

What Matters for Elementary Literacy Coaching? Guiding Principles for Instructional Improvement and Student Achievement

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Although literacy coaching offers promise in terms of improving teacher practice and student achievement, guidance is often needed regarding the qualifications, activities, and roles of literacy coaches.

Amanda Davis (all names are pseudonyms), the literacy coach at Washburn Elementary, arrives at school and checks her e-mail. She responds to a message from her principal about an upcoming staff meeting, and she replies to a third-grade teacher who wants to meet with her. Amanda then reviews her daily calendar. She will be modeling a guided reading lesson in a first-grade classroom, holding a preobservation conference with a second-grade teacher, and meeting with the kindergarten teachers to discuss their students' phonemic awareness assessment scores. Amanda also plans to prepare for an upcoming book study group. Although Amanda has clear plans for her day, she often finds herself faced with unexpected situations, requests, and emergencies. For example, she may be asked to assess a newly enrolled student, or she may find herself researching information about a reading strategy to respond to an inquiry from a grade-level team. At times, Amanda feels overwhelmed and wonders how she can best spend her time so that she is able to support teachers and students in her school.

Whether a reading professional is spending all of her time coaching, dividing time between coaching and working with students, or considering adding coaching to her work as a reading specialist, the tasks

that fall to this individual can be daunting. Questions remain about literacy coaching such as, What types of knowledge and preparation does a literacy coach need to be successful in the position? How much time should the literacy coach devote to working directly with teachers as compared with completing other coaching activities? What can a literacy coach do to build collaborative relationships with teachers? Which literacy coaching activities help teachers enhance their instruction and students improve their learning? These types of questions suggest that further guidance is needed regarding the qualifications, activities, and roles of literacy coaches. In this article, we provide such guidance in the form of seven research-based principles for literacy coaching.

Background

Literacy coaching provides job-embedded, ongoing professional development for teachers (International Reading Association [IRA], 2004). This approach to professional development is rooted in cognitive coaching, peer coaching, and mentoring (Costa & Garmston, 1994; Showers, 1984; Toll, 2005, 2006). To date, the available research related to literacy coaching has focused mainly on roles, responsibilities, and relationships (e.g., Bean et al., 2007; Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003; Bean & Zigmund, 2007; Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007; Dole, 2004; Pogliinco et al., 2003; Rainville & Jones, 2008). Some research has examined the relationship between literacy coaching and teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005; Gibson, 2006; Neufeld & Roper,

2003). Yet other research has investigated the effects of literacy coaching on student achievement in reading (Bean et al., 2008; Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2008; Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2007; L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2006, 2009).

We synthesized the findings from our studies (Bean et al., 2007; Bean et al., 2008; Bean et al., 2003; Bean & Zigmund, 2007; Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2007; L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2006, 2009) and the related literature to develop seven guiding principles that literacy coaches can use to focus their work on the improvement of literacy teaching and learning in the elementary grades. In addition, a vignette is provided to illustrate each guiding principle in action. We developed the vignettes based on our several years of work with literacy coaches during professional development and research activities.

Guiding Principles for Literacy Coaching

Principle 1: Coaching Requires Specialized Knowledge

The major responsibilities of literacy coaches involve helping classroom teachers improve their instruction through job-embedded, ongoing professional development. These professional development activities may include providing large-group presentations about literacy education, facilitating small teacher-study groups and grade-level team meetings, and supporting individual teachers as they work to develop their instructional and assessment skills (IRA, 2004). All of these activities revolve around knowledge of literacy processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction; therefore, it is essential that literacy coaches bring a strong knowledge base about the various aspects of literacy education to their coaching (Frost & Bean, 2006). Coaches also need to know how to work effectively with teachers; this requires an understanding of adult learning principles which suggest that adults are most open to learning when they are involved in planning instruction, when experience is the basis for learning, when learning has immediate job-related relevance, and when learning is problem-centered (Flaherty, 2005; Knowles, 1984).

How do coaches develop this expansive knowledge base? Successful classroom teaching experiences must form the foundation of any coach’s knowledge base. In addition, their active

Reflection Questions

- How do your professional experiences as a classroom teacher, literacy coach, reading specialist, or administrator relate to the guiding principles in this article?
- Which guiding principle might you want to focus on in your school? What steps could you take to begin putting this guiding principle into action?
- Which of the guiding principles do you think would be most difficult to accomplish in your school? How might you be able to overcome the obstacles to implementing this guiding principle?

participation in ongoing professional development builds on the knowledge and skills gained during their initial certification programs. Furthermore, a graduate degree that leads to advanced certification helps them gain in-depth knowledge of literacy and provides opportunities for them to learn about how to work with teachers to improve their practice. Taken together, these experiences enable coaches to meet IRA’s (2004) criteria.

