Podcast: Coaching From the School Improvement Plan

Dr. Karen Johannesen, a highly experienced school leader, writer, and organizational change consultant explores the role of professional development and coaching in school improvement plans that positively impact student success. She believes that when schools support teachers with well-designed and rich professional learning, those teachers create the same type of rigorous and engaging opportunities for students. Her book, "*Coaching for Multilingual Student Success*" brings the work of school-based and district based coaches to life.

Find Karen's book, "*Coaching for Multilingual Student Success*" here.

Visit Karen's website here.

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.290] – Steve [Intro]

Welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. As instructional coaches and school leaders, you are tasked with guiding continuous teacher growth to create student success. This podcast looks to support you with strategies from experienced guests, as well as my own insights that I've gathered over the years. I'm thrilled to have you with us. Thanks for tuning in.

[00:00:29.580] – Steve

Coaching Coming from the School Improvement Plan. Our guest today is Dr. Karen Johannsen Brock. With over three decades of experience, she is an expert in instructional coaching, school improvement, and organizational change processes. Holding a PhD in Educational Research Methods from Oxford University, she has consulted for over 100 schools in Utah and Washington with a specific emphasis on professional learning and instructional coaching to improve student achievement. Karen has been the Director of Professional Development at Provost City School district in Utah, where she now is serving as a principal. Her research, writing, and consulting focus on organizational change, leadership development, instructional coaching, professional learning plans, and strategic planning. Dr. Brock advocates a problem of practice approach, beginning with student learning data to design a school improvement plan that incorporates instructional coaching as a proven pathway to organizational change, ultimately enhancing student learning.

[00:01:45.260] – Steve

Those of you who listen to this podcast regularly can tell from my reading that why I am excited to have her on the podcast. Welcome, Karen.

[00:01:55.680] – Karen

Well, thank you for having me. I'm excited to have this

conversation.

[00:01:59.290] – Steve

What would you say are some of the insights that you've gained regarding coaching across the varied multiple roles that you've played in schools?

[00:02:10.000] – Karen

I came across the coaching concept in the late '90s, and I keep coming back to, coaching is the secret sauce. It is the thing that will make the difference. Any plan that you have, any goal that you to have within education to move from one circumstance to another, coaching has to be there. It won't get the depth of implementation. It won't get the impact without coaching. And so I'm a zealot, I guess. I'm really an advocate for coaching that anytime I see a school seeking to improve, we need to really come right to the center of, if we don't change instruction, we don't change change student outcomes. And we change instruction through a plan that includes our professional development, our professional learning, our teachers engaged in professional learning, and then going back to the classroom and getting the support they need. We've all been in a situation where we try something new and we try it the first time and we think, well, that was terrible. That did not work, or the way I do right now, I like better, whatever. And so coaching gets us away from the, I I tried it once, to, I do it all the time now. This is my thing.

[00:03:32.800] – Karen

So coaching is the vehicle that moves us from one spot to another.

[00:03:40.100] – Steve

It's interesting. I was just working on a presentation today, and I've been, for years, using the statement, every teacher deserves a coach. So I have moved away from that they need a

coach, they deserve a coach. But in aligning with your thing about students, I've now pressed that statement to every student deserves their teacher getting coaching.

[00:04:05.540] – Karen

Absolutely. And the thing that is a hidden blessing, I guess, of coaching is coaching makes teaching so much more fun. To be a shoulder partner with a teacher who cares about your class in a similar way to the way you care about your class, to have somebody just grapple with a problem of practice is great fun. It really sparks the learning for everybody. The coach learns, the teacher learns, and ultimately, the students learn.

[00:04:37.230] – Steve

It reinforces for the teacher that the work you're doing is important. Absolutely. And then in isolation, I think sometimes we miss that point.

[00:04:46.650] – Karen

Right. We can get caught in, I've tried everything. We can move quickly to, It's this student. I've tried all of my tricks, and this student is a reader, or this student just isn't…fill in the blank. It's often just that little tweak of, try it this way, let's measure engagement when this happened. Did you notice engagement dropped in this part and really was up high in this part? So let's talk about what happened in a lesson and just having somebody else reflect with you and try it with you. And maybe it's a, I'll do it, you watch and see how your kids react with me. Now we'll see how your kids react with you and just playing around and being curious.

