

# Complexity in coaching: A self-study of roles and relationships

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## Abstract

Teacher development, whether in pre-service teacher education or in in-service coaching, is a complex and context-dependent enterprise. As schools recognise the need to provide embedded and extended professional learning opportunities for novice and veteran teachers, the role of coaches has expanded. This study explores how coaching differs depending on the role of the feedback-giver, as well as what holds consistent across roles. The context is a large urban middle school in which the same coach supported teacher development in the area of English as a second language instruction through varied roles. Following Meyer-Mork (2010), we employed self-study as a methodology uniquely suited to offer insights into the interactions that took place in coaching conversations carried out by Marcus (Author 1). Laura (Author 2), supported Marcus by serving as a critical friend and offering commentary on the self-study in an effort to examine Marcus's coaching from different perspectives. We were able to reflect on the various ways these roles are designed to support novice teachers. Our findings indicate that the role of the coach subtly shifts based on the relationship with the teacher being coached, and more understanding is needed within the coaching literature to better parse the overlaps and differences based on role relationships.

**Key words:** education, teaching, supervision, mentoring, peer coaching

## Introduction

Teacher development, whether in pre-service teacher education or in in-service coaching, is a complex and context-dependent enterprise. As schools recognize the need to provide embedded and extended professional learning opportunities for novice and veteran teachers, the role of coaches has expanded. However, the challenges of becoming a coach are not well understood, especially across differing dyads such as cooperating teacher/student teacher, university supervisor/student teacher, and instructional coach/novice teacher. In addition, the literature on coaching is generally authored by those who research or facilitate coaching, rather than by the coaches themselves.

In this paper we explore some of the ways coaching differs depending on the coach's role vis-à-vis the teacher, from the viewpoint of a novice coach based in an urban middle school. Marcus (Author 1) carried out a self-study of his role as coach, negotiating his experience and reflecting upon it with Laura (Author 2), a facilitator of supervisor development at the college that places pre-service student

teachers at his school site. We were particularly interested in exploring how one semester engaged him in three separate but overlapping roles: (1) as a cooperating teacher (classroom teacher hosting a pre-service student teacher), (2) as a university supervisor (observing pre-service student teachers in other classrooms in his school building), and (3) as an instructional coach (supporting new and experienced colleagues in his school). In Marcus's school, this coaching role was titled *peer instructional coach*. As he juggled these three roles, he maintained coaching journals for each of the teachers he observed, recorded his conversations with them, and met regularly with Laura, who acted as a "critical friend" in supporting him to voice the challenges of his work. Hatton and Smith (1995) suggest that the critical friendship process is a method to engage with another in a way "which encourages talking with, questioning and even confronting the trusted other, in order to plan for teaching, implementation and its evaluation." Marcus and Laura developed this critical friendship over the course of the semester and during the duration of this research project. Laura's purpose as a critical friend was to provide advice and facilitate reflection in an effort to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and coaching. In this paper, we seek to better understand how coaching may differ depending on the role of the coach, as well as what might hold consistent across roles. Our purpose was to provide awareness of how roles need to be better understood in order to better support instructional coaches, cooperating teachers, and university field supervisors.

### ***The Nature of Overlapping Coaching Roles***

The very fact that terms such as "cooperating teacher," "coach" and "supervisor" have so often been used interchangeably suggests that the roles involve overlapping skills and engage teachers and their observers in similar tasks. Wisker, *et al* (2013) describe the overlapping nature of these roles, noting that "each of these roles has the underlying intention of supporting, facilitating, enabling, and empowering students to develop their autonomous, owned work and [to] develop as learners." (p. 8) In the field of English as a second language instruction, in which Marcus was a peer instructional coach, the research on language teacher coaching indicates that development can occur in different professional contexts where support is provided to pre-service student teachers (e.g., Maynard, 2000; Tomaš, Farrelly, & Hasam, 2008) and to novice teachers (e.g., Bowman, Boyle, Greenstone, Herndon, & Valente, 2000). In pre-service student teaching contexts, student teachers engage in relationships with various teaching professionals. Once placed in a school for student teaching, these teachers receive feedback about their practice from the university supervisor, who evaluates their performance in the classroom. Coaching in this context is also offered by cooperating teachers who have the responsibility of supporting the pre-service student teacher in understanding the complexities of theories and their practical application to teaching in actual language classrooms. Cooperating teachers and university supervisors mentor pre-service student teachers during the practicum stage of their teacher education training. This compulsory practicum experience is recognized as one of the important components in a novice teacher's training (Crookes, 2003; Farrell, 2001, 2008). With regard to novice teacher contexts, newly hired teachers interact with school supervisors, the principal, or the department head who assess their practice, while coaches or fellow teachers provide emotional and professional support to help them reflect on and learn from their teaching experience.

### ***Local Relevancy of Coaching Practice***

When educators take on the role of coach—either as a cooperating teacher, university supervisor, or peer instructional coach—there may be neither training nor research-based practices available to follow. Much of the writing about coaching employs the terms in locally-relevant ways that make it difficult for readers to understand the exact role of the educator in the coaching position—whether indeed, for example, a so-called "coach" is actually a colleague employed in the same school, a host to a pre-

service student teacher, or a visiting university supervisor or evaluator from a university (Ambrosetti 2011; Deckkers, 2010). In addition, generic coaching protocols may fall short or fail to recognize the unique way particular and contextual role relationships will play out and the impact of one's content-area expertise on what is targeted and observed in a coaching cycle. In addition, the content-area focus of the coaching will also influence the kinds of observations and evidence the coach will look for and the types of instructional practices the coach will seek to advance among teachers.

