

# Promoting Quality Assurance in Literacy Instruction: The Preparation, Inquiries and Practices of Literacy Professionals

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## Foreword

*Literacy coaching* is a term that first gained prominence in the early years of the new millennium, and the overwhelming majority of literacy professionals heralded the introduction of this phrase to the educational lexicon. Long before the advent of the term, those in the reading field had advocated that those trained, as reading specialists should have major responsibility for the professional development of classroom teachers in their schools. The federal allocation of monies for the Reading First initiative made this long-sought goal a reality. Schools began hiring educators whose main responsibility was to train teachers in how to implement effective reading and writing strategies with their students. Originally, the schools focused on providing coaches for the primary grades. Later, as their effectiveness became apparent, literacy coaches began to appear at the secondary level as well. Unfortunately, some of those hired did not have adequate training to function most effectively. Thus a, a number of books and staff development opportunities were developed. *Literacy coaching* became a “very hot topic” on the annual survey that my colleagues and I have conducted for over 15 years. Today, almost all those surveyed agree that literacy coaching should still be a very hot topic.

In 2008, with the start of the global recession and a cutback in federal funding, many literacy coaching positions were eliminated. However, a series of national summits held in 2009, 2010, and 2011 showed that literacy coaches were still an important and vital part of the national landscape. The last of these conferences was held in Philadelphia and was hosted by Widener University. Chairs of the conference were Widener faculty members, Dr. Annemarie Jay and Dr. Mary Strong. Both of these educators had much experience training and “coaching” literacy coaches. Their first book *A Guide to Literacy Coaching* published by Corwin press has become an important resource for supporting literacy coaches and those who prepare educators to be literacy coaches.

This volume of works, entitled *Promoting Quality Assurance in Literacy Instruction: The Preparation, Inquires and Practices of Literacy Professionals* is based on some of the papers presented at the 2011 literacy coaching summit. Fittingly, Dr. Annemarie Jay and Dr. Mary Strong, who are fast becoming among the nation’s pre-eminent authorities on literacy professionals, edit this book. Also, most appropriately, the opening chapter, “Leadership: Keystone of Literacy Coaching”, is written by Dr. Rita Bean from the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Bean’s research and writings on literacy coaches/reading specialists have been a major resource in the field for over 25 years. She was among the first reading experts to advocate strongly for the leadership role of the literacy professional. Other chapters in this volume deal with some of the current issues that literacy professionals must know in order to work effectively in the schools. Among those issues are technology, response to intervention (RTI), and common core state standards. Working with adolescent readers, teachers of special education, and middle school educators are the focus of other chapters. Drs. Jay and Strong also write about a topic rarely addressed in the professional literature: “Working with the Inflexible Teacher.”

Inevitably, this volume will be an important resource for all K-12 professionals as well as the teacher educators who prepare them. The literacy professional was, is, and will be a crucial part of the educational milieu.

Jack Cassidy  
April 2, 2012

## Acknowledgements

Without the financial support of Widener University, the Third International Literacy Coaching Summit would not have occurred. The chapters for “Promoting Quality Literacy Assurance in Literacy Instruction: The Preparation, Inquiries and Practices of Literacy Professionals” were a result of the papers that were presented at this meeting.

Dr. Rita Bean and Dr. Jack Cassidy were both contributors to this volume and keynote speakers for the Third International Coaching Summit. They also provided wise advice to the co-chairs of the meeting and editors of this book. We are very grateful for their participation and support.

Mary W. Strong and Annemarie Jay

Editors

## Reviewers

This book would not have become a reality without the careful review of manuscripts by our friends and colleagues who contributed their time to this effort. We are very grateful to each of them for their time and expertise. We were fortunate to have these reading experts offer their comments and reflections on the papers submitted for consideration. We thank them for helping us to promote quality assurance on behalf of literacy instruction.

The panel of reviewers for *Promoting Quality Assurance in Literacy instruction: The Preparation, Inquiries and Practices of Literacy Professionals* is:

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## Introduction

As advocates for the roles of both the reading specialist and the literacy coach, we are pleased to share this volume of work by practitioners and researchers in the field of reading education. This book is the result of our involvement, and the involvement of the contributors of each of the articles, with the *Third International Literacy Coaching Summit* that was held in Philadelphia, PA in April 2011. As co-chairs of that event, we attempted to provide a venue for further learning about the significant contributions that both reading specialists and literacy coaches make every day in the schools across this country. Additionally, we recognize the significant role that universities play in the preparation of reading professionals by emphasizing theory-practice connections and ensuring alignment with the International Reading Association's (IRA) professional standards. Often, literacy professionals are not recognized by the public in the same way that classroom teachers are; however, these specially trained professionals are regularly the educators who scaffold the learning of both students and teachers.

We can assure you that the quality of articles here represents the quality practices of expert reading professionals from throughout the United States. As a reader of this text, you will gain insightful information about the preparation, inquiries and practices of literacy professionals.

*Promoting Quality Assurance in Literacy Instruction: The Preparation, Inquiries and Practices of Literacy Professionals* is divided into three distinct sections. Part I contains a stand-alone chapter by Rita Bean in which she emphasizes the historical roots of literacy coaching and focuses on the importance of coaches' providing professional development to teachers. Although many educators think of literacy coaching as a new and innovative approach for professional development and for supporting teachers in their efforts to provide effective instruction for students, in fact, it is not. The notion of coaching has been in existence for many years. Many principals and supervisors have been coaching teachers for years, but often it was a small part of their role. Moreover, there are differences in the ways in which those who coach in today's schools approach their responsibilities. In Chapter 1, based on Dr. Bean's keynote address at the *Third International Literacy Coaching Summit*, Bean discusses briefly the role of coaches as providers of professional development for teachers; in the remainder of the article, she describes what she sees as the leadership role of the coach in helping to support school change as a means of improving student learning.

Part II of this volume focuses on the preparation of literacy coaches. The five chapters provided in this section convey valuable information about the graduate level training coaches receive as well as information about the job-embedded training they afford their colleagues. The section contains facts and narratives about the wide spectrum of tasks literacy coaches are assigned, or take on as part of their own initiatives, in schools today. The coach's critical stance as a reflective practitioner is also emphasized throughout this section: attitudes toward their work and others, and their own self-learning are examined.

In Chapter 2, *Transforming Future Literacy Specialists into Literacy Leaders*, Hopenwasser and Lord explain a model for training candidates in a graduate-level literacy program for their role as future literacy leaders. In a diagnosis course, candidates led workshops and facilitated study groups pertaining to core topics. Not only did the candidates study the course content, they also prepared for and led professional development initiatives. They utilized various assessment tools, video clips, student work samples, key articles, and remediation techniques. The candidates and professors candidly shared their

reactions to this approach. Chapter 3, *The Most Effective Professional Development*, written by Howerton, looks at why literacy coaching is so valuable, what it takes to make it work, and how it can be a tool for genuine professional development. In Chapter 4, *The Literacy Coach: Preparation, Practice and Reflection* of elementary, middle, and secondary school classroom teachers as they learned about literacy coaching are thoroughly described by Bukowiecki. First, the particular graduate courses in which these teachers discovered the definitions, models, and responsibilities of a literacy coach and literacy coaching are presented. Next, the varied manner in which these graduate students practiced literacy coaching is pointed out. Finally, the teachers' thoughts as they became literacy coaches to other educators in their schools/school districts are depicted. Paramount to this entire coaching experience is the change in these educators' attitudes as they learned as much about themselves as teachers as they discovered about the teaching styles, beliefs, and classrooms of the peers they coached.

Another aspect of preparing the literacy coach is presented in Chapter 5 by co-authors Paxton, Slattery and Baynum. They explain the curricular progression and transition from foundational coursework to a clinical setting to literacy coaching involves the development of understanding the use of purposeful teacher prompts. These authors developed a continuum of graduate level courses that are based on reflection-based models designed to scaffold the development of purposeful prompts. Through the curricular framework outlined, *Purposeful Prompting* is examined from multiple perspectives, including the classroom teacher, the clinician, and the literacy coach.

The final chapter of this section provides an interesting lens to view the role of the reading professional. In Chapter 6, Gibbons shares *Educators' Perceptions of the Role of the Literacy Coach*. This chapter combines the author's personal experience as a literacy coach which directly illustrates the ambiguity of the coaching role. Portions of the chapter support findings from the author's research that specifically explored the perceptions of principals, reading specialists, and literacy coaches regarding the role, responsibilities, and professional development of the coach on a daily basis. The end of the chapter focuses on combining past research with current research in an effort to determine future pathways for literacy coaching.

Part III, *Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists in the Field*, provides many rich discussions about the actual work reading specialists and literacy coaches do every day throughout the elementary, middle, and secondary levels. A variety of topics such as content area teaching and the reading process, Common Core State Standards, stages of concern of teachers' instructional development, action plans for working with inflexible teachers, and how the full cycle of literacy coaching advances teachers' professional growth are just some of the areas addressed by the contributors of this section. Additional topics include imbedding technology into teaching and coaching, helping teachers gain confidence with the new literacies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, response to intervention techniques, working with special education students, and of course testing in this age of accountability.

Secondary level reading professionals will become well informed in Chapter 7 with Howerton's timely article on *Helping Content Area Teachers Say YES to Common Core Literacy Standards*. The author purports that the "reading across the curriculum" journey is beginning again with the adoption of the Common Core Literacy Standards for science, history/social studies, and technical subjects. This time, success as secondary-level literacy coaches will require stepping out of reading-strategy comfort zones and understanding that literacy in content areas represents more than teaching vocabulary and comprehension strategies. It also requires seeking the help of content-area teachers to learn about literacy specific to the content. This chapter presents an overview of previous attempts to bring content teachers to



literacy practices and offers suggestions for genuine literacy instruction by today's content-area teachers.

Selvaggi addresses *Teachers' Concerns When Adopting New Practices* in Chapter 8. Application of the Concerns Based Adoption Model is discussed as well as the implications for the application of this information for literacy coaches. In Chapter 9 Jay and Strong describe the importance of the role of the coach as collaborator when interacting with teachers who struggle and/or teachers who may be noncompliant in *Coaching the Inflexible Teacher*. Action plans to assist coaches in these situations are shared in this chapter.

In Chapter 10, *Literacy Coaches in the Middle School: Using the Literacy Coach Cycle for Success*, Stinnett and Kennan describes the process and function of a Literacy Coach Cycle, a plan for the Literacy Coach to work one-on-one with a teacher. It includes teacher observation, weekly planning meetings, and conferences. Teacher growth is discussed. In Chapter 11, *Integrating Meaningful Literacy Instruction with Technology: Coaching Through Teachers' Voices of Exemplary Practice*, Still and Gordon offer findings from an investigation about understanding professional development and how it impacts 21<sup>st</sup> century technology skills when integrated into current elementary classrooms. The results of Still's and Gordon's study suggest that "Peer Coaching" is a viable and collaborative path towards professional development.

*Literacy Coaches and RTI: Time and Intensity*, in Chapter 12, shares information about what is needed for RTI implementation to be successful. Puente discusses the role of the literacy coach in providing the support necessary for change, will concurrently working with teachers to strengthen their ability to use data in order to make good instructional decisions for students. Another RTI perspective offered in Chapter 13 by Traynelis-Yurek, incorporates a view of addressing the needs of special education students in middle and secondary schools. In *RTI: An Opportunity for Literacy Coaches to Assist Teachers of Adolescent Special Education Students with Language Process Deficits*, Traynelis-Yurek states that literacy coaches have the opportunity to play a vital role in addressing the concerns of teachers and meeting the needs of special education students who have language processing deficits. This chapter addresses several language processing deficits in the special education population of middle and secondary school students and discusses methods of identifying the problems as well as offering effective strategies that literacy coaches may utilize with these students.

In Chapter 14, *Change the Test, Not the Teaching*, Lewinski discusses the dangers of high stakes testing on writing instruction. Many teachers are forced to change their instructional practices to fit the restrictions of the test or are given scripts to follow with fidelity in order to prepare their students. After spending a year in a low performing fifth grade classroom, the author observed one teacher who taught her students to be writers. In doing so, she prepared her students for the standardized test without abandoning her teaching convictions.

Himes and Boulanger describe the process they used in structuring a supervision plan to include options for individual professional learning including teacher study groups. Chapter 15, *Facilitating Teacher Study Groups*, provides practical and reflective information about the types of study groups organized and the texts that were most successfully used by the groups.

This volume will enrich the knowledge of reading professionals, school leaders and university faculty as they either begin or continue their work in promoting literacy through coaching. It may be used as a professional development resource in school districts for either formal training sessions or for professional learning communities. *Promoting Quality Assurance in Literacy Instruction: The*

*Preparation, Inquiries and Practices of Literacy Professionals* consists of research-based practical strategies for new and veteran reading professionals (coaches, specialists, literacy supervisors) to use when collaborating within schools about literacy pedagogy.

MWS and ABJ  
March 14, 2012

*Promoting Quality Literacy Assurance in Literacy Instruction: The Preparation, Inquiries and Practices of Literacy Professionals*

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## Table of Contents

Foreword Jack Cassidy	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Reviewers	v
Introduction	vi
Authors and Affiliations	x
<b>Part I: Leadership: Keystone to Literacy Instruction</b>	
<i>Chapter One</i> <i>Leadership: Keystone of Literacy Coaching</i> Rita Bean	2
<b>Part II: Preparing Literacy Coaches</b>	
<i>Chapter Two</i> <i>Transforming Future Literacy Specialists into Literacy Leaders</i> Caroline Hopenwasser and Kathleen Lord	9
<i>Chapter Three</i> <i>Literacy Coaching: The Most Effective Professional Development</i> Dauna R. Howerton	20
<i>Chapter Four</i> <i>The Literacy Coach: Preparation, Practice and Reflection</i> Elaine Bukowiecki	25
<i>Chapter Five</i> <i>Purposeful Promoting: Preparing the Literacy Coach</i> Mary Paxton, Cheryl Slattery, and Lynn Baynum	35
<i>Chapter Six</i> <i>Educators' Perceptions of the Role of the Literacy Coach</i> Meridith Gibbons Kutz	42
<b>Part III: Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists in the Field</b>	
<i>Chapter Seven</i> <i>Helping Content Area Teachers Say YES to Common Core Literacy Standards</i> Dauna R. Howerton	55

<i>Chapter Eight</i>	62
<i>Teacher's Concerns When Adopting New Practices</i>	
Tina Selvaggi	
<i>Chapter Nine</i>	67
<i>Coaching the Inflexible Teacher</i>	
Annemarie B. Jay and Mary W. Strong	
<i>Chapter Ten</i>	78
<i>Literacy Coaches in the Middle School: Using the Literacy Coach Cycle for Success</i>	
Melissa Stinnett and Mal Keenan	
<i>Chapter Eleven</i>	87
<i>Integrating Meaningful Literacy Instruction with Technology:</i>	
<i>Coaching Through Teachers' Voices of Exemplary Practice</i>	
Kristine Still and Jacki Gordon	
<i>Chapter Twelve</i>	100
<i>Literacy Coaches and RTI: Time and Intensity</i>	
Norma Puente	
<i>Chapter Thirteen</i>	103
<i>RTI: An Opportunity for Literacy Coaches to Assist Teachers of Adolescent</i>	
<i>Special Education Students with Language Process Deficits</i>	
Elaine Traynelis Yurek	
<i>Chapter Fourteen</i>	113
<i>Change the Test, Not the Teaching</i>	
Kimberly Lewinski	
<i>Chapter Fifteen</i>	123
<i>Facilitating Teacher Study Groups</i>	
Toni Himes and Joanne Boulanger	

## Part I

### Leadership: Keystone to Literacy Instruction

#### Chapter 1 Leadership; Keystone of Literacy Coaching

*Rita Bean*

## Chapter 1

### Leadership: Keystone of Literacy Coaching

*Rita Bean*

Although many educators think of literacy coaching as a new and innovative approach for professional development and for supporting teachers in their efforts to provide effective instruction for students, in fact, it is not. The notion of coaching has been in existence for many years. Many principals and supervisors have been coaching teachers for years, but often it was a small part of their role. Moreover, there are differences in the ways in which those who coach in today's schools approach their responsibilities. In this article, I discuss briefly the role of coaches as providers of professional development for teachers; in the remainder of the article, I describe what I see as the leadership role of the coach in helping to support school change as a means of improving student learning.

#### **The Professional Development Role**

Coaching has had an ubiquitous history and multiple definitions. Joyce and Showers (2002), for example, focused on peer coaching, a professional development model in which two colleagues or peers work collaboratively to learn together. Their research findings indicated that when coaching was included as one of the components of a staff development model that consisted of a study of theory, demonstrations, practice, and peer coaching, there was greater and stronger transfer of the new learning to classroom implementation than programs that included the first three components only. The focus of their work then was on teacher learning that occurred between two peers, both of them involved in learning new content or approaches.

In the late 90's and early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the notion of coaching as a professional development tool to improve teaching gained momentum, especially with the No Child Left Behind Act and its programmatic unit, Reading First. States applying for monies to institute Reading First programs, included in their proposals funding for reading coaches who would provide support to K-3 teachers as a means of helping them implement the key notions embedded in that federal initiative (e.g., 90 minute uninterrupted block for reading instruction, teaching reading using a scientifically based approach as described in the National Reading Panel Report [National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000], and the use of assessment evidence for making instructional adjustments). Thousands of coaches who worked in Reading First schools, received professional development about reading instruction and about coaching. They were then provided professional development to the teachers in their schools that included both individual and group coaching. Coaches modeled, observed, co-taught, and co-planned with individual teachers. They worked with teachers in grade level groups, analyzing test data and making decisions about how to instruct students, especially those with specific learning needs.

Likewise, around the same time, because of concern about student achievement and the drop-out rates in high schools, the International Reading Association and other professional organizations

representing various academic disciplines, e.g., English, math, science, and social studies, developed Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches (2006). This document identified two sets of standards. Content area literacy standards that highlighted the knowledge and skills necessary for working with teachers from the various disciplines were identified. In addition, three standards related to leadership were described: coaches are skillful collaborators; they can work skillfully with teachers both individually and in groups; and they can evaluate the literacy needs of teachers in the various subject areas. In this instance, the leadership skills identified were those that related to working with other adults in a skillful and effective manner.

Others who have written about coaching as an approach to teacher learning include Hasbrouck & Denton (2005), Jay & Strong (2008); Toll (2007), and Walpole & McKenna (2004). Although these authors identify the coach as a leader, the focus of leadership is on the professional development role of coaches. That is, how can coaches work with individuals and with groups of teachers to promote their learning? To help teachers put into practice approaches or strategies that are new to them? To bring about change in student learning? In other words, the emphasis has been on the role of coaches in building human capacity in schools. Human capital can be defined as the “ability, education, and training that people bring to a job” (Leana, 2010, p. 16). Although the emphasis on human capital is necessary, especially for supporting individual teachers, there is evidence that such an emphasis may not be sufficient for overall school improvement.

### **The Leadership Role of the Literacy Coach**

There is no doubt that coaches must possess key leadership capabilities; they must be able to communicate effectively and exhibit interpersonal skills that enable them to establish trust and build relationships with teachers and other personnel in the school. But there are other leadership skills that coaches should possess. These leadership skills require that coaches understand how to work within the organization to serve as change agents—working with others to create systems change. Leana (2010) describes the importance of social capital, or the ways in which teachers interact in a school, on school improvement and achievement. In an earlier study, Leana & Pil (2006), found that social capital in a school could be described as follows: teachers talked to one another, they had a common vision, and gave similar descriptions of the school culture and norms. They also found that these indicators were more important than human capital in predicting student achievement scores. In a later study in schools in New York, these findings were confirmed (Leana, 2010). As Leana states, we can no longer rely on individual “star” teachers if we want to see school improvement; all teachers in a school must be committed to quality teaching and learning.

Such findings about the importance of establishing schools in which there is a focus on developing a culture of collaboration and collegiality are consistent with the research of others (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu & Easton(2010); Saunders, Goldenberg & Gallimore (2009); Vescio, Ross, & Adams, A. (2008). In my study of schools using a Response to Instruction and Intervention framework in Pennsylvania (Bean, 2009), I found that the literacy coaches’ role was greatly focused on such leadership. These coaches organized, coordinated, and monitored the school’s reading program. They worked with the principal in making scheduling decisions and interpreting data. They worked with teachers to make decisions about instructional grouping, materials, and approaches, and they spent time with reading specialists who then had primary responsibility for providing intervention. These reading specialists also supported the work of teachers by providing coaching support when they had an opportunity to do so. Although these literacy coaches indicated that they spent time coaching, they also acknowledged that their other responsibilities made it difficult for them to coach teachers on a consistent and regular basis.



## Ideas for Coach Leadership

In this section, I describe four ideas about how coaches can serve as literacy leaders and can work with others in their schools to develop social capital and the capacity of the school to change as a system.

### Work with the Principal

Although a coach can serve as a “point person” for facilitating school change, principal leadership is necessary for change at the school level. In other words, the principal has a key role in helping personnel in the school establish a common vision and set goals for the school as well as for each grade level. Although principals may rely on the coach to lead grade level or data analysis meetings, principals must have an understanding of what the ultimate goals are and what the data indicate about student performance. In schools I visited, principals often worked with groups early in the school year, helping them set norms for these meetings. Likewise, these principals often participated in grade level or data analysis meetings, encouraging participation by all and sharing ideas for how teachers might achieve their goals. As one principal indicated, “I’m the lead learner.” Moreover, these principals met frequently with the coaches, often once a week on a formal basis and more frequently informally, to discuss data, instruction, grouping, and to make suggestions to the coach about their work with teachers. The major point is that the principal has a key leadership role for understanding and promoting the work of the literacy coach and coaches must work closely with them.

### Understand the Notion of Shared Leadership

In Bean (2009), I define leadership as a “set of activities associated with working with others to accomplish a common goal, that of improving student literacy learning” (p. 65). This definition describes leadership as a set of actions or behaviors. In other words, rather than focusing on leadership as a formal role, e.g., the principal, the superintendent, it recognizes the importance of informal leadership in the building. Indeed, it recognizes that many teachers can assume a leadership role: serving as chair of a curriculum committee, mentoring student teachers, working with other teachers to provide support or addressing questions that they might have about literacy instruction. Stoelinga (2008), in studying teacher leadership, indicated that teachers often talk to each other about their concerns or problems, rather than to interact with the coach or the principal. It is the role of the literacy coach to encourage these interactions and to build the leadership capacity of others in the building. For example, in one school, the literacy coach took over the instructional role for an experienced second grade teacher for one reading block a week for an entire month. During that time, this second grade teacher worked with two new second grade teachers, helping them with their small group instruction. When coaches recognize the potential of leadership in others and encourage and support such leadership behavior, they are building the organizational capacity of a school, necessary for systems change.

### Support the Notion of a Culture of Collegiality

Schools that exhibit a culture of collegiality have the following characteristics: there is a sense of shared values; a focus on shared leadership; reflective dialogue occurs among teachers; teaching is made public; and teachers work collaboratively (Vescio, et al., 2008). In too many schools, teachers have operated in isolation, deciding upon the topics or instructional approaches to use, the assignments to give to students, etc. Such behavior has led to inconsistency and lack of vertical (between grade levels) and horizontal (within a grade level) coherence for students. This can lead to a gap in what students in a school know and are able to do. Building a culture of collegiality requires that the coach work frequently with groups rather than just with individuals. Such group meetings can be held for many purposes. Grade level teams can meet to discuss grouping, analyze data, or discuss curricular or instructional issues. Teams of teachers can be convened to form a study or book group in which they select a specific text that

might help them address a problem or concern in the school, e.g., how to work with English Language Learners. At the secondary level, various content area teachers can work as a team to discuss the curriculum in that subject, e.g., English Language Arts teachers; or in a specific school, it might be more effective to establish a cross-disciplinary team responsible for a specific group of students. Below, I describe a few suggestions that literacy coaches may find helpful in working with groups in their schools.

*Experiences should be authentic, not contrived.* Enthusiasm for developing schools as communities of learners can lead to the use of group activities that, although enjoyable for participants, are not focused on supporting student learning in the school. For example, participants often appreciate the opportunity to participate in activities which help them learn more about their “learning styles” or to discuss ways of improving communication skills. However, the skillful facilitator must help participants understand how the knowledge and understanding gained from these group process activities relate to improving their own learning and ultimately, the learning of students in their classrooms. There are many protocols available that leaders can use to build group process skills; the National School Reform faculty website provides excellent examples of protocol materials (<http://nsrharmony.org/protocol/index.html>). What the facilitator has to do is to focus on ways to help teachers apply what they learn through the group process activities to working with other adults in the school as a means of improving classroom instruction and student learning.

*Develop shared norms and establish a format for meetings.* Too often group meetings, such as grade level or subject matter meetings, have been viewed by teachers as lacking meaningful substance. Too much time is spent complaining or addressing trivial issues or topics that can be handled effectively via written communication. By identifying as a group a list of norms that can be used during meetings, participants can do much to assure that such meetings will be productive ones. Norms can be identified to address the following issues: attendance and engagement, respectful and reflective dialogue, and decision making rules. Often, participants will identify norms such as the following: Start and end on time; stick to the agenda; be respectful of team members’ ideas; and challenge ideas, not people.

Once participants recognize that meetings can be a source of shared information that leads to learning, there tends to be much more enthusiasm for such events. Establishing a format for meetings can help participants “know what to expect.” Often a meeting can start with a review of group norms and sharing the agenda for the day. Setting time limits for each item on the agenda is helpful. Likewise, it is beneficial, near the end of the meeting, to summarize the results, to identify tasks that need to be accomplished for the next meeting, and to discuss briefly how well the goals of the meeting were accomplished. For more information about holding group meetings, see Bean (2009, pp. 72-74).

*Provide opportunities for choice.* Although there are many opportunities for teachers to work together to solve problems related to instruction, the more that teachers are given some choice in identifying a specific topic and the approach for addressing it, the more likely there will be buy-in by those teachers. For example, at a high school level, one group of teachers might be concerned about the instruction for English Language Learners in their classrooms; with the support of the literacy coach, they agree to participate in a study group in which they read specific professional texts about that topic and discuss what they have learned and how they apply that learning to their classroom instruction. In another example, a group of social studies teachers teaching at the same grade in a school are concerned about the need for higher expectations and more rigorous instruction for their students. These teachers, with the support of the coach, agree to participate in Lesson Study (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999) in which they jointly develop a lesson for their students and one of them teaches the lesson; the other teachers either observe the lesson or it is videotaped for later viewing. This is followed by a discussion and recommendations for revising and then re-teaching the lesson. Other approaches to teacher learning may include: action research, analysis of teacher assignments, etc. (See Chapter 18 in Bean & Swan Dagen, 2010) for additional activities.

## Leadership Requires One to be Nimble!

In any social organization, change is constant. There may be changes in the personnel in a school- with a new principal, or several new novice teachers. There may be changes in the initiatives being promoted by central administration—a new reading program, a focus on reading in the content field, new assessment tools. There may be changes in the structure of a school, with new grouping procedures, addition of (or elimination of) specific grade levels. And there may be changes in the role of various personnel – including the literacy coach—sometimes, because of other changes that are occurring in the school. Therefore, an effective leader must be nimble, that is, quick, adaptable, and flexible. In other words, effective literacy coaches understand that there may be times when they need to focus on their professional development role, working to support teachers. At other times, they may need to work closely with the principal, analyzing the assessment data for the school as a whole and thinking about how to help teachers make sense of those data. At other times, they may need to focus on their role with parents or community agencies as a means of building an understanding of and support for school activities. As a leader, expect that the days will differ in terms of focus and role. And most importantly, understand the importance of anticipating what needs to be done in order to address current and future challenges in the school.

## Conclusion

Effective literacy coaches understand that their role is a complex one that requires them to both support individual teachers by serving as providers of professional development, and to also serve as agents of change, promoting student learning and school improvement. Such a role requires individuals who are knowledgeable about literacy instruction and assessment, and, in addition, have the leadership skills—interpersonal and communication skills—that enable them to work effectively with other adults to attain the goals established by the school. Moreover, effective literacy leaders must have an understanding and knowledge of the school change literature that addresses organizational change and the important role that leaders play in helping schools develop as places of learning capable of addressing the challenges of meeting the instructional needs of the students they serve.

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## Part II

### Preparing Literacy Coaches

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|-----------|--|
| Chapter 2 | Transforming Future Literacy Specialists into Literacy Leaders<br><i>Caroline Hoppenwasser and Kathleen Lord</i> |
| Chapter 3 | Literacy Coaching: The Most Effective Professional Development<br><i>Dauna R. Howerton</i>                       |
| Chapter 4 | The Literacy Coach: Preparation, Practice and Reflection<br><i>Elaine Bukowiecki</i>                             |
| Chapter 5 | Purposeful Promoting: Preparing the Literacy Coach<br><i>Mary Paxton, Cheryl Slattery, and Lynn Baynum</i>       |
| Chapter 6 | Educators' Perceptions of the Role of the Literacy Coach<br><i>Meridith Gibbons Kutz</i>                         |

## Chapter 2

### Transforming Future Literacy Specialists into Literacy Leaders

*Caroline Hopenwasser and Kathleen Lord*

Oftentimes, literacy specialists are asked to assume roles that include leading professional development initiatives, preparing workshops, and facilitating study groups. All of these pursuits require coaching adult learners; however, many literacy specialists are assigned to such coaching positions without adequate training in how to coach adult learners (Frost & Bean, 2006; Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007). On-the-job training is often not provided. On-the-job failure is not an option either.

Beyond the responsibility of preparing literacy specialists to become subject matter experts, professors are also charged with grooming literacy leaders. Professors must “prepare and coach reading professionals to collaboratively plan, lead, and evaluate professional development activities at the grade, school, district, community, and state levels” (IRA Standards, 2010).

Within graduate programs, how do literacy professors prepare literacy specialists for their potential leadership and coaching roles? The integration of content and coaching is critical. Literacy candidates must have opportunities to become experts on literacy topics, but they also need opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and coach others in these topics. The purpose of this paper is to describe the components of professional development training in a graduate literacy master’s program. This training is embedded in a diagnostic workshop.

#### **School-based professional development**

The goal of school-based professional development is to enrich classroom instruction that leads to improved student learning. Many schools and districts opt for job-embedded and ongoing professional development tailored to the needs of teachers and students. Literacy coaching is an effective solution for single session workshops or seminars that are often deemed ineffective because they rarely transfer to practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

In order to meet this demand, it is important that literacy coaches are trained to fulfill this role during graduate-level classes. The International Reading Association (IRA) Standards for Reading Professionals (2010) indicate that reading specialists/literacy coach candidates require training beyond classes in reading and writing. They must be ready to prepare, lead, and facilitate professional development models within their schools or districts. Candidates need to demonstrate effective communication and leadership skills; use knowledge of students and teachers to build effective

professional development programs; and use the research base to assist in building an effective, school wide professional development program (IRA, 2010).

