

Exploring Case Studies in Reading

2010

How Does Coaching Affect Classroom Practice?

BASED ON THE CALIFORNIA READING FIRST YEAR 5 EVALUATION REPORT
2006-07

NATIONAL READING
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER



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<http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/support/index.html>

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Introduction

This case study has been prepared for individual readers, a study group of readers, or school-site teams with an interest in and commitment to coaching teachers of reading to improve classroom practice. This document includes a definition of case study, a statement of this study's intent, a quick overview of current research on coaching, and an introduction to this study's context. Guiding questions are included for both individual reflection and follow-up group discussion. The appendix contains an optional activity school-site teams can use to identify and explore their school's most valuable experiences with their reading coaches and plan future coaching roles that would prioritize coaching services to meet current teacher needs.

Definition of "case study"

A case study is a form of qualitative, descriptive research that seeks to examine the interplay of factors that explain how and why things happen within a context under study in order to offer a holistic understanding of the program or activity. It may suggest new factors or questions for further study or application.

Why read a case study on coaching?

The intention of the researcher in this case study on coaching was to surface professional issues and examine findings on how California's K-3 reading coaches viewed their experiences based on the state's annual survey. The coaches were asked to judge their roles as coaches. Teacher colleagues and site principals were also asked to judge the extent and nature of coach support in their school. This particular study is based on the fifth year of implementation of the Reading First program which included schools in the program for five to two years. Additional information on perceptions of coaching was collected through the survey's open-ended question.

What is generally known about coaching?

Many articles on coaching and the role that coaches play in their schools have been published in recent years. Puig and Froelich (2006) defined coaches as "[those] that assist in shifting classroom teachers to better understand critical pedagogy and the need for change based on evidence." The role of the literacy coach is very different from that of the reading specialist as that role has been traditionally defined, with its focus on the instruction of struggling readers; the coach's role is oriented more toward resource support and leadership (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, and Wallis, 2002).

Showers (1985) outlined three purposes of coaching: (a) to build communities of teachers who continuously engage in the study of their craft, (b) to develop the shared language and common understandings necessary for collegial study of new knowledge and skills, and (c) to provide a structure for the follow-up to training that is essential in acquiring new teaching skills and strategies.

The International Reading Association summarized:

Coaching provides ongoing consistent support for the implementation and instruction components. It is non-threatening and supportive—not evaluative. It gives a sense of how good professional development is. It also affords the opportunity to see it work with students. (Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, & Supovitz [2003], as cited in International Reading Association, 2004).

Taken together, these definitions suggest that the essential elements of coaching are: helping teachers improve their understanding, offering ongoing support to teachers as they implement their new understandings, and providing feedback and follow-up in a non-threatening, collegial way.

Setting for this case study

The California Reading First Year 5 Evaluation Report (Haager, Dhar, Moulton, & McMillan, 2008) explores the value of coaching with the intent to describe the backgrounds of the state’s coaches and document perceptions of the coaching role. It presents survey outcomes obtained from a considerably large population of Reading First implementers: 17,261 teachers; 1,028 coaches; and 1,073 principals. These participants yielded a response rate of 91 percent on questions dealing with the perception of coaching roles. Teachers, principals, and coaches were asked about their perceptions on four parameters of the coach’s role: responsibility for program implementation, access availability, informed resource provider, and facilitator for grade-level meetings.

The evaluators used qualitative methods to analyze responses to open-ended questions. Teachers and principals were asked: “In your opinion, what aspects of Reading First-funded coaching do you view as most valuable or beneficial and why?” Coaches were asked: “In your opinion, what are the most valuable or beneficial aspects of your role as a Reading First coach and why?” Given the high response rate of written narratives by the implementers, the evaluator concluded that this case study merits consideration for representing findings that validate an informed view on the value of coaching.

Key questions for the individual reader

What are the similarities and differences in the value of coaching from three viewpoints—the teachers, principals, and coaches?

The reader may wish to focus on the evaluator's findings in the categories that define coaches' roles:

Training

- Based on qualifications, experience and training provided, what is the level of expertise of the coaching personnel in this study?

Accountability

- How did the perception of teachers differ from that of principals and coaches regarding who held primary responsibility for program implementation?

Access

- What level of access to teachers did coaches have?

Resource

- How was the coach perceived as a resource?

Facilitator

- What was perceived as the coach's role in facilitating meetings?

Perceived value of coaching

- What was common in perceptions of the value of coaches' various functions? What was different?

Key questions for group discussion

What are the connections and applications from the California study to coaching at your school or district?

The group may wish to compare the evaluator's findings with its members' experience in the categories that define coaches' roles:

Training

- How does our coaching staff compare in terms of qualifications, experience and training?
- What is the level of our coaching staff's expertise?
- Is it sufficient?

