

SITUATED IDENTITIES, POWER, AND POSITIONING:
INSIDE THE PRACTICES OF THREE LITERACY COACHES IN NEW JERSEY

by

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ABSTRACT

SITUATED IDENTITIES, POWER, AND POSITIONING: INSIDE THE PRACTICES OF THREE LITERACY COACHES IN NEW JERSEY

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The purpose of the qualitative study was (a) to explore the practices of literacy coaches and how they negotiated their situated identities, practices, and positioning within the various contexts they worked; and (b) to identify the Discourses that inform these shifting practices. Grounded in a sociocultural and poststructural framework, this study examined the interactions of three literacy coaches in New Jersey as they worked with the teachers, administrators, and other faculty within their schools.

The three literacy coaches had all been prepared by the New Jersey Department of Education during a year-long sabbatical, and during this study, they had returned to their home districts to coach, with continued support from the state. All of the literacy coaches identified as White middle-class women, had varying years of experience, and worked in very different contexts. One literacy coach worked in a large urban school district, one in a small working-class district, and the third part-time in an affluent suburban district.

Data were collected over a four-month period, with school visits occurring three mornings a week and including participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. To better understand the situated identities of literacy coaches, the negotiation of their practices, as well as how power circulated in their interactions and how coaches positioned themselves and were positioned by others, complementary modes of analysis were used: constant comparative analysis and Discourse analysis. Case

studies were constructed of each literacy coach, and then a cross-case analysis was conducted.

Each of the case studies demonstrated how literacy coaches' situated identities and practices are not static; rather, they are constantly shifting in response to the context and the participants. Power and positioning also shifted and were carefully negotiated by each of the literacy coaches in response to the context in which they were worked. The findings illustrate that literacy coaches' work is about far more than a knowledge base in how teaching and learning work in literacy classrooms. It is about deep understanding about situational enactments and how one's position will impact what happens in a particular context.