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Your Role and the Task at Hand

The Responsibilities of a Coach in Supporting Effective Literacy Instruction

In this chapter, we

- discuss recent changes in the role of the literacy coach
- identify and discuss current recommendation for roles of the literacy coach
- identify the qualities that make coaches effective
- provide examples of effective teaching activities with relevance for coaching early literacy

The importance of effective early literacy instruction is widely accepted: patterns of school failure that begin in the early school years persist as children move into the elementary grades (Strickland, 2002). The achievement gap between high-socioeconomic and low-socioeconomic students has long been a source of concern for educators and policy makers. The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), including the Reading First and Early Reading First programs, has intensified the attention

focused on accountability and achievement in early literacy education (Mraz & Kissel, 2007). Having literacy coaches in schools who are prepared to address children's learning needs by providing guidance for classroom teachers has been recognized as a necessary component for improving the quality of literacy education in schools for some time (International Reading Association [IRA], 2004). However, ideas about the nature of that role and the direction it should take have evolved in recent years.

How Has the Role of the Literacy Coach Changed?

Before the title *literacy coach* was commonly used, reading specialists were hired in schools to work directly with struggling readers in small groups or pullout programs where students typically received intense, skill-based instruction outside of the regular classroom (Pipes, 2004). Often, there was little collaboration between the classroom teacher and the reading specialist about the type of instruction each student received, and concerns were frequently voiced about the effectiveness of the pullout program model (Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Dole, 2004).

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"I learned that I really had to define what it is that I did on a daily basis. I came up with an acronym to remind myself of my job responsibilities. The acronym is COACH. C is for building community because it is so important to build relationships with the teachers I work with. O is for observing. I think one of the biggest parts of my job is to go into classrooms and just watch and learn. A is for analyzing. Once I observe, it is so important for me to help teachers analyze what they did as instructors. C is for communicating. It is vital that the teacher and I talk about what happened in the classroom and keep an open line of communication. H is for help. I am there to help the teacher realize her best potential. I'm not there to evaluate or talk down to the teacher. I am there to help her—to build her up."

Elizabeth

In response to concerns over the low reading achievement of many students as reflected in standardized test scores, educators and policy

makers sought ways to improve reading proficiency levels. The options for providing reading education support expanded, and the role of the reading specialist was more broadly defined. Communication and collaboration between reading specialist and teachers were increasingly emphasized. Ongoing professional development initiatives designed to increase the knowledge and skills of all educators were more commonly implemented (Bean, Trovato, & Hamilton, 1995; Moxley & Taylor, 2006; Mraz, Vacca, & Vintinner, 2008).

As these changes occurred, the benefits of having literacy professionals in schools became increasingly apparent: literacy professionals could support teachers in improving instructional practices to enhance school reading programs and, in turn, increase student achievement in reading (Lapp, Fisher, Flood, & Frey, 2003; Shaw, Smith, Chesler, & Romeo, 2005). Literacy coaching began to find wide acceptance in professional circles as one way of addressing the literacy needs of schools, teachers, and students.

Changing expectations for the role of literacy coaches produced new titles and new job descriptions. Titles used to describe literacy coaches include the following:

- learning specialist
- literacy facilitator
- language arts specialist
- language arts coach
- curriculum specialist
- instructional specialist
- instructional coach
- academic facilitator

The jobs literacy coaches fulfill in schools can be as varied as their titles. Some focus specifically on supporting classroom teachers in their daily implementation of the school's literacy program (IRA, 2006). Others support teachers by working across subject areas or by providing general and specific professional development sessions (Dole, 2004). Still others report that paperwork and administrative tasks consume their time (Dole & Donaldson, 2006). In recent years, as greater emphasis has been placed on the potential of a literacy coach to improve the effectiveness of a school's reading program, recommendations from professional organizations and researchers have helped to clarify the role of the literacy coach.

According to the IRA (2004), the primary responsibilities of the literacy coach should encompass support for the classroom teacher,

instruction within and outside the classroom, assessment of student strengths and needs, and leadership both within the school and between the home and school. Literacy coaches also provide professional development for teachers on effective reading practices and culturally informed teaching (Tatum, 2004). This leadership often includes tasks such as selecting reading materials, coordinating the reading program, planning literacy lessons and strategies with teachers, modeling lessons for teachers, and co-teaching.

