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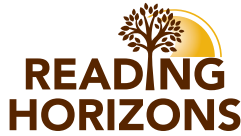


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Literacy Coaching for Instructional Change in Guided Reading: Navigating Form and Function

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine how one teacher's guided reading instruction evolved while engaged in a job-embedded professional development experience across the school year. The teacher taught and debriefed multiple guided reading lessons per visit with a literacy coach. The authors employed qualitative methods to analyze the transcripts from interviews and pre- and postconferences, written reflections, and field notes from the lessons. Findings demonstrate that the teacher shifted from being hyper-focused on the form of guided reading to the actual function of guided reading. Initially, she concentrated on text level, time and planning, and management, which the authors identified as attention to form; over time she gave more attention to the decision-making aspects and instructional opportunities that the authors identified as the function of guided reading. The findings further show how the social nature of the job-embedded professional development supported the teacher's change in instructional practices.

Key words: *literacy coaching, professional development, guided reading*

In architecture, form and function are two fundamental principles of design. Form refers to the configuration or shape of a building and function to its purpose. Both are necessary, with form giving way to function. These terms used regularly by architects, designers, and others in construction sciences could also be applied by educators to describe aspects of guided reading instruction.

Though guided reading has been around for over a quarter of a century (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Mooney, 1990, 1995), its implementation and evolution are largely understudied, especially in terms of how teachers come to understand the nuanced practices that foster responsive teaching (Evans et al., 2020). There is a difference between delivering and teaching a guided reading lesson. When delivering a lesson, certain elements

have to be addressed (e.g., create a group, select a text). Additionally, there are component parts that are completed within the lesson (e.g., introduce the book, set a purpose for reading), which typically occur in a particular order with specific time constraints. Elements related to delivering the lesson and the component parts of the lesson could be considered the form of a guided reading lesson. Form on its own, however, does not address the function of the instruction. Function can be equated with the teaching or purpose of a lesson, which is much more than just delivery. It is the tailored teacher decision making that takes place in the moment based on students' responses and needs. Function in this metaphor is equivalent to the responsive and contingent teaching (Wood, 1998) that moves well beyond the form.

Researchers have identified that many teachers are too focused on the form of guided reading (Ford & Opitz, 2008; Maloch et al., 2013). Therefore, we contend that job-embedded literacy coaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ford & Opitz, 2008) can assist teachers in examining the interplay between form and function as they move toward more contingent guided reading instruction (Gibson, 2006, 2011; Wold, 2003). Job-embedded literacy coaching is directly connected to a teacher's practice and is unique depending on the teacher's pedagogical knowledge. This type of coaching differs from the one-shot, sit-and-get professional development delivered to large groups that, by its very nature, cannot address the needs of individual practitioners (Darling-Hammond, 2015).

This study examined the development of a second-grade teacher's understanding of the form and function of guided reading while engaged in a job-embedded literacy coaching experience and was guided by this research question: How does a teacher's guided reading instruction change while engaged in a job-embedded literacy coaching experience? To answer the question, we drew upon Vygotsky's (1978) social construction of knowledge, specifically Spillane's (1999) zones of enactment, as a theoretical framework to describe the changes in the teacher's guided reading instruction as a result of a literacy coaching experience.

Literature Review

Guided reading as defined by Fountas and Pinnell (2017) is a "small group instructional context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of systems of strategic actions for processing new texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty" (p. 12). The potential of guided reading is that it offers teachers a way to differentiate student reading instruction. It enables teachers to provide in-the-moment targeted instruction to small groups of students. However, the complexity of enacting guided reading instruction can unintentionally stymie instruction as teachers' attention may initially be more focused on the mechanics of "doing" guided reading rather than on students' development as readers, in other words, focusing on form without attention to function.

In a national survey of 1,500 K–2 teachers, Ford and Opitz (2008) found wide variation in teachers' understanding and implementation of guided reading. Teachers reported varying the frequency of meeting with groups from daily to just once a week. Some kept groups together all year long while others changed the makeup of groups. Many teachers reported being more focused on teaching skills rather than supporting strategic, agentive reading. Ferguson and Wilson (2009) found similar findings in a survey

of 40 K–5 teachers. They reported teachers were guided more by the curriculum than by students’ individual needs, again showing confusion about the purpose and practice of guided reading.

Surprisingly, a limited number of studies have focused on teachers’ implementation of guided reading. In fact, over a 20-year span (2000–2020), the guided reading instruction of fewer than 40 teachers have been examined (Evans et al., 2020). During that same time period, there were two surveys asking teachers to self-report about their guided reading practice (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Ford & Opitz, 2008). For being so widely implemented, there is limited research on how teachers take on and refine this instructional practice.

Fountas and Pinnell (2012) identified an evolution in the development of teachers’ expertise in guided reading. For example, they found that appropriate text selection is one of the first dimensions teachers take on, followed by book introductions. Other dimensions such as prompting for students’ strategy use during reading, engaging in rich discussion, and providing explicit teaching points based on students’ reading are more sophisticated and difficult. However, Fountas and Pinnell noted that each dimension, even ones considered less difficult, require complex thinking and that “achieving a high level of expertise in guided reading is not easy” (p. 282).

