Effective Collaboration Between Instructional Coaches and Principals
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To help provide instructional leadership in the critical areas of literacy, math, and science, many schools have made the decision to hire full- and part-time professionals to lead instructional programs in those areas. Typically, this relatively new position in schools (Sturtevant, 2003) has been assigned the title of "coach" to emphasize the primary intended role of these professionals, namely to provide ongoing, job-embedded professional development to the classroom teachers. Under pressure for high achievement, many schools are recognizing the need for site-based, content-specific expertise to guide improvements in curriculum and instruction. In fact there has been a recent, substantial increase in the number of instructional coaches working on campuses across the country (International Reading Association, 2004; Russo, 2004).

School leaders are staffing instructional coaches in the hopes that the coaches will be able to improve instruction within the content area (e.g. reading, math, science) and improve student achievement in that area. With the promise of that outcome, school leaders are eagerly finding funds to support such a position. But do coaches actually substantially improve instruction? Do they improve student achievement? There is very little empirical evidence yet documenting the efficacy of the instructional coaching model (Cornett & Knight, 2009; Walpole & Blamey, 2008; Wren, 2005), but there is mounting (albeit tangentially related) evidence suggesting that there are problems with the coaching model as it is currently being implemented in schools across the country. Investigations have found that the role of the coach is quite complex and ill-defined (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007), and that few who are given the role of instructional coach receive adequate support or training to perform adequately (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005; Poglinco & Bach, 2004). Coaches have a tendency to settle into roles and routines that have little impact on classroom practice (Bean, 2004; Killion, 2009), and they spend less than half of their time engaged in activities designed to support professional growth in teachers (Bean, Turner, Draper, Heisey, & Zigmond, 2008; Deussen, Autio, Nelsestuen, Roccograndi, & Scott, 2006; Walpole & Blamey, 2008).

These problems might lead to the conclusion that staffing an instructional coach is a bad idea. But these are not problems with instructional coaching, rather they are caveats about effective implementation of instructional coaching. School leaders are right to strive for high-quality professional development and instructional leadership within the content areas, and they are quite correct to expect that a full-time professional is necessary to lead those efforts. There is ample evidence that the knowledge and talent of the classroom teacher is one of the most important variables influencing academic success for students (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Ferguson, & Ladd, 1996; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). There is likewise ample

evidence that teacher quality (knowledge and skills) is significantly influenced by the quality of professional development in which that teacher is engaged (Farrell and Cirrincione, 1986; Gallagher, 2002; Joyce and Showers, 1995; Lyons and Pinnell, 2001). And it is well documented that the most effective professional development is authentic and job-embedded, ongoing, data-driven, outcome and task oriented, and collaborative (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Joyce and Showers, 1995, 1996; Lieberman, 1995; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001).

It is a good idea for schools to hire and support instructional coaches to provide full-time, site-based, high-quality professional development for classroom teachers, but only when the coach is properly supported and situated into the school community. The instructional coaching model has tremendous potential, both good and bad. Instructional coaches can be the wind in the sails of a struggling school or they can be the anchor. There is growing evidence that instructional coaches can be a driving positive force in a school, but only if certain conditions are met, and much of the literature related to instructional coaching focuses on describing those conditions.

In reviewing the coaching literature, most of what has been written has focused on the roles and responsibilities of instructional coaches. Many have suggested that instructional coaches must be adept at "wearing a lot of hats" in their role as instructional leaders, and much has been written about the various "hats" that coaches must be able to wear. Wren (2005) surveyed a variety of published articles and books about literacy coaching and identified over 40 different roles that coaches might play on a campus, suggesting that there is currently little clarity or consensus about the responsibilities and endeavors of this position. As a consequence, a few experts in the field are raising concerns, pointing out that no professional can hope to be effective if their efforts are spread too thin (Walpole & Blamey, 2008). It is appropriate to expect coaches to take on a few different roles and responsibilities as instructional leaders, but those roles should be relatively few, very clear, and highly prioritized. Many are now attempting to identify and prioritize clear and specific behaviors and roles in which coaches should be engaged to be maximally effective (Bean, 2004; Killian, 2009; Killian & Harrison, 2006; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Toll, 2004; Walpole & McKenna, 2004; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). And to further help clarify roles of the position, the IRA has created standards for 3 different reading instructional leaders – specialist, coach, and coordinator/facilitator (International Reading Association, 2007). Unfortunately, as Walpole and Blamey (2008) have pointed out, "What coaches should do on the job is the matter of intense debate and very little scholarship." Hopefully as more empirical evidence about instructional coaching as a model for professional development becomes available, there will be more evidence-based consensus about the most effective roles and practices for professionals in this position.

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In addition to the roles and responsibilities, much has also been written about the personal and professional characteristics of successful coaches (Ertmer,

Richardson, Cramer, Hanson, Huang, Lee, O'Connor, Ulmer, & Um, 2005; Feger, Woleck, & Hickman, 2004; McKenzie, 2002; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). Instructional coaches are described as people who are patient, relational, supportive, organized, and eager to learn and share learning. They are also described as people who are recognized experts in their domain (e.g. reading, math, science), masters of assessment and data-management, accomplished classroom teachers, comfortable working with adult learners, and adept group facilitators. (In other words, effective coaches are people who can smile while walking on water and juggling piranha.) Even in creating the standards for literacy coaches, the International Reading Association acknowledged that there are very few people who would meet the standards they were creating (International Reading Association, 2004; 2007). And while few may be qualified for the position, of those who are qualified, even fewer are interested in leaving the classroom to take the position (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007).

That leads to another major condition for success often discussed in relation to instructional coaching—ongoing support for the coaches. If it is true that very few professionals meet the standards and expectations of the instructional coach, then it follows that the coaches themselves, once hired, will need ongoing professional development, mentoring, and support (Neufeld and Roper, 2003). The Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh has been developing and testing models and resources useful for providing ongoing professional development and support for instructional coaches (West & Staub, 2003). Efficacy studies of their model are underway, but preliminary results with a treatment-comparison group study with literacy coaches suggest that their model of staffing and supporting coaches leads to less turn-over in the literacy coach position, improved classroom practice, and significant gains on norm-referenced measures of reading comprehension (Bickel, McCarthy, Huckabee, & Wren, 2009).