Job-embedded professional development commonly takes the form of classroom coaching (observing, modeling, co-teaching). To be truly effective, the coach must also facilitate professional learning communities and design professional development plans (Shanklin, 2006). In this role, the literacy coach is a literacy leader who sets goals and directions for the school's literacy program, redesigning the school organization to meet literacy goals (L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010). The coach engages the faculty in this plan and determines ways to disseminate the information.

Teachers report that these school-focused and job-embedded trainings are more likely to lead to learning that is implemented in the classroom (Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, & Herman, as cited in Knapp, 2003). Workshops and study groups are effective school-based approaches to share best practices and build teachers' knowledge.

Workshops are time-efficient avenues for sharing practices pertaining to the objectives of the literacy plan and pave the way for instructional change within each classroom. In the workshop setting, the skilled coach assists teachers in learning more about a specific area and various assessment tools (Rosemary & Feldman, 2009). The coach purposefully guides the sharing of classroom lessons, remedial strategies, and differentiation options to meet the needs of all students. Analyzing student work and engaging in collaborative problem solving are often included in many workshop settings. Student work can take the form of video clips, audio segments, lesson observations, written work, or assessment data. While learning about a topic, including student work offers a powerful application aspect of the content being learned. The coach can develop a protocol for examining student work or provide various assessments to assist in administering, scoring, and analyzing. Moreover, it provides a common experience for all participants. This consistently yields positive outcomes for students and teachers.

Study groups also provide opportunities for teachers to share a common experience while building expertise (Walpole & Beauchat, 2008). Again, this type of school-based professional development is successful when the areas of study are purposeful and connected to real school experiences or concerns. The literacy coach, as co-learner and participant, organizes and guides study groups by soliciting interest in topics and providing access to articles and books (Vogt & Shearer, 2011).

## This project

This paper describes a professional development training model implemented during a graduate-level class in the diagnosis of literacy difficulties. Prior to this project, instruction was delivered through professor lecture. In order to provide candidates with hands-on coaching experiences, instruction was modified to include a candidate-led professional development workshop and article study. Following the class, graduate candidates provided feedback in the form of reflections. Their responses are described and analyzed, identifying the strengths and challenges in the training program.



## Method

### Participants and Setting

This project involved two professors and 60 candidates in a Master of Literacy Education Program. Twenty to twenty-five percent of the candidates were straight out of undergraduate school and had no teaching experience other than student teaching. A further 20–25% were practicing teachers with their own classrooms. The remainder had some teaching experience gained through substitute teaching or leave replacements. This variety in experience level led to a wide range in candidate understanding of course content as well as basic teaching skills.

The course in which the project was implemented was titled “Workshop in the Diagnosis of Literacy Difficulties”. This course is the second in a series of five content core courses and is designed to teach literacy candidates how to determine a student’s reading and writing deficits by administering, scoring, and analyzing multiple assessments. Candidates also learn remediation techniques based on the assessment results. This class prepares them to work in the university’s literacy clinic the following semester.

### Description of the Course Design

Incorporating literacy coaching into our diagnostic workshop was a twofold process. First, we redesigned the course to include opportunities for our candidates to lead workshops revolving around core literacy topics. We endeavored to simulate a work environment in which the candidates had been hired as literacy coaches, handed a new assessment or reading program, and been told by their administrator to explain this to the faculty.

Second, the candidates facilitated an article study with their peers. Our goal was to give them the opportunity to practice leading a teacher study group similar to what they would find in a work setting as a literacy coach. As professors, we provided candidates with quality articles related to their workshop topics. They read the articles and designed guiding questions to facilitate discussion with their classmates.

### Materials

**Topics.** Much advanced preparation was required for this shift in instruction. First, we identified a list of core topics essential to learning the course content (see Figure 1). We then assembled key information that we wanted the candidates to engage with and then disseminate to their peers during the workshop and study group. The candidates were provided with further support in the form of their assigned textbooks.



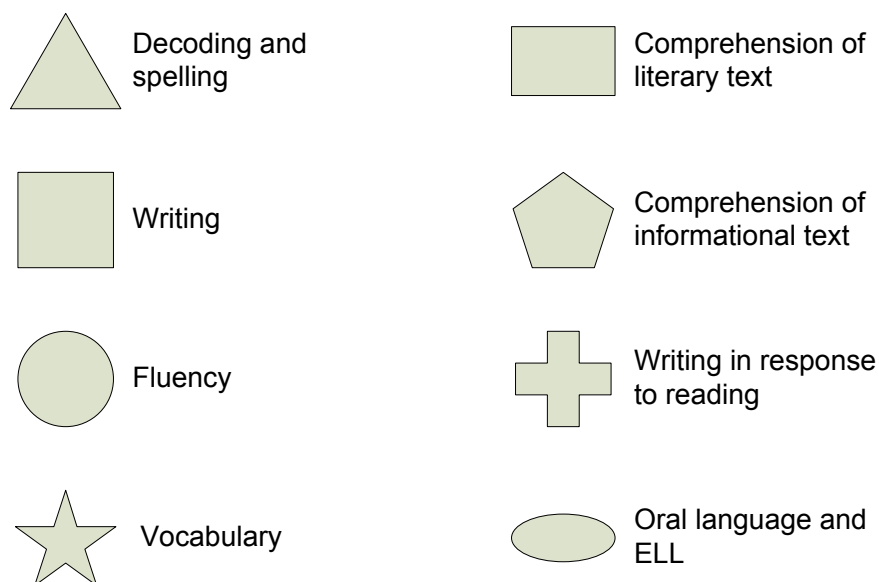


Figure 1. Core topics

**Articles for study groups.** Articles were carefully chosen for the study group discussions based on several factors. First, we wanted students to leave our program knowing the names of key researchers and practitioners such as P. David Pearson, Katie Wood Ray, Tim Rasinski, and Lance Gentile. We felt it necessary for our candidates to be exposed to seminal research studies such as *The Method of Repeated Readings* by S.J. Samuels. Finally, we included articles such as Hart and Risley’s work, *The Early Catastrophe: The 300 Million Word Gap by Age 3* that would stir candidates’ passions about literacy education.

**Assessments.** For each topic, we determined important assessments that we wanted our candidates to be proficient at administering, scoring, and analyzing. Then, we video-recorded candidates currently working in our literacy clinic administering these assessments and collected student work samples. These video clips allowed for hands-on training in administering and scoring, as well as provided a common experience for all candidates in the class. Our candidates enjoyed viewing clips from the campus clinic knowing they would soon be working there. This took assessment administration from the world of theory into the world of real-life application for them, enriching the learning experience.

## Procedure

The semester was comprised of fifteen class periods, eight of which contained candidate-led lessons. The first three classes were utilized by the professor to model how to lead a professional development workshop and how to facilitate an article study. The professor used a video of a reading inventory being administered to teach both how to administer the inventory and analyze the results. Moreover, the professor modeled how to lead a group of teachers as they learned a new assessment. The professor also facilitated an article study. After the workshop and the article study, the class discussed what the professor had done and not done to facilitate the activity. Key points of this discussion included that the professor had not lectured to the class, but involved them actively. Working as a coach, the professor provided guided practice of the assessment administration, scaffolded participants’ analysis of results, and

shared implications for remediation. During the article study, the professor posted guiding questions, initiated small group discussions, and led the entire group in sharing the ideas discussed in small groups.

After receiving their assigned topic, the candidates reviewed the pre-made packet. Figure 2 illustrates an example of packet contents for fluency. The candidates had two weeks to grapple with the materials without guidance from the professor. They used the resources at hand to construct meaning for themselves and created an action plan for their workshop and study group. Candidates read the assigned materials, developed an overview of the topic, and practiced the assessment to be used for diagnosis. The assessment results were used to determine the student's remediation needs. Two to three remediation techniques were created to share with the class and included in the action plan.

Table 1

*Fluency Packet Contents*

Assessments	Video Clips	Articles
DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Measure (ORF)	Student being administered the DIBELS ORF	<i>The Methods of Repeated Readings</i> by S. J. Samuels
Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MFS)	Same student reading for a longer time period to rate with the MFS  Student participating in a fluency building activity	<i>Teaching Reading Fluency to Struggling Readers: Method, Materials, and Evidence</i> by T. Rasinski

During the third week, the candidates met the professor with their action plan and questions. In this meeting, the professor provided the scaffolding needed for the candidates to succeed in their coaching attempts. In other words, the professor coached the candidates. While discussing the action plan, the professor clarified confusion, guided candidates to appropriate remediation techniques, helped with time management, and celebrated what the candidates had accomplished. Building confidence was essential as most candidates were extremely nervous about leading this learning experience. After meeting with candidates, the professor planned the remainder of the class time to complement, expand, and enrich the information provided during the workshop and article study.

In the fourth week, the candidates implemented their planned workshop and article study for an hour and a half of the three-hour class session. See Figure 3 for a visual of the full timeline. The teaching presentation included a 10-minute summary of the topic as well as an overview of the assessment(s) to be learned. The candidates then led the class in administering, scoring, and analyzing the assessment(s). As this was a key purpose of the workshop, candidates spent 20-30 minutes focusing on the assessment. Finally, hands-on remediation techniques were shared with the workshop participants. This took 20 minutes of the instructional time. Throughout the workshop, the professor continued to support the candidate as needed, clarifying confusion or correcting misinformation. The same team then led a 20-30 minute article study using professor-selected articles related to their core topic. They were asked to develop two or three guiding questions concerning their topic that would promote discussion among

participants. Leading a discussion group was different from the stand and deliver presentation style that many of the candidates were used to engaging in, thus providing an excellent opportunity for our candidates to gain authentic experience working with adult learners.

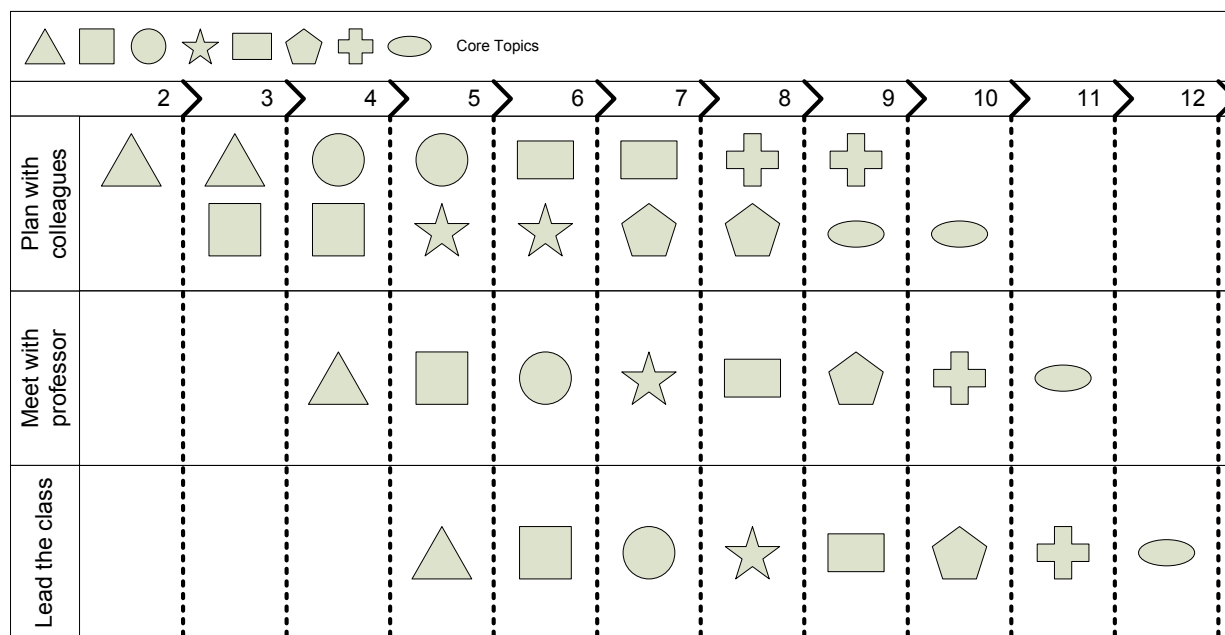


Figure 2. Semester timeline

## Results and Discussion

Candidates were assessed using a rubric that was divided into five categories: presenting the lesson overview, teaching the assessments, teaching the remediation activities, facilitating the article study, and the overall quality of the presentation.

Candidates also provided written reflections on the coaching process. In the reflections, candidates were asked to consider their reactions regarding the process of leading the workshop and the article study. From these reflections, themes emerged. The themes of “expert”, “coaching”, and “collaboration” permeated the responses. Even though the majority of feedback contained comments with regards to the benefits of the candidate-led workshop and study group model, some candidates shared challenges of the model. These are outlined below in the candidates’ own words.

### Literacy Expert

As a result of preparing for and leading the class, the candidates obtained an in-depth understanding of the topic. Most candidates reported that this preparation required them to “acquire a deeper understanding of the material than would have been gained had they simply heard the information in lecture format.” Some candidates embraced the challenge, “I felt it was empowering...we were the experts.”

An important realization reported by one of the candidates was that she was asked to lead a workshop on a topic that she *thought* she knew well. She quickly recognized that she had more to learn:

Phonics is a topic that we all have learned about since we began taking courses in the education field. I never expected to learn more about it. In order to become an expert on the topic, however, I did have to do additional reading and research and I learned more than I expected. I was also able to uncover great activities to use with my own students that I probably wouldn't have known about otherwise. It also felt good being the professional on the subject area and being able to answer my classmates' questions to help them understand phonics better.

## Coaching

Leading the simulated workshop and study group provided candidates with a glimpse into coaching the adult learner. They found this aspect particularly beneficial:

To be quite honest I did not fully grasp the weight of the literacy coach position until completing the presentation experience. It became evident through this experience that being responsible for teaching a group of people how to assess a student's skills and then teach that student strategies based on the weakness areas of that assessment is no easy task. Although I know I am certainly not ready to be a literacy coach, I am confident in saying that the coaching presentation experience certainly left me more prepared!

Another important insight is that some candidates reflected on the importance of listening in the coaching role. One candidate shared that, "The most important aspect of being a coach is listening to what others have to share, whether it is experiences, opinions, or concerns and respond with empathy and understanding to determine a plan of action."

Some candidates recognized that peer-driven activities are essential when supporting adult learners. "Because these activities were peer-driven, there was more comfort in discussing controversial issues, and perhaps even disagreeing with the presenters without facing any 'backlash' that may happen from disagreeing with a higher-up."

Another realization that some candidates expressed pertained to coach as peer:

As we've discussed throughout the semester, educational coaches are no higher-up than teachers, and should act as, and be treated as such. In other words, just as we all worked together throughout the semester to glean all the information we could while being open to other viewpoints and remaining equals, so must teachers and coaches work together to achieve one common goal: educating our students.

## Collaboration

Planning and coordinating the workshops and study groups required peer collaboration. Occasionally, the role of the coach requires co-facilitation with someone the coach may not know well. Recognizing, as aptly stated by one candidate, that "every person had something new and different to bring to the table." Another candidate reported:

Not only was it supportive to work with two others to gather information on my topic to present, but the whole collaborative class environment of learning and exchanging information with others was highly conducive to my growing as an educator.

Some candidates enjoyed feedback and insights from others. “I was eager to see if my classmates were as passionate about the material as I was and I was also interested to gain their feedback on the article and their insights on the issue.”

Additionally, candidates recognized that dissenting viewpoints within groups should be expected and compromise is the key to a resolution. “We had differing views on how we wanted to construct the article study. It took a bit of compromising, but that is the point of collaboration.”

## Apprehension

Some candidates commented on their apprehension in leading the class and presenting in general, “I get really nervous even though I have done things like this a thousand times.”

Another comment was that most candidates had not experienced preparing for a workshop or lengthy presentation. “I used to worry about a ten-minute presentation, and this was much longer and easier!” It was easier because the structure was modeled, the material was provided, and the professor offered scaffolds along the way. The candidate’s responsibility was to learn the topic well enough to teach it to others while in a safe environment.

Some commented on the fear of not knowing their topics: “The part that was hard for me, at first, was the whole idea of presenting something I was not familiar with.” Even though the topics were new to many candidates, presenting to their colleagues who were also learning “provided a safe environment for us to learn unknown information and not feel inferior to anyone.”

## Candidate-led vs. professor-led classes

Some candidates reported that they enjoyed having different presenters each week. “Instead of just having the instructor present the material the same way every week, it made it more interesting and I looked forward to the different activities. Everyone brought their own style and flair to the presentation.” Moreover, this allowed them to learn from one another’s teaching styles, “I was able to learn from my partner’s teaching style during our presentation as well as from my other peers’ teaching styles during their presentations.” “Learning from my colleagues kept the class fresh and new.”

The shift from the professor-led format to a candidate-led workshop model was not welcomed by all. Some candidates commented on the challenges of this learning modality. These reflections serve as important feedback as we modify our model.

Even though the format was professor-designed and monitored, some candidates still preferred the expertise of the professor. “Discussions after the presentations and the questions/comments directed by [the professor] were found to be most helpful for me.”

Additionally, a few of the participants reported that even though the topics were interesting, “A majority of time I found myself losing interest in the presentation.” This particular candidate did conclude, that “all-in-all, the presentations were a valuable addition to the class and helped bring everyone closer together.”

### **Next Steps from the Professors’ Perspective**

The emergence of these themes (expert, coaching, and collaboration) from the reflections confirmed our belief that these facets of coaching need to be experienced. No amount of lecture will prepare literacy candidates for the demands of these very important aspects of the role of literacy coach. Knowing how to learn about a topic in depth, prepare to teach others about the topic, facilitate discussion around the topic, and work and compromise with others must be lived and not heard. In order to help candidates understand the significance of this process, we plan to spend more time at the beginning of the semester explaining the process and share research highlighting the effectiveness of teaching as a vehicle for learning material.

Another important matter that we will reconsider next semester is how to partner candidates to ensure an optimal learning experience for everyone involved. A novice teacher working with a more experienced teacher yielded higher quality learning experiences than did two novice teachers working together. This was true for those leading the workshop as well as the rest of the class. In future courses, we will endeavor to partner novice teachers with more experienced teachers to better ensure success for all.

Occasionally, candidates hesitated stepping out of their instructional comfort zone. That is, we found that our candidates preferred to develop and share the remedial activities than to teach how to administer and score the assessments and then analyze the results. Consequently, we are considering how to place more emphasis on the assessment administration, perhaps by making it worth more points on the scoring rubric than the remediation activities.

Additionally, some topics had stronger appeal than others. For instance, most candidates enjoyed writing as a topic because they felt it applicable to students of all ages. However, many did not find oral language relevant to their interest area or current grade level. As professors, we know that candidates must be knowledgeable in all facets of literacy to be competent as literacy leaders, and on a more practical level, to pass the content specialty test in literacy required for certification. We are considering ways to involve students in this understanding such as sharing the broad-reaching impact of the topic. For instance, oral language development clearly impedes or enhances comprehension ability in the later grades. In this way, candidates will recognize the importance of early literacy skills on subsequent literacy success.

To combat the problem of candidates in different locations trying to share packet contents, a Blackboard site containing all packet contents is being developed. Before teaching this course again, we will have loaded all video clips, assessments, student work samples, remediation activities, and articles onto this site and our students will all have access to it. In the future we plan to use this assignment to help develop students’ digital literacies by building into the assignment collaboration through Skype, GoogleDocs, Wikis, Blogs, and other technologies.

## Conclusion

As stated earlier, the International Reading Association (2010) charges professors to “prepare and coach reading professionals to collaboratively plan, lead, and evaluate professional development activities at the grade, school, district, community, and state levels.” As a result of our project, we learned that integrating coaching and content is feasible as well as beneficial to the growth of our graduate program. As we develop our future literacy leaders, we teach content but also groom their ability to lead and coach others. Providing literacy candidates with confidence and the tools to lead is not optional, it is our responsibility.

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## Chapter 3

### Literacy Coaching: The Most Effective Professional Development

*Dauna R. Howerton*

This year school districts are tightening their budget belts, and sometimes at the cost of a most valuable resource, their literacy coaches. When budgets are tight, an on- or off-site coach is one of the most powerful, cost-effective resources available, but only if their skills are used to the fullest.

Literacy coaches can be the most powerful, cost-effective tool for improving teaching and learning in these uncertain financial times. Literacy coaching is validated year after year by professional organizations as something of value. For example, the annual International Reading Association's "What's Hot" list regularly notes literacy coaching as "hot" or as something that should be hot (Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Shettel, 2011). In addition, literacy coaching bridges the research to practice gap.

It has been said that the professional development system is broken (Hill, 2009). But professional development can work well if there is a clear understanding of why teachers need professional development that is differentiated to their needs and that happens in real time, and of what literacy coaches are able to bring to such professional development. One way to address issues in the professional development system is to provide professional development that is anchored in a deep understanding of how teachers learn, that incorporates learning into their planning for instruction, and that is situated where teachers need the learning to happen—close to home and not at some distant conference.

For schools to get the most out of their investment in literacy coaching, they need clarity around the *how* and the *why* of such coaching. The lack of clarity can be addressed by first looking at *how* reading specialists who took a giant step toward adult learning with little preparation. We can also clarify our understanding by noting the *why* behind the elements of instructional coaching that make it the most effective, efficient way to provide genuine professional development that supports constructive, collaborative conversations between colleagues (Author, 2011).

#### **Why Now?: The Shift from Reading Specialist to Literacy Coach**

Prior to federal policy changes in No Child Left Behind (2002), many school sites had "content specialists" who provided interventions to students. When federal monies required a coach for teachers of math and reading (No Child Left Behind, 2002), many content specialists were quickly recruited to become instructional math and literacy coaches, shifting the population they worked with from students to teachers. In 2004, Jan Dole published "The changing role of the reading specialist in school reform,"



which issued a warning about differences between the role of a reading specialist and that of a literacy coach.

Dole voiced concern about reading specialists who would soon have coaching duties under NCLB. She noted that there would need to be clearly defined roles for reading specialists getting ready to take on this new role that would mean teaching adults, not just teaching children, and knowing about interventions. Coaching adults is not like teaching children: Adults can be less compliant and are inclined to talk back. The reading specialist who may have been very familiar with the instructional needs of children, might be less familiar about the instructional needs of adults—their peers—the teachers.

Certainly, one of the unintended consequences of NCLB was to raise our awareness of the many roles of instructional coaches. The research has been slim on the effects of instructional coaching per se, but the research on the value of job-embedded, collegial professional development is ample is the best way to support teachers as learners (Darling-Hammond, et.al., 2009).

And now, at a time when fiscal concerns are high, many states have adopted Common Core State Standards that include secondary literacy standards that are to be addressed in core content areas other than English Language Arts (such as history, social studies, science, and other technical subjects). On the whole, secondary teachers of these subjects have rarely seen great success when adding reading and writing instruction to their responsibilities (O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). An outside professional development provider will not bring such teachers into the literacy instruction fold. A coach working closely with teachers to support new learning, on the other hand, may be able to do so.

## **What it Takes to do Successful Literacy Coaching**

### *Elements of literacy coaching that support teachers*

Effective professional learning developed between teacher and coach occurs in real time, meets the needs of the learner and the context, is more immediate in bringing changes to instruction that will positively affect student learning, and can support the education goals of the school or district. To attain such effective learning, however, requires that everyone in the system work from the same understanding of professional learning. The following, which is adapted from *Making the Most of Your Coaching Investment* (2011) defines some elements of professional learning that 1) enhance the relationship of coach and teacher and 2) provide a practical frame for building and creating the work.

Successful professional learning through coaching draws on elements including the following:

*Recognize teachers as learners:* Teachers are also learners who need ongoing instruction (not periodic professional development), and who, as adults, learn best through collaborative and active learning experiences.

*Recognize multiple constructs of coaching and pick the right one.* Teachers can be coached in a one-to-one or a one-to-some model, and coaching can be directive or responsive, content-specific or content-neutral. Regardless of the label or format, each opportunity to coach can be designed to particular

needs. Coaching provides ways to gather data as teachers implement new or refined practices and collaborative processes to reflect on that data.

*Build a professional collaborative community.* Creating and sustaining a professional collaborative community among faculty members is the greatest challenge and the most important goal of any instructional leader, for through collaboration, every teacher can build his/her capacity for teaching and leading. Teachers need the expectation of—and support for—collaboration: such expectations and support entail more than just time and space to collaborate. True support for collaboration also involves skilled facilitation through the implementation of tools and processes to guide and focus the collaborative effort.

*Draw on context-centered instruction.* When there is an authentic context for instruction that mirrors real-life situations, there is the opportunity to see practice in the real world change. The first step of any teacher facing the adoption of a new practice is to be able to imagine the practice in his or her classroom. Context-centered instruction with the coach moves into real-time classrooms and into the real lives of teachers.

*Rely on differentiated instruction.* The focus of the content or instruction is best negotiated by the coach and teacher. This negotiation must be informed by content standards, guidelines from federal and state education agencies, and the expectations of district and campus leaders; however, teachers' learning needs, like those of students, are not one-size-fits-all and require differentiated instruction. Teachers are at different stages of learning and understanding; therefore, it is not an effective or efficient use of time and funds to require the same professional development for all.

These elements are unlikely to be achieved through one-size-fits-all large-group professional development or one-shot (unsustained) professional development. These elements support the learning of all teachers, not the teachers identified as in need of intervention; can be used flexibly within any school system; and provide a much-needed outline for coaches to use to define their work. It is also possible to measure whether—and how well—these elements have been attained. Such measurements can provide district administrators with the evidence needed to defend personalized, specific, job-embedded professional development that only a coach can provide.

### **Why Coaching Teachers is the Most Effective Way to Provide Genuine Professional Development**

We know that research supports that the best practice for teachers to learn and grow in their field is through job-embedded professional development—that is, through experiences that take place as close to their classrooms as possible. We also know that when teachers spend time learning out of context, that learning has a minimal chance of being used in the classroom. Coaching, then, can be vital to enabling changes in teacher practices and beliefs. When teachers can see an instructional change actually happening in their classrooms, chances are they will adopt that change.

When we work toward a common vision in our schools, we must also recognize that we work with teachers who come to the classroom with their own vision of what education should be, of who they are meant to teach, and of who they will be as teachers (Calderhead, 1996; Henson, 2002; Jordon & Stanovich, 2003; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). The teacher and the education system share a vision of educating students; however, when there is a mandated change (e.g., full inclusion, teaching to standards) or visions of leaders that are not shared by teachers, coaching can be the most effective way to work toward a shared vision.

Teachers benefit most from collaborative, job-embedded opportunities to learn and refine contextualized, content-specific instructional practices (Author, 2011). And everyone benefits when teachers deepen their understanding of what they teach and how they teach it within the context of the classroom (Hill, 2009).

As teachers learn their craft, they, too, are students in need of time, guidance, and support. Coaching can bridge the gaps and build a way for teachers to capitalize on their talent and develop their craft closest to the context of their practice. Coaching is not about “fixing” teachers; it is about collaborative, differentiated learning.

Whether the focus is on coaching teachers as individuals (one-to-one) or as teams (one-to-some), we know that teachers who are allowed to learn in the context where they teach and work have a greater chance of implementing new programs and practices; becoming the best teacher they were meant to be. Literacy coaches can be the most effective, efficient, and economical professional learning tool in a system that implements coaching with purpose and deep understanding of how it works.

Scott and Dinham (2008) contend that just as we have learned that excellent classroom teachers are not “born that way,” we have also learned that teachers need support in their professional learning throughout their careers. We can anticipate the sorts of specific supports that teachers will need as they move through predictable stages of concern and levels of use when learning new practices (Fuller, 1969; Hall & Hord, 2001). The novice teacher needs something quite different than the veteran teacher; however, when all teachers are sent to the same professional development without differentiating for learning need, we mismanage our investments. Differentiated instruction benefits students and teachers. Teachers need to learn at their own pace—and at the point of need—and for such learning, they need a coach.

When coaches support learning—whether it be how to use a new resource or how to teach a new curricular program—the preparation and time needed for teachers to absorb the purpose, plan together, coordinate materials, implement them, and attain proficiency can be greatly reduced.

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## Chapter 4

### The Literacy Coach: Preparation, Practice and Reflection

*Elaine Bukowiecki*

In elementary, middle, and in some secondary schools, literacy coaches are often an important addition to a school's/school district's staff. The exact role a literacy coach fulfills in a school/school district is dependent on the specific description of the position, the school's/school district's philosophy regarding literacy coaching, and the mindset of the administrator (either school- or district-based) who developed this role. Often times, the coach works directly with teachers, guiding them as they interact with their students on a daily basis. Thus, "coaches model appropriate strategies, observe in classrooms, confer with teachers, and conduct [ongoing] staff development" (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2009 as cited in Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2010, p. 9). Sometimes, the coach directly teaches and assists students with various and relevant literacy skills. Other times, the coach carries out administrative duties in a school/school district such as providing professional development workshops, analyzing assessment data, procuring instructional materials, and writing grants. No matter what the particular responsibilities of the coach involve, the coach is first and foremost an excellent classroom reading teacher, having "taught in a classroom, informed by deep knowledge of literacy development, assessment, instruction, and materials" (McKenna & Walpole, 2008, p. 2). Literacy coaches also should have a deep knowledge of the learning needs of all students in order to guide teachers in addressing those pupils' specific literacy skills. Since there seems to be "as many literacy coaching contexts as there are coaches" (Burkins, 2009, p. 9), all stakeholders involved in the coaching experience (coaches, classroom teachers, ancillary staff, administrators, students, families) should know very clearly what the coach does and does not do. In this way, there is no confusion regarding the coach's specific responsibilities in the school/school district.

In this article, the preparation, practice, and reflection of elementary, middle, and secondary school classroom teachers as they learn about literacy coaching is described. All of these educators were matriculated students in a specific graduate reading program (Master of Education in Reading or Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Reading) at a large state university located in the northeastern United States. First, the particular graduate courses in which these teachers discovered the definitions, models, and responsibilities of a literacy coach and literacy coaching are presented. Next, the varied manner in which these graduate students practiced literacy coaching is pointed out. Finally, the teachers' thoughts as they became literacy coaches to other educators in their schools/school districts are depicted. Paramount to this entire coaching experience is the change in these educators' attitudes as they learned as much about

themselves as teachers as they discovered about the teaching styles, beliefs, and classrooms of the peers they coached. For these teachers and graduate students, coaching was associated with “multilayered reflective practice” (Jay & Strong, 2008, p. 2). Not only did each graduate student reflect on his/her coachee’s literacy instruction but thought and learned about his/her own literacy teaching at the same time.