Accountability

- Who in our district or school is primarily responsible for program implementation?
- How does this affect school leadership?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages of having the coach rather than the principal perceived as the instructional leader?

Access

- What kind and level of access do coaches have to our teachers?
- Is it sufficient?
- What are the barriers to direct support of coaching in the classroom?

Resource

- Are coaches generally thought of as a resource for the school site? What's the evidence?

Facilitator

- What is the role of the coach in our district, staff, and /or grade-level meetings?
- How could this role be enhanced (e.g., lesson study, monitoring student progress)?

Perceived value of coaching

- How does the "response category" rankings reflect the functions of the work of our coach(es)?
- What is the perception of the value of these functions? What evidence do we have from teachers, coaches, and administrators of their perceptions of the value of these functions?
- Respond to the conclusion in the evaluator's study: "They [coaches] are highly valued by program participants. The positive perceptions of coaches and the importance of their role in supporting the curriculum and implementation are almost universal. Coaches serve important functions in supporting implementation of the Reading First program and maintaining a school's focus on improving student achievement." Could similar conclusions be drawn about our coach(es)? What is the value of coaching in future implementation of reading instruction?

Overall use of the study

- What is the value of this case study to our group's work?
- Could similar surveys provide useful information about our own work?

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Featured Case Study

How Does Coaching Affect Classroom Practice?
Based on the California Reading First Year 5 Evaluation Report
Chapter 5: Evaluation of Reading First Coaching
2006-2007

Introduction

In this section, we examine the perceptions of Reading First participants regarding the coaching model used in Reading First schools. LEAs receiving funding have had the option of using part of the funding to hire, train, and support reading (or literacy) coaches and out-of-the-classroom teachers assigned to provide classroom-level support for program implementation. Extensive resources have been allocated to training and supporting a vast statewide network of coaches. This document addresses the question, “What elements of Reading First coaching are beneficial and why?”

Employed here is information from the Reading First surveys that examines the roles of coaches in depth. We use selected items from the survey to determine teachers’, coaches’, and principals’ views of the roles and functions of coaches. In addition, we examine the responses of participants to an open-ended question that provided teachers, coaches, and principals opportunities to express their views of the beneficial aspects of coaching.

The findings are:

- Reading or literacy coaches are an integral part of the Reading First program in California. They are highly valued by program participants.
- Coaches serve important functions in supporting implementation of the Reading First program and maintaining a school’s focus on improving student achievement.
- The Reading First initiative has provided extensive training and support to coaches, an effort that has built capacity at the district, school, and classroom levels. Coaches have reached a high level of expertise to the point that many are now qualified to provide training at Reading First institutes.
- The most important functions served by coaches in California are providing demonstration lessons, serving as a source of resource and support for teachers, and facilitating collaboration focused on student achievement and fidelity of implementation.
- Most coaches have ready access to classrooms to provide support for instruction and assessment.

Research on Coaching

The concept of coaching has developed, in part, because traditional professional development has been criticized for offering workshop-type sessions with little or no follow-up support (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Novick, 1996). The research on sustaining professional development is just beginning to document the value of coaching. Garet and colleagues (2001) identified aspects of professional development that significantly correlated with changes in teachers' knowledge and practices. They posit that effective professional development should focus on specific content knowledge; provide ongoing training at the school site; integrate training with the daily work of teachers; promote the collective participation of teachers; align with instructional goals, instructional practices, and local standards; and provide opportunities for active participation and learning.

Sustained professional development that focuses on specific academic subject matter and gives teachers integrated opportunities for hands-on practice is more likely to increase teacher knowledge and produce positive student outcomes. Formats that promote implementation include coaching, in-class modeling and observations, and reflective meetings, all elements of the Reading First coaching model.

A recent report on Reading First coaching in five states (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, Autio & Institute for Education Sciences, 2007) documented five distinct categories of coaching types seen in Reading First: a) data-oriented coaches, who focus mainly on data and data results; b) student-oriented coaches, who spend a great deal of time working directly with students; c) managerial coaches, who focus on the system of meetings, paperwork, etc.; d) teacher-oriented coaches, who focus mainly on whole-group coaching activities such as running meetings or providing training; and e) teacher-oriented coaches, who focus mainly on working with individual teachers.

Data sources

The California evaluation report examined selected items from the survey related to Reading First coaches. Teachers and principals completed survey items on the extent and nature of coach support. Additionally, coaches self-reported on their roles and information was obtained from the California Technical Assistance (C-TAC) personnel regarding the training and expertise of coaches.

To gather additional insight into perceptions of Reading First coaching, teachers and principals had the opportunity to respond to this open-ended question, "In your opinion, what aspects of Reading First-funded coaching do you view as most valuable or beneficial and why?" Coaches responded to this question: "In your opinion, what are the most valuable or beneficial aspects of your role as a Reading First coach and why?"