Finally, there is one critical topic that is only beginning to get long-needed attention in the instructional coach literature—the placement of the instructional coach within the school and the working relationship the coach should have with the principal and other administrators within the school. Many strong opinions have been put forward about how the coach should be situated at the school, and how the coach should relate with the principal. Many have cautioned emphatically, for example, that the coach should never be placed into a position of evaluation of teachers (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders & Supovitz, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). In the name of trust-building, teachers should perceive the coach as an equal, a co-learner, and a resource. Some have even suggested that the coach and principal should have very little interaction in order to avoid the perception of collusion in evaluation.

This advice seems to be not so much grounded in empirical evidence and investigation as it is in a few unfortunate but fairly isolated experiences. Perhaps it reflects more of a philosophical position about coaching than a research-based examination of common problems and successes of coaches in the field. Regardless, the success or failure of a coach surely depends in large part upon the support the coach receives from campus and district administrators, and it is surely a topic of needed critical examination.

There is some wisdom in the warning that an instructional coach should never be an evaluator, and teachers do need to understand that the coach does not have the authority to influence their performance evaluations. Coaches should not put themselves in that position, and principals should not ask coaches to take on that burden. It is simply not the coach's job. Evaluation of classroom teachers (at least in most states) is strictly one person's millstone—the principal's.

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However, we feel strongly that the principal and the coach must work shoulder to shoulder with a shared vision for the school. Based on our experience, we would argue that communication, peer coaching (coach to principal and principal to coach), and collaboration are essential to the sustained health of the school culture.

As an instructional coach (Wren) and a school principal (Vallejo) with a track record of success in our collaboration to improve a large, linguistically diverse, urban, Title-I elementary school, we felt that many of the articles and books related to instructional coaching were either lacking in detail or were naïve in advice when it came to cultivating a healthy partnership between instructional coach and principal. In three years of collaboration at our school, we have learned a great deal about how an instructional coach and principal can work together without creating a culture of fear, divisiveness and mistrust. We have learned and wish to share valuable lessons as we have worked to create structures and systems in our school that stimulate a culture of inquiry and growth based on trust and collaboration. Summarized in this paper are 10 of the most important lessons we have learned.

Lesson 1: Develop a Vision that Shifts the Goal of the Work Well Away from "Fixing the Teachers"

Many principals seem to have a view that the role of the coach is to go forth and teach the teachers how to teach. Their apparent assumption is that the teachers are incompetent, and they want the coach to disabuse the teachers of their current poor practices and replace them with "best practices." This premise is flawed, and if this is the foundation for the role of the instructional coach, then there is little hope for sustained improvement.

Early in our relationship, we (coach and principal) began to articulate a shared vision for our school. This was not strictly a content-specific vision. While Wren is a campus literacy coach, the vision we developed for our school was more systemic in nature. We imagined a place where teachers collaborated and learned from each other, and worked together to apply new ideas and approaches. Both of us rejected the notion that a new program, curriculum, or set of materials would substantially improve the quality of education our students received. We shared a fundamental

belief that the teacher in the classroom makes all the difference, and that our students deserved to have the smartest, best-prepared teachers in the city. We did not see the teachers as flawed or their practices as inferior. Instead, we saw fleeting and accidental islands of excellence—every teacher with some remarkable talents, occasional lessons of high quality and rigor, but much inconsistency in application across the campus and little deliberate planning to ensure consistent effective instruction.

We believed that building upon and expanding the islands of excellence into consistent, universal practice in all classrooms all the time should be the focus of our improvement efforts. We had faith that our teachers were hungry for knowledge and eager to serve their students to the best of their ability, and that they would share their excellent talents and expertise with their colleagues if given the some support and encouragement. What was needed was frequent and consistent opportunities for teachers to work together in a structured way to research topics, collaborate, share knowledge, plan lessons, and reflect on their own practices.

The first step in school change, then, was to create effective communities of inquiry and learning. First, a Campus Leadership Team (CLT) was formed, consisting of one team leader from each grade, a team leader from special education and enrichment, three instructional coaches (two reading, one math), and campus administration. This CLT was created to work collaboratively to build capacity in leadership skills, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge. (We found that the greatest need and the greatest challenge was in building capacity in leadership skills. Most people are not born leaders; they must learn how to be effective, facilitative leaders.) Members of the CLT were charged with leading in research and investigation, applying and refining new practices in their own classrooms, and then facilitating the rest of their grade-level team in developing conceptual and practical understanding of those new practices. At every meeting, members of the CLT were to bring reflections about the new practices from their grade-level colleagues back to discuss with the leadership team.

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The principal created and protected time for the CLT to meet (one full day each month), and she also purchased professional resources for the team members to read prior to each meeting. The principal and coaches worked together to set goals for the team and to plan agendas for the monthly leadership team meetings. Principal and coaches were usually co-facilitators and co-learners in these meetings. In other words, sometimes a coach would take the lead on facilitation (especially when the coach had more expertise in the area), sometimes the principal would, and at various times, principal and coaches and teachers would all adopt a posture of investigative inquiry.

Following the creation of the CLT, the principal set an expectation for regular grade-level team meetings. The principal had arranged common planning times for teachers (to the extent that it was possible to do so on such a big campus). Teachers were also expected to work together after school two days per week to plan rigorous lessons and share reflections (post lesson). With the common planning time and the

expectation for two days of after-school meeting (approximately 3 hours per week) teachers had many opportunities for collaboration and shared learning. Coaches were expected to attend all collaborative team meetings to help facilitate learning and guide planning. This created many opportunities for coaches to follow-up in class lessons after planning, either to model, team-teach, or observe.

At times this was rough. Most teachers were not accustomed to collaboration in lesson planning, and they were not used to having to go through lesson plans with coaches in advance of lessons. In the beginning, there were conflicts and disagreements and strife and (alas) drama. But the vision and actions of the coaches and principal was steadfast. The coaches tried to gently but persistently guide lesson plans to more rigor and higher expectations. The principal did not relent on expectations for meaningful collaboration and deep planning. And most importantly, the CLT members lent political strength and guidance from within the grade-level teams to these new practices.

Lesson 2: The Principal and Coach Engage in Constant Collaboration

On our campus, with the difficult challenge of developing a thriving and successful learning community, the coaches and principal must maintain constant communication. We have a 1-hour structured meeting scheduled every week, but in reality, at our school, the coaches and principal are constantly talking. Every day, several times a day, the principal is in the coaches' offices and vice versa. Most of the conversations are informal, but they are focused on the immediate needs of the campus.