Sometimes schools must hire literacy coaches quickly to meet grant requirements or to address district mandates (Frost & Bean, 2006). In other instances, principals want to appoint one of their exemplary teachers as the literacy coach. In such cases, does it really matter if a coach has advanced preparation in reading?

What Can Be Learned From the Research? Yes, advanced preparation for coaches does matter! L’Allier and Elish-Piper (2006) conducted a study in a diverse, low-income school district that had received a Reading First grant (hereafter referred to as the Valley District Study). The study’s participants included 5 literacy coaches, 65 kindergarten through grade 3 classroom teachers, and 1,596 students. The researchers collected students’ fall and spring test scores as well as weekly literacy coaching logs that used a structured protocol. Analysis of the data indicated that the highest average student reading gains occurred in classrooms supported by a literacy

coach who held a Reading Teacher endorsement (24 credit hours of course work in reading); conversely, the lowest average student gains occurred in classrooms supported by a literacy coach who had neither an advanced degree in reading nor a Reading Teacher endorsement.

In a second study conducted by Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2007), the participants included 12 literacy coaches, 121 kindergarten through grade 3 classroom teachers, and 3,029 students (hereafter referred to as the Metropolitan District Study). The Metropolitan

District Study was also conducted in a diverse, low-income school district that had received a Reading First grant.

Teachers in both districts used a core textbook, guided reading instruction, and literacy centers/stations within the framework of an uninterrupted 90-minute reading block. As in the Valley District Study, weekly coaching logs and students' fall and spring test scores were collected.

Analysis of the data using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) suggested that significant reading achievement gains were made by students of teachers who received support from a literacy coach who had either a Reading Teacher endorsement or Reading Specialist certificate (32 credit hours of course work in reading).

While the specific requirements for a master's degree, reading endorsement, or reading certificate may vary from state to state, completion of advanced preparation in literacy education indicates that the coach has acquired a solid knowledge base through an articulated set of courses so that her understanding of literacy is both broad and deep. In summary, the results from these two studies indicate that advanced preparation does make a difference for literacy coaching effectiveness related to student reading performance.

The Guiding Principle in Action. Amanda Davis, who was introduced at the beginning of this article, is a case in point. She recently earned her master's

degree in reading, which enabled her to meet the qualifications for a Reading Teacher endorsement. She finds that she relies on her knowledge on a daily basis in her work as a literacy coach in a large urban district. Her previous experience as an elementary teacher is very helpful in her work with teachers, but she realizes that literacy coaching also requires specialized knowledge across multiple grade levels and at the student, classroom, and school levels. She developed much of that knowledge while completing her master's degree, and she continues to update her knowledge base by reading professional journals and books and by attending conferences. In addition, her graduate course work and ongoing professional development have enabled her to enhance her expertise with assessment, data analysis, Response to Intervention (RTI), and other new initiatives that are essential for her literacy coaching work. When asked about what has contributed to her success as a literacy coach, Amanda responded, "Having the Reading Teacher endorsement and using the in-depth knowledge from my graduate program are key pieces of my literacy coaching success."

Principle 2: Time Working With Teachers Is the Focus of Coaching

To provide ongoing, job-embedded professional development for teachers, coaches spend time with teachers engaged in activities such as observing, modeling, conferencing, co-teaching, and leading book study groups (Casey, 2006; Froelich & Puig, 2010; IRA, 2004). However, many coaches also spend a great deal of time on other activities such as organizing book rooms, administering assessments, and participating in district-level meetings (Bean et al., 2007; Bean & Zigmond, 2007; Knight, 2006; Roller, 2006). In fact, a study of 190 coaches working in school districts funded by Reading First grants (Deussen et al., 2007) indicated that, on average, coaches spent only 28% of their time working with teachers. Using time allocation to categorize the main focus of their coaching, four categories of coaches emerged: teacher-oriented, student-oriented, data-oriented, and managerial. Only one third were classified as teacher-oriented coaches—coaches who spent between 41% and 52% of their time interacting with teachers. In light of the varied ways that coaches spend their time, it seems important to ask, do

The results from these two studies indicate that advanced preparation does make a difference for literacy coaching effectiveness related to student reading performance.

students benefit when coaches' schedules include a high percentage of time working with teachers?