What Are the Current Recommendations for the Role of the Literacy Coach?

In many school districts, the role of the literacy coach is undefined and ambiguous. Perceptions of literacy coaches vary among the coaches themselves, teachers, and administrators. At a recent gathering, literacy coaches were asked to define their job role as literacy coach as perceived by themselves, teachers, and school administrators. When asked to explain how others define their job responsibilities, coaches offered a myriad of responses: lesson modeler, classroom researcher, resource provider, change agent, assessment analyzer, purchasing agent, student advocate, literacy program implementation police, principal's spy, learner, substitute teacher, book study leader, grade-level facilitator, trainer, and supervisor.

While we agree with several of these perceptions (change agent, learner, student advocate), we strongly disagree with others (implementation police, principal's spy, supervisor, substitute teacher). Literacy coaching has the best chance for success when the role of literacy coach is clearly defined. In this section, we propose our list of job roles for the literacy coach. These job roles are illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Coaching Teachers to Plan for Instruction

Effective literacy instruction is not simply a matter of selecting a commercial reading program and then following the instructions in the teachers' manual (Au, 2002). Effective teachers must be knowledgeable and reflective about literacy research and instructional practices, and they must use that knowledge to make informed instructional decisions that will meet the literacy learning needs of students. Teaching is "systematic presentation of content assumed necessary for mastery within a general area of knowledge" (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006, p. 7). Effective teachers plan, manage,

Figure 1.1 Job Roles of the Literacy Coach

deliver, and evaluate their content presentations. Through ongoing collaboration and problem solving, literacy coaches can help teachers to effectively implement each of these instructional components.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"It was awkward when I first became a literacy coach because I went from being a teacher to being a literacy coach at the same school. So, I was somehow viewed differently from my friends. When I first went into classrooms, my friends would want to gossip about peers or the administration. I really had to resist this. I remember that I had to literally write down what my responsibilities were as a literacy coach. So, I sat down with each teacher and explained the purpose of my job and how I was there to really help teachers within their own classrooms. I think this helped with communication. Teachers started to realize that I was there for a real purpose. We all got on the same page about my role as a literacy coach."

Terry

Effective planning involves making decisions about what content to teach, how to teach it, and how to communicate realistic teaching expectations to students. Each of these decisions includes specific activities that can be supported by effective coaching.

Coaches help teachers decide *what to teach* by assessing students' skills, analyzing the instructional task, establishing a logical instructional sequence, considering contextual variables, analyzing instructional groupings, and identifying gaps between actual and expected performance. Deciding *how to teach* means setting instructional goals, selecting instructional methods and materials, pacing instruction appropriately, monitoring performance, and revising instruction. Examples of coaching activities related to helping teachers plan instruction in both early childhood (preK–K) and elementary classrooms (Grades 1–3) classrooms can be found in Table 1.1.

Coaching Teachers to Develop Manageable Classrooms

Managing includes preparing for instruction, using time productively, and creating a positive environment. Each of these decisions includes specific activities that can be supported by effective coaching.

Literacy coaches help teachers prepare for instruction by helping them set and communicate classroom rules, teach consequences of behavior, handle disruptions effectively and efficiently, and teach student self-management skills. Literacy coaches and teachers work collaboratively to establish routines and procedures, organize the physical space, create transitions that are brief, limit interruptions, and allocate sufficient time to academic content instruction. Creating a positive environment means making classrooms friendly places, accepting individual differences, keeping interactions positive, and involving all students in all classroom activities (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006).

Preparing for instruction, using time productively, and creating a positive environment are important aspects of effective teaching. Examples of coaching activities related to helping teachers manage these areas of instruction in early childhood (preK–K) and elementary classrooms (Grades 1–3) can be found in Table 1.2.

Coaching Teachers to Deliver Effective Instruction

Delivering instruction involves presenting content, monitoring student learning, and adjusting instruction. Each of these decisions includes specific activities that can be supported by effective coaching.

