

9-2020

The Learner Profiles of Novice Literacy Coaches

Lisa L. Ortmann

Gustavus Adolphus College, lisaortmann@gustavus.edu

Katherine Brodeur

Bowling Green State University, brodeuk@bgsu.edu

Susan Massey

Upper Iowa University, masseys80@uiu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons



Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, Language and Literacy Education Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation

Ortmann, L. L., Brodeur, K., & Massey, S. (2020). The Learner Profiles of Novice Literacy Coaches. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 59 (2). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol59/iss2/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



The Learner Profiles of Novice Literacy Coaches

Lisa L. Ortmann, *Gustavus Adolphus College*

Katherine Brodeur, *Bowling Green State University*

Susan L. Massey, *Upper Iowa University*

Abstract

Literacy coaches need support developing their professional capacities for coaching (Kern et al., 2018). This study explored the ways novice literacy coaches developed literacy coaching discourses during coursework in two reading specialist master's degree programs. Through qualitative and discourse analysis of transcribed coaching videos and assignments, novice literacy coaching discourse was compared to professional literacy coaching discourse. Findings revealed candidates used coaching language and stances with varying degrees of success, but the discourse of novice and professional differed greatly. Five learner profiles of novice literacy coaching are presented: the interviewer, the role-player, the curious learner, the cheerleader, and the natural novice. Implications on literacy coach preparation and research are discussed, including the use of the learner profiles as a pedagogical tool for online course delivery.

Keywords: literacy coaching, specialized literacy professionals, teacher education

The International Literacy Association's newly adopted *Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017* (ILA, 2018) has articulated important distinctions between literacy specialists' roles as teachers, coaches, and leaders. In addition to instructional expertise, "[literacy specialists] must also be able to collaborate with and support colleagues...be involved in the development of school-wide literacy programming and may be involved in mentoring and coaching their peers" (Kern et al., 2018, p. 222). The new standards emphasize the value of interpersonal leadership and communication skills in literacy specialist work (ILA, 2018, p. 18). With these shifts, teacher educators are pressed to rethink instructional methods and program goals in order to prepare literacy professionals for success in literacy coaching, professional development, and leadership.

Despite the increasing prevalence of literacy coaches in schools, we know little about the process of coaches' development (MacPhee & Jewett, 2017). Specialized literacy professionals have been shown to benefit from training that prepares them for the diverse roles of the job, including coaching (Bean et al., 2015; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014); however, the best ways in which to do this are still being explored. Recent studies also suggest the

need for prospective literacy coaches to gain knowledge related to adult learning theory and effective use of coaching language in coach–teacher discourse (Blachowicz et al., 2010; Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Heineke, 2013). Because the goals and expectations of literacy coaching can vary widely across schools, districts, and states, new coaches require opportunities to practice coaching within their own authentic professional contexts (Bean et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways novice literacy coaches developed professionally during online literacy graduate coursework to cultivate learning experiences better matched to the specific needs of individual candidates. We set out to move beyond mere description of individual student cases to develop characterizations, or learning profiles, that would offer an instructional resource for literacy teacher educators working to support new coach development. Learning profiles have been valuable in teacher education, particularly in the areas of special education (Alexander & Murphy, 1998) and differentiation (e.g., Tomlinson et al., 2003). Profiles of novice literacy coaches could provide teacher educators with greater understanding of a range of student experiences, allowing them to provide specific, targeted feedback on novice coaches' learning and growth. To our knowledge, novice literacy coaching profiles have not been explored in the literature. Specifically, we sought to understand:

1. How do new coaches construct professional literacy coaching discourse in online learning environments?
2. What characterizations, or profiles, of the process of learning to coach exist within the data?

Literature Review of the Challenges Facing Novice Literacy Coaches

Empirical evidence indicates that coaching teachers has significant impact on teachers' use and quality of recommended literacy practices (Davis, McPartland, Prysieski, & Kim, 2018) and student literacy achievement (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018) but that there may be limitations of that impact when bringing coaching models to scale (Piasta et al., 2019). Recent studies have articulated the challenges new literacy coaches face when integrating coaching knowledge into their professional contexts (Hunt, 2016; 2018). New literacy coaches have been surprised to learn how much they need to differentiate their coaching between teachers (Calo et al., 2014). In their first year of coaching, literacy coaches have been observed to struggle to negotiate new professional identities for coaching within existing teacher–colleague relationships (Rainville & Jones, 2008). Novice literacy coaches have been found to feel the pressure of demonstrating expertise to educate colleagues while learning how to develop effective, collaborative relationships with them (Hunt & Handsfield, 2013). Additionally, Shaw (2007) has argued that many graduate students lack the knowledge and experience to coach other teachers. Analysis of the coaching discourse of one novice coach illustrated that she contended with striking a balance between coaching and consulting roles, building rapport with two different teachers, using questions effectively, and using active listening strategies such as paraphrasing and wait time (Pletcher, Hudson, & Watson, 2019). This coach openly shared with teachers her professional challenges and growth as both a literacy teacher and as a novice coach, modeling a reflective nature and positioning herself as a learner (Pletcher et al., 2019).

In a study analyzing the interactions of an experienced coach and teacher next to the interactions of a novice coach and the same teacher, Haneda, Sherman, Bose, and Teemant (2019) found the experienced coach's discourse provided more opportunities for the teacher to critically reflect on her pedagogical goals and explore her students'

perspectives. The novice coach's discourse was more directed toward helping the teacher address immediate issues rather than developing over time (Haneda et al., 2019). They suggested that coaches' orientations towards coaching and learning guide their discursive practices in coaching.

As candidates learn new coaching skills, they require support in recognizing and deconstructing changes to their own professional identities and in their relationships with teachers (Hunt, 2018). Intentional discourse moves to build a trusting relationship by positioning teachers as collaborators have resulted in teachers feeling more empowered and supported by their coach (Finkelstein, 2019). Specifically, supporting literacy coaches to "identify and role play shifts between responsive and directive stances ... could help coaches grow more confident in their own skills and relationships" (Ippolito, 2009, p. 62). Online preparation programs can support literacy candidates to develop professional capacities as coaches through structured, scaffolded coaching experiences (Parsons, 2018). To achieve these goals, teacher educators will need better pedagogical frameworks and tools that account for the ways new literacy coaches develop coaching identities, discourses, and practices, particularly when learning in online environments.

Theoretical Perspectives

Professional Literacy Coaching Discourse

Although literacy coaching is widely defined, and a recent national survey of literacy specialists' roles and responsibilities acknowledges the shifting demands of the literacy coach over the last decade (Bean et al., 2015), literacy coaching frequently centers around the coaching that takes place in one-on-one conversations between a literacy coach and a practicing teacher (Toll, 2007). Recently, these coaching conversations have been framed as a professional discourse (e.g., Hunt, 2016), which offers a theory of "language-in-use" (Gee, 2014, p. 11) of the professional literacy coach. Gee's (2014) theory of discourse includes what and how information is communicated, what is understood about the identities of the speakers, and how the discourse is situated within a broader "social practice" (p. 11) in a given conversation. As a social practice, literacy coaching discourse has both local and global sociopolitical aims. Literacy coaching discourse can be understood as the verbal and nonverbal language used when a coach and a teacher engage in a coaching conversation focused on the improvement of literacy instruction. To our candidates in graduate-level preparation programs, we explained literacy coaching as a professional, social practice, with its own political and institutional history of literacy instructional improvement, which is taken up in specific ways within different school and district contexts. It is the coach's responsibility then, as the one with the most institutional authority in the teacher-coach relationship, to understand how the language choices made when engaging in literacy coaching conversations with teachers work within this broader professional literacy coaching discourse.

