

Elementary Literacy Coaches: The Reality of Dual Roles

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Literacy coaches perform more than one role in their work by coordinating the literacy program of a school while supporting teachers in the classroom.

Literacy coaching is generating intense interest in the reading research community, but that interest has not yet yielded much research. We meet many coaches struggling to define their roles and organize their time. They ask us for research-based advice, but we really cannot provide it. What we have are many different experiences in search of research. In this article, we describe one such set of coaching experiences. We share principals' and coaches' reflections, and then, informed by those and by our ongoing experiences with coaches and coaching, we propose that literacy leaders balance coordination of the literacy program with direct professional support for teachers. We envision not a one-size-fits-all model but rather a one-size-fits-here-now model.

Proposing Roles

Coaching is evolving. In theory, literacy coaches serve teachers through ongoing, comprehensive professional development consistent with a system of theory, demonstration, practice, and feedback (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Their goal is to build teacher knowledge and skill so that children's literacy achievement will be increased. In practice, though, coaches assume a variety of duties, some of which are not easily defined as professional development. Coaches must work within a system, in concert with both their principal and the teachers they serve.

The coaching system might encompass a variety of activities initially presented by Bean (2004) on a

continuum from least intense to most intense. The least intense activities foster relationship building. These include collaborative work outside the classroom to build knowledge and plan instruction. The middle intensity levels of activities allow coaches a window into current performance of students within a classroom. Coaches might review assessment data and help teachers to target their instructional planning. And finally, the most intense level of coaching involves a formative observation system, with coaches having access to the very personal world of teaching on a daily basis. These most intense activities are surely the heart of coaching, at least theoretically. They are flexible and appropriate for many different schools. These intense activities are often the target of a coaching initiative, but that target is not always achieved.

Current coaches experiencing conflict or ambiguity in their roles are not alone. In *The Literacy Coach's Handbook: A Guide to Research-Based Reform* (Walpole & McKenna, 2004), a literacy coach is described as wearing many hats. Coaches may be learners, seeking new information in professional readings and relationships. Often, coaches may be grant writers, helping to design or administer grants to help fund their positions. Coaches may be school-level planners, working as partners with principals to set up school schedules to provide adequate time for teaching and learning during the school day. Coaches may be curriculum experts, having very specific knowledge about the standards and teaching materials that their teachers use as tools to support literacy achievement. Finally, coaches may be researchers, enacting specific instructional strategies with teachers and helping teachers chart their effects on student achievement. When those effects on achievement are positive, the instructional strategies are appropriate; when achievement gains are

not realized, coaches may help teachers to find and implement new instructional strategies. This specific list of roles has been used to argue that the role of the elementary literacy coach is relatively well defined (Snow, Ippolito, & Schwartz, 2006), but this has not been our experience in schools. One potential reason for this is that the more defined roles in the literature and in the standards are only slowly making their way into the schools; in the meantime, many coaches are simply managing the multiple demands of principals and teachers in idiosyncratic ways.

Evolving Standards

Researchers and policymakers are considering the knowledge and skills that coaches need. The International Reading Association (IRA) supports rigorous, changing standards. This is as it should be. Ideally, for coaches, the standards are additive. Coaches must have the characteristics of excellent classroom reading teachers (IRA, 2000b)—knowledge of reading development, assessment, instruction, and materials. In addition, they must have the focused skills of reading specialists (IRA, 2000a)—particularly the ability to serve struggling readers and work with teachers to improve classroom instruction for all children; to interpret assessment data at the individual, school, and classroom level; and to assume instructional leadership roles in the school. Reading coaches add additional areas of specialization to those encompassed by reading specialists (IRA, 2004)—knowledge about adult learning, excellent facilitation of adult learning communities, and specialized knowledge and skills in the area of classroom-based observation and feedback. Reading coaches working in middle school or high school settings add to this list a deep understanding of the structure of knowledge in the content areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies as well as scaled-up strategies to evaluate teaching and learning within and across classrooms and disciplines (IRA, 2006).