[00:05:32.880] – Steve

It's my second podcast recording today, and it's the second time teacher curiosity was raised as an issue that's connected to teacher growth. I think you're just right on with curiosity – being aware it's hard to be that curious by yourself. The

reflection with the coach really triggers it.

[00:05:53.930] – Karen

Yeah, absolutely.

[00:05:55.450] – Steve

I've been reading your book, "Coaching for Multilingual Student Success," and in that book, you have a quote from Linda Darling-Hammond and Richardson. And it struck me. I wanted to read the quote for the listeners and have you respond to it. "Providing intensive, content-rich, and collegial learning opportunities for teachers can improve both teaching and student learning. When schools support teachers with well-designed and rich professional learning, those teachers create the same type of rigorous and engaging opportunities for students." Expand on that?

[00:06:38.160] – Karen

Yeah. It's that the one-shot workshop doesn't work. The audience that should know that best is the classroom teacher. We perpetuate that. But really, as we're looking at student data and saying, this is what our students need, if as a school, we're implementing a new program, whatever it is that after we've looked at our student data and after we've looked at our situation, we have a goal, we need to provide teachers the opportunity to dig in and get an intensive content-rich opportunities. It's not just one time. Darling-Hammond has some great research around how long it really takes to implement and engage in a skill, putting new skills in place for teachers and it's nothing less than 20 hours across a year. And 20 hours, really, it's depending on the intensity and the depth of what it is you're trying to learn. 20 hours is just scratching the surface, too. Sometimes it's more like 40, 50 hours, which sounds overwhelming with thinking, we never have 20 hours. We do because we've got staff meeting for 45 minutes a week, we've got professional development chunks

here for two hours and an hour and a half there.

[00:08:00.090] – Karen

We can map out a year in the same way we map out a unit for students. We can map out a year and say, we're going to come together and work together, and then we're going to go back to the classroom. You're going to try it. The coach is going to come in. You're going to work with your PLC. All of that counts towards your 20 hours, your 40 hours, your 50 hours. Again, depending on the complexity of, are you trying to implement a full program? That might take 50 or 60 hours. Are you trying to implement an instructional strategy? That might be in the more in the realm of 20 hours. It just really depends on what the complexity of the task that we're trying to implement is. But we really need to start with a school improvement plan that is about professional learning for teachers and in sequential ways. That in the next six weeks, when we're doing a professional development session, we say, okay, so in the next six weeks, we'll come together again in six weeks. Between now and then, this is your assignment. Practice this section of it in your classroom for this many times.

[00:09:07.580] – Karen

It really depends on so many factors. But putting together a reasonable assignment that everybody engages in, and then a PLC follow-up assignment, and then a coaching follow-up work that gets us from sitting together learning about something all the way through to implementing it and seeing impact on student learning. That actually can be very quick. When it's a smaller task, one example that we use in the book is the example of learning the vocabulary routine to really get some in-depth vocabulary before we read and before we write. That routine is fairly simple in terms of step-by-step. Within six weeks, every teacher in your school can really good at using that routine. If you are teaching it in a professional development setting, practicing it together in the setting,

and then working with PLC's then working with the coach to get the steps going correctly and having your students engage and really paying attention to, how is my student engagement during this process and routine? And within six weeks, you've got an embedded new skill. So it doesn't have to be 20 hours of sitting locked in a room doing professional development. It really is about, let's learn together, and then we move to coaching.

[00:10:40.790] – Karen

Implementation doesn't work without coaching, but coaching doesn't work without an implementation plan that has some content to it where we're working together.

[00:10:50.420] – Steve

So I think I'm hearing a gap, so help me. I think in a lot of schools, the expectation is that the the principal, along with other leaders, but that the principal is responsible and accountable for a school improvement plan. But I'm thinking there's insufficient of the principal being responsible for what's happening with professional development and coaching. And so we got a gap there because I'm hearing from you, those two things need to be put together.