Although professional literacy coaching is complex, when learning a new professional practice, it can be useful to focus on a set of observable skills first. Highlighting a small set of foundational skills has been useful for novice teachers in approximating the practice of teaching (Grossman et al., 2009), so we assume the same can be true for novice coaches. A central practice of coaching includes the language moves a coach makes within a coaching conversation to realize the goals (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012). For example, shifting between responsive and directive stances, or relational orientations toward the teacher, is achieved through sometimes subtle shifts in the questions and comments a coach makes (Ippolito, 2009). For this reason, we selected a small set of observable

language “moves,” the statements, questions, or responses the literacy coach uses to guide a coaching conversation, that were frequently cited in the literature as supporting the goals of literacy coaching. First, we considered the role of *responsive* and *directive* approaches to literacy coaching; whereas responsive coaching aims to support the teacher’s cognitive and reflective practices, directive coaching works to support teacher improvement in specific areas identified by administration (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007). Although the literature on coaching supports a more responsive approach, it has been found that experienced literacy coaches find value in using a balance of both approaches (Ippolito, 2009; Killion, 2008; Toll, 2007).

In support of literacy coaches moving between a responsive and directive approach, L’Allier and Elish-Piper (2012) articulated three primary coaching stances that literacy coaches take when in conversation with their teachers: *facilitating*, *collaborating*, and *consulting*. Skillful coaches use these fluidly throughout coaching conversations. When *facilitating*, coaches allow teachers an opportunity to share and reflect while paraphrasing teacher remarks. In this stance, the teacher is encouraged to take the lead in problem solving, while the coach makes inquiries to increase awareness or broaden perspectives. When *consulting*, coaches offer instructional suggestions to the teacher, supply information, and lead the problem-solving process. Consulting is a more directive coaching approach because the coach assumes expertise and role-authority while the teacher is positioned as the learner. Finally, when *collaborating*, coaches and teachers coanalyze situations and share in the problem-solving process as equals (L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2011). For the novice coach, moving through these three stances in a conversation requires skillful awareness of the ways the stances work to achieve certain outcomes in the coaching conversation. Developing one’s capacity to establish and maintain these three coaching stances within the literacy coaching discourse is an essential professional practice (L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2011).

Methods

Context

This study took place in a required literacy coaching capstone course for the reading master’s degree programs at two Midwestern universities. At Eastern University (all names are pseudonyms), the capstone course consisted of literacy leadership and literacy coaching content. At Western University, students completed two similar courses: a literacy leadership course that was taken prior to their literacy coaching capstone course. The capstone courses at both Eastern University and Western University focused on literacy coaching roles and responsibilities as part of a coaching cycle with a practicing teacher. The courses were taught in an entirely online (Eastern) or hybrid (Western) model, with a specially designed coaching cycle assignment that required students to participate in peer and collegial literacy-focused coaching. Data were gathered from the coaching cycle assignment at each university.

The Coaching Rounds Framework (Massey, Ortmann, & Brodeur, 2020) included the following: (1) watching training videos (L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2011) and completing individual response assignments, (2) completing the coaching cycle with a peer classmate, and (3) completing the coaching cycle with a colleague. This assignment was designed to support candidates as they moved through a gradual release of responsibility model of learning (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) from instructor modeling, to guided practice coaching with peers, to independent coaching, and finally to reflection on the learning process. Participants from Western University participated in all three rounds of coaching. For the

first three semesters of data collection, participants at Eastern completed only the first two rounds due to restraints in the program requirements; beginning in the fourth semester of data collection, participants were able to complete all three rounds. All participants completed at least one coaching cycle that included a preconference, observation of teaching, and a post-observation conference with a teacher.

Participants

All students enrolled in the capstone courses were invited to participate in the study. Out of the more than eighty enrolled students, nineteen consented to participate, and of these, twelve participants had complete data and were included in this study. Since a large amount of our data involved participant-generated videos of teaching or coaching, when videos were either missing, or the video or audio quality was so poor we could not understand it, we omitted participants from the study. All twelve participants identified as female, eleven identified as white, and one as Latina. They came from a variety of teaching experiences, spanning pre-K–12 grade levels in rural, urban, and suburban school districts; in public and charter school systems; and ranging from 1–24 years in the classroom. Two-thirds of the participants worked in a school or district that employed literacy or instructional coaches. This range reflected the demographics of all enrolled candidates in the program; however, the majority of our candidates had 2–6 years of teaching experience in an elementary school. Table 1 summarizes the professional experience and contexts of our participants (all names are pseudonyms).

Data Sources

Since our goal was to observe the ways new coaches learned to coach, specifically the ways they constructed literacy coaching discourses, we collected the following data sources throughout the entire semester of the capstone course: (a) student-written reflection assignments, (b) Flipgrid video reflection assignments, (c) participant-collected videos of coaching, and (d) participant-created written analyses of video.

Analysis also included course materials, transcripts of model videos from *The Literacy Coaching Series DVD* (L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2011), protocols for guiding coaching conversations, and descriptions of assignments as relevant data sources. We viewed these instructional materials as essential to the structured learning experiences we provided our candidates. As we hoped to address how new candidates learn through structured online learning experiences, it made sense to compare the coaching protocols and model coaching videos we provided in our instruction to the enacted coaching discourse practices and coaching reasoning of our candidates.

Data Analysis

In order to examine the ways individual literacy specialist candidates learned to coach and enacted coaching discourse, we used a multiple, comparative case study design that included both constant-comparative analysis methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and discourse analysis methods (Gee, 2014). After compiling case files for each participant and deidentifying all data sources by removing attributions of authorship on digital files and using pseudonyms, we transcribed all coaching video files, including the model coaching video, into written transcripts. We recognize a transcript as a “theoretical entity” that is representative of our theory of language, context, and interactions within discourse (Gee, 2014, p. 136). We transcribed all spoken utterances into dialogical transcripts, making margin notes of intonations, pauses, and vocal inflections that carried meaning for the interpretation of the spoken language. We then read through all of the data for each

Table 1
Participant Professional Experience and Context Data Sources

Name	Current Position	Grade Level Experiences	Years of Teaching Experience	Type of School	Type of District	Has Coaches?
Emilia	2nd	K–5	6	Public	Suburban	Y
Cara	3rd	pre-K, 3	5	Public	Urban	N
Bridget	2nd	2	2	Public	Urban	N
Becky	K	K	2	Public	Rural	Y
Florence	2nd	K–3	8	Public	Rural	Y
Meredith	9-12 Math	pre-K–12	12+	Public	Rural	N
Leah	3rd	3–6	5	Public	Rural	Y
Kelly	10-12 ELA/SS	8–12	1+	Charter	Suburban	N
Peggy	K-5 ESL	K–5	24	Public	Urban	Y
Sophia	School-based coach	pre-K–3	5	Charter	Urban	Y
Alexandra	K	K, 2	5	Public	Suburban	Y
Felicity	K	K–3	5	Public	Suburban	Y

participant, including course assignment data and written reflections, making observational memos and developing sensitizing concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 72). Through our initial analysis, it became evident that the coaching transcripts provided the richest source of data for our research questions, thus we moved into a microlevel discourse analysis of this data source in phase two.

