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Instructional Coaching and Its Importance in Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports

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Typically when a person hears the word coach or coaching, their first thoughts automatically go to athletics. When visualizing a coach, the image that comes to mind may be a person of authority standing on the sidelines, actively engaged in the game that is being played in front of them. Considering a person's previous experiences and exposure to this idea, the coach may be portrayed as being supportive or encouraging to the athletes they are coaching. On the opposite side of that, they may also be perceived as being condescending and judgmental to those they coach.

The term "coach" can be used in multiple grammatical forms including as a noun or a verb. When considering coach as a noun, one definition of the word is "someone with knowledge of a particular content who has the ability to provide direction for others to become fluent with that content and enact a plan for moving from knowledge into application" (Flannery et al., 2018, p. 30). When using the phrase "to coach" as a verb there are several components at work. To coach someone means "articulating the knowledge, supporting a team of individuals in acquiring that knowledge, applying it to a particular context and putting in to action the steps necessary to move towards fidelity of implementation, positioned to build local capacity and ensure that along the way steps are taken to promote sustainability of the efforts" (Flannery et al., 2018, p. 31). These definitions can be used to accurately define athletic coaches but can also be used to define instructional coaches in educational settings.

Coaching in an instructional context is not a new concept. In an article from 1982, Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers compared the similarities between coaching in a classroom and coaching on a field. In their article "The Coaching of Teaching" (1982), they discussed the importance of effective professional development and how just

because teachers are shown something, that does not ensure the transfer of knowledge into their classrooms and daily lives. Through their work, they found four key principles that ensured successful implementation of new ideas; study of new concept, observation of demonstrations, practice and feedback, and most importantly peer coaching (Joyce & Showers, 1982). In the early stages of instructional coaching practices, many positive outcomes were reported including, better lesson planning and organization, instruction for children with disabilities, classroom management, improved school culture and improvement in collaboration and teacher attitudes (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

Instructional coaching has typically taken place in reading and literacy instruction but has begun to move into other academic and social emotional learning areas (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Cavanaugh & Swan, 2015; Bethune, 2017). Need for this has risen due to multiple factors. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that passed in 2015 helped support local school districts by funding programs designed to train and compensate coaches to assist teachers in meeting the needs of all their students in response to intervention programs (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Passing of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 and 2004 put in place the need for positive behavior interventions and supports for students whose behavior interferes with learning, which has encouraged schools to adopt social, emotional learning strategies to meet the students' needs. (Walker & Cheney, 2012; Desimone & Pak, 2017).

Instructional coaching has proven beneficial in various academic areas and is beginning to show its importance in social emotional learning areas as well. Any type of new initiative introduced into an academic environment needs proper support which involves effective professional development, continued feedback and support of the

information learned as well as administrative support (Walker & Cheney, 2012; Flannery et al., 2018). With the increase of schools implementing social emotional learning strategies, specifically positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS), the need for coaches focusing specifically around PBIS has increased as well.

This paper will use current literature to identify the components of an effective PBIS program, describe the components of an effective coach and the characteristics of effective coaches when they are specifically focused on coaching PBIS.

Components of an Effective PBIS Program

PBIS is a “research-based instructional approach framed by systems, data, and practices for improving the teaching, learning, and social culture needed to achieve academic and behavior success for all students” (McCamish et al., 2015, p. 17). This program is currently being utilized in over 18,000 academic settings including public and private schools along with alternative schools (Scheuermann et al., 2013; Cavahaugh & Swan, 2015).

In the past, PBIS and Response to Intervention (RTI) have followed a similar three-tiered intervention system in which supports are developed to meet the needs of all students. RTI focused more specifically on academic skills whereas PBIS was more centered around social emotional and behavioral skills (Walker & Cheney, 2012). The new trend currently has been to combine PBIS and RTI into Multi Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) in which the whole child is considered when making academic and behavioral interventions.

When looking at the structure of PBIS the three tiers are: universal, targeted, and intensive (Scheuermann et al., 2013; Cavahaugh & Swan, 2015). PBIS universal

supports, or Tier 1 supports, include establishing specific expectations for common areas and implementing a reward system for all students when they exhibit appropriate behaviors (Cavahaugh & Swan, 2015).

Targeted supports, or Tier 2 supports, focus on supporting students who have shown to have a higher number of office referrals or are struggling in some area (Cavahaugh & Swan, 2015). Some interventions that may be used in this Tier are Check in/Check Out or Social Academic Instructional Groups (SAIG). These interventions are typically not specific to the student but more generalized to the behavior. Examples of SAIG groups may include groups based on attendance issues, homework completion or conflict management strategies.