Qualifications of Coaches

Coaches were asked to report on their level of experience and preparation. This table shows the number and percentage of coaches' responses.

Coach survey results regarding experience and preparation

How many years of experience do you have with your district's adopted reading/language arts program?	N	% of total
Less than 1 year	8	1
2 years	8	1
3 years	23	2
4 years	284	28
5 or more years	609	59
How many years will you have taught or provided support in the primary grades (K-3) as of July 2006?	N	% of total
Less than 1 year	13	1
1 year	23	2
2 years	27	3
3 – 5 years	207	20
6 – 10 years	279	27
11 – 20 years	273	26
21 – 25 years	87	8
26 or more years	109	11
How long have you been a Reading First coach?	N	% of total
This is my first year.	255	25
This is my second year.	204	20
This is my third year.	227	22
This is my fourth year.	312	30
What qualifications does your school leadership require of its reading coaches? Check all that apply.	N	% of total
A valid California teaching credential	999	97
Three years or more of successful classroom teaching experience	966	94
Recent, relevant training in scientifically-based reading instruction	773	75
Demonstrated skill in working with adult learners	730	71

Note: Rounding of percentages and items left blank on individual surveys result in less than 100% reported here.

Additional information about coach qualifications was provided by C-TAC personnel. In California, 1,320 Reading First reading/literacy coaches have received specific coach training aligned with their duties related to implementing the Reading First Assurances. From 2004 through 2006, about 300 coaches completed the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) Reading Certificate program, qualifying them to be reading experts. An additional 110 coaches matriculated into the CTC Reading and Language Specialist Credential program in the past year, qualifying them to be reading experts at the district level by the summer of 2008. Both of these CTC programs have been partnered with UCLA Education Extension.

The C-TAC has developed and coordinated semi-annual, two-day professional development sessions for all Reading First coaches. This program, begun in 2003, was designed to enhance the skills of the coach to provide demonstration lessons in classrooms and school site professional development, instruct individual teachers, and facilitate grade level collaborative meetings twice a month. In 2006-07, the C-TAC developed teacher modules for coaches to use with teachers to improve the quality of teaching in specific skill areas. The C-TAC professional development program for coaches was modified to offer much of the same content as the courses for the Reading Certificate program. Given the turnover of Reading First coaches, LEAs had the opportunity to send new coaches to two additional sessions per year beyond the semi-annual coach trainings. In 2006–07, 1278 coaches attended these sessions; 462 were Reading First coaches.

This extensive training built capacity in LEAs around the state. Based on their acquired expertise, many of the coaches applied for and were accepted as instructors for the teacher summer institutes under the auspices of the statewide network of the Reading Implementation Centers, the authorized Reading First professional development provider. Of the instructor pool of 550, 184 were active coaches, who conducted almost 600 five-day professional development courses for teachers during the summer of 2007. These courses ranged from Year 1, beginning level, to Year 5, most advanced level.

In sum, Reading First coaches, through the semi-annual professional development program of four days and their involvement with the professional development summer institutes, either as instructor or participant, received from 14 days to 24 days of instruction. Coaches’ expertise and experience has risen steadily at the district, school and classroom levels.

Perceptions of coaching roles

Accountability

Teachers, principals, and coaches were asked on the survey to indicate who held primary responsibility for implementation of the district’s adopted reading/language arts program. The following table presents the percentages of responses from each group. Though the proportion of principals and coaches responding in each category seemed to be similar, the proportions of teachers’ responses differed. A higher percentage of teachers (than coaches and principals) indicated that the coach assumed primary responsibility and a lower proportion of teachers indicated that the principal assumed primary responsibility. The Reading First program encourages principals to take primary responsibility, in collaboration with the coach. This is perhaps an area of implementation that could be strengthened.

Teachers’, coaches’, and principals’ responses regarding responsibility for program implementation

Who takes responsibility for teachers using the district’s adopted reading/language arts program?	Teachers %	Coaches %	Principals %
Neither the principal nor the coach take much responsibility	2	1	0
The principal takes primary responsibility	13	37	36
The principal and coach share equal responsibility	45	47	50
The principal gives the coach primary responsibility	38	14	10

Access

Teachers' access to coaching is an important concern in a coaching model. Teachers need to feel they can get the assistance they need, when they need it. To be effective, coaches need to communicate and work with teachers. Teachers, coaches, and principals were asked to report the level of access that teachers have to coaches (results appear in the next table). A high level of access to coaching was reported by all three groups. This is particularly notable, considering that this is a shift in practice from the traditional model of teacher independence with little involvement of peers.