### *Co-operating Teachers*

Literature on the type of coaching that takes place between cooperating teachers (defined as host teachers taking in a pre-service student teacher for a set period of weeks while that teacher is part of a university training program) and their pre-service student teachers indicates that cooperating teachers tend to focus on pre-service student teachers' accountability for pupil learning. To this end, cooperating teachers might refer to standards documents and question teachers about the fit of their lesson to standards and problem-solve with them about students—but by and large they offer suggestions (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2010). Hobson, Ashton, Malderez, and Tomlinson (2009) found that cooperating teachers often focus on technical and management issues in their interactions with novices, and “devote little or insufficient attention to pedagogical issues, to the promotion of reflective practice, or to issues of social reform...[and] some have a limited understanding of concepts such as critical reflection and/or continue to hold dualist notions of theory and practice” (p. 211). Rajuan, Beijaard, and Verloop (2007) also found that cooperating teachers held primarily technical and practical expectations for coaching that emphasized artistry, knowledge, behavioral skills, and classroom techniques. Cooperating teachers in the context of these expectations saw themselves as models to follow rather than as coaches in support of another's development. The positioning of the cooperating teacher vis-à-vis the pre-service student teacher influences the way they structure and approach their coaching (Helman, 2006).

### *University Supervisors*

In university-based supervision, (supervisor defined as an experienced teacher assigned by a university preparation program to observe and conference with a pre-service student teacher at set intervals), a persistent tension is that supervisors must simultaneously adopt two stances: they serve as evaluators *of* performance as well as coaches *for* that performance (Fayne, 2007). This classic “assess vs. assist” paradox (Slick, 1997) inevitably leads to dilemmas for those enacting the role of university supervisor. Because supervisors want to minimize teachers' defensiveness, they often compensate by providing lots of praise in combination with extensive suggestions for improvement (Farr, 2010). In fact, Malderez, Hobson, Tracey, and Kerr (2007) found that most pre-service student teachers credited their supervisors for boosting their confidence, providing support for classroom management, and offering guidance regarding time and workload management. They also considered it important to have university supervisors observe their lessons and provide feedback.

At the same time, for several reasons it is possible that the evaluative role of the university supervisor can offer the opportunity for more challenging conversations than cooperating teachers may have provided (Fayne, 2007). First, since the supervisor does not have to maintain a collegial working relationship with the pre-service student teacher, there is less of a need to avoid probing questions that may upend hidden norms and practices of egalitarianism among teachers. Second, the supervisor, as university faculty, may be able to provide more theory-practice connections, fostering deeper levels of reflection. Third, precisely because of the power differential between the two, the university supervisor

can manage the conversation and direct the pre-service student teacher's attention to features of the lesson that may be important to investigate.

### *Peer Instructional Coaches*

The function of peer instructional coaches (defined as teacher of pupils assigned special duty to support novice teachers in their school) has also been frequently addressed in the research literature on teacher development. Malderez and Bódoczky (1999) point out that school-based coaches need to go beyond simply being models of accomplished teaching, and must assume additional professional roles such as that of (1) acculturator of their new peers to the policies and practices of the school community, (2) supporter of emotional and cognitive processes in the development of their peers' professional identity, and (3) sponsors of their novice peers for full acceptance by the school community. Orland-Barak (2001) presents the coach's job as acknowledging the new teacher's perspective while also reflecting on and modifying their conceptualizations of teaching; thus, the coaching experience involves reciprocal learning. This view contradicts the framing of peer coaching relationships as a transmission model in which the sharing of expertise is unequal and unidirectional. The current model emphasizes that strong peer coaching relationships are characterized by parity and bi-directionality (e.g. Bleach, 2013).

The differences between mentoring and coaching have also been delineated and discussed in the literature. According to D'Abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum (2003), mentoring has a general goal of promoting long-term professional development, whereas coaching is more strongly associated with a specific goal situated in a teaching context to improve performance in a task or skill in a short-term framework. Mentoring also involves behaviors such as introducing the beginning teacher to the faculty, modeling instruction, counseling about difficult professional situations, providing professional and emotional support, and advocating for the novice when necessary. In contrast, coaching is more concerned with goal setting, providing practice, and giving feedback for specific instructional situations (Asención Delaney, 2012).

According to Joyce and Showers (2002), all types of effective professional development includes ongoing modeling, practice, feedback, and reflection over time. The core of professional development is the trusting relationship between teacher and coach. When this relationship is fostered, coaches come to know, understand, and appreciate the teachers' level of experience, expertise, and interests. Because of this knowledge, the coach can more effectively support them in their professional growth, and the relationship can become more collaborative and more reflective (Anderson & Olsen, 2006). However, in all of these dyads, the nature of the teacher-coach relationship is delicate.

Trust, which is nurtured over time, forms the foundation for learning. Through trust, the teacher takes risks, the coach admits "I don't know," and together they discover what needs to happen next in order for students to grow as learners. Eventually, coaches leave the classroom, and teachers navigate these inquiries on their own (Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Shoniker, 2011, p. 500).