The issue of coaches assuming roles more akin to school-level organization (e.g., grant and report writing, school-level planning of the instructional schedule or the assessment system, or the selection of grouping and intervention strategies) appears to divide the field. In a 2007 revision of the *Standards for Reading Professionals*, the IRA defined the reading specialist as an intervention teacher (working

with struggling readers), the reading/literacy coach as a provider of professional development to teachers, and the reading supervisor/coordinator as a professional combining some of the responsibilities of the coach with more schoolwide, systemic ones. In hindsight, then, the roles of the coach proposed by Walpole and McKenna (2004) and highlighted by Snow et al. (2006) are actually consistent with IRA's reading supervisor or coordinator.

Few individuals would meet all of the standards for literacy coaches—even fewer for supervisors or coordinators; literacy professionals must participate in self-reflection to guide their continued professional learning at the same time that they are learning on the job. While they do this, these professionals make choices about their roles and goals and about how they use their time each day.

Enacting Standards

What coaches should do on the job is the matter of intense debate and very little scholarship. The *Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse* (literacycoachingonline.org) scours the research literature for empirical studies of coaches or coaching. A November 2007 review of the resources linked in the site's library yielded seven case studies, three randomized experiments, and two surveys—hardly the stuff of strong, replicable evidence to define the work or effects of coaching. In fact, these pieces address different types of coaching in different contexts—making it impossible to draw conclusions across them. That is not to say that there are few sources for coaches to consult. In fact, most of the buzz about coaches and coaching comes in formats outside of peer-reviewed scholarship: books, book chapters, evaluation reports, and privately funded case studies.

One evaluation report (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007) is particularly relevant to our work. It is a study of the real world of coaching in Reading First. Coaches in Reading First are asked to support teachers as the teachers build knowledge, enact scientifically based reading instruction, and administer and interpret the results of valid and reliable assessment systems. This federally funded program has high stakes and is fast paced, targeted specifically for the K–3 grades in elementary schools with low reading achievement. The authors of the study defined coaching as a potential intervention for improving teaching and learning, albeit one with little

empirical evidence, and expected to find coaches spending a large proportion of their time in direct service to teachers—consistent with the 2007 IRA role definition for literacy coaches. They collected survey and interview data from 203 coaches in 5 states.

Results indicated that these coaches did not use the bulk of their time in professional development. Across these coaches, only 28% of the workweek was spent coaching teachers individually or in groups; 25% of the coaches' time was spent on data-oriented tasks; 10% of their time was spent on planning or providing interventions. Surprisingly, the largest portion of coaches' time (36%) was spent on activities that Deussen and colleagues call "unrelated" to their professional development role: planning for and attending meetings, attending (rather than providing) professional development, completing paperwork, or doing other duties (e.g., subbing or bus duty).

Not all coaches used time in the same way. The authors used cluster analysis to group the coaches according to their use of time. Unfortunately, a large number of coaches (55 out of the 203 surveyed) spent a significant portion of their work week (45%) in tasks unrelated to coaching. It may be that many coaches in this project were not using time wisely. Alternatively, it may be that the realities of the schools (including the mandates of states, districts, and principals) may have directed coaches to complete tasks not anticipated in the IRA's role definitions. Regardless of the language or intent of the standards, coaches must work in schools with particular needs and with principals with specific expectations; this evaluation report indicates that there are still ambiguities in the roles and realities of these elementary coaches.

The Current Study

Our work with coaches in a similarly high-stakes and fast-paced initiative provides another illustration of the multiple ways that coaches conceptualize time. This two-year multiple-case study included 31 participants who were engaged in staff development while implementing building-level Reading Excellence Act (REA) reforms in Georgia. Rigor in the study's qualitative design was ensured through extensive time with the participants in the field, consideration of multiple data sources and reliability checking, and member checking of descriptions with participants (Barone, 2004).

School Characteristics

Participants in this study were working in 20 different schools, each of which qualified for the program because of a history of low achievement or high levels of poverty. The average number of students per school was 649. Students included 48.6% Caucasians, 40.7% African Americans, and 8.3% Hispanics. The mean percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was 68.2% (MGT of America, 2003).

These schools agreed to several up-front requirements: They created a school-level schedule to protect three hours of literacy instruction each day (including both reading and genre-based writing instruction) in each classroom. They committed to daily read-alouds of children's literature and to both whole-group instruction and small-group differentiated instruction. They decided whether and how they would use a core reading program; choices included materials from various large publishers (Harcourt, MacMillan/McGraw-Hill, Open Court, Reading Mastery, and Scott Foresman), from two locally-marketed programs, and also from sets of leveled guided reading books. They agreed to use the state-mandated screenings and to select their own informal diagnostic measures.

