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Literacy Coaches: What Research Says and Does Not Say

Problem

One of the most important variables influencing student literacy success is the knowledge and talent of that student's reading teacher (especially in the early grades). Increasing literacy-teacher quality (knowledge and skills) is likely to significantly improve literacy achievement. However, typical models of teacher professional development are fairly ineffective for improving or even changing classroom practice.

Typical models involve workshops and inservice presentations outside the classroom (Lieberman, 1995). During a few reserved professional development days, teachers are able to take time away from teaching for their own professional development. A fraction of this time (NSDC, 2001) is used on professional development in literacy instruction. There is rarely any follow-up after the professional development training to ensure implementation of knowledge and skills in the classroom. As Sweeny (2003) put it, "As educators, we are used to taking into account the diverse needs in a classroom of children, but the needs of adult learners are quickly forgotten. Adult learning is too often reduced to pulling together hundreds of teachers to listen to an expert pontificate on a given subject."

This model commonly found in schools pales in effectiveness (Fullan, 1991; Hodges, 1996; Joyce and Showers, 1995; Newman, King, and Youngs, 2001; Smylie, 1995) when compared to more ideal models that are designed around 5 core principles -- ideal professional development for teachers is job-embedded, ongoing, data-driven, outcome and task oriented, and collaborative (synthesized from Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Joyce and Showers, 1995, 1996; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001; Lieberman, 1995). Models that satisfy these 5 principles are more likely to result in improved teacher efficacy, and by extension, improved student achievement.

Solution to the problem

There is evidence of a shift away from sporadic, irrelevant "sit-n-get, spray-n-pray" workshops towards more ongoing, job-embedded professional development. To coordinate and deliver this professional development for literacy teachers, many experts are advocating staffing full or part-time instructional "coaches" to provide job-embedded professional development to all teaching staff. Coaching (in a general sense) have been long advocated as an effective vehicle for professional development (Bennett, 1987; Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 1999; Elmore and Burney, 1999; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Guskey, 1995; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2000; Hawley and Valli, 1999; Joyce and Showers, 1995; Lyons and Pinnell, 2001; Showers, Joyce, and Bennett, 1987). There is wide-held belief that a coach can play a critical role in leading effective, high-quality professional development.

The terminology is still quite vague -- people who play this coaching role are described by a variety of different terms: technical coach, executive coach, collegial coach, content coach, challenge coach, change coach, team coach, cognitive coach, peer coach, mentor, lead teacher, field-based reform coach, etc. In the specific field of reading and literacy, three terms are most commonly used -- reading specialist, reading coach, and literacy coach. The term "literacy coach" seems to be the one most commonly used at present, so that is the term that will be used in this paper.

A literacy coach is tasked, at minimum, with providing professional development services to other teachers on a daily basis. The literacy coach can, among other things, work with teachers,

demonstrate lessons, observe lessons, provide feedback, and follow-up with teachers regularly so professional learning builds over time. Joyce and Showers (1996) identify 5 kinds of professional development experiences, all of which make a contribution to improving practice: Theory, Demonstration, Practice, Feedback, and In-Class Coaching. All of these experiences can be provided or facilitated by a literacy coach.

Literacy coaches have been around for years in middle- and high-school settings (Sturtevant, 2003). At those school levels, teachers have not historically seen themselves as literacy or reading teachers, and professionals with a background in reading were hired to help teachers learn how to integrate literacy instruction into content-area lessons.

With the recent passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, however, the population of literacy coaches in elementary schools has been growing rapidly. All schools receiving federal Reading First funds (the K-3 component of NCLB) were required to staff a full-time literacy coach. Many schools who were not receiving Reading First funds also elected to staff a literacy coach using their own funds or state-provided funds. It has been estimated by the Alliance for Excellent Education (Sturtevant, 2003) that ten-thousand literacy coaches will be needed to address the needs of the more than nine-million struggling readers in 4th grade and beyond in this country. Certainly more would be needed to cover grades K-3.