Table 1 presents an overview of these common underlying goals and limitations of fostering teacher learning from the point of view of each coaching role: cooperating teacher, peer instructional coach, and university supervisor.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Peer Instructional Coach</b>	<b>University Supervisor</b>	<b>Cooperating Teacher</b>
<b>Unique feature of each role</b>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Works with novice and highly experienced teachers</li> <li>-Gives feedback on instruction, management</li> <li>-Feels loyalty to school administration</li> <li>-Sees peers at regular intervals</li> <li>-Can see student work at regular intervals</li> <li>-Is adept at networking, acting a liaison between departments and establishing relationships</li> <li>-Works in cycles for progress</li> <li>-Is familiar with resources and staff who are able to act as auxiliary support</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Lacks time and efforts are constrained due to working with multiple teachers and handling own instructional responsibilities</li> <li>-Finds it difficult to maintain impartiality when acting as a conduit between administration and teachers</li> <li>-Wrestles with achieving balance between school-wide and classroom instructional goals</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Works with novice and in-service teachers</li> <li>-Gives feedback to plan and instruction</li> <li>-Feels loyalty to university goals and the field</li> <li>-Sees candidate progress in snapshots overtime</li> <li>-Sees snapshots of student work</li> <li>-Is able to use evaluative role to spur progress</li> <li>-Is able to focus on succinct goals and direct progress toward specific areas</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Observes student teacher only three to four times per semester</li> <li>-Lacks full understanding of school and classroom teaching context</li> <li>- Experiences tension in duality of roles as supporter and evaluator</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Works with novice and in-service teachers</li> <li>-Can provide a strong model of teaching for a novice</li> <li>-Directs and shares planning</li> <li>-Shares common students</li> <li>-Feels loyalty to students</li> <li>-Sees student progress daily and overtime</li> <li>-Can see student work daily</li> <li>-Allows student teacher to see a well-rounded and more coherent picture of teaching</li> <li>-Is fully integrated into school community</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Finds familiarity can lead to comfort and passivity and avoidance of conflict</li> <li>-Lacks training for the coaching role</li> <li>-Must serve as intermediary between school and university</li> <li>-May not have input on evaluation of the student teacher</li> </ul>
<b>Common features across roles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Seeks teacher growth through one-to-one engagement</li> <li>-Gives targeted feedback on instruction</li> <li>-Works with novice teachers</li> <li>-Provides opportunities for teacher reflection on their practice</li> <li>-Can personally gain from the coaching process</li> <li>- Exhibits empathy and employs observation skill in non-judgmental fashion</li> <li>-Matches developmental support to individuals skills and needs (professional, emotional, psychological)</li> </ul>		

**Table 1. Overlapping and Unique Role Relationships as Coach**

## **Methodology**

Marcus teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) at a large public middle school on the border of Sunset Park and Chinatown in Brooklyn, New York. The school has 1,492 students, 40% of whom are English language learners (ELLs). Of these ELLs, 102 students speak English as their dominant language at home; 45% of the population is Hispanic, and 43% are Asian. The majority of the Latino students are from the Puebla region and the Federal District of Mexico and most of the Asian students are from the Fujian region of China. These demographics are reflective of the local community in Sunset Park and Chinatown, who are mostly new immigrants; 87.8% of students at the school are classified as Title 1 and live at or near the poverty line (School Comprehensive Education Plan, 2015).

### ***Participants***

Marcus and Laura, as well as the three teachers working with Marcus, constitute the participants in this study. Laura has served as a faculty member in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at a university located in the same urban school district where Marcus teaches, and has been a university supervisor and program course instructor for 10 years. She frequently visits Marcus's middle school to observe pre-service student teachers. Marcus has taught ESL there for 7 years and has received National Board Certification. He received his MA in TESOL working with Laura and continued on as a cooperating teacher, then as a seminar instructor and university supervisor. This was his first semester in the role of a peer instructional coach. He had participated in several training sessions provided by the school district for this role as part of a citywide initiative that sought to build schools' capacities in three domains: coaching, increased collaboration, and enhanced professional development opportunities for staff. Developing competency in coaching is at the core of the peer instructional coach position. For the peer instructional coach role, Marcus meets regularly with district support personnel who monitors his growth as a coach and fosters reflection on his coaching goals and strategies.

### ***Participating Student Teacher in Marcus's Classroom***

Karl (all names of participant teachers have been changed) is studying for his teaching certification and masters degree in TESOL. He is in his mid-forties and has had multiple careers before seeking TESOL teaching certification. He has a strong grasp of educational theory, second language acquisition, curriculum design, and how it is applied to practice. He is in his last semester of graduate school and is now able to synthesize course work, realizing the multiple connections to classroom practice. Marcus worked closely with Karl as his Cooperating Teacher.

### ***Participating Student Teacher in Marcus's School***

Nancy is in her last semester of course-work for certification and a TESOL masters degree. She is in her mid-forties and has extensive experience in multiple contexts from her role as a substitute teacher in New York City. While she has taught in many contexts as a substitute, heretofore Nancy had not worked with the same group of students for an extended duration of time. Nancy enjoys working in middle school and describes her teaching strengths as her classroom management ability and creativity. Marcus was assigned by the Masters program at the university to Nancy as her university supervisor.

### ***Participating Novice Teacher in Marcus's School***

Hannah is a first year, special education teacher who is seeking her teaching certificate in Special Education. She is in her mid-twenties, recently moved to the area and is studying for her Masters degree in Special Education. Hannah has very little prior teaching experience, having taught only for a few months of English as Foreign Language (EFL) to adults. This is her first year of teaching full-time in the K-12 context. Marcus was assigned by the school to serve as Hannah's peer instructional coach.



### ***Data Sources and Analysis***

Laura and Marcus scheduled a weekly conversation over the course of one semester (15 weeks) to discuss Marcus's coaching activities in order to monitor and support his self-reflection. Like Meyer-Mork (2010), we employed self-study as a methodology uniquely suited to offer insights into the very private interactions that take place in coaching and mentoring conversations. We also collaborated on-site monthly at Marcus's middle school and biweekly via a shared Google Doc whereas Marcus would record his analytic field notes and reflections from pre and post observations in a digital journal. In each session and entry Marcus described his primary coaching goal, current dilemma or challenge and the relevant next action steps he planned to take. Throughout the paper journal entries are labelled and examples are provided with reference to the data source.

Our "common purpose" (Lassonde, Galman, & Kosnik, 2009, p. 10) in this study was to ascertain differences, if any, in the work of coaching as experienced by Marcus across the three teachers he was assigned to at his school site as defined by in his roles of cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and peer instructional coach. We also wondered whether his focus on English learners in his coaching would transfer across the coaching contexts while other aspects of his interactions might differ based on the nature of his "status" vis-à-vis the observed teacher. This purpose was in service of expanding the literature on coaching, adding in the nuances of particular contexts and particular coaching foci.