Teachers', coaches', and principals' responses regarding teachers' access to coaches

Degree of access that teachers have to coaches	Teachers %	Coaches %	Principals %
The coach is often unavailable	10	-	-
The coach is usually available	53	-	-
The coach seeks me out to assure that I have the support I need	35	-	-
Coach and Principal Survey: How much access do you (do coaches) have to teacher classrooms?			
Not applicable	-	-	0
Coaches need teacher or principal permission to visit a classroom	-	3	1
Coaches have free access to classrooms, but only a few teachers welcome my (the coach's) presence	-	4	3
Coaches have free access to classrooms, but only about half of the teachers welcome my (the coach's) presence	-	13	14
Coaches have free access to classrooms, and almost all of the teachers welcome my (the coach's) presence	-	78	78

Coaches as resources for teachers

The coach serves as an important resource for teachers to answer questions, find information or materials, help interpret data, and demonstrate instructional strategies. Coaches were generally perceived to be effective in these roles, but not always to provide specific assistance. As shown in the next table, most respondents indicated that coaches provide help by answering questions or conducting demonstration lessons. Later in this report we will see that teachers highly value the demonstration lessons, but here only 33% of teachers felt the demonstrations significantly improved their teaching. Improving the quality of demonstration lessons provided by coaches may be an area in need of strengthening in Reading First implementation.

Teachers', coaches', and principals' responses regarding the coach as a resource

(Teachers and principals) How helpful is your coach in answering questions about how to teach the program?			
(Coaches) How helpful do you feel you are in answering teacher questions about how to teach the program?	Teachers %	Coaches %	Principals %
Coach often doesn't know more than the teachers about how to teach the program	7	1	0
Coach gives general answers to questions	24	12	8
Coach gives specific, detailed answers that teachers can use	66	86	87
(Teacher/Principal Surveys) If the coach has conducted demonstration lessons, how helpful were they?			
(Coach Survey) If you conduct demonstration lessons, how helpful are they?			
Coach does not conduct demonstration lessons	27	5	2
Coach's demonstrations do not help much	6	2	2
Coach provides adequate demonstrations	32	35	25
Coach provides demonstrations that significantly improve teaching	33	58	68

Coach as facilitator

Coaches are expected to facilitate grade-level meetings, lesson studies, and data analysis sessions with teachers. The next table shows the percentages of teachers, coaches, and principals who indicated varying levels of coach involvement in the facilitator role. Teachers reported a lower level of facilitation than did coaches and principals, but overall the results are positive. The majority of respondents viewed coaches as facilitating meetings and keeping the meetings focused on instructional needs. Both of these roles are important.

Teachers', coaches', and principals' responses regarding the coach as a facilitator

Does the coach (do you) facilitate regular grade-level teacher meetings related to your district's adopted reading/language arts program?	Teachers %	Coaches %	Principals %
Coach is not involved with the grade-level meetings	23	12	7
Coach helps facilitate the meetings regularly	46	37	33
In addition to facilitating meetings, coach keeps the focus on instructional needs of teachers	29	49	56

Perceived value of coaching

In this section, findings are reported from the qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses to a survey question designed to obtain further information about perceptions of coaching. Teachers and principals responded in narrative form to the question, "In your opinion, what aspects of Reading First-funded coaching do you view as most valuable or beneficial and why?" while coaches responded to, "In your opinion, what are the most valuable or beneficial aspects of your role as a Reading First coach and why?" Qualitative research methodology was used to examine findings from these open-ended questions.

Of the 17,261 teacher surveys collected, 12,243 wrote narrative responses to that question, or 70.9%. Of the 1,028 coach surveys collected, there were 928 narrative comments submitted, or 90.3%. Of the 1,073 principal surveys collected, there were 947 comments, or 88.3%. This high response rate lends validity to the findings, ensuring that the opinions expressed are likely to be representative of all Reading First participants.

Limitations in the generalizability of qualitative findings should be noted. Though qualitative research may provide in-depth insight into phenomena and why they occur, results should be viewed as inconclusive.

Relative importance of aspects of coaching

The responses are listed in rank order in the following table. Rankings are listed for all respondents combined and then for teachers, coaches, and principals separately.

In this table, we see that the order of frequencies is similar for the columns of all respondents and teacher respondents, but not identical. This is because the teachers made up the largest proportion of the response pool. There is some variability in the coach and principal listings. Demonstration by coaches was in the top three rankings across respondent groups indicating that this is a highly valued aspect of coaching. Teacher support, which was highest in frequency among coaches and principals, was sixth in frequency for teachers; however, coach as a resource (third highest for teachers) is a very similar category, so the function of coaches in which they provide support and resources could be thought of as highly valued also. Other high-frequency categories of responses across groups included instructional strategies, program implementation support, and collaboration/grade-level planning. The negative comments category captured a variety of responses but occurred at a relatively low frequency.