[00:11:33.470] – Karen

Right. There's absolutely a gap. Every principal has to turn in a professional learning plan to the district as part of their school improvement plan. Everybody's doing that. However, how it's implemented, few people are measuring. And that's the big gap is we hope that by saying that we're going to have this in place, that it's going to move us from A to B. But principal is really, really, really visible. A lot of times a principal may pass off that responsibility to, the coach will do, or somebody will run the professional development. I like to engage all of my teachers, et cetera, and that is fine. At some point, first of all, the principal

must be present the whole time. Start the meeting, never leave. It needs to show up that it is the most important the thing that the school is about. This is a school improvement plan, and after looking at the data, we know that implementing this will move us to where we need to go. So first is, principal needs to start the meeting, be present during the meeting.

[00:12:45.860] – Steve

Give the why?

[00:12:47.250] – Karen

Yes, absolutely and expect and plan for and accommodate some interaction and engagement throughout from teachers the whole session. And then at the end of the session, the principal will stand up and say, this for the next six weeks, this is your assignment. And then this is how the coach will be utilized throughout the process. The expectation is everyone needs to work with the coach during the next six weeks while you're playing around and trying to implement this piece. Then, Steve, the other day I was talking to you, and you added another piece to that that I I haven't added that I'm going to add in my repertory, I think is just implied, but I hadn't done – then the principal makes himself, herself available to say, I would like to come in and watch in your classroom. I would like to observe in your classroom and take data on that. So please sign up in eight weeks so that I can see how that's going. And then we tweak the plan based on that. Maybe the plan was way, way too hard. But really, what we thought we could do in six weeks, we can't.

[00:14:09.560] – Karen

And so the principal needs to see that and know that. And there's the formal observations that I love adding that piece because that keeps everybody in the conversation. And of course, the principal is going to be in those classrooms every

one of those weeks for the six weeks in some pop-ins and seeing how it's going. So we're constantly looking at data and looking – the data that I'm most interested in is, how are the students engaging? The teacher is working on this. When did we have the highest engagement? When did it drop? How is their learning impacted with this new strategy, this new implementation?

[00:14:47.190] – Steve

You're triggering an old experience that I had that's making me smile. I was doing some PD for a district, and so there were teachers there from several schools. It was a rather large audience. And we're like two hours into the training, and things are moving along pretty well. And I ask, now, where are the administrators because I'd like your thoughts on this. And not a hand in the room went up. I could feel the teachers turning their heads to look around the room. And I know I might as well have shot myself in the head with a gun because my recovery of getting anybody focused back on what we were doing, I've lost it.

[00:15:40.100] – Karen

You make such a good point that when teachers notice when the administrator is not there. They could have told you that when they walked in the room, well, there whether or not an administrator is there.

[00:15:55.560] – Steve

I just pointed it out to all of you. [laughter]

[00:15:59.340] – Karen

[laughter] Let's make everyone mad. I wish that that were a unique situation, but that wasn't the only time you were silly enough to ask the question out loud.

[00:16:12.200] – Steve

That was my learning that day. We won't ask that question.

[00:16:16.070] – Karen

But we can't overstate how important it is to have the principal standing there, opening and saying, this is why, and I'm very excited, and this is how it will help our school, and this is what our next step throughout it, and I'm going to stand next to you the whole way. Those are important words that every principal can say, and it'll make an incredible difference to what impact this time with teachers will have on student learning.

[00:16:49.680] – Steve

In your book, "Coaching for Multilingual Student Success," you illustrate how the plan for increasing multilingual student success as a school improvement plan gets laid out. I love the detail that you had there. I'm wondering if you could at least give folks an outline of what they can find if they go to your book as a resource.