## **Preparation for Becoming a Literacy Coach**

For these graduate students who had very varied teaching experiences (number of years; type of school/school district – public, private, urban, suburban, or rural; and grade level – primary, elementary, middle school, and secondary school), this introduction to literacy coaching began in an advanced graduate reading course. There are two separate courses depending on the graduate reading program in which literacy coaching is a valuable component. In the Masters Degree in Reading Program, the course in which there is a literacy coaching focus is “Supervision and Administration of Literacy Programs.” In this course, the graduate students learn about the varied supervisory and administrative work of a literacy specialist. Literacy coaching fits in perfectly with the diverse responsibilities of a literacy specialist at the school level. In like manner, in the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies Program, a post-Masters Degree program, the graduate students investigate literacy coaching in a course entitled “Principles and Programs in Professional Development.” The graduate students quickly learn that coaching is a vital form of professional development as the coach is providing on-going professional development to teachers, paraprofessionals, and other specialists in schools and in school districts. While each of these graduate courses has a slightly different focus, they each include a 25-hour school-based experience in which the graduate students are provided with opportunities to connect their course-based learning with actual school- or district-focused coaching experiences.

In each of the graduate programs in reading (Masters Degree or Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies), the preparation regarding literacy coaching follows the same procedure. First, various models of literacy coaching are presented to the students during a course session. These models include:

- **Informal Coaching Model:** Support teachers outside of the classroom through conferences
- **Mixed Model:** Support teachers primarily outside of the classroom but includes some in-classroom observation
- **Formal Literacy Coaching Model:** Support teachers primarily within the classroom
- **Peer Coaching and Mentoring Model:** Support teachers in a mentoring role in classroom lesson format
- **Cognitive Coaching Model:** Observe teaching; provide focused feedback
- **Clinical Supervision Model:** Evaluate lessons; provide formal feedback on teaching performance. (Vogt & Shearer, 2011, pp. 44-45)

Once the graduate students are informed of various coaching models, the Cognitive Coaching

Model (Costa & Garmston, 2002), which the graduate students will be practicing in their own school settings, is described in class. The Cognitive Coaching Model (Costa & Garmston, 2002) consists of a pre-observation conference in which the coach and the coachee decide on the focus and purpose for the observation; the classroom observation in which the coach observes the coachee's lesson with a specific objective decided upon at the pre-observation conference; and a post-observation conference in which the coach and the coachee review the observed lesson and discuss next steps in the coaching cycle. These next steps might include future coaching opportunities, either additional classroom observations or classroom modeling of specific literacy procedures or strategies by the coach/graduate student. Cognitive Coaching is "a nonjudgmental, developmental, reflective model derived from a blend of the psychological orientations of cognitive theorists and the interpersonal bonding of humanists" (Costa & Garmston, 2002, p. 5).

After the Cognitive Coaching Model (Costa & Garmston, 2002) has been fully explained and modeled in class, the graduate students watch several segments from the CD/DVD, *Layered Coaching: Mentoring New Teachers* (Allen, 2007), regarding peer coaching of new teachers. Even though these peer coaching scenarios do not follow the formalized Cognitive Coaching Model (Costa & Garmston, 2002) with specific pre- and post-observation conferences, the graduate students have the opportunity to observe and discuss different classroom lessons and the coaching exchanges between the novice (coachee) and experienced (coach) teachers. By watching these classroom teaching and coaching sequences, the graduate students begin to realize the true purpose of a classroom coach as one "who works with teachers to improve instructional practices, . . . establishes productive learning communities, . . . and supports the literacy learning of students" (Mraz, Algozzine, & Kissel, 2009, p. 1).

Following the viewing and discussion of different classroom coaching exchanges, the graduate students participate in an in-class practice with Cognitive Coaching. First, each graduate student videotapes him/herself teaching a 15- to 20-minute lesson from his or her own classroom. During a course session, each graduate student shares this videotape with a course peer. This videotape sharing serves as a pre-observation conference as each graduate student explains to his/her partner what he/she would like observed in the videotape. The videotape mimics the classroom observation. Finally, at the next course session, each peer partnership meets again to discuss the teaching videotape they observed and to offer compliments and suggestions regarding the observed classroom lessons. This exchange between each graduate student represents the post-observation conference in the Cognitive Coaching model.

Once the graduate students are introduced to various types of coaching experiences, have learned about the Cognitive Coaching Model (Costa & Garmston, 2002), have viewed and have discussed several teaching/coaching scenarios, and have practiced Cognitive Coaching with a course peer, they participate in a course assignment in which they became a coach to a teacher or



paraprofessional in their school (Masters of Education in Reading students) or to a small group of novice teachers or paraprofessionals in their school district (Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Reading students). For this assignment, each graduate student plans and implements three classroom observations (approximately 20 minutes each) and participates in three pre-/post-observation conferences (about 10 minutes each) with their coachee (s). These classroom observations and coaching discussions are based on literacy topics which the coachee chooses and needs feedback in order to improve his/her classroom teaching. To accompany each observation, the graduate student and his/her coachee develop together at the pre-observation conference an observation form, which the graduate student employs during the classroom lesson observation. These forms are either generic and can be used during various classroom observations (Table 1) or are specific to the particular lesson being observed (Table 3). Finally, each graduate student chronicles this school/school district-based Cognitive Coaching experience in a five-page report in which the graduate student describes the teaching style and classroom setting of the coachee (s), explains the three pre/post-observation conferences and classroom observations, and reflects upon the entire coaching experience.

### **Practice in Implementing the Role of a Literacy Coach**

During the next semester following the two graduate reading courses in which the Masters of Education in Reading and the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Reading students are introduced to and initially practice literacy coaching, these graduate students are provided opportunities to be year-long (Masters of Education in Reading students) or semester-long (Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Reading students) coaches to two teachers or paraprofessionals (one at the elementary-school level and one at the middle-/secondary-school level) from the school districts where they teach. This coaching is a requirement for the capstone practicum associated with each graduate reading program. The weekly contact the graduate students have with their coachees is a combination of face-to-face meetings, email correspondences, and telephone conversations. The content of this coaching consists of assisting each coachee to use assessment data to create a group profile of their class in order to plan flexible grouping and relevant instruction and guiding the coachees in providing “best” practices in literacy instruction, including content-area literacy for the middle- and secondary-school teachers. Each graduate student records this coaching in a daily-weekly log (Figure 1) and in a by-weekly mentoring/coaching reflective journal (Table 3). While the graduate students are often anxious in the beginning of their practica to be coaching educators who work at different grade levels than those they teach, they find, in the end, they learn so much valuable information about literacy teaching and learning in kindergarten through grade 12 classrooms. This broad-based literacy knowledge and experience coincides with the state certification the teachers receive when they graduate from these reading programs, which is a Reading Specialist license, prekindergarten-grade 12. “Literacy coaching is a powerful vehicle for moving districts, buildings, and teachers toward their goals” (Sandvold & Baxter, 2008, p.17). This entire



coaching experience, beginning with graduate course and classroom practices and culminating in these practicum coaching interactions, certainly aid these graduate students in discovering and understanding the daily work of a literacy specialist and coach as well as achieving their goal of becoming a literacy specialist in kindergarten through grade 12.

**Table 1**

**Generic Observation Form**

Coachee: School:

Date: Coach:

Lesson Focus/Objective:

- Coach is to Look for: (notes from pre-observation conference):
  - Observations (coachee language, student language and engagement, general notes):
  - Potential Discussion Points for Post-Observation Conference (affirmation, questions, ideas/suggestions)
  - Questions for Reflection/Next Steps:
- 

**Table 2**

**Specific Observation Form: Observing Literature Circle Participation**

**Day #1: 30 minutes**

**Day #2: 30 minutes**

**Student**

**Time Spent on Task**

BD

Day #1: 14 minutes reading; 2 minutes on job

Day #2: 7 minutes on job

AM

Day #1: 2 minutes reading; 4 minutes on job

Day #2: 2 minutes on job

AB

Day #1: 14 minutes reading; did not start job

Day #2: 7 minutes on job

**Figure 1**

**A Sample Mentor Log**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics Discussed</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>	<b>Resources/Evidence</b>	<b>Length of Session</b>
9/8	What is a group profile?	Create assessments	NA	10 minutes (telephone)
9/10	DRA	Administer DRA	NA	20 minutes
9/21	Gave Chart to Angela	Put data into chart	Chart	10 minutes
9/23	Discussed findings	Created groups	Chart	30 minutes
10/2	Discussed chart and DRA	Used chart to group students	Chart	15 minutes (email)
10/3	DRA grouping, ELL	Used chart to group	Chart	15 minutes (email)
10/4	Offered advice about ELL students	Email with any remaining questions; sent results	Email	10 minutes (email)
10/11	Parent complaints for grouping; my case study student	Angela to email parent about grouping issue	NA	10 minutes (telephone)
10/18	Discussed possible assessment options for elementary students	Give interest inventory	Interest Inventory	30 minutes

**Table 3**

**Sample Mentor Log Reflection**

### **October 2010**

During October, I compiled a Group Profile using the information I received from Wendy. I emailed for missing information and made arrangements to pick up information after school. The Stanford scores were totals for comprehension, vocabulary, and scanning. I created groups based on the comprehension scores; a review of the individual questions and student responses is needed in order to plan effective instruction for each category: comprehension, vocabulary, and scanning. The student responses to the “Tell Me About Yourself” Survey indicate that most

students identified a favorite book or reading in general, what they like most about school (seeing friends to specific subjects), what they like least about school (the earlier start time to [state testing]). These students lead active lives participating in sports and art outside of school. The student responses to the Reading and Writing Attitudinal Survey indicated they are engaged in their reading (they enjoy fiction, especially mysteries) and feel they are good at predicting. Some students indicated they need to read more, read more slowly, or read with more focus to be better readers. The student responses about what they do best when writing focused on handwriting, interesting opening sentences, and writing stories....

At the end of October, I read *Jeremy Fink* and *Walk Two Moons*. I expressed to Wendy my pleasure in reading both these books. She said she had used them in prior years.

### **The Literacy Coach: Reflection**

As the graduate students participate in school-/district-based coaching experiences as part of two graduate reading courses and throughout their capstone practica in reading, they have numerous opportunities to reflect on the literacy coaching process. They discover varied and interesting information about themselves as teachers and learners, school policy, literacy instruction, and interactions with other educators. By coaching other teachers and paraprofessionals, each graduate student examines his/her own classroom environment and pedagogical practices. Through observations of their coachees as they interact with their pupils, the graduate students learn about varied and novel instructional techniques and materials they can incorporate in their own classrooms. Both the graduate students and their coachees relish the time to observe each other teach; discuss their students' accomplishments, skills, and needs; and exchange teaching suggestions, materials, and philosophies regarding education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In many incidences, the collegial relationships the graduate students and their coachees develop continue long after the graduate courses and practica in reading end.

In addition to increasing their pedagogical knowledge regarding literacy teaching and learning, the graduate students discover valuable information regarding school change, policies, and cultures as they participate in these coaching endeavors. The graduate students quickly learn that if the school's/school district's philosophy, administrators, and educators welcome and understand the purpose of peer coaching, then the coaching experience will thrive and be very positive for both the coach and the coachee. Yet, on the other hand, when school policies discourage teachers from observing each other in their classrooms, or when videotaping/audiotaping of children is prohibited due to confidentiality mandates, then peer coaching is very difficult to fully accomplish.

Finally, throughout these coaching opportunities, the graduate students realize the necessity of clear communication as they interact with other educators in their schools and school districts. In many cases, the graduate students have to carefully explain the rationale and purpose of peer coaching to administrators, classroom teachers, and other specialists in a school/school district. When conferring with the coachee during the pre-/post-observation

conferences, it is imperative for the graduate students to precisely point out that coaching is indeed not evaluation of a teacher's performance but rather an avenue for collegial and professional conversations between two peers regarding literacy education and student learning. It is paramount to establish trust between the coach and coachee at the very beginning of the coaching relationship. Thus, through various exchanges the coach and coachee have with each other, the ability of the coachee to trust the suggestions and advice of the coach is continually communicated. "When we communicate, we learn; share thoughts, experiences, and emotions; and become colleagues, friends, and soul mates" (Knight, 2007, p. 58). For the graduate students who participate in these literacy coaching interactions, clear communication is the most valuable asset of this experience. (Examples of the graduate students' reflections regarding the literacy coaching/mentoring they conducted in their schools/school districts are found in Table 4.)

**Table 4**

**Examples of the Graduate Students' Reflections Regarding Literacy Coaching and Mentoring**

- "I found this experience enlightening. I learned just as much about myself as I did about [this teacher]. I learned that other people feel a lack of confidence, too, and that I am not the only one who is willing to collaborate and work with others."
- "I truly loved this assignment and would like to initiate a group of people who coach each other next year in my school."
- "I look forward to becoming a coach or mentor in the future. I enjoy discussing and bouncing ideas around. This is the only way for the 'coachee' but also for the 'coach'."
- "I learned it was important to use 'I' statements and open-ended questions that promote non-threatening discussion that enables both parties to communicate more effectively and grow from the experience."
- "After taking part in this literacy coaching exercise, I realize the direct impact coaching has on teaching and learning. I feel strongly that all teachers, including veterans and beginning teachers, would greatly benefit from taking part in weekly literacy coaching sessions with fellow teachers."

**Rewards and Challenges Regarding Literacy Coaching**

As the graduate students engage in various coaching activities, they soon discover the many rewards and challenges of literacy coaching. First, literacy coaching provides an on-going and reciprocal professional development learning opportunity for both the coach and coachee. Second, through coaching, a process of change can be fostered in a school/school district as the coach and coachee experiment with novel and innovative pedagogical strategies and materials. Third, the coach and coachee help to promote unity and collaboration within the school/school district as they demonstrate how beneficial to each teacher's professional growth a coaching relationship is. Fourth, the coach and coachee transform their students' learning as they

implement in their own classrooms optimal literacy practices they are discovering through their interactions with each other. Finally, as teachers take part in literacy coaching, they become reflective practitioners as they make retrospective glances at their current literacy teaching in order to make changes in their future instruction.

Along with the varied rewards of literacy coaching, there are also some challenges. First, there is school change. Some teachers welcome school change and find it an exciting possibility. Other educators are wary of any deviations from the manner in which they usually teach. Working with different teachers does present challenges for literacy coaches. A second challenge confronting literacy coaches is the lack of a clear job description. With many different definitions regarding coaching, the exact responsibilities of a literacy coach's role in a school/school district should be very clearly defined. Having enough expertise and knowledge concerning literacy instruction and diverse student needs in order to coach other educators is often a third concern for literacy coaches. Fourth, the attitudes of school/school district administrators regarding coaching, and an environment that is conducive to coaching present additional challenges to the literacy coach. A final challenge involves the coach employing optimal strategies to develop a trusting relationship with the coachee. Without such trust, the success of the coaching experience can be jeopardized. The students in the two graduate reading courses described in this article discussed the various rewards and challenges of literacy coaching and brainstormed solutions to literacy coaching challenges in case these graduate students would be confronted with similar challenges when implementing literacy coaching in their own schools/school districts.

### **Final Thoughts**

The varied experiences the graduate students described in this article have regarding literacy coaching allow them to discover and practice the many dimensions of literacy coaching. Some of these graduate students actually acquire coaching positions in a school/school district, while others use the information gained from these two courses regarding literacy coaching to become knowledgeable instructional leaders in their own schools/school districts. At the end of their graduate reading programs, all these educators found literacy coaching to be most educationally rewarding and agreed with Burkins (2007) that:

the benefits of coaching is to reach beyond individual classrooms. In the end, helping teachers feel safe and confident and positive not only affects instruction but also helps coaches feel safe and confident and positive. A coaching relationship provides the opportunity for reciprocity of gifts of knowledge and skill, caring and support, feedback and celebration. (p. 125)

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## Chapter 5

### Purposeful Prompting: Preparing the Literacy Coach

*Mary Paxton, Cheryl Slattery, Lynn Baynum*

Within the curricular progression of a graduate reading program, the transition from foundational course work, to a clinical setting, to literacy coaching requires a change of stance from reflection-on-action to reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987). In order to support this transition, university professors have developed embedded opportunities for using assessment of and reflection on instructional practice with a focus on developing and utilizing purposeful prompting along the graduate course continuum. The use of effective prompts provides a lens for teacher envisioning and reflection (Denton, 2007).

This article includes detailed information on the following three stages of graduate reading candidate development: (a) Foundational level of courses where candidates plan and implement small group instruction, (b) transitioning to a clinical setting where candidates provide tutoring experiences, and (c) transitioning to a literacy coaching model where teacher-to-teacher interaction develops. The authors will include examples of how graduate candidates are required to critically evaluate goal setting, reflection, and action planning from multiple perspectives.

#### Foundational Coursework

Graduate reading candidates at the onset of their masters program have a variety of background experiences that shape their perceptions of effective literacy instruction. Honoring graduate reading candidates' philosophical perspectives is necessary in creating coherence within a graduate reading course, as well as between graduate courses. Through authentic and systematic professional development within and among a reading master's program, candidates' literacy content knowledge, as well as their literacy pedagogical knowledge, is enhanced, and thereby shapes instructional choices in their classrooms (Quick, Holtzman & Chaney, 2009). According to Alfassi (2009), "Traditionally, the teaching of literacy has been based on behavioral and task analysis concepts that view language as a precise neutral tool for instruction, through which knowledge and skills are transmitted" (p. 540). Just like beginning readers, graduate candidates in the beginning of their academic study of literacy need explicit instruction. In order to extend teachers' views of effective literacy instruction, coursework was designed to integrate their background experiences while incorporating reflective practices to enhance their view of literacy. Teacher talk or strategic teacher prompts during practicum experiences were evaluated within individual courses, and among a reading masters' program to monitor changes in reading candidates' use of strategic prompting.

#### A Lens to Look Forward in Foundational Courses

Graduate reading candidates have a varied view of effective teacher prompts to support strategic comprehension. In a foundational reading course, candidates shared their perceptions of effective strategic

prompts used during literacy lessons. For example, one graduate reading candidate, a novice primary teacher in a rural, public school district in Southcentral Pennsylvania, had a comprehensive definition of strategic teacher talk used to prompt readers' comprehension behaviors in a small group setting. This teacher reported using this prompt with a struggling reader, "I noticed that you seem confused. When I am confused, I reread a sentence, phrase or word to help me understand." Whereas, another graduate reading candidate had limited prior knowledge related to effective literacy prompts. Her instructional experiences included teaching struggling readers in a learning support middle school classroom. Her definition of prompting students' comprehension behaviors was limited to teacher directed content questions, including "Who are the characters in the story?" Another example of a graduate reading candidate's definition of strategic support was based on the scope and sequence from a basal program. For example, her use of a basal approach during balanced literacy instruction tended to introduce the strategic behavior prompts in a teacher-directed format, rather than using data from students to determine the prompts needed. She seemed confident to follow a step-by-step process for prompting based on the curricular framework and not the needs of her readers. She struggled to conceptualize that a teacher's prompts are adjusted within a lesson to support and scaffold a reader.

Based on discourse research and the social cognitive theory, the professor determined that a social constructivist approach to group discussions and planning would scaffold the diverse definitions of strategic reading prompts (Alfassi, 2009; Cantrell, 2002). Since graduate reading candidates have a variety of definitions about strategic prompts, a course assignment was designed to evidence candidates' perceptions of prompts used in literacy lessons. For instance, graduate reading candidates were required to share their perceptions of strategic behavior and list teacher prompts that could be used to support readers. Working as a group, the graduate reading candidates planned a comprehension strategy based lesson to explore the use of prompting to support beginning readers. The candidates selected a strategy focus to introduce to beginning readers. Strategies included Identifying Important Information, Monitoring, and Making Connections. The candidates created a list of prompts to be implemented within the lesson. A lesson simulation with primary readers served as a practical experience to investigate the use of the prompts. Lessons were tapped, and following the lesson, the professor printed prompts on sentence strips. Using three categories, graduate reading candidates sorted the sentence strip prompts into content prompts, directional prompts or pedagogical prompts. Content prompts were identified as requiring the reader to relate efferent information from the text, including "What is a noun?" Directional prompts required the reader to follow a process or steps to complete a task, including "Find the topic sentence and look for a key word that explains the main idea." Pedagogical prompts included statements that modeled expected literary behaviors used to scaffold readers, including "When I read that sentence, I thought of a connection."

Graduate reading candidates found that a majority of their statements could be categorized into content prompts and directional prompts. They noticed that the more effective prompts were those statements that included a model of best practice, thereby validating the importance of pedagogical prompts. They surmised that to support strategic readers their prompts must explicitly direct readers' critical thinking through the comprehension process.

In a foundational literacy course, both the professor and graduate reading candidates must recognize prior knowledge as a starting point for constructing a unified approach for prompting. Through a synchronized view of effective practice, graduate reading candidates can plan and evaluate the use of



prompts with beginning readers. This expanded knowledge of effective teacher talk can support the graduate candidates as they transition from foundational knowledge into practicum experiences.

### Clinical Setting

Graduate reading candidates then transition to a clinical setting where they are provided with literacy tutoring experiences which involve systematic and daily reflection in the use of purposeful teacher prompts for facilitating children's specific literacy development. Assessment and instructional strategies are practiced and discussed as a means of building insights about literacy processes related to individual developmental needs. This promotes an understanding of the relationship between assessment and instruction that includes purposeful teacher prompting to adjust and strengthen literacy behaviors. The experience necessitates decisions that have to be made within a clinical setting with real children who struggle with literacy.

### A Lens to Look Back in the Laboratory Practicum in Reading

At this point, graduate reading candidates are provided experiences in facilitating children's literacy development in a clinical setting with guidance and support from the course professor as well as feedback from peers. The graduate reading candidates, now called clinicians, deliver one-on-one literacy lessons that are balanced and planned based on observed need. The clinical experience provides a supportive context in which to explore understandings about the teaching and learning process in the areas of reading and writing. The clinicians are expected to articulate an understanding of the foundations and processes of becoming literate. They are also expected to articulate an awareness of the reading-writing connection with the use of purposeful teacher prompting to adjust and strengthen literacy behaviors that have shown to be obstacles in literacy development. Clinicians are required to plan and participate in meaningful instruction including purposeful prompting for the development of proficient literacy. This clinical framework is a four-week program where the clinicians meet with two tutees individually five days each week. Each tutee has a 60-minute lesson involving a balanced literacy framework.

Within this setting, an action research project is set up and planned around a specific identified need of the tutee based on an observed reading behavior weakness. Prompts are chosen to adjust the reading behavior and strengthen the tutee's literacy development. The clinicians experience real children who struggle with literacy. They have the opportunity to look very carefully at the development of each child, observe gaps and weaknesses, and ultimately make decisions about which reading behaviors are most significant at that point in the child's development that need adjusting. Once that critical behavior is identified, choices are made about purposeful prompting to adjust that behavior. The source of the purposeful teacher prompting comes from *The Fountas and Pinnell prompting guide part 1. A tool for literacy teachers* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

There are five critical steps in the action research process. First, clinicians identify a problem area in either reading or writing after working one-on-one with the tutee for four days, one hour each day. The clinician begins a collection and an organization of data that is done on a daily basis. The clinician then interprets the data, also on a daily basis. After review of the initial data collected and research on the issue, a plan of action is designed and implemented that will allow the clinician to make a change in the tutee's literacy behavior. The clinician is expected to study that change. The clinician continues that

action based on the interpretation of the data and uses purposeful teacher prompting to complete that action. Finally, the clinician evaluates the results. Changes or adjustments to the action, including reinforcement of the action, the purposeful teacher prompting, are made and maintained for the remainder of the clinical experience.

Areas of focus by the clinicians in the tutees' individual literacy development vary from clinician to clinician based on individual need. For example, one clinician discovered that her tutee did not read for meaning; therefore, she chose to respond to the reading behavior with the prompt, "You said \_\_\_\_\_. Does that make sense?" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 13) or "Try that again and think of what would make sense" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 7). Another clinician chose to focus on the tutee looking through the entire word while reading, and in this case, the clinician's purposeful teacher prompt chosen was, "Does that look right?" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 7). Similarly, another tutee demonstrated proficiency at using picture clues to determine unknown words when reading but needed to check visual clues in the word. In addition to using the prompt, "You said \_\_\_\_\_. Does that look right?" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 13), this tutor also chose to prompt with "Does the word you said look like the word on the page?" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 13). One tutee was not making any attempts when he came to an unknown word, but he would verbally appeal to the clinician each time he came to an unknown word. That clinician chose to prompt with, "Try something" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 15) and "Say the first sound" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 11). A related issue appeared when a tutee came to an unknown word and did not do anything – he did not appeal, or ask, or attempt anything – he sat still and waited for a told by the clinician. His clinician chose to say, "What can you do?" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 15). After first working to teach him to get his mouth ready to initially attempt the first sound, eventually the clinician worked to prompt him to look through the whole word. Another clinician chose to focus on her tutee reading word endings. Her prompt was simply, "Read to the end of the word" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 7). When it comes to fluency, one clinician was concerned about her tutee having difficulty in this area, often ignoring, skipping, or misusing punctuation when he read. In addition, his reading rate was much slower than what is expected for his grade level. His fluency seemed to be impeding his comprehension of the text. This clinician chose to purposefully prompt him with, "Read it again and read the punctuation" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 17) or "Read this part again, faster" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 17), or "Put your words together so it sounds like the way you talk" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. 18).

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the clinician to determine what area of the tutee's literacy development is most crucial in adjusting at this exact point in time. What reading behavior can be adjusted and strengthened today, through purposeful prompting by the clinician, that will make the tutee a more strategic reader tomorrow?

### Literacy Coaching

At this juncture, the candidate transitions from the stance of a clinician to that of a Literacy Coach. The seminar course is specifically designed as the capstone experience for the graduate program and includes background knowledge and application skills developed in the previous courses. It necessitates two changes in stance. The first transition is from a focus on pedagogy to a focus on andragogy. The second transition is view one's self as possessing a sufficient level of expertise to facilitate reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987) in a peer.

## A Lens to Look to the Future as a Coach

Students utilize the framework of Lyons and Pinnell (2001) to examine the development and implementation of high-quality professional development for literacy educators as a starting point for the coaching process. They develop professional development experiences intended to scaffold the introduction and implementation of instructional strategies for the teaching of literacy based on the language and literacy framework developed by Lyons and Pinnell.

While the graduate students have participated in professional development as a learner, they have little experience in planning and delivering it to fellow educators. One of the challenging aspects of use of the framework is the interview of the educators using questions designed to gather information regarding perspectives about personal efficacy and willingness to work in a collaborative setting. One student reported that she had never had to think about what she knew or needed to know, that someone told her what training she would attend. Another student shared that asking another professional about what he/she needed to know required a level of inquiry and prompting that was uncomfortable for her. Another student stated that she didn't feel that she knew enough personally to be preparing and offering professional development even though she was in the final course in the program. The inception, preparation and delivery of a professional development experience targeted toward perceived needs required scaffolding and prompting by the professor.

In order to make visible the experience of coaching a peer, class members record themselves teaching three reading lessons in their own classroom. Students are directed to select either a teacher directed large group or small group lesson that they would teach during a typical class and record it from the introduction to ending. Teacher behavior and language is the focus of the recording rather than student reactions or interactions. The recordings are used as an artifact for simulated coaching rounds.

During coaching rounds, students work in triads and assume alternating roles. The student either shows the recording, assuming the role of classroom teacher, or assumes the role of a literacy coach, or assumes the role of process observer, essentially coaching the coach. The professor models the various roles so that members have an understanding of the responsibilities and behaviors of each participant. The triads complete the simulated coaching rounds and the professor observes the process and notes specific language used by the participants.

Students have commented that the role of the coach is the most difficult. They said that asking another educator about the intention of a lesson or about the reasoning behind a particular instructional choice made them uncomfortable. One student remarked that she didn't want her classmate to think she was judging the quality of the lesson. Another student stated that she just didn't know what to say that would lead the teacher to make judgments about his/her own teaching. When coaching the coach, students stated that they didn't know what to say when sharing observations because they didn't know what to suggest for the coach to say or do differently. It appeared that the dissonance they experienced in the rounds was required for them to build a schema for creating actual coaching prompts.

The professor has noted that the tendency of the students assuming the role of teacher and coach to move off the task when they became uncomfortable. During the observations, the professor has prompted participants back onto task when overhearing them discuss classroom decorations or specific students rather than the teacher behaviors exhibited.

Students share perceptions of the simulations from the three viewpoints and collaborate on prompts or comments that could be used. The intent of the coaching rounds and collaboration is to offer guided practice in the process in a scaffolded setting outside of their own districts. This is in preparation for the experience of coaching a peer.

Students identify a peer in his/her own district and ask the peer to participate in a coaching session on-site. The student-coach utilizes the Lyons and Pinnell (2001) framework for building a collaborative coaching relationship. The coach prompts the peer to determine an area of instructional need and to do the analytical preparation for a classroom observation. The coach completes a classroom observation using the pre-determined parameters to collect data. The coach analyses the data and prepares a plan for sharing it. The coach and peer meet to have a conversation about the lesson and the coach uses questions to prompt the peer to analyze teacher and student behaviors observed during the lesson. The coach offers suggestions and resources related to his/her expertise in teaching reading developed during the graduate program.

The process is detailed in a case study paper that contains information about the setting, the participants, the pre-observation conference, the observation and data analysis and the post-observation coaching conversation. The coach articulates her/his own perceptions of personal growth during the various segments of the experience. The paper also includes a summary that is a reflection-on-practice (Schon, 1987).

Students have commented in the reflection section that they felt some initial discomfort in coaching a peer, yet as the process developed they were able to draw on the experiences from class to assume the role of a coach. Students' comments have included that they felt empowered by the experience, that they were amazed by their own level of expertise about teaching reading, that they felt they were ready to become a coach if the opportunity would become available. Students have also reported a high level of support by building and district administrators for the concept of literacy coaching and peer led professional development and collaboration.

### Final Thoughts

The graduate program described here has been developed on a continuum designed to facilitate the development of purposeful prompting. The concept of prompting is purposefully built into each course because the professors in the program view it as a needed element for facilitating intellectual growth, both with children and adults. The consistent use of purposeful prompting is one characteristic of instruction built on theory-in-action.

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## Chapter 6

### Educators' Perceptions of the Role of the Literacy Coach

*Meridith Gibbons Kutz*

Across the country, literacy coaching has been gaining substantial momentum, in the field of American education. Although the term “literacy coaching” was thought to be a relatively new educational term, many would be surprised to learn that the idea of literacy coaching actually dated back to the 1920’s (Hall, 2004). According to Jay and Strong (2008), the function of the literacy coach, as we know it to be today, is defined as a reading specialist recognized as an expert teacher by peers and superiors whose main function is to provide professional development to teachers in both one-to-one and group venues with the goal of improving literacy instruction. A growing interest in literacy coaching rapidly increased in response to the No Child Left Behind Initiative (2001) which was primarily designed to raise standardized test scores and improve literacy achievement. Literacy coaching was also shown to be a means to bridge the gap between school vision for literacy instruction and actual student accomplishment.