Supporting teachers in developing this high level of expertise is important. Puzio et al. (2020) reported on their meta-analysis of differentiated instruction. They examined 18 studies within a 20-year span and found that at the elementary level differentiated instruction is an effective evidence-based practice. Guided reading offers a viable way for teachers to provide differentiated instruction. However, Puzio et al. cautioned that there was “an alarming lack of information about the decision-making processes used to guide and inform differentiation” (p. 486). Better understanding of teachers’ evolution and decision making in guided reading instruction has the potential to inform the field and address this important concern.

Other researchers have raised concerns about the limited research on guided reading instruction (Blything et al., 2020; Young, 2019) and on aspects of this instructional practice. Specifically, questions have been posed asking whether this practice is a modern version of the ability grouping of the 1970s and 1980s (Maloch et al., 2013). Additionally, concerns have been voiced about the unintended consequences of using leveled texts (Hoffman, 2017), with students defining themselves by a level rather than as a reader or being denied access to a variety of texts despite personal interest. There is no doubt that these issues can negatively influence students’ sense of identity and learning. In their original and subsequent publications on guided reading, Fountas and Pinnell (1996, 2012, 2016) never promoted static grouping nor did they argue a child should be identified by reading level and limited to that reading level throughout the day. Further, they have clarified that the makeup of student groups should be fluid and flexible, and the use of leveled text should not extend beyond guided reading instruction.

From a review of the literature on guided reading, it is clear that teachers need support implementing this ubiquitous instruction practice. Ford and Opitz (2008) called for ongoing professional development, especially opportunities embedded in the real work of classroom teachers, for effective guided reading instruction to occur. Guided

reading is a complex practice with many moving parts, and researchers have noted the need to provide job-embedded literacy coaching experiences for teachers as a way to support this practice (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Gibson, 2006, 2011; Maloch et al., 2013).

Job-Embedded Literacy Coaching

The lasting effects of professional development have been well documented. Specifically, the duration of the professional development matters when it comes to depth of teacher change (Garet et al., 2001), with Banilower et al. (2006) indicating that it can take as long as 60 contact hours to bring about lasting changes to teachers' pedagogies and student learning outcomes. Rather than short, unconnected, and decontextualized professional development, embedding professional development in the daily work of classroom teachers can be an important step toward achieving higher standards and outcomes (Croft et al., 2010; Joyce & Showers, 1982). In 2018, an International Literacy Association (ILA) Literacy Leadership Brief explored a coaching model referred to as Coaching Into Practice, which promotes "self reflection through practice" (p. 4), with the coach serving as a resource working collaboratively with the teacher to develop an action plan to support practice.

The Coaching Into Practice model offers job-embedded professional development opportunities to build capacity with classroom teachers so they can share their learning and expertise with their colleagues. According to Cordingley and Bell (2007), One of the major issues facing any education system is how to ensure that good ideas and excellent practice don't get "trapped on location" but travel laterally (and vertically) to improve the quality of education provision being offered to each and every student. (p. 2)

By its very nature, job-embedded literacy coaching encourages buy-in from teachers because they see the applicability of professional development in relation to their daily instruction. It also addresses many of the key elements of school reform, including ownership, depth of knowledge, sustainability, and spread (Coburn, 2003).

Usually this type of job-embedded coaching involves a conversation about the teacher's plans for the lesson; the observation of the lesson, with the coach sometimes providing feedback during the lesson; and a debriefing or coaching conversation after the lesson (Amendum, 2014; ILA, 2018). The social construction of knowledge that occurs between the coach and teacher is a result of the relationship and the coaching conversation, both of which also enhance teacher decision making and practical change. Further, the interactional space affords opportunities to seek and receive feedback in ongoing ways (Finkelstein, 2019). Teachers do not need to wait until the next professional development session to ask a question or share an experience; they can problem-solve immediately.

Job-embedded professional development offers opportunities to support teachers in their guided reading instruction. At the heart of guided reading is teacher decision making. Shavelson (1973) argued that "any teaching act is the result of a decision, whether conscious or unconscious" and that "the basic teaching skill is decision making" (p. 144). Decisions can be overt and deliberate or subtle and intuitive. They happen during the planning for and in the moments of instruction. Specifically, in guided reading, Iaquinta

(2006) noted that

skillful teachers use their knowledge of literacy development and literacy processes to decide where to go next, independently of the commercial materials they use; when to intervene and when not to; when to draw children's attention to which features of text; and how to model and explain strategies in ways that children can make their own (p. 417).

In guided reading in particular, teachers are challenged with responding to the strengths and needs of individual readers while also making instructional decisions that help students navigate text demands. This expertise is not fine-tuned in large-group professional development sessions on guided reading where the focus tends to be on form. Engaging in job-embedded literacy coaching during guided reading instruction when teachers are working with their own students does provide the opportunity to have personal tailored feedback and develop expertise. Teachers benefit from these classroom-specific coaching opportunities because they support refinement of instruction (Dennis & Hemmings, 2019; Gibson, 2006; 2011; ILA, 2018; Wold, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

Our study used a sociocultural lens (Vygotsky, 1978) to better understand how collegial interactions and coaching conversations led to knowledge construction and changes in guided reading practice. In keeping with Vygotsky's (1978) genetic law of cultural development, we expected the intermental (between minds) exchanges between participants, in this case between a coach and teacher, to facilitate intramental (within mind) development (Wertsch, 1996; Wertsch et al., 1993). According to Vygotsky, knowledge construction occurs "first, on the social level, and later on the individual level" (p. 57). We also recognized that while collaborative conversations and the social construction of knowledge are important, how these new understandings contribute to action are equally important.

