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The Role of the Literacy Coach: The Challenge of Change

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The Role of the Literacy Coach: The Challenge of Change

Abstract

The process of change in education requires effective leadership along with professional development and on-site support. Fear of change and risk-taking may result in some teachers resisting change. Literacy coaches can provide the needed follow-up training and support for professional development that assists teachers to successfully implement new strategies and methods of instruction. Michael Fullan's ideas on the change process serve as the foundation for this article. The author incorporates the perspectives of researchers and leaders in the field of change with her own experiences to discuss the importance of understanding change, the factors affecting its initiation, and the role of professional development when implementing educational change. She attempts to assist others to better understand the coaching role by sharing information about the qualities, duties, and responsibilities of a literacy coach ~long with the need for a system support system to assist coaches in their efforts.

The Role of the Literacy Coach: The Challenge of Change

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Summary

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The Role of the Literacy Coach: The Challenge of Change

Recently, a new job offer not only brought change to my life but also has made me a facilitator of change in my new role as a literacy coach. Prior to this, my professional life had been pretty consistent for many years. I had taught mostly the same grades and at the same school. Even though I had left the classroom and moved to a new position in Title I and Reading Recovery for the last five years, I was still pretty comfortable.

When a call came suggesting I consider a job as a literacy coach the book Who Moved My Cheese? (Johnson, 1998) came to mind. This is a parable using four mice as characters to teach about change. In his book, Spencer Johnson has the cheese stand for what people want in life and the maze is used to represent where they look for what they want. The book relates to how each character deals with change as faced with it. Throughout the book the reader is reminded that while some people look for change, others are very fearful and resistant.

Questions came to mind about whether I would still be happy and what my future would look like in this new role. I felt secure where I was but knew the coaching position could be interesting yet challenging with a chance to grow professionally. I also knew I had a lot of experiences and expertise to share. The new cheese would provide an opportunity for me to still use my teaching skills in a different way. I knew if I took the coaching position, not only would my own cheese move but I would be responsible for helping others to move theirs. I would also broaden my knowledge in many areas as I helped others to move their cheese. So, I decided to go in search of new cheese.

Since the coaching role was a newer concept for our district and not well defined, I knew I had a lot to learn concerning the change process and that the job would bring challenges while I became familiar with the whole coaching role. I decided to seek out sources who had written about change, leadership, professional development, and coaching. I hoped that by reading about the research and experiences of others, it would support my efforts to grow and develop in the coaching role.

As I began my search for information on the various areas of support, I felt that understanding the change process was essential to my growth in the leadership role of a coach. I knew that it was necessary for me to have a personal commitment to any changes that I would ask of teachers. I found that the work of Michael Fullan (1982, 1995) was a valuable resource for helping me to understand the change process and some of the factors affecting the implementation of change. He helped me to understand why change is difficult for some along with the need for support when implementing change.

As I read Michael Fullan's work, I found that several broad categories stood out as explaining, affecting, or supporting change and that these could be of benefit to study in relationship to my role as a coach. These included understanding educational change, factors affecting the initiation of change, and the professional development of educators. It seemed that the next step would be to gather readings from additional sources pertaining to each of these three categories to find out how others viewed or supported these along with experiences or insights they may have.

In the early 1980s, Joyce and Showers (e.g., 1983) found that teachers who were coached generally practiced new strategies more frequently and developed greater skill in the new strategy. This was supported by the more recent study on coaching by the Bay

Area schools in California (Symonds, 2002). Based on the information from these studies, I added a fourth category--that of literacy coaches as a support for change. I knew that reading about the coaching role from the perspectives of others would be of great value in helping me to define my coaching role and also give me a better understanding of the range of duties and responsibilities many encounter.

This paper has been organized into these four categories with Fullan's views of change serving as the foundation. My hope is for this to serve as a guide for others initiating the coaching role.

Throughout this paper, I cite the work of those I found to be valuable resources in supporting my efforts. In addition, in italics I have included insights that have evolved from my experiences as a coach. Sometimes new ideas for change provide answers to questions professionals already have about their practice. At other times, change can involve a major paradigm shift in thinking. A literacy coach can be a helpful partner in this journey of change.