Rank order and percentages of responses for categories

Response category	All N=14,118		Teachers N=12,243		Coaches N=978		Principals N=947	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Demonstration by coaches	1	24.2%	1	17.5%	3	28.3%	2	36.1%
Teacher support	2	17.2%	6	8.1%	1	40.7%	1	38.9%
Instructional strategies	3	15.4%	2	10.8%	5	25.9%	8	17.7%
Program implementation support	4	14.6%	8	5.5%	2	35.1%	3	35.9%
Collaboration/grade-level planning	5	13.9%	5	9.0%	4	26.8%	5	21.2%
Knowledge and skills provided by coach	6	12.2%	4	9.4%	10	16.1%	12	11.6%
Coach as a resource	7	11.9%	3	10.0%	12	13.2%	13	7.3%
Data Analysis/assessment	8	11.9%	7	6.8%	6	22.1%	4	23.7%
Professional development	9	9.8%	9	5.3%	8	21.1%	7	19.4%
Qualities of coach	10	7.2%	11	4.3%	16	6.5%	6	19.3%
Observation and feedback	11	7.2%	13	3.1%	11	14.9%	9	15.3%
Expertise of coach	12	6.5%	12	3.3%	14	8.2%	10	14.7%
Negative comments	13	5.8%	10	4.8%	17	4.2%	17	1.9%
Improvement of lesson quality	14	5.3%	15	1.2%	7	21.2%	11	11.6%
Comments about waived/bilingual classes	15	5.1%	17	1.0%	9	19.8%	19	0.6%
Improved student achievement	16	3.5%	18	0.9%	13	12.0%	15	3.9%
Coach in non-judgmental role	17	2.7%	14	1.6%	18	3.6%	14	4.9%
Improved awareness of research	18	1.7%	19	0.6%	15	7.3%	16	2.2%
Increased accountability of teachers	19	1.3%	16	1.1%	19	1.2%	18	0.6%

Code characterization

For each code, or response category, in the next table, a brief definition is provided along with representative comments from the respondents. These are listed in the order of frequency occurring within all respondent groups combined. Descriptors are provided for all, but comments were included only from those categories that occurred within 10% or greater of any respondent group.

Code descriptions and representative comments

Response category description	Representative comments
<p>Demonstration by coaches States that demonstration or modeling of lessons and teaching techniques by coaches is a valuable aspect of Reading First.</p>	<p>"Lesson demonstrations by the coach are the most beneficial. Seeing the actual lesson plan presented helps me visualize what I need to do and helps me understand how the lesson should be carried out (Teacher)"</p> <p>"I feel the demonstration lessons really provide a 'hands on' approach to learning. Teachers can sit and see what good teaching looks like from the modeling of a coach (Principal)"</p> <p>"Through demonstration lessons teachers have the opportunity to observe the coach's delivery and pacing of lessons and use of effective strategies to enhance student engagement and implementation of scaffolds needed for student learning (Coach)"</p> <p>"The coach is very helpful and gives me suggestions as well as demonstrates teaching techniques that will improve my teaching (Teacher)"</p> <p>"Demonstrations, observations and feedback to teachers is very beneficial because teachers need continuous support, reflection and practice time to make instructional changes (Principal)"</p>
<p>Teacher support States that coaches are supportive to the teachers in providing many different types of assistance to the teachers including cognitive planning and reading practices.</p>	<p>"The most beneficial aspect of having a coach is that we have someone to support and guide, and help us with anything we need to achieve our goals in teaching reading (Teacher)"</p> <p>"The most valuable aspect of my role is to provide support to my teachers in implementing the program, clearing up any misunderstandings and helping them reach the needs of their students. I have also helped teachers to cognitive plan their lessons (Coach)"</p> <p>"Coaches have been a great asset to our school and provided invaluable information and assistance. The assistance to teachers is immediate and hands-on. It is a win-win situation for everyone, especially our students (Principal)"</p> <p>"A Reading First coach is the hub of the wheel- supporting, guiding, and coordinating the school's efforts toward full implementation and data driven instruction (Coach)"</p> <p>"Our coaches are very supportive and consistently look for ways to assist both the teachers and the students. They model lessons, conduct workshops and implement action plans for improvement (Teacher)"</p> <p>"The Reading First coach is providing direct support for teachers in the classroom. She is able to focus on teachers that administrators have identified as needing extra support. This is something that we would not be able to provide otherwise (Principal)"</p>
<p>Instructional strategies States that coaches provide teachers with guidance and planning of instructional practices and strategies. Further indicates that coaches are knowledgeable in the area of instructional strategies.</p>	<p>"The coach's professional ideas for bettering the teaching in the classroom and daily support the coach gives to teachers is invaluable (Teacher)"</p> <p>"I am able to assist teachers in improving teaching practices and guiding instruction to reach all the students in the class (Coach)"</p> <p>"One of the most valuable aspects is the bank of strategies that I can provide to teachers. Through demo lessons and collaborative meetings teachers can incorporate new strategies in their lessons and continuously improve (Coach)"</p> <p>"Help with strategies and ideas is most beneficial. The coach is always on target as to what I need to include in my instruction at the time (Teacher)"</p> <p>"Coaches and teachers are able to dialogue about program implementation as well as effective teaching techniques and strategies in order to improve instruction in the classroom (Principal)"</p>
<p>Program implementation support Indicates that coaches monitor, support and guide implementation of the reading program.</p>	<p>"The most valuable aspect of coaching is being able to provide a highly trained person to improve teachers' program implementation through observation and feedback, demo lessons and elbow coaching (Principal)"</p> <p>"The coaches provide needed assistance and guidance to help implement the curriculum and make it most beneficial for the students (Teacher)"</p> <p>"The most valuable aspect of my role as a Reading First coach is the support I provide in helping teachers understand the purpose of the components of the program and how to implement them to achieve the highest success with the students (Coach)"</p> <p>"Coaching provides guidance to stay on track with the program and focus on student achievement (Principal)"</p>