To this end, we anticipated the interactions that occurred during job-embedded literacy coaching sessions would not only facilitate intramental growth but also create a zone of enactment that in turn would promote practical action. Spillane (1999) defined a zone of enactment as "the space in which [teachers] make sense of and operationalize for their own practice" (p. 159). These zones fall on a continuum from very individualistic, meaning little to no collegial interaction, to very social, meaning extensive interaction. Specifically, Spillane examined why some math teachers changed their instructional practices and others did not. Interestingly, he found that it was the presence or absence of highly social enactment zones that contributed to changes in instruction and not a teacher's academic background or content knowledge. Those who participated in highly social zones, collaborating with more knowledgeable others, like the job-embedded literacy coaching cycles in our study, made the most change. Further, Spillane found that while the teachers had opportunities to draw upon the same level of professional development and support, it was their participation in a highly social zone that was the catalyst for change.

We believe the social construction of knowledge taking place in a zone of enactment can influence instructional decision making during guided reading. Therefore, the job-embedded literacy coaching was structured to support co-inquiry and social interaction by using a coaching cycle that consisted of a pre-observation discussion, observation

of guided reading instruction, and a debriefing conversation between and among teachers (ILA, 2018). The pre-observation conversation established the context and provided a shared understanding of the setting and practices. The teacher then engaged in the activity of guided reading instruction, which was followed by a debriefing conversation during which the coach and teacher reflected on the lesson and discussed potential next steps. The cycle then continued, with each revolution providing the opportunity to develop new understandings that through the created zone of enactment supported the teacher in implementing practices that provided responsive and contingent instruction for students.

Methods

Context

The research took place in Lakeview Independent School District (ISD; pseudonyms used throughout), a suburban school district in the southwestern United States. The district serves over 20,000 students in 15 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, and 4 high schools. Forty-four percent of the student population is classified as having low socioeconomic status. The racial demographics are as follows: 39% White, 40% Hispanic, 12% African American, and 5% Asian.

At the time of the study, Robin had served as an outside literacy consultant in the district for 3 years. She provided job-embedded coaching and afterschool and summer professional development for classroom teachers and literacy interventionists in the district. In her third year partnering with Lakeview ISD, she led a yearlong job-embedded literacy coaching project designed to build capacity in the school district by investing in a small group of K–2 classroom teachers who would serve as literacy leaders in their schools and in the larger district setting. The participating teachers were selected by the English/language arts/reading coordinator and the district early literacy coordinator with input from the schools' literacy interventionists and Title I teachers. Teachers worked with partners for the job-embedded literacy coaching cycles; each of the six schools involved in the project included two teachers. The rationale for this project structure was embedded in the concept of zones of enactment in which the teachers would ideally continue the collaboration and professional conversations with their partner teacher in between the coaching cycles.

Robin led two 2-hour after-school professional development sessions on teacher decision making in guided reading, which were followed by three cycles of job-embedded literacy coaching that occurred in September, January, and April. A coaching cycle lasted the entire day, and each teacher selected two to three guided reading groups to teach in the morning or afternoon. Robin and both teachers were present throughout the day so that the teachers were able to observe each other's lessons as well as offer insights and pose questions throughout the day.

Robin led a pre- and postconference for each guided reading lesson observed. During the preconference, the teacher shared information about the readers in the group, including about their strengths and needs as readers in the areas of word solving, fluency and expression, and comprehension. The teacher also shared the text selected for the lesson, how she planned to introduce the text, and the lesson goals. The teacher then taught

up to three guided reading lessons while Robin and partner teacher observed. After each lesson, the Robin facilitated a debriefing conversation that addressed the lesson goals, how the teacher had supported the learners, and what she might do next to scaffold the readers toward strategic, agentive reading. These postobservation conferences allowed for collective problem solving and reflection and created space for empowering teachers to make instructional changes with confidence. At the conclusion of the day, the teachers wrote about and then discussed their final takeaways from the coaching experience and their identified goals for subsequent instruction.

Participants

This case study follows Nancy (pseudonym), one of the teachers in the job-embedded coaching project. This case is bound by Nancy's experiences in the three job-embedded coaching cycles that occurred across the year. Case study research allows for the meaning or knowledge constructed by individuals to be explored as it is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 1998). While researchers have documented the wide range of teachers' interpretations or misinterpretations of guided reading implementation (Ford & Opitz, 2008; Maloch et al., 2013), there have been fewer studies (e.g., Gibson, 2006) about how teachers' instruction changes over time with job-embedded literacy coaching support. In an effort to understand how teachers move beyond the form of implementing guided reading to its function or purpose, we closely examined one teacher's journey.

Nancy, a White woman, was in her 11th year of teaching and beginning her second year of teaching second grade. She had earned a bachelor of science in education and held teaching licenses in early childhood education (PK–4) and English as a second language. After having taught third grade for 9 years, this was only her second year of implementing guided reading as she had not used guided reading with her third graders. We purposefully selected Nancy for this in-depth study of guided reading implementation because although she had teaching experience, she was a novice when it came to guided reading implementation. Nancy's teaching offered a context for examining how teachers' guided reading instruction might evolve while engaged in job-embedded literacy coaching focused on moving beyond the form of guided reading to considering the nuances and informed teaching decisions related to the function of guided reading.

