JRF! Literacy Coach Academy Training

Facilitator's Guide

Module 1 - Introduction (slides 1-11)

90 minutes

Materials:

> Handout 1 - Article – *Increasing the Effectiveness of Literacy Coaches*
> Chart paper
> Post-it Notes
> Markers/highlighters
> Data information for slide 4 – prepared by facilitator before the training

Slide 1	Facilitator will prepare 2 charts with the following questions:
	     What is a Literacy Coach?
	     What is the role of the Literacy Coach?
	
	Use as a pre-assessment. As participants arrive, have them answer the questions using post-it notes. This will give you an idea of their knowledge of a Literacy Coach and the role they play.

Slide 2	Share with participants – Goal - Coaches will be learning content and applying what they have learned in order to impact student achievement.
Slide 3	Establish norms with the participants – you may want to post these on chart paper and bring them out as a reminder whenever you meet.
Slide 4	Facilitator will prepare this slide ahead of time. What does your data look like at your district/school? (Use the most recent data- i.e. FSA, ELA,STAR reading, universal screening data, etc) After reviewing the data with the participants, have them discuss how this impacts their coaching.
Slides 5 – 10 **Handout 01**	The article *Increasing the Effectiveness of Literacy Coaches* is divided into 5 insights. As you go through each insight – ask the guiding questions on each slide. Lead a whole group discussion or small groups and share out. You may want to have the coaches read the article prior to the PD and come to the meeting prepared to discuss the article.
Slide 11	Wrap up and Reflection Give the participants an opportunity to reflect on the article. Ask the participants: Which insight has the most significance to you as a coach and why?

JRF! Literacy Coach Academy Training

Middle School Coaches

Modules 1-7

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
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Literacy Coach Training

The goal of this Literacy Coach training is to provide content and the opportunity for implementation across the school year in order to impact teacher practice and student achievement.

Norms

Let's Begin with Some Data and Why We are Here.

- Insert your data in this slide

Module 1 – Introduction
Increasing the Effectiveness of
Literacy Coaches

Increasing the Effectiveness of Literacy Coaches

- Review Insight 1 *Expand Pedagogical and Content Expertise in the School Context.* Discuss the following questions in your table groups:

  - What has your district done to help you build deeper knowledge in reading processes, how children learn to read and assessment? Is this a need in your district? What is unique about the middle grades?

  - What are the benefits of holding professional development for coaches in a school? What are the barriers?

Increasing the Effectiveness of Literacy Coaches

- Review Insight 2 *Use Adult Learning Theories.*
  Discuss the following question in your table groups:

  - What are some strategies you've used to engage adult learners? Write three strategies on sticky notes (one per sticky) and post on the chart.

Increasing the Effectiveness of Literacy Coaches

- Review Insight 3 *Promote Collaboration and Co-Learning*.

  - Based on the importance of collaboration and co-learning, how can you create an environment that supports collaboration and co-learning?

Increasing the Effectiveness of Literacy Coaches

- Review Insight 4 *Focus on Data-Driven Instruction and Student Learning.* Discuss the following question in your table groups.

  - Consider the data your districts collect to demonstrate student learning. How do you use data as the focus of your coaching with teachers?

Increasing the Effectiveness of Literacy Coaches

- Review Insight 5 *Create the Vision for Being a Change Agent.* Discuss the following questions:

    - What is your school's vision?

    - How does clarifying the coaches role with the principal support being an agent for change?

Wrap Up and Reflection

- Which insight has the most significance to you as a coach.

- Share your insights with the group and explain why the insight you chose is important to you.

SEDL insights

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Ramona Chauvin, PhD, and Kathleen Theodore, MA

Increasing the Effectiveness of Literacy Coaches

Literacy coaches provide teachers from all content areas with the support and professional development they need to deliver high-quality literacy instruction to all students. This issue of *SEDL Insights* examines how education leaders can help literacy coaches have the greatest impact at their schools.

Classroom teachers are instrumental in student reading success. As more states adopt college- and career-ready standards that require teachers of all core content areas to teach students to access information from a variety of texts, the importance of reading instruction continues to grow. At the same time, providing high-quality professional development for all teachers can pose financial and logistical challenges for school districts. Many districts turn to literacy coaches to deliver professional development, follow-up, and support in implementing evidence-based instructional practices and programs. While literacy coaches offer an effective job-embedded professional learning mechanism for teachers, districts should also provide professional development opportunities for literacy coaches.

Our experience—as teachers, literacy and regional reading coaches, and now as literacy consultants who support literacy coaches—has given us valuable insights into how to develop literacy coaches and help them build their skills. The insights outlined below are based on our professional experience and recent research findings. District and school leaders can use them to better support literacy coaches and to facilitate professional learning opportunities for them. Literacy coaches may also find these insights helpful as they seek to improve their skills and increase their impact on teacher quality and student performance.

SEDL Insights on Supporting the Professional Development of Literacy Coaches

1. Expand pedagogical and content expertise in the school context.
2. Use adult learning theories.
3. Promote collaboration and co-learning.
4. Focus on data-driven instruction and student learning.
5. Create the vision for being a change agent.