Understanding Educational Change

The role of the literacy coach has change embedded in much of what is done. As a result of my readings from Fullan, I have learned that change is a process rather than an event and that leaders need to assess the priority of a change in relation to other needs. When attempting change, it is best to work on those innovations with which we have a chance to succeed. We must do so in small increments but do them better (Fullan, 1982).

The following example illustrates how my current district has used small increments to implement change. From standardized test scores it was evident that our district needed to focus on reading instruction. As part of a Reading Excellence grant, the

decision was made to focus on small group reading instruction with the assistance of a national reading consultant. Teachers were gathered for several days of in-service during which they received a basic foundation for small group reading instruction. Over the following three years, the consultant visited each school in the district three or four times a year. The focus of the visits was determined by each grade level at the school and often involved demonstrations using small groups of students. Discussions occurred before and after each lesson. The consultant modeled different types of reading instruction including guided reading, transitional guided reading, and Reader's Workshop. During additional visits she provided support for book selection, teacher talk (use of prompts, coaching statements, and questioning), and literary elements (plot, setting, characters). My role was to support the teachers in applying this information in their classroom. Since teachers were introduced to this information in small increments, they were able to practice and refine before being presented with another piece. This enabled teachers to implement the change more successfully and to discover its value. Also, as I supported teachers, I increased my own knowledge and use of strategies.

Factors Affecting the Initiation of Change

Change is a highly personal experience and each person needs a chance to work through it in a way in which the rewards at least equal the cost (Fullan, 1982). A coach must help teachers to explore the risk-taking process and the variables that will change. Open discussions are needed to bring out the issues of change to make it less threatening (Vacca and Padak, 1990).

It has been my experience that the encouragement and support of a coach can turn risk-taking into a positive experience. Our university advisor was going to visit a second

grade classroom to observe a reading lesson. I had previously supported the team when they planned a comprehension strategy lesson as a follow-up to a consultant's visit.

However, I knew that nobody had actually taught the lesson yet. I encouraged one teacher (who said she was hesitant about teaching the new strategy) to take a risk and try it. Her lesson was extremely successful and the teacher viewed this as a positive experience. When teachers have an experience such as this they often try to continue the implementation and adapt to change. It does take encouragement and support because those who are hesitant often won't attempt it on their own.

The way in which teachers view the magnitude of the change required for implementation affects the probability of their implementation of a new program or innovation. The more negative experiences they have had previously the more their effort to implement a change will be affected (Fullan, 1982). The true test of any reform is the reaction of veteran teachers. If they change their practices, the reform is usually a big success (Symonds, 2002).

Some teachers may be resistant out of fear and frustration. Others have seen changes come and then leave again after a few years only to be replaced by something else. As a result, they are reluctant to put effort into another new change and question how long it will last. They feel that if they "wait it out" this too will go away. While this can be true of some teachers, it's part of my role to support the district and teachers in implementation since a multiyear commitment was made to the Building Blocks program as part of a Reading Excellence grant. It's important for a leader to stay positive throughout the change process.

Support is the key for helping teachers to recognize the value of new strategies.

Specific concerns and doubts can arise when teachers actually try to implement new approaches. Those that succeed in the implementation combine their own good ideas with new ideas. A good support system may help them to see how existing ideas may be enhanced (Fullan, 1982). People are less resistant if they have input and time to adjust.

Teachers often need and want help in channeling their efforts to combine the old with the new (Kanter, 1985). *For example, a teacher presented an excellent small group reading lesson using an old basal. As I observed, I thought about how the district had been focusing on comprehension strategies. The story used in the lesson was perfect for teaching students how to infer. After sharing with the teacher how I enjoyed the lesson, I mentioned that I thought it would also be a good story to use in teaching the strategy of inferencing. Hopefully prompts like this encourage teachers to think about how certain texts lend themselves to a variety of strategies.*

Fullan (1982) found that with change a leader must address a need and then be clear in terms of what teachers will have to do and how it will affect them personally (time, energy, new skills, and interference with existing priorities). People are especially appreciative of a leader who acknowledges that major change requires time, effort, and creativity (Kanter, 1985). As I interact with teachers, I can get a sense of the areas on which they need extra time to work and also those that have caused frustration. Being sensitive to the needs of teachers is essential along with various types of support. It is critical for coaches to encourage administrators to provide time for teachers to plan and reflect on lessons dealing with the change being asked of them whether it is to work individually or in teams.