The principal has used the relationship she has with her coaches as an illustrative model for all professionals on campus. She frequently tells the teachers that she is unable to do her job effectively without collaboration and support from colleagues. Sometimes that means working with another principal, but that's rare. Most of the time, that means that she is collaborating with the campus instructional coaches. She uses them as "sounding boards" and reflection aids. She consults with them and asks their advice before taking action. She values their positions and honors their expertise. She learns from them, and they learn from her. And in the spirit of leading by example, she tells the teachers that she believes that all professionals—especially teachers—must have professional collaborations to do their jobs well.

The principal and coaches also frequently attend professional development sessions together. Most of the time, the principal's professional development opportunities and the coach's professional development opportunities do not overlap, but when possible, we try to engage in shared learning experiences. We have been very fortunate to be able to go to many coach-training sessions together (a luxury rarely enjoyed on many campuses), and while we are in those trainings, we were constantly adapting what we were learning to the needs of our camps. Sometimes when Vallejo is invited to tour another school (what are colloquially known as "learning

walks"), she invites a coach to go with her. This gives them an opportunity to learn together and make plans for new initiatives together. These frequent shared learning opportunities help to solidify our shared vision for the school. And actions taken based on these coach or principal professional learning opportunities are actions universally supported by coach and administration.

Lesson 3: The Principal and Coach Share Responsibility for Campus Professional Development

The primary role of the instructional coach is to plan, design, and implement professional development for the campus teachers. When there are opportunities for whole-staff professional development sessions, the coach typically creates and leads that training. When there are opportunities for small learning-group sessions, the coach designs and facilitates those sessions. And, of course, the coach also works with individual teachers to plan, implement, and reflect on lessons.

However, the coach does not take sole responsibility for these endeavors. The campus principal almost always plays a key role. At times, the principal participates as a learner alongside the teachers. At other times, the principal co-facilitates sessions with the coach. And occasionally, the principal works with the coach to plan a session that the principal will lead.

Typically, the principal is described as the primary instructional leader for the campus. However, with a coach on campus, the principal must relinquish part of that responsibility so that the coach can step up as an instructional leader. The principal, busy with other administrative and leadership burdens, may be tempted to fully abdicate the role of primary instructional leader for the campus, but we feel strongly that would not be prudent—the principal on our campus is still the primary instructional leader, but the coach brings valued expertise and perspective that the principal might not have.

On our campus, almost all professional development is created and delivered in a collaborative effort between the principal and coaches. The principal determines the needs of the teachers, and works with the coach to plan and develop professional learning opportunities for the teachers. At the beginning of each school year, before the first day of class, the principal and coach work together to create a formal professional development plan for the school year. Dates are put on the calendar, primary "themes" for the year's professional development are identified, and rough outlines for professional development activities are created. If there are materials that need to be purchased, a budget is created. If there are potential conflicts for time (for example between reading and math), they are identified and addressed.

The principal and coaches then work together throughout the year to implement that plan. Sometimes, the principal introduces a discussion topic for the

campus and describes why it is important for the school before turning it over to the coach. Sometimes, the principal is a participant. Sometimes the principal is the facilitator or co-facilitator. But all the time, the principal is directly and intimately involved in the professional development activities on campus.

Striking this balance requires mutual trust and a great deal of communication. On our campus, it is explicitly understood that the principal is the primary instructional leader, and that the coach acts to support the initiatives and directives set by the principal. The principal and coach both make that clear through words and actions. What is also clear, however, is that the principal trusts and respects the knowledge and talents of the coach, and that she depends on each coach to take a leadership role on campus. Not an administrative or evaluative role, but leadership and guidance.

The coach and principal on our campus also have an explicit understanding about the communication of information about individual teachers. The coach and principal may work very collaboratively, but some information is off-limits, and we both understand that. The work that the coach is doing with individual teachers should not in any way influence the principal's evaluation of those teachers. As Vallejo often puts it, "I don't need to be nosey – you'll tell me if there is something I really need to know." The coach may have some frustrations with individual teachers (who are we kidding, of course the coach will have frustrations with individual teachers), but the coach should not share that frustration with the principal. As a bottom-line rule, explicitly stated on our campus, the coach is only expected to convey information about individual teachers when ethics rules are being broken or when students need protection (and those situations, unfortunately, do come up). Anything short of that is confidential, and the coach is expected to honor the trust of the teachers.

Lesson 4: The Principal and Coach Find a Balance Between "Fidelity of Implementation" and "Building Capacity"

Many coaches on many campus (especially in Reading First positions) were hired primarily to ensure that teachers implemented the campus or district core program with fidelity. As part of a grant or initiative, schools often purchase or develop a core instructional program, and their primary expectation for the campus instructional coach is to make sure that all teachers understand the program, organize their time and materials effectively, and teach lessons prescribed by the program.

At times, this is taken to inappropriate extremes with campus instructional coaches monitoring instruction primarily to ensure that teachers are following the program on time, teaching the same lesson at the same time of day. Some coaches have fallen into the role of "program police" rather than "instructional leader." This really is a simple-minded view of the role of the instructional coach. As Lucy West put it, "Too often coaches are hired to be 'salespeople.' The district wants the coach to convince the teacher to 'buy into' the use of particular materials or strategies instead of

engaging with teachers to solve authentic dilemmas related to teaching and learning identified by the district and teachers" (West, 2009, p. 120).

Savvy principals understand that simply enforcing program implementation is unlikely to lead to substantial or sustained gains in student learning. When the coach's efforts with the teachers are primarily focused on superficial implementation of the core program, the result is likely to be fairly mindless and superficial instruction. All programs have limitations and shortcomings, and only smart and very well trained teachers understand how to go beyond the core program and craft rigorous and challenging instruction catered to the learning needs of individual students.

Again, the primary role for the coach should be to build capacity and deepen understanding of the instructional content for the teachers. This involves voluminous professional reading, discussion and planning with peers, observing lessons, and receiving feedback after lessons. Teachers and coaches should investigate important topics, collaboratively plan lessons, and reflect and refine practice after instruction.

