

Study explores sociocultural implications for district support of professional learning

Instructional Coaching: Building Theory About the Role and Organizational Support for Professional Learning

Gallucci, C., DeVoogt Van Lare, M., Yoon, I.H., & Boatright, B. (2010, December). *American Educational Research Journal* 47(4), 919–963.

OVERVIEW

This case study examines how and what coaches learn within their own professional development. The authors guide their analysis with two questions: 1) How and what do instructional coaches learn in the context of district instructional reform? 2) What organizational structures and policies support them in that process?

STUDY APPROACH

The authors use Vygotsky Space, a sociocultural learning theory model, to examine the nature of professional learning for coaches. The model frames learning in terms of relationships between collective and individual actions and public and private spheres, and breaks the learning process into four iterative phases — appropriation, transformation, publication, and conventionalization.

Over a period of two years, researchers focused on a single case study of a junior high literary coach, who participated in a longitudinal study of three reforming school districts and their partnership with a university-based, third-party organization.

SELECTED FINDINGS

Coaches are not simply conduits

of ideas from the district to the classroom. The study's analysis describes the coach's learning as a complicated, sociocultural process. Coaches' learning is ongoing, continuous, and not limited to time, place, or activity. Often it occurs while guiding and supporting teacher learning. Instead of simply replicating new ideas or models, coaches require time and opportunity to understand and interpret new ideas through their own experiences before exploring them with teachers.

The coach's learning in the case study came from a variety of individual and team-based events at the school and district level, with mixed and similar-role participants, suggesting that professional development should be a system structured to meet the learning needs of everyone who supports teachers, including principals, specialists, and coaches.

Using the Vygotsky Space model allows professional development planners to make the connection between people, settings, and events in order to align their support to address various dimensions of learning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

Citing the lack of research on structures and policies supporting coaches' learning, the authors "suspect that successful systems of support for professional learning address the dynamics between individual and collective dimensions of learning," and emphasize the need for further research to explore how systems can

support the processes of learning across public and private spheres.

This study raises key questions for system leaders to consider when planning and supporting professional learning:

- How can system leaders continue to support coaches in their ongoing understanding of new ideas beyond the initial implementation?
- Using the Vygotsky Space model to understand the processes of learning, how can system leaders support collective and individual learning in both public and private sectors?
- What ongoing opportunities does the current professional learning system offer for individual learning focused on generating private ownership of new ideas? In turn, what opportunities exist to share those new ideas publicly in ways that allow others to learn as well?
- How does the school system's current professional learning go beyond the learning needs of teachers and support the learning of principals, coaches, and other staff as well?



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