There is very wide-spread belief in the potential for literacy coaches to significantly improve literacy instruction and achievement. A short "professional paper" disseminated by the Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence (FLARE) states, "With similar results being reported all over the country, there is little doubt about the importance of school-based literacy coaches."

Problem with the solution

Unfortunately, there is very little empirical evidence that the literacy coach model is an effective model for improving literacy instruction. While according to the International Reading Association, there is a "rapid proliferation" of literacy coaches, there is not yet much compelling evidence that hiring a full-time literacy coach will significantly improve literacy instructional practice or student literacy skills (Neufeld and Roper, 2003). In fact there is some evidence that coaches do not significantly change practice or achievement in a school (Gutierrez, Crosland, and Berlin, 2001; Veenman, Denessen, Gerrits, and Kenter, 2001).

Evidence supporting the effectiveness of literacy coaches largely stems from non-rigorous investigations and informal journalistic descriptions of individual coaches. Publications describing literacy coaches are rarely found in peer-reviewed sources, but instead are found in books, magazine articles, and internet sites.

These post-hoc examinations of school improvement models and literacy coach models typically describe the working contexts and practices of one or a few successful literacy coaches. However, for every successful literacy coach documented in this body of literature, there may be dozens or hundreds of ineffective literacy coaches that are never described or even examined.

Staffing and properly supporting a full time literacy coach can easily cost well over \$100,000 per year, depending on salary, benefits, and professional resources provided to that literacy coach. The expenses, it could be argued, are actually considerably greater than that when the time spent by other teachers in literacy coach-led activities is included in the calculation. Just one day of professional development for all staff in a school can easily cost \$50,000 when all expenses are calculated.

To determine whether staffing and supporting a literacy coach is worth the expense, there are fundamental research questions that must be rigorously investigated and answered:

- To what extent does adding one literacy coach to a school improve student achievement?

- Does adding more than one literacy coach to a school improve student achievement more than just adding one? Is there a "coach-teacher ratio" that is optimal?
- Are there other advantages to having more than one literacy coach in a school? (e.g. mutual professional support, complementing talents, etc.)
- Can one literacy coach be effective when divided among more than one school campus?
- What is the trade-off between percentage of time and measurable school improvement? (i.e. Is a 0.5 FTE literacy coach half as effective as a 1.0 FTE literacy coach?)
- What are the characteristics of a literacy coach that are most often associated with success?
- What specific roles and behaviors of the literacy coach are most important for success?
- What percentage of time and energy should be dedicated to each of the critical roles and behaviors of the literacy coach?
- What kind of training or support is effective for developing effective behaviors and characteristics in a literacy coach?
- What role, if any, do school and district leaders have to play in supporting the literacy coach to maximize effectiveness?

Proposed answers to these questions have been put forward in a variety books and articles germane to the topic. For example, several experts writing on the topic have indicated that part-time coaches are less effective than full-time coaches (Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler, 2003; Neufeld and Roper, 2003). And at least one author has indicated that one coach should work with no more than twenty teachers (Sturtevant, 2003). These claims, however, seem to come largely from informal, anecdotal evidence. There is, to date, no empirical evidence that can be cited to support these claims.

The informal, anecdotal evidence is fairly substantial, with dozens of articles and several books written on the topic by various, well-respected experts in the field. This substantial body of advice about literacy coaches would be compelling if it provided convergent evidence and consistent, concrete advice. However, the literature is rife with contradictions, vague descriptions, and anecdotes of frustration on the part of literacy coaches, teachers, and school leaders.

Consider the variety of advice provided about the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the literacy coach. In Table 1, the various roles and responsibilities have been summarized in the right column, and the source of that advice has been cited in the left.