This, however, does not negate the need for some fidelity of implementation. If there is a core program, the coach should help teachers to implement that program as effectively as possible, but the coach should also build capacity in the teachers to augment and extend the learning beyond the core instructional program, to differentiate instruction in ways that the program may not be able to accommodate, and to fill in gaps that may be missing from the program. We also spend a lot of time on our campus talking about increasing the rigor of instruction, and we find that most mass-produced programs lack rigor in at least some components of the program. The coaches on our campus describe the core program as a starting point (a very useful tool for a novice teacher), but we also expect teachers to push beyond the program, find more challenging and engaging materials, and develop activities that are more rigorous and set higher expectations for student learning.

We strongly support efforts to increase alignment within a campus (and even between campuses if possible). Students often move around—from class to class and from school to school—and continuity in their instruction is important. It is also unfair for students to have dramatically different learning opportunities in one class than they would have in another. When teachers collaborate to plan instruction, part of the coach's role is to ensure that the plan is implemented with some consistency and fidelity. We are certainly not advocating "cookie cutter" instruction, with all teachers behaving in exactly the same way—that's unreasonable. Instead, the coach can help teachers to infuse some of their own personality and style and creativity into lessons without drifting away from the core components of the lesson.

We also see the coach as more of a "facilitator" than a "commander." Nestled into this continuum that ranges from "ensuring fidelity and alignment" to "building

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capacity and teacher empowerment," there is another continuum ranging from promoting thought and reflection on one end to directing and mandating actions on the other. When coaches dwell too long in the role of ensuring alignment and fidelity to a core program, they tend to also coach from a more directive and commanding position. When teachers question a new practice or the use of a new resource, the commanding

coach might say something along the lines of, "This is a district expectation, and the principal will be checking all of the classrooms to be sure that you are complying." The more facilitative coach, on the other hand might guide teachers to read a relevant professional article, ask the teachers their thoughts about how this new practice is consistent with research findings, and then help them to find ways to make the practice work within their classroom and individual teaching styles so that the new practice is more likely to take root and grow.

The coach as a facilitator is, ideally, still an expert, prepared to offer advice and guidance when it is necessary. It is tempting for coaches (as experts) to simply instruct teachers in practice, but that more directive approach should be held in reserve. The first approach should be to facilitate learning, use questions to guide reflection, and lead the teacher toward changes in practice that the teacher understands and values. Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) made a similar point when they described coaches adopting a "co-learner" stance, wherein the coach and teacher investigate and learn together side-by-side. We see this as a useful approach up to a point. When it becomes clear, however, that the teacher is not making the critical insights and connections that would substantially improve instruction, we feel the coach does need to move more into a guiding role, offering advice, explicitly modeling new practices, and asking the teacher to try a new approach.

Coaches and principals should not feel they must decide between fidelity of implementation of a core program and building capacity of teachers to be flexible and responsive to student needs—this is not a mutually exclusive choice. Fidelity and consistency are important, but it is not healthy for the school if the coach spends too much energy enforcing fidelity and alignment. Teaching is an art—it is a professional craft—and teachers need to grow as individuals. In addition to encouraging alignment across classes and some adherence to the core instructional goals, the coach must also help teachers to grow as professionals, reflect on practice, investigate and evaluate different approaches to achieving curriculum goals, and to bring their own passion and enthusiasm to their instruction.

The coach and principal, in defining the role of the coach on campus, should work together to strike a healthy balance between fidelity to a core program and building the capacity, knowledge, and talent of the teacher. Building alignment between classrooms involves more than simply ensuring that the teachers are teaching the same thing at the same time. There is more to it than just ensuring that all of the teachers are including time in their reading (for example) instructional plan for a read-aloud, shared-reading, guided-reading, writing, word-work, etc. Those are just activities, and including all of those activities in a lesson plan does not ensure quality and rigor. The coach must work with the teachers to deepen their understanding of how to use activities, tools, and resources to the maximum benefit of students in each class. The coach must also help teachers to work together to examine the core instructional materials, other available materials, and assessments to develop the most rigorous and effective instruction possible.

Lesson 5: The Coach Must Have "Ownership" in the Work

We are well aware of coaches who are not comfortable with the work they are being asked to do. For lack of a better word, we describe this as a lack of "ownership" in the initiative. As described above, many coaches were hired to ensure fidelity in implementation of a program. Some of those coaches, alas, lacked faith in the program they were hired to support. If the core instructional program the coach is expected to support contradicts the coach's own pedagogical philosophy and beliefs, it is unlikely that the coach will be comfortable or effective as a champion of that program. If the coach does not have much respect for the curriculum, assessments, or resources, that lack of respect will be transferred to the teachers in the classroom.

Further, coaches are often provided with training and support and direction from administrators and consultants to help guide them in their role. Sometimes that guidance is not thoroughly understood by the coach, and sometimes that guidance is not very respected by the coach. In either case, it is unlikely that the coach is going to be comfortable in their role. They will either endeavor to try (without much success), or they will fall back into practices and actions that give them more confidence.

Just as we expect some fidelity in implementation among teachers, we expect some fidelity in implementation among coaches. After an investment in training and support and guidance it is reasonable to expect the coach to transfer that learning and guidance into practice. What point is there in providing training to coaches if it is not applied? By the same token, however, just as we do not expect mindless, "cookie-cutter" teachers following orders and reading scripts, we do not expect coaches to act as simple conduits of information and practices.

To be effective in the classroom, we contend that teachers must deeply understand the curriculum, instructional goals, and assessments of students' knowledge and skills. We see value in the teacher's struggle to develop and refine lessons aligned with the standards and curriculum goals. That struggle results in teachers who more deeply understand what they are teaching, why it is important, and how best to implement lessons with their students.

Similarly, we believe that coaches need to have some ownership in their roles. We see value in a coach adopting and internalizing an initiative, developing a very deep and sophisticated understanding of that initiative, and bringing a measure of zeal and enthusiasm to that initiative.

Occasionally, a grant director or a district administrator has been known to give very specific "marching orders" to a coach. A district initiative developed without the consultation of the coach is given to the coach to present to the campus teachers. Sometimes the presentation materials and resources are given to the coach as well.

And in these situations, just we all learned in kindergarten playing the game of "telegraph," the message passed on to teachers often bears only superficial resemblance to the initiative originally created by the district or grant administrator.