Insight 1

Expand pedagogical and content expertise in the school context.

Literacy coaches are first and foremost excellent teachers who understand how children learn and know how to create an environment that meets students' instructional and social-emotional needs. Once a teacher becomes a literacy coach, however, he or she needs to develop a level of expertise that is more focused than that of a classroom teacher in order to support teachers and build their own credibility. Professional development for literacy coaches can help them develop content expertise

and deeper knowledge in key areas, such as the reading processes, how children learn to read, and assessment.[1]

District and school leaders will want to arrange for professional development in a setting that enables coaches to collaborate with colleagues and apply what they have learned. Situating the professional development at the school allows the coaches to develop a deeper understanding of the school's strengths and problem areas, along with a deeper knowledge of the school's community, area, and district.[2] In this job-embedded experience, coaches and participating teachers can draw on classroom experiences in training sessions and can examine practices and site-specific implementation. Finally, by participating in school-based professional development, literacy coaches are able to spend more time in the classroom, which supports the development of strong relationships between coaches and teachers.[3]

SEDL literacy consultant Kathleen Theodore's experience providing professional development to three school districts in southwest New Mexico illustrates the benefits of job-embedded professional learning. When the work began, each district assembled a literacy leadership team composed of coaches, teacher leaders, and administrators. Theodore modeled one instructional strategy multiple times in multiple schools, so that the literacy leadership teams could see what implementation looked like at each elementary grade level. The teams observed Theodore modeling the strategy and completed observation forms. They then participated in debriefing meetings, where they discussed what they observed and how the strategies applied to their own schools.

In the following weeks, the teams worked on implementing the strategy at their schools, with the coaches modeling the strategy and practicing it with the teachers they supported. One month

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[1] International Reading Association, 2010; L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010.
[2] Blackhowicz, Buhle, Ogle, Frost, Correa, & Kinner, 2010.
[3] Puschak, 2006.
[4] Knowles, 1990.
[5] L'Allier, et al., 2010.

later, one of the districts hosted a 1-day literacy leadership team meeting, during which two teachers modeled the strategy that the group had studied and practiced. Again, the group debriefed with the teachers and provided supportive feedback. Once the 1-day meeting was complete, Theodore began the process again by modeling a new instructional strategy for the literacy leadership teams. Conducting these meetings in the school context had several benefits for the participants: they were able to see the strategy in action, which made it easier for them to build both pedagogical and content expertise. The literacy coaches were able to link the experience to their school setting, which increased the likelihood that they would use what they had learned at their own schools.

Insight 2 — Use adult learning theories.

Working with teachers can be very different from working with elementary, middle, and even high school students. Where young learners are more likely to look to the teacher to determine the area of study and provide instruction, adult learners often know what they need to learn and prefer that the instructor facilitate a self-directed learning experience rather than simply transmit information.[4] Adult learners also have a wider range of life experiences than young learners and expect what they learn to be relevant to their job or some other aspect of their lives.[5] With these differences in mind, a literacy coach will want to ask teachers what they expect from a professional learning experience and plan sessions accordingly.

While working with a school district in South Carolina, SEDL literacy consultant Ramona Chauvin observed a high school literacy coach conduct professional learning sessions that addressed participants' adult learning needs. The school leadership asked teachers for input on the topic, time, and format of the professional development sessions. Based on teachers' feedback, the leadership team decided to focus on helping teachers improve

instructional strategies for content-area extended writing. They created six heterogeneous groups of 25 teachers each that met during planning periods. These small, flexible groups then completed hands-on tasks from *What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy*, a resource that summarizes and discusses recent adolescent literacy research and describes promising research-based instructional practices.[6]

The results were phenomenal: teachers were actively engaged, working on specific content-area learning tasks that the coach had modeled, and voluntarily sharing examples of their teaching dialogue and the results of their work. They were process-oriented, practicing and learning a content-area writing strategy based on a school-wide instructional need. All administrators were present and participating in the sessions. When we asked individual teachers what made their sessions so successful, they spoke of how they felt valued and respected by one another, by the administration that held them accountable for attendance at the sessions and implementation of the strategies, and by the literacy coach. They also said that they felt they had a voice and a choice in the topics selected for study and that they could immediately use the strategies in their classrooms. The teachers' feedback made it clear that the coach's use of adult learning theories had helped make the professional development sessions successful.

Insight 3 — Promote collaboration and co-learning.

Collaborative professional learning encourages teachers to share expertise and resources and builds a community of adult learners. Coaches must first create an environment in which teachers feel that their professional expertise is valued and they can safely take risks and ask for help. Teachers have reported that when they feel that coaches respect their professional expertise and opinions, they have more effective relationships with them. Coaches may sometimes find it beneficial to take

themselves out of the role of expert and focus instead on cultivating professional dialogue among teachers. In addition to professional respect, trust is an important component of collaborative relationships. Coaches are encouraged to maintain teacher confidentiality and refrain from sharing conversations about classroom observations and instructional needs with administrators and other teachers. They can also establish trust by following through on commitments they have made with teachers.[7]

Language can also play an important role in the coach–teacher relationship. Experienced coaches tend to paraphrase and ask more open-ended questions, facilitating discussion among teachers and showing respect for their opinions.[8] Studies have also found that a coach's language is often illustrative of the relationship between a coach and teacher.[9] Findings such as these suggest that professional learning opportunities for literacy coaches should include an analysis of coaches' language when they work with teachers.