What Can Be Learned From the Research? Yes, students do benefit when coaches work with teachers! Results from the Valley District Study (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2006) indicated that the highest average student reading gains occurred in classrooms supported by a literacy coach who engaged in the most interactions with teachers; conversely, the lowest average student gains occurred in classrooms supported by a literacy coach who spent the lowest percentage of time with teachers.

In a study of literacy coaching in schools that received Reading First grants, 20 literacy coaches each participated in five in-depth retrospective interviews during which they described exactly what they had been doing during the previous 24-hour period (Bean et al., 2008). The researchers divided the schools where the literacy coaches worked into two groups based on the median amount of time coaches spent working with teachers engaged in group and individual coaching. The researchers found significant differences between the two groups of schools; that is, schools in which coaches spent more time working directly with teachers (i.e., high coaching schools) had a greater percentage of students scoring at the proficient level in first and second grade. Furthermore, in high coaching schools, a lower percentage of first- and second-grade students scored in the at-risk range on standardized assessments. The results of these studies indicate that students benefit when literacy coaches' time is spent working directly with teachers to help them improve their practice.

The Guiding Principle in Action. Let's listen in as Selena Rodriguez, a literacy coach at Lincoln Elementary School located in a suburban school district, meets with her principal, Marilyn Tobart, to discuss her goal of increasing her coaching time with teachers. Marilyn begins their discussion by saying, "I love the way you've organized the book room and compiled all of the assessment data."

Selena replies, "Yes, I'm pleased with my work in both areas, but they did take a lot of time—reducing the time I spent with teachers. Next year's schedule offers more opportunities for working with teachers; there are different designated times for the primary and intermediate literacy blocks as well as common planning times for each grade level. If someone

could catalog and organize new guided reading materials and help me input the assessment data, I could spend more time helping teachers with guided reading and assisting them in designing data-driven instruction."

After further discussion, Marilyn responds, "I can schedule time for one of our teaching assistants to input the assessment data. I also know a retired teacher who wants to volunteer in our school; the book room activities might be perfect for her." Selena leaves the meeting confident that there is a plan in place to help her meet her goal of spending at least 50% of her coaching time with teachers.

Principle 3: Collaborative Relationships Are Essential for Coaching

Although a shared focus on student achievement can provide the foundation for collaborative relationships between coaches and teachers, coaches must build on that foundation by establishing trust, maintaining confidentiality, and communicating effectively with teachers. Coaches establish trust by openly respecting teachers' professional expertise (Knight, 2009) and following through on the commitments they make to teachers. As coaches engage in activities such as making classroom observations and conferencing with teachers about those observations, they must maintain confidentiality by not discussing those activities with other teachers or the principal (Rainville & Jones, 2008). And when coaches focus their discussions on how to address the needs of students—rather than on the strengths or weaknesses of a teacher's instruction (McCombs & Marsh, 2009)—they clearly communicate their intention to be a collaborator with the teacher, not an evaluator (Casey, 2006; Toll, 2005).

What Can Be Learned From the Research? Insights about building collaborative relationships can be gained from listening to teachers who work with literacy coaches (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2009; Vanderberg & Stephens, 2009). Vanderberg and Stephens interviewed 35 teachers, each of whom had worked with a literacy coach for three years. In terms of building trust, interview data indicated that teachers felt coaches respected their abilities to select strategies based on their students' needs. Teachers also noted that their coach was "more like a facilitator of their

learning rather than a dictator” (p. 3). The coaches’ willingness to answer questions and to offer suggestions, not absolute solutions, was cited as an example of this facilitative communication style.

In another study involving 6 literacy coaches and 19 of the teachers with whom they worked, findings from structured interviews indicated that teachers consistently cited trust and confidentiality as two essential elements of effective literacy coaching (L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2009). One teacher we interviewed in that study explained, “I know my literacy coach is there to help me and not to judge me. She is professional, and she will keep my questions, no matter how silly I think they may be, private.”

