing teachers.

Coaching for transformation not only provides spaces for teachers to reflect on their practice, but also questions existing power structures in schools, advocating for change beyond one single classroom context. Coaching for transformation requires a coach to "step out of their comfort zones (in some cases, of prescribed roles and hierarchies) and to engage in discussions that challenge traditional notions of professional development with classroom teachers" (ILA, 2018, p. 5). As a coach, I chose to coach for transformation, to not only build capacity in the team leader, but also disrupt the existing power dynamic on the team.

Subsequently, Mrs. Campbell began inviting contributions from her team members in the planning of the writing unit. While she still entered the plans into the shared document, the team provided feedback on the pacing of the lessons. For example, when the team noticed that their students were not grasping the use of line breaks during a mid-unit writing analysis, Mrs. Campbell suggested spending more time on the skill of creating line breaks by exploring different teaching strategies and analyzing the writing to look for growth at their next meeting.

As a result, I led the team in a job-embedded coaching experience where we rehearsed and practiced teaching strategies with small groups of students inside of one classroom. The goal was to practice the strategy collaboratively, then reflect on the outcomes, and modify, if necessary, in each individual classroom, moving through each phase of the CLEAR model within one extended professional learning day (Hawkins & Smith, 2010).

The excerpt below captures a portion of the conversation immediately following this experience:

> **Mrs. Campbell:** And to think there were four kids in our group and four kids in your group. That's eight kids we were able to help as writers today! I mean, that's almost half my class! It's really exciting to know that on the first day of teaching line breaks, so many are already getting the groove of it...I'm excited to go deeper the next couple of days!
>
> **Mrs. Walker:** And it was really helpful to see that happen in action in her classroom with her students. I really liked seeing someone else's kids writing. Sometimes I panic thinking I'm doing something wrong, but then I go into her classroom and think, "Okay this is normal. That's good. They're doing good!"
>
> **Mrs. Campbell**: And I think too, normally tomorrow we'd be doing something else, but we adjusted our pacing based on what our kids needed, so now we have two more days to go deeper. And I think we'll be more comfortable over the next two days and that will transfer to our teaching of the kids. Where normally this would have all been one day...
>
> **Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Meadows:** Yes!
>
> **Mrs. Campbell:** The fast pacing overwhelms us as teachers. I can only imagine how it feels to them as students!

Moving through the CLEAR model (Hawkins & Smith, 2010) throughout this process allowed the coaching experience to shift from coaching into practice to coaching toward transformation. Teachers were able to safely take a stance to question their assumptions about the methods and structures they've been using as a teacher and try out new approaches in the safety of their own classroom spaces.

Additionally, because the teacher participants' decisions were grounded in their understanding of the standards, genre demands, and best practices for teaching writing, their shared responsibility for student learning enhanced the curriculum and informed their instructional decisions. This conversation illuminates how Mrs. Campbell was transitioning from focusing on herself leading to a collaborative model of leadership across the team. In a final

interview, she credited purposeful planning for her own confidence and understanding of the unit. As her coach, I noticed that her confidence grew as she began releasing pieces to her teammates and growing alongside them.

In the final focus group, the teacher participants discussed possible ways to carry this process into other subject areas and grade levels, possibly influencing teachers in the school vertically. Mrs. Campbell said, "I know I feel like we're still going to come to you, but just think of the opportunity to now spread this throughout the school." In this way, Mrs. Campbell had a transformation in her understanding of leadership and sustainable change, extending from within her classroom to influence her school building as she felt the obligation to share their learning and influence the rest of the school.

Because the coaching was situated as a mutual relationship, teachers were the ultimate decision-makers while the coach created rich opportunities for job-embedded learning, grounded in the model of coaching for transformation. Positioning myself alongside the team, rather than the leader, helped build capacity in the team's existing leader, which cultivated a more sustainable model and transformative experience for all.

Discussion

During our final meeting of the school year, I listened to the teachers reflect on the experience and it was clear that regular collaboration between teachers not only improved the teacher's own professional growth and confidence but also their students. The transcript below captures a portion of this final conversation:

> **Mrs. Campbell:** Before this we had all this extra fluff!
>
> **Mrs. Meadows:** And now we are so much more knowledgeable because we knew what to focus on...not trying to do every little thing!
>
> **Mrs. Walker:** And we did it together. That's what I loved about it. So, it made it where we are *all* knowledgeable about [teaching poetry writing].
>
> **Mrs. Gomez**: I think because we were supported as teachers then it showed in our students' work.
>
> **Ms. Meadows:** Yeah, like meeting and talking about it built our confidence as teachers for poetry...and that transferred to our students and their confidence.
>
> **Mrs. Campbell:** Those were the exact words I was going to say.

As coaches, we might not be able to fix or change the district's method for implementation, but we can support, encourage, and advocate for the needs of the students and teachers in our schools by choosing a coaching model that moves away from conformity and fidelity and toward real transformation through joy, confidence, and collaboration across a team. Young, et al. (2002) argue that effective teachers, who are grounded in both the science and art of teaching, apply their knowledge of the content and add their own spin, drawing on experience, creativity, and

student data. When adopting the model of coaching toward transformation, we can help teachers navigate that delicate balance between the art and science of teaching, helping them become innovators that will pave the path for future educators.

While my story takes place over just a few weeks in a small district, the lessons I learned have changed me forever as a coach. I have learned how to listen. I have learned how to simplify. I have learned how to build capacity. But ultimately, we all found joy in teaching writing.

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