Phase two began with the application of deductive, descriptive codes generated from the professional coaching instructional materials used in class to code the coaching language and stances evident in the transcripts. Although we did not analyze the teachers' discourse, we did consider the teachers' responses when interpreting the coaches' social languages (Gee, 2014, p. 63), or linguistic moves within the discourse, and their decisions to either engage with or disregard topics for discussion that were cued by the teacher. Two members of the research team were assigned to code each transcript separately and then

meet to confirm coding. Any time there was a disagreement on a code, team members discussed alternative interpretations and, when necessary, consulted the instructional materials and course texts to align our coding with the literature. Although our intention was to code each utterance in the transcript, we found evidence of language types that did not fit the codes. When this happened, we used open-coding to account for the language type and then together affirmed the use of the new codes. In most cases, members of the research team agreed upon new codes and in a few instances were able to collapse codes together. When one of the three coaching stances (collaborating, facilitating, or consulting) was not used in a coded language type, we considered possible alternatives; if there was no other known stance, we did not code a stance. After all utterances were coded, we then counted each code to determine frequencies of language types and stances. See Table 2 for a summary of codes and frequencies used.

Table 2
Coding Scheme and Frequency

Deductive Codes		Inductive Codes	
<u>Coaching Stance</u>	<u>Coaching Language</u>	<u>Coaching Stance</u>	<u>Coaching Language</u>
Facilitating (34%)	Questioning (21%)	Other (3%) Student	Affirming (18%)
Collaborating (7%)	Suggesting (14%)		Summarizing (11%)
Consulting (56%)	Other (2%) Plural Nouns Paraphrasing Clarifying		Analyzing (8%) Agreeing (11%) Telling (9%) Other (6%) Pretend Coaching Practicing Citing- research Moving on Self-reflecting Noticing Evaluating

In the third phase, we re-read additional data sources from class assignments for each participant to compare incidents across data sources (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 73). Since we wanted to account for the ways in which the novice coaches' learning was evidenced in their coaching discourse, we made theoretical comparisons in the discourse to the evidence of student reasoning in their written reflections, coaching protocols, and other data sources to determine patterns within the case.

Finally, we developed discourse flow charts for each participant, which served

as a visual display (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of the language types and stances for each case. Through viewing their coaching moves in this format, we discovered that the novice coaches were at varying levels of authenticity in their engagement with the coaching discourse.

Once we began to group individuals along a continuum of authentic engagement, we were able to observe patterns within the transcripts across the cases, which led to our characterizations as emerging learner profiles. For example, we observed a noticeable difference in the way participants used questioning. The four individuals whose questions were coded as enacting the consulting stance had a different tone to the discourse than those whose questions were coded as facilitating or no stance was coded. Through conversations as a team about this pattern, we began to describe the tone of the discourse for those four individuals as “like an interview” more than “like a coaching conversation”. We confirmed this pattern throughout the transcripts, selecting examples to include in the discourse flow charts, and thus characterizing this group as “interviewers.” We repeated the same process across other cases—first grouping cases by code and stance frequencies, then discussing the tone of the conversations in which there were similarities, and selecting examples for the discourse flow charts. Through this process, all participants were seen to fit into one of five characterizations of novice coaching discourse, which are presented in depth in the following section. These characterizations, or descriptive profiles, are not meant to account for all novice coaches, but rather to offer an analytic framework that can illuminate some of the observable similarities and differences in the ways the novice coaches in our study learned to coach.

Findings

In this section we present findings to the two research questions. To address the first question, we present our analysis of the comparison of participant discourses to the professional coaching videos we used to prepare them. Then, in order to address the second research question, we present the five descriptive profiles, providing a case example and coaching discourse flow chart for each. A discussion of each of the learner profiles and potential implications on how we prepare new coaches follows.

Question 1: How do new coaches construct professional literacy coaching discourse in online learning environments?

The model video proved an important source of their developing coaching discourse. Most candidates followed a similar agenda in their coaching conversations to what was modeled, used variations of the same questions in their coaching, and used similar transitional phrases to signal shifts in topic. All candidates reflected on the coaching language and stances used by the model coach in the videos. Although novice coaches identified and explained the value of multiple coaching stances in the model video, they did not demonstrate all three in their own coaching. In reflecting on the stances, coaches noted the importance of collaborating, frequently indicating it as central to their values as an educator. For example, Leah wrote:

I think my strength as a coach is being part of the team. I genuinely want to help improve the teacher’s instruction and help him/her find what works best for his/her students. I think that the teacher can tell by my personality that I am there to support them, not to judge them. Together we can make a plan in order to benefit them and their students.

And Meredith wrote, “I don’t feel comfortable being overly critical of someone. I could

easily see myself taking a collaborative stance and helping someone out with a problem they are having...” Despite this value and intent, the collaborating stance was the least regularly enacted stance; novice coaches did not always adopt one of the three professional coaching stances. Figure 1 presents the frequencies of the uses of the coaching stances in all coaching conversations of the participants, compared to that of the model video.

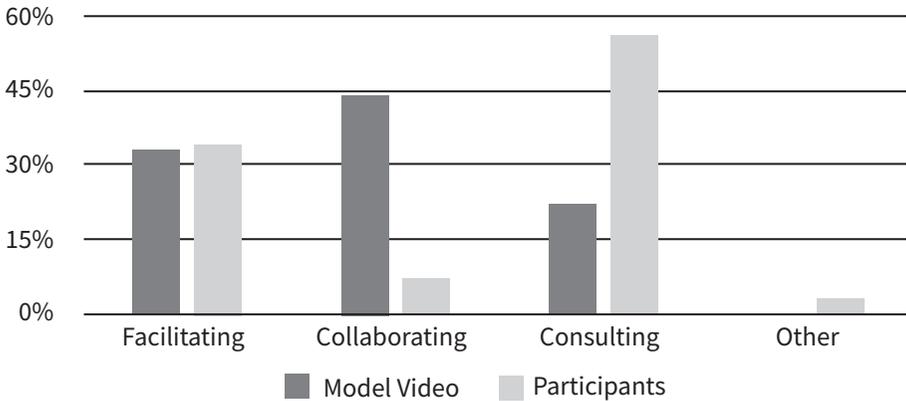


Figure 1. Coaching stance comparison of participants to model video

Novice coaches were observed to use the facilitating stance 34% of the time, similar to the model video (33%). However, novice coaches used the collaborating stance only 7% of the time, in comparison to 44% in the model video. The novice coaches used a consulting stance the majority of the time, 56%, whereas the professional coach in the model video used consulting only 22% of the time. Although some novice coaches recognized these differences after viewing video of their own coaching, others did not accurately account for their uses of coaching stances. For example, Cara became critically self-aware when she wrote:

After listening back to the audio of my coaching session, I realized that I should have taken more of a collaborative stance. There were a few times that I gave her feedback and I feel like I was just giving suggestions instead of talking through them with her.

Alexandra was one of the few coaches who used a collaborative stance, and she was able to identify specific coaching moves in which she entered the collaborating stance with her colleague:

In the collaborating stance I asked questions such as, “Can we brainstorm some ideas together?” and “What have you tried before?” These types of questions allow me as a coach to work together with the teacher in a positive manner.

One of the more striking counter-examples was Leah, who, after viewing her coaching video, reflected that she felt she mostly used the facilitative stance and that her teacher did most of the talking. “I would say it was a 70:30 teacher to coach ratio of time,” although the video revealed that she was talking for 15 of the 20 minutes and using the consulting

stance 58% of the time.

Novice coaching language was found to be more variable than the model video. Candidates pulled from other familiar discourse patterns like those used in class activities (see Figure 2). Candidates used analytic language to work out their own ideas about literacy instruction and pedagogy during the conversations. One of the more surprising findings was that candidates were observed to use more affirming language and statements of agreement than the professional coach. Although some candidates used affirmations and agreements more than others, this trend was evident across all participants.