Table 1.1 Helping Teachers Plan Instruction in PreK–K and Grades 1–3

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Coaching Example</i>
Decide What to Teach	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
• assess students' skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask children to name uppercase letters • ask children to answer comprehension questions
• analyze instructional tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify instructional strategies for developing sound-letter connections • identify instructional strategies for developing prosody when reading aloud
• establish logical instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • list the sequence of steps for a rhyming game • list the sequence of steps for a making-words activity
• consider context variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify children's familiarity with the alphabet system • identify children's access to reading materials at home
• analyze instructional groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish small groups for learning center time • establish guided reading groups based on students' reading levels
• identify performance gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze assessment data to determine students' knowledge of print concepts • analyze assessment data to determine students' vocabulary knowledge
Decide How to Teach	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
• set instructional goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify goals for phonemic awareness acquisition • identify goals for fluency development
• select methods and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organize materials for a phonemic awareness lesson • select texts for an oral reading lesson
• pace instruction appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish a timeline for presenting phonemic awareness lessons • establish a timeline for rehearsal of a Reader's Theater script
• monitor performance and revise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • based on observations of student performance, revise lessons on letter identification • based on observations of student performance, revise preparations for Reader's Theater presentations

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Continued)

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Coaching Example</i>
Communicate Expectations	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actively involve students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>establish a routine for students as they listen and respond to a read aloud</i> • <i>establish a routine for students as they participate in a literature circle</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explicitly state expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>explain expectations for students’ participation during a read aloud</i> • <i>explain the role of each student as a literature circle participant</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain high standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>monitor appropriate listening behaviors during read alouds</i> • <i>monitor the interaction of students during literature circles</i>

Literacy coaches work with teachers to present lessons that are relevant to their students. Students need experiences in the classroom that develop their reading and writing processes, show how reading and writing are necessary in their lives, and develop their independence as readers and writers. These lessons must maintain student attention, communicate goals of instruction, and check for student understanding. Coaches help teachers develop instruction that is engaging, motivational, and purposeful in the lives of their students.

Presenting content, monitoring student learning, and adjusting instruction are important aspects of effective teaching. Examples of coaching activities related to helping teachers deliver instruction in early childhood (preK–K) and elementary classrooms (Grades 1–3) can be found in Table 1.3.

Fostering a Collaborative Professional Environment

Literacy coaches must create and maintain a supportive professional collaboration with teachers. The teacher-coach relationship is reciprocal: teachers learn from coaches, coaches learn from teachers, and both learn from students. These close collaborations help to establish a positive learning environment for all members of the school community. Effective literacy coaches foster these collaborative environments by encouraging teachers to share their insights, knowledge, beliefs, and experiences during coaching conversations and professional

Table 1.2 Helping Teachers Manage Instruction in PreK–K and Grades 1–3

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Coaching Example</i>
Prepare for Instruction	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set and communicate rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>establish rules for student behavior during center time</i> • <i>establish rules for student behavior during independent work time</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teach consequences of behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>establish a system for acknowledging appropriate student behavior</i> • <i>establish a system for responding to inappropriate student behavior</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • handle disruptions efficiently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>establish a plan for responding to inappropriate student behavior in whole group settings</i> • <i>establish a plan for responding to inappropriate student behavior in small group settings</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teach students self-management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>develop questions to ask of students as they prepare to transition from one center to another</i> • <i>develop a list of questions for students to use when self-assessing their written work</i>
Use Time Productively	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish routines and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify current routines that are ineffective</i> • <i>establish a routine for independent reading time</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organize physical space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>organize the classroom library</i> • <i>organize the writing center</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keep transitions brief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify ways to reduce transition time from one center to another</i> • <i>identify ways to reduce transition time from independent activities to whole group activities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limit interruptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify options for students who need help completing a learning center task</i> • <i>list options for students who complete assigned work early</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use an academic, task-oriented focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify the components student must include in a rhyming activity</i> • <i>identify the components students must include in a persuasive letter</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allocate sufficient time to academics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>establish a timetable for introducing theme-based vocabulary concepts</i> • <i>plan a week-long literacy block</i>

(Continued)

