
Preface

We are coaches. In our professional lives, we coach literacy educators, principals, reading coaches, reading specialists, teachers, and parents every day. In our personal lives, we are coaches and coached as well—Nancy is a long-distance cyclist; Tamie is a runner. We do not separate our personal and professional learning; all aspects of our lives contribute to who we are and how we wish to grow and help others. Our vision is to be the best we can be—professionally, personally, and physically—and each aspect of our busy lives complements the others. We wrote this book to help others as they begin the journey of literacy coaching or for those who are well on the way and want to check their progress. We have found coaching to be a journey, an exciting, challenging, and occasionally frustrating journey, but well worth the trip. Come along for your own personal challenge.

Purpose

As public schools are faced with increased challenges resulting from state and federal achievement policies, districts around the nation are seeking evidence-based, effective, and practical ways to meet all learners' literacy needs. As a result, the concept of literacy coaching has gained considerable attention in research and practice in the past several years, with literacy coaches being employed at increasing rates in elementary and secondary schools. While on the surface, additional personnel in schools may appear to be a remedy for improving instruction, the individuals being hired as literacy coaches often do not have the requisite knowledge base of literacy, instruction, professional development, leadership, and experience to successfully negotiate the varied roles and responsibilities that come with being an effective coach.

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Historical Foundation

Literacy Coaches and Adolescent Literacy

Help! I am coaching, and I don't really know what I am supposed to do.

—Recently hired literacy coach, 2008

What does a coach really do? This question has been asked by coaches, teachers, administrators, supervisors, and school board members. The list of job requirements and expectations is long, and the answers vary greatly. As an educational profession, we are not sure of the most advantageous roles for a literacy coach, but we are intrigued by the potential.

A short decade ago, coaching references in education primarily were related to athletic sports. Currently, if one looks up literacy coaching, over 300,000 English pages can be found on the subject. In the short span of 10 years, literacy coaching has gone from a relatively unknown topic to a “very hot” topic. For the past three years, according to the International Reading Association survey of “hot” topics, literacy coaching has led the list in “what’s hot” (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2009, p. 1). During the same decade, adolescent literacy has also emerged as a hot topic (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2008, 2009). The challenges associated with the topic are to develop a clear under-

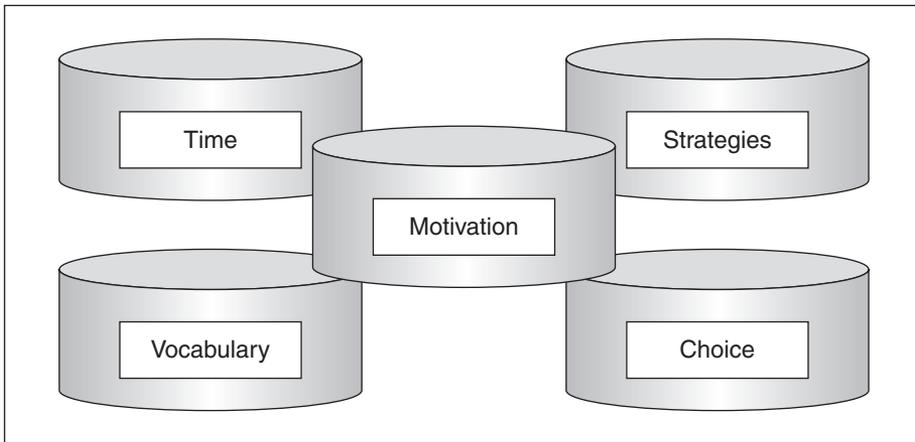
Current Expectations: Literacy Coach and Reading Specialist

The role of literacy or reading coach, according to the International Reading Association (2006), is as

a reading specialist who focuses on providing professional development for teachers by giving them the additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practices. They provide essential leadership for a school's entire literacy program by helping create and supervise long-term staff development processes that support both the development and implementation of literacy programs over months and years.

