

FROM THE CHALKBOARD UP: MASTER TEACHERS ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP, COACHING, MENTORING, AND ASSESSMENT

by:

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Master teachers occupy a unique position within schools because they stay in the classroom while also helping to structure and implement school programs. Thus, the way they view instructional leadership, coaching and mentoring, and assessment tools is a useful tool for school improvement. Informed by recent evidence (2022–2024) and related synthesis work, the article triangulates findings obtained from master teachers on what works and available evidence to establish how the three domains interlink to enhance teaching and learning.

Master teachers say that instructional leadership is more about the work of improving practice than the work of supervising it. They focus on modeling lessons, aligning curriculum with standards, planning collaboratively, and observation cycles. Leadership that focuses on teaching and learning—such as setting clear goals, supporting teacher development, and monitoring instruction—has been linked to better outcomes for teachers and students. In short, master teachers as instructional leaders do not need titles or positions of authority in order to affect their practice.

They also know that the instructional leadership aspect of master teaching cannot be separated from coaching and mentoring. Mentoring is regarded as a long-term process that supports professional identity formation and career development. Coaching is viewed as more focused and short-term, aiming to help teachers enhance specific pedagogical techniques. Research shows that the degree to which teachers have structured opportunities for practice and receive high-quality feedback predicts the effect of professional development on both teacher practice and student learning. In contrast, approaches that focus primarily on modeling (without rehearsal and feedback) are usually not effective. This implies that sufficient demonstration, practice and rehearsal, and prompt, data-driven feedback should be the foundation of the coaching cycle for master teachers. But when asked to serve as both trusted coaches or mentors and evaluators, they also talk about conflicts. Additionally, the coaches' knowledge and readiness are the main factors that determine

how successful the program is. As a result, schools that use master instructors as coaches must invest heavily in their supervision and training.

Assessment is another aspect where master teachers link theory and practice. For them, assessment is more than an accreditation box to check; it is the cornerstone of good teaching. They use various methods, including checks for understanding, performance tasks and rubrics, and collaborative item analysis. What is consistently found in the studies examining formative assessment is that although there is variability in what effect it has on student learning, it always supports student learning when teachers and students are properly trained, and the results of these assessments are followed by changes in instruction. However, teachers tend to have inadequate assessment skills due to the inability to transfer theoretical knowledge into practice. Master teachers act as conduits by translating the assessment model's language into tools and strategies that colleagues can implement.

Taken together, master teachers' views indicate that these three areas intertwine and reinforce each other rather than exist as isolated responsibilities. It is effective instructional leadership that establishes the enabling conditions like time, schoolwide goals, and data systems, for coaching and mentoring. Coaching then gives the teacher practice and feedback on how to incorporate formative assessment into daily instruction. When these domains integrate, they enhance teaching and learning. Field experiences amply demonstrate that master teachers, when given role clarity, protected time, and easy-to-use tools for collaborative reflection and assessment of their students' learning, can act as powerful multipliers to other classrooms.

The implications for schools and policymakers are profound. First, it is vital to invest in the training and development of coaches and mentors because individuals have different levels of program effectiveness. Schools need to identify coaches and mentors rigorously, train them on skills that work (e.g., rehearsal and feedback) and supervise them constantly. Second, leadership must protect time and align incentives so that master teachers can co-plan, observe, and debrief as part of the school day rather than on top of all their other duties. Third, the assessment literacy should be developed through continuous professional training rather than one-time seminars. Training is more effective when it is part of ongoing coaching cycles, which enable teachers to test tools during real lessons, gather data, and collaboratively reflect with their mentors. Finally, roles

must be clarified for the sake of trust. If the master teachers conduct formal evaluations, safeguards need to be in place to ensure that accountability does not interfere with the trust required for effective mentoring and coaching.

Master teachers are pragmatic theorists in the sense that, while grounded in classroom reality, they formulate ways to implement educational research. Recent research validates the teachers' reports that structured coaching with practice and feedback, coherent instructional leadership focused on the technical core of teaching and learning, and heightened assessment literacy lead to better teaching and learning. To make the most out of their contributions, schools need to invest in their preparation, protect their time together, and align systems so that mentoring, coaching and assessing can be a sustainable engine of school improvement.

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