Table 1: Recommended Roles/Behaviors of Literacy Coach

<p>Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Dole (2004); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Lyons and Pinnell (2001); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Observe instruction in classroom and provide clear and articulate feedback and advice</p>
<p>Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003)</p>	<p>Provide supplementary instructional services directly to struggling readers</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Collect videos of teachers teaching and analyze -- Use videos to help teachers reflect and improve instruction</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Identify needed literacy assessments and guide administration and use of assessments</p>
<p>Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Provide training on assessment administration, and oversee the administration of assessments and organization of data</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Dole (2004); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Communicate assessment data to all stakeholders -- Help teachers and administrators to interpret and use assessment data and student work samples and plan necessary interventions</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003)</p>	<p>Keep logs of work with students and teachers</p>
<p>Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Communicate with and provide resources for parents and other community stakeholders</p>
<p>Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003)</p>	<p>Work with volunteers and tutors</p>
<p>Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003)</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with librarians, speech therapists, counselors, and psychologists</p>
<p>Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Regularly communicate with campus and district leaders to ensure the coach's efforts complement campus and district initiatives</p>

<p>Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Work collaboratively with individual teachers or small groups of teachers to develop lesson plans</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Dole (2004); Rock (2002); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Reflect with individual teachers or small groups of teachers after a lesson on the effectiveness of the lesson and ways it could be improved</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Plan and lead implementation of school reading program -- Lead in the development and adoption of a campus or district literacy curriculum</p>
<p>Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Lead in the alignment of curriculum with assessments and standards -- Facilitate curriculum alignment teams</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Identify needed instructional resources and programs -- create or acquire needed resources</p>
<p>Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Write grant proposals -- Secure and manage funds to pay for literacy-improvement initiatives</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Monitor teachers' professional growth -- Help principals identify professional development needs -- Help principals find professional development resources -- organize or broker professional development activities</p>

<p>Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Create coherence -- Maintain relevance of professional activities -- Help teachers and administrators make clear connections between classroom instruction and professional activities (meetings, workshops, study groups)</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Sturtevant (2003)</p>	<p>Act as a two-way conduit of information between teachers and administrators -- provide feedback to principal from teachers -- serve as an advocate for teachers/administrators</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003)</p>	<p>Help all staff maintain a focus on reading-improvement -- minimize distraction away from that focus</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)</p>	<p>Have informal conversations with teachers to discuss problems, set goals, and make informal plans -- regularly "check in" with teachers -- maintain an "open door" policy</p>
<p>Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)</p>	<p>Reorganize and restructure classroom environment</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Dole (2004); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Lyons and Pinnell (2001); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Identify and demonstrate instructional strategies and programs -- model lessons or facilitate the modeling of lessons</p>
<p>Bean (2004); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003)</p>	<p>Co-teach lessons</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Neufeld and Roper (2003)</p>	<p>Help content-area teachers integrate content with literacy instruction</p>
<p>Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Help develop and monitor school improvement plans and goals -- Help design systemic and structural changes to schools designed to improve literacy achievement (e.g. class schedules, team meetings, school calendar, etc.)</p>

Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Sturtevant (2003)	Create, organize, and facilitate regular meetings with a campus or district leadership team that plans and monitors literacy improvement efforts
Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Act as a "cheerleader" to motivate, energize, reassure or console discouraged stakeholders
Neufeld and Roper (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Document and clearly communicate problems with chronically resistant teachers to the principal -- Discuss progress of work candidly with principal
Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)	Work with one teacher to create a model or laboratory classroom for other teachers to observe
Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Dole (2004); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Personally practice instructional strategies and lessons with students, iron-out problems with the lessons, then share with other teachers
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Promote and coordinate peer collaboration and peer support -- facilitate sharing of effective practices across classrooms
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Neufeld and Roper (2003)	Build capacity for leadership among teachers -- Encourage shared and distributed leadership in a school
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003)	Develop conceptual understanding of pedagogy and cyclic nature of data-driven instruction
Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Kemp, K.R. (2005); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003);	Mentor teachers by sharing general knowledge and experience -- provide advice and guidance -- Mentor and support new teachers
Neufeld and Roper (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Stock and maintain a professional library for the school
Bean (2004); Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003); Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003); Sweeney (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Lead professional discussion groups, study groups, and book clubs