Additional insights about building collaborative relationships can be gained from the research about coaches’ use of language. Perkins (1998) found that, when compared with novice coaches, experienced coaches’ conversations with teachers included more paraphrasing of teacher concerns and comments, more open-ended questions, and more respect for teachers’ opinions, indicating that experienced coaches used their language to build collaborative relationships with teachers. Rainville and Jones (2008) concluded that a coach’s language is often indicative of the relationship between the coach and the teacher. Thus, they suggest that professional development for coaches include opportunities to analyze the language used by other coaches as well as to reflect on their own use of coaching language through role-playing activities. Such activities will highlight the important role that language plays in the development of collaborative relationships.

The Guiding Principle in Action. Selena Rodriguez believes that trust is the foundation for all of her coaching work; therefore, she uses a three-pronged approach to build trusting relationships with the teachers in her school. First, she contacts teachers who are new to the building before the start of the school year to introduce herself, to explain what her role is, and to offer help in setting up their classroom libraries. Selena also works hard to establish



and maintain trusting relationships with all teachers by clarifying through her words and actions that she is not part of the evaluation process and that her primary goal is to be a person with whom teachers can think and solve problems. She often prefaces conferences with teachers by saying, “Remember, I’m here to be a sound-

ing board and a resource. What we discuss will stay here.” Finally, by actively participating in grade-level meetings and attending local conferences and workshops with groups of teachers, Selena positions herself as a colearner with the teachers in her school.

Selena also knows that the way she says something can be as important as what she says. For example, she recently met with Jasmine, a teacher who came to Selena for ideas to improve her guided reading instruction. Selena started the conversation by saying, “So, Jasmine, tell me about your guided reading groups.” By using an open-ended prompt, Selena invited Jasmine to share her ideas without creating a tense or negative situation. Jasmine replied, “I think I’ve grouped the students well, and I’m finding interesting materials that are appropriate for each group. However, I’m really concerned that I’m not providing enough instruction.” Selena responded, “Let’s talk about what you are doing now and then discuss some ideas you might want to add to ensure that your instruction supports students’ learning. Or I can come in to watch you teach a group to get a better idea of what you are doing. Which would be most helpful to you?” By using this type of response, Selena gives the teacher choices while also emphasizing the importance of working together to help Jasmine reach her goal of improving guided reading instruction.

Principle 4: Coaching That Supports Student Reading Achievement Focuses on a Set of Core Activities

Literacy coaches juggle dozens of different activities in a typical week as they work to support teachers (Walpole & Blamey, 2008). For example, Geraldine Martin, a literacy coach in an urban school, facilitates grade-level meetings, coplans lessons, coteaches in

classrooms, facilitates professional book clubs, and delivers monthly professional development workshops for teachers. With so many activities that can be done to support teachers, Geraldine wonders which coaching activities she should prioritize—especially because she wants to focus on activities that support student reading achievement.

What Can Be Learned From the Research?

Findings from the HLM analyses of the Metropolitan District Study (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2007) suggested that when literacy coaches administer and discuss student assessments with teachers, observe teachers' instruction and offer supportive feedback, conference with teachers about their instruction and students, and model instruction in classrooms, student achievement in reading increases significantly more than in comparable classrooms where these coaching activities are not provided. What is it about these literacy coaching activities that supports student achievement gains?

When a literacy coach administers assessments and shares results with a classroom teacher, she is able to explain results, offer suggestions for grouping, and help develop plans to differentiate instruction. When a literacy coach observes a teacher's instruction and offers supportive feedback, the teacher is able to enhance and fine-tune her implementation of best practices. When a literacy coach conferences with a teacher, she is able to discuss that teacher's instruction, curriculum, and students in an in-depth manner. Finally, when a literacy coach models instruction in a classroom, that teacher is able to see best practices in action with her own students, which provides a foundation to support the teacher with implementing such instruction in the future. By engaging in these activities, a literacy coach is able to provide support that is tailored to each individual teacher's students, needs, and goals (Kise, 2006).

The Guiding Principle in Action. Let's visit Geraldine Martin, the literacy coach at a large urban elementary school, to see what this principle looks like in her coaching work. Geraldine's belief that assessment should drive instruction (Bernhardt, 2008) is apparent in her recent work with Tyson Davis, a third-grade teacher. At his request, she completed a Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) for several of the struggling readers in his classroom.