If utilized effectively, literacy coaches could serve as literacy leaders and agents for change during professional development workshops. Joyce and Showers (1988) provided a popular model of a professional development system which required new resource allocations, time and personnel, and budgetary decisions to be considered in order to effectively develop this system for change. With the literacy coaching model, professional development could be tailored to meet the needs of the school districts. Bean (2007) supported the notion that one-shot workshops and seminars disconnected from the school context seldom resulted in substantive and sustained change in classrooms. In addition to professional development workshops, it was proposed that graduate level courses could begin to serve as a tool to better equip literacy coaches in servicing the needs of their schools, teachers, and students.

#### **Research Study**

As a relatively new college professor, I developed a research interest in literacy coaching and in the creation of graduate courses for training literacy coaches. This paper reports on the study conducted to determine educators’ perceptions about coaches.

The purpose of the study was to determine the benefits of implementing a literacy coaching course at the graduate level according to the perceptions of school reading specialists, principals, and literacy coaches. Questions were generated based on my personal experience as a literacy coach five years prior: (1) What are the benefits of having a literacy coaching course at the graduate level based on the perceptions of school reading specialists, principals, and literacy coaches?, (2) What course objectives should be met in a graduate level course in literacy coaching based on the perceptions of school reading specialists, principals, and literacy coaches?, (3) According to observations, interviews, and surveys, how

can graduate programs better prepare reading specialists to become literacy coaches? My own feelings of ambivalence, apprehension, and lack of training for a new position in a brand new school were overshadowed by teachers' anxiety and sheer dread that I was assigned the coaching role in a supervisory capacity. The district had no formal job description except for excerpts *The Literacy Coach's Handbook: A Guide to Research-Based Practice* (Walpole & McKenna, 2004) that had been handed to me the summer prior to obtaining the position. Needless to say, my first year as a literacy coach was also my last!

## **Participants' Surveys**

Participants in the study were principals, reading specialists, and literacy coaches in each of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania. Four hundred and fifty surveys were sent out (150 surveys to each group). One hundred and six participants responded including 50 principals, 36 reading specialists, and 20 literacy coaches.

Each of the three groups' surveys contained open-ended questions. Each survey began with general questions (years of service, experience in current position, etc.), but also included specific questions about the role of the reading professional in their buildings. For example, principals were asked to: (1) Describe the main responsibilities of the reading specialist as well as the literacy coach; (2) Describe the amount of training that all reading specialists and coaches receive throughout their school district in the area of working with teachers. Finally, principals were asked, "Given what you know regarding literacy coaching, what course objectives would you identify if a class of this nature were being taught at the graduate level?" They were then asked to rank order those objectives. Figure 1 shows the portion of the survey pertaining to designing a coaching course at the graduate level.

Similarly, reading specialists and literacy coaches were asked a set of specific questions about teacher preparation and training for their particular role as a reading professional. They were also asked questions about their daily duties and their own perceptions of each other's roles.

## **Responses to Surveys as Perceived by the Participant**

Table 1 illustrates each of the three groups (principals, reading specialists, and literacy coaches) perceptions' regarding professional development opportunities. Prior to 2008, literacy leadership trainings were predominantly offered through professional development workshops in school districts or local intermediate units. A few respondents reported trainings offered at the graduate level or through other out-of-district venues, but indications were that there were few universities and colleges that offered a formal 3-credit literacy coaching course within reading coursework requirements.

Figure 1. *Designing a Course at the Graduate Level*

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Given what you know regarding literacy coaching, what course objectives would you identify if a class of this nature were being taught at the graduate level?

Please rank order the below list from “1-10” with “1” being the highest level of importance.

- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will be able to examine methods of gathering and analyzing data in order to inform systematic change that supports standardized testing in accordance with the No Child Left Behind and Reading First Initiatives.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will learn and apply various literacy coaching models.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will learn the components of a balanced literacy program.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will explore ways to facilitate professional development.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will be able to critically reflect on various course readings, discussions, and personal experience.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will investigate a variety of formal/informal assessment tools.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will contrast the major theories of reading instruction and learning.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will demonstrate an ability to act as grant-writer, school-level planner, curriculum expert, and researcher.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will learn to incorporate appropriate modeling techniques into their system for professional support.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher will learn ways to act as a liaison between administration, teachers, support staff, community, allied professionals, parents, and the wider community.



Table 1.

*Perceptions of Principals, Reading Specialists, and Literacy Coaches Regarding Professional Development Opportunities*

		Principal	Reading Specialist	Literacy Coach	Total
District	Count	18	20	7	45
	% within groups	36.7%	55.6%	35.0%	42.9%
Graduate Courses	Count	9	5	2	16
	% within groups	18.4%	13.9%	10.0%	15.2%
Conferences	Count	7	4	2	13
	% within groups	14.3%	11.1%	10.0%	12.4%
Some combination	Count	15	7	9	31
	% within groups	30.6%	19.4%	45.0%	29.5%
Total	Count	49	36	20	105
	% within groups	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

These findings may have been indicative of the growing need for universities and colleges to take a closer look at restructuring graduate programs, particularly reading specialist certification programs. Before graduate programs began incorporating a literacy coaching component or colleges and universities began to actively seek state approval for a literacy coaching endorsement, it became clear that IRA would need to publish a universal position statement regarding the role of the coach. Change was imminent!

Table 2 is indicative of the impending need for such a position statement from national, and later, state organizations. The table illustrates responses by principals, reading specialist, and literacy coaches when asked about their perceptions regarding the target population for which a literacy coach works with on a daily basis.

Although the largest percentage of respondents reported literacy coaches working primarily with teachers, it is still important to emphasize the fact that, in 2008, it was still acceptable for literacy coaches to work with small groups of remedial reading students, which was, is, and has always been clearly defined in the role of the reading specialist.

The International Reading Association (2003) produced the *Standards for Reading Professionals* in an attempt to define the roles and responsibilities of the literacy leader and reading professional. IRA's standards stress the importance of reading professionals' high foundational knowledge of reading and writing as well as the acquisition and life time development of the processes. IRA defined the literacy coach as follows:

“...a reading professional who must be a certified reading specialist and have three years of teaching experience. This must be an individual who focuses on providing professional development for teachers by providing them with the additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practices. They provide essential leadership for the schools entire literacy program by helping create and supervise a long-term staff development process that supports both the development and implementation of the literacy program over months and years. These individuals need to have experience which enable them to provide effective professional development for the teachers in their schools.” (IRA, 2003, p. 3)

Table 2.

*Perceived Target Population for the Literacy Coach on a Routine Basis*

		Principal	Reading Specialist	Literacy Coach	Total
Primarily with Students	Count	6	4	2	12
	% within groups	12.0%	12.1%	10.5%	11.8%
Primarily with Teachers	Count	20	7	4	31
	% within groups	40.0%	21.2%	21.1%	30.4%
Primarily with Administrators	Count	0	1	0	1
	% within groups	.0%	3.0%	.0%	1.0%
All of the Above	Count	24	21	13	58
	% within groups	48.0%	63.6%	68.4%	56.9%
Total	Count	50	33	19	102
	% within groups	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Using the 2003 national standards, reports were issued on graduate literacy programs which were seeking national recognition from the organization. Results of pilot reports indicated that institutions had already begun to make a paradigm shift to incorporate a variety of different coaching models which was strongly indicative of the universal need for the implementation of literacy coaching courses into graduate reading programs (Shaw, Smith, Chelser, & Romeo, 2005). Graduate literacy coaching courses were essentially now responsible for providing literacy educators with professional development opportunities and the tools they needed to effectively work with teachers, administrators, and the wider community.

Robust research, an emerging number of well-known reading proponents, and a growing presence of the literacy coach in schools was strongly suggestive of the position gaining powerful momentum around the country. Since this instructional innovation did not appear to merely be this year's fleeting "hot topic," graduate schools began to offer literacy coaching courses within reading specialist certification programs and certain states began the approval process for a literacy coaching endorsement. Jay and Strong (2008) further assisted those educators in the process of obtaining more comprehensive information, such as contact information for each state department, in a *Guide to Literacy Coaching: Helping Teachers Increase Student Achievement*. Undoubtedly, this information would provide future reading professionals with invaluable resources when conducting doctoral work, or simply locating information regarding reading certification guidelines as per state regulations.

Table 3 enhances findings from the previous table by illustrating the perceptions of principals, reading specialists, and literacy coaches regarding the main duties of the literacy coach on a routine basis. The findings clearly indicate a lack of clarity among each group regarding the role of the literacy coach on a daily basis.

Table 3.

*Perceived Main Duty of the Literacy Coach on a Routine Basis*

	Principal	Reading Specialist	Literacy Coach	Total
Works With Small Groups of Students	11	10	8	29
Models Best Practices for Teachers	43	26	15	84
Assesses Students and Analyzes Data	13	6	9	28
Provides Professional Development	16	10	13	39

Modeling best practices for teachers was reported as being the main duty of the literacy coach on a daily basis. The next most frequent duty reported was providing professional development. The categories believed to be of lesser importance were working with small groups of student, assessing data, and analyzing the data. One may argue that Table 3 directly addresses the fact that, in 2008, principals were under an extreme amount of pressure to ensure that teachers were implementing strategies and best practices that would raise standardized test scores. Student data from formal standardized tests were strictly measuring a school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Across the country, student test data was determining district funding and schools were at risk for being overrun by the state because of low test scores. Unfortunately, in 2008, it was reported to me by a reputable source that corporation oversight may result in the firing of reading specialists and literacy coaches because budgets were not withstanding the

economic pressures. Money was dwindling, school districts quietly slipped into exclusivity, and certain positions were seen as a “luxury,” rather than a crucial element in keeping the core educational infrastructure at its maximum thriving capacity. Literacy coaches, who were performing a variety of duties to improve teacher instruction and academic achievement, historically, may be employed to avoid corrective action from the state. Jay and Strong (2008) corroborated these findings by reporting that state mandates are communicated to administrators, who then delegate the responsibility for implementing these mandates to those in leadership roles. Such roles include the position of a literacy coach.

### **2011 International Literacy Coaching Summit Presentation**

During my presentation at the 2011 International Literacy Coaching Summit, I asked participants to reflect on the vast changes regarding the role, responsibilities, expectations, and definition of the literacy coach since 2008 and currently today in 2011. Participants who attended my session were asked to engage in a “Think Back” pre-activity followed by a “Think Today” post-activity which played a part in the reflective portion of the presentation. Appendix A was provided to facilitate discussion. Attendees were shocked to learn that the role of the literacy coach could be traced back to 1920 or that the primary target audience (Table 2) should be predominantly teachers, rather than servicing small groups of remedial reading students. Overall, it was my interpretation that participants who attended the conference were astounded by the infidelity of the coaching role across the country, along with the continuing misuse of the literacy coach, as defined by the International Reading Association in 2003, and other state organizations such as the Keystone State Reading Association (Adopted by the KSRA Board of Directors (April 4, 2009).

Even though many states are now offering a literacy coaching endorsement, the number of literacy coaches who serve in our schools seems to be on the decline. Research, however, on literacy coaching and the elements that comprise this growing educational innovation have not lost momentum. It is clear that leading researchers refuse to believe that “literacy coaching” is just another one of last year’s “hot topics.” The International Reading Association, as well as other reputable reading organizations, such as The National Council of Teachers of English, and The National Reading Panel have remained dedicated to producing scholarly works which continue to have an impact on the field of literacy coaching. As clearly demonstrated at the International Literacy Coaching Summit for the third year, dedicated reading leaders remain devoted to promoting the fidelity of the coaching role across the nation. While Table 3 reflects the perceived notion that the main role of the literacy coach is to model best practices for teachers on a daily basis, a larger and more growing need is for the literacy coach to provide the larger teacher population with high-quality and expert professional development that will more adequately provide teachers with the skills and techniques needed to raise students’ proficiency levels in their classrooms. While these professional development instructors serve as peer coaches and leaders to their teachers, they also serve as strong advocates for those teachers who consistently applaud renewed funding for the literacy coach, simply because they perceive the coaching role as a “support system” in an educational society where “support systems” are no longer custom.

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## Appendix A

### *Educators' Perceptions of the Role of the Literacy Coach*

Dr. Meridith Gibbons, Cedar Crest College

- ☐ Results from my 2008 Doctoral Study
- ☐ Brief Background on Myself and How My Study Came to Be
  - ▶ Research Questions, Surveys, Related Handouts, etc.
  - ▶ What did you do?
  - ▶ How did you do it?
  - ▶ Who did you do it with?
- ☐ The Nagging Question?
- ☐ What Did I Learn?
- ☐ What Surprised Me?

### What Did You Think About the Role of the LC in 2008?

Directions: Try to “Think Back” to 2008. What did you think was the role of the LC? Fill out the Anticipation Guide by answering True or False.

#### “Think Back”

TRUE

FALSE

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The role of the LC can be traced back to 1920.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

A LC serves to improve student’s scores on standardized tests.

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\_\_\_\_\_

A LC does not need graduate work. They become highly trained experts through summer seminars and symposia.

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\_\_\_\_\_

LC receive most training through the I.U., within district, or outside conferences (Table 1).

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

LC’s are expected to work primarily with students (Table 2).

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

One of the main duties of a LC is to model best practices (Table 3).

## What We Know Today Compared With Findings From 2008

### ☐ The International Reading Association Provides a Definition:

“...reading professional must be a certified reading specialist and must have three years of teaching experience. This must be an individual who focuses on providing professional development for teachers by providing them with the additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practices. They provide essential leadership for the schools entire literacy program by helping create and supervise a long-term staff development process that supports both the development and implementation of the literacy program over months and years. These individuals need to have experiences which enable them to provide effective professional development for the teachers in their schools.” (IRA, 2003, p. 3)

### ☐ Some Questions to Explore:

- ☐ What were limitations of the study as it relates to IRA’s definition?
- ☐ How can you relate your research to what we know today?
- ☐ Time for Q & A?

## What Do You Think About the Role of the Literacy Coach in 2011?

Directions: Try to “Think Today” (THREE YEARS LATER!) when you think of the role of the LC as it is implemented today in 2011. What has changed from your “Think Back?” Fill out the Anticipation Guide by answering True or False.

### “Think Today”

#### TRUE

#### FALSE

- |       |       |  |
|-------|-------|--|
| _____ | _____ | The role of the LC can be traced back to 1920.   |
| _____ | _____ | A LC serves to improve student’s scores on standardized tests.   |
| _____ | _____ | A LC does not need graduate work. They become highly trainer experts through summer seminars and symposia. |
| _____ | _____ | LC receive most training through the I.U., within district, or outside conferences (Table 1).              |
| _____ | _____ | LC’s are expected to work primarily with students (Table 2).   |
| _____ | _____ | One of the main duties of a LC is to model best practices (Table 3).                                       |



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## Part III

### Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists in the Field

- Chapter 7      Helping Content Area Teachers Say YES to Common Core Literacy Standards  
*Dauna R. Howerton*
- Chapter 8      Teachers' Concerns When Adopting New Practices  
*Tina Selvaggi*
- Chapter 9      Coaching the Inflexible Teacher  
*Annemarie B. Jay and Mary W. Strong*
- Chapter 10     Literacy Coaches in the Middle School: Using the Literacy Coach Cycle For Success  
*Melissa Stinnett and Mal Kennan*
- Chapter 11     Integrating Meaningful Literacy Instruction with Technology: Coaching Through Teachers' Voices of Exemplary Practice  
*Kristine Still and Jacki Gordon*
- Chapter 12     Literacy Coaches and RTI: Time and Intensity  
*Norma Puente*
- Chapter 13     RTI: An Opportunity for Literacy Coaches to Assist Teachers of Adolescent Special Education Students With Language Process Deficits  
*Elaine Traynelis Yurek*
- Chapter 14     Change the Test, Not the Teaching  
*Kimberly Lewinski*
- Chapter 15     Facilitating Teacher Study Groups  
*Toni Himes and Joanne Boulanger*

## Chapter 7

### Helping Content Area Teachers Say YES to Common Core Literacy Standards

*Dauna R. Howerton*

Content-area educators have been down the “reading and writing across the curriculum” road many times before with limited success. For secondary teachers, the journey is beginning again with the adoption of Common Core State Standards and Common Core Literacy Standards for science, history/social studies, and technical subjects. This time around, success as secondary-level literacy coaches and educators will require understanding that literacy in content areas represents more than teaching vocabulary and comprehension strategies. The successful literacy coach will need to think like a historian when looking at text, read like a scientist for factual information, and support multiple types of technical reading. Success will require moving away from a traditional or, at times, generic vision of literacy toward a vision of literacy that is not anchored in narrative, but in informational text. It will require stepping out of our reading-strategy comfort zones.

For decades, secondary teachers have been telling researchers why, despite knowing its powerful effect on college and career readiness, they resist teaching reading and writing. This time, we need to listen to those teachers and consider their concerns if we hope to change their hearts and minds about literacy instruction. The following article focuses on the reasons why reading instruction has not been embraced by content-area teachers in the past and how it could be better understood today.

#### *What We Know and Have Known for Decades about Imposed Policies and Practices*

When defining content and how to teach that content, both veteran and novice teachers often base their approach to classroom instruction on their own experiences as students (Calderhead, J., 1996; Daisey, 2009). Consider, for instance, the high school science teacher whose own secondary science teacher had explicitly said, “I’m going to read this definition of the stages of mitosis, and now I’m going to draw a picture of the stages,” or “I’m looking at the stages of mitosis and, at the same time, creating a narrative in my head of what the pictures illustrate and how this connects to . . .” Or consider another exceptional case, in which a current practitioner’s social studies teacher boldly stated, “I reject the History Channel’s scientists’ and historians’ interpretations of events because I know something about their politics, areas of study, specialties, or allegiances, and these don’t align with the lens I use concerning politics, areas of study, specialties, or allegiances.” Unless those or other such unlikely scenarios are part of a current teacher’s experience, then that teacher probably will not naturally come to those literacy practices or see the necessity and value of them in her/his classroom. This does not mean that

teachers deliberately reject such practices; rather, such examples are simply not typically part of the culture of their context, content area, or school.

Teachers have a definite image of who they are and whom they teach, but what they teach may not include a literacy lens. Policies and standards stand a slim chance of evoking real change unless they also address teachers' self-image, efficacy, and beliefs, which must change if there is going to be a change in practice. Though not overwhelming, such change requires a journey that does not include short cuts (National Council of Teachers of English, 2011).

### *Literacy Skills and Content Area Instruction*

We know what successful adolescent readers do and how they do it (Biancarosa, & Snow, 2004; Kamil, 2004; Sturevant, 2004), but we often don't consider how this translates to practice for the history, science, or technical-subjects teachers who, in accordance with the Common Core State Standards, are now expected to teach literacy skills in reading. Unless teachers come to the classroom fully confident in their abilities and committed to teaching the literacy skills needed to access their content, they will not be able to model or guide their students to this understanding.

Too often, literacy coaches are assigned to simply give all teachers a generic "strategy." When universal literacy approaches are disconnected from the context or content, without considerations for curriculum, pedagogy, and the culture of the school and subject area, the future is dim for adoption or implementation (O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). The task gets added on—not incorporated as a practice—and the content teacher will likely use it only when required to or when observed.

There is a plethora of research that telling us that secondary content-area teachers need more than a nudge in the right direction or a nod from the International Reading Association's *What's Hot* list (Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Shettel, 2011) to really support this sort of college readiness in their students. State adoption of the Common Core State Standards for Reading and Writing Literacy—without further support through sustained, meaningful professional development—may represent the right pedagogical discussion, but it neither insures understanding and compliance—nor, indeed, anything beyond lip service—to the standards.

### *From Remedial Programs to Literacy Standards for All*

Focusing on the reading needs of secondary students is nothing new. Sadly, it has been a recurring topic that has received lukewarm attention and attempts at changes to practice for nearly a century. In 1994, Arlene L. Barry wrote that, since the 1920s, most reading instruction that took place at the secondary level was (1) remedial in nature and (2) delivered by English teachers without training. William P. Blintz (1997) called secondary teachers' (yes, even those of English) painful inability to provide successful reading instruction as "reading nightmares." Teachers have reported to me that they do not see reading instruction as falling within the scope

of their practice. It is in our nature to avoid something we feel unprepared to do; thus, when teachers do not think themselves successful in a particular practice, they tend to avoid it.

The cliché that “all teachers are teachers of reading” is used to convince teachers that it is their responsibility to support literacy. How many secondary schools have adopted programs like *Read 180* or Scholastic’s *Guided Reading Program* and committed to making every teacher a teacher of reading, only to see these programs—within a few years or, sadly, even within a few semesters—shelved because a sense of personal or professional efficacy was not initially established? When teachers feel that practices are being imposed upon them, they either respond with resistance or simply wait until the program or the trend—the “flavor of the month”—passes.

### *The Big Three and The Real Experts*

Three key components—namely, (1) connection to the curriculum; (2) incorporation into pedagogy, and (3) acceptance into the content department and school culture—have been missing from efforts to get all secondary teachers to embrace the goal of including reading and writing in their content instruction (O’Brien et al., 1995). In the absence of these three considerations, secondary teachers—including English teachers—typically fail to implement the depth of instruction needed for students to master literacy in the subject-area content. If these three components are not addressed before policies and programs are imposed on teachers, the game of waiting for the trend to pass will have begun before the 3-ring binders have even been delivered.

Nobody knows more than content-area teachers about the literacy necessary for accessing their content and constructs; however, they have seldom been asked to define it, quantify it, and teach it. For example, a historian approaches a text with a different mindset than a scientist. The historian looks for the author’s perspective, which they recognize as being influenced by the author’s culture, personal beliefs, and historic events. The scientist looks at a text and constructs meaning via connections to other areas of scientific knowledge. Both are connecting text to background knowledge, but the type of knowledge is different.

Traditionally, however, we have not expected content-area teachers to explicitly unpack, acknowledge, and learn how to share their respective approaches to texts. They are the gatekeepers to literacy instruction, even if they are not recognized as such.

Teacher beliefs about what instruction and content should or should not be can create problems for students and outcomes. Although 40 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards, without effective, sustained professional development, adoption in itself does nothing to ensure that content-area teachers will be adequately prepared for or open to implementation of the literacy standards.

### *Translating Shanahan and Shanahan into Practice: Changing Pedagogy*

Not very long ago, everything remotely related to education was anchored in “the data.” It was possible to understand what the data meant without knowing how to translate those data into practice. This is similar to the present issue of applying literacy standards into classroom practice for content-area teachers. For this challenge, we must consider that we are changing the cultures within schools and content departments, the practice of delivering the content, and the content itself.

Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) suggest that the *disciplinary literacy* that educators use when engaging texts is different for each subject. There is a specific, understood vocabulary for each discipline and distinct perspectives required for fully engaging with the content. If educators’ automaticity in applying this knowledge is less understood and literacy skills *are* content specific, this would challenge the approach of teaching the same literacy practice to all educators. Draper, Smith, Hall, and Siebert (2005) noted the dilemma of *literacy content dualism*—when teachers struggle to teach content at the cost of teaching literacy, and vice versa, the disconnect begins—and history has shown that the content usually wins.

Once we agree that content-area teachers are the experts on the vocabulary and perspectives that they use to understand their content, we must look to them to show us how to “package” and teach these keys to literacy in their content areas. We must bring them into this process as partners who may know more than we do about the literacy skills and practices that best suit their content area.

### *What Might Next Steps Look Like?*

When was the last time you heard that the best way to ensure students do their homework is to tell them to “just do it”? Never. This approach does not work with students, so why would we tell content area teachers to “just do it because it is in the standards”? Or why would we expect teachers to adopt new practices simply because they attended a professional development session that told them to? The following steps represent an alternative to this approach that respects the expertise of content-area teachers while helping them discover what literacy practices look like in their content area.

*Step One: Making Connections with Content-Specific Texts.* Ask content teachers to read using a “think-aloud” technique (i.e., in a stream-of-consciousness manner). As they read, ask them to “hit the pause button” and talk about what they are thinking in response to the text, what connections they are making with other texts (facts, events, philosophies, artifacts, etc.), which skills or strategies they are using, and what other thoughts occur to them. Reading teachers may need to model this using an accessible, general text, such as a passage from a nontechnical source. Reading teachers (and elementary teachers) are intimately familiar with this practice, as it is an integral part of their daily teaching, but this is not the case for many secondary teachers. Upon seeing and, perhaps, demonstrating the “think-aloud” method with a text from their own content area, the teachers should record their findings and discuss them with peers.

*Step Two: Identifying Content Specific Literacy Skills.* Ask teachers to identify which literacy skills students who are at an early stage of development or who have been newly introduced to the subject typically need in order to access the most complex content. Also ask teachers how they might address the needs of students who seem unlikely to be successful in the course. What do these students need in order to access the content? More specifically: What did the teachers themselves need in order to successfully study their content area? This practice will help teachers think of all students' needs—not just those who will learn regardless of what is presented and how it is presented. Mapping these skills back to the Common Core standards for the teacher's grade level and earlier grades will provide them the opportunity to connect what they know to the anchors and the grade specific stems.

*Step Three: Differentiated Content-Specific Adult Instruction.* We differentiate for our students, why not for teachers? Learn from the teachers, and then offer a menu of choices. With regard to literacy instruction, content teachers are at different levels of understanding and practice, and different degrees of acceptance. Once teachers have discovered and defined how to model the ways they interact with a text, offer content and strategies that are specific, not only to the content area, but also to a specific lesson. For history teachers, offer teacher-friendly articles or research on strategies used by other history teachers. For example, for students studying the United States Constitution, Leslie Harper Blatteau's (2011) lesson, "What are my rights? Exploring and writing about the constitution" includes primary source documents, case studies, and meaningful issues. In lieu of a generic KWL chart, content-specific materials that support close reading, research, and synthesis of known and newly learned information gets us closer to changes in practice and success in literacy skills.

*Step Four: Gradual Release and Reflection.* Use gradual release and reflection to help teachers "own" the new techniques. Enough cannot be said about the power of the "model–support–reflect" cycle for building professional capacity. Content-area teachers may not see the value of close reading practices, pre-reading or comprehension strategies, and vocabulary builders if these are not used successfully in their classrooms. To teach a technique with success, one must be prepared to plan for it, practice it, and reflect upon its delivery and outcomes.

*Step Five: Action Research.* As an action research project, duplication of Shanahan and Shanahan's (2008) work with classroom teachers, rather than scholars, could open many opportunities. We have nearly 100 years of research on why reading/literacy practices are not embraced. Why not foster professional learning community work around a study that could change understanding, practice, content, and school culture?

These are only the initial steps if we hope to truly implement the Common Core Reading Standards in Literacy. As we invite core content-area teachers to show us their thinking as they deconstruct text and explicitly model their own processes, we can, in turn, duplicate those processes with others in the pursuit of building genuine literacy in the content areas. Removing the "you are a teacher of reading" stigma and anchoring literacy instruction in the content is key.



To change practice, much less hearts and minds, in ways that truly benefit students will require sustained professional development that supports teachers in their practice. Short, “drive-by” professional development efforts that are disconnected from the classroom will not be effective (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Teacher-focused professional development that is focused on specific content and encourages collaboration can bring the change that has historically eluded us.

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## Chapter 8

### Teachers' Concerns When Adopting New Practices

*Tina Selvaggi*

Change is a constant in education. It is important for literacy coaches, reading specialists, and classroom teachers to be aware of the research behind the change process and the stages of concern and how to apply these stages of concern to innovations in curriculum and instruction. Implications for use of the stages of concerns for literacy coaches is applied and discussed.

#### Background

Hall and Hord (1987) researched team dynamics and determined the role of the principal as a facilitator of change was an important one. Because principals have many other responsibilities, Hall and Hord (1987) suggested the creation of second change facilitators who would provide day to day coaching to teachers learning to implement new skills in the classroom. They suggested second change facilitators could be assistant principals, lead teachers or department chairpersons. Today these second change facilitators in schools or districts are often literacy coaches.

In later research, Hall and Hord (2006) described a change agent as someone who influences decisions in a direction considered appropriate by a change agency. A change agent often tries to make sure the adoption of new ideas will produce positive effects. Literacy coaches are often asked to act as change agents that provide professional development about an innovation, or new skills learned, and then support the teachers' implementation of the innovation.

#### Concerns Based Adoption Model

Because Hall and Hord (1987) were concerned about implementation, they developed the Concerns Based Adoption Model, a model which asks questions to allow change facilitators to determine teachers' level of concern about an innovation. The seven stages of concern are described as follows:

Awareness: The teacher in this lowest stage has very little concern about the innovation.

Informational: The teacher in this stage requires more information about the innovation.

Personal: The teacher in this stage is concerned about how the innovation will affect him/her personally.

Management: The teacher in this stage is concerned about managing time and/or resources related to the innovation.

Consequence: The teacher in this stage is concerned about how the innovation will affect the students and how to refine the innovation to be sure it is more effective.

Collaboration: The teacher in this stage is concerned about how to relate what he/she is doing to what others are doing with the innovation.

Refocusing: The teacher in this highest stage has ideas about how to improve the innovation.

Once these stages are determined, they are addressed with support from the principal or the second change facilitator. For example if a teacher is found to be in the awareness stage, the change facilitator may have several meetings with the teacher to provide the information needed to begin to accept the innovation. This would be an effective strategy for a teacher in the information stage as well. A teacher in the personal stage may need guidance on what the innovation looks like in the classroom and may be offered the opportunity to observe another teacher effectively using the innovation. A teacher in the management stage might need guidance about time management or use of resources. A teacher in the consequence stage often needs data to support the innovation's effectiveness. A teacher in the collaboration stage should be provided with time to meet with other teachers to share and refine ideas about instruction. Finally, a teacher in the refocusing stage should be invited to a curriculum committee meeting to share his/her ideas about how to improve the innovation. This process allows change facilitators to support teachers in each stage and ensure implementation is effective rather than introducing an innovation at an in-service meeting, then leaving teachers to struggle alone to implement that innovation into their classrooms.