<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); IRA (2004); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Network and collaborate with other coaches and with other experts in the field</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003) IRA (2004); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Dedicate time and resources to the coach's own professional development (conducting literature research, attending conferences, workshops, etc.)</p>
<p>IRA (2004)</p>	<p>Seek formal feedback and guidance from teachers and administrators about ways to improve in the role as a literacy coach</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003)</p>	<p>Maintain a clear "literacy improvement" posture to ensure teachers value the role of the literacy coach - - avoid becoming "administrative" or disconnected from classroom teaching.</p>
<p>Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Provide various "services" to teachers to make their jobs easier and to build a relationship (e.g. make copies, enter data, unpack boxes, etc.)</p>

Clearly it is impossible for a literacy coach to fulfill all of these roles and responsibilities. Not only are there not enough hours in a day, some of the roles are at least somewhat contradictory. Is it more appropriate for a coach to work with one teacher to create one ideal, model classroom? Would they model lessons for other teachers by co-teaching? Or is it more appropriate for the literacy coach to model and demonstrate lessons herself? Or should the coach simply observe teachers and provide feedback and advice? Is it difficult to build trusting relationships with teachers while also candidly discussing the progress of the work with the principal?

Also, much of the terminology that is used in describing these roles and responsibilities is somewhat vague, and little effort has been made to "unpack" some of these terms. What is involved in building capacity, acting as a knowledge resource, promoting collaboration, and creating coherence?

It is no wonder that so many of the articles that make claims about the efficacy of literacy coaches in literacy improvement efforts also complain and caution that there is typically a great deal of confusion and frustration among coaches, teachers, and administrators about the roles and responsibilities of the literacy coach (Bean, Swab, and Knaub, 2003; Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler, 2003; International Reading Association, 2004; Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz, 2003). As Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003) put it, "Perhaps one of the most important factors that impinged on the coaches' ability to be effective was... the ambiguity of the coach role and the uncertainty of what the relationship should be to the teachers, the principal, and the leadership team."

Many of these roles and responsibilities depend substantially on the characteristics of the person who is filling the role of literacy coach. Some people will be more facile and comfortable with

certain roles than others and will tend to gravitate towards certain roles and responsibilities (Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler, 2003; Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz, 2003). Some people are really not even qualified to perform some of these roles and responsibilities.

Unfortunately, there is not much clear guidance and advice about the recommended characteristics of the people who fill the role of literacy coach. In Table 2, summaries of desired characteristics have been provided in the right column, and the source for those desired characteristics have been cited in the left column.

Table 2: Recommended Characteristics of Literacy Coach:

Neufeld and Roper (2003)	Coaches must understand the instructional reform they are helping teachers to implement
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)	Coaches can have served in a variety of positions previously with varying amounts of work experience
IRA (2004)	Coaches should have documented excellence teaching at the level where they are coaching -- they should have first-hand experiences to share
IRA (2004); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Talent as a professional-development provider working with adult learners, excellent presenting skills, and excellent group-facilitation skills
IRA (2004); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Experience observing instruction and providing feedback and guidance to education professionals -- experience cultivating "trusting" relationships
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003)	Coaches should have experience in the school and should be very familiar with the context of the school
Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Coaches' previous experience with the school was sometimes beneficial and other times an impediment. Described as a "double-edged" sword.
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Highly organized, and able to "wear many hats"
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Should be dedicated to working with teachers and focused on a "hands-on" approach to instructional improvement -- should avoid "looking like an administrator"

<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Dole (2004); IRA (2004); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003)</p>	<p>Coach should have credibility among staff -- teachers should trust and believe the coach is an instructional leader with a profound knowledge of literacy instruction who can help them solve instructional problems</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003)</p>	<p>Coaches should approach their work as a learner, not as an expert who has all the answers -- Coaches should make teachers feel comfortable as a colleague collaborating in group learning</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Willingness to listen -- talent for responding to teachers' needs -- not out of touch with real instructional issues -- able to individualize support based on teacher's needs</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Trusted by and clearly connected to the principal or district leaders -- frequent access to the principal or district leaders</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Neufeld and Roper (2003)</p>	<p>Able to bring key stakeholders together and facilitate a common vision for improvement</p>
<p>Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Comfortable seeking help when needed -- not shy about approaching outside experts in the field or leaders and asking for help or advice</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003)</p>	<p>Has a good understanding of the history of the school and a vision and goals for the future</p>
<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003)</p>	<p>Different coaches bring different talents, and each coach must make choices about how to use their talents to lever change</p>
<p>Dole (2004); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)</p>	<p>Able to clearly articulate instructional issues -- able to communicate clearly with others</p>
<p>Dole (2004)</p>	<p>Able to strike a balance between support and pressure -- knows when teachers are under too much stress</p>
<p>Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)</p>	<p>Able to strike a balance between being supportive and being a "crutch" that teachers over-depend on</p>