We feel strongly that the act of creation builds deep understanding, and deep understanding leads to better teaching. Coaches are responsible for professional development—they are effectively teachers of teachers. And as such, we find that it is very useful for the coaches to be involved in the creation of their curriculum and materials.

On our campus, when a district initiative is passed along to us, the principal and coach deconstruct the initiative and rebuild it as our own. The underlying goals the district has set become the underlying goals for our work, but it is undeniably our work—we create the materials, we create the vision, we create the benchmark goals and expectations for the campus teachers.

This local "ownership" of the initiative makes the implementation of the district's initiatives much more effective on our campus. The initiative fits better into the systems we have on place on our campus, and it is less likely to be seen by the teachers as "yet another thing we have to do."

None of this denies the fact that coaches frequently must do things they are not comfortable with. Bean (2004) described three levels of coach behavior ranging from lowest risk to highest risk, and she found that coaches tended to spend more time engaged in "low risk" activities. Those activities involved more trust and relationship building, but did not result in substantial changes to instruction. It is the higher-risk activities (e.g. modeling, providing feedback and guidance) that result in modifications to instructional practice, but coaches were less comfortable engaging in those activities. (Similar conclusions have been drawn by Killion, 2009).

Having "ownership" in the work does not mean that the coach controls all activities and behaviors and avoids work that is outside of her "comfort zone." The coach and the principal should work together to ensure that the coach is being challenged to work in low-risk and high-risk (Bean, 2004) situations. The roles and responsibilities of the coach are still determined by the coach and principal (with guidance and advice from district administrators and consultants when appropriate), but the coach and principal should endeavor to integrate the coach's activities and content initiatives into the systems already in place in the school, and the coach and principal should endeavor to take personal leadership and ownership of all important content initiatives.

Lesson 6: The Coach and Principal Must Work Together to Become Experts in Assessment and Data Analysis

We know of no school that has made substantial and sustained gains in student achievement without developing a good system for examining and using available data. Data management and use are at the very center of everything we do. We use data to justify actions, and we monitor data to evaluate the impact of our actions.

As the instructional leaders on campus, the coach and principal work together to examine the data in every way imaginable. We have become recognized experts in data analysis, and we work together constantly to track a variety of data and share what we know about the students with teachers. We have developed innovative ways of looking at the data, highlighting trends, areas of concern, subpopulations of students who need modified instruction, etc. We have also identified important gaps in our assessments, and have begun to modify our assessment systems to create data that is more informative for planning instruction.

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While we examine all data from every imaginable perspective, we do not share all of the data with all of our stakeholders. Drowning in data is just as bad as lacking data. The coaches and principal on our campus spend hours disaggregating data, examining student performance on each item in each test, and generally trying to understand the learning needs of every student. When we find interesting and useful information, we highlight that information and share it with the appropriate audience. Whether it is growth over time (which may be shared with a parent), or performance on learning objectives (which may be shared with a teacher), the data is customized and shared in a very user-friendly format with every appropriate stakeholder. Highlighting useful data and sharing it in a user-friendly way has been one of the important keys to our success.

None of this was easy, and this expertise did not come without a great deal of collaborative effort over the past 3 years. We developed and refined assessment and data systems that are tailored to the needs of our school. We invested substantial time into educating teachers in the interpretation and use of data. A good deal of time and effort was required to develop sophisticated systems for clearly communicating data to teachers, parents, and district personnel. We can only say that the amount of energy we have invested into these endeavors is a reflection of the extent to which we value using data to inform instruction.

Lesson 7: The Principal Must Support the Coach in Words and Actions

This is implied in much of what has been written above, but it is an important lesson worth addressing explicitly. Any sort of school change always hinges on the words and actions of the principal in the school. If the principal actively supports an initiative, it is much more likely to be successful. If a principal only pays lip-service to an initiative, then it is very likely to wither and fail. The placement of an instructional coach on a campus is like any campus-based initiative—the principal largely determines the degree of impact a coach will have (Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz, 2003). As Kral (2007) so aptly put it, "A distant relationship between the principal and the coach sends a message of low priority, which results in teachers' opting out of the intended reform."

We are familiar with anecdotes from other instructional coaches encountering problems gaining clear and consistent support from their principals. Sometimes the lack of support is subtle or accidental, and at other times it is deliberate and blatant. Typically, the principal just does not know how to support the coach (understandable given that the instructional coach is a relatively new position), but sometimes the principal is threatened by the coach, and sometimes the principal simply does not have faith in the talent and expertise the coach brings.

When problems occur, in most cases, the principal undermines the coach's efforts by accident rather than by plan. The principal might accidentally say something about the coach that leads teachers to believe that the coach is not a permanent part of the improvement efforts. Or the principal might excuse certain teachers from activities planned by the coach, giving the impression that the principal does not believe that all teachers would benefit from the coach's efforts or that the coach's support is optional. Principals need to be thoughtful and creative in how they show their support—in words and in actions—for the coach. The principal can not be too heavy-handed (mandating participation rarely works), but at the same time the principal can not say things that might accidentally marginalize the efforts of the coach.

On rare occasions, it is clear that the principal's actions undermining the coach's efforts are not at all accidental. Situations can arise that pit the principal against the coach, and the principal can convey—in words and in actions—a lack of confidence in the coach. The principal may publicly disagree about fundamental issues related to instruction and curriculum, or the principal may withdraw scheduled time on the campus calendar when the coach planned to meet with groups of teachers.

Sometimes a power struggle between the principal and district administrators can get a coach caught in the middle of an ugly situation. If, for example, district administrators hire and place a coach on a campus without an enthusiastic promise of support from the principal, then the principal may undermine the coach's efforts just to spite the district administrators.

In situations where the principal has no faith and trust in the coach and consciously withdraws support from the coach, there is absolutely no value in maintaining a coach on campus—in fact, keeping a coach in those situations is likely doing more harm than good. If the principal can not fully trust and does not fully respect the talents of the coach, then the teachers on campus quickly figure that out, and the coach becomes feckless and frustrated. The teachers do not take the coach seriously, and the more the coach struggles to assert her influence and do her job, the more confusion and aggravation is created.