## Discussion

At the Third International Literacy Coaching Summit, these stages of concern were presented to an audience of teachers, reading specialists, and literacy coaches. The participants listened to and discussed the explanations of each stage of concern then worked in pairs to discuss sample quotes from teachers about an innovation. The pairs identified the sample teacher's stage of concern and developed a plan to help the teacher progress from one stage to the next. For example, one sample quote shared was "I

am not really interested in trying guided reading. My mind is on managing my class and learning the new curriculum.” This teacher would be identified as being in the awareness stage in the Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 1987) because he/she has very little concern about the innovation. Participants suggested involving this teacher in committee meetings and ensuring he/she was aware of all the information related to the innovation. Another quote was “Using this material is taking all of my time. You can’t imagine all the pieces and steps entailed in just doing one step!” Participants suggested this teacher is in the management stage of the Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 1987) because he/she is having difficulty managing all the materials that accompany the innovation. In order to support this teacher in progressing to the next stage of concern, participants suggested scheduling several meetings with this teacher to help him or her sort through the material then use the organized materials to plan lessons together. One other quote shared was “I just attended a workshop on cooperative learning. I can’t wait to try it with my kids; I know they will love it.” The participants identified this teacher as being in the consequence stage in the Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 1987) because he/she seemed concerned about how this innovation would affect his/her students and learning. Suggestions for helping this teacher progress to the next stage of concern were encouraging him/her to collaborate with others and providing feedback on how the innovation positively affects student learning. Participants discussed the importance of awareness of the stages and communication with the teachers. It was stressed that an open dialogue and questioning is important in helping teachers progress from one stage to another and ultimately accept the new innovation. Coaches should ask questions about implementation and listen carefully to a teacher’s responses in order to determine his/her level of concern. Participants also pointed out the importance of proper management of resources, which would include both materials and personnel. An example of material management is providing workshops for using new programs the district adopts and ensuring teachers have all the necessary components of that program. An example of personnel management is the use of teachers/coaches/other professionals to cover classes in order to provide time for teachers to collaborate with each other or observe each other’s classes. These valuable discussions show how important it is for change agents in schools to understand the stages of concern and the Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 1987).

### Implications for Literacy Coaches

Fullan’s more recent research on the aspects of coaching centered mainly on the information and techniques leaders need to manage complex change. He discussed the five components of leadership in schools, which are: moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, relationships, knowledge and coherence (Fullan, 2007). According to Fullan, it is important to address an implementation dip through effective leadership. One way to address this concern is for leaders to use coaching as a tool to listen to

concerns and develop ways to solve problems. In an attempt to predict the future of teacher learning over the next decade Fullan (2007) suggested a radical shift in the way teachers learn. He ascertained that student learning depends on every teacher learning all the time (Fullan, 2007). Fullan stressed the importance of creating learning opportunities for teachers within the classroom setting and encouraging teachers to work together to constantly improve instruction.

Use of the Concerns Based Adoption Model allows literacy coaches to pinpoint where teachers are on the continuum and address questions. For example, it is important to focus on teachers' comfort with the material before addressing student achievement. This model also allows coaches to focus on implementation over a span of time, because it takes time for early concerns to be resolved and later ones to emerge. (Hall & Hord, 1987) This model can also be applied to the concerns of other stakeholders, including administrators and parents.

Hall and Hord updated their research in 2006 to include specific activities for ensuring an innovation becomes practice. These activities should be considered by literacy coaches and can help guide the work of a coach. The activities, according to Hall and Hord (2006), include developing, articulating, and communicating a shared vision of the intended change, planning and providing resources, investing in professional learning, checking on progress, and providing continuous assistance. These are important activities that can be incorporated into a coach's daily practice and will serve to ensure an innovation is understood, accepted, monitored and supported over time.

## Conclusion

The Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 1987) and knowledge of the change process are important tools for literacy coaches. In addition to visiting classrooms, literacy coaches often facilitate professional development, conduct assessments, and design curriculum. Because coaches are often change agents that ask teachers to adopt a new innovation, knowledge of these stages and how to apply them is essential to being an effective coach.

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## Chapter 9

### Coaching the Inflexible Teacher

*Annemarie B. Jay and Mary W. Strong*

A primary charge of the coach is to help other professionals develop and invest in their capacity building (Goleman, 2000). In education, building capacity includes developing pedagogical and managerial techniques as well as creating a mindset of collaboration with colleagues and a disposition toward lifelong learning. Capacity building within a staff is necessary for long-term improvements (Taylor & Gunter, 2007). Job-embedded professional development is an opportunity for teachers to work toward lasting improvements as they share ideas and issues, brainstorm new possibilities, and collaboratively perform action research.

Ideally, all teachers will be accepting, active participants in the professional development process alongside a coach, regardless of the form it takes. A desirable form of coaching is one in which one coach and one teacher work together to improve the capacity of that teacher's instruction and the achievement of the students in that classroom. In some instances, the coach may work with a grade level of teachers or a department team as a unit. Capacity is built as the group, with the guidance and suggestions of the coach, explores common experiences as well as differences. Coaches may also find themselves providing large group professional development when the entire staff of a school or district convenes to learn about an initiative or curricular mandate. Whether a one-on-one or group coaching situation, a professional disposition should be evident in all participants. Classroom teachers, as front-line literacy leaders, as well as coaches, should maintain a professional disposition that enables them to garner both support and respect from peers (Lewis-Spector & Jay, 2011).

Realistically, a few teachers may be inflexible and show non-accepting reactions during professional development. The behaviors and/or comments of the inflexible teacher may not always be obvious; some reactions will be covert and even difficult for the coach to detect. Working with the inflexible teacher can quickly and easily turn an ideal situation into a nightmare for the coach. What should the coach do? Why should a teacher demonstrate inflexibility or negativity toward a coaching session?

There are two basic reasons for teachers' inflexibility: discomfort and intransigence (Jay & Strong, 2008). When a teacher experiences discomfort during or after coaching, it is most likely for one of the following reasons: (1) a lack of foundational knowledge, (2) misassumptions

about expectations, (3) fear of change, (4) lack of understanding of the coach's role, or (5) struggling with instructional delivery.

The intransigent teacher is one who is noncompliant; inflexibility is often a conscious choice for this teacher. We posit that the intransigent teacher reacts negatively to coaching due to (1) refusal, (2) low self-efficacy beliefs, (3) avoidance of opportunities to work with a coach, (4) a self-determined belief that they are too busy, or more busy than colleagues to have time for coaching, (5) an attitude that the coach cannot show them anything new, and (6) the assumption that they are free to act as an independent contractor and do not have to adhere to the school's instructional guidelines and standards.

### Attitudes Affecting Inflexibility

*Busy Teacher, Busy Students.* When the coach talks with this type of inflexible teacher, the coach may discover that the teacher believes that many good assignments that he has developed and carefully planned for the students should not be changed. This teacher is under the misconception that good assignments equal good teaching and tells the coach and others that things are running smoothly in the class. However, this teacher does not model in the classroom, provides little guidance for the students and does not implement the new curriculum. He spends most of his time correcting the student assignments. Unfortunately, this teacher does not see that he is not meeting the instructional obligations that he needs to fulfill for the district and the students. When the coach attempts to make an appointment to visit the class or to do the demonstration teaching, the busy teacher reports that he does not have time for such things and his students are also very engaged in learning the present material.

*Nothing is really new.* The inflexible teacher who feels (and may state) that nothing is really new is covertly relaying the message that the coach cannot teach him/her anything new. There may also be the presumption that what is being introduced is unnecessary. The teacher may challenge the coach in a defiant way about the initiative or curriculum change during the professional development session. Whatever words the teacher uses in their comments, the message is clear: my intention is to refuse the "new" proposal. When in a one-to-one coaching situation or in a group, the inflexible teacher's comment may be made directly to the coach. However, in a group situation, the comments may be made only to those within close proximity to the negative teacher and not within range of the coach.

*Independent Contractor.* During professional development sessions, this type of inflexible teacher may appear to be participatory. However, when she returns to the classroom she does not carry out the new directives made in professional development. She believes that she can do whatever she wants regardless of professional development. She does not feel that she wants to participate as a member of the school's team and has no allegiance to the school's mission. Therefore, she is independent in her thinking and relies on her own independent methods of teaching.



## Examples of Teacher Inflexibility

The following scenarios (Jay & Strong, 2011) are examples of interactions and action plans coaches may experience when encountering an inflexible teacher. The purpose of these scenarios is to ask potential or practicing coaches to consider the coaching skills one would need in order to decrease inflexibility and to move teachers forward toward a collaborative mindset and behaviors.

### Elementary Coaching Scenario

Stephen Rodriguez is a new literacy coach at Smithtown Elementary. The principal of the school asked Stephen to come by her office in September and chat with her about the second grade teacher, Peggy Martin. The principal told Stephen in the meeting that she was constantly receiving phone calls from parents about the curriculum in Peggy's class. The parents were complaining that Peggy sent home reading worksheets every night for the students to complete and that there were no accompanying directions.

Stephen made an appointment with Peggy to visit her classroom. When he stepped into the classroom, he noticed the desks were arranged in rows and that there were no learning centers. Only a few books in the classroom library and the shelves were filled with the basal anthology. The second graders were all filling out worksheets during the reading period and Peggy was circulating around the room helping them. The worksheets were placed on a bulletin board with stars and points on them. A reward chart with individual student names and points on it was also placed on the bulletin board.

When Stephen asked Peggy about the worksheets on the bulletin board, she replied that she had been trained in the Skinnerian method thirty years ago. She remarked that in her many years of teaching experience, she had discovered that using worksheets and behavioral reinforcement was the best way to teach reading.

Change is difficult for some individuals like Mrs. Martin because they do want to leave their comfort zone (Fullan, 2001). Instead, they cling to what they know and are satisfied with the results. However, Stephen should ask Mrs. Martin if she can show him that all of the students in her class are meeting the district standards. If they are not reaching the goals, then something must change in order for that to happen. This coach should point out that the worksheet and reward system that she has in place may not take care of all of the student's needs in the classroom. Stephen might also ask Mrs. Martin if she had thought about asking the librarian to work with her on an individualized library book take-home program for the students, instead of the worksheets that were sent home every night.

When talking with the principal, Stephen might suggest a homework hotline for the school. Each teacher, including Mrs. Martin, would be asked to send directions for their class

homework assignments at the end of the day to the principal's office. Volunteer students from the local high school could be asked to man the phones or computer homework website and provide directions for the parents. Stephen could further suggest to the principal that Mrs. Martin should be given the opportunity to visit other second grade teachers in the district. She would be asked to report in a meeting with Stephen and the principal on what materials and methods that she observed that were used in these classrooms. Stephen could later then use this report as a springboard for further discussion with Mrs. Martin on what other ideas could be implemented in her classroom. In this way, Stephen could encourage Peggie Martin to do some risk taking. Thus, Stephen will exhibit the change agent role of effective leadership in this scenario. McAndrew (2005) indicates that one of the four important roles that a coach holds is being a change agent.

### High School Coaching Scenario

Nancy Brennan has been the literacy coach at Thomas Jefferson High School for four years working with each of the departments throughout the school. Her peers, the principal, students and parents respect her. Nancy is always professional and personable, and is generally perceived as helpful and trusting.

Recently, two situations surfaced that were challenging for Nancy. The first situation involved on-going coaching of Miss Shallis. Last year, Miss Shallis was a second year teacher at Thomas Jefferson and taught ninth grade English. The coach and the teacher worked well together all last year. With the start of the current year, Miss Shallis was assigned to teach tenth grade English. However, Nancy noticed that Miss Shallis was still experiencing difficulty with lesson planning and classroom management. Nancy spoke with Miss Shallis and they established times to meet and times for Nancy to observe in the tenth grade classes.

In another situation, Nancy was surprised to observe that Mr. Maenner, a member of the Social Studies department, was intently reading the newspaper during an in-service session she was conducting for his department. As a follow-up to the training, Nancy made a schedule for both observations and demonstration lessons for each of the seven social studies teachers. When Nancy arrived for her appointment to observe in Mr. Maenner's classroom, the students were independently reviewing study guides for their next test as Mr. Maenner worked at his computer. Nancy expected to see teacher-student interaction, but that did not occur.

When Nancy arrived in Mr. Maenner's class the following week to conduct a scheduled demonstration lesson, there was a substitute teacher in the classroom that day for Mr. Maenner. Nancy felt hopeful about the first situation, and frustrated about the second. How could Nancy work with both of these situations that occurred at the same time?

The two situations that Nancy faces in the high school demonstrate the differences between focusing coaching to meet the needs of the struggling teacher as well as the inflexible teacher. In the first instance, an experienced teacher is learning a new curriculum and

experiencing the dynamics of new class structures. Since she and the coach had a collaborative working relationship the past two years, it is prudent to assume that they will continue to collaborate this year in their efforts to reduce the difficulties Miss Shallis is facing as a new tenth grade teacher. Becoming familiar with required curriculum demands knowing more than the content of the curriculum; one also needs to learn about alignment with standards, mandated evaluations and formative assessments (Jay & Strong, 2008). Nancy may help alleviate some of the teacher's struggles in this area by meeting with her, helping her plan a few lessons, observing in her classroom and providing demonstration lessons. Each of these actions should help move Miss Shallis along her own learning continuum so that she builds her foundational knowledge of the curriculum as becomes more confidence in herself. However, these steps alone may not improve the issues Miss Shallis is having with classroom management. Marzano and Marzano (2003) assert that effective classroom management is crucial to positively impact student achievement. One key part of good management is ensuring that all students know both their academic task and their behavior responsibilities (Jay & Strong, 2008). It may be possible that the instructional issues with which the teacher struggle are causing students uncertainty in their classroom actions and interactions. The coaching action plan established by Nancy and Miss Shallis needs to consider the classroom management piece of the picture; good instruction which keeps students engaged and on task is an excellent way to deter management problems. Nancy will be able to help Miss Shallis by discussing the materials the students use in class, and the clarity of teacher direction to students about their tasks. She may also suggest professional books or journals as resources for Miss Shallis. Addressing each of these issues with the coach will help the teacher build capacity that leads to long-term improvements.

The inflexibility of the second teacher with whom Nancy needs to coach, Mr. Maenner, seems blatant in each of the three accounts of his behavior in the scenario: he behaved unprofessionally during a group professional development session, he was not teaching when he had a scheduled observation with the coach, and he did not go to work on the day he and the coach had scheduled a meeting. Nancy needs to do some serious thinking about how to deal with this teacher. After all, her job is to coach all teachers in the departments to which she is assigned. Using the *Scale for Determining Intensity of Refusal to Comply with Professional Development* (Jay & Strong, 2008) shown in Appendix A would help provide Nancy with a realistic account of the level of Mr. Maenner's resistance to coaching. After that, Nancy needs to create a specific action plan so that she and Mr. Maenner can come to an understanding about the work they need to accomplish together.

MacKeracher (2004) describes a cycle of adult learning which may be applied to coaching teachers. First, the learner participates in situations which provide him with information. Although Mr. Maenner was physically present during the professional development session, he seemed more engaged with reading the newspaper than with the content of the session Nancy provided. Next, making sense of the new information through problem solving and action planning is required. In other words, the adult learner himself does something with

the new information. This important step was craftily avoided by the teacher in this scenario. Finally, the adult learner receives responses from others and feedback is provided about the implementation of the new information. This final step may represent the essence of quality literacy coaching. However, the teacher's inflexibility limited coaching by his avoidance behaviors in each of the three encounters he had (or should have had) with the coach. It is only by working together that coaches and teachers can discover successful methods for meeting instructional challenges (Knight, 2007).

### Diminishing Inflexibility

In her work on differentiating coaching, Kise (2009) posits that when the coach is engaged with a teacher who demonstrates resistance, the coach must reflect on adjusting the coaching style while still endeavoring to meet the needs of the teacher. Coaches need a process to understand the inflexible teacher's personality as well as their beliefs. Kise (2009) suggests forming a hypothesis about the teacher's natural style, identifying the teacher's beliefs, and then identifying the problems the teacher wants (or needs) to solve.

When coaches begin visiting classrooms in their schools, doing the teaching of a model lesson first, rather than observing, may alleviate teachers' discomfort while simultaneously providing the foundation for a collaborative relationship (Jay, 2009). Offering to teach a lesson in the teacher's classroom with his/her own students is an opportunity for the teacher to observe the coach using the same materials and instructing the same students he/she encounters every day. The coach-teacher meetings before and after the demonstration lesson dispel in the inaccurate notion that the coach's purpose is to scrutinize what the teacher is/is not doing instructionally. It helps to create the collaborative interplay that is necessary to establishing the on-going coaching relationship.

Being observed by a colleague may be a very intimidating experience for many teachers. Even though the coach is not an evaluator of teachers, having someone else come in to observe, make notes, and discuss one's practices, can have an evaluative impression unless handled appropriately. Having an "observation frame" aids the coach in providing a focused observation and participating in valuable feedback with the teacher after the observation (McKenna & Walpole, 2008). Bukowiecki (2007) sagely explains that the "coach-sponsored classroom observation is the highest test of trust between the teacher and the coach" (p. 17). We suggest that a trusting relationship is the foundation of the collaborative culture necessary for effective coaching. Although the culture is generally germinated one classroom at a time, literacy coaching can be a conduit for improved teaching and learning throughout an entire school (Jay, 2010).

Another technique for diminishing inflexibility suggested by Jay (2009) is for coaches themselves to engage in professional development and networking. There are many more books and articles about coaching now than there were even a decade ago. Wide reading on the topic,

taking graduate courses focused on coaching, attending conferences and seminars about the topic are all ways to network with other coaches in order to talk and reflect about coaching methodology.

## Conclusions

Coaches who inherently value each teacher with whom they work, whether struggling, inflexible, or cooperative, are often valued themselves (Jay, 2009). Helping teachers build instructional capacity is a tall order. Coaches need to be well-versed in curriculum and instruction as well as in adult learning theory (Lewis-Spector & Jay, 2011). It is important for coaches to face inflexibility, or any level of resistance to coaching, through open, honest conversations with teachers. (Jay, 2009). The coach does not have to have a “right answer” to every question or problem posed by teachers (Casey, 2006);

Understanding the resistant attitudes teachers may have toward coaching is important to the reflective process in which coaches must engage on a daily basis. The talk that surrounds each formal and informal meeting of the coach and teacher is critical. Whether a quick question is answered, or a lengthy dialogue occurs about a particular curriculum area, talking with teachers often about their practices helps teachers to improve instruction and assists coaches in improving their capacity to positively influence teaching and learning in multiple classrooms over the course of one school year.

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## Appendix A

### Scale for Determining Intensity of Refusal to Comply With Professional Development

The literacy coach should read each descriptor related to professional development to rate the teacher's reaction. A scale of 1 (lowest resistance) to 4 (refusal) is provided. The scores can be tallied to determine intensity of refusal.

#### *A. During Professional Development*

	Low resistance	Mild	Strong	Refusal
1. The teacher did not participate in cooperative small group work.	1	2	3	4
2. The teacher made challenging comments about the professional development topic.	1	2	3	4
3. The teacher distracted others with comments and/or behavior	1	2	3	4
4. The teacher was late or absent during most of the professional development session	1	2	3	4
5. The teacher did not bring the requested materials to the professional development session.	1	2	3	4
6. The teacher was not attentive and performed tasks unrelated to the professional development (reading newspaper or magazine)	1	2	3	4

#### *B. After Professional Development*

	Low resistance	Mild	Strong	Refusal
1. The teacher neglected to provide a written comment/evaluation of the professional development at the end of the session.	1	2	3	4
2. The teacher's lesson plans did not reflect implementation of the newly learned strategies.	1	2	3	4
3. The teacher was not available to meet with the coach regarding implementation of the professional development topic.	1	2	3	4
4. The teacher directly states to the coach that the professional development initiative was unnecessary or unrealistic.	1	2	3	4
5. The teacher did not use the materials provided from the professional development training.	1	2	3	4
6. The teacher did not follow-through with requested activities related to the professional development (providing reports, sharing at faculty meeting, etc.)	1	2	3	4

7. The teacher wrote and distributed a statement that is contrary to the professional development initiative to other stakeholders in the school community (parents, school board, principal, other staff members)	1	2	3	4
Column Scores				
TOTAL Score =				

Scoring: 1 – 13 = low resistance; 14 – 26 = mild resistance; 27 - 40 = strong resistance;

41 – 52 = refusal

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## Chapter 10

### Literacy Coaches in the Middle School: Using the Literacy Coach Cycle for Success

*Melissa Stinnett and Mal Keenan*

Over the last 15 years, the demand for literacy skills has intensified with an emphasis on increased student reading achievement (RAND, 2002). The federal No Child Left Behind Act (2002) has added pressure to raise student reading scores by requiring that all children read at grade level by the end of Grade 3. However, while there is considerable attention paid to early literacy, adolescent literacy continues to experience an ongoing crisis (Conley & Hinchman, 2004). The issue of how to improve the reading of young adolescents, especially those who enter middle grades behind their peers (Jackson & Davis, 2000) needs further research. Professional development is a powerful way to address teacher learning and to create effective instruction that may boost student achievement (Elmore & Rothman, 2000).

Coaching, one popular model of ongoing professional development, aims to provide long-term support for teachers in learning and implementing new instructional strategies (Poglinco et al., 2003). These instructional strategies may include teacher collaboration, sustained change efforts, teacher reflection and inquiry, and connections between professional development goals and teachers' work with students (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Within the activities of coaching, one way to support teachers is to incorporate a plan or structure for working one-on-one with them called a Literacy Coach Cycle (Sweeney, 2011).

#### **What is a Literacy Coach Cycle?**

A Literacy Coach Cycle is an efficient way to support individual teachers in a school within a structured framework that emphasizes students' learning goals (Frost, Buhel, & Blachowicz, 2009). The term "coach cycle" was coined by national education consultant Diane Sweeney (2011, p.86) to describe a plan, or structure, for working one-on-one with teachers where "there is nothing hit or miss" (Frost, Buhel, & Blachowicz, 2009, p. 54). The notion of a coach cycle originated from the need to directly connect the work of a coach to student learning. A coach cycle is characterized as generally lasting from six to nine weeks, although some cycles may be as short as 3 weeks, and includes an in-depth partnership between teacher and coach.

Within the total cycle, there are regular weekly planning sessions lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. The teacher chooses the focus of the cycle which can vary with broad goals (teach reading within the content) to specific goals (use mini-lessons for writer's workshop). Another component of the cycle is to have classroom visits where the Literacy Coach visits the classroom approximately 1-3 times per week while the teacher is instructing (Frost, Buhel, & Blachowicz, 2009).

## Coaching Contract

Middle School Literacy Coach, Mal, described her experience using the Coach Cycle (personal communication, June 11, 2011):

The cycle begins and ends with the coaching contract. The coach asks a specific question about student learning goals during this conference. The teacher needs to know this is not about the Literacy Coach being the expert, but it is about the teacher and the coach working together to improve student performance. Once a goal is decided on, the teacher and the Literacy Coach write up a coaching contract, stating days and times in the classroom working together, days and times of planning and collaborating, and finally a date to end the coaching cycle.

The Literacy Coach Contract is a formal written contract in which the coach and the teacher together define the following items in no particular order:

- Student learning goals
- Data to supporting need for goal
- Responsibilities of the teacher and the Literacy Coach
- Meeting dates and times
- Coaching strategies needed
- Cycle length of time
- Identified ways to document whether or not the goal has been reached, and
- Opportunities to share student learning

The importance of the coaching contract is emphasized, “It's critical that the Literacy Coach and teacher adhere to the contract. The times committed to meet and teach together are essential for a successful coaching cycle” (Stinnett, M., & Keenan, M., 2012). The power of the coaching contract lies in its focus on one identified learning goal; therefore, if a new learning goal emerges, a new coaching contract is required.

Although there are different types of Literacy Coaching Cycles (Casey, 2006; Sweeney, 2011), The Literacy Coaching Cycle described in this paper was designed by Frost, Buhle, and Blachowicz (2009, p. 54). Also, the Literacy Coaching Contract used by teacher and coach are included in the text by Frost, etc. (p. 61). The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the process of the Literacy Coaching Cycle by illustrating its steps through the complete process as demonstrated by one Literacy Coach, Mal, and one teacher, James (pseudonym).

## Coaching Style

Literacy Coaches who hold the same job may perform their work in different ways. How a coach works with a teacher is largely dependent upon his/her particular coaching style. Based on the main Literacy Coach types presented by Duessen and colleagues (2007) as: data-oriented (data and assessment), student-oriented (providing interventions), managerial (keeping the systems running, paperwork and meetings) and teacher-oriented (time with teachers individually or in a group setting), Mal identified her own coaching style. Some coaches in her district have styles that are more managerial while others are more data oriented; Mal self-identified as falling between the student-oriented coach and

the teacher-oriented coach (Deussen, et al., 2007). She works in a middle school in grades 6-8 and works with both teachers and students. Mal said, “My time is split down the middle.”

This is Mal’s second year as a Literacy Coach at the middle school. She has had a wide array of teaching experiences; including teaching middle school students, working as an elementary learning specialist, and working as a hearing itinerant teacher. Her school district adopted the Comprehensive Literacy Model as their method for literacy instruction (Dorn, et al., 1998) so Mal has received training in various coaching styles and in providing professional development to adults. James is a sixth grade teacher who has been teaching for nine years and is described as being liked and respected by his students. James was somewhat new to teaching guided reading and had a diverse group of students in his classroom, including a special education cluster. James approached Mal with the request to participate in a Literacy Coaching Cycle.

### Preparing for the Cycle

#### Initiation Sheet

The Literacy Coaching Cycle begins with the Coaching Cycle Initiation Sheet (Frost, Buhle, Blachowicz, 2009, p. 57) where the teacher is asked to answer, in an open-ended format, the following: what instructional practices have already been tried, materials used, student learning outcomes, and current assessment practices. This initiation sheet allows the coach to see what the teacher is already doing in regard to literacy instruction.

#### Collegial Observation

Next, the Literacy Coach typically teaches a lesson in the classroom of the teacher prior to observing the teacher’s instruction. By teaching first, the coach helps to establish a trusting relationship between coach and teacher. Then, the Literacy Coach spends some time observing in the classroom, paying attention to the literacy instruction of the teacher. In Mal’s school district, an observation tool is used called, “Guided Reading Collegial Observation Checklist” (Naponelli, & Olsen, 2010) which specifically focuses on the teaching occurring before, during, and after a guided reading lesson. Such observed areas include workspace, teaching focus, language used, prompts, strategies, and appropriate text levels.

The collegial observation and use of the checklist allowed Mal the opportunity to see the strengths that James held as a teacher as well as to determine what he needed to work on with his literacy instruction. Mal noted that there were several areas missing in James’s instruction for an effective guided reading lesson (See Table I) and that he lacked the ability to differentiate for instruction within a small group.

Additionally, there existed no system for record keeping, nor was he consistently hosting before, during, and after reading conversations at the guided reading table. Mal described what she observed:

During the reading there were no running records taken. There was no oral reading, no fluency checks. He wasn’t prompting the kids, they were just reading the article by themselves at the table. And, then afterwards there was no reinforcement of the focus. There was no meaningful extension; any kind of writing.

Table I: Guided Reading Collegial Observation Checklist

Teacher Name: James Grade: 6 <sup>th</sup> Date: 1-4-11	Book Title/Level: at level readers  Observer: Mal
<b>X = what is missing during the lesson</b>	
<b>Before Reading</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Guided reading workspace clearly defined, organized and prepared <input type="checkbox"/> "Before reading" lesson component clearly evident (book introduction, vocabulary exploration, building background/schema, etc.) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clear focus explicitly stated and modeled <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teacher models explicit reading strategy language. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teacher models explicit comprehension strategy language. <input type="checkbox"/> Student(s) use reading strategy language. <input type="checkbox"/> Student(s) use comprehension strategy language. <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of D47 Reading Curriculum Guidelines	
<b>During Reading</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Running record/Anecdotal notes taken on student(s). <input type="checkbox"/> Silent reading <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Oral reading <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher prompts for and praises reading strategies on-the-run <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher prompts for comprehension strategies on-the-run <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher provides appropriate level of support during reading <input type="checkbox"/> Student(s) use reading strategies <input type="checkbox"/> Students apply instructional focus and other strategies/skills <input type="checkbox"/> Fluency addressed	
<b>After Reading</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Purposeful conversation to deepen meaning <input type="checkbox"/> Revisit focus after lesson <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher returns to text highlighting powerful teaching points <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher uses reading strategy language <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher uses comprehension strategy language <input type="checkbox"/> Student(s) use reading strategy language <input type="checkbox"/> Student(s) reflect on how strategies support meaning <input type="checkbox"/> Student(s) revisit text to support lesson focus <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meaningful extended response activity (journal, rereading, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of D47 Reading Curriculum Guidelines <b>Other</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Record keeping systems evident (none) <input type="checkbox"/> Students taking books home <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate level text used <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate length lesson	
<b>Away From the Teacher Activities</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Meaningful, literacy-based activities evident <input type="checkbox"/> Clear structure and management in place <input type="checkbox"/> Students engaged <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher interruptions minimal <input type="checkbox"/> Students work independently and cooperatively with others <input type="checkbox"/> Choice is evident	

When determining a specific learning goal for James, Mal shared that she had several ideas in her mind for learning goals that directly linked to guided reading instruction such as: choosing a clear teaching focus, using explicit reading instruction language, and modeling for comprehension instruction. However, in the Literacy Coaching Cycle, the teacher is responsible for choosing his own learning goal. This allows for more ownership of learning. James chose the learning goal of record keeping (for documenting student progress and learning behaviors), rather than other goals that related specifically to guided reading instruction. Mal accepted this idea enthusiastically. She described her thinking about his choice:

As I walked back to my office, I was thinking about and wondering, ‘What will his focus be?’ When he said record-keeping, I replied, ‘Okay, that sounds GOOD.’ because he initiated this cycle. I’m not going to say, ‘Really? Record keeping? James!’ But, in my mind I’ve got it tucked away.

The completed coaching contract for James and Mal (see Table II) showed that the student learning goal was to achieve consistent student documentation for increased reading comprehension. As indicated by their contract, the goal of documentation for James may include evidence as shown by running records, anecdotal notes, and reading response journals, and for the students, it may additionally include writing responses to reading.

For the contract length of time, James requested a longer cycle than other teachers typically have requested. Instead of listing an arbitrary ending date, Mal provided a date for when they would decide the end of the cycle. She commented that, “I have found it unsuccessful to pre-determine the end of the cycle, rather, it is helpful to ballpark the ending date, and then decide if the teacher and coach are comfortable with that.” This ending date is largely based upon the teacher’s progress and confidence level about the achievement of the learning goal.

### **Let the Cycle Begin**

#### **Planning**

The skills of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum were used as the core of small group instruction while incorporating specific skills students needed to strengthen their reading comprehension. As a beginning point for systematic record-keeping, Mal introduced the notion of keeping a notebook.

Each week, James and Mal met for 30 minutes in order to plan for two days of side-by-side instruction at the guided reading table, for a total of 3 days per week. Side-by-side instruction is when both coach and teacher are together at the table, literally sitting side-by-side (Frost, Buehl, & Blachowicz, 2009). In this format, both people may be teaching at the same time, or one teaches and the other observes. Mal described the process,

Some days I would teach the first group while James observed and then he would teach the second group. Other days, he would teach first, and I would teach second. During every session of guided reading, I took notes on how things were going at the table with the students, praising James for great ideas and comments, other times jotting down "wonderings" about students' oral and written responses, reading abilities, and his record keeping.