Data collected across the 15 weeks included all of the materials associated with 3 coaching cycles for each of the 3 teachers, for a total of 9 sets of materials associated with 9 coaching cycles. Each coaching cycle resulted in the collection of five sets of artifacts: (1) observed teachers' lesson plans; (2) pre-observation feedback from Marcus on the plans; (3) Marcus's low-inference notes taken during the observations; (4) post-observation narratives written to the observed teacher; and (5) observation self-reflections on Marcus's role as a peer instructional coach, as documented, placed in an interactive journal with feedback from Laura. Because Marcus was both participant and researcher, it was important for the validity of the findings for both individuals to spend time analyzing portions of the data separately, then work together to consensus-code, employing the constant comparison method guided by the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The goal was to capitalize on joint expertise to better understand these coaching cycles, and to contribute to a better understanding of both individuals as supervisors/coaches in particular, and teacher development in general (LaBoskey, 2004; Lighthall, 2004).

## **Findings**

### ***Case 1: The Role of Cooperating Teacher***

In his role as cooperating teacher, Marcus collaborated on a daily basis with Karl. Each morning they met between 7:00 and 7:30, before classes started, to review the day's agenda and refine lesson plans. In these meetings, Karl and Marcus planned for an advanced group of ELLs in a course tasked with utilizing a new common-core aligned English language arts text. While they planned together closely, Marcus led almost all of the instruction. Karl also accompanied Marcus to all staff trainings and meetings with administration that were relevant to the classes they taught, and Karl conducted inter-visitations with other staff to observe their students in different contexts. Karl had previously visited

Marcus's classroom as part of fieldwork requirements in his MA TESOL program, thus he and Marcus had a preexisting rapport and the foundation of a trusting professional relationship.

In analyzing Marcus's role as a cooperating teacher, two pervasive and interwoven themes dominated: (1) Marcus's desire to move beyond the co-planning stage, to see Karl more frequently taking on the role as lead instructor; and (2) Marcus's desire to impart actionable instructional solutions. These themes emerged primarily through Marcus's daily interactions with Karl, structured coaching sessions, observations, and reflective notes taken prior and after their coaching conversations. Marcus recorded his thoughts and observations for each teacher in a reflective journal. In each session Marcus described his primary coaching goal, current dilemma or challenge and the relevant next action steps he planned to take. Throughout the paper journal entries are labeled and examples are provided below with reference to the data source.

### *Seeing Karl "Take the Stage"*

Marcus believed that Karl had a strong grasp of assessment and lesson planning, finding it unusual for a pre-service student teacher to possess such a strong grasp of how theory relates to practice. Karl was conscious about language and content planning and attempted to make his plans relevant to what he had been learning in his university coursework. Karl also developed a functional rapport with the students, quickly learning their names and interests. Marcus was grateful to have the extra help. However, Karl only taught as the lead teacher on average of once per week and anytime Marcus was absent from the class. In his reflective journal Marcus noted:

*Karl and I co-plan every lesson together. While this has its obvious benefits the both of us (we get more accomplished during the day and I am able to support many more teachers beyond my building) it may have the potential to hinder his development. We plan all lessons together but I act as the lead teacher and I deliver 90% of instruction. I am concerned that he is not getting enough time in front of the class as the lead teacher. (Reflective Notes/Karl/Session 2)*

Marcus began to be increasingly concerned that the requisite skills to be a successful teacher must be gained from planning, instructing, and trial and error—and was aware that his reluctance to push Karl into more lead teaching resulted from his own concerns about losing his own instructional time. Marcus's comments highlight the tension of teacher accountability vs. allowing a novice pre-service student teacher time to experiment.

*Many times I feel that I can just step in and do a quick fix that makes a large change and avoids time being wasted. I also am conscious of what I am expected to accomplish in this classroom and how I will be held accountable for test scores. Accountability is high, the students' scores are my scores, and we (the students and myself will be held responsible) not Karl. (Reflective Notes/Karl/Session 3)*

Marcus's journal notes highlight the balance he tries to strike between making sure his students make academic progress while also meeting the demands of the departmental pacing calendar. Much of Marcus's observation notes were focused on management, which he felt to be the largest challenge for Karl and one that he felt could only be overcome via more time in front of the class—yet that was exactly what he found difficult to provide.



I don't know how to best help him grow in the one area he needs most-- management. Sometimes I think these processes just develop and come with experience in front of class. Can finding your voice in the classroom come from any one other than "yourself?" What is the right mix of being prescriptive and letting Karl find his authority in the classroom? Part of me thinks this can only come from authentic experience. (*Reflective Notes/Karl/Session 3*)

#### *Giving Karl Something He Can "Act On."*

From his observations of Karl teaching, Marcus's journal reveals his struggles with identifying what to recommend to Karl to act on. Although he knows that Karl's instruction should foreground English language skill development, doing so in a content-heavy environment still proves very challenging for Marcus. He writes:

*I'm internally struggling with the idea of discussing strategies and ideas that you know are very difficult to do as a teacher. Maybe this is similar to an athlete's relationship with their coach (NFL, NBA) in that their coaches are not always able to do the tasks themselves but are very good at diagnosis and coaching. (Reflective Notes/Karl/Session 1)*

This and other statements reveal Marcus's uncertainty that he is able to enact an effective balance of English language development with content instruction. Although he has very little struggle in classroom management, he begins to become increasingly self-conscious about his own ability to write clear language objectives and foster student use of the target language---two areas of practice that he is focused on developing in Karl. The desire to "help" Karl makes Marcus keenly aware of his own limitations and how the context for learning shapes what is at times possible. The new curriculum that he is tasked with implementing has texts that are by far too lexically dense for his learners' proficiency levels, and contextually removed from his immigrant students' lives. Yet he needs to use these texts as he is accountable to his department chair and school to do so.