Intensive supports, or Tier 3 supports, are implemented when a student needs individualized attention and support (Cavahaugh & Swan, 2015). An example of a Tier 3 intervention could be Check and Connect or performing a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and placing the student on a specific Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) (Crone & Horner, 2003).

Across multiple studies certain factors have proven to be instrumental in building and sustaining effective PBIS programs. Administrative supports, utilizing a team based approach, effective professional development surrounding PBIS and coaching are all key ingredients for successful, sustainable PBIS programs in schools across educational settings (Cavahaugh & Swan, 2015; Flannery et al., 2018; Walker & Cheney, 2012; McCamish et al., 2015).

Multiple studies showed that without administrative support, PBIS programs tend to struggle and do not show sustainability over time (Cavahaugh & Swan, 2015, Flannery

et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2016). Behavioral expectations and supports need to be one of the school's top priorities in order for PBIS programming to be successful (Crone & Horner, 2003). Administrative support may appear different in different settings but one way that it may be shown is that a PBIS goal is one of the district's or building's yearly goals. Members from the administrative team should also be present or have representation for meetings concerning PBIS issues and should play an active part in decision making.

Another component of an effective PBIS program is utilizing a team-based approach. PBIS is grounded in data and decision-making around that data so in order to fully utilize the program an effective team needs to be in place. Some features of an effective team are: consistency, members are well known in the school, efficient, strong data collection system, clear procedures for meetings and defined systems for making decisions based on the data collected (Crone & Horner, 2003).

Having effective professional development is an integral part of any new initiative. Professional development for PBIS is no different (Cavahaugh & Swan, 2015; Bethune, 2016; Flannery et al, 2018). For any professional development to be effective five key components need to be present. Professional development must be content focused, active learning strategies should be used, coherence with other objectives currently in place, sustained duration, and collective participation (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

When these factors are in place, administrative supports, team-based approach and effective professional development, the final component is coaching. All four of these factors need to be present in order to maintain a successful PBIS program. Keri S.

Bethune states in her article “Effects of Coaching on Teachers’ Implementation of Tier 1 School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Strategies” (2016) that “a key component of a School Wide (SW)PBIS plan is the accuracy with which the plan is implemented. The use of coaches is a core component used to promote the success of the SWPBIS plan” (p. 132).

Components of an Effective Coach

As mentioned in the previous section, having an effective coach is one of the most important supports that can be in place for an effective PBIS program (Bethune, 2016). While having a coach is an important factor in the success of PBIS and any new initiative, studies have shown there are certain components that can add to a coach’s success (Scheuermann et al., 2013).

When coaching was just beginning in education, Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1982) compared it to athletic coaching and explained why it was important for educators to consider a different way of doing things. “Athletes do not believe mastery will be achieved quickly or easily. They understand that enormous effort results in small incremental change. We [Teachers], on the other hand, have often behaved as though teaching skills were so easily acquired that a simple presentation, one-day workshop.... were sufficient to ensure successful classroom performance” (Joyce & Showers, 1982, p.8). Applying the concept of athletic coaching to education has proven to support educators and the new initiatives that have been introduced.

The use of instructional coaching has the ability to support effective professional development by being a link between trainings that teachers receive and actual implementation (Bethune, 2016). Coaching has proven to help new teachers be

successful when moving into a district, assist facilitating ongoing teacher learning, help with implementing new initiatives and most recently help teachers better understand new state standards (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Many researchers suggest utilizing staff who are already present in the building to fill a coaching role (Joyce & Showers, 1982; Bethune, 2016). A coach should be someone who has had experience working with teams in addition to problem solving experience (Bethune, 2016).

One practice that leads to effective professional development identified by Desimone and Pak (2017) was the idea of collective participation. Collectively participating in discussion with grade level groups helps to “establish shared vision, expectations, commitment, responsibility for student learning, and trust.” (Desimone & Pak, 2017. p. 7). Coaches have the opportunity to lead these groups and facilitate discussion as well as being utilized in numerous other ways. They may be called upon to model a lesson for a teacher, co-teach with a peer or even observe a particular lesson and provide feedback to that co-worker (Suarez, 2017).