Code descriptions and representative comments (continued)

Response category description	Representative comments
<p>Collaboration/grade-level planning States that coaches are important in facilitating meetings between teachers, administrators and school staff. Coaches are connectors of people in the school environment.</p>	<p>"Cognitive coaching and grade level collaboration are powerful tools that can shape and strengthen a staff's professional and instructional development (Coach)" "A well-trained coach on site to assist, facilitate and collaborate with teachers is essential to the program's success. The ability to collaborate and assist teachers in analyzing data, targeting student achievement and teaching strategies has been valuable (Principal)" "The lesson study planning and implementation have been very helpful. The colleague feedback time and time for reflection have also been extremely beneficial to my teaching (Teacher)" "I feel that coordination of collaborative meetings has helped my staff to share ideas and become stronger with implementation. I also feel that facilitating Action Plan meetings has helped to focus our goals (Coach)" "Having a literacy coach at the school full time provides an open forum for administrators and coaches to deepen the collaboration discussion and broaden their knowledge base. It gives support for administrators to evaluate and implement the district Reading/Language Arts program and helps support teachers by providing a focus for grade level collaboration (Principal)" "I think that our unit planning time has been very valuable. It gives us an opportunity to meet as a grade level with our coach and plan out specifics for each unit (Teacher)"</p>
<p>Knowledge and skills provided by coach Indicates that the coach supports the development of teachers' knowledge and skills; deepens and expands teachers' expertise. Further states that coaches clear up any misunderstandings about the reading program or Reading First.</p>	<p>"It is very helpful to have a coach on site who is always available to answer questions I may have regarding the program (Teacher)" "Having staff that are knowledgeable of all the program details and at all grade levels is invaluable for teachers and administrators (Principal)" "The most valuable aspect of my role as a Reading First coach is the ability to work with teachers and support teachers in their continuous learning and improvement as professional. As I coach, I impact hundreds of students by sharing my knowledge with their teachers (Coach)" "Reading First funded coaches are valuable when coaches are knowledgeable in the program and are able to provide assistance to new teachers when needed (Teacher)"</p>
<p>Coach as a resource States that the coach is a resource of materials, information and ideas for teachers and their specific classroom needs.</p>	<p>"The coaches are always there to support us in many ways. They provide great model lessons and materials and if we have questions which are unknown at the moment, they go out of their way to find answers for us (Teacher)" "The most valuable aspect of my role is being the resource person at my school site. I am able to find activities and present new ways to teach by providing training and support (Coach)" "I like having an onsite person to ask questions of and get help when needed. The coach is available to meet with me and help me design lessons. Having someone who actually understands the students as well as the material is very helpful (Teacher)" "I value being a resource to support and answer any questions or concerns that the teachers may have about the program implementation or research that guides the program (Coach)"</p>
<p>Data analysis/assessment Describes that coach's role in supporting and guiding teachers in the area of data collection and analysis of student data is vital.</p>	<p>"I find it very valuable that I can sit with my reading coach and analyze data and determine the needs of my students. We are able to brainstorm ideas to better reach those students (Teacher)" "I believe the Reading First grant has really brought us together as a school. We now collaborate every week and discuss data (Coach)" "My role as a coach has helped student achievement at my school by helping teachers with looking at data and reflecting on it (Coach)" "The literacy coach will review the 6-8 Weeks Skill Assessments with me and make me aware of what my students need overall and individually to improve my success in teaching reading (Teacher)" "Facilitating the teachers in their analysis of data, assisting them in recognizing areas of strength and areas that need growth, and identifying changes in instruction and intervention to achieve that growth (Principal)"</p>

Code descriptions and representative comments (continued)