*The difficulty of adapting and creating meaningful readings for our students cannot be understated. There is a tension in our department to adhere to the assigned Common Core curriculum but how does this look for beginners or special education students who are just acquiring the language and how can all of this be accomplished within any given school day? (Reflective Notes/General/Session 1)*

#### **Case 2: The Role of University Supervisor**

Marcus worked with Nancy for a period of four months as her university supervisor. In this role, he observed Nancy three times over a four-month span using a rubric provided by the university. For each observation, he reviewed and provided feedback on her lesson plans and conducted a post-observation coaching conversation. Marcus first met with Nancy early in the semester to conduct the first of three formal observations. Nancy taught a minimum of three times a week to a beginner and intermediate group of ELLs.

In Marcus's role as a university supervisor, two dominant interwoven themes emerged: (1) managing the duality of evaluator and coach; and (2) how to best support the teacher to structure her lesson to achieve language and content goals. These themes emerged primarily through Marcus's three

observations of Nancy, their coaching conversations, reflective notes taken prior and after their coaching conversations, and audio recordings made of their discussions.

#### *Helping—while evaluating--Nancy*

In his reflective journal, Marcus recounted that Nancy appeared to be extremely nervous during the first observation. Her pacing was rapid and the students were not able to meet the multiple language and content objectives that Nancy had set forth. In his reflective journal Marcus noted Nancy's disposition. His description suggests a potential cause for this nervousness and highlights a tension in the duality of roles as coach and evaluator.

*Beyond the content and language skills, teachers need a disposition that is responsive and flexible to the many stressors of working in a large, complex school system and responding to students with diverse needs. Nancy is great at being open to feedback but she gets very nervous during observations, causing interference with her lesson delivery. I spoke to her about my role as a supporter in her work. She mentioned that she understands this but that I am also I am evaluating her, raising an obvious conflict...this made me realize the dual role of evaluator and coach as a university supervisor. (Reflective Notes/Nancy/Session 1)*

In Marcus's first post-observation conversation, he sought to engage Nancy in a reflective discussion around the lesson's language goals and the pacing of learning activities. Marcus also sought to reaffirm to Nancy that he is a supporter of her work and wanted to do all that he could to help her grow as a language teacher. His reflective notes suggest that Marcus has a strong commitment to developing teachers and building capacity and professionalism in the field of TESOL.

*I believe that when teachers develop capacity, they need to give back and coach others. Often, we are quick to look for advice from consultants or textbooks. While there is a certain wisdom to be gained from this approach, we need to first look within and to each other for support, sharing and reflecting our success and failures along the way. This is how the field will move forward. (Reflective Notes/General/Session 1)*

#### *Working with Nancy to Set Language Objectives*

Nancy and Marcus spoke for an hour and a half immediately after school on the day of their first observation; she was receptive to feedback and Marcus felt they engaged in meaningful conversation around instruction, language, and practice. He opened the conversation with open-ended, divergent questions, specific to language, content and assessment such as:

*Can you walk me through the process of using signal words [her language goal] to help determine meanings of unknown words? How did you determine or know that this was new for kids? Can you tell me about context clues and how they were used here as a content and language goal? (Audio Recording/Nancy/Session 1)*

As evidenced in his reflective journal notes and audio recording, Nancy was struggling most with pushing through too much content and feeling confined by the language objectives and the restrictive university

lesson plan format. After this conversation, it was evident to both that this was a singular area in which they should focus their efforts. Marcus's reflective journal describes this dilemma:

*I've encouraged her to let the restrictive nature of the university lesson plan inspire creativity, but this clearly stresses her out. She, like many pre-service student teachers in the TESOL program, is seeking to create authentic opportunities for student-to-student talk through language objectives but she isn't clear on how to execute this in her planning and lesson delivery. I know the most effective way to accomplish this is to plan with her and have offered this as our next step. I have to be sure to keep a balance, where she is doing the work here, struggling through, and hopefully learning from mistakes along the way. (Reflective Notes/Nancy/Session 2)*

Nancy's second observation was captured on video. Marcus reviewed the lesson plan, video and conducted an in-person coaching conversation a week after reviewing the lesson. They again spoke for over an hour. Challenges around establishing clear language goals that directly led to student English output, and overloading the lesson with too many objectives persisted. Marcus's feedback again concentrated on being explicit with students, stating a concise objective, and supporting the objectives with explicit instruction focused on the stated goals.

Nancy was aware that too many language and content goals had been planned, causing her instruction to be rushed and incoherent. She was also aware of the importance of a language objective, stating: "If a language objective is good it is like scaffolding, it's just what they need to express themselves." Simultaneously, she still felt resistance to having to write explicit language objectives. She stated:

"If I could do a lesson plan without the university requirement, I could just do reading comprehension ... I would come back to the language later. (Audio Recording/Nancy/Session 2)."

Marcus found himself feeling compelled to point out the inconsistencies in her reasoning but deciding that it was better for her to discover the value of clear language objectives herself. To that end, and although feeling "skeptical to take on additional responsibility" Marcus agreed to meet with Nancy to help plan out the next lesson with a focus on establishing clear language objectives (*Reflective Notes/Nancy/Session 2*). After his third observation, his notes suggest progress in this area:

*I was so proud that she had made progress in creating and executing language objectives areas in her last observation. We were in contact while she was planning this lesson and I was able to offer input to help her refine her thinking and narrow her language objectives. After these suggestions she sent out a reworked plan with four language objectives. This too was then reworked before she taught her lesson (Reflective Notes/Nancy/Session 3).*

The conversation, reflective notes, and results from the third observation support the value of co-planning with teachers as they write and rework lessons. Marcus's reflections on his work with Nancy indicate that the need to co-plan might be as valuable as post-observation conferencing, but the time involved is beyond what is involved in a university supervisory relationship. He also is left with a feeling of incompleteness as he wonders how Nancy will continue to progress in her instructional planning without an intense focus on language development.