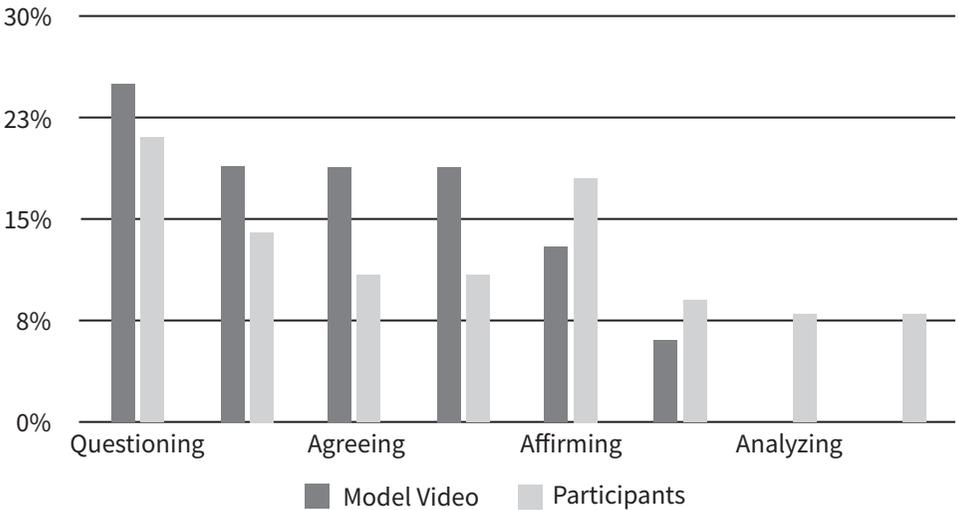


Figure 2. Coaching language comparison of participants to model video

Question 2: What characterizations, or profiles, of the process of learning to coach exist within the data?

In this section, we present the five descriptive profiles that characterize the distinctions among novice coach learning in our study. Table 3 presents a summary of the five novice coaching profiles: *the interviewer*; *the role player*; *the curious learner*; *the cheerleader*; and *the natural novice*. Based on our analysis presented in research question 1, these profiles are arranged along a continuum of professional coaching authenticity, with the least like the professional literacy coaching modeled in the instructional videos on the left (interviewer) to the most like professional literacy coaching on the right (natural novice). Each profile is described in the following sections with a summary of the characteristics of the profile first, then a brief participant example, and a coded discourse flow chart for each profile. Each flow chart is organized with the coach’s quotes provided in the left-hand column and the teacher’s comments summarized in the right-hand column. Each coaching comment is coded in the black bar above the speech bubble; the coded language types are listed first, followed by the coded coaching stance in all caps.

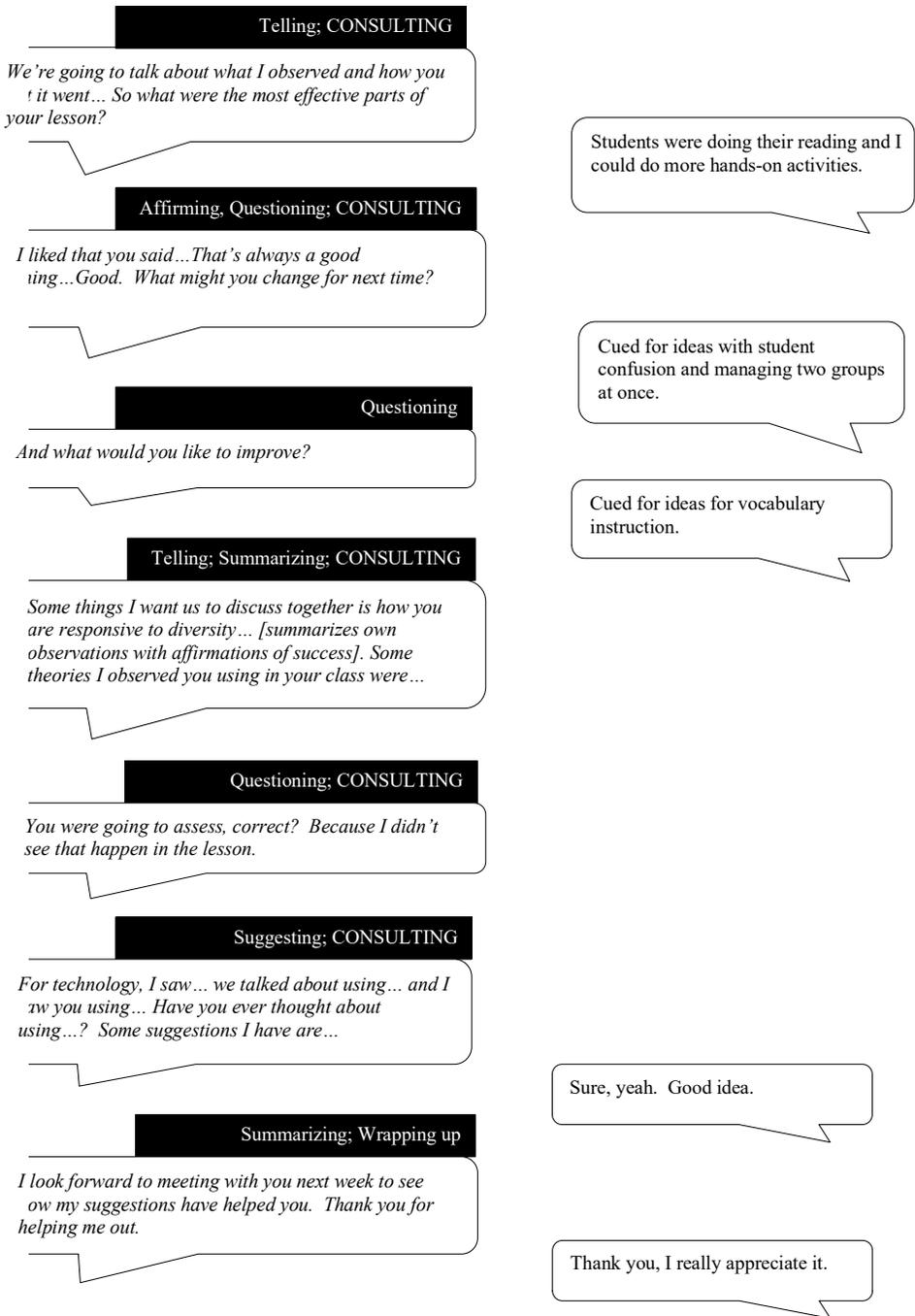


Figure 3. Interviewer discourse flow chart.

in the lesson. The interviewers spent a great deal of time reading through the provided protocols, selecting the questions they wanted to ask, and writing out their summary of what they observed in the lesson. The four participants who fit the interviewer profile were conscientious students in class who had strong pedagogical content knowledge of literacy. Because of this knowledge, they shared suggestions and ideas in the coaching conversations and viewed their role as offering expertise in order to support teacher development. They also emphasized the “amount of work” involved in preparing for coaching conversations, as in this example from Leah’s written reflection:

It takes a lot of work to be a coach! There is so much planning and researching that goes into being a coach. It isn’t solely observing teachers and then discussing. I felt very prepared for my conversations, but it did take me a while to feel prepared.

Leah coached a teacher at her school after observing her teach a lesson, and this conversation is represented in the flow chart (Figure 3). She wrote a comprehensive summary of what she observed and created a list of questions that drew directly from models used in class as well as a coaching protocol used at her own school. She used directive statements (“We’re going to talk about...”) and directive questions (“What would you like to improve?”) that established her command over the direction of the conversation. There was an observable shift in the teacher’s responses throughout the conversation. The teacher cued for specific areas she hoped to discuss at the start of the conversation, but her suggestions were overlooked by the coach who remained focused on her prepared questions. At the end of the conversation, the teacher was passively going along with the interview through statements of tacit agreement.