Table 1.2 (Continued)

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Coaching Example</i>
Create a Positive Environment	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make the classroom a friendly place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>begin each morning meeting with an engaging rhyme or song</i> • <i>encourage behaviors that are mutually respectful</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accept individual differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>read literature related to valuing individual differences</i> • <i>discuss appropriate responses to students who present their writing during author's chair time</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keep interactions positive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify ways to provide supportive feedback to students</i> • <i>model a positive tone when responding to student questions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involve students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>acknowledge supportive interactions between students</i> • <i>identify ways in which students can provide supportive feedback to one another</i>

development sessions. Understanding the foundations of effective teaching is the first step in helping teachers to refine their instructional practice. Understanding how teachers use and interact with their models and mentors to improve their instructional practice is a critical next step for literacy coaches.

At the core of every outstanding preservice apprenticeship program is a commitment to provide a practical foundation for future teaching through field experiences that demonstrate proven, established, and successful strategies for teaching reading—and a mentoring relationship that involves regular debriefing of fieldwork activities for greater understanding and future effectiveness in the classroom. These same principles apply to effective coaching relationships.

In *Teaching Reading Well*, the IRA (2007) provided a synthesis of research on teacher preparation for reading instruction. In college and university preparation programs, field teaching provides preservice teachers with practical experience in using their newly acquired knowledge and skills to assess student needs and to plan, manage, deliver, and evaluate lessons under direct and indirect supervision. The leaders of these programs pair students with experienced teachers who act as models, and they put them in classrooms that are as

Table 1.3 Helping Teachers Deliver Instruction in PreK–K and Grades 1–3

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Coaching Example</i>
Present Content	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • present lessons • make lessons relevant • maintain student attention • communicate goals of instruction • check student understanding • teach thinking skills • teach learning strategies • show enthusiasm • assign interesting work • use rewards intermittently • assign work that students can achieve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>implement an integrated phonics lesson</i> • <i>implement a lesson on making inferences</i> • <i>identify relevant background knowledge that students bring to a unit of study</i> • <i>connect new concepts to students' own experiences</i> • <i>engage students in kinesthetic activities that relate to sound-letter connections</i> • <i>engage students in peer interactions to facilitate text comprehension</i> • <i>explain the rationale for a phonics activity</i> • <i>write lesson objectives where students can see them</i> • <i>ask comprehension questions throughout the presentation of a lesson</i> • <i>ask students to recap directions before they begin independent work</i> • <i>ask questions that encourage students to connect new information to their own experiences</i> • <i>use strategies, such as a discussion web, that require students to consider different points of view</i> • <i>teach students to look for phonograms when trying to decipher an unfamiliar word</i> • <i>teach students to use the five-finger rule when selecting a book for independent reading</i> • <i>model an interest in different genres</i> • <i>use library resources to research topics with students</i> • <i>identify age-appropriate topics for unit studies</i> • <i>use a variety of sources to teach literacy skills in context</i> • <i>list rewards currently used; then list other ways to respond positively to student effort</i> • <i>develop alternatives to external reward routines</i> • <i>identify the progression of writing process stages</i> • <i>determine students' reading levels</i>

(Continued)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Coaching Example</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teach skills to mastery • vary instructional materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>scaffold instruction so that phonics skills are presented in multiple contexts</i> • <i>provide multiple opportunities for students to make inferences</i> • <i>list potential materials for tactile letter formation</i> • <i>acquire different types of texts for a classroom library</i>
Monitor Student Learning	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give feedback • actively engage students • redirect students not responding • provide ways to request help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify for students those elements that make their work effective</i> • <i>conference with individual students about their independent reading</i> • <i>ask for student input about their work on a project</i> • <i>establish a student self-assessment tool for written work</i> • <i>rephrase a question to which a student is not responding</i> • <i>review concepts that may connect to new material</i> • <i>list with students ways in which they can request help</i> • <i>list sources to which students can turn to answer their questions</i>
Adjust Instruction	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vary teaching approaches • vary materials • vary pace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify the readability levels of different texts</i> • <i>identify and apply alternative strategies for fluency instruction</i> • <i>use a different medium for presenting literacy concepts</i> • <i>establish a balance in terms of fiction and nonfiction text use</i> • <i>establish options for inviting oral language use</i> • <i>revise the guided reading routine based on student needs</i>