Signs of an effective coach are centered around the main components of coaching. These components are prompting, fluency building, performance feedback, and adapting new skills to the present environment (Flannery et al., 2018). In order to do these tasks effectively a coach needs to be able to develop trust along with showing a reciprocity for feedback, they must also be a good listener, be able to broker resources well and apply professional knowledge accurately (Flannery et al., 2018, Scott & Martinek, 2006).

Building trust among coworkers and peers along with being able to give and receive helpful feedback are important qualities for every employee to have. Once a coach has trust built in a relationship with a coworker, that person will feel more

confident in coming to that coach for help with instruction or other issues in their classroom (Joyce & Showers, 1982; Desimone & Pak, 2017). Brokering resources and applying one's professional knowledge both go hand in hand when looking at instructional coaching. Brokering resources refers to the ability to understand when a team needs additional resources, possibly from outside sources, to help them to be effective (Flannery et al., 2018). This may be sharing ideas from other schools or providing professional development on new strategies to use. Sharing one's own professional knowledge is also important but should be considered when it's an appropriate contextual fit and time. Sometimes a coach's role is to facilitate a team's learning and help them come up with their own ideas versus just giving them solutions.

Characteristics of an Effective PBIS Coach

Hershfeldt, Flammini, and Matheson (2018) specifically define a PBIS coach as “someone who is fluent with the use of data for decision making, competencies and skills that are necessary to install and sustain a particular practice, and the knowledge about how a school functions in order to establish systems that support effective implementation” (p. 31).

The components of an effective coach can be applied to all types of coaching whether the person is an athletic coach, reading instructional coach, math instructional coach or a social emotional coach who focuses on PBIS. Being able to listen effectively and respectfully, build a sense of trust with staff and peers, utilize resources available and use their own professional knowledge to help others are all qualities that all coaches must possess in order to be effective at their position (Scott & Martinek, 2006). When

considering what makes a person an effective PBIS coach there are some additional factors and specific characteristics to consider.

Scheuermann et al., (2013) outlined what PBIS coaches should be able to do in order to help their district be successful in the PBIS process. Coaches should have a strong understanding of PBIS components and be able to lead team meetings with planning and implementation.

A large portion of PBIS is centered around data and using that data to make effective instructional decisions. Having a PBIS coach who is able to input, interpret and share data is also an important characteristic of an effective coach. Coaches should be teaching and encouraging staff to use the data they gather to evaluate programming for the betterment of all students (Scott & Martinek, 2006).

Being able to communicate effectively with stakeholders is also an important component of PBIS. Stakeholders may include students, staff, teachers, administrators, parents and even community members. Communicating the importance of and the success of PBIS programming to stakeholders can help continue support of the program from administrative, community and family perspectives.

Earlier in the paper, information was shared about various interventions that could be utilized based on the Tier interventions that were needed; Check In/Check Out, Check and Connect, SAIG Groups. PBIS coaches should be well educated in all of these interventions in order to be able to inform the team of different options they may have to use based on various situations.

Conclusion

Numerous schools utilize PBIS as a behavioral intervention strategy for their buildings and districts. It is a program that is currently implemented in over 18,000 schools from preschool through high school (Scheuermann et al., 2013; Cavahaugh & Swan, 2015). PBIS is a research-based program comprised of different layers of behavioral interventions based on needs of students (McCamish et al., 2015). There are certain components that have proven to make PBIS programs effective and the one highlighted in this paper is the presence of a PBIS coach.

Instructional coaching as a tool has been present in education for many years (Joyce & Showers, 1982). Effective instructional coaches are active listeners who are trustworthy and knowledgeable about the content they are responsible for due to the fact that they are typically focused on a particular academic skill (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

An effective PBIS coach encompasses all of these skills along with others specific to PBIS. Being knowledgeable concerning PBIS strategies and data interpretation and being able to share that knowledge is a key trait for PBIS coaches to have when assisting with implementing PBIS (Scott & Martinek, 2006). A PBIS coach should also be confident in talking with shareholders in order to be able to communicate effectively the importance of PBIS and how it is impacting the lives of students and staff in their building to ensure the continuation of the program.

Studies have proven that in order for implementation of PBIS programming to be effective in any building, in any setting, there is a need for an effective instructional coach specifically tasked with the job of facilitating PBIS (Flannery et al, 2018; Walker & Cheney, 2012). Supporting staff by providing relevant and engaging professional

development, modeling new information in the classroom, along with being a trusted person to talk to are all key in ensuring the success of any program, PBIS is no different.

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