The literacy coach for this project, Robin, was a literacy professor at a nearby private university. As an outside consultant, she was aware of but not fully immersed in the culture of the school district and its mission and goals related to literacy education. She had a close working relationship with the district's curriculum coordinator for English/language arts/reading, the early literacy training specialist, and Title I reading coordinator. Having worked with each of the Title I reading teachers and the literacy interventionists at each of the 15 elementary schools in previous years, Robin had established important and helpful professional collaborations with numerous literacy leaders in the district. Throughout the coaching cycles, the literacy coach adopted a stance as a collaborative partner (Merriam, 1998) rather than of a participant observer. By positioning herself as a collaborative partner, she was able to fully engage in the role of literacy coach while also gathering data for the study. She coached from a strengths-based perspective, encouraging the teachers to look first at what children know and can do rather than focusing on their deficits and gaps in knowledge. She adopted a social constructivist

view of coaching and framed each coaching interaction as a professional collaboration among colleagues.

Data Sources and Collection

Data included (1) the transcript of the initial interview with Nancy conducted prior to the coaching cycles, which involved gathering background information on her experiences in education, previous experiences and comfort level with guided reading, ability to articulate the strengths and needs of individual students, and areas of instructional strength as well as instructional areas that provided significant challenges; (2) transcripts of pre- and postconferences for seven guided reading lessons across three different coaching cycles; (3) coach's field notes from the seven guided reading lesson observations; (4) Nancy's written reflections and transcripts of the final takeaways from each coaching cycle (three total); and (5) a transcript of the final interview with Nancy conducted after completion of the coaching cycles, which focused on her participation in the literacy coaching experience, the parts of the coaching experience that were most helpful, and her suggestions for future iterations of this work. Nancy was also asked about how her comfort level with teaching guided reading had changed, her areas of noticed growth and need, and her awareness of her teaching decisions in guided reading after the experience. Finally, she was asked to comment on her growth and identity as a potential literacy leader. To ensure trustworthiness during our data collection, we used multiple methods of collection, including observations, teacher interviews, and written reflections.

Data Analysis

To begin our analysis, each of us independently coded the initial interview and first lesson in coaching cycle 1 using qualitative content analysis (Patton, 1990). We each engaged in line-by-line coding, noting and commenting on the teacher's verbalization, the coach's comments, and the interchanges between the two. Following initial coding, we convened to consider these codes in light of the research question. Three analytic conversations occurred to solidify the coding schemes, during which time the literacy coach was asked to assess the analysis and interpretations of authors Denise and Celeste to ensure accurate representation. From these conversations, we developed a coding document with inclusion and exclusion criteria as well as color codes for the following categories related to Nancy's guided reading instruction: general guided reading practice, knowledge of her students, students' reading processing, Nancy's decision making, and coaching moves.

To establish interrater reliability, we independently coded the two subsequent pre- and postconference transcripts for each guided reading lesson that occurred during the first coaching cycle. A comparison of the coded segments was then assembled in Google Sheets so we could examine our instances of initial disagreement. During team meetings, we used the Google Sheet to guide our analytic discussions about the differences that appeared. These meetings also gave the literacy coach, a key informant in the study and member of the research team, opportunities to address any misconceptions or inaccuracies that occurred during the analysis by fellow research team members (Barone, 2011). Finally, after each analytical discussion, we revised our coding document to reflect our current understandings and to guide future analysis.

After refining our code book, which included a which included a description of each code (Ryan & Bernard, 2003), we coded the remaining transcripts individually. Data were arranged again in Google Sheets by a research assistant so the entire data set could be recoded, noting changes across Nancy’s lessons and across the three coaching cycles. At the completion of this process, two themes emerged: (1) Nancy’s attention to the form of guided reading, which we labeled “Attention to Form: Doing Guided Reading,” and (2) her transition to the function of guided reading, which we labeled “Transition to Function: Teacher Decision Making.” Within each theme there were three subcategories. See Table 1 for a description of each subcategory.

Table 1

Themes and Subcategories

Theme	Codes	Description and representative quote
Attention to form: “Doing guided reading”	Focusing on levels, not readers	Teacher’s description of students is void of reference to reading behaviors “I need a level F for this student.”
	Struggling with time and planning	Consumed with logistics “It is taking me so long to plan for my lessons.”
	Expressing concerns about management	Interruptions preventing instructional focus “The other students are not working well independently.”
Transition to function	Expanding instructional awareness	Guided reading becomes an opportunity to focus on instruction “I was prompting for more strategic action with this text.”
	Selecting text intentionally	Texts are more than a level “There were several books at level H and I picked the one that had the work in it that my students need.”
	Tailoring book introduction	Book introductions are not generic “With this group, I am going to have the students focus on how the characters change.”

To ensure dependability and credibility of the findings, an audit trail was established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which consisted of all records from the study organized and managed so that an independent auditor could reconstruct our findings. Google Sheets was especially helpful in maintaining our audit trail as we linked our final themes and their corresponding codes to the original sources to ensure the findings were grounded in data.