The Role-Player

Like the interviewer, the role-players relied on the coaching protocol as a script for the conversation; however, the discourse was more characteristic of an actor rehearsing for a stage performance. Two participants, Emilia and Alexandra, were seen to fit the role-player profile. Role-players were aware of the discourse patterns of coaching but used coaching discourse tentatively, as if in rehearsal. They used questioning language to facilitate teachers’ processing, but somewhat ineffectively because questions led to the teacher’s long explanations for their teaching decisions, rather than reflective thinking or generating new ideas. Role-players came to the coaching conversations prepared but remained responsive to the teacher with a positive tone and a facilitating stance.

Coaching moves of the role-player reflected scripts of what had been seen and heard, either in class or in their own professional experiences of working with coaches in the past. Some of these scripts included exact phrases lifted from the model videos, and some from written coaching protocols developed for class assignments. Although the use of these scripts included phrases that might be routine in many coaching scenarios, they felt insincere in the conversation. For example, Emilia ended a peer coaching conversation with the line: “I can’t wait to come back... thank you very much for having me in today,” even though we were all aware this conversation was the only one she would be having. This type of playful role-playing was a comfortable way to rehearse the coaching discourse, without assuming any of the emotional risks involved in more authentic engagement. In her reflection, Emilia wrote:

I feel that this process appeared overwhelming at first and then resulted into being a pretty natural process. I was overthinking the process at the beginning, worried about what to say or how to say it, but it turned out that the conversation

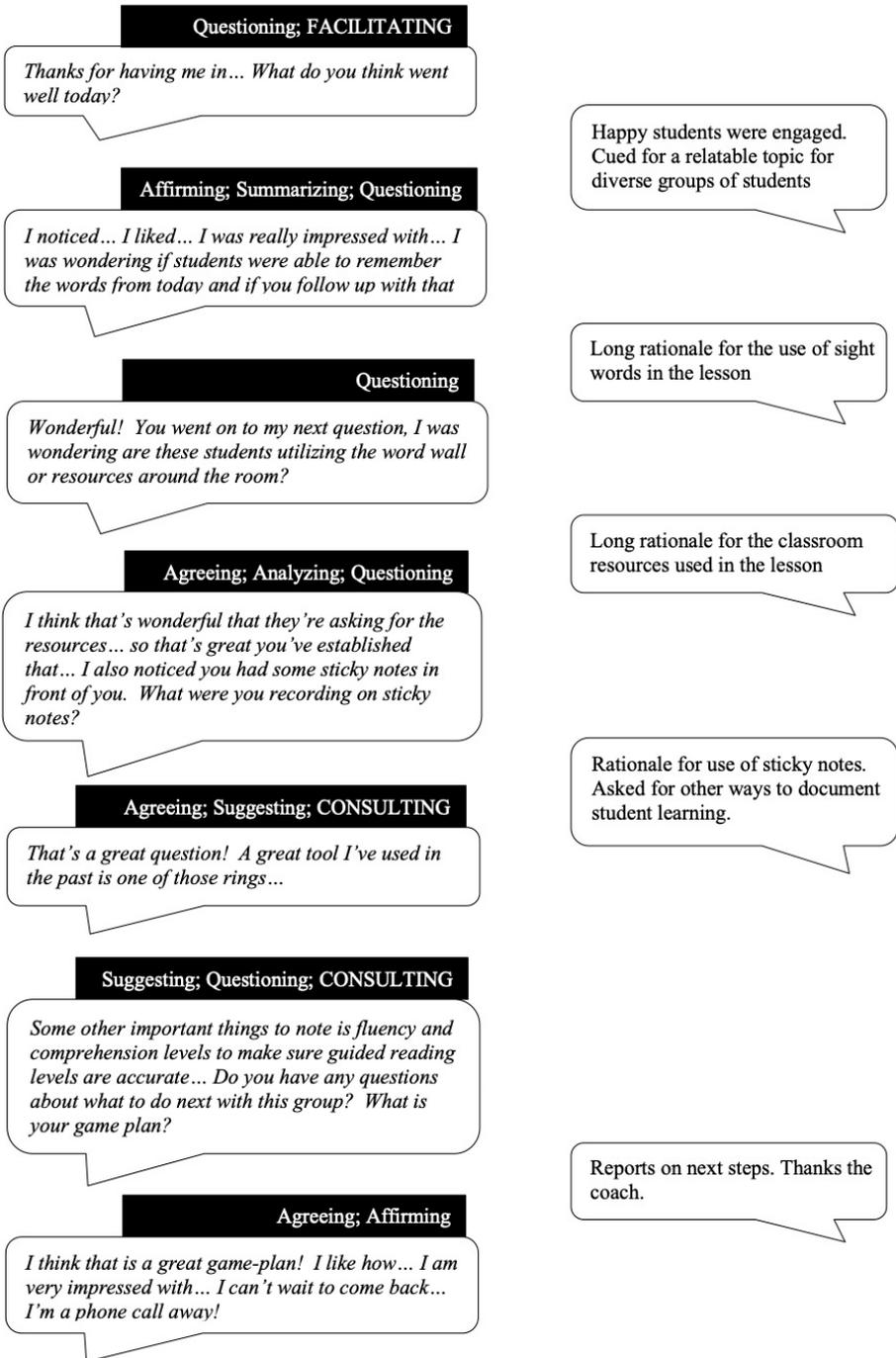


Figure 4. Role-player discourse flow chart.

really did just come pretty naturally between my partner and I.

In the flow chart (Figure 4), Emilia coached a peer after observing video of her teaching a literacy-focused lesson. She used her own predeveloped protocol to guide the conversation, including places she wished to inquire into further. She used a variety of language types and few observable coaching stances, with “other” being the most frequently coded stance. Her questions were sometimes facilitative of teacher learning, but the teacher responses to these questions could be characterized as reporting information or justifying decisions.

The Curious Learner

The curious learners (Meredith and Kelly) were coaches who were genuinely excited by the opportunity to observe in a colleague’s classroom and were open about how much they were learning from the teacher. Their enthusiasm for the instructional and pedagogical practices the teacher used was evident in the areas they chose to direct the conversation toward; rather than focusing on areas for improvement, they talked about aspects of the lesson that sparked their own new ideas. Although the curious learners often led coaching conversations to analyze the intentions behind teaching decisions and the impact of these decisions on student engagement and learning, the teacher’s benefit or learning was not always at the focus. Curious learners were more responsive to the teacher than the interviewers or role-players, and only referred to their prepared coaching protocols after a topic had been sufficiently discussed, or at the end of the conversation to search for additional conversation topics.

The curious learners were unique in a few notable ways. First, they did not use an observable coaching stance most of the time, coming to conversations as a learner, asking questions that could be characterized as curious. For example, when Meredith asked “I wondered why you did that because I hadn’t thought about it before...the students really did need time to think through that...” it communicated a genuine interest in the teacher’s decisions and a desire to listen to the teacher. Also, the curious learners used a wide array of language types, with no one type coded more frequently than the other. They had the largest frequency of analyzing language types out of the five profiles. Finally, the participants who were observed to fit this profile were not traditional literacy teachers, one was a mathematics teacher and the other worked with English learners, both at the secondary level, which likely contributed to their natural curiosity about the literacy instruction they observed. In her reflection, Meredith wrote:

Whenever I coach someone, I want to make sure that I’m sincere, genuine, positive, and can really listen to what the other person is saying. I want them to know that I care and I’m thinking about ways to help them improve. I want to learn from them as much or more than they could learn from me.