Geraldine shared the results of the DRA with Tyson, and they discussed how Tyson is currently teaching these students. Tyson explained, "I do guided reading with these kids, but I'm not sure they are getting the comprehension instruction they need." Geraldine suggested, "Why don't I come in to observe these students during guided reading? I would then have a better idea about how we can work together to improve their comprehension." Tyson agreed, and Geraldine observed in his classroom the next morning. Later that day, Tyson and Geraldine met to confer about her observations, his questions, and their next steps. When Geraldine asked if he thought the think-aloud approach might help these students, Tyson responded, "I've tried it a few times, but I don't really feel confident using think-alouds." Geraldine asked, "Would you like me to model a guided reading lesson with a think-aloud for comprehension instruction tomorrow?" Tyson agreed, and Geraldine modeled the think-aloud strategy while Tyson observed. By focusing her coaching on the activities of administering and discussing assessments, observing, conferencing, and modeling, Geraldine was able to stay on target with her coaching goals—supporting teachers and promoting student reading achievement gains.

Principle 5: Coaching Must Be Both Intentional and Opportunistic

Effective coaches recognize that intentionality is critical to their successes. In each situation, the coach must have a plan for working with teachers that is deliberate but flexible. For example, a coach working with a novice teacher may decide that modeling is a good first step followed by coteaching and, finally, observing the teacher in action. That same coach may select a different route with an experienced teacher who is hesitant about coaching support. The coach might, for instance, facilitate discussions at grade-level meetings that include the sharing of instructional ideas by all members. The key is that coaches have road maps that guide their work, and they understand the need to modify and readjust, if necessary.

At the same time, effective and efficient coaches take advantage of opportunities. They are available and accessible. They chat with teachers in the hallways, stop in classrooms, and visit the teachers' lounge to say "hello" or to talk briefly with teachers. They have an open-door policy not only for

classroom teachers but also for others such as librarians, special educators, and administrators. Most of these encounters are short and spontaneous. They often lead to more intense interactions that can then become intentional.

What Can Be Learned From the Research? In an interview study of 20 coaches who worked in districts that received Reading First grants, Bean and colleagues (2008) concluded that these coaches had an in-depth understanding of why and how they were working with teachers. Several examples from the interviews illustrated this notion of intentional coaching. In one instance where the coach felt that the teacher would benefit from extended support to implement the literacy framework, the coach worked with that teacher during the entire 90-minute reading block, 3 days a week for 3 weeks. In another instance, the coach provided an experienced third-grade teacher with some supplemental resources for her struggling readers, reviewed their use, and then suggested that the two of them meet at the end of the week to discuss whether the materials were helpful. From past experience, the coach knew that this teacher would be more likely to raise questions and identify possible next steps (e.g., coplanning and modeling) if she first had the opportunity to actually use new strategies or materials with her students.

Eighteen of the 20 coaches also reported opportunistic or on-the-fly coaching. For example, teachers would stop the coaches in the hallways or catch them in the office in the morning. Sometimes, opportunistic coaching occurred when coach and teacher happened to be sitting next to each other at a school meeting. Several coaches noted that these encounters opened the door to intentional coaching.

The Guiding Principle in Action. Geraldine Martin, in building her schedule for the upcoming week, reserved three 30-minute periods in the morning where she could work with a new second-grade teacher who was experiencing difficulty with guided reading. She had planned with this teacher yesterday, and they had decided how their work would proceed during the three lessons. Geraldine also scheduled a meeting with two kindergarten teachers who, while walking into school with her that morning, had voiced their concerns about the effectiveness of their instruction for several of their students who were

English-language learners. Geraldine suggested that they meet to talk about their concerns in more depth.

After scheduling several activities for the upcoming week, Geraldine walked down the hall to coteach a phonics lesson in a first-grade classroom. On the way, Sam, the special education teacher, stopped her to talk about a new student. Specifically, he wanted to know what some of the assessment scores in the student's folder meant. Geraldine took a few minutes to answer Sam's question and indicated her willingness to review the entire folder with him at another time. She then continued down the hallway to the first-grade classroom. It is evident that Geraldine is intentional about her coaching, and also, that by being accessible and receptive, she often has on-the-fly opportunities to coach.

Principle 6: Coaches Must Be Literacy Leaders in the School

Literacy coaches are frequently involved in three practices that are considered essential for successful literacy leadership: setting goals or directions in a school, developing people, and redesigning the organization to facilitate accomplishment of goals (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Many coaches, along with teachers, are involved in setting the direction for the school in the area of literacy. Further, in their role as a developer of people, coaches support teachers' professional growth by working collaboratively with teachers to help them achieve the school's literacy goals, by facilitating study groups about literacy topics, and by working with individual teachers. Through these activities, literacy coaches promote collegiality and teacher leadership in the school.