On our campus, teachers have occasionally expressed frustration over working with the various coaches (remember, we have three). The coaches have asked teachers to move out of their "comfort zone" and to invest more effort into developing new practices and reflecting on the efficacy of those practices. Naturally, teachers already quite burdened with a difficult and often thankless job, have complained to the principal—tacitly checking to see if the coaches really have the full support of the principal. Vallejo has responded to these situations by reminding the teachers that the coach is helping the school to serve the students better, and that our students deserve the best education we can give them. She has personally attended many of the professional-development sessions so the teachers understand that every professional development opportunity is a valuable use of time. She has made it clear—explicitly and implicitly—that the coach's work is part of the whole learning community effort that she supports. In short, she is prepared with measured and supportive responses to teachers' complaints, so that she is less likely to accidentally undermine the efforts of the coach, and is more likely to encourage collaboration between teachers and coaches.

Another way that principals show support for the instructional coach is to provide ongoing professional development and mentoring for the coach (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Sturtevant, 2003). Remember, no coach is ideally suited for this position, and all coaches need some kind of ongoing support and guidance (Hasbrouck, & Denton, 2005; Poglinco & Bach, 2004). There is little expectation that the coach will instantly take leadership and guide the school. Instead, it is understood that the coach will grow into a position of leadership shared with the principal. That investment in the coach's professional development and in the coach-principal relationship is visible evidence to all teachers on campus that the principal believes in the potential talent of the coach, that the principal intends to support the coach for the long term, and that the principal values professional learning for everybody.

It is also worth noting that building support from the principal is not a one-way street. The coach can do a lot to garner support from the principal, and conversely the coach can also do a lot to erode the principal's trust and confidence. Some coaches we have encountered seem to believe that their principals are inept or imprudent instructional leaders. These coaches have been known to engage in passive-aggressive behavior, petty politics, and adding to an "us-versus-them" culture in their school. When the coach colludes with teachers against the principal's authority or efforts, then it is reasonable to expect the principal to respond by withdrawing support for the coach. The trust and faith in the competence in the coach begins with the coach demonstrating trust and faith in the competence of the school leaders. When

the coach does not hold the principal in high esteem, then it is unlikely that the principal will reciprocate with great respect for the coach.

At our campus, there is absolutely no place for an "us-versus-them" mentality. The district administration, the campus administration, the teachers, the parents, and the students are all working toward the same goals. We try always to remember that we want to develop a culture of collaboration, cooperation, and continuous inquiry and improvement in our school. We have a lot to learn from each other, and everybody brings something of value to the table. We reject any notion that anybody's job is easier or harder or more or less important—every educator in every position has a difficult and challenging job, and we have great respect for the work that all of our colleagues do.

> *In short, no professional should ever be put in a situation where their authority and reputation are not supported—not coach, not teacher, not principal.*

In short, no professional should ever be put in a situation where their authority and reputation are not supported—not coach, not teacher, not principal. The position of instructional coach is quite challenging, fraught with tensions and potential for misunderstandings and strife. It is rarely clearly defined, and frequently the role changes over time (see below). The coach can play an important role in a systemic, school-change effort, but only with abundant support from the campus principal and senior administration, and both the coach and the principal have a responsibility to develop that trusting, supportive relationship.

Lesson 8: The Coach Must Strike a Balance Between "Mentor" and "Director"

Walpole and Blamey (2007) described tendencies toward "coach as mentor" or "coach as director" that seem to evolve naturally for different coaches and in different situations. As they describe it, some coaches tended toward roles and behaviors that involved more personal relationship building with individual teachers. Other coaches fell more into the "big picture" examination and guidance of the content for the campus.

Walpole and Blamey did not suggest that one role or the other was more or less effective—they were only commenting on the fact that coaches they studied tended toward one or the other. They suggested, however, that both roles are possibly important at different times. That certainly has been our experience at our school.

The role of the coach, primarily, is to develop rich, ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers. To do this, we find that the coach must work closely with the principal to develop a system-wide perspective of the school goals, curriculum, assessment system, data, and resources. However, the "rubber hits the road," so to speak, in the classroom. So the coach also needs to have a close and trusting relationship with the teachers.

The balance between "coach as mentor" and "coach as director" is struck daily. Sometimes the coach tends toward one, sometimes toward the other. There are clear shifts throughout the school year, as well. From June to August, the coach is probably working more as a director, working with the principal to set a vision and make plans for the school year. From August to November, the coach is working more as a mentor, helping teachers get classroom routines going, find resources, develop instructional practices. With mid-year assessment, the coach may shift back into more of a director role, organizing data and developing communications to stakeholders (district, campus, parents, community). In response to that data, the coach would work with teachers to help make decisions about grouping, instructional strategies, interventions, etc. And as the end of the school year rolls around, the coach might shift back to reflection about the systems that worked during the year and the systems that might need modifications for the next year.

Furthermore, the role of the coach changes from year to year. In the first year of a coach's work, the emphasis may be heavily on relationship and trust building among the teachers. In the second and third years, the coach may focus more on laying foundations for understanding more sophisticated instructional practices. In subsequent years, the coach may focus more refining practices and building sustained systems for ongoing improvement in the school.

Principals, by the way, share a similar tension. They shift from "administrative" duties to instructional leadership duties constantly. They build trust and relationships with teachers, and also develop systems, analyze resources, and make "big picture" decisions. Who better to mentor the coach in striking balance in this dual role, then, than the school principal? We see this as yet another opportunity for the principal and coach to develop a professional, collegial relationship. We believe it is mutually beneficial for both coach and principal to investigate the literature on effective, facilitative leadership, and reflect on their own practices.

Lesson 9: The Coach Should be a Full, Contributing Member of the School Community

We have found great wisdom in the advice of Hasbrouck & Denton (2005) encouraging coaches to become full-fledged members of the school community participating in social functions, extra-duty responsibilities, task teams, PTA, etc. On the surface, this seems obviously valuable advice. A large part of coaching is trust-building and relationship-building, and it is hard to do that as an outsider. And anybody who has worked in schools understands that there is more to becoming an active member in the school community and building trusting relationships than having regular conversations with teachers.

Teachers, especially veteran teachers, are often somewhat skeptical of "experts" giving them advice. The first thing they want to see is that the coach is able

to model effective lessons with the teacher's students. But they also want to see that the coach cares about the students enough to go the extra mile.