[00:17:14.660] – Karen

The problem of practice that I landed on for the book was multilingual student success. Multilingual students are not experiencing the success that they should in the classroom. That's the problem of practice that I felt was common because almost every teacher has this as an issue. It's a good place to start if you're going to have a school-wide emphasis on professional development and put a plan in place that every teacher can engage with and be part of. But with the process, overall, we start with, where are we with our students? What's our student need right now? And we've got to have compelling data. Teachers want to know, why are we sitting here today in this session? And so looking carefully at the data and making sure that we have enough information so that every teacher is linked into the plan and into the conversation with, well,

this is what will happen in my classroom, and this is how it'll impact. One of the biggest mistakes we make when we're putting professional learning plans in place is we do this, opt out certain groups of teachers. We're going to start with the K3, we're going to start with the English department, we're going to start with…

[00:18:38.690] – Karen

And then we'll move forward. Well, every 4, 6 teacher knows that if a program starts with K3, it'll never come to them. We have to keep looking at our data just so we can see what's our common link where we're all working on this. It'll look different in K3 than it will in 4, 6. It will look different in the English department than it will in the science department. But we need to have this is the strategy, this is the approach, this is whatever it is. This is what we're looking at. Here are your links, teachers, to where it fits for your setting. That's the first due diligence work that we need to do, is give everybody their why. Once we've established that, and then we look for, well, so then what is the instructional solution? We can't keep regrouping students and coming together in PLCs and looking for ways to do Tier 2 when we haven't really looked at what's going on with tier 1? Have we grabbed our 80% of students in our Tier 1 instruction? The answer is usually, no, we have not. That's where we're really focused on how are we making sure that we're getting more robust and differentiated and engaging tier one instruction.

[00:19:57.570] – Karen

The first delivery, the reteaching, all of that is included in tier one. So making sure that we are clear on the why and then clear on the how, and that we have a plan that includes every single teacher. They might not all be included at the same level, but they must all be included. And oftentimes, we'll do something with the, well, we don't want to overload this group of teachers or that group of teachers. I really push back on

that. What we want is to make sure that every teacher has the fun and the enjoyment of adding another tool to their tool belt. Professional development isn't a thing we do on the side. Professional learning, professional development is the core of and the gift of coming together as colleagues that know quite a bit and coming together and working together and really honing in our craft. That's fun. That's energizing. That's renewing.

[00:20:59.490] – Steve

Collective efficacy.

[00:21:01.040] – Karen

Absolutely.

[00:21:02.060] – Steve

It's a critical part of getting to collective efficacy.

[00:21:04.680] – Karen

We have to have a plan that we're all working on. We don't have collective efficacy just because we like working together. We have to have an instructional strategy, a program that we're working on that we're saying, we used to not implement this, and now it's implemented. And so the plan, the school improvement plan, it just can't be understated how important that is. And if you don't have that, coaching isn't the solution. You have to have a plan of implementing whatever it was your students need. That's where utilizing the multilingual student problem set made sense in trying to explain the process through something that we can all latch on to. We all know that we can do better. We can have higher expectations for the academic experience for the multilingual student. So starting with that and then moving to the, if this is a plan, what is our first session? Let's map out a 20-hour plan for the year. That, again, doesn't include sitting together for 20 hours. That's not what we're looking for.

We're looking for maybe we have 8 to 10 hours of coming together across the year as a faculty, learning, skill, and practicing, and lesson planning in small groups and some of those really useful professional development structures and strategies.

[00:22:37.050] – Karen

And then the other hours are, now go practice, now go try it, now do a learning walk where you're watching someone else do it and you're seeing what's happening in your classroom. Now video yourself, watch, and use the checklist and the implementation rubric to see what your next step is. Now talk to the coach, and now have a coach come in and model this part of this strategy or have the coach take engagement data while you are trying to implement this strategy. It just keeps the energy of it up. Within months, every teacher in the school can be utilizing the program, the practice effectively. It's a very quick process when you use a coach.

[00:23:25.870] – Steve

What I'm hearing is really focused. Too often, professional development is scattered. Too many things at the same time to have sufficient focus on achieving the… Maybe is that because some of the school improvement plans are too big or too unfocused, not narrow enough on what they want to make happen?