In the flow chart (Figure 5), Kelly coached an English language arts teacher after observing a lesson at their alternative high school setting. In this conversation, Kelly summarized some of what had been discussed in a previous conversation that did not get audio recorded and used her own list of questions/topics that were not directly derived from the course resources. She also brought a number of handouts of graphic organizers and other instructional resources to share with the teacher. In this conversation, she used the consulting stance or other stance most of the time, and used summarizing, suggesting, and analyzing language most frequently. There was a back-and-forth dialogue between Kelly and the teacher, and a significant amount of time was spent at the end of the conversation generating new instructional ideas for future use.

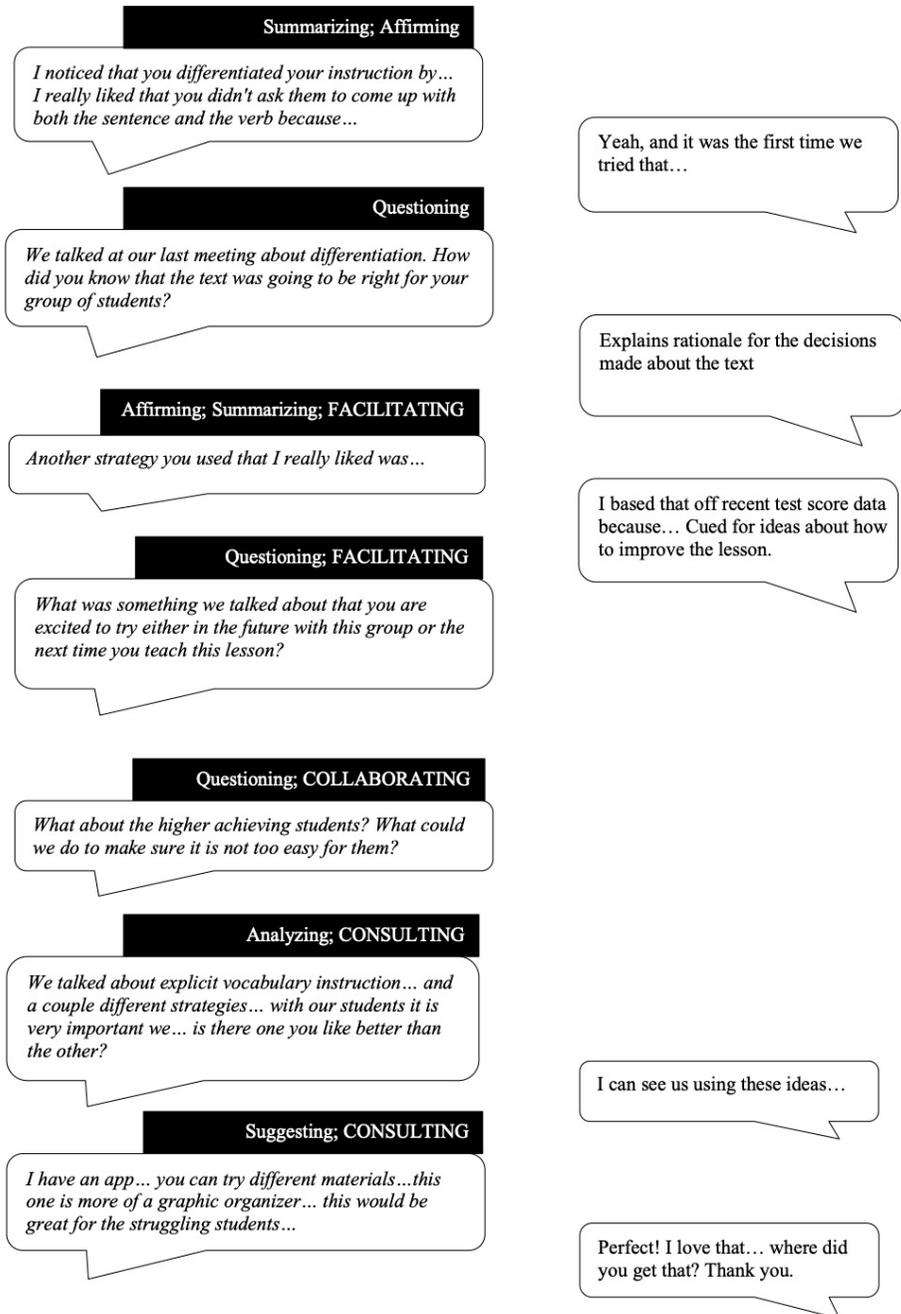


Figure 5. Curious learner discourse flow chart

The Cheerleader

The cheerleaders (Cara and Florence) were coaches who wished to be supportive and helpful to the teachers they coached. They used affirming language to build rapport with the teachers during their conversations and often paired their affirmations with a suggestion for another way to approach a lesson. This type of discourse pattern was more like the discourse of a personal trainer or motivational coach. The cheerleaders also used summarizing and statements of agreement to build trust and to show their desire to encourage the teacher in their efforts.

The cheerleaders led with a positive statement about what they observed and shared why they felt the teacher's decisions were successful. When offering a suggestion, they attributed the suggestion to an outside source rather than their own expertise, as in this example from Florence: "If you could maybe slow it down and just give them a little more wait time. I heard recently at a workshop that if you try and process the same thing that you are asking the students to process ...that should allow enough wait time." The majority of the time, cheerleaders added in statements of support and encouragement any time they were talking ("Good job!" "I loved it!" "You had really great ideas!"). In her reflection, Florence wrote about her value of being positive:

I think using a positive approach in the coaching setting is key! It's similar to when we work with our students, we know that they will respond better to positive feedback rather than negative feedback.

In the flow chart (Figure 6), Florence coached a peer after observing a video of the teacher's lesson. She used affirming language to build rapport, and many of her statements were not attributed to one of the literacy stances. However, the conversation is facilitative of teacher reflection, and the tone of the conversation was engaged and supportive, communicating a genuine interest in the teacher's own professional growth.

The Natural Novice

The natural novice discourse was the most akin to the professional literacy coaching discourse modeled in the videos and instructional resources used in class. Natural novices (Becky and Felicity) were aware of their own uses of coaching discourse and articulated their professional development goals. They were intentional about their coaching moves, often mirroring the model video. They used the facilitation stance effectively to engage the teacher throughout the conversation and were responsive to the teacher's cues for feedback or suggestions while in the moment of coaching. They attended to the relational aspects of coaching by making use of affirming language, while also asserting their literacy expertise when stepping into a consulting stance.

It is important to note that although the natural novice was seen to be most like professional coaches, they still struggled to make use of the collaborative stance effectively. In Becky's reflection, she noted collaborative literacy coaching is meant to be a positive experience for both the coach and the teacher, but often coaches come across as "lecturing" teachers. She was surprised to see the teacher doing most of the talking in the model video, and seeing this shifted her own sense of what coaching should be. She worked hard to encourage the teacher to do most of the talking, although this was not always as effective as she hoped.

In the flow chart (Figure 7), Becky coached a peer after observing a video of her teaching. In this conversation, Becky used some of the exact language and stances from the video with success. She made use of the consulting stance, used questioning rather than directive suggestions, and encouraged authentic reflection.

Questioning; FACILITATING

How do you think the lesson went?

Affirming; FACILITATING

*I am actually going to touch on a couple of those ...
You're using the mentor text. I think that was a great
way to show them some concrete examples...*

Suggesting; CONSULTING

*When you were asking those questions, if you could
maybe slow down and just give them a little more wait
time?... I heard recently at a conference...*

Affirming; Self-reflection

*I loved your two examples of the question and telling
story... I learned a lot from your lesson, so thank you!*

Analyzing; Affirming

*...that goes along with responsive classroom. I don't
know if you use that at all but... I really liked that.*

Questioning

*Would you go into any other types of beginnings with
them or are those just the two types you will focus on?*

Affirming; Suggesting

*I think that was really great... and if you need any
other suggestions, I think that is a great place to start!*

Cued for help to come up with more examples of strategies to teach.