Professional Development for Educators

Professional development is a crucial component of change and professional growth. It should be continuous learning and not an add-on (Fullan, 1995). A professional development system should include ways of engaging teachers as learners so their interest is aroused and they begin to see how procedures fit with their own students. This way they will build commitment and ownership (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). If one just provides staff development for teachers and sends them back to the classroom, a small percentage of what they learned will be used (Ezarik, 2002). Personal contact through groups or one-to-one interactions allows teachers to learn how to use innovations and to judge whether to accept, modify, or reject the change (Fullan, 1982).

I want teachers to see the value of various strategies and methods of instruction yet worry they will try these once and feel it is enough. My goal is to create a desire in them to carry these over and make them part of their ongoing instruction. When a consultant visits schools to work on comprehension strategies, while many teachers feel the ideas presented are worthwhile, some may only discuss them or try out a lesson one time. This is where I see the benefit of a coach to help to support and encourage teachers through conversation and modeling. Some teachers also appreciate a coach stopping by to see how things are going or suggesting a lesson they could model from an area in which a teacher feels uncomfortable.

A major problem with implementation can be the lack of clarity about where and how a new strategy fits with existing practices. Fullan (1982) advocates the recognition of individual meaning as being the key to school improvement. Leaders must take steps to enhance the meaning and help teachers to discover how new ideas can fit with their

existing practices. Sometimes it appears that teachers see lots of pieces but not the whole picture partly because they may only look at their own grade level. Since coaches receive more professional development and work with all grade levels, they may be better able to see the "big picture" and can then help to explain it to others. When teachers are shown how the various parts of the curriculum support each other they are often more likely to understand why the change is for the best. Otherwise, some may view the change as overwhelming in relation to the rest of the curriculum and not attempt to implement the desired change.

Joyce and Showers (1982) support Fullan by suggesting there is a period of discomfort with any new skill and that most teachers do not just leave a staff development session and experience no difficulty. They believe that at least 15-20 demonstrations of the model should be observed for effective implementation to occur. Coaches must not assume that little teacher reaction means teachers are not learning or valuing the time the coach has spent supporting their implementation. Sometimes coaches just have to keep doing something for awhile until people are able to see how well it works. *For example, I was unable to work with a particular classroom on writing for awhile due to other commitments. One day the teacher stopped me and shared how much she missed my visits to her room to model lessons of the various writing traits. She asked me to stop by to see her students' work and how far they had come. For months she had never indicated her feelings as to the value of the new ideas. She said that her students' growth really helped to show the effectiveness of the lessons I had modeled.*

Leaders must remember school improvement is important to everyone, from the teachers in a school to those at the district, state, and federal levels. Everyone must be

involved not just teachers (Fullan, 1982). *When interacting with teachers at professional development sessions, I've overheard positive comments when teachers have seen district administrative leaders not just in attendance but actually participating. It seems to reinforce the importance and value of it.*

Staff development, combined with coaching, results in a higher transfer of knowledge into practice than any other methods of professional development (Joyce & Showers, 1988).

Literacy Coaches as Support

Coaching provides a structure for the follow-up training that is essential for acquiring new teaching skills and strategies (Showers, 1985). Joyce and Showers (1983) found that continued assistance provided by an outside expert or peer expert resulted in much greater classroom implementation. They also found that coached teachers exhibited greater long-term retention of knowledge and skill with the strategies in which they had been coached. In 2001-2002, a descriptive study on coaching was conducted in the Bay Area Schools using interviews, focus groups, and observations (Symonds, 2002). The results of the study indicated that teachers who worked with coaches showed growth in collaboration and increased levels and quality of implementation of new instructional strategies.