Response category description	Representative comments
<p>Professional development States that coaches provide professional development for teachers and receive their own professional development to become experts. Professional development is a vital aspect of the Reading First program.</p>	<p>"I find that the coaches receive ongoing training that they are able to share with our faculty. This helps us keep up with better ways to teach language arts. They also provide excellent professional development that assists us in implementing better practices in the classroom (Teacher)"</p> <p>"I believe my most valuable role as a coach is to share what I have learned at Coach Institutes and other trainings through demonstration lessons, staff meetings, grade level meetings and workshops (Coach)"</p> <p>"Providing extensive training to the coach is important so that the coach is able to support teachers across grade levels in all components (Principal)"</p> <p>"I can provide ongoing research-based training and support for our teachers. I work collaboratively to plan staff development and promote school-wide instructional improvement (Coach)"</p>
<p>Qualities of coach The quality of the coaching makes an impact on a school. Responses indicate that high quality coaching has a positive impact and low quality coaching does not.</p>	<p>"The teachers and I have immediate access to someone who is knowledgeable in literacy to model lessons, facilitate grade level meetings, provide demonstrations and observe teachers (Principal)"</p> <p>"The coach is an integral part of what we do at the school. Her expertise and support of teachers help make them better teachers. Teachers feel comfortable with her. All of these aspects, no doubt, lead to improved student achievement (Principal)"</p> <p>"Teachers are understanding why some practices are better than others. I am able to help teachers by passing along best practices, which many teachers never get to see. It also makes teachers feel good about what they have done (Coach)"</p> <p>"Our coach is very organized and efficient. She works very hard to answer any questions we have and keeps us motivated. She puts a lot of time and effort into her job and it shows in our student data (Teacher)"</p>
<p>Observation and feedback States that coaches conduct regular observations of reading lessons and help teachers improve by giving feedback.</p>	<p>"Monitoring the implementation of the program ensures fidelity. The coaches providing feedback to teachers with acknowledgement of components and strategies that are in place as well as areas to improve instruction (Principal)"</p> <p>The most valuable aspects of the Reading First coaching (for me) are the immediate feedback on instructional practices which allows me to be more effective, and strategizing together about what instructional practices to use in a workshop/intervention when the 6-8 week assessments results come back (Teacher)"</p> <p>"I try to take each teacher to the next level of teaching in terms of their implementation and their knowledge. I meet with teachers in a variety of settings, individually, small groups or whole staff. Each venue allows me to customize and individualize my coaching. I succeed in my mission when teachers believe all students can learn from them and they analyze and respond to their students' needs. I succeed when I see all students learning to read and progress in language arts (Coach)"</p>
<p>Expertise of coach States that because coaches have developed expertise to be a specialist in reading curriculum or instruction, they are valuable because of this expertise.</p> <p>Improvement of lesson quality Shows that when coaches help teachers with their lessons, the quality of instruction is improved.</p>	<p>"Having a knowledgeable highly trained coach is of great value because it supports the teaching and it helps with refinement of the core Language Arts Program (Principal)"</p> <p>"Our coaches are experts in reading and can apply their knowledge to actual situations occurring in the classrooms. They are not rule-stickers but thinkers. They provide depth of understanding to teachers of why they are doing what they are doing and why some things do not work (Principal)"</p> <p>"Our coach is highly qualified, exceptionally well prepared, exceptionally conscientious and has a remarkable can-do attitude in the face of tedious tasks (Teacher)"</p> <p>"The coach takes the time to come into my classroom and teach a lesson to help me find new ways to teach that lesson. I like to have the coach's honest input, not criticism (Teacher)"</p> <p>"The coach helps teachers to enhance their knowledge and their lesson structure (Principal)"</p>

Code descriptions and representative comments (continued)