Thank you. Affirmed the coach's suggestions.

Absolutely! Affirmed the coach's suggestions

Just those two types, yes.

Thank you, I am excited to try some new things!

Figure 6. Cheerleader discourse flow chart



Figure 7. Natural novice discourse flow chart

Discussion

The findings from this study support literacy coaching research that highlights the ways novice coaches develop the capacities for coaching, including their knowledge of professional literacy coaching, how to build relationships with teachers they coach, and the uses of professional literacy coaching discourse (Collet, 2012; Finkelstein, 2019; Hunt, 2018; Parsons, 2018; Rainville & Jones, 2008). Similar to findings in previous studies, as new coaches worked to understand how to position themselves as “experts” and coaching “novices” with professional colleagues, their use of professional coaching discourse was tentative, with other discourse patterns of being a student or a teaching colleague woven in (Ortmann & Roehrig, 2019). From these patterns, we developed the five learner profiles.

The predominant coaching stance modeled in the instructional videos was the collaborating stance. This was where the coach and teacher both engaged in the analysis of teaching and in generating instructional solutions to perceived instructional challenges (L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2011). Despite recognizing the value and effectiveness of the collaborating stance, the novice coaches used this stance rarely and ineffectively. They used the consulting stance most frequently, assuming responsibility for the analysis of problems and offering solutions. This could be due to the fact that the coaches in our study were, first and foremost, students. They did not hold the institutional or role authority in this context typically attributed to professional coaches, as they were completing these coaching conversations as part of a graduate course assignment. Without a broader, school-based context for coaching, it may be difficult for candidates to ground their coaching conversations within collaborative partnership principles, which have been found to take time for coaches to develop (Hunt, 2018).

Establishing coaching stances has been found to be difficult even for experienced literacy coaches. Ippolito (2009; 2010) determined certain coaching circumstances supported the balance between responsive and directive coaching, and that the majority of literacy coaches believed that balancing between responsive and directive stances is more effective than predominantly working from one stance. The challenge for literacy coaches is in developing this skill as a routine coaching practice. For the novice coach, moving through coaching stances in a conversation requires a new set of conversational skills that are very different from those developed as a teacher. Although the Coaching Rounds Framework (Massey et al., 2020) provided opportunities for candidates to develop an awareness of the coaching moves that support coaching stances, only the natural novices were seen to maintain the three professional coaching stances throughout the conversations. This points to the complexity of coaching discourse and how challenging it may be for new coaches to learn to read each conversation and respond appropriately in the moment.

For teacher educators, awareness of these novice coaching discourse patterns can open doors to targeted, individualized feedback and the design of differentiated learning experiences that could work to support coaching development (Brodeur, Massey, Ortmann, & Bertelsen, 2018). Some of this feedback can come from peers through the use of the Coaching Rounds Framework (Massey et al., 2020), as peers have been shown to provide a support network in the midst of learning how to coach (Parsons, 2018). However, feedback can also come from course instructors through video analysis software tools such as YuJa and GoReact, which would allow course instructors to type comments into video of teaching or coaching. Video analysis tools like these have been valuable to support teacher candidates in reflecting on the pedagogical and classroom management decisions they made and offering alternative possibilities through instructor guidance.

Opportunities to observe and analyze videos of their own coaching, as well as creating discourse flow charts similar to those presented here, could support candidates in identifying their own uses of conflicting or alternative discourses. When they are further removed from the experience and able to reflect on their coaching performance more analytically, novice coaches could also be guided to consider the impact of their coaching moves on the teacher involved. Prompting coaches with questions about the teachers' responses and asking them to justify with examples from their videos might generate deeper understanding of the careful dynamic they are working to develop. Just as teachers have been found to benefit from viewing and analyzing videos of their own practice (Kleinknecht & Schneider, 2013), the coaches in our study reflected on the value of video analysis as well. Transcribing video segments for further analysis has been found to support teachers in the reflection process (Kucan, 2007). Creating a visual model of the conversation patterns has been found to offer new coaches insights into their own coaching moves that were otherwise unapparent (Ortmann & Roehrig, 2019). If the goal of the coaching reform is to support teacher reflection and instructional improvement, it will be important that coaches are prepared to recognize in-the-moment opportunities for support during the coaching conversation.

We argue that novice coaching discourse may be seen to develop through a continuum of authenticity with the interviewer profile the most closely oriented with the student position, and the natural novice most akin to the professional literacy coach. The use of learner profiles as a pedagogical tool can offer critical perspectives in professional learning and development (Snyman & van den Berg, 2018). Specific, targeted feedback and structured self-reflective assignments that cue candidates in to how they are constructing coaching discourse by drawing from their own familiar discourses as a student or teacher colleague may help support them to move into more authentic engagement.

Since this study, the focus of our feedback on student coaching assignments in our graduate courses has shifted. We are now using direct quotes pulled from their coaching videos as examples of language moves that worked to facilitate teacher reflection and learning, as well as examples of affirming language or statements of agreement that may be interpreted as dismissive by the teacher. We ask our candidates to consider ways they might revise their language choices to either paraphrase what the teacher said or provide an additional insight that gives value to the praise while communicating active listening. These types of language revisions can help candidates understand how subtle shifts in the ways they talk with teachers directly impact the success of the coaching conversation.

Limitations

We recognize some important limitations to the interpretation of this work. Although we have participants from multiple institutions and states, and our findings resonate with our years of experience preparing literacy coaches, the small sample size of the study suggests that the findings of our analysis should not be generalized into other contexts. Specifically, the learner profiles we presented here must be interpreted as narrative representations of the individuals who agreed to participate and not representative of all novice literacy coaches. We recognize that characterizations, although useful to empirical research, can be problematic because they do not capture the diversity or complexity of all learners. For these reasons, it is important for readers to keep in mind that the narrative representations of the individuals included in this study provide a glimpse into their learning and development as literacy coaches during one semester of their graduate program only. Although a limitation, this perspective is familiar to many literacy teacher educators and

supervisors who work to teach candidates to coach in one semester or less.

Conclusion

Reading specialist candidates need authentic opportunities to develop professional literacy coaching discourse (Heineke, 2013); however, teacher educators are challenged to create these learning experiences in online environments. Despite the conceptual literature regarding the development of literacy coaches, there remains little empirical evidence of effective instructional approaches, particularly in online spaces. As the expectations for novice literacy coaches increase and more teachers pursue advanced professional degrees online, the exploration of how we shape meaningful learning experiences for our candidates is essential. The distinction of roles of the literacy specialist from literacy coach in the 2017 *Standards* “requires program designers to rethink the ways in which candidates are given opportunities to collaborate with and coach their peers” and “the single course in the previous programs was not sufficient for preparing those who became coaches in the schools” (Kern et al., 2018, p. 225). The use of a gradual release of responsibility approach to literacy coaching such as Coaching Rounds Framework (Massey et al., 2020) and the “Gradual Increase of Responsibility model” developed by Collet (2012) offers multiple opportunities for novice coaches to learn the complex practice of coaching while also supporting teacher colleagues in their literacy instructional improvement efforts. The learner profiles of novice literacy coaches can open doors to new possibilities for differentiating the learning experiences of literacy specialist candidates and supporting them in their development of critical and professional literacy coaching discourse.