A literacy coach can often assist in effectively implementing change. Costa and Garmston (1994) use the analogy of a stagecoach to describe coaching. They explain that to coach means to take colleagues from where they are to where they want to be. A coach can also be compared to an athletic trainer. The trainer tells the team member of ways it might be easier to catch a ball. A literacy coach may share an idea and suggest a teacher

give it a try (Guiney, 2001). In 1989, Poole and Okefor completed a study from which they concluded that higher teacher efficacy along with more frequent task-relevant interactions resulted in higher levels of curricular change. Interactions with coaches can be a means of assisting teachers to gain confidence with a new strategy.

Coaches are needed in a leadership role to assist in implementing change by helping others to assess and find meaning and commitment to a new way. Fullan (1982) cautions the first six months will be bumpy no matter how well-planned a leader may be and that it takes two to three years to make a significant change. A leader must be committed to the change process as well as to the change.

Qualities

Those who have written about successful coaches have found a number of qualities to be present. Coaches must be respected by staff and community members both personally and professionally (Makibbin & Sprague, 1997). A coach should have a wealth of knowledge about all aspects of literacy and always be in search of new knowledge and experiences to be shared. The new learning may be from teachers, children, or other professionals (Jaeger, 1996). *I have found my classroom experience, Reading Recovery training, Title I experience, 6 Trait Writing training, and Writer's Workshop training invaluable in supporting my coaching efforts.*

It is essential for teachers to view the coach as competent and knowledgeable. *At the request of teachers at one school, I started working with some first grade students who the teachers believed were not progressing. While working with these students, I also discussed strategies that might move the children forward in reading. As a result, the learning of several students started to accelerate noticeably within the classroom. When*

the teachers saw student growth, they could see that the new strategies were valid and beneficial. The teachers appeared to find new appreciation for the role of the coach.

Coaches should be able to foster leadership among teachers (Guiney, 2001). It is important for coaches to recognize teachers' strengths and to know how to encourage them to apply and share their expertise (Costa & Garmston, 1994). *An English Language Learner teacher has taught me so much about working with students whose primary language may not be English. She has not only helped me to deepen my understanding of these students and their culture but has also shown me effective teaching strategies for working with them that could be shared with other teachers and applied to many other children.*

Guiney (2001) speaks of the need for a coach to possess or develop trust-building skills. *I too have found that building trust is very important to change. As trust has been built, it seems teachers share more of their ideas, successes, and frustrations. Keeping promises and commitments are both important to building trust. Coaches need to understand the individual and attend to little things in building relationships. One teacher shared her fear of visitors in her room and how she was extremely nervous when others observed her class. As a result of this, when the university advisor was scheduled to visit I told her of the teacher's reservations. To make it less stressful, the professor interacted with students once the lesson was introduced instead of just sitting and observing. The teacher was appreciative that her feelings were considered.*

The coach must seek to create a non-judgmental environment where teachers feel safe to experiment and risk (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). *One non-threatening way to begin to work with teachers in their rooms is to help with centers or listen to students read. The*

teacher is usually grateful for the help and it allows the coach to observe the curriculum being implemented. Discussions about what occurred or requests for advice often follow. These informal discussions can open doors for future visits.

I found that another non-threatening way to spend time in classrooms is by investigating an issue or question. This not only provides the coach with an opportunity to observe but also creates discussions and gives opportunities to problem solve collaboratively. One day a teacher had a question regarding kindergarten writing and the modeling of temporary spelling. To gather information, I discussed the issue with several other kindergarten teachers, observed writing in their rooms, and checked with other resources. All of these activities stimulated thinking and discussion among us and provided opportunities for dialogue.

Coaches cannot assume their version of what change should be is the one that should or could be implemented. Conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable but also fundamental to successful change (Fullan, 1982). *Instead of being discouraged by things that I have not accomplished, I have learned to be encouraged by what has been accomplished as a result of my coaching actions.* Leaders must be open to the perspectives of others. The fact that the coach possesses some knowledge does not mean that he or she knows all of the answers (Vacca, 1990 & Jaeger, 1996). Although a coach can't please all of the people all of the time, one can stay tuned to teachers' needs (Thompson, 1988). *Sometimes it is hard to work with people who have not been responsive but coaches always have to look at the positive and the good things that have been accomplished.*

It is important for teachers to view the coach as having a genuine interest in them and their students. As this happens, rapport is built. One teacher had never been involved with my services and it seemed evident that she did not see a need for someone in a coaching role. As I reinforced her successes and efforts, she started opening up and stopping me in the hall to share or to invite me to come in to observe.