typical of contemporary educational settings as possible. They provide them with carefully arranged, hands-on demonstrations of effective instructional methods, and they provide corrective and supportive feedback as their students teach and practice what they have learned. The overall goal is to provide supervised opportunities to teach that mirror and reinforce the course work and preparation provided in the university and field settings. The best practices in teaching teachers—explicit explanation and demonstration of content, and high levels of active and engaged responding with feedback, followed by multiple practice opportunities, continuous evaluation of progress, and adjustment of instruction—turn out to be the best practices in preschool and elementary school classrooms.

Teacher educators know that two factors influence the success of field experiences: opportunities to practice in classrooms where references to course and case content are explicit; and guidance from master teachers, with ongoing feedback to support effective and correct ineffective teaching behaviors (Maheady, Mallette, & Harper, 1996; Mallette, Maheady, & Harper, 1999; Mallette, Kile, Smith, McKinney, & Readence, 2000).

Similarly, effective coaching relationships are built on principles and practices of effective teaching practices, fostered through collaborative professional environments, which promote thinking through reflective inquiry and allow student data to guide instructional decisions. In this way, coaching is designed to reinforce practices and help teachers become more aware and intentional about their teaching. It triggers needed reflection on the reasons behind use of a particular approach to reach students. Teachers develop knowledge that is established, ingrained, and extended with real-world applications in the classroom.

The most effective coaches provide frequent and continuous support in the teacher's classroom to help turn knowledge and principles into effective teaching practices. Guided demonstrations in real-time classrooms are a key factor in establishing sustained changes in teaching behavior (IRA, 2007). Providing support to practicing teachers means opening up their instructional spaces so they can ask questions and make multiple attempts with different instructional approaches, and the process must include a system of observations and guided feedback.

Promoting Thinking Through Reflective Inquiry

Effective literacy coaches encourage teachers to think reflectively about their practice. That is, literacy coaches hold mirrors to teachers

in hopes that teachers will *re-see* the instructional decisions they made and whether these were effective decisions for their students. The coach serves as a guide and mentor, but the essential insight comes from within the teacher.

Effective literacy coaches encourage teachers to think deeply about their instructional practice, question decisions they make, find evidence that their instruction is impacting students, and consider how their teaching can be improved.

Allowing Student Data to Guide Instructional Decisions

Evaluation, discussed at length in Chapter 4, is the process teachers use to determine whether their teaching is effective. Sometimes they use formative evaluation to make decisions while they are teaching, and other times they make decisions after they have taught. Six activities contribute to evaluating effectively: monitoring students' understanding, monitoring engaged time, maintaining records of students' progress, informing students about their progress, using data to make decisions, and making judgments about students' performance (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). Examples of coaching activities related to helping teachers evaluate instruction in early childhood (preK–K) and elementary classrooms (Grades 1–3) can be found in Table 1.4.

What Are the Qualities of Effective Literacy Coaches?

Literacy coaches are as diverse as the teachers they lead. Some are quiet but poignant. Others are assertive but collaborative. Regardless of their personality type, there are common traits among literacy coaches who dedicate themselves to helping teachers fulfill the literacy mission of the school and enrich the literacy lives of their students. Effective literacy coaches

- are content experts
- are collaborative advisors and confidants
- honor the knowledge of the teacher

Content Experts

Literacy coaches are knowledgeable of literacy processes. Often, this knowledge comes from an advanced degree in a literacy-related