Dole (2004); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)	Appreciates and communicates a value for talents that teachers already have -- makes teachers feel appreciated -- includes them in planning and makes them feel like an equal partner -- solicits input from teachers
Dole (2004); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)	Flexibility and patience -- able to respond to immediate demands -- able to keep pace with teachers and administrators
Dole (2004); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Good personality -- sense of humor -- able to cope well with stress -- people skills -- approachable -- friendly -- tactful -- persuasive
Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Good at motivating people and keeping stakeholders from getting discouraged
Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Be a savvy consumer of literacy research
Walpole & McKenna (2004)	Good "salesman" able to sell a new reading program, and garner enthusiasm for improving instruction

These characteristics are even more vague and contradictory than the roles and responsibilities. Most sources advocated for a very knowledgeable teacher who is widely respected by the teaching staff as a very knowledgeable instructional leader. How such a well-respected knowledge resource is supposed to present herself as a learner instead of an expert who has all the answers is not well explained.

Even to the extent that contradictions and vagueness in descriptions of the desired characteristics of a literacy coach could be resolved, it is extremely unlikely that even a handful of professionals could be found (at any price) who embody all of the various characteristics desirable in a literacy coach. Where are we going to find 10,000 of them?

Several authors writing about the topic have complained about the difficulty of finding qualified professionals with the right characteristics to fill these roles (Neufeld and Roper, 2003; Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz, 2003). In most low-performing school settings, the ideal person will not be available. This will make the support for the literacy coach from the school and district that much more important.

Most of the books and articles written on this topic have failed to even mention the supportive roles that schools and districts play in ensuring the success of a literacy coach. However, a few sources clearly described the critical roles and responsibilities of school and district leaders in supporting the efforts of the literacy coach. Several authors pointedly stated that the success or failure of a literacy coach depends largely on the level of support provided to that person.

In Table 3, the support roles that school and district leaders should provide are summarized in the right column, and the source advocating those roles are cited in the left column.

Table 3: Support for the literacy coach

<p>Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); IRA (2004); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003)</p>	<p>The role of the literacy coach needs to be clearly defined and understood by both coach and administration -- role of the literacy coach needs to be communicated clearly to all teachers</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003)</p>	<p>District/campus leaders should communicate a clear expectation to all staff that the work of the literacy coach is a high priority and that all staff are expected to work with the coach</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003); Sturtevant (2003)</p>	<p>District/campus leaders should meet with the coach regularly and monitor the coach's work to ensure effectiveness and to avoid allowing the coach to get overwhelmed or frustrated</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003)</p>	<p>Ensure that the coaches hear the same message that the teachers do -- Ensure that the efforts of the coach are integrated into the goals of the school/district</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>District and school leaders should clearly communicate (in words and actions) that the literacy coach is not serving in an evaluation role and is not an administrator or director</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003)</p>	<p>Principal needs to understand the reforms the coach is trying to implement</p>
<p>Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)</p>	<p>Principal needs to play an active role in coach's activities (e.g. visit classrooms with coach, attend and co-facilitate meetings, attend training and modeling sessions, etc.)</p>
<p>Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Neufeld and Roper (2003); Walpole & McKenna (2004)</p>	<p>Principal needs to "follow up" with teachers, provide clear indications that the coach is providing a valued service, and "back up" the coach with resistant teachers</p>
<p>Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)</p>	<p>Principals should not be heavy-handed in follow-up and should avoid putting the coach in a position as a "tattle-tale" who creates problems for teachers</p>
<p>Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)</p>	<p>Principal needs to actively integrate the coach into the system -- coach should not be treated as an "outsider"</p>