A coach should not expect to go into a new building and be instantly welcomed by everyone with open arms. A coach needs lots of "people skills". This requires patience along with tact and diplomacy in dealing with people. The way that people are approached is crucial. A coach must show teachers what they can do but the help must be offered very gently (Guiney, 2001). *When dealing with change, it is a fact that sometimes people are extremely sensitive and take things personally. I learned that even when doing something such as showing teachers how data need to be recorded differently for district reports, some can become upset if not approached diplomatically.*

Coaches need to be willing to admit when they are wrong and to apologize. For example, one time I found that a consultants' building visit had only been approved by part of the team of teachers, rather than by all of them. The others were disappointed that I had not asked them personally what they wanted. As a result, I scheduled a meeting with the team and began by apologizing and explaining my concerns and the reasoning behind the in-service plan. After a discussion, the team reached a consensus and the issue was pretty much resolved. However, I learned a lesson that on some decision-making issues you need to include everyone.

Coaches need to establish communication as they listen, offer suggestions, and encourage teachers. Sometimes hand-delivering items to rooms rather than just

distributing them through mailboxes provides opportunities for me as a coach to dialogue about how things are going and find out the needs of various teachers.

Communicating effectively with people is important. Coaches increase their credibility when ideas are presented clearly and in the context of a deep understanding of the paradigms (Covey, 1989).

To be effective and credible, a coach must be efficient. Organization is important for survival especially if a coach serves more than one school. I find myself constantly revising lists. Folders and notebooks fill up as I organize materials for easy access. The back of my car is full of resources to have available at each school. I always carry a pencil and paper to write down questions and requests. This way teachers know that I will pursue their requests and respond as quickly as possible. Time is a major issue with so much to do and often too little time to accomplish everything I would like. Scheduling follow-up sessions to lessons with teaches can be frustrating. It is sometimes hard for teachers to realize the extent of a coach's job. As the coaching position evolves and teachers interact more with coaches, they begin to get a better sense of all that is expected of those in coaching positions.

Joyce and Showers (1982) believe that successful teaching requires successful student response and that any new innovation or strategy must be adapted to fit the students. They also suggest that students need to become acquainted with what is expected of them, how to fulfill the demands of what is being implemented, and how to gauge their own progress. At first teachers are concerned with their own behaviors, so one of the major functions of a coach is to help to "read" the responses of students to help in making decisions about the skill training and how to adapt the model. *I have found that a coach*

must be able to interact well with students and be viewed as part of the school community. I suggest that building rapport with students is as important as building rapport with teachers. As I have spent time in rooms, the students have gotten to know me. As student rapport grows, they respond more to lessons I model and it helps with my success. They see that I care about their growth as readers and writers. It makes my day as a coach when I see progress in what I have been working on with a teacher or class. A story comes to mind of the day I opened the door to a fifth grade classroom with whom I had been working on writing. Five students rushed up to ask my opinion on their latest piece of writing. One girl announced that while she had never liked to write before, she now loved it. Moments like this make it all worthwhile.

Careful listening, another key to establishing positive interactions, can be a valuable source of accurate information with which to work. Covey (1989) describes empathic listening as getting into a person's frame of reference to see the world as he or she does, not by sympathizing but by listening with ones ears, eyes, and heart for meaning and behavior. *I have found from years of teaching that sometimes teachers just need to "vent". As a coach, I must stay calm and logical even if someone is upset. I can listen and empathize but then I need to support and encourage a teacher. This support could be given through suggestions or by attempting to locate resources. Actively listening at meetings or when talking with individuals often gives insights into problems. I try not to jump in too quickly to share or offer advice. The more information I gather the better the response I am able to give. Also, asking reflective questions and questions that assist in gathering more information can be of value.*