When Wren (a stodgy, overly intellectual, Anglo male) began working as a coach at our elementary school (99% minority, low-income population), the teachers were much less impressed by his vita than his eagerness to sit down with students and work with them. Teachers noticed (and commented on) his steadfast and vocal belief that every student could meet and exceed high expectations for academic achievement, and his consistent belief that good instruction from caring adults in the school will make all of the difference in cultivating successful students. None of this would have gone very far if Wren was not willing to personally put his words into action. Wren taught at extended-learning-day tutoring sessions (after school and on Saturdays). He grabbed a few students for lunchtime lessons. When the teacher had a small group of students in a class, Wren would occasionally pull another small group or at least monitor the other students to ensure that they were engaged and working hard. Teachers noticed that he was committed to the students' success, and were more willing to follow his actions than his words.

Coaches are often advised to not work with students directly unless the goal is to provide a model of instruction for a teacher (perhaps to emphasize the distinction between a specialist working with children and a coach working with adults). We understand the concern, and fully agree that the instructional coach should spend the lion's share of her time working with teachers. However, it is worth remembering that teachers do not greatly respect colleagues who are not eager to work with kids.

The coach has many responsibilities, and her primary responsibility should always be to the professional growth of educators at her school. However, when there is an extra-duty burden to be borne, the coach would be wise to step up and share the burden alongside the other teachers. Morning and lunch duty, tutoring, test administration, extended day tutoring—these are onerous tasks, and the teachers (and the principal) have less respect for people on their campus who shirk these responsibilities and fail to pull their weight.

Likewise, when there are after-hours community-building activities, the coach is wise to attend and support. On our campus, we try to get parents involved with literacy night, math night, and holiday-oriented social events (e.g. Halloween Haunted House). It is a lot of work, but it is very worthwhile in this community where parents seem to be intimidated by schools and teachers. When Wren participates, it is not as a coach, but as a member of the campus community who cares about the overall success of the school and the education of the whole student. We have found that, while teachers may not always eagerly embrace the advice and guidance of the coach, they do always respect a fellow educator who has passion and commitment to their students.

Lesson 10: Coaching, Done Right, Really Is a Full-Time Endeavor

If there is one final important lesson that we have learned the hard way, it is that coaching on a campus of substantial size (more than 600 students) is more than a full-time job. Some have claimed (e.g. Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders & Supovitz, 2003; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007) that coaches can be either full- or part-time. We find this claim difficult to fathom. Perhaps with a very small campus, or a very limited focus (e.g. two grade levels), it may be feasible for a literacy coach to be effective part-time, but even then we are skeptical.

The first year Wren served as a literacy coach, he split his time between two large campuses. The problems with this arrangement became immediately obvious. It was extremely challenging to schedule meaningful time with teachers. A pre-lesson conference might take place on a Tuesday, the lesson would have to be scheduled for the next time Wren was on campus (say a Thursday), and the post-lesson reflection might need to wait until the following week. Frequently (too frequently) Wren missed important opportunities to make progress at both schools simply because he was on the wrong campus when the opportunity arose.

We agree with Rita Bean (2009) that a large part of coaching is "deliberate steps" and a large part is "opportunistic leverage." The deliberate coaching involves such things as setting up formal meetings, arranging and facilitating learning groups, planning and enacting lessons (either as demonstrations, co-teaching, or observations with feedback), and generally mentoring teachers. The opportunistic coaching, however, is also very important, and often leads to more formal plans. Opportunistic leverage can be gained through conversations with teachers in the copy room or over lunch, a teacher dropping by with a question, informal and unscheduled classroom visits, a phone call asking the coach to quickly come to a classroom to give praise to a student's accomplishment. (When teachers are proud of their students, they want to show them off, and the first person they call is often the coach.) The more of these opportunities that coaches miss, the slower the work will proceed.

It is also worth noting that coaches really need to work very long hours. On our campus, the contract day ends at 3:30 in the afternoon. Very few teachers actually leave campus at that time, but the coaches' cars are typically among the very last in the parking lot at the end of the day. Coaches on our campus arrange meetings until 4:00 most days. A coach might see one group of teachers on Monday, a different group on Tuesday, and another group on Wednesday. While each teacher only stays late to meet with the coach one or two days during the week, the coach, meeting with different groups or individuals, needs to be available after hours every day. The coach likely will also stay after those meetings to organize materials and lessons for the next day. And before the day finally ends, the coach and principal typically meet informally just to touch base, share a little reflection, and make informal plans for the next day.

Ours is a large campus—we serve around 800 students—but most of the time commitments and the need to be flexible and available have little to do with the size of the campus. Perhaps a coach can work effectively part time on a very small campus, but we think it unlikely. The coach needs to be able to arrange her schedule around the teachers' schedules. The coach needs to be able to meet with different groups at different times, take advantage of opportunities when they arise, and leverage openings when they occur.

There may be some highly effective coaches who work part time. There might even be some highly effective coaches who work on more than one campus. But we have to wonder how much more effective those coaches would be if they dedicated themselves full-time to one campus. Some coaches are expected to work across all grade levels at a school, and we have grave doubts that they can be particularly effective working with that many teachers. And some coaches are expected to coach in multiple content areas (a reading and math coach, for example), and again, we think it unlikely that a coach can bring high levels of credibility and expertise to such a position.

Rather than spreading a coach thin or cutting back hours, we believe that school and district leaders should acknowledge the flexible and opportunistic nature of this work, and invest in full-time coaches—preferably one coach per 15 teachers (for an experienced coach, we find that to be a manageable number). We would also argue against paying coaches on a limited calendar or using the teacher pay schedule. Coaches are not administrators, but they do work very long hours, and much of their work is done when teachers are not on campus. District and school administrators would be wise to extend the contract for coaches to work later in the day, and more days out of the year.

That said, we would also recommend that the coach and principal confer frequently to examine the activities of the coach, prioritize duties and goals, and eliminate efforts that do not lead to improved instruction and student success. There is abundant evidence that many coaches are tasked with a wide variety of responsibilities that do little to influence teachers' professional growth or influence classroom instruction (Walpole & Blamey, 2008; Deussen, Autio, Nelsestuen, Roccograndi, & Scott, 2006; Deussen, Coskie, Robinson & Autio, 2007; Bean, Turner, Draper, Heisey & Zigmond, 2008). The principal and coach must work together to examine the coach's schedule and responsibilities, and maximize time and energy dedicated to building the capacity of the classroom teachers.