While Chauvin was working with a middle school that was conducting a series of professional learning meetings by content area, the principal reported how he and the literacy coach created an environment that supported collaboration and co-learning. The principal noticed that when he attended meetings with English language arts teachers and literacy coaches, teachers expected

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[6] NICHD & NIFL, 2007.
[7] Knight, 2009.
[8] Perkins, 1998.
[9] Rainville & Jones, 2008.

him to lead the meeting and were reluctant to participate in discussions. The principal made it clear that he was there to observe and provide support, but he wanted the coach and teachers to lead. The coach modeled the facilitator role and began guiding the teachers in taking turns facilitating meetings. As the work progressed, teachers assumed greater responsibility for facilitation. The coach asked guiding questions, provided resources as needed, and sometimes helped the group stay focused, but encouraged teachers to lead. As the administrators, coach, and teachers cultivated a safe environment where teachers felt their professional experience and expertise were valued, teachers were more willing to participate in meetings and share instructional challenges.

Insight 4 Focus on data-driven instruction and student learning.

When we work with school and district leaders on their literacy plans, we sometimes find that a focus on data and student learning are missing. Teachers and coaches may work hard to improve instructional strategies, but they sometimes do so without first identifying students' academic needs and later evaluating student work for mastery of a concept or skill. Analysis of student data, such as benchmark tests, should shape both long-term planning and the development of weekly lessons, as this activity helps teachers determine the areas in which students need the most support. Instead of waiting for the results of the next benchmark test, a teacher will examine student work for evidence of learning soon after delivering a lesson. This ongoing focus on student learning encourages teachers to reteach a lesson, differentiate instruction, and employ other strategies that will improve student outcomes.

For example, Chauvin worked with the principal and literacy coach at an elementary school in South Carolina as they examined their school-wide data to determine where students needed the most support. They discovered that all grade levels needed to focus on making inferences while reading. Literacy coaches and teachers formed

book study groups, and all faculty members and administrators researched the topic of making inferences and related instructional strategies. Over time, each grade-level team received support from the literacy coach on how to examine student data and narrow down the instructional needs to the individual student level.

Chauvin also helped the principal, literacy coach, and teachers implement professional learning communities (PLCs) at the school. In their PLC meetings, grade-level teams selected appropriate instructional strategies based on individual student needs and provided differentiated instruction. After delivering a lesson, teachers assessed student work using common teacher-developed assessments. Teachers brought student work samples to PLC meetings so that they could identify where students were having difficulties and further modify instruction. During one of the PLC meetings, teachers commented on how invaluable this process was, especially since students were improving in their ability to make inferences.

Insight 5 Create the vision for being a change agent.

In addition to fulfilling many other roles, literacy coaches must view themselves—and be viewed—as literacy leaders in their schools. This involves setting goals and directions for the school's literacy program, supporting teachers and other school personnel in improving learning outcomes for all students, and redesigning the organization so that

[10] L'Allier, et al., 2010.

it accomplishes its goals.[10] Literacy coaches can share information from local, state, and federal literacy initiatives, serve as a link to parents and the community, and advocate for the school. A literacy coach can also work as a change agent by integrating school-wide efforts with district and state mandates, coordinating staff development, making presentations, and keeping the principal informed.[11] Literacy coaches see supporting a vision as critical to their role. In order to establish and implement the vision of the school, literacy coaches must work with the support of the principal.

Theodore saw literacy coaches become change agents when she was delivering professional development in New Mexico. At a literacy leadership team meeting, some teacher leaders and coaches told the principals that observing other schools and districts had caused them to examine their school's literacy initiative more closely and understand it within the context of the entire school improvement initiative. They felt that some districts had progressed further in the implementation of literacy initiatives than they had, and they wanted to assume more leadership responsibilities to support the literacy and school improvement initiative. With the support and trust of their principals, the coaches began offering more professional development sessions, including after school sessions, and focusing on how the work would influence student outcomes in all areas, not just literacy. Everyone was impressed with the openness, honesty, and courage of the discussion and follow-up actions. The coaches were on their way to facilitating the vision, which is the real work of a change agent.

Conclusion

As college- and career-ready standards call for teachers of all content areas to help students develop literacy skills, literacy coaches play an increasingly important role in ensuring that these teachers provide effective literacy instruction to all students. Just like the teachers they support, literacy coaches need professional learning opportunities that will help them improve the support they offer.

[11] Walpole & Blamey, 2008.

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SEDL Insights is based on the experience, expertise, and research of SEDL staff. It is designed to give education practitioners practical suggestions for implementing school improvement strategies.

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