[00:23:51.910] – Karen

Yeah. When you read it, you think, okay, so obviously there are 25 different programs and structures going on school, and that has to be that way. There have to be a few things that we hone in on and say, this group is not performing well, or the improvement plan is intended to improve something intentionally. And so what are we going after? And there are certainly things that can be done simultaneously. If some of the strategies and structures are really more focused on the younger grades or a certain department or your core subject

areas, then you can have a two-tiered program going on at once where the emphasis, it looks different in one area than another, but we're all on, this is what I'm implementing this year. This is how I came together and learned first, and then we had a goal, and then we're measuring that implementation.

[00:24:57.830] – Steve

I'm real big on the Principal/Instructional Coach Partnership model. And I'm big on a summer meeting where that gets hashed out. So I'm really hearing the School Improvement Plan ought to be at the core of that conversation.

[00:25:17.460] – Karen

For sure. And it makes good sense. I would say every principal feels pressure about their school improvement plan. I would assume that their supervisor is coming wants to look at that plan at the beginning. There are probably deadlines and things over the summer where you got to turn in the plan, and then we have to put our budget to the plan. And then we have our professional development days. We have all the different pieces. There's some pressure to be able to articulate that plan. By going through this process, it makes it very easy for a principal to display, and this is where we are, and this is how it's going. Here are the four classrooms that I want to have you come walk with me and look at because they're pretty amazing at this structure. Here are the three that I'm still worried about. But to be able to have that level of conversation changes the relationship with the principal and the supervisor. There's many reasons to be this linear and this focused. It helps with that relationship, and it helps be really be able to articulate. When you have the board presentation where you want to show and you're supposed to tell what's happening at your school, it's really nice to be able to have this level of conversation where you're able to talk about, this is where we were, this is where we started, and this is what's happening. Let me show you some really great pieces and the progress that we're making.

[00:26:46.520] – Karen

Again, that's fun to be in the position where you're bragging about your school and bragging about the process and highlighting the work that your teachers are doing and really acknowledging that every teacher is on a different path and we can differentiate and do some great things in school.

[00:27:11.660] – Steve

Will you have an instructional coach position in your school this year?

[00:27:17.230] – Karen

Yes, I do. I'm really proud of our district. They have moved to a coach in every school model. We have been limping along with sharing coaches around schools. So I am really fortunate to have an instructional coach come in with me, and it's a new position for the instructional coach. So I've already given her my book. She's reading that, and we're really going to dive in and focus on creating the professional learning plan, mapping out the year, determining which of our faculty meetings are going to go to professional learning, and how we're going to co-develop with the staff, because it'll be new to the whole staff. Typically, we've used coaching in our district for new teachers because that was the bandwidth we had. And so moving it to every teacher deserves a coach is going to be a culture change. And so we'll co-develop coaching menus so that teachers know how and when and where and why to use the coach. And so I'm really excited. In some ways, it's starting from scratch, but it's starting from scratch with a seasoned faculty. So it'll be a fun year. I'm excited.

[00:28:45.480] – Steve

So I'm going to put in a request. At the end of next year, join me in a podcast with your coach.

[00:28:53.850] – Karen

Oh, I'd love that.

[00:28:55.520] – Steve

And let's debrief the experience. That'd be cool.

[00:29:00.270] – Karen

Okay. Yeah. I love that.

[00:29:01.260] – Steve

Karen, I'm really excited that I found your book, even more excited that it caused me to get connected to you and to have this conversation. I thank you so much. You want to tell listeners how they can find your book and how they can follow up with you if they have questions?

[00:29:23.410] – Karen

Absolutely. So my book is a SolutionTree book, and so it can be found on SolutionTree. It's also on Amazon. That's an easy way to grab it. My website is under construction right now, but I will also have it available on my website. My website is just karenjbrock.com. Pretty simple. So that's three different ways you can grab the book. My website is probably going to be the easiest way to get a hold of me.

[00:29:55.020] – Steve

Alright. We'll put that karenjabrock.com into the podcast lead-in so folks can find it easily.

[00:30:03.780] – Karen

Okay. Thank you so much.

[00:30:05.170] – Steve

Thank you.

[00:30:08.470] – Steve [Outro]

Thanks for listening, folks. I’d love to hear what you’re pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn at Steve Barkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.