Findings

In this section we elaborate on the two themes that resulted from our analysis. The first theme, form, addresses the structures related to guided reading, specifically Nancy's concerns with text level, time and planning, and management. These are important constructs in the successful implementation of guided reading and required Nancy's attention before she could transition to the more nuanced aspects of guided reading. The second theme, function, is at the heart of instructional awareness and decision-making. There were changes in Nancy's text selection choices and book introductions. This shift from form to function was gradual and developed over the three cycles. We highlight Nancy's initial focus on "doing" guided reading and her subtle shifts to "teaching" guided reading.

Attention to Form: Doing Guided Reading

As stated earlier, *form* is an architectural design term used to describe elements related to a building or structure. For example, the floor plan and drawings, concrete blocks for the foundation, and trusses that support the roof are all related to form. We have used the term to describe what emerged in the data as the generalities of guided reading practice. The generalities include grouping strategies, frequency of lessons, and elements included in the guided reading lesson. These were all issues related to form described by the teacher and labeled by Robin as part of doing guided reading.

Focusing on Levels, not Readers

During the first coaching cycle, Nancy stated she had administered the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA; Beaver & Carter, 2006) to her students. In initial coaching conversations, she described her students, not by their individual needs or behaviors as readers, but rather by their DRA reading levels. She shared, "I know them more by numbers and data and things like that. I know them personally but not in the area of reading" (Cycle 1, Lesson 1). She described students as being on a "level 12" or as "bubble kiddos" (Cycle 1, Lesson 1). Occasionally, she noted various reading behaviors such as one student's tendency to "sound out every sound" (Cycle 1, Lesson 2), but this was limited. She sometimes articulated general needs for a group (e.g., "This group needs to look more at punctuation to support their fluency"), but her awareness of various students' needs lacked depth. She acknowledged this by saying, "I [don't know] them in that way yet" (Cycle 1, Lesson 1).

As the coaching cycles progressed, Nancy moved from talking about her students as levels (e.g., "So he started at a 6") and began to notice more about their individual reading behaviors and strategy use. As a result of the coaching conversations and the

literacy coach's encouragement to describe children's literacy processing, Nancy's intramental understandings showed a shift in focus from reading levels to reading behaviors. Her reflections capture how students' reading behaviors pointed to learning needs that, in turn, influenced her teaching decisions about text selection. For example, she shifted from "I have these kids at a level H" (Cycle 1, Lesson 1) to noticing readers' strengths and needs. Specifically, in a Cycle 2 preconference, she noted the readers' inconsistent comprehension "as kind of hit or miss." She stated, "Riley is good at making connections to the text, but Brandon and Brady sometimes pull more from their background knowledge than the text. It's almost like they add details to the text that aren't there." It was not just the reflection on the students' needs but also on her role as the teacher. Nancy recognized the need to draw the readers' attention to meaning and reflected on her decisions as the teacher to support that goal. She reminded herself that in this lesson she would "draw them back to the text by saying, 'Can you show me evidence? Like you show me in the book where it says that or how do you know that.'" Interactions like these illustrate Nancy's developing awareness of the readers' characteristics beyond simply a reading level as she moved through the coaching cycles. Nancy's shift was also documented in the literacy coach's field notes: "I see so many comments about the students' processing and about the specific strategies they are using and neglecting. Nancy's language is more precise, and she certainly has more detailed knowledge of her students' reading behaviors" (Coaching Reflections, Cycle 2).

Struggling With Time and Planning

Another aspect related to form were issues of time and planning. During the first coaching cycle, Nancy expressed concern about the amount of time she was spending on planning for guided reading. She stated, "I emailed you last year and I was like, 'It's taking me 3 hours to plan'" (Cycle 1, Lesson 1). Nancy decided that she needed to rework her guided reading lesson format to alleviate the amount of time it was taking her to complete her lesson plans. Nancy shared, "And so for time's sake, I really am extending a book into a whole week. So, I kind of broke it down by parts like the first day, like introducing the book and things like that, so it's not an everyday book thing. It kind of extends it out over a week" (Cycle 1, Lesson 2). Nancy adjusted her instruction to ease the amount of time she spent planning. The decision was not based on the children's needs as readers, but instead reflected her struggles with the form of guided reading. As a result, her struggles impacted the students' opportunities for time in text. For example, having a guided reading group spend the entire week on a book reduced the volume of text the students read, which was not ideal for the students' reading growth.

Concerns about time and planning occurred across the cycles, but Nancy continued to refine form or structure (e.g., how to create a workable lesson plan, how to be efficient in planning) that would eventually give way to the function of guided reading and allow her to focus on instructional decisions. With each coaching cycle, Nancy's work in guided reading was evident. She kept consistent records that documented her guided reading lessons, and she no longer spent an entire week on one book; rather, she introduced a new book, or portion of a longer book, in each lesson. She still spent quite a bit of time planning and "tended to overthink" it, but she was beginning to concentrate her planning efforts on text selection and book introductions (Cycle 2, Lesson 3 Debriefing). She stated, "So hopefully... I'll have a better system in regards to planning" (Cycle 2, Final Takeaway).