### ***Case 3: The Role of Peer Instructional Coach***

Marcus was a colleague with Hannah for five months. He worked with Hannah as her peer instructional coach for several months during the same fall semester as the prior cases, after she approached him asking for help with a particularly challenging special education, ELA class. Before approaching Marcus, Hannah had already sought support from veteran special education colleagues in the form of informal chats and inter-visitations and met twice weekly, with a literacy coach.

She had also presented her assistant principal, who was her direct supervisor, with some of her management dilemmas although she reported being guarded in these conversations. Many of Hannah's students in the coaching focus class had been held back due to poor academic progress and a few of these students do not come to class regularly. There is a paraprofessional in the class and occasionally a co-teacher.

In Marcus's role as a peer instructional coach with Hannah, two themes were dominant: (1) the difficulty in solving intractable problems beyond the scope of the classroom such as curriculum or administration mandates, and (2) Marcus's perception of inadequacy in the content area.

#### *Coaching Hannah and Confronting "Wicked" Problems.*

Hannah's instructional challenges were apparent as soon as Marcus began visiting her classroom. Hannah teaches in a twelve to one context. All of her students have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and many have documented emotional and psychological issues. In the class Marcus observed, two of the students have paraprofessionals close to them whose role is to assist students with reading and writing. One student is severely visually impaired, requiring any text to be enlarged and one student is over-age and has been held back from grade promotion three times. Chronic absenteeism is an issue for many in this group, requiring Hannah to adjust her lessons and keep pace with what was missed. Hannah had been tasked with teaching a Common Core aligned textbook as well as a daily grammar lesson. Due to lexical density, it was necessary for much of this curriculum to be adapted to the individual needs and limitations of her students. The learning deficits in this class are pronounced even in comparison to the demographics of the school. Coaching Hannah in terms of her instructional practices could not be done in isolation, but both stemmed from and were contextualized in the wider school community. Marcus noted:

*Some of the challenges she is experiencing can be attributed to school-wide or system-wide protocols or lack thereof (e.g. a prescriptive curriculum, improper student placement and insufficient resources or support systems). These deficiencies unintentionally conspire to keep a system of inefficiency in place...and are wicked problems to solve. This also speaks closely into our school (and schools in general) retaining bright teachers.  
(Reflective Notes/Hannah/Session 2)*

Marcus's comments suggest that Hannah's struggles are rooted in the perceived confines of the course curriculum and in the lack of established systems of support. During the three times Marcus met with Hannah, he observed the students did not complete the tasks that had been set forth, indicating a lack of connection to what was taught. For example, during one session, the teacher taught contractions for ten minutes, shifted to direct vocabulary instruction for ten minutes, then shifted to a shared reading. As evidenced by the off-task behavior and lack of completion of the lesson goal, it was clear that this lesson presented a linguistic and cognitive overload for these students.

Marcus spoke to Hannah about the lesson's goals and how they synced with the class curriculum. The notes from their conversation suggested that Hannah felt confined by the curriculum. Hannah shared:

“I would love to do something with hands-on learning but it isn't in our curriculum. The art teacher uses computers and technology, and with him the students seem much more engaged.”  
(*Reflective Notes/Hannah/Session 3*)

This exemplified her desire to engage students in more hands-on tasks and experiential learning activities. Marcus spoke to both her direct supervisor and her literacy coach about the difficulties Hannah was experiencing with her curriculum and it was suggested that Hannah adapt her lessons to make them more accessible and engaging for her students. A comment from his journal suggests Marcus's feeling of frustration that support systems for curriculum planning, and inquiry groups were not established by the school administration.

*Many of these areas of difficulties seem to be a part of our shared experience, particularly for novice teachers...It's as if we have exhausted all our resources or are not making the changes that will bring about positive results because we are too overwhelmed by the other things which need to be attended to during the day. (Reflective Notes/Hannah/Session 3)*

During these conversations with administration and the ELA coach, Marcus felt overwhelmed with the recognition that the challenges and time commitment required to truly make a difference in Hannah's practice were more than he was able to give as her peer instructional coach. He sought to help Hannah navigate conversations with the assistant principal and direct supervisor to be sure that the curriculum would be in line with departmental goals and to help her negotiate how to make decisions about adapting her curriculum. Adapting curriculum is time consuming and often beyond the abilities of a first year teacher who is already mired in lesson planning and grading. He realized that the best results would come from thoughtful co-planning with Hannah but was unable to engage in this work with her.

*I've offered to be a partner in this work; further stretching my time. I'm not sure if I can pull this off but I don't see another way to do it... Perhaps this will help me learn as I feel on the edge of my abilities. I think you gain credibility by sharing the work but this is overstretching my abilities and energy levels. (Reflective Notes/Hannah/Session 3)*

Marcus's relationship as a teacher in the same school made it hard for him to not feel obligated to do what he could for Hannah, yet he also felt his limitations in both time and expertise.

#### *Hannah's Coaching Outside the Comfort Zone.*

The second salient theme to emerge from Marcus's journal entries, observations, and conversations with Hannah was the sense of engaging in work that is beyond the scope of Marcus's abilities and formal training. Marcus has had scant formal training working with special education students, only having taken a weekend course that provided an overview of major special education policies for ELLs. Although he is familiar with advocating for students with Individual Education Plans

(IEPs), and his own students' IEPs, he has a lack of experience in instruction of non-ELL special education students.