In many districts, the literacy coach and reading specialist are the same person; this model may work well for smaller school buildings (less than 1,000 students). Schools may also recruit a highly qualified, well-respected teacher to serve as a literacy coach, working closely with the reading specialist and administration. The coach can step into the classrooms, working shoulder to shoulder with the teacher, while conferring often with the reading specialist for additional research-based strategies or materials to assist in each student's learning. Coaches can also help teams of teachers plan curriculum units, engage in lesson study, provide materials, and watch videotapes of students struggling with particularly challenging concepts. A key function of coaching is to help teachers identify the limits of student understanding and address their learning needs. A coach has the opportunity to see firsthand what teachers need to enhance their content and pedagogical knowledge. The coach may assist in organizing leadership teams and may design professional development to target areas of need (Anders, 1998; Sturtevant, 2003). According to a study by Blachowicz, Obrochta, and Fogelberg (2005), the literacy coach's major job responsibility is "to provide professional development and to support teachers to improve classroom instruction" (p. 55).

The expectation for the literacy coach to provide professional development mirrors the expectation for the reading specialist as set out in the position paper *Teaching All Children to Read: The Roles of the Reading Specialist* (International Reading Association, 2000). In these new professional models, teachers and reading specialists (now *coaches*) are to work collaboratively in providing effective instruction for all students. To coordinate these services, schools must have read-

Figure 2.1 Five Pillars of Adolescent Literacy Programs

These five pillars may seem simplistic, yet if all five of these pillars are given careful attention at the secondary level, students will continue to develop personal literacy skill. With the competing pressures created by budget constraints, large classes, and the mandates to cover increased content, it is very rare to see all five pillars in place in secondary schools. However, when several of these causal factors are targeted as part of a total literacy improvement plan, a school's culture can become collaborative and focused in working toward improved literacy achievement for all its students. This focus then provides the avenue for a literacy coach to work with the teachers, as a professional skilled peer, to help them with daily literacy instruction in each classroom. It is helpful to focus on one pillar at a time yet keep the attention on all pillars throughout the school year.



Time to Read for Enjoyment

The first area of focus that may produce measurable results is to add additional time for reading tasks to the daily schedule. As previously mentioned, reading is a skill that becomes rusty and slow when not exercised regularly (Trelease, 2001). Struggling students cannot be expected to grow in literacy ability when given the same amount of time as the average or higher performing students. It is not hard for a sports coach to recognize this fact; however, in our experience, it is more common to add additional practice time to the schedule of a runner, soccer player, or wrestling student than to build additional time for instruction and practice into academic schedules. Irwin and col-

Examples of School Improvement PD



First Challenge: Make Time

We start out the year with the literacy coaches “volunteering” to take every teacher’s class for 30 minutes, and the only string attached is the teacher must stay in the room. This is a 30-minute read aloud and/or think aloud by the literacy coach and gives the teacher an opportunity to sit down, make a class list, watch the students, and organize papers—anything in the classroom. We have multiple goals attached to this offer. One, the literacy coaches have the opportunity to introduce themselves to each student in a nonthreatening manner. Second, this read aloud gives the literacy coaches an opportunity to model read-aloud and think-aloud protocol for the teachers. The goal is that teachers realize how easy this is and see that they can use the technique often. The coaches may have books from appropriate content area or may have several books from a favorite author. One high school literacy coach read a variety of alphabet books and showed how interesting and full of information some of the advanced alphabet books are to the older students. Time for reading aloud and short discussion is immediately set as a priority and then followed by ideas for self-selected silent reading for the students.

Time is also built into each school’s schedule. We discuss with the school leadership team when the faculty would like to provide 10 to 15 minutes of time for silent self-selected reading. Our schools have used a variety of time schedules. Several schools rotate the class period each week. For example, first period has silent reading the first week, second period has silent reading the second week, third period the third week, and so on. The teacher must provide 15 minutes of uninterrupted time, and the principal chooses a random class each week to visit. The teacher has the option of extending the time but not the option of cutting the time. It takes a while for everyone to be engaged, but now that the schools are in their third year, silent reading time is part of the institution at one high school and one middle school, and the students look forward to this time.



Second Challenge: Appropriate but Not Restrictive Choice

Offering some type of reading material choice sounds so simplistic, but we find this may be the most difficult pillar to support consistently. If choice as far as reading material is not provided, the