Expressing Concerns About Management

Early in the study, Nancy expressed concern about the management of guided reading, another aspect we identified as form. In the past, Nancy stated she had difficulty dividing her attention and focusing on the group in front of her while the other children worked independently. In the first lesson cycle, she recalled an observation from an administrator during which she struggled to manage the rest of the class while teaching guided reading lessons. She stated that during the observation

there were too many of them [her students] that were quietly giving the appearance of working and I thought that we were okay, and for the sake of time, I didn't do that mid-teach to check in with them and so while they all looked really good, they weren't. (Cycle 1, Lesson 2)

In light of discussing the administrator observation with the coach, Nancy realized that managing the guided reading group while ensuring meaningful engagement for the rest of the students was difficult and divided her attention. The job-embedded literacy coaching was leading to new intramental understandings for Nancy about guided reading practice and the ways that form and function were related. In other words, Nancy had to solve some stressful management issues.

At the beginning of the literacy coaching cycles, Nancy spoke about guided reading as something to complete or check off as part of the literacy block. As time progressed, she recognized that solving the management issues allowed her to focus on her guided reading instruction, which included getting up from the guided reading table and managing the children who were working independently. She said in the final interview,

So, even though it's not easy ...seeing the leaps and bounds they make from point A to point B makes it easier for me to come back to the table and find guided reading so important because I see how much they benefit from it.

Addressing the management challenges allowed Nancy to transition to the function of guided reading and shift attention to the instructional decisions she was making.

Transition to Function: Teacher Decision Making

Expanding Instructional Awareness

As Nancy's level of confidence in her guided reading instruction grew, her conversations with Robin shifted to become more student centered. Robin prompted this reflective thinking by asking Nancy to first "tell me about the readers in this group" when they were together and then asked further questions such as "What are your goals for these learners in this lesson?" For example, when Nancy focused solely on her students' decoding ability, Robin asked her to also consider their comprehension performance. In another conversation, Robin prompted, "So you've talked a lot about their reading rate. What have you noticed about their expression and phrasing?" Through questioning and conversation, Robin encouraged Nancy to expand her instructional awareness. Through such work, Nancy began to demonstrate how she could use the time during guided reading to tailor instruction to meet her students' needs and the opportunities within guided reading time.

In addition, Nancy's conversations with Robin transitioned from questions and statements about the number of guided reading groups and the amount of time it took to plan to thoughts about students' literacy processing and ways to support their reading progress. Questions and time concerns were no longer present in Robin's later field notes documenting their conversations. In her final interview, Nancy reflected on her beginning-of-the-year teaching: "I don't know that I was thinking about what I was doing very much before at all."

This shift became apparent as Nancy began to talk more about her instructional decision making, especially as it related to comprehension instruction and was evidenced in the lesson field notes. In Cycle 1 field notes, Robin documented a perfunctory nod to comprehension after the reading when Nancy said, "Turn and talk. Practice your five-finger retell." A noted shift occurred in subsequent comprehension conversations. During the reading of a biography on Rosa Parks, Nancy asked Riley, "What are some things you've learned about Rosa Parks so far?" and then asked Brady, "What kind of challenges has she faced so far? Show me the text evidence" (Cycle 2 Field Notes). Further, in Cycle 3 Final Takeaway, she reflected on the fact that she had learned "to use comprehension to build on meaning more, don't throw out strategies but don't be afraid to adjust [the book introduction and prompts] as readers need as the text had different demands and opportunities in it."

Resolving the perceived issues related to the form of guided reading allowed Nancy to think more deeply about functions such as differentiating instruction. She showed that her attention was less divided once the structures related to guided reading were under her control. In turn, this allowed Nancy to adjust and modulate support for readers as needed because she was freed up to focus on teacher decision making. As a result of the ongoing and embedded nature of the coaching, she worked on resolving issues related to the form of guided reading that were dividing her attention, and this gave way to a new instructional awareness and shifts in her teacher decision making. In Cycle 1 field notes, the coach noted Nancy's text selection was based not on students' needs but on the opportunity to "make it last a week." Her prompting during the lesson focused on accuracy, with prompts to "stop and check" noted throughout. Changes in her prompting were noted in the Cycle 2 field notes. The coach noted more prompts for a variety of word-solving strategies like "Keep reading and see if that makes sense" and "Check the parts. You know this part *eat* that will help you read *seats*." The coach commented on this change in her field notes, identifying it as a "landmark shift," and going on to state that Nancy used the information she observed about her students to "think about teacher decision making." Specifically, the coach noted that Nancy made comments "on general growth of students but she also includes a lot of specific information about their processing strategies—way beyond just the level and their attitudes toward reading" (Field Notes, Final Interview).

Like many teachers, we contend Nancy was only vaguely aware of her teaching decisions because of her preoccupation with the form of guided reading. In the first lesson cycle, Nancy reflected on her teaching decisions by noting, "Obviously there are decisions that I make even unconsciously, you know, that I'm not even aware of." In her initial interview, she went on to explain that she felt many of her decisions were a result of mimicking what she observed other teachers doing:

I almost think those things happen because I watch someone else and I'm like, 'Oh, that's what you are supposed to do.'... I'm really mimicking and copying what I've seen, which is fine but doesn't mean I'm always aware of it.

Being unable to articulate the rationale for a decision is a common struggle for teachers, and this was highlighted in Nancy's statements. However, over time, the collegial nature of the job-embedded literacy coaching created a zone of enactment for Nancy, offering space to reflect on her teaching. This space allowed her to take action specifically linked to the needs of her students, which showed in the rationales she provided for her decisions around text selection and book introductions.