Duties and responsibilities

The duties and responsibilities of a coach are often very broad and vary from district to district. Thompson (1988) believes the coach should be a mentor to new teachers, be a resource, demonstrate and share strategies, assist in selecting materials, help with planning, diagnose, and assist with professional development. *My experience indicates the coaching role also involves linking instruction to assessment, working with volunteers, working with teachers at their individual stages of development, validating teachers' work, and serving as a link between teachers and the administration.*

New teachers sometimes require more support from the coach since they often struggle with management in addition to needing curriculum support. I have found that as a coach I can model management while also presenting a lesson. For example, when beginning my first session of modeling writing with a class, some of the students did not appear to be interested. However, as I worked with and modeled lessons, I noticed that resistant students began to participate. For some students, it is a matter of seeing they can actually do the task; for others, it's that the strategy draws their attention. As new teachers observe such lessons, they observe management ideas along with curriculum strategies.

My experiences have taught me that serving as a resource is a major role for coaches. I have observed that as I have established myself more in the coaching role, some teachers have started to depend more on me for support. Teachers stop me in the hall with requests and leave notes. Their requests are often for materials to support instruction, assistance in understanding an issue, or help in problem solving about a student. Even though I don't know all the answers, the important thing is to know of

sources to answer questions or to assist with resources. I try to let people know I will get back to them as quickly as possible. They appreciate it when I am on top of things and it builds credibility. Coaches in our district also serve as distributors and collectors of materials, forms, and other teacher resources, which is a very large part of the job at the beginning of the year.

Demonstrating lessons and strategies for teachers is an important component of the coaching role. The coach needs to be knowledgeable about a wide range of literacy strategies. Every time a coach enters a classroom and demonstrates a lesson in front of a peer the teacher becomes more encouraged to do the same (Symonds, 2002). Teachers become more confident in trying new approaches by having on-site demonstrations and assistance (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). *In addition, the teaching of model lessons provides opportunities for me to try out new strategies and reflect on them so that I can be more effective in my coaching role.*

A coach can help teachers to see how everything fits together. For some, such as a long-term substitute, it may mean starting from scratch if they have not received training in district initiatives. When this situation first occurred, I spent time after school viewing videos of the consultants teaching model lessons and discussing small group reading with the substitute. Our discussions also included planning the reading lessons and selecting materials. This seemed to help the substitute see how everything fit together to support the curriculum. Next I modeled reading with small groups of children. After I taught the groups, I reflected aloud on what went well and what did not. I also discussed what I would do differently the next time. As a coach, I need to be honest in my reflections. I

want teachers to see how I reflect and think of ways I might improve my lessons. I also ask for the teacher's response to the lesson.

Within my district many of the coaches are also in charge of bookrooms which house books for small group reading instruction. Responsibilities include organizing books and materials, ordering new materials, entering new information on a database, and contacting company representatives to deal with any problems or requests. By working with these materials, I am better able to assist teachers in selecting materials to support their instruction especially of small group reading.

Applying a strategy can be hard and some teachers have trouble creating lessons. Coaching can support this. Without a coach to consult, when a teacher confronts failure or a difficult situation, it is often likely that he/she will revert back to a previous instructional method but do it better, instead of changing (Guiney, 2001). *In my role as a coach, I may help a teacher plan a reading lesson and choose an appropriate book or discuss a strategy to try with a student who is not accelerating. At times, I have supported teachers by evaluating students who are not accelerating. A summary of my findings can provide additional information for teachers to use when problem solving with administrators as to possible interventions to try.*

In my district, the coach is a facilitator of staff development. As such, I am responsible for the visits of the national reading consultants in my schools. This means preparing teachers and determining current needs the consultant might support. It also means scheduling sessions and sending the information to the consultants, gathering permission forms for video-taped sessions, gathering needed materials for the consultant, assigning

substitutes to rooms to relieve teachers so that they can attend sessions, arranging for lunch, and accompanying the consultant for the day.