Staff Development Program

What makes the sample unique is that the state REA plan required the coaches and principals to engage in professional development and then to make specific choices for their own school; there were relatively few top-down directives. Thus, the study was conducted in the context of an intensive staff development program designed by Sharon Walpole (first author). That program included 2 three-day summer institutes, monthly meetings and book study groups (108 hours in all, roughly equivalent to three full graduate courses), and formative school visits (3 hours at each site). A timeline with professional development topics is presented in Table 1. Participants came to the staff development sessions to discuss research and theory so that they could make informed choices in the curriculum, the assessments, and the staff development system they would enact in their own school.

Table 1
Professional Development and Data Collection Timeline

Date	Formal presentations	Total hours	Data collected
Summer 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sample calendar of two-year reform ■ Dimensions of reading ■ Word- and text-level skills ■ Managing reading practice ■ Managing reading instruction ■ Describing student achievement ■ Changing teacher practice 	24	School report cards
September 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stages of reading development ■ Developmental spelling assessment 	3	Individual coach interviews
October 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Texts for beginning readers 	3	Individual coach interviews
November 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Describing and evaluating phonemic awareness programs 	3	Individual coach interviews
December 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Describing and evaluating phonics programs 	3	Individual coach interviews
January 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Comprehension strategy instruction ■ Choosing commercial programs 	3 12	Implementation survey
February 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Comprehension strategy instruction ■ Vocabulary instruction 	3	Individual coach interviews
May 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Planning site-based best practices institutes 	3	Implementation survey Criterion-referenced test
Summer 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Genres for reading and writing ■ Core program selection ■ Classroom observation ■ Data analysis ■ Scheduling time 	24	Interview #1
September 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Planning interventions 	3	
October 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Observation ■ Scheduling ■ Providing professional support 	3	
November 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Integrating instruction and intervention for kindergarten and first grade ■ Fluency in second and third grade 	3	
January 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Designing staff development ■ Comprehension instruction during read-alouds 	3	
February 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Report from external evaluators ■ Results of internal surveys ■ School-level data analysis ■ Providing professional development 	12	Interview #2
May 2004			Criterion-referenced test scores
May 2005			Criterion-referenced test scores

School-Level Achievement

Grant funding and participation in professional development certainly do not guarantee success in improving achievement. One measure of student achievement particularly applicable to these schools is the state-level measure of adequate yearly progress (AYP). All of the schools in the project were Title I schools. In 2003, after the first year's staff development, 80% of the 20 schools in the study achieved AYP, compared with 68% statewide passing rates for all 1,151 Title I schools. In 2004, 90% achieved AYP, compared with 81% statewide. Finally, in 2005, one year after the study ended, AYP designations were available for all but one of the schools (which had been closed); 100% of those schools achieved AYP, while only 83% of Title I schools statewide achieved this goal.

Participant Characteristics

Participants in this study were in a unique position to reflect on literacy coaches' roles because of their shared experience in the professional development program and their individual experiences in their own schools. Informed consent was sought from principals and literacy coaches in 55 schools. In some cases, neither the coach nor the principal was willing or able (because of district rules) to provide consent ($n = 7$); in others, both leaders from the same school provided consent ($n = 14$); finally, in some cases, either the principal or the coach provided consent ($n = 21$). In addition, some individuals ($n = 4$) were excluded from the study because they did not complete the data collection protocol. Of the 14 principals in the study, 4 participants were male and 10 were female; their experience as principals ranged from 2 to 33 years with a mean of 12.4 years. Of the 17 literacy coaches participating in the study, all were female. Their experience, too, varied widely. All had graduate degrees, but only one was a certified reading specialist. Their experience in education ranged from 6 to 32 years, with a mean of 16.6 years.