Table II: Coaching Contract

<b>Teacher(s):</b> James <b>Coach:</b> Mal	<b>Dates of Coaching Cycle:</b> January 10 – March 23
<b>Student learning goal:</b> Consistent student documentation will show increase in reading comprehension with written responses to reading (running records, anecdotal notes, and reading response journal).	
<b>Student data supporting need for student learning goal:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase record keeping</li> <li>2. Increase notetaking</li> <li>3. Writing journal</li> </ol>	<b>Meeting dates and times (to plan, debrief, monitor, etc.):</b>  Two times a week in the classroom – Mon/Wed Planning – Wed. afternoon
<b>Instructional practices to learn, refine, and continue after cycle is completed:</b> *Recognize specific student needs. *Target specific reading and writing behaviors.	<b>Coaching strategies needed (modeling, observation, discussion, study group, etc.)</b> *Modeling, observation, discussion
<b>Coach responsibilities:</b>  *Have consistent weekly meetings *Utilize James's system (notebook)	<b>Teacher responsibilities:</b> *Be available to meet with Mal *Create system *Have student information, running records, writing conference forms, organized system.
<b>Gradual release of responsibility from coach to teacher:</b>  Mal will model, James watches, Mal and James work together, discuss together.	<b>Documentation that student learning goal is achieved.</b>  *Composition notebook and reading response notebooks.  Mal, "What do you have to show me?"
<b>Date for end-of-cycle reflection meeting:</b>  *Will meet (3/23) to decide the end of the cycle.	<b>Possible opportunities to share student learning with other teachers.</b>  Share out at Professional Learning Community (6 <sup>th</sup> grade team).

Likewise, James also took notes while Mal taught and shared them afterwards. According to Mal, the benefits of side-by-side coaching are that it gives you an “in” to add things to the conversation and to be part of the discussion in the group. She said, “That opens the door for you to be able to say, ‘Hey, that’s a good idea’ and extend the thinking of the student as well as the teacher.”

#### Teaching: Guided Reading Lesson

After several weeks of working with Mal, James conducted a guided reading lesson based on the reading skill of synthesizing. In this lesson, James demonstrated improvement in his teaching by showing the following behaviors: providing a clear learning focus, using concrete examples for abstract concepts, and generalizing this skill to other subjects and reading tasks.

James made his learning goal specific by saying to his guided reading group, “Today we are going to work with the skill of synthesizing.” James began by reviewing the term synthesizing and asked a student to read its definition located on the anchor chart in the room. After the student read the definition (Readers seek to understand the big idea or theme in the text), James said, “That sounds easy, but easier said than done. I will break it down for you.” He demonstrated this idea by mentioning the phrase “spider webs” and how this detail may relate to going to a Halloween theme party. James restated the concept of synthesizing, describing that it is taking little ideas to create a bigger idea.

The reading task that James introduced was an article entitled, “War: What happens when nations don’t work it out.” He asked the students about their background relating to the topic of war. A brief conversation between teacher and students ensued:

Student: It happened years ago.

James: Okay it happened years ago when they were fighting.

Student: My grandpa has been in a war.

James: Yes, my grandpa has been in a war, too. My brother-in-law is over in Afghanistan again. Derrick, what do you know about war?

Once the prior knowledge was established, students had a framework from which to draw when reading. The students independently read the article about war and wrote down answers to comprehension questions. Mal, also at the guided reading table, looked at student’s paper and whispered, “Derrick, go back into the text to check your answer. How many years did it last?” James reinforced, “Effective readers should always go back so that is a good skill.” The interaction among James, Mal, and the student was comfortable and supportive.

Then, in the *after reading* section (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001) of the lesson, James reinforced the focus and connected to the content areas. He asked, “When you are in social studies or in math, could you gather little details to pull a bigger idea or is it just a reading thing?” The student replied, “Yes, I could use this in other subjects.”

James said, “Yes you could. So, think about this with your own books.” This restatement of the focus and connection to other subject areas was a demonstration of growth from James, which was lacking prior to the Literacy Coaching Cycle.

## Conferencing

Conferencing and debriefing directly after a lesson created a powerful learning space for both coach and teacher. This reflective component helped James to increase his awareness for the student learning goals as he stepped back to look at his teaching style. Mal shared how she and James typically debriefed after a lesson, “We would then sit together following the lesson to debrief and discuss how things went, ideas for future lessons and to review our notes from that day.” She pointed out that taking the time to discuss soon after the lesson had a greater effect than conferencing some time later.



## Evaluating a Completed Coaching Cycle

### Evaluation Form

At the end of the cycle, the coach and the teacher each fill out an evaluation form (Frost, et al., 2009, p. 64) and then meet for discussion. The discussion should focus on the process of the cycle, time lines, roles and responsibilities of the coach and teacher, and whether the cycle clearly centered on student learning. The effectiveness of the cycle may be evaluated by asking the following questions (p. 62): did the teacher feel supported?; did the coach feel effective?; and was the learning goal realistic?

### Final Conference

The last piece to a coaching cycle includes reflection by the teacher and the coach with the main question being: *Did you achieve the learning goal?* (Frost, et al., 2009, p. 60). In the closing conference between James and Mal, James was doing much of the talking, describing his learning:

The name of the game in school now seems to be documentation and proof. Before we started the coaching cycle, it seemed like I had my piles everywhere. I had post-its, I had some loose-leaf paper, I had some stuff in some drawers, it wasn't all collected. I admitted that that was kind of a weakness of mine that I needed to work on, hence, the coaching cycle.

He talked about his implementation of a record keeping system introduced by Mal.

You (Mal) introduced this notebook system to me, keeping that with dates, kids, lessons, and focus. And, then we also did the crates. Any time I had a handout, I would put it in a crate. So, like the anecdotal notes and keeping everything in one central location whether it was the binder or the notebook really helped me. This is working really well for me now because I access the notebook all the time.

James talked about organizational skills and record-keeping techniques that he learned and practiced during the last nine weeks. When Mal asked how the record-keeping impacted his instruction, James described how he was able to use the notebook to prompt his memory about the specific needs of his students, and how he could generalize from one student to others. He said that his recorded observations drove his instruction.

When I took notes on specific kids, you think probably someone else could benefit, too. Anything that we worked on here (indicating the table and he and Mal together), those little notes and details, I could go back into the notebook and make sure that I was going to hit those specific details.

Mal commented that he gained an awareness of his students and their needs, which was more in-depth and accurate than prior to the coaching cycle. He agreed and added, "Definitely better than when I started, balancing when those right times are; what words can I jot down quickly and kind of developing my own shorthand." Mal and James closed out their Literacy Coach Cycle by talking about the learning that occurred and stating that the cycle was completed. In a survey after the cycle, James wrote that their conversations during the coaching cycle helped him to better understand students' needs and; thus, the instruction that would be best for his struggling students. Mal indicated that even though the initial



learning goal of record keeping was not what she would have chosen, ultimately, it accomplished the same results as other goals. By the end of the cycle, James was clear with his teaching focus, incorporated guided reading language, and used lesson extensions such as writing.

Mal offered some final tips for working with teachers within a Literacy Coaching Cycle. The practice of staying in their classroom for discussion and conferencing, rather than going to the lounge or library, is critical. For teachers, their own classroom is their comfortable space. She emphasized that sitting at the table to talk where the “action just took place” or near their desk is going to make the teacher feel more comfortable and ready to talk about their teaching. Also, it’s important for the coach to document, maintaining a notebook, log, or journal in order to reference conversations with the teachers. Mal added, “I’m modeling record keeping.”

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the structure of the Literacy Coach Cycle allows teachers and coaches a way forward to focus on student learning goals as demonstrated by James and Mal. The Literacy Coach Cycle allows for the teacher to choose his/ her own learning goal and this is empowering to the teacher. With specific learning goals, clear communication, and an agreed upon contract, Literacy Coaching Cycles are an effective method to increase professional development, teacher reflection, and student performance.

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## Chapter 11

### Integrating Meaningful Literacy Instruction with Technology: Coaching Through Teachers' Voices of Exemplary Practice

*Kristine Still and Jacki Gordon*

This study details a research agenda focused on understanding professional development and how it impacts 21<sup>st</sup> century technology skills and the New Literacies as they are integrated into current elementary literacy classrooms. The researchers have focused upon elementary classroom teachers and have engaged them in dialogue to investigate their integration of technology with the literacy curriculum in meaningful ways. Specifically, the researchers questioned where exemplary teachers gain support and the professional development to maintain and expand upon their professional practices. Further, how do exemplary teachers synthesize the information gained through professional development into a form that is useful for them when integrating technology with literacy instruction?

#### **Related Research**

Related research literature on effective professional development suggests that to better serve the needs of teachers in their quest to integrate technology, professional development should be thoughtfully constructed. Effective designs must move beyond the traditional model based on transmission of information from someone in authority to engage and empower teachers to have stronger voices in directing their own learning. Zepeda (2002) stated “a more empowering view . . . casts teachers as active participants, constructing knowledge . . . applicable to classroom practice and that engages them in more collaborative processes” (p. 84).

Collaborative relationships have been found to be instrumental in facilitating professional growth in teachers. Professional development should shift away from solely providing content for improved teaching and focus more on building meaningful relationships amongst teachers. Indeed, research has shown that less than 10% of teachers implement new ideas learned in traditional workshop settings (Joyce & Showers, 1988).

Professional development should be implemented in ways that serve teachers and their needs for integrating technology in meaningful ways. Ultimately, professional development should establish environments conducive for nurturing collegial relationships. Sanders and Schwab (2001) identified “that education is a deeply human process, and that those who teach both need and deserve psychological and social support to keep their energies focused upon what is essential” (p. 277). Research suggests that professional development should engage and empower teachers to have a stronger voice in

directing their own learning (Educational Research Service, 1998; Lyon & Pinnell, 2001; Robb, 2000). Adults learn best in situations that reflect a constructivist view of learning. According to Zepeda (as cited in Sandholtz, 2002), “Learning is not only a matter of transferring ideas from one who is knowledgeable to one who is not. Instead, learning is perceived as a personal, reflective, and transformative process where ideas, experiences, and points of view are integrated and knowledge is created” (p. 816).

Zepeda further stated that, “When a constructivist perspective is applied to teacher learning, a key focus becomes how teachers learn to make critically reflective judgments in the midst of action and how they subsequently change their actions in response to new insights” (p. 816). The ultimate model of professional development will result in the formulation of learning communities among staff members involved in the experience. Kinnucan-Welsh and Jenlink (as cited in Sandholtz, 2002) concluded that “learning communities become important ways of supporting individual construction of meaning and knowledge” (p. 816). Shamburg (2004) also found that,

An approach to professional development that emphasizes the social dimensions of learning from classroom teachers . . . would facilitate learning channels among professional developers and teachers, with an emphasis on formalizing opportunities for teachers to share and reflect with each other. (p. 242)

## **Methods, Techniques, and Data Source**

During this study, data were collected through a focus group and focus group follow-up questionnaire. Additionally, data were also gathered using an online questionnaire.

Focus group methodology was employed to allow the researchers direct interaction with teachers who successfully employ technology in the elementary classroom in meaningful ways. As Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) suggest, focus groups permit the respondents and researcher to interact and help respondents build synergistically upon their discussions. Meanings are often deepened in this flexible environment which is particularly useful with literate individuals such as elementary grade educators. Although there are many benefits, certain limitations are inherent in the methodology which must also be considered. Most significantly, the small number involved in a focus group prohibits broad generalizations; additionally, the interaction may limit independence of thought in the responses. Despite these limitations the focus group methodology was selected because it has been found to be a viable mode of inquiry when investigating teacher beliefs and practices in the early childhood domain (Laffey, 2004; Makin, Hayden, & Diaz, 2000).

The nature of the focus group was upheld by a nonthreatening environment around a dinner table. Participants were offered a broad overview of the topics to be discussed prior to coming to the focus group session. Consideration for the least talkative individuals was detailed in their placement around a large dining table which also afforded eye contact between all members of the group as well as the discussion facilitators. Respondents were given a pen and paper to jot down thoughts that might have been prompted by colleagues’ responses as the discussion unfolded. At the onset of the session, the respondents were asked for permission to record the discussion which was granted by all. As the session began, each participant was asked to briefly introduce themselves to the larger group.

The facilitators assured each participant that their input was valuable and indeed essential to the success of the discussion. As the interview transpired, careful attention to time spent on each question was monitored to ensure that each very important topic was carefully considered and integrated into the discussion. The discussion was fruitful and extended over a 3-hour period which included dinner and dessert.

The following research questions guided the focus group discussion:

1. What technology do you currently use in the classroom?
2. How do you currently integrate technology with literacy instruction? How has this changed over time?
3. Where and how do you acquire the information needed to support your successful integration of technology?

Two questionnaires were constructed following the focus group. One examined how a broader population engaged with technology in meaningful ways through the Language Arts curriculum (see Appendix 1). The second investigated how the participants of the focus group connected their practices of integrating technology with literacy. The questionnaires in this study did reflect elements which might eventually inform the construction of a survey document. As Fowler (2002) suggests, the questionnaires were: (1) connected to a focus group; (2) predicated on a set of research questions; and (3) individual laboratory review to detect common flaws (p. 105). Specifically, the researchers noted that a good survey instrument, or even a questionnaire, is to define the purpose and research questions pursued by the instrument. Additionally, the value of a preliminary focus group is well documented and noted as a “valuable [method] to conduct focused discussions with people who are in the study population about the issues to be studied” (p. 106).

In this study, the questionnaires only preview the possible trends that emerged from responses of this very narrow sample frame. To conduct the first questionnaire the researchers accessed the database of two digital listservs which are resource sites for the population that the researchers hoped to investigate. Each of these sites was peopled by educators who were known to address the integration of technology in the elementary classroom language arts curriculum in meaningful ways. The researchers believed that they had accessed the only national site which addressed this particular population of educators (T.I.L.E. SIG of the International Reading Association). The other site was a Ning which was known to be a local resource for this population.

The drafting of prompts, for both questionnaires as well as the focus group, was predicated on two previous studies which were a review of the research literature and a Q methodology study (Authors, 2009a, 2009b). Care was taken to construct items that would “mean the same thing to all respondents; answers to the questions would be a task that all respondents could perform;” while, the need for an interview script or protocol was negated due to the digital format of the questionnaire (Fowler, 2002, p. 115).

## Data Sources

The data sources for this study included the tape recordings as well as the transcription of the focus group discussion and the questionnaire responses.

## Results

### What Technology Do You Currently Use in Your Classroom?

The following discussion of results is centered on data gathered from the focus group interview:

The data indicated that six out of the seven teacher participants currently used Smart Board technology in their classrooms. In addition, they coordinated the Smart Board with peripherals such as Elmo Projectors, Digital Cameras, Image Projection Devices, and Digital Recorders. In all of the classrooms, computers were accessible for students to use on a regular and ongoing basis. Students had access to computer programs including Accelerated Reader, I Excel, STAR Math, STAR Reading, and EarRobics. As one teacher noted:

We have fantastic classroom programs and great technology in the classrooms. There isn't enough time in the day to utilize it effectively. . . . We are working on overload. My Elmo sat . . . for two months. I wasn't ready for it because I didn't know. Now that I have it, I use it every day, all day long. I don't get the overhead out. (Focus Group, 3/3/10)

The teachers in this particular school are collaborative, heavily relying upon their colleagues as resources and are supportive of each other's professional growth. This is evidenced in the following statement: "We're very rich in the resources that we have compared to some of the buildings. We're lucky that we have people trained. [We] support each other" (Focus Group, 3/3/10).

Teachers used the technology in a collaborative fashion as they commented in the following ways:

Having the Internet and having the ability to find or tap into a resource like that. It doesn't just impact you but can impact the whole school system. The idea of the isolation and building something for my Smart Board for my classroom and only I get to use it is disappearing. People can tap into something that is fabulous and all you have to do is make sure everybody knows about it. That's not a hard thing. You have to learn new language and translate it into something else. It's just, here's the link. I'll send it to you. It opens a door **and** that becomes one of the newer problems. How do I find the best in a reasonable amount of time so that I can make it work best for kids? You could spend forever hunting trails. That's another issue. When you find the site, I love the fact that everyone is good at sharing that kind of thing. You're not out there struggling all by yourself. That kind of feeling is unique to our building. Our family reminds me all the time that there aren't too many [school name] around. There's a ton of that in that building. I've chosen to stay there for a long time because I love that feeling. I cannot say it's not encouraged in other buildings. (Focus Group, 3/3/10)

Technology integration also encouraged teachers to differentiate instruction across the literacy curriculum. Specifically, the teachers acknowledged that:

That's a handheld hundred dollar computer that thinks with a host computer. There's software on there for math and for reading and some literacy. The teacher can prescribe per student. If you have somebody reading at a very low reading level, or reading at an A, B, or C level, you can tune that machine to do work at their level compared to somebody else who may be at a D or an H, or another reading level. That came from a grant from Chase. It's not in the whole school system. It's in maybe four **and** you set up the skill sets for individual students. It monitors and it can give you feedback as to how you're doing. (Focus Group, 3/3/10)

Technology has increased motivation as students engage in constructing their own connections and making meanings through the literacy curriculum. It was noted that:

I like the fact that they're taking ownership. This is their learning. They're helping each other. They're getting stuff. They're learning the same thing, but they're in control of how it's going. They're doing the calendar. They're doing the numbers. It's interactive with them. They're learning how to use new technology. I think it's fabulous. There's no going back. There's only going forward, adding more pieces **and** everybody gets more excited. They tend to sit closer to each other, so that everybody is closer to the Smart Board. The whole feeling of the room changes when we do something. (Focus Group, 3/3/10)

Above all, the teacher participants understood the power of technology in the literacy curriculum to frame their students' understanding of real world skills as well as the foundational skills necessary for their technologically enhanced futures. The teacher participants concurred that:

One factor is feeling responsible, to have the children as successful as possible. Not so much for their own school, but for their own life. One of the things that you said, when you're talking about technology, we are preparing our students for a world that's totally different from the world that we grew up in. Technology is part of that world. The more technology that we can have in their world, helping them use it appropriately, helping them search for information, helping them know how to find things, how to utilize their skills, the better prepared they will be. Their world will never be even the way it is now. Think how much it's changed in five years. Five years from now, it will be completely different. They will always have this. We grew into this. We didn't have this **and** I was talking to someone the other day. The sad thing of it is, see that computer over on that table? You can put this down next to the computer; which one do you think the kids will go for? That's their generation. This is their time, the computer. It's not the thing that we have in our classrooms that we think is WOW. It's not. If we can get them to that path, it's like this. It's all over. How awesome can you be? They can do their writing on it and print right off of it. All you need is one computer in the classroom to print off of. It is what it is. We hold them back. We talk about this all the time. We're gate keepers. I think we hold them back and don't mean to. You just don't have the resources available at this point. (Focus Group, 3/3/10)



The strongest asset of this particular group of teacher participants was willingness to share openly with other school colleagues. This is evident in many ways as is illustrated in the following examples:

We would meet and we would just kind of sit and share our ideas about what we did today or how you get into the notebook, how you get to be interactive? What are the steps? We would just sit there and seriously write a note . . . that's what helps me, to actually sit there and watch somebody do it **and** multiply that with all the other people around us. If you are at different levels, you have the ability to bounce off each other. You will go to your next level and John will go to his next level **and** we're so lucky to have each other to get to the next level. I went to a class of beginner Smart Board. The person that was teaching it couldn't get anything working. Nothing was working. Finally, [an instructor colleague] came to the class, and was expert at it, to learn more about it. She ended up going up in front and suggesting gently, "You might want to try that, or let's try this." That's how you learn, by watching it successfully done **and** just getting together and sharing the different things. I never would have thought to use the Smart Board as your circle time until you see that. I thought that was brilliant **and** . . . said, look at this site and this site. I looked at the sites and picked everything I liked, that I thought would work in my class and just adapted it. I'm forward thinking. This is what I'd like to see my kids do. This is how technology can help in Kindergarten, now how can I get to that point? (Focus Group, 3/3/10)

What was truly inspiring was the vision and motivation that these teacher participants possessed although each in very different ways. The strongest of these is represented in the following teacher comment:

If I could dream it and have everybody do it, one would be Twitter. Use Twitter as a way of getting educational people that are sharing their educational things. There are three or four people who talk. Sometimes, I watch two guys from Britain. I did get a response from one guy. He'll respond back sometimes, a direct message back to me, or out to the public. He sent one out just recently about his favorite apps on his I phone. I started looking at the apps he had. I didn't have that one. It's a free one. I'll check it. I love it. There's some great stuff. Most of it is free. If I could dream that it would happen for us, it would be one to start to build on how you use Twitter for educational people. It would get you what people are doing in their classroom and sharing what they're doing. Then, we start to share. I found this site. A lot of times, here's a site that does this. Click that. I tend to look at it later. The other one I think that's real powerful is finding a few good sites and work that through Google reader. You're Google reader to go and just give you a quick synopsis of what those 20 things are. If anything is of any value, that's when you click that one. You're sifting just the titles and looking at just the titles. A lot of things I found that I've shared like Wordal. A lot of slideshows. There's 20 ways to use a flip cam or something like that. That all comes from somebody on a blog saying they're using it or they're doing that. For me, that would be the dream come true. People using that. (Focus Group, 3/3/10)

As can be gleaned from the teacher voices in the vignettes shared previously, teachers are paramount to successful incorporation of technology in meaningful ways and fostering their continued development is essential for the literacy futures and lives of this nation's current and future youth. In closing, the following teacher comment represents its significance:



When I have my Smart Board in front of the class, and when I had my Elmo in front of the class, I think I'm going to be able to use them more. I think you do arrange your classroom around the things that are most effective. I think you become a more effective teacher. I think I'll do a better job next year than I am right now. I'm looking forward to that, taking a step up from where I am now. (Focus Group, 3/3/1)

#### How Do You Currently Integrate Technology With Instruction and How Has This Changed Over Time?

The following is a discussion of results and is centered on data from the online and focus group follow-up questionnaires:

##### Online Questionnaire Multiple Choice Items

When survey respondents were asked "if they worked with their colleagues to observe, evaluate, and provide feedback on each others' practices," of the 21 respondents slightly more than half noted a collaborative relationship with colleagues. As respondents addressed the possibility of their definition of "literacy" evolving, overwhelmingly they asserted that it had evolved and predicted that it would continue to evolve. All respondents agreed that integrating technology had positive effects on the literacy development of their students. The majority of respondents viewed technology as a collaborative endeavor, in that they noted their preference for a collaborative grouping structure with computers at student work areas within the classroom. Moreover, they found this in concert with their philosophical approach which honored the collaborative nature of the "new technologies". Finally, within the "new technologies" respondents overwhelmingly preferred Internet-based resources to support the meaningful integration of technology.

##### Online Questionnaire Example of Open Ended Response

I believe a classroom immersed with a technology-rich learning environment reaches the various learning styles of all the students in a classroom. Therefore, my students use computers on a daily basis for research, reading, writing, math, social studies, and science. We do have a classroom web page where students blog on a daily basis. I believe, as educators, we need to prepare our students for the future and provide a classroom environment that promotes 21<sup>st</sup> century skills! (Online Survey Response, September, 2010).

##### Focus Group Follow-up Questionnaire

The follow-up questionnaire helped to illustrate specific strategies which were implemented in a Kindergarten, First Grade, and Fourth Grade Classroom. Respondents described these activities and how they believed each supported the meaningful use of technology as a tool to support literacy growth.

**Kindergarten.** In this classroom, a "blog site" was created to allow the children to have a voice in engaging with a global community. The students authored their blog and awaited responses from the blog site followers. This classroom blog can be found at the following address: <http://keenskinderblog.blogspot.com/>. The teacher described the benefits of this blog in several ways.

First, the blog acted as an aid to students in writing for a purpose and for an audience. Second, it allowed inter classroom connections with their fifth grade buddies. Third, it connected the classroom with local families as well as across the globe. Finally, it gave the children an opportunity to engage in authentic reading and writing tasks. Additionally, this teacher shared her students' perceptions of their blog site:

My students love to blog. They frequently ask me if we can check the blog for messages and when doing activities they will ask me if we can blog it (which is humorous to hear a kindergarten child ask). At the beginning of our blogging they would ask if we could blog everything. It has been a process to help them determine what blog worthy events are. It has also been a process to try and get their words in the blog and not just mine. We are making progress with this. At first they just don't know what they want to say. Now they want their words in there with their name. (Follow-up Focus Group Questionnaire Teacher Response, April, 2011)

**First grade.** In this classroom, a problem-based learning project was facilitated at a grocery store within the local community surrounding the school. During this project, students began as they researched various fruits and vegetables. Next, the students wrote persuasive speeches about their assigned fruit or vegetable and then were given the opportunity to present their speech at this local supermarket. This allowed the children to advocate for their featured produce item in a "real world" setting. Finally, the students created resources in support of their presentation including business cards and a CD of original produce related songs. Details of this assignment, including footage of the presentations as well as the produce songs, can be found on the classroom's website at the following address: <http://www.portagepathschool.org/Bennett/Welcome.html>. The teacher described the benefits of this community-based project in the following ways. First, it was an opportunity for children to construct their own knowledge through research about their assigned produce item. Second, children had complete ownership of the product as they designed their own advertisements. Third, the children had the opportunity of integrating "fine arts" with technology and literacy as they created their "props" for a real purpose. Finally, the first graders engaged in technical writing and persuasive speaking through the creation of their advocacy speeches. They were clearly motivated as can be gleaned from their teacher's statement below:

If you watch the videos on the website or listen to the song, you will see and hear the excitement and engagement of the students and their desire to impact the shoppers to make good choices about fruits and vegetables. (Follow-up Focus Group Questionnaire Teacher Response, April, 2011)

**Fourth grade.** In this classroom, students were engaged in the creation of online videos which illustrated relevant vocabulary that they were reading in literature. To create these videos, students engaged in the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, and editing) as they wrote scripts for their online videos which were ultimately performed by Avatars. Students also conferred with their teacher through all phases of the writing process required for this project. These online videos can be found at the following address: <http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/11578398/reading-vocabulary?listid=22267671>. The teacher described the benefit of this online vocabulary-based activity in the following ways. First, the activity engaged students in support of technology-enhanced literacy learning. Second, it supported authentic use of communication skills through conferencing with their teacher around their project. Finally, this project aided the purposeful use of the writing process. The students in this fourth grade classroom appreciated the opportunity to be "actively involved" with technology as their teacher stated:

My students love creating Xtranormal productions! They enjoy the use of technology in their learning adventures because they are actively making choices about how to generate, manipulate, and display their knowledge. (Follow-up Focus Group Questionnaire Teacher Response, April, 2011)

Across all of the projects, the teachers facilitating these innovative strategies noted the following benefits in support of literacy learning. For the students, each allowed active learning and student ownership for their final products. Each project also promoted meaningful technology integration through authentic experiences in support of the literacy curriculum. Finally, motivation was evident for both students and their teachers as a result of engaging with technology in these meaningful ways.

### Where and How Do You Acquire the Information Needed to Support Your Successful Integration of Technology?

The following discussion of results is centered on data from the focus group and follow-up focus group questionnaire as well as the online questionnaire.

According to the results of the focus group, the teachers reported that they acquired the information needed to support their integration of technology from the following sources which included their school district, their school building, and their teacher colleagues. When survey respondents were asked, “What is your most useful source of professional development?” the most prominent specific topics noted as sources for professional development included attending conferences and collaborating with peers (see Figure 9). When the focus group participants were asked “How did you learn or acquire the proficiency to do this in your classroom?” during the follow-up focus group questionnaire, they noted self-study through the Internet and attendance at professional conferences as can be illustrated through their words in the following quotes:

***Self Study Through the Internet.*** I watched the movie Julie and Julia and watched her blog about her cooking experience and I thought I could do that with my class. I then went to Google and started my search on how to blog. After much reading I subscribed to a blog site and followed their instructions on how to begin blogging. I spend a lot of time pressing buttons and trying to figure out what they do and when that fails I go back to Google. I occasionally am fortunate to get a bit of assistance from peers or university students. I went to a blog workshop offered by my district but it basically taught me how to sign up for a blog account, which I had already figured out on my own. (Follow-up Focus Group Questionnaire Teacher Response, April, 2011)

***Attendance at a Professional Conference.*** I was introduced to Xtranormal at the 2010 ISTE Conference. Upon returning, I quickly began to explore the program learning as much as I could so I was prepared to share my knowledge with my colleagues and the students in my classroom. As an educator preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I am convinced that technology must be an integral part of our daily instruction and can definitely promote literacy skills. (Follow-up Focus Group Questionnaire Teacher Response, April, 2011)

Interestingly, in this particular study, the responses detailing the avenues used by the teachers to support their successful integration of technology did not reveal support from the district and/or the building literacy coach. In fact, when asked about the literacy coaches, these particular teachers expressed that the literacy coach was not assigned to their classroom or was not available. Indeed, in this case, there was no evidence indicating that these respondents felt they had established a relationship with their district and/or building literacy coach.

### **Discussion of Educational Importance**

Through this research study the conversations with practicing classroom teachers suggest they are taking ownership of their professional development. At present, the teachers highlighted in this paper are forging professional peer relationships both “in person” and in cyberspace as they use the Internet as a vehicle to enhance classroom practice. Indeed, these teachers are emblematic of the power of “peer coaching” as Joyce and Showers (2002) “estimate that when a combination of components is employed, especially “Peer Coaching,” there is likely to be a real and strong transfer to classroom practice by 95% of the participants (p. 78).

The authors proffer their recommendation for future research to investigate the critical role of the Literacy Coach when assisting teachers to employ technology in support of meaningful literacy instruction. In closing, the authors strongly encourage that research of this nature be given a new stage; one that will allow for an intellectual dynamism whereby all stakeholders, teachers and coaches alike, will have a collaborative voice when asking the question “What is the connection between Peer Coaching, Literacy Coaching, and Technology Integration?”