Implementing the Work

An instructional coach, with the right temperament, the right skills, and with adequate support from campus and district leaders has the potential to substantially

influence instruction and learning on a campus. There are many caveats to consider, but in balance, an effective coach can fundamentally improve teachers' practices in ways that more traditional forms of professional development can not.

However, beyond the variables intrinsic to the coach, we believe that the context in which the coach is placed and the relationship that the coach develops with the principal and other school leaders have tremendous influence over the impact the coach will have on instruction and student success. In our case, as coach and principal, we worked together to build a learning community context in our school. With our focus on developing a high-functioning learning community, the context for coaching naturally evolved.

The addition of a coach to a school should not be a disconnected initiative tossed on a pile of initiatives. (In our collaboration with the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, we were introduced to a pithy expression that served as a valuable reminder throughout our work: "We do not want to become a bunch of piling morons.") Adding new initiatives and new expectations into an already overwhelmed campus culture serves only to frustrate and annoy teachers.

> *"We do not want to become a bunch of piling morons."*

The coach must be situated in the school, and a culture within the school must be developed to create fertile ground for sustained improvement (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). At our school, with the focus of our collective work on the development of a learning community and a culture of continuous inquiry and improvement, the coaches fit in as a natural part of that community and culture. They are not additional burdens and distractions for the teachers, but instead are aids to help with learning community efforts focused on planning, implementation, and reflection about practice.

Also, it is very easy for coaches to fall into the role of "Jack of all trades" (and ultimately become master of none). The studies showing that about 30% of a coach's time are spent doing administrative tasks (Bean, Turner, Draper, Heisey, & Zigmond, 2008) and less than 30% of their time coaching teachers (Deussen, Autio, Nelsestuen, Roccograndi, & Scott, 2006) are worrisome to say the least. Responding to this, many experts have forwarded advice about the ideal roles and responsibilities coaches should take on and suggestions for how coaches should allocate their time (e.g. Bean, 2004; Killion, 2009; Killion & Harrison, 2006; Toll, 2007).

While all of this advice is valuable and informative, we believe that the coach's roles and responsibilities should primarily be determined by the experience and talents of the coach, the needs of the school, and the existing context of the work. Through constant collaboration, the coach and principal can prioritize and adjust the coach's roles and responsibilities. Those roles and responsibilities will change over the course of the year, and over the development of the school culture. A coach who has been involved with a school for 3 months will engage in fairly different activities than a coach who has been involved in a school for 3 years. A school that is operating effectively as a learning community provides a very different context for coaching than a school that is not. The needs and receptiveness of the teachers in the first month of school are fairly different than the needs and openness of the teachers in the month leading up to the high-stakes accountability assessments.

Through constant collaboration, the principal and coach can find ways to keep the coach from being pulled in too many different directions, spread too thin, or distracted from irrelevant responsibilities (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz; 2003).

We have found that there are reasonable and measurable goals that principal and coach can work toward, and benchmarks that can be examined to gage the effectiveness of the coach's efforts. Those goals and benchmarks by necessity will change from year to year, and the principal and coach can work together to identify those goals and plan the coach's activities accordingly.

Each year, the coach and principal should assess the needs of their school, and identify some goals and benchmarks that they will work toward. As an example, each year coach and principal might develop some ideas that look like this:

Year 1 — Global Goal: Develop a trusting learning community
- Teachers are meeting frequently to discuss and plan instruction
- Teachers are reading and discussing professional literature
- Teachers are observing the coach model lessons and reflecting with the coach about what they observed
- Teachers are developing trust and confidence in the coach
- Teachers are trying a few new strategies and approaches in their classroom

Year 2 — Global Goal: Develop a culture that supports risk-taking

- Teachers are more comfortable observing and being observed by the coach and possibly by peers
- Teachers are regularly engaged in planning-instruction-reflection cycles with the coach
- Teachers are beginning to use data to inform instruction
- Teachers are reading professional literature and applying ideas in their classroom
- Teachers are beginning to add components to lessons to make them more rigorous and challenging

Year 3 — Global Goal: Refining practice

- During meetings, teachers and coach look at student work and common assessment results to reflect on lessons
- Teachers work with the coach to find creative ways to enhance the rigor of most lessons
- Teachers communicate very clear expectations for all student work and consistently hold students accountable for meeting those expectations
- Teachers plan around larger units of instruction and focus on larger themes and ideas

- Teachers search actively for instructional materials of the highest quality to supplement the core materials and enhance the richness of lessons
- Student performance is directly related to new practices and professional growth of the teachers

Year 4 and Beyond — Global Goal: Becoming experts and leaders

- Teachers begin to focus on the needs of the whole school and begin to take personal responsibility for students in other classes
- Teachers create assignments that are rigorous but still differentiated to the needs of individual students
- Teachers work collaboratively to develop new ideas for instruction and use feedback to refine and improve instruction
- New teachers are mentored into a culture of continuous inquiry and improvement by coaches and more veteran teachers
- Gains in student achievement are substantial, and teachers are setting higher expectations for student performance

In setting goals and deciding on benchmarks of success, the coach and principal should understand that in the first year of a coaching initiative, they are unlikely to see significant gains in student achievement. In the first year, they are laying the foundations for future work, but building a collaborative culture is unlikely, by itself, to substantially effect student learning immediately. The second year, there may be some pockets of improvement, but the campus as a whole is unlikely to improve significantly. It may be three or four years before instructional practice improves to the point where evidence of the work can be seen in student achievement data.

This is not an indictment of instructional coaching as a model of professional development, but rather it is a recognition that meaningful and sustained school improvement takes time (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). Rather than trying to score a quick victory through short-term gains in student achievement scores—a victory that will likely be reversed in the next school year—savvy principals look for the fundamental improvements that will result in sustained growth over time. Having an instructional coach as a collaborative partner can be very useful to a principal with a 5-year plan for systemic school improvement, and the more that principal is willing to invest in supporting that coach in the first few years, the more likely that investment will pay off over time.

Certainly not everybody should be an instructional coach—finding qualified people to fill that position is itself a daunting challenge. And certainly not every school will benefit from having a coach—some schools do not have a culture conducive to coaching, and some school leaders will not collaborate well with an instructional coach. Also, just about every coach will need ongoing training and support to help them to grow into their position. However, when principals and coaches work well together, we can attest to significant and beneficial changes in a school's culture, instructional practices, and student learning.

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