Data-Gathering Procedures

Semi-structured interviews of both principals and coaches were conducted in the summer of 2003; after a full year's staff development; and again in February of 2004, at the last staff development session. In

addition, the literacy coaches were interviewed during the month of their formative school visit at some point during the first year of the project. For coaches, there were three interviews, and for principals, two. Survey data were collected in a web-based data collection system designed by an external evaluation company at the end of each project year.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was guided by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) with constant comparative coding procedures (Merriam, 2002). Principal interviews were analyzed first because of the literature on the importance of the principal in guiding and sustaining building-level change (Blase & Blase, 2004; Fullan, 2005; Murphy, 2004; Murphy & Datnow, 2003). Since the literacy coaches in the study worked in change systems directed by principals, their work was partially constrained by the roles that principals defined for them.

Principals' Views of Coaches' Roles

The principals viewed literacy coaches either as school-level or classroom-level actors in the school staff development model they were enacting together. We termed principals' views of coaches either as mentor ($n = 6$) or as director ($n = 8$). Below we illustrate each of these roles using multiple examples from the principals' own language.

Literacy Coach as Mentor

The literacy coach as mentor was the teachers' teacher. Principals noted that modeling of instruction was essential to defining the literacy coach's role. Literacy coaches could be "in the classroom all the time." Because of this focus, a literacy coach could support teachers, saying, "OK. I've been in here today." The literacy coach as mentor defined "what literacy can look like...what a teacher can look like" by showing teachers how to teach various segments of their literacy program. For struggling teachers, those who "just couldn't get it together with so many children that were at risk," the literacy coach as mentor could provide extensive support by teaching those very children in front of those specific teachers.

Relationships were central to defining the literacy coach as mentor. She knew her teachers and principals personally and professionally; she served them as a trusted critical friend. While mentors used modeling as one part of their overall strategy for supporting a particular teacher, they also provided observation and confidential constructive feedback. One principal defined the coach-teacher relationship this way: “It’s kind of a relationship between an apprentice and a master...the apprentice will see a master work, and then [the master will] provide feedback as [the apprentice] tries and works and grows until [the apprentice] becomes the master.” The literacy coach as mentor also used other strategies to meet individual needs—arranging for peer visitations or visits to other schools, providing one-on-one attention through shared planning, asking and answering questions, and engaging in extended personal discussions about literacy and about learning.

The key to defining the role of the literacy coach as mentor was the emphasis on confidential, unflinching, one-on-one support for individual teachers. The literacy coach as mentor was not an administrator; instead her time was devoted to identifying and addressing individual teachers’ needs. The mentor focused on cultivating nonthreatening relationships, one at a time. Principals viewed this as important, given that “it’s a significant change for teachers to work that intimately with another person.” The coach encouraged teachers when instruction was difficult and offered praise when appropriate. Yet, at the same time, she knew how to offer constructive criticism without offending teachers when she saw an area that needed improvement.

The literacy coach as mentor possessed more than the specialized pedagogical knowledge of a reading specialist; she also had the personal skills to connect one-on-one with a large number of other adults. The mentor “takes what [she] knows, models, observes, conferences, teaches, and reteaches.” She was someone teachers “really look up to to give [them] the guidance [they] need.” Out of that personal relationship came a sensitivity to the needs of specific teachers and the ability to help them identify, assess, and improve their reading instruction in a climate free from evaluation. The literacy coach as mentor provided various forms of classroom-based support.

Literacy Coach as Director

Eight principals defined the literacy coach in a different way—as director. The literacy coach as director guided the total literacy program of the school. She served as site-based “change agent,” “kind of like the glue that holds everything together.” That direction included integrating schoolwide efforts with district and state mandates, coordinating staff development inside the school, and making presentations based on sessions provided by experts outside of the school. Her focus was on defining and building the schoolwide program. The literacy coach as director also kept administrators informed about the state of instruction and achievement in the school and asked for assistance and support from administrators when implementation of the program was weak. The nature of the director role assumed that the literacy coach was “already out of the teacher realm,” focusing first on the schoolwide picture and then on the individual teachers in the school. The director was “somewhere between teacher and administrator.” The director had “knowledge of the literacy instruction that’s going on in the school and knowledge of the kind of literacy instruction that ought to go on in the school and [the ability to take] the steps to make those meet.” The literacy coach as director may have modeled as one of those steps and provided mentoring as another step. However, the director assumed roles beyond these two, also working on school-level issues of program design, program quality, and program assessment.