Some in-service sessions are also presented by coaches in my district. Topics a coach may be responsible to present include test analysis, use of writing rubrics to assess progress and form instruction, implementation of curriculum guides, reinforcement of strategies presented by consultants, and review of testing procedures at the beginning of the year.

Coaches must be able to assist teachers in linking assessment to instruction along with accessing and using research (Symonds, 2002). The collection and interpretation of data can involve a great deal of time for a coach. It may mean answering questions pertaining to administering tests, reviewing testing procedures, helping teachers to understand how to record results, the ordering, organizing, and distribution of testing materials, and the interpretation and use of the data. If a school is involved in any grants, there are often time-consuming reports to be completed using data.

Coaches sometimes provide assistance to volunteers (Bean et al., 2003). Community members often work as volunteers to support reading, especially with younger students. Volunteers are very appreciative when they can see the coach model working with a student. This enables the volunteer to see how to prompt and support students in the use of strategies.

One purpose of coaching is to build a community of teachers who continuously and collaboratively engage in the study of their craft (Guiney, 2001). Research suggests if teachers analyze their teaching in order to improve instructional practice, they may be more likely to implement change than if they are simply told to change (Edwards, 1993).

Coaching helps to develop a shared language and a set of common understandings. It is very valuable to have a common language when discussing curriculum and various district initiatives. When all schools share this common language, it makes for a better understanding of the change being implemented.

Coaches must learn to be flexible and adapt the coaching process for each person. Even though everyone may attend the same professional development session, when teachers actually start to implement and work through the change, they have different needs. They can be at different stages of development and in need of different levels of support. Coaches need to scaffold as they attempt to implement change so that the teachers feel empowered to take over as their ability develops (Bruneau, 1989).

Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) found that many teachers want validation from coaches; they like to know that their work is worthwhile. With validation comes an increase in confidence and security. *For example, sometimes teachers want me to take a look at their students' writing after they have focused their instruction on a specific strategy. They appreciate the second opinion that their efforts are supporting their students' growth successfully.*

Coaches can facilitate communication between teachers and the district administration. The coach needs to be an advocate for both groups, representing teachers' concerns to district staff and the district's perspective to teachers (Symonds, 2002). *I have found it important to have effective communication with building leadership, especially the principal. In my district there are also opportunities to interact with the district administration at monthly principal in-services presented by coaches. These opportunities for communication help keep information flowing between the two groups.*

The Needs of coaches

Just as coaches support teachers, it is important for coaches to receive support and training in order to keep current and focused. One means of achieving this is by scheduling weekly coaches meetings so coaches can support each other by sharing their expertise (Symonds, 2002).

In my district, weekly meetings are held where coaches discuss issues pertaining to district initiatives with the Curriculum Director. Sessions are also scheduled for the professional development of coaches to keep them current in their knowledge of literacy strategies and issues. Other administrators sometimes attend these meetings to give support. All of the eight coaches in my district have different strengths that lend support to our coaching efforts. Since all fourteen elementary schools are represented at the meetings, it results in the creation of a link between schools.

It is also helpful if coaches receive training in group leadership, group dynamics, and planning meetings (Makibbin & Sprague, 1997). Support is also needed in how to lead literacy reform, understanding and using data, how to facilitate collaboration, and learning how to work with resistant teachers (Symonds, 2002). *The support that I have received so far has helped me to increase my confidence in some areas but on-going support and training are needed.*

Time needs to be provided for coaches to receive professional development on a core set of research-based literacy strategies (Makibbin & Sprague, 1997). *Professional development is important as a means of achieving this. Sometimes it is a matter of attending sessions to reinforce what I already know and then expanding my knowledge to higher levels. It may mean hearing a different perspective on what I know. At other times,*

forward. Next, I dealt with the importance of professional development in bringing about change. Finally, by sharing information about the qualities, duties, responsibilities and needs of coaches, I hoped to assist others to better understand the particulars of this role.

In my new role as a coach, I am finding additional ways every day to lead and to support teachers in the change process. As the role of the literacy coach becomes more defined, coaches will hopefully be better equipped to help and encourage teachers to find their way through the maze to new cheese, success, and the realization that change can be good.

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