Marcus realized early on that Hannah's classroom management challenges were beyond the capacity of his own classroom experience. The students did not complete tasks set by Hannah, engaged in off-task calling out and talk, and frequently challenged her authority. In his reflection notes he shows concern that the suggestions he has offered, such as establishing reward systems and changing the pacing of the lesson would improve student engagement, were rebuffed by Hannah. He writes:

*It was clear that many of the suggestions I recommended simply didn't work in her class: incentive systems, being firm, and conducting inter-visitations. This made me feel like my advice was somehow trivial and doesn't really work. I hope she can develop realistic expectations and adopt a problem solving approach as I realized there would not be a quick fix to help her. (Reflective Notes/Hannah/Session 1)*

Hannah discussed how she is very familiar with reward systems and had sought out literature on class management. She mentioned that she had also conducted several inter-visitations with veteran staff members who have extensive experience with this group of students. Her goal was to learn new strategies to reach this particular group. She said it hadn't really helped and that her colleagues were very busy with their own instruction and commitments.

With Hannah's permission, Marcus contacted an art and ESL teacher, who are both talented at adapting and scaffolding curriculum, with a goal of establishing a wider network of collegial support to engage in inquiry work with Hannah. The art teacher shares the same group of students and does not have any management challenges with the group. He is also adept at adapting curriculum and using technology to enhance instruction.

*I thought it would be helpful to connect her with other like-minded teachers who are experiencing similar issues or who have had success overcoming these challenges, with a goal of establishing a critical friends partnership...How can I support her without stretching my time too thin? (Reflective Notes/Hannah/Session 3)*

Marcus lamented that he was not able to quickly improve this situation. He realized that this process could be improved with thoughtful partnerships, inquiry and a reflective approach. He also knew this was a lot to ask of a first year teacher.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The busy schedule of cooperating teachers, coaches and university-based supervisors can preclude close investigation of practice. However, through the methodology of self-study, we were able to reflect on the various ways these roles are designed to support novice teachers. By focusing on how one individual moved in and out of these roles, we had the opportunity to better reveal the complexities of coaching while also furthering understanding of these widely-used roles. Our goal was to move from Marcus's experiences to the wider teacher education community, offering possibilities for improving the training and preparation of teachers, especially those who are working to enhance teachers' skills in teaching English language learners. The intersecting and complex nature of these roles calls for a



heightened awareness to the challenges and affordances of each role and for more goal oriented training that recognizes and addresses the unique constraints and benefits of each role (Fairbanks, Freedman, Kahn, 2000).

### ***Role 1: Cooperating Teacher***

The cooperating teacher is tasked with demonstrating a strong model of teaching for the novice to emulate and to foster an awareness of what the novice teacher has to do to enhance both confidence and competence. The cooperating teacher is fully integrated into the school community, allowing the pre-service student teacher to experience a well-rounded and coherent picture of teaching. Together they direct and share planning and instruction and are able to view student growth over time. The cooperating teacher provides emotional, psychological and content area support, forming a close relationship with the student teacher (Bruce, 1995; Haring, 1999; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009). This close and relatively long-term nature of this partnership affords the possibility for a solid bond to develop, thus fostering a reciprocal relationship. At its best, this partnership can resemble a co-teaching model with an equitable division of responsibilities and the opportunity for the teacher to learn collaboration skills through inquiry, trial, error, and reflection (Santagata & Guarino, 2012). It is a shared process where both cooperating teacher and pre-service teacher are mutually engaged in the instructional materials and teaching methodology.

Cooperating teachers may not fully recognize the unique potential they have for developing a pre-service student teacher —therefore finding time for them to identify and discuss how they usher student teachers into the world of teaching should be enhanced. In our study, we found that Marcus needed more support for creating a partnership that would have allowed Karl to take more initiative and responsibility in teaching, as he had begun to do with planning. We found an important concern for cooperating teachers is how to allow pre-service student teachers to learn from their monitored failures, and how to coach teacher through these events. Ways for cooperating teachers to support pre-service student teachers while still addressing their concerns about potential loss of instructional time might involve efforts to develop schedules that include a set amount of teaching hours and a clear division of labour that delineates the relevant instructional and planning responsibilities. The pre-service student teacher ideally would schedule finite blocks of time with the cooperating teacher for reflection and dialogue once per week. By documenting and formalizing each party's roles and processes, accountability and growth are then higher for both the pre-service student teacher and cooperating teacher, allowing for more hands-on experience, and reflection through trial and error. These elements are essential to engender the highest potential for teacher and student success. Table 2 below concludes our key findings for this role:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Key Considerations for Cooperating Teacher</b>	<b>Requisite Supports to Optimize Impact of Coaching Role</b>	<b>Critical Questions and Potential Areas of Future Research</b>
<b>Cooperating Teacher</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Clear division of roles and responsibilities should be documented and formulized.</li> <li>- Scheduled predictable and regular time to meet with student teacher to discuss lesson plans, goals, and reflection.</li> <li>-Must allow student teacher to learn from failures, reflecting on process and encouraging student teacher to try new instructional techniques learned in teacher training program.</li> <li>-Employs a directive and facilitative stance towards supporting instruction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provide training opportunities for coach to learn how to support cooperating teacher in learning to coach student teachers through failures.</li> <li>-Provide training support and space for dialog for cooperating teacher to learn how to provide emotional, psychological and instructional support as the student teacher navigates the demands of the classroom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-To what extent does the cooperating teacher feel they can let the pre-service student teacher “mess up” without harming the students’ academic progress?</li> <li>-What models of co-teaching are known to the cooperating teacher and pre-service student teacher in order to share more co-planning and co-teaching responsibilities?</li> <li>-How can the time spent in the critical work of cooperating teachers be rewarded by the school and the university?</li> </ul>

**Table 2. Key Findings: Cooperating Teacher**

***Role 2: University Supervisor***

University supervisors meet with both pre-service student teachers and novice teachers for a predetermined amount of time each semester to provide targeted coaching and give feedback on observed instruction. The nature of this role allows the supervisor to observe teachers’ performance in progressive snapshots over the course of an academic semester or year. As an evaluator who is loyal to the university, the supervisor is able to spur progress in the teacher utilizing methods that are distinctly different from the roles of peer instructional coach or cooperating teacher.