Vision was central to the literacy coach as director. Establishing and implementing that vision required the active support of the principal. For example, one principal indicated, “I know that people would much rather have the principal be the academic leader, but in our school [the literacy coach] is the leader in that sense...and that doesn’t bother me.” The literacy coach “helps the school get a direction, and gives [teachers] the specific mechanics and what that means practically...in the instruction of kids.”

Coaches’ Views of Coaches’ Roles

When we applied the categories of mentor and director to the data derived from the coaches about their activities, these categories still encompassed most of the data. The coaches reported that they viewed

themselves as supporting change either at the school level as directors ($n = 6$), at the classroom level as mentors ($n = 5$), or at both levels ($n = 6$). The one outlier case assumed the role of tutor, taking direct instruction of struggling readers as among her major roles. Because this role was inconsistent with the grant requirements and with the roles defined by principals (including the principal of her school), we did not build the role of tutor into our final model.

As directors, our literacy coaches described their role using leadership terminology. One coach stated, "I'm more of a lead teacher, top person. I'm considered, I think, administrative personnel.... I determine curriculum needs for the reading portion of the program." In contrast, when speaking about their role as mentors, literacy coaches repeatedly used the word *support*. As one coach explained, "I define my role as a support, a literacy support person for teachers, basically somebody that is there to help and there to show new things to them."

The literacy coaches' interview data provided additional insight into the specifics of each of these broader roles. Strong themes across participants indicated that, within the broad structure of director or mentor, literacy coaches viewed themselves as assessors, curriculum managers, formative observers, modelers, teachers, and trainers. Literacy coaches indicated that they viewed their roles as multidimensional, encompassing many specific activities.

Literacy Coach as Assessor

All 17 of the literacy coaches indicated a strong role definition as chief assessor in their schools. Literacy coaches as assessors first designed, then implemented, and finally interpreted an integrated, school-level assessment system. They considered tests by type (norm-referenced outcome, criterion-referenced outcome, screening, informal diagnostic, and progress-monitoring) and by area (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, motivation, and writing). They managed the day-to-day training of teachers to administer assessments, and tackled the difficult job of summarizing the results in ways that were useful and accessible.

Literacy Coach as Curriculum Manager

The role of assessor was intimately related to the role of curriculum manager—the use of assessment data actually informed literacy coaches of the extent to

which their curriculum materials were helping teachers effectively meet the needs of students. Again, all of the literacy coaches in this study viewed themselves as curriculum managers at some level. They worked with teachers to group and regroup students and to schedule their instructional time. They organized large, shared book rooms to facilitate differentiated fluency instruction. In some sites, literacy coaches assisted in the selection of new core program materials. They also bought professional books for teachers.

Literacy Coach as Formative Observer

In addition to assessor and curriculum manager, literacy coach interviews indicated that they all assumed the role of formative observer. After professional development, literacy coaches watched teachers implement new instructional strategies and gave specific, private feedback to them. Literacy coaches were formative observers when they conducted both brief walk-through observations and in-depth observations of the entire literacy block in classrooms.

Literacy Coach as Modeler

In many instances, formative observations were used by coaches to inform their modeling. The role of modeler included demonstrating lessons both inside and outside the classroom, either for the entire staff or grade-level teams or for individual teachers struggling with a particular instructional strategy or group. Modeling was used as follow-up to both teaching and training, described below.

Literacy Coach as Teacher

The role of teacher was strongly indicated in the literacy coach interviews; 71% of these coaches indicated this was one of their roles. We defined a teacher as one whose goal is to deepen knowledge and understanding of reading development, of the importance and use of assessment data to guide instructional decisions, and of specific instructional strategies and their research base. A teacher is building deep understanding of teaching and learning rather than simply training teachers in instructional strategies or procedures. Literacy coaches as teachers used their own professional libraries to research topics. They facilitated teacher study groups, particularly by choosing professional books to meet the needs of groups of teachers. Literacy coaches indicated that they

assumed this role at various levels: for the whole staff, for grade-level teams, and for individual teachers.