<p>Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003); Sturtevant (2003)</p>	<p>School and district leaders need to restructure the school to give the coach as much time and support for teacher professional development activities as possible</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)</p>	<p>Cultivate trust for the literacy coach within the school system</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)</p>	<p>Protect the coach from being pulled in too many directions or being taxed with irrelevant responsibilities</p>
<p>Neufeld and Roper (2003); Sturtevant (2003)</p>	<p>Provide necessary time, funding, and resources for the coach's own professional development -- provide "coach mentors" to support the coach</p>

Given the number of complaints cited in various sources about ambiguity of roles, poor communication, and lack of respect and cooperation from "resistant" teachers, clearly the role of school and district leadership is pivotal. Leaders begin by clearly defining the expected roles of the coach, hiring the best qualified individual to fill that position, and then providing sustained support to help that individual grow into the position. When the principal does not play an active role in the decisions related to the roles and responsibilities of the coach and the individual who will be filling that role, the principal is less likely to be supportive and facilitate the success of the coach (Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz, 2003). And coaches who do not receive adequate support from school and district leaders are much less likely to be successful in their role (Neufeld and Roper, 2003).

Discussion:

Because of a paucity of empirical research on the topic, there is little consensus about the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches, nor is there much consensus about the characteristics that are typically attributable to successful literacy coaches. Professional organizations such as the International Reading Association (IRA) have been endeavoring to outline standards for literacy coaches, but most of those standards have been derived from expert opinion and conjecture -- not research.

It is unlikely that even a significant proportion of the rapidly growing population of literacy coaches are meeting the requirements and standards recommended by the IRA. Nor is there any evidence that they are consistently meeting any established requirements and standards. On the contrary, the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches seem to be very rapidly evolving and changing. At best, they are defined locally, and evolve through experience and negotiation. At worst, they are not defined at all.

Many coaches, when interviewed, reported feeling frustrated and overwhelmed (Bean, Swab, and Knaub, 2003). As one coach described it, "I have to keep track of everything -- student data, teacher schedules, research findings, all the ROP stuff. (The principal) needs me to do that -- there's no way it would happen without me -- but it always takes more time than I expect it to" (Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003) p. 22).

In that environment, many coaches begin to define their own roles and engage in behaviors that they are most comfortable with rather than behaviors they know to be most effective (Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler, 2003; Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz, 2003).

Unfortunately, this frequently involves spending less time with teachers focused on improving instruction, and more time engaged in administrative tasks that are more disconnected from instruction (Smylie and Denny, 1990).

This, potentially, could lead to scores of literacy coaches who have little measurable impact on teacher knowledge and skills or on student achievement. Again, for every success story publicized, there may be dozens or even hundreds of coaches that are contributing little to improved literacy achievement. Without solid empirical research, we have no idea whether literacy coaches are worth the expense, and we can use little more than common sense to make decisions about the roles, responsibilities, and characteristics of the literacy coach.

Fortunately, the research is beginning to emerge, albeit slowly. One study of literacy coach efficacy has been recently funded by the U. S. Department of Education through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). AIR and MDRC will be examining a comparison between teachers who have literacy training through a 5-day summer institute and teachers who work with a literacy coach in addition to attending the 5-day summer institute. There is no information available at this time about the roles and responsibilities or characteristics of the literacy coaches that will be used in this study, nor is there information about the roles that the schools and districts will play in supporting these coaches. Hopefully that information will be made available when the study is complete in 2008.

Notes, references and other stuff I don't know what to do with yet:

Instructional leadership is a vague term, poorly defined -- there is little advice for practices that best exhibit instructional leadership

Hallinger, P., and R. Heck (1998). Exploring the Principal's Contribution to School Effectiveness. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9, 2, 157-191.