Trainers who work with university supervisors would benefit from discussing the defining features of the position as well as methods to improve feedback such balancing praise with specific recommendations for growth. Research suggests that university supervisors often seek to minimize defensiveness of teachers by providing praise in combination with extensive suggestions for improvement (Farr, 2012). While the pre-service student teacher often appreciates praise as it helps boost confidence (Malderez, Hobson, Tracey, and Kerr, 2007), praise may not support the teacher with feedback in specific areas of growth. Supervisors might consider methods of feedback that direct teachers’ thinking and which accept rather than try to minimize their role as evaluators. University supervisors must prioritize their goals for teachers by considering and jointly defining measurable outcomes. In our investigation of Marcus’s practice, we found that university supervisors' match of discipline-area makes it possible for

feedback to be much more targeted and specific. In the case of Nancy, Marcus was able to guide her into attending more and more fully to her language objectives and how students were using English during her lesson as a natural corollary to her classroom management feedback, whereas in the case of Hannah, he felt limited in providing classroom management and instructional feedback since he did not have the same discipline-area background as the teacher. The table below concludes our key findings for this role.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Key Considerations for University Supervisor</b>	<b>Requisite Supports to Optimize Impact of Coaching Role</b>	<b>Critical Questions and Potential Areas of Future Research</b>
<b>University Supervisor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Establish a consistent meeting schedule with pre-service teacher allowing for pre-brief, lesson observation and post-observation conference to occur on the same day.</li> <li>-Articulate your role to the pre-service student teacher as both an evaluator and supporter of their professional practice.</li> <li>-Collaborate with pre-service candidate to definite and set goals for measureable outcomes of progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provide training opportunities for supervisors to learn defining features of the role and how to offer support, praise, and evaluation.</li> <li>-Establish a community of practice to support field supervisors to share and reflect on their experiences and to collaboratively problem solve.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How are supervisors trained to exert their influence as evaluators for the benefit of teachers' improvement?</li> <li>-What types of training are provided for university supervisors that take into account their unique discipline area foci?</li> <li>-What meeting systems are in place to support fieldwork? How are supervisors briefed on the priorities of the preparation program they work with?</li> </ul>

**Table 3. Key Findings: University Supervisor**

### ***Role 3: Peer Instructional Coach***

Peer instructional coaches work with both novice and veteran teachers, giving feedback on instruction, management, or other aspects of practice as set forth by the school's leadership. The peer instructional coach is integrated into a larger school context and needs to be familiar with school-wide trends and resources. They are often adept at networking and act as a liaison between the needs of administration and teachers. Peer instructional coaches engage in conversations with school leadership that seek to define and improve school-wide initiatives and with the intended consequence of better alignment with coaching efforts and school-wide goals (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). In the case of Marcus coaching Hannah, he had to manage tensions between administration and Hannah while balancing school-wide and individual instructional needs. University trainers and others who work with peer instructional coaches would do well to address these tensions. One method might be to engage peer instructional

coaches in constructed, scenario-based conversations with a targeted agenda for administration. Marcus’s experience and research suggests that many of the problems which a teacher faces in this role are intractable and beyond the scope of immediate instruction and planning (Harris et al., 2013). It is essential that the parties involved recognize this reality. The recalcitrant nature of these difficulties can be overwhelming for both the peer instructional coach and teacher. These areas can be categorized as wicked institutional problems as there is no definitive path to follow to tackle the problem and the sources always have more than one cause (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Trainers who are seeking to enhance the skills of the peer instructional coach, would benefit from teaching how to engage their teachers in building efficacy, engaging their peers, and suggesting alternatives to school-wide challenges such as city and state wide mandates, curriculum and programming difficulties. Peer instructional coaches should also be aware of the value of “critical friends” who can engage the mentee in a dialogue around instruction and problem solving in a non-evaluative manner. By using assets already in place in the school, the peer instructional coach builds partnerships that support the development of the overall school capacity. The table below concludes our key findings for this role.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Key Considerations for Peer Instructional Coach</b>	<b>Requisite Supports to Optimize Impact of Coaching Role</b>	<b>Critical Questions and Potential Areas of Future Research</b>
<b>Peer Instructional Coach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Network with wider school community to gain knowledge of school-wide trends and resources.</li> <li>-Establish confidentiality in coaching conversations, allowing a shared safe space for inquiry and reflection.</li> <li>-Support teachers with methods to engage their peers to advocate and address shared school-wide challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provide training opportunities on benefits of directive, facilitative, and transformative coaching styles.</li> <li>-Provide systems that support coaching work such as a regular meeting times for peer instructional coaches and candidates and/or release time for teachers to meet with coaches.</li> <li>-Provide training opportunities for peer instructional coaches to learn and refine low-inference observation skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How can peer instructional coaches work with teachers in different discipline areas than their own?</li> <li>-What role will the peer instructional coach play in regards to teachers’ evaluation process by the school administration?</li> <li>-How will the peer instructional coach negotiate between loyalty to the teacher and the school administration?</li> </ul>

**Table 4. Key Findings: Peer Instructional Coach**

The work of preparing teachers is complex, ill-structured, and ever-changing. To achieve the goal of high retention and high effectiveness among our entering teaching force will require ever greater

efforts among all those who support them—and increased attention to the specific nature and value of each supporting player: cooperating teacher, supervisor, and peer instructional coach.

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