Literacy Coach as Trainer

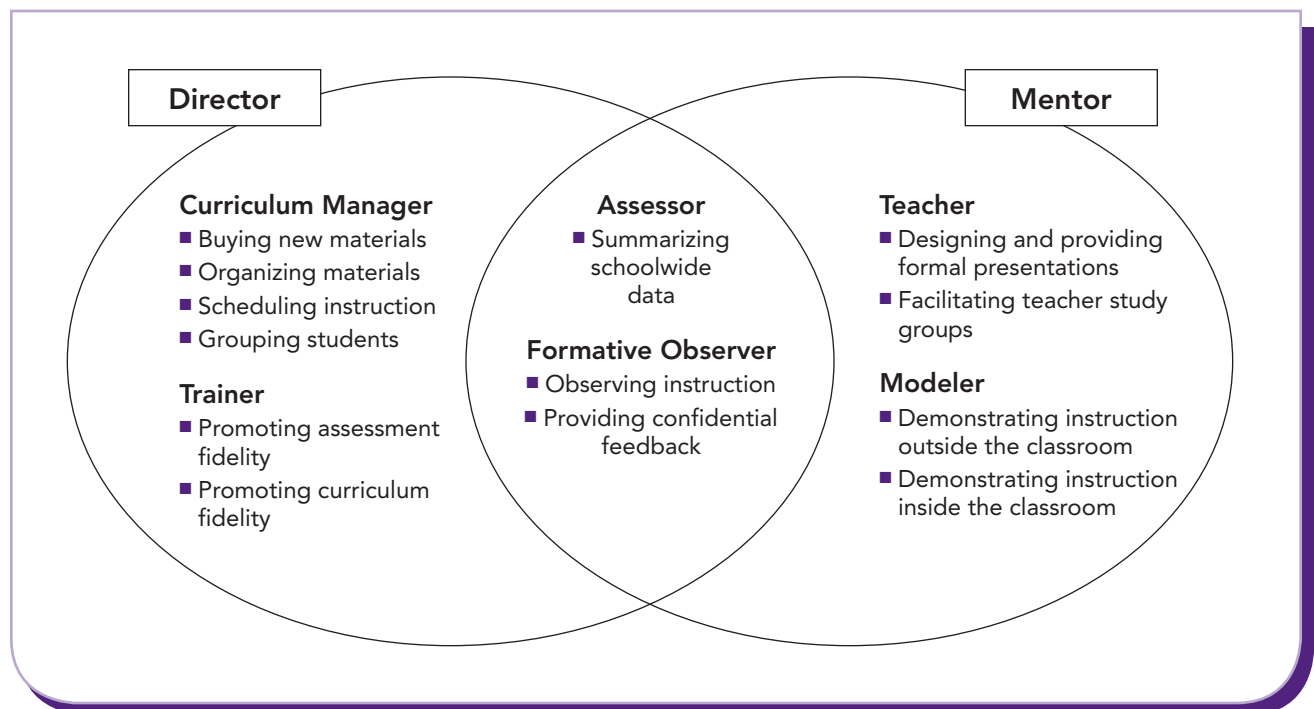
All but one of these literacy coaches also indicated a different professional development role—that of trainer. We defined the role of trainer to include staff development aimed at increasing or improving instructional fidelity (rather than understanding of the underlying developmental or instructional concepts). Training targeted commercial programs, instructional strategies, and assessments. At times, literacy coaches as trainers worked collaboratively with consultants to provide training for their staff.

Mentors or Directors?

The principals in our study identified roles for coaches that we termed directors and mentors. This dual definition is consistent with the argument about coaching made by Neufeld and Roper (2003),

who defined “change coaches”—coaches with a school-level focus, including intense work with the principal—and “content coaches”—coaches who work directly with teachers to facilitate improvements in one area of the curriculum. It is also consistent with IRA’s (2007) most current role definitions—definitions we had not seen when we analyzed our data. Our coach-as-director fulfills responsibilities that the IRA role definitions reserve for coordinators; our mentor fulfills responsibilities that IRA reserves for a coach. When we applied these two broad categories to the coaches’ own reports, they became populated with very specific responsibilities. In Figure 1, we present our own model, derived from our participants’ reports and then organized conceptually for future coaching initiatives. Our answer, then, to the basic question *Is a coach a mentor or director? is... both.* In a given school, a principal and a coach must work together to understand the needs of teachers and children, to specify a coaching role that is appropriate, and to identify specific activities that will allow the coach to fulfill that role.