Neufeld, B. and Roper, D. (2003) -- "Indeed, there are scant studies of this form of professional development and how it influences teachers' practice and students' learning." P.1

Coaches and other stakeholders are not clear about what coaches should be doing:

Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003) -- there is "a good deal of uncertainty in the minds of principals, teachers, and coaches about the role and responsibilities of the coach." (page 13)

Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003) -- coaches tend to focus on areas where they have the greatest comfort or perceived skill. Also, there is a weak correlation between what coaches think they should be doing and what they actually spend their time doing. Also, the role of coaches has not been clearly defined, leaving it wide open to variation in implementation.

Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003) -- coaches tend to engage in behaviors that give them the greatest job satisfaction. Coaches admitted that they "observed more where they felt more welcome, not necessarily where the need was greatest." Several coaches stated that they should be observing more, but they did not have the time.

Bean, Swab, and Knaub (2003) -- Reading specialists "expressed a great deal of frustration and confusion about these many tasks that they were asked to perform."

Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003) -- "Perhaps one of the most important factors that impinged on the coaches' ability to be effective was... the ambiguity of the coach role and the uncertainty of what the relationship should be to the teachers, the principal, and the leadership team."

Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003) -- "Despite the importance of the coach's role, there does not appear to be one "official" written job description for coaches that is shared by all America's Choice Schools. Some coaches had never seen a written job description, or had seen an abbreviated one in the form of a job advertisement posted by the state, school district, or the school itself. Several coaches felt that the lack of a clear definition of their role from the outset made their job difficult, and contributed to misunderstandings with the school administration and/or teachers."

Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003) -- this evaluation article was rife with incidents of confusion, frustration, and conflict that were usually traced to a lack of specificity about the roles and responsibilities of the literacy coach and the school administration.

International Reading Association (2004). The role and qualifications of the reading coach in the United States. Retrieved February 25, 2005, from www.reading.org.

"At present, there is little consistency in the training, backgrounds, and skills required for such positions, and there is little consistency in the general competence of coaches, in part because there are no agreed upon definitions or standards for the roles."

There are few people who are already qualified to meet these roles.

Neufeld and Roper (2003) -- "One primary difficulty is that, due to the novelty of the enterprise, there are few people with the extant knowledge and skill necessary to lead these programs."

Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003) -- "the diversity also illustrated how difficult it is to find a single person whose profile matches the combined expectations of the role." (page 12)

Sturtevant (2003) -- schools in the Alabama Reading Initiative that had literacy coaches outperformed schools in the initiative that did not have literacy coaches. Other factors were present as well (e.g. committed leadership, teacher commitment to integrate literacy instruction into content areas)

Extra information I don't know where to put:

Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003)	Literacy coaches can serve more than one school
Neufeld and Roper (2003)	Literacy coaches can not effectively serve more than one school
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003)	Literacy coaches can serve in part-time role, teaching or working in some other capacity the

	rest of the time
Neufeld and Roper (2003)	Part-time coaches have trouble dividing their time between coaching and other responsibilities (such as teaching)
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003); Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)	Literacy coaches should have some clearly identified free time to serve as a literacy coach (i.e. they should not be full time teachers or administrators)
Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler (2003)	Full-time coaches tended to spend more time on instructional support than part-time coaches
Neufeld and Roper (2003)	Coaches who work with small groups of teachers are more effective than coaches who work individually with teachers
Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)	The literacy coach should be non-threatening and non-evaluative -- focus more on providing support and being a resource
Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)	Sometimes the literacy coach is tasked with being a general "knowledge resource" -- other times the coach is responsible for leading a specific reading program (e.g. America's Choice or Success for All)
Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003)	Principals who did not have an active role in selecting the literacy coach were less likely to support the literacy coach
Neufeld and Roper (2003)	When the coach is not supported by school/district, he or she is less likely to be successful
Bean (2004)	Describes 3 levels of intensity for coaches ranging from informal, to somewhat formal, to very formal (which may create some anxiety for teachers)
Smylie and Denny, 1990	Instructional leadership positions often end up looking more like administrative roles, disconnected from instruction.

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