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## APPENDIX 1

### Teacher Technology Questionnaire

1. How comfortable do you feel with using technology to support literacy instruction?
  - ☐ I am familiar with some educational software and websites
  - ☐ My students use technology almost daily to support their language arts skills
  - ☐ I have given presentations on how to integrate technology into the language arts
2. What is your most useful source of professional development?
  - ☐ Attending conferences
  - ☐ Subscribing to journals
  - ☐ Being an active member of professional organizations
  - ☐ Submitting to and reading publications
  - ☐ Giving presentations
  - ☐ Involving yourself in leadership roles (i.e. mentorships)
  - ☐ Collaborating with peers
  - ☐ All of the above
  - ☐ None of the above
  - ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. What types of experiences do you think may have been influential in helping to shape your current beliefs about using technology to support literacy instruction?
  - ☐ Personal
  - ☐ Professional
  - ☐ Both
4. Do you work with your colleagues to observe, evaluate, and provide feedback on each other's practice?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
5. Does your school district support your integration of technology?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ NA
6. Does your school district hinder your integration of technology?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ NA
7. Does your school building support your integration of technology?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

- NA
- 8. Does your school building hinder your integration of technology?
  - Yes
  - No
  - NA
- 9. Has your current definition of literacy changed since you first began teaching?
  - Yes
  - No
- 10. Has your current definition of literacy changed since you began integrating technology into your practice?
  - Yes
  - No
- 11. Do you think your definition will continue to evolve?
  - Yes
  - No
- 12. Do you believe that meaningful technology integration is an important tool in enhancing literacy instruction at your grade level?
  - Yes
  - No
  - NA
- 13. Do you believe integrating technology has positive effects on the literacy development of students?
  - Yes
  - No
- 14. Which area of literacy development do you think could potentially benefit the most from meaningful integration of technology?
  - reading
  - writing
  - speaking
  - listening
- 15. In your opinion, what grouping structure is most beneficial for students as they interact with technology in support of meaningful literacy activities?
  - Individually
  - Collaboratively

16. Which statement best reflects your philosophy for integrating technology with literacy instruction?
- It is important for my students to learn to successfully employ the latest hardware and software to produce their best individual product.
  - It is important for my students to work collaboratively with new technologies through a team-based approach interacting with the global community.
17. What does an effective ideal literacy classroom look like?
- computers down the hall in a computer lab
  - computers along the wall in your classroom
  - computers at student work areas within the classroom
18. Which resources do you use most frequently in support of meaningful technology integration with literacy?
- Packaged Educational Software Programs
  - Internet-based resources (i.e. websites, blogs, pod-casting, etc.)
19. In your classroom, which area of literacy is most supported through student interaction with meaningful technologies?
- Reading
  - Writing
  - Speaking
  - Listening
20. Please share any additional information you would like to regarding your integration of technology to support meaningful literacy instruction?  
(Please limit your response to 100 words)



## Chapter 12

### Literacy Coaches and RTI: Time and Intensity

*Norma Puente*

Response to intervention (RTI) is an approach used to increase the opportunity for all students to meet academic achievement standards through early identification of students who might be considered at risk based on academic and/or behavioral needs. RTI ensures that instructional resources and interventions are appropriately targeted to serve all struggling learners as early as possible through high-quality instruction.

The RTI process provides a vehicle for all teachers, both general and special education, to share the responsibility and work collaboratively in a supportive environment to ensure that student learning and student behavior issues are met with success (Mentoring Minds, 2010). Some important advantages of having an RTI process include:

- High-quality, core instruction is provided in the general education classroom so students are successful.
- Core instructional strategies are research based to provide effective instruction, whether in whole group, small group or individual.
- Prevention through intervention is the emphasis.
- The provision of effective instruction for all students becomes the focus rather than identification for special education.

As an elementary literacy coach in a large south Texas school district, it is one of my many duties to assist teachers and administrators with the RTI process. In addition to that important charge, I, and other literacy coaches across the nation, perform a variety of duties related to professional development. Literacy coaching involves analyzing data, joint planning, modeling lessons, observing lessons and providing constructive feedback to teachers. Time spent with teachers is essential, not only for student improvement in reading, but also essential for building a collaborative relationship with the classroom teacher. This collaboration provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their instruction and engage in collegial conversation with the literacy coach.

#### **State Testing**

Corpus Christi Independent School District (CCISD) serves over 38,000 students at sixty campuses. The student population is predominantly Hispanic and economically disadvantaged.

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test has been administered yearly to students in grades three through twelve, since 2003. The students are tested in reading, writing, math, and science. At the elementary school level, 17 campuses received exemplary status, 18 campuses received recognized ratings and four schools attained academically acceptable status (CCISD, 2010). Administrators and classroom teachers view the assistance of literacy coaches as an additional resource to help children pass the state mandated tests.

The school district also uses the TAKS test as a Universal Screener for progress monitoring in grades three through twelve. The Texas Primary Reading Inventory is the universal screener for kindergarten through second grade. District benchmarks and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) are also used as universal screeners. These universal screeners are used to monitor student progress and provide interventions in specific areas as needed. I use the data from these universal screeners, as well as other student data to assist teachers of the fourteen elementary campuses that I am assigned to. My role is to provide staff development and work with teachers to help them improve the literacy instruction in the classroom by assessing student data to come up with an effective RTI plan.

Just as RTI has three tiers, so does our approach to providing staff development and support to such a large school district. The three RTI tiers are:

- **Tier 1-** All students in Tier 1 receive high-quality, scientifically based instruction, differentiated to meet their needs, and are screened on a periodic basis to identify struggling learners who need additional support.
- **Tier 2-** In Tier 2, students not making adequate progress in the core curriculum are provided with increasingly intensive instruction matched to their needs on the basis of levels of performance and rates of progress.
- **Tier 3-** At this level, students receive individualized, intensive interventions that target the students' skill deficits for the remediation of existing problems and the prevention of more severe problems.

CCISD currently has three elementary literacy coaches to serve thirty-eight campuses. Therefore, in an effort to provide effective RTI staff development, we offer a three tiered approach to assist administrators and teachers.

The first tier consists of district wide professional development. Teachers from the district can sign up for book studies and workshops conducted by the elementary literacy coaches. The workshops, which were conducted during the work day, include: literacy stations, assessment, guided reading, reading workshop, writing workshop and word study. The department of curriculum and instruction paid for the teacher's substitutes. The book studies were offered after school and teachers were given a stipend for attending. The books studied were *Reading with Meaning* by Debbie Miller and *Strategies that Work* by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis. The teachers who attend the workshops have an opportunity to become Job Embedded Trainers (JETS). These teachers volunteer to work with the literacy coach assigned to their campus in order to develop model classrooms for the district. The literacy coaches' help

teachers plan effective literacy instruction, models reading and/or writing strategies, and team teaches with teachers. Literacy coaches also observe instruction and provide feedback using the Balanced Literacy Observation Form. The JETS also open their classrooms to teachers in the district who want to see the implementation of successful reading or writing strategies. Feedback from teachers who observe JETS has been very positive and they would like more opportunities to visit model classrooms and discuss instructional strategies with the JETS.

The second tier for providing campuses with RTI support is using appropriate progress monitoring and intervention resources. In 2009, the CCISD school district purchased RTI materials from an educational publisher, Mentoring Minds. These resources and interventions are appropriately targeted to serve all struggling learners early as possible. The Intervention Plan form is used by the teachers in collaboration with the literacy coach. It is important that the district use the same forms across the district, not only for continuity, but because there is a high mobility rate among students. If the RTI process is started at one campus, then the information from Intervention Plan can be helpful to the teachers at the student's new campus.

Literacy coaches' assistance in the third tier is crucial. Not only do the literacy coaches help teachers analyze data and assist in planning interventions, they identify high quality, research-based intensive instructional strategies. During instruction, literacy coaches monitor student progress by observing student learning and evaluating student work with the teacher.

Helping teachers and students with the RTI process has been very rewarding. This process allows me the opportunity to work closely with teachers to develop the most beneficial instructional plan targeted to the individual struggling student's needs. The successful collaboration also allows the teachers to grow professionally and add to their repertoire of effective instructional reading strategies. Although time is always a factor that we need more of, the student's best interest is always a priority.

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## Chapter 13

### RTI: An Opportunity for Literacy Coaches to Assist Teachers of Adolescent Special Education Students with Language Process Deficits

*Elaine Traynelis Yurek*

As Response to Intervention (RTI) became available for middle and secondary schools, it afforded a unique opportunity for literacy coaches to construct meaningful interventions for struggling readers on these grade levels. An in-depth investigation of the types of problems these students exhibit reveal that many of these students experience language processing deficits which cause problems in reading and listening comprehension. Literacy coaches have a crucial role in alleviating these types of problems through carefully constructed reading tasks. This crucial role of the literacy coach expands into the classrooms and has the capability to enhance the content area teachers' knowledge base and expertise with meeting these challenges in the classroom environment. Understanding the unique needs of the students with language processing deficits and the nature of the tasks required in content curricula is the first step toward developing instruction that helps these students become more successful in meeting the literacy demands of school (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011).

The International Reading Association has a set of standards for middle and secondary school literacy coaches that serves as a framework in which the reading coach may consider all of the possibilities in her/his role as a coach (IRA, 2005). The standards are as follows:

1. Standard I: Skillful collaborators — a literacy coach must (a) collaborate with the school literacy team; (b) promote positive relationships among school staff; (c) promote foundations of literacy; (d) encourage family literacy.
2. Standard II: Skillful job-embedded coaches — a coach must (a) provide professional development; (b) conduct demonstration lessons; (c) engage in one-on-one classroom coaching; (d) support content area reading; (e) provide differentiated instruction; (f) organize materials.
3. Standard III: Skillful evaluation of literacy needs — a coach must (a) support effective assessment practices; (b) analyze data and monitor student progress; (c) conduct assessment.
4. Standard IV: Skillful instructional strategist — a coach must (a) possess content knowledge; (b) provide instruction.

Standards III and IV are pertinent to working with language deficit students and implementing RTI where necessary. The literacy coach must become familiar with the content and develop appropriate strategies for working with that content which will remediate the language deficit student and allow her/him to be successful on both counts, mastering the content and understanding the language demands to master the content.

## Description of Students

Students with language processing deficits may or may not have problems in decoding. The students without decoding problems are the hidden dyslexics because these students appear to have low comprehension skills when answering questions and being assessed. The crux of the problem, in many instances, is a language processing deficit and not a problem in comprehension. According to Mann (2006), there are four levels of language processing that may be affected by learning disabilities from mild to severe in the language processing areas. They are speech perception, vocabulary skills, short-term memory, and syntax and semantics. Siegal (2006) relates phonology, syntax, working memory, semantics and orthography as the processes that are significant in the development of reading skills. Students may exhibit these language processing problems as a receptive or an expressive language problem, or both. These students may also have experienced a lag in the development of inner language, which results in problems with metacognition. This means that the problems may exist in reading, speaking, monitoring and judging the essence of their responses both oral and written. In either case, the same strategies for ameliorating the problem can be used.

### Areas of Cognitive Processing Difficulty

#### Phonology

Students with language processing deficits, when they were younger, may have experienced problems in perceiving speech sounds. They require longer segments of a gated word to perceive accurately. Metsala (1997) suggests that the perceptual problem associated with poor reading comprehension and the concomitant difficulty with phoneme awareness may have a common source. If students cannot perceive clear distinctions between phonemes it will be difficult for them as they grow older to have lexical representations that can be easily accessed.

#### Vocabulary

When instant recognition of words is assessed through rapid naming tests, the naming speed of secondary students with problems in this area scored on the level of eight-year-olds (Fawcett & Nicholson, 1994). Low scores on these types of assessments can play a prolonged role in compromising decoding and/or comprehension. Problems with naming speed can be associated with students who possess less phonologically complete lexical representations (Katz, 1986). These students are particularly prone to difficulties in producing low frequency and polysyllabic names/words.

#### Syntax and Semantics

Some students with language processing deficits cannot repeat spoken sentences as accurately as strong readers do. They do not comprehend sentences as well as good readers do (Mann, Cowin, & Schoenheimer, 1989). Good and poor readers differ in their ability to both repeat and comprehend sentences that contain relative clauses, such as “The dog jumped over the cat that chased the monkey.” They also perform less well on instructions from the Token Test such as “Touch the small red square and the large blue triangle” (Smith, Mann, & Shankweiler, 1987). They are also less able to distinguish the

meaning of spoken sentences such as “He showed her bird the seed” from “He showed her the bird seed.” The latter sentence uses the stress pattern of the sentence, the prosody and the position of the article *the* to mark the boundary between the indirect object and the direct object.

### **Short-term/Working Memory**

Problems in working memory could lead to problems in comprehending sentences whose processing somehow stresses short-term memory. These readers cannot hold an adequate representation of the sentence in short-term memory long enough for accurate processing (Gottardo & Siegal, 1996; Mann et al., 1998, 1989; Smith, Macaruso, Shankweiler, & Crain, 1989).

The information on this last point of deficits in short-term memory for language tasks is very strong. When reading disability is defined on the basis of decoding deficits, the problem is defined as phonological processing deficits. When reading disability is defined in terms of comprehension deficits, the group that emerges is heterogeneous and does not show phonological processing deficits but shows problems with short-term/working memory (Siegal, 2006).

### **Types of Language Processing Problems Affecting Reading Comprehension**

Some of the most common types of reading and speaking comprehension problems caused by language processing deficits involve understanding the surface meaning of sentences and failing to process deep structure; confusion with pronouns and their referents; confusion with the multiple meaning of words; cluttering which results in students mispronouncing polysyllabic words; inability to process passive voice; problems comprehending sentences with long strings of modifiers; misunderstanding test directions; inability to accurately repeat sentences; problems processing auxiliary verbs; problems finding the main idea, supporting details and summarizing; problems understanding the meaning of function words in the sentence; and memory for only the last part of a sentence. These are only representative of the most common types of problems that affect a student’s ability to comprehend accurately. There can be many more. For the purposes of this paper, the last five problematic areas will be explained and instructional suggestions will be given in the next section.

### **Language Processing Deficit Areas, Examples and Instructional Suggestions**

#### **Confusion with Pronouns and Their Referents**

**Example.** “Many people came to the play. This included the older generation, youngsters and the church hierarchy. The stage scenery was beautiful and all of them were fascinated with the drama.” In this passage, the student did not know who *all of them* referred to.

It is important to begin with more simple sentences, such as “One man in the crowd stood out. Though it was raining hard, he had several paper bags of food that were getting soaked. He made no attempt to protect them.”

Since this paragraph has a double *he* in it, it is a good place to begin. The first question to be asked is who the first *he* is referring to. If the student is not sure and says it is the man who is not

protecting the bags, you would ask, “Is there more than one man in the sentence?” You would then point out that the “one man in the crowd [who] stood out” is the only man in the sentence. Therefore, both *hes* refer to that man. He was holding paper bags of food and he did not protect them.

**Suggestions.** The sentence passages are to get increasingly more complicated; for example: “When the settlers held a picnic, many of them danced on the platform. But several of them sat around on blankets with their families. The children played games. When they were called to listen to the auctioneer, everyone paid careful attention.”

The student is to work through each pronoun. Students may not always know what words are pronouns when it comes to words like *them*. They may only be familiar with pronouns such as *he*, *she*, *it*, *we*, *you*, etc. If that is so, the student must be directly taught all of the pronouns.

A question to be asked is: “Who does the first *them* in the sentences refer to?” The answer must be that it refers to some of the settlers. There must be a realization that it refers to only those dancing. The next question is: “Who does the second *them* refer to?” The answer must, again, be that it refers to only some of the settlers, those sitting with their families. The next question is: “Who does *they* refer to?” This one is tricky because we have to assume that it includes the children. The answer is everyone at the picnic.

In order to have the student come to a correct understanding, he/she must not only understand the types of pronouns but also work with them in sentences to learn what/who they really refer to. It cannot be taught in isolation. Usually the problem cannot be detected easily from the student’s speech. The one characteristic of these students, in speech, is that they often do not give a referent when using pronouns or they do not use nouns but refer to everything with pronouns. When you observe one of these two habitual ways of speaking in a student, it can be a good clue that she/he may have this problem.

### **Auxiliary Verb Confusion**

**Example.** “I would like to take you with me but I can’t because you should be going to dance class.” A student processed this sentence as “I was going to take you with me but you might be going to dance class.” The student lost the exact meaning of the sentence because of an inaccurate understanding of *would* and *should*.

Often the student has a poor grammar background for sentence structure as well as a fuzzy idea about auxiliary words. Teaching the meaning of the auxiliary word within a sentence structure is recommended. The words that are most problematic are *would*, *should*, *could* and their contractions with *not*. *Won’t*, *don’t*, *have* and *has* are also often difficult for these students.

**Suggestions.** Recommended instructional suggestions are as follows:

1. Directly teach that *would* is the conditional future possibility of *will*: “I will do it, I would do it if you gave me your permission.”
2. Directly teach that *should* is a directive that is directly related to the future word *shall*. It can be a synonym for the word *must*: “I shall do it. I am going to do it. This is something that must be done for some reason.”



3. *Won't* and *don't* should be taught as contractions of *will not* and *do not*.
4. *Have* must be taught as “in my possession or ability” and “something does or does not contain something.” It is in the present when it stands alone. Other meanings are “to experience,” “to hold mentally” and “to cause.” When used as an auxiliary verb it expresses completed action.
5. *Has* must be taught as “cause” or “go,” according to Webster’s dictionary. It is the present indicative of *have*.
6. *Was* is a word that can be easily confused in eye tracking when reading. Students who do this should be encouraged to keep an index card under the line as they read. This will greatly improve the situation.

### **Finding the Main Idea, Supporting Details and Summarizing**

**Example.** “About 300 years ago, an American geologist named William Davis proposed that rivers follow a distinct pattern of development. Davis compared rivers to living organisms, noting that both change markedly as they age. But the age of a river is not measured in years. The age of a river is measured by how completely the river has eroded its watershed, which is the area that it drains. Young rivers have steep banks and narrow valleys and fall in elevation quickly. Old rivers fall very slowly in elevation, have low banks and wide valleys, and tend to meander. The life cycle of a river begins when a huge block of flat land is lifted above sea level. Rainwater running down the fresh slope carves out gullies, or ditches. These gullies run together to form larger channels which in turn run together to form still larger channels” (Vacca, Vacca & Mraz, 2011). The student stated the main idea of this passage as “Rivers must be first lifted above the sea.” Consequently, the supporting details were also missed and the summary sentence was not an accurate summary.

**Suggestions.** The following are some techniques to find the main idea and summarize:

1. Use the title or the heading or first sentence to make a hypothesis (careful guess) as to what the main idea is.
2. Read each sentence and see whether it supports the hypothesis. If not, review the hypothesis.
3. If you can’t make a hypothesis about what the main idea is, see what all the sentences have in common or are talking about.
4. Select a sentence or make a sentence that tells what all the sentences are about (Gunning, 2008).
- 5.

### **Function Words (Determiners, Conjugations and Prepositions)**

**Example.** “Several people went on the bus although the bus was filled to capacity.” In this example sentence, the student did not understand that *although* meant “in spite of or even though” but thought it meant “because.”

**Suggestions.** The definition of a function word must be used in the sentence. Even that will not ensure understanding. One must carefully explain the connecting word and its exact meaning in the



sentence. Many dictionary definitions are ambiguous to read if one has a language processing problem. It is recommended that a dictionary of the following terms be typed out for the student and laminated. That way the student can refer to it when encountering the words while reading.

Although	In spite of the fact; though; also
Because	On account of; for the reason of
But	A negative: “We will go but not if it rains” = “We won’t go if it rains”
However	In whatever manner; to whatever degree; nevertheless
Nevertheless	In spite of (spite must be explained in this instance as it does not mean ill will, malice or grudge. It means <i>regardless</i> )
Since	From then until now (remained ever since); at some time between now and then (has since recovered); before now (long since gone); after the time (two years since); continuously (lonely ever since he left); because (since I can)
That	Pointer to the one or thing mentioned (that is John); the farther one, the other one (this house is larger than that one); which (the road that we took); result (he ran so fast that I lost him); at that point (with that); to that extent (I can’t see that far); expressing surprise (oh, that one); also (with that)
This	Designating the nearer or another one (this desk); designating something about to be presented (hear this); to an extent (it was this big)
Though	However (see however above); even if (though he failed he will have tried); and yet (however); in spite of the fact that (though it rained, he went)
When	At what time; on what occasion; at that time; as soon as; although; the time of an event

These are just some of the connecting words with their definitions, Guralnik, 1984). A more exhaustive list must be made, which would include the type of connecting words in the student’s reading material and textbooks. Students with this problem need to specifically apply the correct definition to the sentence. They must have a sheet handy as they read to ascertain which definition is correct. They must indicate this for the teacher to check. Much modeling by the teacher is needed.

### Memory for the Last Part of a Sentence

**Example.** “Each of the strong, brilliantly colored, many-faceted, and extremely large stones were carefully packed away and stored on the ship which was to carry them to their island home.” The student

understood this sentence as saying that only large stones were on the ship and they stayed there without being unpacked.

**Suggestions.** With this problem, there are several approaches that may be helpful. Sometimes, it is very useful to design exercises for the sentence to give the student practice in carefully reading and thinking about the sentence. It is important to begin with the number of thought units in the sentence, so the first question is to have the student count the different thought units. There are four in the example sentence, and the student should be asked to list them. They are (a) described stones; (b) carefully packed away; (c) stored on the ship; (d) carried to the island home. Next would be to ask how many modifiers are in the sentence. Again, there are four: (a) strong; (b) brilliantly colored; (c) many-faceted; (d) extremely large. This type of exercise allows the information to be read several times, thus increasing exposure for memory. The following are more general techniques to be applied to any reading rather than a specific sentence:

1. The strategy from the Orton-Gillingham technique of underlining the sentence and making a mark-up between the phrases and thought units (pencil facilitation) could be very helpful (Rawson, M.B., 1972). The student should be encouraged to say each thought unit separately. This will help with the memory of the beginning and middle of the sentence.
2. The sentence repetition strategy may also be helpful. But, in this case, the student should center on the first part of the sentence.
3. When reading, the student should be shown how to use the eraser end of a pencil and place it under each word as he/she reads the line of print.
4. Students should stop and ask themselves, when reading, what the sentence was about. If they cannot remember, they need to go back and reread the sentence.
5. Sometimes, this condition is only when listening to speech. These students have an auditory memory problem and should be taught to ask a question about what they heard before the end of the sentence. This will put the answer at the end and they have a much better chance of remembering it.
6. The literacy coach must use hierarchical content literacy guides when working with these students. This makes them an active reader with all parts of the selection.
7. All graphic organizers can be used with reading selections to help students with this problem. Try different ones until some connect with the student's learning style.
- 8.

### **Identification Procedures**

The identification of these problems will not be apparent from either standardized assessments or informal assessments, including portfolio assessments, unless certain steps are in place. Students who are exhibiting comprehension problems must have an error analysis of errors carried out in their assessment responses. This and very careful observation in class will indicate if language processing is a problem.

Analyze the types of comprehension problems presented in test and oral responses. Make a list of the possible categories represented and begin observing the two that have the most documentation from your analysis. Formulate classroom situations in which the student is presented with the type of task analyzed and observe if the same type of mistakes are made. Ask teachers in the other classes of the

student to keep an observational record of whether or not the same inaccuracies occur. Speak with the student, requiring oral responses, and note if the same types of mistakes are made. (Remember, you are only working with two categories of errors at a time.)

If you come to some consensus on the type of mistake(s), have a private talk with the student in which you share your concern. If the student fronts or covers, explain that you will be able to help the situation and you want the student to begin noticing if this is a problem. You must have the student's input and cooperation. If the student insists on covering, end the conversation. You have planted the seed. Continue to present the student with the problem. If you have really observed a problem, it will show and you will be able to work with it.

Begin treatment of the problem. The literacy coach has a dominant role during this process. She/he has presented staff development on these problems, has helped analyze student responses when teachers have a concern, and plans the instruction. If it is decided that RTI should come into place, the IRA, 2005, has published principles for this. In the critical components of RTI, No. 2 is the definition of the problem. It must be specifically stated with objective measurement. Formal test and classroom test mistakes, along with how and why they indicate a language processing problem, must be presented on identifying the problem. The error analysis data along with information from other teachers corroborates the identification. A written plan of intervention is formulated by the literacy coach and the teacher. This plan states specifically what the intervention is and how it is different from the classroom instruction. Progress monitoring must take place, which includes the following items: Who is going to carry out the intervention? When, where, for how long, and how will it be monitored? There are two other items that would strengthen the plan, if the student is involved in the planning and if the instruction is tied to class content.

### **Example of RTI for a Student with Language Processing Deficits Impacting Comprehension**

Student A has been identified as exhibiting problems in determining the main idea, the supporting details and summarizing paragraph information, as well as having a deficit in short-term/working memory. Classroom instruction offered direct teaching on choosing the main idea. Student A was also given graphic organizers to help memory. This student remembered best with organizers that depicted items in a spatial configuration. After two months, it was decided by the classroom teacher, the student and the literacy coach that Student A needed more intensified instruction to overcome these challenges than the classroom teacher could give. A plan was formulated for putting the student in Tier two of RTI.

After conferring with special education personnel, a special education teacher would work with Student A twice a week for 20 minutes during the student's study period, in an empty classroom (teacher's planning period). This would take place for a six-week period at which time the student would be taking quarter exams in his subjects. Exact instruction period would entail using the *Kansas Strategy, 1999*, for paraphrasing, which entails stating the main idea, choosing supporting details and writing a summarizing paragraph. In addition, strategies for enhancing working memory were taught and practiced with history content. Student A was taught to chunk information into small units and create an association list to peg the chunks to. Oral rehearsal strategies were taught along with developing radial graphic organizers for discrete items.

Progress monitoring took place at the end of each week through informal assessments on information from the history class that was used in the sessions. Some of these assessments required the student to write a language experience story about history information read in which the main idea, two supporting details and a summary conclusion sentence were included. The quarter testing would be the assessment that illustrated if these techniques would bring success in class. If only marginal success was exhibited, the student would be moved to Tier three, where an assessment would take place to ascertain if there were other processing problems that also needed to be addressed.

## **Conclusion**

After researching this topic of middle and secondary students with comprehension problems, several situations became apparent. Many students with comprehension problems having these types of language processing problems were never diagnosed as having any language problem and never received any language therapy as youngsters. Thus, there is no history of it in their files. When language-processing deficits are blatant, everyone knows what they are dealing with. When the problems are subtle, no one seems to know what they are dealing with. In this era of high dropout rates and teacher accountability, the literacy coach is extremely important. With RTI for upper grades, the literacy coach is the pivotal person who will acquaint the faculty with the situation, aid in the identification and plan the instruction. The literacy coach has the position of acclimating the faculty to the fact that reading problems are not just decoding problems and that language-processing deficits mask as problems with comprehension. The final point is that these deficits are remediable. With the appropriately developed instruction, carried out directly with close monitoring, the student has a much better chance of becoming successful in understanding information in the content areas.

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## Chapter 14

### Change the Test, Not the Teaching

*Kimberly Lewinski*

At the end of the year when I asked Amy Trucker, a fifth grade writing teacher, what she was particularly proud of she responded by saying, “I think that my kids really enjoy writing. We created an environment where it was fun to write and everyone shared their writing. Everyone is a writer! I feel good about that.” It was interesting that she didn’t even bring up the results of the standardized tests she received just hours prior to our conversation. To Amy, it was never about the test, it was about teaching her students to be writers.

After spending one and a half hours during my first visit observing Amy and her students, it was evident these students were indeed writers, and that the components of writing workshops were in place: the period began with a minilesson of an author study, allowed time for the students to write, as the teacher wrote with them and conferred with a student, and concluded with a student reading his draft to the class seeking supportive response from his classmates.

My interest in studying writing instruction in this type of classroom stems from the first time I attended a National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) Conference and I was able to go to sessions focusing on ways to prepare students for standardized state essay tests. I anticipated hearing about how inappropriate the standardized test was because it forced many teachers to change their classroom practices. Surprisingly, this is not what I encountered. I did not see teachers showing the five-paragraph essay as supposedly prescribed by state tests; I did not receive handouts of graphic organizers to help the students’ frame their writing in a prescribed manner; I was not given a script on how to teach the students how to write; nor was I bombarded by research advocating prescription as the best way to teach writing.

Instead, I was introduced to working groups of practicing teachers that were concerned about losing their authority to continue to prepare their students for state writing tests via the principles they knew worked; they were concerned about losing their professional integrity. These teachers were not interested in orthodoxies. They were engaged in brainstorming sessions, the consensus of which was if we continued to use effective writing practices with our students, they would gain the skills necessary to pass the standardized essay test.

Unfortunately, while studies on the teaching of writing confirm those teachers’ beliefs (Emig, 1971; Graves, 1983; Applebee, 2000; & Bennet, 2007), most teachers enter the field not knowing about writing instruction, and this has led to the concern for orthodoxies; conforming to one prescribed way of teaching writing rather than using practices dictated by the students’ needs and interests. Given the gap in teacher knowledge, and given mandates by No Child Left Behind, administrators have faced decisions: Do we provide professional development opportunities for teachers, or do we buy scripted writing programs that

tell them what to do? Many school districts have opted to spend large amounts of money buying prescriptive programs to prepare the students for the state writing test.

Studies on the teaching of writing introduced over thirty years ago by Emig (1971) and Graves (1983) and reaffirmed by recent research (Applebee, 2000 and Bennett, 2007), have shown that when teachers use the basic principles of process writing in a writing workshop context, the students will improve. However, after thirty years most teachers enter the field still not knowing about writing instruction.

My study evolved from the above dilemma. I was interested in learning how a teacher designs writing instruction based on the needs of her students, rather than using prescribed lessons she have been given. I wanted to see how this informed instruction could lead the students to grow as writers, and how they would perform on their state essay test.

### **Statement of Problem**

The emphasis on accountability and concern for measureable outcomes has influenced schools to use scripted researched-based programs, programs that leave no room for the teachers to use their professional judgment in their classrooms. Teaching, however, is situational. No two classrooms are alike and no two students share the same interest and experiences. Newkirk (2009) writes about how teachers have various decisions to make when helping a student. Teachers needs to keep in mind their previous experiences with the child, the child's experiences, the significance of the task at hand, the child's relative strengths and weaknesses and the behavior of the rest of her class. No program can anticipate the variables among children. Yes, teachers must be informed of strategies they might employ to help particular students, but which strategy or combination of strategies they uses and how they implements them should be left to the discretion of the teachers.

Teachers, however, are being required to work in pre-established systems that limit their ability to make individual decisions about the curriculum and their students. Schools have become factories where the teacher is the machine and the students are the products by using these programs. This is a problem that leaves many students in need of specific writing instruction that enables them as writers.

The intent of these questions is not to determine specifics of effective writing instruction that other teachers should implement. The instructional practices this teacher used would differ from classroom to classroom due to the teacher's instructional purpose and the needs of the students, but some basic principles central to the teaching of writing guided Amy Trucker's instruction. These principles include allowing time to write, giving students' choice of topics, supportive response, creating a literacy rich environment, and providing instruction based on the needs of the students.

### **Theoretical Framework that Informed this Study**

Writing instruction rooted in a writing workshop context allows students to have frequent and consistent time to write, frequent choice in what they write, and ongoing supportive response. These ideals were first discussed in the early works of Emig (1971) and Graves (1983) when they set out to



learn about how writers grow. Today, a plethora of research justifies the viability of writing workshops as an effective way of helping students grow as writers (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; 1994; Reif, 1992; Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001; Newkirk, 2009). Further, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that most students who scored at the proficient or advanced level claimed to be in a writing workshop daily (Mc Cleary, 1994).

In a writing workshop, the teacher uses minilessons (Calkins, 1986), and conferences (Calkins, White and Zoe, 2004), when she provides instruction. She also teaches within a setting where students share their writing with classmates, thus by teaching students to learn from mentor texts. Plus, she sets up her classroom so her students use each other as resources.