Coaches also contribute to redesigning the organization in various ways; they can work with principals to create literacy blocks that enable teachers to effectively implement the school's literacy framework and to develop a plan for using paraprofessionals to support small-group, differentiated instruction. Moreover, these coaches often serve as the communication hub for the school—they share information about local, state, and federal literacy initiatives with teachers and administrators, and serve as a link to parents and the community. They also serve as advocates for the school, highlighting its accomplishments to the community (Bean et al., 2008; Quatroche & Wepner, 2008).

What Can Be Learned From the Research? In-depth interviews of 20 coaches in schools that received Reading First grants (Bean et al., 2008) revealed that these coaches often took leadership roles. Many chaired committees that made decisions about goals for the reading program or the selection of materials; others were involved in writing proposals for funding. Most worked collaboratively with specialized personnel and teachers to make decisions about how to provide effective instruction for all students. All had responsibilities for developing people through facilitating grade-level meetings, providing professional development, and coaching individual teachers. By working closely with the principal, the coaches also had a voice in making decisions about how to modify the organizational structure to facilitate reading instruction.

Coaches in the Bean and colleagues (2008) study were involved in developing and scheduling learning labs for students as an additional period for reading instruction and changing schedules so that teachers at a specific grade level could meet together. As summarized in Leithwood and colleagues (2004), administrators cannot do the job alone; they need the contributions of others, including literacy coaches, to help them conceptualize, implement, and evaluate their literacy programs.

The Guiding Principle in Action. As Ben Jackman, a literacy coach in a rural elementary school, reviewed the reading test scores of the fifth-grade students, he noted that many of these students were having difficulty with reading comprehension. He also observed differences between their comprehension of narrative text as compared with informational text. Given that the teachers had identified improvement in reading comprehension as one of the key goals for the school year, Ben knew they would want to address these results. Although he had talked informally with individual fifth-grade teachers about teaching comprehension, Ben felt that teachers needed to see the data across classrooms and to begin thinking as a group about reasons for the lack of improvement. This could be an important professional development experience for these teachers.

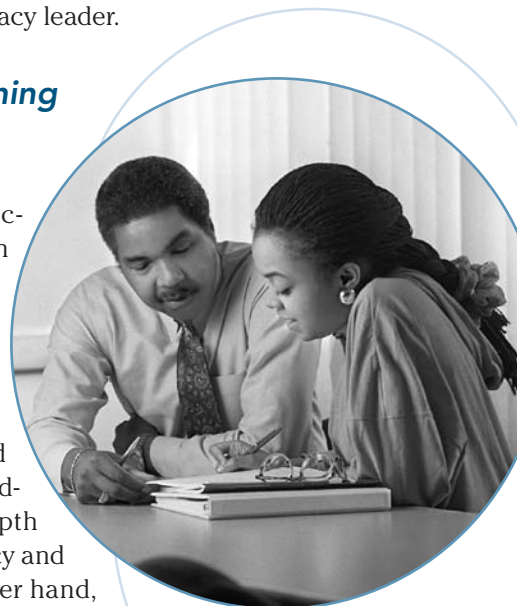
After the meeting, Ben began to think about the teachers' suggestion that more time be allocated in the reading block for meeting with small groups and for discussions that called for higher levels of thinking. Ben had promised the teachers that he would

model such a discussion for them. In addition, he would work with the principal to identify possible modifications to the current schedule that would allow time for meeting with small groups and then discuss those options with the teachers. By helping teachers focus on one of the school's reading goals and by setting into action a series of steps that would build teacher knowledge and modify the schedule to allow for small-group work, Ben certainly demonstrated his role as a literacy leader.

Principle 7: Coaching Evolves Over Time

Some coaches who accept a coaching position do so with a great deal of teaching and collaborative experience; they enjoy working with adults and have excellent leadership and interpersonal skills in addition to having in-depth knowledge about literacy and instruction. On the other hand, some new coaches begin their role with little experience in working with other adults, even though they may be experienced teachers. Moreover, there may be little structure or direction for them, given the newness of the position. These coaches, faced with an uncertain agenda and some tentativeness about their role, may have a more difficult journey as they learn on the job. But both sets of coaches continue to learn, develop positive relationships with teachers, and modify what they do as they evolve as literacy coaches.