Table 1.4 Helping Teachers Evaluate Instruction in PreK–K and Grades 1–3

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Coaching Example</i>
Monitor Understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • check understanding of directions • check process students use to do work • check success rates 	<p><i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>observe students' implementation of multistep directions</i> • <i>ask students to explain directions to a partner</i> • <i>establish checkpoints within a lesson</i> • <i>use a writing conference to assess student progress</i> • <i>analyze the degree to which a student correctly identifies rhyming words</i> • <i>list frequent misspellings found in a student's work</i>
Monitor Engaged Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure active engagement • self-monitor teaching performance • scan for engagement 	<p><i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>incorporate an element of student choice in particular center activities</i> • <i>use small groups to facilitate participation among all students</i> • <i>reflect on the progress of a small group rhyming lesson</i> • <i>identify ways in which student participation in a vocabulary lesson can be increased</i> • <i>observe students' behavior as a lesson proceeds</i> • <i>observe students' body language and facial expression as signals of engagement</i>
Maintain Records <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keep up-to-date scores of performance • chart student progress 	<p><i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>establish a way to monitor students' participation in centers</i> • <i>establish a way to compile and organize samples of student work</i> • <i>establish a schedule for assessing students' knowledge of sound-letter correspondence</i> • <i>establish a way to record students' independent reading selections</i>
Inform Students About Progress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide feedback 	<p><i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>respond to students' input about a story</i> • <i>identify areas of improvement in student writing</i>

(Continued)

Table 1.4 (Continued)

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Coaching Example</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • correct errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>model the use of conventional spelling, while encouraging students' attempts to write using transitional spelling</i> • <i>ask students to correct their misspellings of high-frequency words that have been taught in class</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide general and specific praise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>praise a group of students for their efforts during meeting time</i> • <i>tell a student why his or her response to text was insightful</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage self-correction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>answer a student's question with a question that will encourage the student to problem solve</i> • <i>identify self-correction strategies that students can use independently</i>
Use Data to Make Decisions	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decide when to refer for assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify patterns in a student's speech that may require help from a specialist</i> • <i>invite appropriate school personnel to observe a student's group interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make teaching changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>review concepts of print based on analysis of assessment data</i> • <i>use interactive strategies to improve students' inferential comprehension skills</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decide when to stop special assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>confer regularly with the intervention specialist about a student's progress</i> • <i>analyze student work samples to identify patterns of improvement</i>
Make Judgments About Performance	<i>Work collaboratively with the teacher to</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specify continuing goals for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>involve parents in goal setting and offer ideas for home-school connections</i> • <i>use student input to establish reasonable goals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chart progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>maintain anecdotal records of students' oral language development</i> • <i>chart students' fluency progress in terms of accuracy, automaticity, and prosody</i>

graduate program. In some cases, literacy coaches without advanced degrees have had ongoing professional development experiences that have enriched their literacy knowledge and prepared them for their role as literacy coach. Regardless, credible literacy coaches are ones who know how young children develop and thrive as readers and writers.

For teachers to gain insight about literacy, they must have confidence that their coaches are knowledgeable about reading and writing instruction. Literacy coaches must instill in their teachers, who in turn will instill in their students, that literacy learning is a lifelong process. In this respect, literacy coaches must constantly strive to enrich their own literacy knowledge by reading professional books, research and teacher-oriented journal articles, and Web sites and newsletters of professional organizations such as the IRA, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Literacy is not a stagnant field of inquiry. New research emerges every day that tells a fuller, more complicated picture of how young children best learn to read and write. One of the most important qualities literacy coaches must have is a desire to constantly build their content expertise and inspire their teachers to do the same. In doing so, coaches can more effectively link the reading program of a school to the broader literacy goals established by a state or school district (Shanklin, 2006).

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"When I meet with teachers, I explain to them my role from the perspective of a basketball coach. For example, Michael Jordan went to the University of North Carolina and was coached by Dean Smith. I ask my teachers, 'Who was a better basketball player: Michael Jordan or Dean Smith?' Naturally, the teachers reply, 'Michael Jordan.' Yes, of course, but Dean Smith coached him. So, I explain to teachers that I am not there to say that I am a better teacher than they are. But, as a coach, I have the luxury of observing and analyzing just like Dean Smith did. Like Dean Smith, I hope to bring out the best in the teachers. When I make this analogy to the teachers, I think they get a better sense of my job role."

Sarah

Collaborative Advisors and Confidants

When literacy coaches enter classrooms, some teachers respond with trepidation and suspicion. Teachers want to improve the quality of their teaching, but they fear the judgmental eyes of others who enter their room. In this regard, literacy coaches are *collaborative confidants*. Together, they work with teachers to learn about students, but do so in ways that promote collaboration between the teacher and coach in a nonevaluative manner. Even during challenges or setbacks, the coach must remain discrete and supportive—careful to respect both the individual differences and the professional needs of each teacher (Shanklin, 2006).