In addition to research that shows writers in writing workshop contexts, my study is informed by the benefits of teaching students to evaluate (Hansen, 1998) their writing and its impact on their ability to make intentional decisions in their writing. Researchers (Wansart, 2003; Kusnic & Finley, 1993) continuously advocate that the most important kind of evaluation is the student's own evaluation of what he does when he reads or writes. Hansen (1998) found that this kind of evaluation told more about students than any score from worksheets or tests that provided only a partial picture. My study of Amy's students learning to evaluate their writing not only confirms the importance of this research but also adds to the literature by demonstrating its impact on the students' ability to use their evaluation skills to successfully perform on their state writing tests.

### **Potential Significance**

Since the birth of NCLB, much research (Allen et al., 2007; Krashen, 2006; Office of the Inspector General, 2006) has been conducted on the impact of this legislation on reading and math, yet, very little is known about the law's impact on writing proficiency. McCarthy (2008) began to open this dialogue in her study, *Impact of NCLB on Writing Instruction*. Of the ten teachers she studied from low-performing schools in Utah and Illinois, only one felt empowered enough to resist the pressure to follow the scripted program adopted by her school district. This teacher taught writing the way she believed it should be taught, using her "professional judgment" by basing her lessons on the needs of her students rather than on the mandates of the program.

McCarthy (2008) acknowledged that she was only able to conduct one in-class observation in each of the elementary teachers' classrooms she studied and saw a great need for researchers to take a closer look at the practices of these teachers in low-performing schools and record the results of how these students grow as writers and ultimately perform on their state writing test. The stories of classrooms where teachers are using effective practices in low-performing schools need to be documented to help policy makers, administrators, and teachers make informed decisions about the best ways to implement writing instruction in all classrooms.

My study of one teacher's practices over an extended period of time examined and illustrated the various instructional strategies and decisions she made to help her students become evaluators of writing. As the students learned to evaluate the writing of others and their own writing, they began to make



intentional decisions about their writing that lead to better writing and a desired outcome on the mandated end of year test. As a result of this, other teachers will gain insight into the process young writers engage in as they develop their writing strategies and learn to use these strategies in a variety of contexts.

### **Gaps Between Research and Practice**

Despite the research on process-based instruction and evaluation, many schools are still teaching according to the product-based model. Additionally, and unfortunately, teachers who provide instruction they think is based on promising writing practices, often implement them improperly. Many schools are using “writing workshop programs” adopted by their district. One program, *Being a Writer* (2007), makes claims as being a yearlong writing curriculum for grades K–6 that combines two decades of research in the areas of writing, motivation, and learning theory with social and ethical development, yet it is presented to the teacher in a scripted form. By putting it in a scripted form it contradicts the same research it claims to be built upon. In the preface of *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (2003) Graves states, “Teaching and writing are highly complex acts, therefore it cannot be a step-by-step teaching method. Rather it should be introduced in the context of everyday teaching that fosters children’s writing fluency.” The rise, then, of precisely designed writing workshop programs, goes against the original intent of Graves’s work—and that of current research.

Today, writing workshops, known as interdisciplinary writing environments that can build students’ fluency in writing through continuous, repeated engagement in the process of writing, have become commonly explored among many researchers (<http://www.teachersfirst.com/lessons/writers/index.html>). But Bennett (2007) warns us that the promise in what the pioneers of this research taught us about writing instruction is becoming lost.

In our era of high stakes testing, many school districts are moving away from the ‘why’ of writing workshop to the ‘what:’

What began as stories of classroom practices with student work; talk and thinking shining brightly has devolved into a bureaucratic obsession with superficial practices for easier system wide implementations. Workshop has been relegated to harsh time constraints, description of activities to do in minilessons, or strict pacing guides that tell teachers how a workshop should unfold over the year. With these cursory structures, the focus is still on what comes out of the teachers’ mouths instead of what comes out of the students’ mouths. We have a problem of broad implementation with shallow understanding of the potential of what a classroom as a literal workshop means (Bennett, 2007, p. 4).

In this sense, workshops are becoming more uniform and scripted rather than student-focused learning environments.

Unfortunately many classes have institutionalized the “model” of the writing process requiring students to move through a predictable format in which students would first prewrite, then draft, revise, edit and publish. Although some students may naturally move through the process in this manner, many may not. Dyson and Freeman comment of the problems inherent in using this format:

Any classroom structure that demands that all students plan, write, and revise on cue or in that order are likely to run into difficulty. Writers need flexibility, and they need time to allow the sub processes to cycle back on each other. (1991, p. 760)

Once again, this underestimates the teacher's role in the classroom, which Hillocks (1983) warned us would not lead to improvement to students' writing. McCarthy's (2008) study of *The Impact of No Child Left Behind on Teachers' Writing Instruction*, found that low-performing schools were using scripted programs mandated by the school districts while high-performing schools were given more professional freedom in their teaching practices. Studying 18 teachers in two states, in McCarthy's view, while all of the teachers are feeling the pressure of NCLB, those in the low-performing schools have less power to resist these pressures and were monitored to a greater degree. For example, she found the teachers in high-income schools used either a writing workshop approach or an integrated approach to daily writing instruction. Whereas teachers in the low performing schools that were required to follow packaged programs, did not have daily writing instruction but practiced extended responses for the reading portion of the state test. This data reinforces that high-income schools not only receive more material resources, but also students receive more complex curriculum with greater opportunities for student input" (Gay, 2007; Kozol, 2005).

Harper, Platt, Naranjo, and Boynton (2007) interviewed fifty-two ESL teachers in a Florida school district mandated to follow a scripted literacy program. The teachers reported their frustration with the mandated program stating that the scripted programs limited their ability to address the needs of individual students in both reading and writing. The teachers considered the scripted program inappropriate for the English Language Learning needs.

McNeil (2005) reported on the inequality of Latino youth and found there may be a rise in scores when the curriculum is truncated and teachers are teaching to the test. Importantly, however, when wider measures were used to examine ability and achievement levels, they showed the achievement gap widening. Students are taught the formula to writing a five-paragraph essay to answer a specific topic, but are not taught to think critically about their writing and how to evaluate it.

The focus of these schools is to raise test scores. Many scripted writing programs such as *Write Source* (2009), *Being a Writer* (2007) and *Write Traits* (2004) are available to schools and claim to raise test scores. These claims, however, are to be read with caution. Riverside Publishers, a subsidiary to Houghton Mifflin, who is the publisher of *Write Source*, is also the creator of the Iowa Writing Assessment. The writing curriculum focuses on what needs to be taught in each grade, and not on the developing skills of students.

The above research shows the impact NCLB has on writing instruction. What has been documented is that many teachers in low performing schools are required to use scripted programs to prepare their students for the state writing essay test, rather than on the promising practices that have been presented in this review. There is a need for research that shows how teachers are using promising practices in their low-performing schools to help the students grow as writers, prepare for their state writing essay test and perform well on it.

I collected data in a classroom that followed such practices. My study demonstrates how one teacher did not succumb to the pressure of “teaching to the test” but rather taught her students based on her evaluation of their needs. Through her own evaluation process, she taught her students to become self-evaluators. By researching in the natural setting of a writing workshop classroom alongside these writers as they became self-evaluators, I learned about the empowering affect self-evaluation has on students as a means to move them forward as writers and give them the skills to write in a testing context.

## Research Strategy

To understand the processes of the teacher and the students in a writing workshop classroom, I spent the majority of an academic year as a participant-observer in a fifth grade writing class. I attended the class twice a week for approximately one and a half hours each visit. Along with observations, I collected students’ writing samples as documentation of what I observed, conducted numerous informal interviews with the teacher and students, and a formal interview with the teacher. As Yin (1994/2008) tells us, conducting a case study entails using as many data sources as possible.

## Results

Analysis of the data revealed one overarching theme and five findings that support the theme.

The teacher and students’ practices in this writing workshop are rooted in evaluation.	
First Finding	The teacher evaluates the current needs of her students as writers and teaches based on these needs.
Second Finding	The teacher teaches her student writers how to evaluate the writing of various authors.
Third Finding	Supportive response from the teacher and peers teaches these students to evaluate their own drafts and apply what they are learning as writers.
Fourth Finding	As the student writers evaluate their own drafts, they apply what they are learning from the teacher, their peers and professional authors.
Fifth Finding	This process enables these students to become evaluators who (are able to) apply what they know how to do as writers when they take their state writing test.

**The teacher evaluates the current needs of her students as writers and teaches based on these needs.** Within the context of a writing workshop, Ms. Trucker evaluated her students’ needs by conferring with them, analyzing their writing and listening and observing individual conferences they held with their peers. The knowledge she gained from her students influenced what lessons she was going to teach.

**The teacher shows these student writers how to evaluate the writing of various authors.** Ms. Trucker taught her students to evaluate the writing of various authors by drawing attention to the techniques they used in their writing. The authors in this class were classified as professional authors, the teacher author, and peer authors. Ms. Trucker would read professional books and the students would discuss the techniques used by authors such as Patricia Polacco, Jerry Spinelli and Hans Christian Anderson. She would also use her own writing as a mentor text to demonstrate her process as a writer or how she uses various techniques to make an impression on the reader. And finally she had the students share their writing to teach their classmates about their individual writing styles, where their ideas come from and techniques that they are trying.

**Supportive response from the teacher and peers helps these students evaluate their own drafts and apply what they are learning as writers.** Another component of this writing workshop that had a significant influence on the Writers' ability to evaluate their writing was supportive response. The students received supportive response from peers, the teacher, and even me during writing conferences and when they read their writing aloud to the class. Supportive response could consist of listening as students talked about their writing or read their drafts aloud or listening and offering some sort of supportive oral comment. Regardless of the specific type of response, this experience influenced the students' writing by helping them gain new ideas to add to their drafts and/or clarify existing information in their drafts.

**As the student writers evaluate their own drafts, they apply what they are learning from the teacher, their peers, and professional authors.** With practice evaluating others' writing and receiving support from their teacher and peers, students internalize the questions they have been asked and begin to evaluate their own writing. This was not something the students were able to do naturally. Throughout the year, Ms. Trucker provided lessons where the students learned to evaluate other authors. She provided support to writers by continually evaluating where they were in their writing and providing minilessons that worked on areas where the students needed practice. Plus, she conferred with them regularly to clarify misconceptions. The students also received support from their classmates as they questioned, suggested and praised each others' writing. Although these findings were presented in a linear manner, they occurred recursively.

These practices helped the students to internalize the evaluation process and in time they were able to evaluate their own writing.

**This evaluation process enables these students to become evaluators who (are able to) apply what they know how to do as writers on their state writing test.** The focus of this writing class was not to prepare the students for the state writing test. Rather, it was to help these students grow as writers and improve their writing throughout the year. However, Ms. Trucker was not naïve about the importance of the students' performance on the state writing test to her school and the district as a whole. Because of this, Ms. Trucker took many steps to teach her students to become evaluators for their own writing so they could write well regardless of the situation. These steps included: 1) evaluating the writers' needs and teaching according to these needs, 2) evaluating various authors' writings to become aware of the techniques they were using in their writing, 3) receiving supportive response from the teacher and peers to assist students as they learned to evaluate their own writing, which led to 4) The

students being able to evaluate their own work. Finally, 5) When it came time for the state writing test, these students were able to transfer what they learned onto the test and perform well on it.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides an in-depth look at how one teacher based her writing instruction on the needs of her students, and taught them to be writers and evaluators of their writing. In doing so, Ms. Trucker equipped her students with the skills necessary to grow as writers and do well on their test. Evident in each of the students' writing test were their use of the various lessons taught throughout the year whether in a whole class mini-lesson or in a one-on-one conference. Every student in the class changed the prompt into a story, used one of the techniques taught for adding a good hook, and had some form of dialogue in their writing. The way each of the lessons was used in their writing was unique to the individual student but the skills were evident. These students were indeed engaged in writing throughout the year and able to transfer what they had been taught onto their state essay test.

The instruction Amy provided her student was based on, and representative of, the promising practices highlighted in the last thirty years of research. She took several writing courses and had mentors throughout her life, which have all influenced her philosophy on writing. Amy demonstrates that with the proper training teachers can teach their students to engage in writing, help them grow as writers, prepare them for the state writing test, and they can perform well on it.

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## Chapter 15

### Facilitating Teacher Study Groups

*Toni Himes and Joanne Boulanger*

Ten elementary teachers hurried into the library at eight o'clock in the morning, almost a full hour before their teaching day would begin, juggling books, papers, and that all important first cup of coffee. They sat clustered at a library table and, with some excitement, began to share lessons that they had implemented during their busy week based upon a text that they had been reading and studying together. The teachers proceeded to listen to each in turn discuss how they had implemented a learning strategy or structure in the classroom during the month. Most shared student work to illustrate the learning strategy or method so that other teachers could examine the evidence of reading and writing products. The teachers came from various grade levels and specialty areas, so lessons were applied in regular classroom language arts instruction, speech therapy sessions, special education instruction, English language instruction, and in science and social studies instruction. One teacher shared a video of her class that she had made on her camera so that the others could view the lesson. The conversation included comments such as, "I'll try that one next time" and "I love how that strategy went with your students." One teacher said, "This is how I adapted that for my kids." When the hour of nine approached, the group dispersed to their respective classrooms eager to read on in their shared text and meet again the next month to repeat the process.

What gets educators so excited about professional learning that they will voluntarily meet and talk about their practice in this way? This article describes our district's journey in the creation of a Teacher Study Group model of professional learning that has had a powerful impact on teacher beliefs and classroom instructional practices.

In their article posted to the *Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse* website, Walpole and Beauchat (2008) state that it is the shared experience that is motivational for teachers, and that shared professional learning experiences should have certain characteristics: respect for principles of adult learning, choice about group participation, topics studied, and products produced, adequate voice in the proceedings, and connections to personal practice. Although these authors acknowledge that some school districts are mandating participation in study groups of certain types on particular topics, they encourage a broad definition with a focus on teacher volunteerism so that "the only requirement is that the group work together to learn something".

It can be difficult for teachers to relinquish some control of the classroom learning process, content, and procedures to students. It can be equally difficult for school administrators who have district objectives in mind to relinquish control of some of the professional learning to teachers. However, as Nieto (2009) states,



Probably the most significant action school districts can take in changing the nature of professional development is to provide meaningful and engaging programs that respect the intelligence and good will of teachers and help them grow in terms of knowledge, awareness, and practice. Such professional development is characterized by teachers' ability to select the topics they want to learn more about and opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues.

Our district's implementation of teacher study groups began with a policy change that facilitated their growth and gave teachers the power to suggest topics of their own for study.

### Context and Framework

Marple Newtown School District is a small district located in southeastern Pennsylvania with approximately 3500 students attending four elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. Professional staff numbers approximately 300 with 22 administrators including central office staff, building principals and assistant principals, and curriculum supervisors. The area is predominantly middle class with racial demographics indicating 86% white, 11% Asian, 2% African American, 1% Latino, and 1% mixed race. Eleven percent of the students receive free or reduced-price lunches.

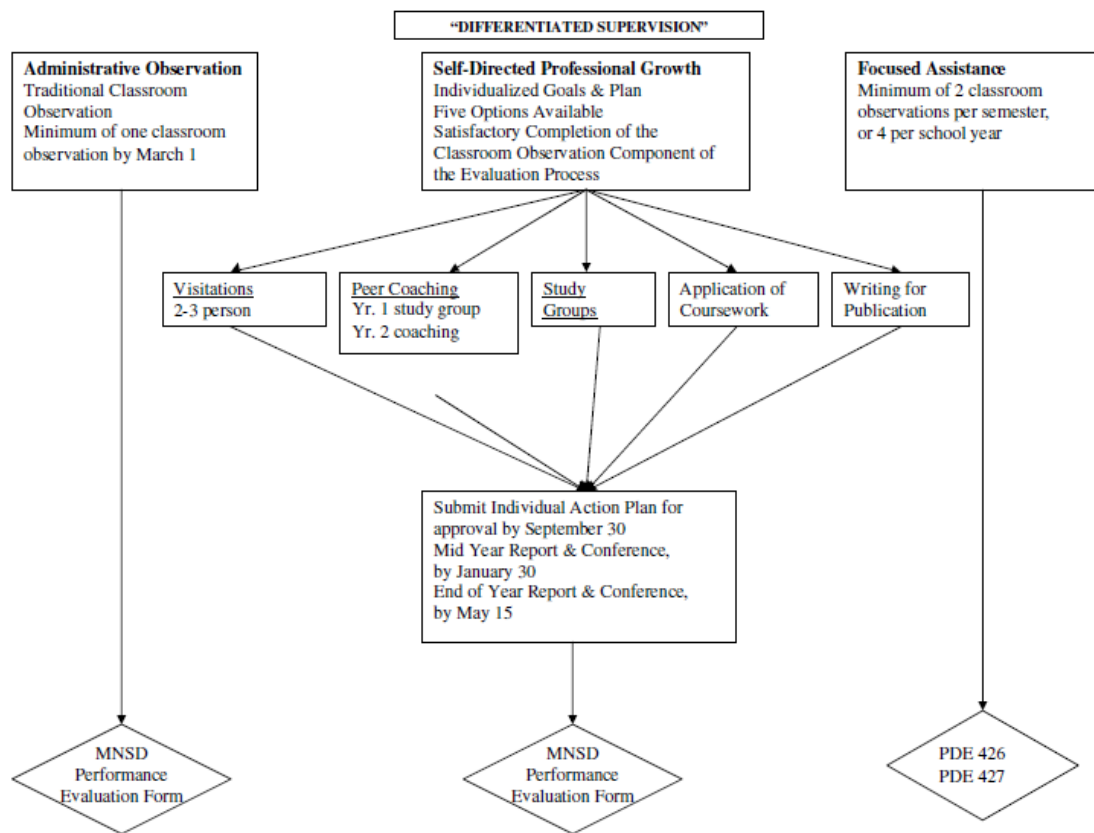
After several years of committee research and planning, the Marple Newtown school board and administration adopted a Supervision Plan for professional staff that included a range of choices for professional growth. The new plan was piloted during the 1999-2000 school year and finalized the following year. Non-tenured professional staff would remain on a Focused Assistance model with four formal observations per school year. Tenured professional staff with satisfactory evaluations could choose traditional administrative observation or one of five options in a Self-directed Professional Growth Plan including: visitations, peer coaching, study groups, application of coursework, and writing for publication (See Figure 1). Of course, all professional staff could still be observed informally at any time.

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (2007) state that although the activities of individual staff development models can vary widely, the key characteristic is that teachers design the learning. Under the Marple Newtown Supervision Plan, tenured staff could set a goal and design an individualized action plan for professional growth. Staff members were required to submit their action plan for approval to the Assistant Superintendent and a teacher representative of the professional development committee for review by September 30 of the school year (see Figure 2).

Figure 1 Self-Directed Professional Development Plan-Individual Action Plan

Statement of Professional Growth Goal:
Professional Growth Option: _____  A. Peer Coaching B. Study Group C. Writing for Publication D. Application of Course Work/Workshops/Training E. Visitations
Detailed Plan: <i>What will be done to achieve professional growth? What is your proposed timeline for completing this plan? How will this action plan relate to the district's Professional Development plan? How will accomplishments be documented? (e.g., student work, teacher-made product, journal, etc.)</i>
Collaborative Partner(s):
Proposed future meeting dates with partners and focus of dialogue:
Resources needed:
Budget:  ( ) My option is achievable within current budget and resources  ( ) Please consider my proposal  Substitute fees                      \$_____ Instructional materials/books    \$_____ Fees (training)                      \$_____ Total                                      \$_____
Professional Employee Signature_____Date_____ Plan Approved_____ Revisions Needed_____ Plan Not Approved_____ Building Principal Signature_____ Assistant Superintendent Signature_____

Figure 2 Chart of Professional Development Options



A staff member who selected the Study Group as an option would agree to initiate a topic and could advertise for participants through district channels. A staff member could serve as their own group leader and recruit members, or they could ask an administrator to act as a Study Group leader to set up times and organize meetings. Members of the Study Group then would agree upon the ways they would share or produce products from their work. At the midpoint and end of the school year, a report would be submitted summarizing professional accomplishments and reflections (see Figure 3).

Tenured staff could also receive Act 48 professional development hours from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and, if the study group occurred outside of school hours, credit towards two district flex days that could be earned as days off after 6.5 hours of professional learning time were accumulated for each day.

Figure 3: Individual Action Report

This report is to be completed by the professional employee and given to the administrator one week prior to conference time.	
( ) Mid Year Report (completed by Jan 30)	
( ) Final Report (completed and signed no later than May 15)	
Professional Employee:	Date of Report:
School:	Grade/Subject/Dept:
Professional Growth Option:	
Professional's Assessment of Accomplishments:	
<p>-A bulleted summary of accomplishments (attach documentation/reflective journal)</p> <p>-A list of what remains to be completed and/or recommendations for follow-up</p>	
Professional's Reflections/Analysis of Accomplishments:	

### Study Groups in Action

With this policy change and incentive time in place, conditions were ripe for teachers to propose ideas to take part in the Study Group option of the Supervision Plan. Some of the first study groups to operate were proposed by building reading specialists around particular texts and hot building topics such as *What Really Matters in Response to Intervention: Research-Based Designs* (Allington, 2009), *What's After Assessment? Follow-Up Instruction for Phonics, Fluency and Comprehension* (Strickland, 2005), *Nonfiction Mentor Texts: Teaching Informational Writing Through Children's Literature, K-8* (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009) and *Mentor Texts: Teaching Writing Through Children's Literature, K-6* (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007). With the reading specialist acting as facilitator, teachers read and discussed the texts while implementing strategies and methods in their classrooms. As the facilitator, the reading specialist advertised the group, set the monthly meeting schedule (groups generally met once a month for the school year), identified a time that was agreeable to all (before and after school times), sent reminders to group members, organized the format of the discussion, assisted teachers with implementation of strategies and methods when requested, and summarized the learning of the group.

Inspired by the model of these initial groups run by reading specialists, teachers began to make suggestions for texts that they would like to study and to reach out to administrators and the reading staff to facilitate a particular group. Some teachers facilitated their own groups as well. One second grade teacher developed a study group with her grade partners to investigate early grades comprehension strategies (Taberski, 2008). Teacher-suggested titles have included: *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do* (Beers, 2003), *Summarization in Any Subject: 50 Techniques to Improve Student Learning* (Wormeli, 2005), and *Mechanically Inclined: Building Grammar, Usage, and Style into Writer's Workshop* (Anderson, 2005). This last text was especially successful with middle and high school English teachers who were interested in finding alternative ways to teach grammar skills in writing. If video clips of actual instruction were available with the text, these were shared at study group sessions as well.

Study groups have been described as looking in two directions, outward to gather ideas on issues and inward to reflect on teaching practice (Jay, 2008). Many of the study groups in Marple Newtown have focused on particular issues of practice, but have had the added benefit of promoting teacher reflection on techniques and beliefs. Hearing the opinions and attempts of colleagues has led teachers to consider new ways of doing business that they may not have considered previously. For example, a special education teacher described a writing lesson in which students used the "Give One, Get One" (Wormeli, 2005) strategy to brainstorm ideas. This strategy required the students to go from desk to desk and talk to their peers. After reviewing the students' written products, other teachers who may not have been inclined to include movement and student conversation in their lessons were inspired to try something new in their classes.

Study groups have been promoted by subject area supervisors who advertise a text in their field or a general text targeted at instructional strategies, post times for discussion to occur, and facilitate the group discussion. In this way, study groups occur in various subject areas with teachers from the same discipline. Social studies teachers read, discussed and implemented strategies from *Deeper Reading* (Gallagher, 2004). Another text that was used with high school social studies teachers, *Never Work Harder Than Your Students* (Jackson, 2009), contributed to what Moran (2007) calls "productive disequilibrium". Teachers expressed some discomfort with the ideas presented that all students should be high achievers and that a classroom should reflect one hundred percent student involvement, and yet the discussion was thought-provoking and caused teachers to reflect on current practices and how they might do more to increase student participation in their classrooms. Science teachers in grades kindergarten through eight enjoyed *Primary Science: Taking the Plunge* (Harlen, 2001 ). This text helped the teachers to reflect upon a constructivist/inquiry approach to teaching science. The science supervisor suggested the text, but teachers asked to have the group run a second time so that more teachers could participate. The study groups promote a sense of community and bonding that has made it easier for supervisory staff to create ongoing relationships with teachers. Teachers would invite supervisors and principals into the classroom to observe lessons that illustrate the work being discussed in the study groups.

As the research on adult learners indicates, adults are highly pragmatic. They want learning that increases professional competence, that is relevant to their current situations, and that has immediate applicability to their jobs (Wlodkowski, 2008). Texts that have been the most successful in the study groups have been those that lend themselves to improving classroom strategies, methods of instruction, or management. Staff from one elementary building focused a two-day summer study group around *Teach*

*Like A Champion* (Lemov, 2010), a text that provides many ideas for classroom management as well as instructional strategies. Teachers in this group opted to read chapters in pairs and report to the whole group on their selected chapters. At the recommendation of the study group members, the staff as a whole decided upon a building-wide adoption of several consistent management practices.

### Would It Work at the High School Level?

As study groups spread in popularity and became part of the culture of the school district, it became apparent that many of them were operating at the elementary and middle school levels. Would it be possible to get high school staff involved in this form of professional learning? As a response to a district concern over achievement on state tests, a study group took shape at the high school level. Initially a school wide program was developed that was referred to by staff and students as The Strategy of the Week. The program would focus the high school teachers on reading, writing and study strategies. Instead of the dreaded “teaching to the test”, teachers would try to incorporate best practice strategies into their regular teaching across the curriculum. This program would be supported by the building reading specialists, curriculum supervisors and administration. Teachers were receptive to ideas that would result in increased scores on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA). The next step was to get teachers to want to explore these strategies more deeply.

The study group that developed was two tiered. The first tier consisted of an online study group that was information driven and the second tier consisted of a monthly meeting of teachers. The tier one study group was made up of the entire high school staff. Every week emails arrived in all high school teachers’ inboxes outlining the focus strategy. A high school reading specialist took the lead in organizing and defining the strategy and giving examples. The emails contained links to useful websites, articles and visuals. This information would eventually be housed on the district website as a resource for the staff. The goal was to make it user- friendly in all disciplines. The belief that every teacher is a teacher of reading was present, but the assumption that every teacher knows how to teach reading was not. All staff were accepted where they were and asked to make a step forward. Various teachers began to email back and forth with questions, ideas, clarifications about strategies and the online study group flourished.

The second tier of the study group was a group of teachers who met monthly. These teachers signed up voluntarily to discuss how the implementation of the strategies in their classes was working. Over twenty teachers signed up for the study group. The group was made up of male, female, new, and veteran teachers with a representation of bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees. The subject areas that were represented were: geometry, algebra, calculus, physics, biology, English, reading, physical education, history, health and special education. Each month the reading specialist hosted four sessions during before and after school times in order to accommodate high school staff schedules (coaches, help classes, etc.). The typical discussion group had no more than six teachers at a time. The discussion revolved around the strategies and their applications in the content areas. The teachers shared concerns. The conversations across disciplines were the most important. Teachers heard, “I tried this with my biology class.” It clicked that these strategies were universal. A high school can be very departmentalized, and the study group broke down some of those walls.

As these examples illustrate, the Study Group model promoted learning and sharing about topics the teachers cared to discuss, promoted reflection on teaching practices, methods, and structures, and created a sense of community that reached across boundaries of content, grade level, and assignment.

### What About Protocols?

In her work on differentiated coaching of teachers, Kise (2006) describes a truly collaborative framework for change as one where, “Teachers feel free to question each other about why a practice works, what kinds of students it reaches, who might be left out, and changes that might improve or adapt it” ( p.56). To do this, teachers must feel safe in making their practice public. Using a structured protocol can provide a framework that ensures a safe arena for discussion (Macdonald, Mohr, Dichter & McDonald, 2007).

Perhaps due to the timed nature of many of the study groups (limited before and after school time), teachers had little time for extraneous discussion. Protocol for the discussion was quickly established by the group itself. In most groups, each staff member had a turn to present his or her application of the material, strategy, or method and to share student examples. Even in groups as large as ten, staff members seemed to monitor the length of their comments so that all had time to respond within the hour framework.

Although some groups have experimented with using protocols to examine student work under the direction of a subject area supervisor, and this has proved beneficial, learning the protocol takes practice and time has been limited for this type of application.

### Funding

In these difficult economic times, it is fair to ask how the Study Group model of professional development is funded. Federal Title II staff development funds have supported the purchase of texts and videos used in the groups. Some staff members received grants from literacy and foundation sources that have supported the work, and some support has come from building budgets when the topic of interest was a building initiative.

### Unexpected Outcomes

One of the surprising results of the study group implementation came in the area of participation. Non-tenured staff joined study groups to learn what their colleagues were studying. Teachers participated in study groups even when they were not participating in that particular supervision option. Teachers on maternity leave sat in on study group sessions to keep up with the work of their colleagues. Word began to spread about particular texts and teachers would ask to have a particular group run a second time so that others could join and share in the discussions. Some groups met off-site at local coffee shops and homes, expanding the learning environment to new venues.

Attendance in the study groups was excellent. Teachers brought up the issue of whether or not sessions could be missed, so administrators discussed the issue. It was decided that missing one session during the course of the year was fine, but missing more than one would require an explanation to be given to the building administrator. Because staff wished to complete the Study Group option of the Supervision Plan,

there was motivation to attend and this policy seemed to work well with staff missing sessions only when life events precluded their attendance.

## Evaluation and Conclusions

When teachers participate in any form of professional learning in Marple Newtown, they complete a written evaluation of their experiences that is entered in an electronic professional development tracking program. This program records teacher comments anonymously so that district administrators can utilize feedback in planning future professional development sessions. Teacher comments were categorized to indicate areas of need or benefit with the Study Group model. One new staff member commented that, “It was nice to talk to other teachers and see what they do. As a new teacher, it is nice to see what others do and find a combination of strategies that might work in your classroom.” A veteran colleague commented, “The Study Group format forced me to read the text carefully and look for the aspects of formative assessment already present in our classrooms as well as to plan for how to implement some of the strands in the future.” Another teacher remarked, “It was beneficial for me to have time to collaborate with my peers and hear so many different points of view.” Toll (2005) points out that teacher thinking can be expanded and changed through exposure to the diverse viewpoints presented in a study group. Another teacher commented that participation in the study group format allowed the teachers to come up with a “usable shared vocabulary.” One teacher commented on the leadership that comes from peers: “I like the nature of the activity...between teachers and not outside session leaders.” These comments indicate that teachers benefitted in several ways: increased collaboration and support for new staff, increased reading and close study of professional literature, increased confidence and openness in trying new strategies and ideas, and increased opportunities for leadership with peers.

The Study Group model continues to be a viable source of professional learning for Marple Newtown School District. As we move forward, we hope to maintain the teacher-initiated component of the model. In relinquishing some control of professional learning to teachers themselves, knowledge and sharing blossom.



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