Selecting Text Intentionally

Nancy taught in a school that had a rich leveled guided reading library. While it was evident in conversations that Nancy had read the books and had considered the potential challenges the text presented, that was not demonstrated in her initial lessons as her lessons were not specifically devoted to linking learners' needs to the goal of the lesson that guided her text selection.

Text selection is an important part of guided reading's function. To help address this, Robin guided Nancy to share her decisions related to text selection, making deliberate attempts to encourage Nancy to identify and reflect on the challenging parts as well as the supports the texts offered readers. For example, when Nancy identified fluency as an instructional need, Robin said, "Talk about places in this book that will allow the students to practice expression." A conversation ensued about the punctuation and dialogue and the expectations of how readers would sound when they read those pages.

Nancy was beginning to see the need to coordinate all three aspects. She stated that her goal was

building the groups more towards independence by noticing their strengths and praising those more so they know what good readers do and then also having more of those in the moment teaching moments... noticing their strengths.... Maybe with the strategy we are working on maybe if it fits in. And then just choosing books like with my questioning and with making sure it is lining up with the level and that I am going as deep as I need to go.

By cycle 2, Nancy indicated that she was thinking not only about reading levels, but also about the ways she could support readers' needs within each level. She shared, "On the planning... it's still new, but [I'm thinking about] how can I support them at a new instructional level instead of being so excited that we finally got past this one level."

In the final interview, she described her text selection decisions as

starting more with the learner whereas before I would start more with the text prior to that so now shifting into starting with the learner more, thinking about what they need. And so the text, for me, is beginning more and more to come last and before it was grab a text and just go.

With issues related to form coming under control, Nancy was able to devote more attention to her instructional decision making, and this evolution was reflected across the coaching cycles.

Tailoring Book Introduction

In ILA's (2018) Coaching Into Practice model, the role of the pre and postcoaching conference offers a time for reflection and conversation. Robin wanted to facilitate Nancy's thinking and engage in proactive planning during these conversations prior to the lessons. When Nancy shared her goals for the lesson and talked about the book she selected, Robin prompted, "Talk about how you plan to introduce this book to the group."

In cycle 1, Nancy's plans for all the book introductions were very similar. In particular, she planned to have students make a personal connection, look at the pictures, and talk about tricky words. However, she expressed her concerns about this plan and stated, "I have no idea what I'm doing." To be clear, Nancy was a competent teacher who had extensive professional knowledge, but in this honest reflection, her response indicated that her tendency to approach all the book introductions the same way may not work for each group of readers. The prescriptive introduction may also reflect Nancy's struggle with form. Early on she expressed her struggles with time and planning. Using a similar introduction for each small group reduced the amount of preparation. During the preconference, while concurrently addressing issues of form, Robin also helped Nancy think about how to include more discussion about the overall meaning of the text in the book introduction to support the needs of the learners, and of one struggling reader in particular. Following the lesson, Nancy stated, "So that was good for me because I feel like I kind of learned like, oh, if I do like you were saying, build in a lot of meaning to begin with, [students] didn't need as much [support during the reading]" (Cycle 1, Lesson 2).

Robin structured the preconference to gather information about the teacher's plans for the book introduction. Helping Nancy talk through her plans for the introduction raised awareness of the decisions related to this aspect of the guided reading lesson. The discussion also provided opportunities to nudge the teacher's thinking about how the book introduction can serve as an intermediary between the demands of the text and the current reading strengths and needs of the learners. For instance, when introducing a level H text about a deer lost in a forest, Robin asked Nancy, "What will your book introduction sound like to support understanding of the fawn's dilemma?" Robin often found herself modeling language that would be helpful: "You could say..." or "I think I would ask..." They co-constructed the book introduction that Nancy could immediately try in her lessons. Such conversations appeared to strengthen Nancy's understanding of the decisions she made regarding her book introductions and how they supported her students' needs.

By the final lesson cycle, Nancy articulated her students' needs and how she planned to adjust her book introduction to support them while they navigated the demands of the text. For a group reading a level M text, Nancy stated that she intended to focus more on the lessons the characters learn in the book because she identified this as an area of weakness for that particular group. Her planned book introduction included a deliberate call for the readers to "think about what lesson Sophie might need to learn and then what we can learn from Sophie." Nancy also began to reflect on her in-the-moment

decisions and how she might modify the book introduction to better meet the needs of individual learners in the group. Following a lesson, Nancy stated, “It did feel like, oh, I’m choosing vocabulary over comprehension. And maybe what I need to be thinking about is using comprehension as the vehicle to get to vocabulary.”

Over the course of the study, Nancy demonstrated that she was a reflective teacher who thought about her students, the texts, and her goals. These reflections did not always result in productive lessons because of issues related to form. However, as form and structure settled into place, Nancy’s instructional awareness and attention to her teaching decisions increased and became more refined in terms of text selection and book introductions.

Discussion

While guided reading is a common instructional practice in many U.S. schools, limited research exists on the individual paths teachers take when developing expertise with this complex and intricate practice. We know the successful implementation of guided reading requires support beyond what can be provided in one or even several professional development sessions. In fact, findings from this study reveal that sustained, job-embedded literacy coaching supported the teacher’s evaluation of her instruction, allowing the transition of a hyper-focus on form to the function or purpose of instruction to occur. The coaching interactions including side-by-side planning with the teacher and the continual and intentional framing of conversations focused on students’ strengths and needs, both of which supported Nancy’s shift from form to function. The planning and conversations that occurred during the coaching cycle were similar to those described in the Coaching Into Practice model and supported Nancy “in making sense of the experiences” (ILA, 2018, p. 3) in her classroom.