About the Authors

Lisa L. Ortmann is an assistant professor in the department of education at Gustavus Adolphus College. A former high school English teacher, K-12 reading specialist, and instructional coach, her research focuses on the preparation and development of literacy educators at various stages of their career, particularly when transitioning to new professional roles or expanding beyond traditional instructional approaches in support of student literacies and learning.

Katherine Brodeur is an assistant professor in the School of Teaching and Learning at Bowling Green State University where she teaches graduate literacy courses. Previously, she worked as a high school special education teacher, a middle school reading specialist, and a literacy coach. Her research focuses on professional learning that emphasizes reflection and empowers educators to put students at the center of their instruction.

Susan L. Massey is an assistant professor at Upper Iowa University, where she teaches graduate courses in literacy and teacher leadership. Research interests include literacy coaching and university-based literacy clinics. She is an active presenter at local, state, and national conferences and is involved in a number of professional organizations.

References

- Alexander, P. A., & Murphy, P. K. (1998). Profiling the differences in students' knowledge, interest, and strategic processing. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(3), 435–447.
- Bean, R. M., Kern, D., Goatley, V., Ortlieb, E., Shettel, J., Calo, K., ... & Cassidy, J. (2015). Specialized literacy professionals as literacy leaders: Results of a national survey. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 54(2), 83–114.
- Blachowicz, C. L. Z., Buhle, R., Ogle, D., Frost, S., Correa, A., & Kinner, J. D. (2010). Hit the ground running: Ten ideas for preparing and supporting urban literacy coaches. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(5), 348–359.
- Brodeur, K., Massey, S., Ortmann, L., & Bertelsen, C. (2018). What DO they do all day?: Field experiences in literacy coaching. *Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers Yearbook*, 40, 145–162.
- Calo, K. M., Sturtevant, E. G., & Kopfman, K. M. (2014). Literacy coaches' perspectives of themselves as literacy leaders: Results from a national study of K–12 literacy coaching and leadership. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 54(1), 1–18.
- Collet, V. S. (2012). The gradual increase of responsibility model: Coaching for teacher change. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 51(1), 27–47.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Davis, M. H., McPartland, J. M., Pryseski, C., & Kim, E. (2018). The effects of coaching on English teachers' reading instruction practices and adolescent students' reading comprehension. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 57(3), 255–275.
- Deussen, T., Coskie, T., Robinson, L., & Autio, E. (2007). "Coach" can mean many things: Five categories of literacy coaches in Reading First (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2007-No. 005). *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.
- Finkelstein, C. (2019). Doing our part: Trust and relational dynamics in literacy coaching. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 58(1), 1–21.
- Galloway, E. P., & Lesaux, N. K. (2014). Leader, teacher, diagnostician, colleague, and change agent: A synthesis of the research on the role of the reading specialist in this era of RTI-based literacy reform. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(7), 517–526.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis theory and method*, 4th ed. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Grossman, P., Compton, C., Igra, D., Ronfeldt, M., Shahan, E., & Williamson, P. W. (2009). Teaching practice: A cross-professional perspective. *Teachers College Record*, 111(9), 2055–2100.
- Haneda, M., Sherman, B., Nebus Bose, F., & Teemant, A. (2019). Ways of interacting: What underlies instructional coaches' discursive actions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 78, 165–173.
- Heineke, S. F. (2013). Coaching discourse: Supporting teachers' professional learning.

The Elementary School Journal, 113(3), 409–433.

- Hunt, C. S. (2016). Getting to the heart of the matter: Discursive negotiations of emotions within literacy coaching interactions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 60, 331–343.
- Hunt, C. S. (2018). Toward dialogic professional learning: Negotiating authoritative discourses within literacy coaching interaction. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 52(3), 262–287.
- Hunt, C. S., & Handsfield, L. J. (2013). The emotional landscapes of literacy coaching: Issues of identity, power, and positioning. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 45, 47–87.
- International Literacy Association. (2018). *Standards for the preparation of literacy professionals 2017*. Newark, DE: Author.
- Ippolito, J. (2009). Investigating how literacy coaches understand balance responsive and directive relationships with teachers. *Literacy Coaching: Research & Practice*, 45–66.
- Ippolito, J. (2010). Three ways that literacy coaches balance responsive and directive relationships with teachers. *The Elementary School Journal*, 111(1), 164–190.
- Kern, D., Bean, R. M., Dagen, A. S., DeVries, B., Dodge, A., Goatley, V., Ippolito, J., Perkins, H. J., & Walker-Dalhouse, D. (2018). Preparing reading/literacy specialists to meet changes and challenges: International Literacy Associations' Standards 2017. *Literacy Research & Instruction*, 57(3), 209–231.
- Killion, J. (2008). Are you coaching heavy or light? *Teachers teaching teachers*, 3(8), 1–4.
- Kleinknecht, M., & Schneider, J. (2013). What do teachers think and feel when analyzing videos of themselves and other teachers teaching? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 33, 13–23.
- Kraft, M. A., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teacher coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(4), 547–588.
- Kucan, L. (2007). Insights from teachers who analyzed transcripts of their own classroom discussions. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(3), 228–236.
- L'Allier, S. K., & Elish-Piper, L. (2011). *The literacy coaching series* [DVD]. Elburn, IL: LearnSure, Inc. Available from <http://www.theliteracycoachingseries.com>.
- L'Allier, S. K., & Elish-Piper, L. (2012). Literacy coaches in elementary schools. In R. M. Bean & A. S. Dagen (Eds.), *Best practices of literacy leaders: Keys to school improvement* (pp. 43–62). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- MacPhee, D., & Jewett, P. (2017). Conflicting discourses: Navigating the tensions of becoming a literacy coach. *The New Educator*, 13(4), 408–431.
- Massey, S., Ortmann, L., & Brodeur, K. (2020). Training novice literacy coaches through

- coaching rounds. In R. Karchmer-Klein & K. E. Pytash (Eds.), *Effective practices in online teacher preparation for literacy educators* (pp. 150–170). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-7998-0206-8
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ortmann, L., & Roehrig, G. (2019). Developing a coaching identity in interdisciplinary STEM partnerships. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*. doi: 10.1080/13611267.2019.1687124
- Parsons, A. W. (2018). Becoming a literacy specialist: Developing identities. *Literacy Research & Instruction*, 57(4), 387–407.
- Pearson, P. D., & Gallagher, M. C. (1983). The instruction of reading comprehension. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 8(3), 317–344.
- Piasta, S. B., Farley, K. S., Mauck, S. A., Soto Ramirez, P., Schachter, R. E., O’Connell, A. A.,... Weber-Mayrer, M. (2019). At-scale, state-sponsored language and literacy professional development: Impacts on early childhood classroom practices and children’s outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/edu0000380>
- Pletcher, B., Hudson, A., & Watson, K. (2019). “I want to learn from them as much as I want them to learn from me”: Finding a balance of coaching and consulting through the analysis of a literacy coach’s conversations. *Reading Horizons*, 58(1), 48–74.
- Rainville, K. N., & Jones, S. (2008). Situated identities: Power and positioning in the work of a literacy coach. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(6), 440–448.
- Shaw, M. L. (2007). Preparing reading specialists to be literacy coaches: Principles, practices, possibilities. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 3(1), 6–17.
- Snyman, M., & van den Berg, G. (2018). The significance of the learner profile in recognition of prior learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 68(1), 24–40.
- Toll, C. (2007). *Lenses on literacy coaching: Conceptualizations, functions, and outcomes*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.
- Tomlinson, C. A., Brighton, C., Hertberg, H., Callahan, C. M., Moon, T. R., Brimijoin, K., Conover, L. A., & Reynolds, T. (2003). Differentiating instruction in response to student readiness, interest, and learning profile in academically diverse classrooms: A review of literature. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 27(2/3), 119–145.