What Can Be Learned From the Research? In a study of coaches from districts in Pennsylvania that received Reading First grants (Bean & Zigmond, 2007), the 30 coaches who completed logs in the first year of Reading First funding and then again in the third year changed significantly in how they allocated their time. There were significant decreases over those years in the percentage of time they allocated to assessing students, entering and analyzing data, and attending professional development sessions. On the other hand, there were significant increases



in time spent conferring with teachers, observing in classrooms, and coteaching. The coaches also spent significantly more time providing professional development to groups of teachers in their schools.

Although coaches spent significantly less time planning and organizing, there was a significant increase in the time allocated to administrative tasks, such as scheduling and providing materials for testing, distributing and organizing instructional resources, and copying materials needed by teachers. This increase in administrative duties seemed to be a reflection of the demands of the Reading First grant with its reporting expectations as well as the fact that school leadership often relied on coaches to handle various administrative responsibilities. Overall, however, coaches seemed to allocate more time to working directly to support teachers during the third year than in the first year on the job.

The Guiding Principle in Action. Ben Jackman was looking forward to another busy day of coaching. He had structured his day so that he could be in each third-grade teacher's classroom for 30 minutes. The teacher would be conducting a guided reading group; the reading teacher would also be in the classroom, working with a small group; and Ben's responsibility, as agreed upon by the teachers, would be to observe the teachers' guided reading groups and monitor the students working independently so that he could talk with the teachers about what they thought went well, their concerns, and possible next steps.

The plan to schedule these classroom visits and follow-up conversations with the third-grade team was made by the teachers and Ben after they had reviewed the progress monitoring data last week. In 15 minutes, they had planned and organized the activities. What a difference a year makes! Ben thought back to his initial attempts last year as a new coach. Even after looking at test data, teachers seemed hesitant about his suggestion that he visit their classrooms to get a sense of how the students were doing. It seemed as though it took several months before teachers were willing to trust that he was there to support their efforts. And even then, he reflected, it was not until he had worked closely and successfully with Molly O'Day, the lead teacher in third grade, that the other members of the team seemed to become more comfortable with him. Finally, he was easily able to schedule individual and group coaching activities

because the teachers saw them as opportunities to discuss students' needs and the instructional practices that would address those needs. Coaching was so much more effective and rewarding now, he thought.

Discussion and Conclusions

The number of literacy coaches in elementary schools is increasing, and this offers great promise in terms of improving teacher practice and student reading achievement. To fulfill this promise, literacy coaches and administrators who hire them can benefit from guidance regarding the qualifications, activities, and roles of literacy coaches. The guiding principles in this article offer research-based suggestions for literacy coaching.

First and foremost, literacy coaches must have specialized knowledge that goes beyond just knowing how to teach reading well; they must also understand how to work effectively with adults. Additionally, literacy coaches need to spend at least half of their time working directly with teachers because when literacy coaches are working directly with teachers, they are more likely to produce positive growth in teacher practice and in student learning. Furthermore, literacy coaches must develop productive working relationships with the teachers they coach. Such relationships are the foundation for all coaching work; therefore, building trust, maintaining confidentiality, and communicating effectively with teachers must be primary considerations for literacy coaches.

In addition, literacy coaches must prioritize the activities they implement so that they focus on research-based practices associated with student achievement gains. Namely, coaches are more likely to produce student reading achievement gains in the classrooms where they coach when they focus on conferencing with teachers, administering and discussing assessments with teachers, observing classroom instruction and offering supportive feedback, and modeling instruction in classrooms. Literacy coaches also need to balance intentional coaching with opportunistic coaching to make the best use of their time and to support teachers in meaningful and relevant ways. Additionally, literacy coaches must view themselves and be viewed by others in their schools as literacy leaders who set goals and directions for the literacy program, support teachers and other school personnel in providing high

quality literacy instruction for all students, and redesigning the school organization to meet literacy goals. Finally, because literacy coaching evolves over time; educators must be patient and mindful of the goals of coaching while providing time for new literacy coaches to lay the foundation for their coaching work.

As the coaching stories about Amanda, Selena, Geraldine, and Ben illustrate, literacy coaching is a complex process. We believe these seven research-based guidelines will help literacy coaches make decisions and enact practices that will have the greatest impact on classroom instruction and student reading achievement.

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