Figure 1
Multiple Roles of Literacy Coaches



Designing Coaching Initiatives

Planning and implementing a new schoolwide initiative through coaching is an extremely demanding job; principals and coaches in this study were charged to do just that. In essence, coaching in a new initiative is so demanding that we think there is an immediate need for tasks associated with directors and mentors. Certainly, all of the coaches we worked with accomplished tasks in both categories, and principals supported them. Although we did not collect data on how they used their time each week, work associated with coordination of the school's program (as director) leaves less time for classroom-based coaching (as mentor). That fact might yield data on time similar to the report by Deussen and colleagues—directors would not have as large a portion of their time devoted to direct teacher professional development; however, the time would not be wasted. It may be that an individual coach might evolve in his or her role as the school's program evolves, moving from more work as director to more work as mentor.

Early tasks of the coach as director could include design of a school-level schedule for classroom instruction and for intervention for those who need more intensive attention. Given the rise of Response to Intervention as a model for providing instruction, time for both high-quality classroom instruction and for additional, temporary, more intensive instruction will be at more and more of a premium in schools. In addition, efficient assignment of all specialists (e.g., reading specialists, speech-language pathologists, special educators, gifted education specialists) relies on collaborative school-level scheduling. Early tasks of the coach as mentor could include collaborative work with teachers to devise a conceptual plan for providing both grade-level and differentiated instruction. In that way, coaches could help teachers to consider developmental and instructional models, at least in broad strokes, to anticipate the needs of children.

Instructional planning cannot be accomplished without data analysis. At the school level, the coach as director could select consistent screening and outcome assessments and plan systems to monitor progress. Equally important at the grade-level, though, are the coach as mentor's efforts to work with teachers to select sensitive and specific progress-monitoring tools and informal diagnostic assessments to guide daily instructional decisions.

Once a new initiative has been established, both schoolwide and with the grade-level teams, the tasks of the coach as director may be accomplished, and then the coach may be more successful with the real meat of coaching—intensive, ongoing work with teachers. Even then, we argue for a differentiated approach, with two large groups of teachers in mind. For inexperienced or struggling teachers, outside-the-classroom coaching time might be best used for coplanning, interpreting assessment data, and organizing materials for instruction. Inside the classroom, such teachers are likely to need modeling, support with management, and frequent observations with confidential, supportive feedback.

For experienced and successful teachers, outside-the-classroom time might be best used in study groups with professional texts chosen to meet the needs of teachers and time spent learning and considering new ideas. Inside the classroom, these teachers still deserve attention from the coach in the form of formative observation, but it is likely to be needed less frequently. In addition, such teachers might serve their colleagues by providing demonstration lessons or modeling; coaches could cover their classes so that they could connect with other colleagues.

Limitations and Future Directions

We hope that schools might consider their own needs for coaches to act as directors and mentors. If those two roles are assumed by one person, that person must be mindful to enact them in such a way that relationships with teachers are established and protected—neither a director nor a mentor can participate in teacher evaluations. We also see the principal as an essential participant in these role definitions. Our own work engaged principals and allowed them to help coaches establish roles consistent with the needs of their school; as they did that, their perceptions predated the IRA's role definitions for coordinators and coaches.

In spite of this emerging convergence on dual roles, we are far from a science of coaching. In fact, our own call for the model depicted in Figure 1 is informed by data from the field and from our work but not validated independently. It captures the experiences of a group of principals and coaches engaged

in a very specific professional development initiative; it is informed by the biases inherent in that initiative. In addition, describing the work of literacy coaches is no substitute for documenting the effects of that work. In our description, we have relied on self-report data that may not paint a full picture. Stronger designs will validate self reports with direct observations. In addition, we have not argued that any one coaching role is more likely associated with changes in instruction or with higher student outcomes.

Stronger designs will explore the link between specific coaching roles and meaningful outcomes for teachers and children. Carefully defining the roles of literacy coaches is a necessary first step, though, to assessing their impact on teaching and learning. Certainly the stakes for all are high enough that continued investigation of the work of literacy coaches is warranted. We continue to prepare literacy coaches in our university work and to support literacy coaches in the real world of schools as they design and implement models of professional support for teachers and monitor the literacy achievement of children. We also look for coaching models with data-based evidence of effectiveness in the real goal of coaching: improving teaching and improving student achievement.

Note

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