Effective literacy coaches understand that the relationship they establish with teachers is critical in helping the teacher grow as a professional. When coaches talk about their teachers to other teaching colleagues or to the principal, they undermine this relationship. For literacy coaches to be effective, teachers must believe that their coach will always support them and use discretion. Whether a teacher is hopeful or worried, confident or confused, the coach and teacher can work collaboratively to build on the teacher's strengths and to refine instructional practices that are in need of improvement. When coaches serve as nonthreatening advisors, they listen to the successes and challenges of the teacher, participate in the celebrations, sympathize with the struggles, and gently guide teachers toward self-reflection and continued inquiry.

Knowledge Acknowledgers

Literacy coaches are not the only experts in the classroom. During coaching conversations, teachers express their own valuable knowledge, experience, and expertise. Whether they are beginners or veterans in the field, the teachers' experience matters and informs conversations between literacy coach and teacher. Effective literacy coaches recognize, and are not threatened by, the wealth of knowledge teachers bring to the conversation. Literacy coaches should encourage teachers to offer opinions, insights, and experiences during coaching sessions. When coaches acknowledge the important insights their teachers offer, they effectively build confidence and rapport.

Today, the literacy coach's responsibilities can be as varied as the teaching contexts in which they work. Fulfilling the promise of literacy coaching is particularly challenging given the changing nature of the role and the variability with which those changes have been

communicated to different groups, particularly to administrators and teachers. We believe, however, that it is a challenge worth undertaking. A basic premise of the No Child Left Behind Act that drives the educational policy in the United States today is that every public school classroom will have a “qualified teacher.” Colleges and universities play a role in achieving this goal, but coaches working in real-life classrooms with practicing teachers play a more important part in making this happen and in sustaining it over time.

Next Steps: Professional Development Suggestions

1. Working with a group of literacy coaches from different schools, discuss how the role of the literacy coach has evolved in each of your schools. Describe how those changes in role were communicated to teachers and administrators. Brainstorm ways to facilitate this process more effectively.
2. Using the activities and actions listed in Tables 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4, collaborate with individual teachers to prioritize these actions in terms of their own professional development needs. Then, list ways in which you as the literacy coach can support them in each of the identified areas.
3. Working with other literacy coaches, discuss ways in which you support teachers in addressing each of the activities and actions listed in Tables 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4.
4. Using Table 1.5 as a guide, survey the teachers and administrators in your school about their perceptions of and expectations for the role of the literacy coach. Based on the results, discuss ways in which your role can be clarified and, if necessary, refined to meet the needs of the teachers and students.

Table 1.5 Survey of Roles and Expectations for Literacy Coaching

Listed below are some of the activities in which a literacy coach may engage, based on the recommendations of Bean (2004). In the first column (1) after each statement, indicate the degree to which you believe that activity is a current part of the literacy coach's role, with 1 being "not a significant part of the coach's role" and 5 being "a highly significant part of the coach's role." In the second column (2) after each statement, indicate the degree to which you think that activity needs to be part of the coach's role, with 1 being "does not need to be part of the coach's role" and 5 being "should definitely be part of the coach's role."

Statement	(1) Is this currently part of the coach's role?	(2) Should this be part of the coach's role?
1. Talks with colleagues about relevant issues or needs	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. Recommends materials for literacy instruction	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3. Works with colleagues on curriculum development	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4. Participates with colleagues in professional development activities such as workshops or conferences	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5. Leads or participates in study groups with teachers	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6. Assesses students	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
7. Instructs students	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
8. Assists teachers with lesson planning	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
9. Holds grade-level team meetings	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
10. Analyzes student work	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
11. Helps teachers to interpret assessment data	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
12. Talks with individual teachers about instructional issues	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
13. Leads professional development presentations for teachers	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
14. Models lessons	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
15. Co-teaches lessons	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
16. Observes teachers teaching and provides feedback	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5