The support provided by Robin through questions and conversations allowed Nancy to consider new possibilities for her teaching. Often by bringing Nancy back to the text, Robin was able to identify an area where thinking could be expanded, whether it was by examining the text language to identify where students could practice their expression and fluency or considering how to best support students’ understanding of the dilemma in the text. By continually having to identify, reflect on, and evaluate her teaching decisions, Nancy’s instructional moves and decisions became more focused and intentional (Griffith et al., 2019). Without reflective spaces and sustained support that encourages and assists teachers in moving beyond form or “doing” guided reading to the function of guided reading as a responsive, dynamic, and deliberate instructional practice, teachers may embrace the status quo of implementing guided reading in ways that are easy, manageable, and compliant with district expectations. Nancy’s changes illustrate that developing these understandings about guided reading is “not easy” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 282) or quick. Further, without an understanding of and commitment to function, the power and potential of guided reading could go unrealized. The small conversations between Robin and Nancy provided a space to investigate these possibilities in this instructional practice and engage in the social construction of knowledge.

Spillane (1999) described social zones of enactment as spaces where teachers were able to support one another as they changed their instructional practice. In these social spaces, teachers had opportunities to seek advice and guidance from fellow teach-

ers and knowledgeable others while having access to needed materials. He found that teachers who did not enact and engage in social zones did not make instructional shifts. Job-embedded coaching opportunities can offer such social conditions for teachers, therefore creating zones of enactment. Because Nancy had the opportunity to explore her practice with a fellow teacher and literacy coach and engage in conversation directly related to her practice, she was able to work through some of her personal challenges related to the form of guided reading. The collaboration occurred over time, which was another important factor in this work. This study suggests that zones of enactment provide a social structure, constructive in nature, that in this case was beneficial for the implementation of a complex instructional practice like guided reading.

This study adds to the body of research on professional development by providing an example of collaborative, job-embedded literacy coaching (Dillon et al., 2011) that occurs over time (Desimone, 2009). Substantial research on the elements of effective job-embedded literacy coaching suggests that it is individualized, intensive, sustained, focused, and content specific (Kraft et al., 2018). In the introduction, we discussed the dichotomy of delivering versus teaching a lesson. Our findings reveal the job-embedded coaching in this study leveraged these elements to support Nancy's pedagogical knowledge, unique context, and individual student needs, all of which are aspects of responsive teaching. In addition, findings from this study highlight the seven characteristics of effective professional development as identified by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017). Included in this job-embedded coaching project were efforts to be content focused, to support active learning based on adult learning theory, to support collaboration in job-embedded contexts, to use models of effective practice, to provide coaching, to offer feedback and reflection, and to be of sustained duration.

Limitations and Future Research

Focusing on one teacher's individual pathway might be considered a limitation of the study, yet it allowed for an in-depth analysis of her evolution over time rather than a snapshot of her current implementation. Teachers follow individual trajectories when learning about guided reading (Griffith et al., 2018), and examining the conditions that support this learning has the potential to support other teachers in their learning. With so many moving parts in the practice of guided reading, looking closely at one teacher's journey highlights how teachers may hyper-focus their attention on the specifics of form, like management, pacing, and planning. From this study, we learned that once form was in place, the shift to function or responsive and contingent instruction occurred with the support of job-embedded coaching.

There is still much research that can be conducted around guided reading. How teachers take on this practice and what challenges they face are still underrepresented in the research literature given the ubiquity of this instructional practice (Evans et al., 2020). What is documented are many of the difficulties teachers face when implementing guided reading (Ford & Opitz, 2008; Maloch et al., 2013). Additional studies examining the pathways teachers follow when enacting guided reading in a job-embedded literacy coaching situation would greatly add to the limited research in this area. Continuation studies that follow a teacher such as Nancy into the following year would also allow researchers to examine how instructional changes hold over time and if teachers are able to retain the same level of responsive practice with a new group of students. For example,

what happens if the teacher changes grade levels? Questions such as this point to a need for further investigation of the implementation of this practice.

Additional inquiry could focus on districts and schools who incorporate guided reading into their instructional practice as they work to include job-embedded literacy coaching as part of the professional development plan. This kind of work is labor intensive, and challenging for schools, but exploring the benefit from such an investment would be helpful to those interested in high quality professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). These ideas are consistent with fellow researchers who have called for more coaching and targeted professional development for teachers on guided reading (Maloch et al., 2013; Phillips et al., 2016).

Conclusion

This study highlights the need to support both the form and function of guided reading when providing professional development, as evidenced by Nancy's transition and evolution in her practice:

[When I first started teaching guided reading,] I wouldn't say it was as bad as survival mode, but whatever is the next step up from that, which is essentially checking things off a list and what's the most basic level that I can get to and say that I've done.... [This experience has] made me think more about, well, what do they [students] actually need?

Given the limited research on how teachers' guided reading instruction evolves, the focus on one teacher's journey and her reflections on navigating all aspects of guided reading highlights the potential and importance of job-embedded literacy coaching as a means of supporting instructional change.

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