Response category description	Representative comments
<p>Comments about waived/bilingual classes Comments discuss bilingual education or waived classrooms</p>	<p>"If they (coaches) are truly capable, they can model bilingual lessons (Teacher)" "Having literacy coaches at our site has really been a great benefit for all our teachers and especially to help guide instruction, monitor student progress and help our English learners (Principal)" "I advocate for our English learners and continuously put their needs at the forefront (Coach)"</p>
<p>Improved student achievement Comments refer to improved student achievement as a goal or result of Reading First coaching</p>	<p>"The use of a reading coach as a support to the grade levels when interpreting student data and determining the next steps for instruction has helped increase student achievement (Principal)" "Having a coach is very beneficial. When coaches really support teachers, they answer questions and guide teachers and students to get better results in language arts (Teacher)" "The coach is a trusted knowledgeable partner for all teachers and myself to work with to continue to improve student achievement (Principal)" "Our coach is a valuable part of our efforts to raise student achievement (Teacher)" "I collaborate with teachers to develop action plans to improve student achievement (Coach)"</p>
<p>Coach in non-judgmental role Indicates that coaches are seen as non-judgmental, non-evaluative, or non-threatening. When coaches go into classrooms to observe, they can be objective and non-evaluative.</p>	<p>"I value having a coach that is non-evaluative and helpful in any way that can help the teacher (Teacher)" "The coaches have an ability to assist the teachers in a way that is not evaluative so teachers take more advantage as it is less threatening (Principal)" "Our coach is always willing and available to help. She is non-threatening in my classroom and I know she is there to help, not criticize (Teacher)" "Teachers have a colleague in the classroom who is there to assist in implementation of the program. Any corrective action that is taken in the implementation is not viewed as punitive (Coach)"</p>
<p>Improved awareness of research Indicates that coaches improve teachers' awareness of research and how it applies to instruction</p>	<p>"Reading First funded coaches are a valuable resource to tap for up-to-date cutting edge research information and instructional strategies (Teacher)" "The strong knowledge base and rich coaching support. She provides strong research foundations for what we are doing and how to best do it (Principal)" "The coaches keep everybody updated on current data and resources (Teacher)" "I explain the effectiveness of certain strategies, materials and organizational structures since many teachers are not familiar with scientifically-based reading research (Coach)"</p>
<p>Increased accountability of teachers The coach helps the teachers to be accountable for full implementation of the program</p>	<p>"I believe Reading First funded coaching helps teachers stay on track and meet the targeted goals for our district (Teacher)" "Our coach stays focused on the accountability component which has provided the teachers with a deeper understanding and focus of the standards and the purpose for their instruction (Principal)"</p>

Code descriptions and representative comments (continued)

Response category description	Representative comments
<p>Negative comments Any negative response about Reading First coaching</p>	<p>Note: Many of the negative comments were vague and did not fall into subcategories. The subcategories listed here represent relatively small numbers of respondents. They are included here only to demonstrate contrasts to the positive comments included in the other categories in this table.</p> <p>Lack of administrator or structural support "If I were supported in the implementation of the program, then I could be beneficial (as a coach). It would be valuable for teachers to have someone to discuss assessment results with, but I am not allowed (Coach)" "The messages or mandates we receive from the coach could just as well be sent by email. I don't feel that the support is really there for implementation of the program. We don't really have coaching (Teacher)" "I am disappointed that Reading First did not keep up the administrator and coach monthly seminars (Principal)"</p> <p>Lack of availability "Coaches are shared with schools. We need our coach to be here at our school for more time in order for our needs and students' needs to be met (Teacher)"</p> <p>Lack of buy-in from teachers "I have been less valuable than I would like to be. This is my first year at this site and the teachers feel they have no need for a literacy coach (Coach)" "About 50% of the teachers at this school have resisted taking the time to debrief after I demonstrate or observe a lesson (Coach)" "I think that the Reading First coaching is a waste of time after two years of the adopted program. The teachers at my school are well trained and capable of understanding the program. It is insulting to pay for a coach (Teacher)" "I don't think coaching is valuable at all. We are teaching our regular Language Arts program like we would anyway (Teacher)"</p> <p>Need for more demonstration lessons "The teachers did not request model lessons so there was not much coaching this year (Teacher)" "The weekly lesson modeling would be great, but it just hasn't happened here (Principal)"</p>

Conclusions

In conclusion, we find that reading or literacy coaches are an integral part of the Reading First program in California. They are highly valued by program participants. The positive perceptions of coaches and the importance of their role in supporting the curriculum and implementation are almost universal. Coaches serve important functions in supporting implementation of the Reading First program and maintaining a school's focus on improving student achievement.

The Reading First initiative has provided extensive training and support to coaches, an effort that has built capacity at the district, school, and classroom levels. Coaches have reached a high level of expertise to the point that many are now qualified to provide training at Reading First institutes.

The most important functions served by coaches in California are providing demonstration lessons, serving as a source of resource and support for teachers and facilitating collaboration focused on student achievement and fidelity of implementation. Most coaches have ready access to classrooms to provide support with curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

References

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Activity (optional)

Action planning to strengthen coaching at a school

Activity: Planning for prioritizing coaching functions at your school site

Scenario

Following a reading and a discussion on the coaching case study, the school team can use this activity to build consensus on the coaching functions it deems most beneficial. Individual teachers are asked to identify the most beneficial functions, then all teacher-identified functions are tallied and a group ranking of these identified functions is created. This is followed by a discussion on coaching roles that need to be prioritized to meet future needs of teachers. In the culminating activity (step 4), participants draft an action plan for prioritizing coaching functions to meet needs of teachers.

Preparation

Have the following materials ready for the one- to two-hour activity:

- Copies for each participant of Coaching Study Form #1: Setting priorities/coaching roles
- Copies for each job-alike group of Coaching Study Form #2a and #2b: Setting priorities/tally chart for most beneficial
- Chart Paper for Coaching Study Form #3: Chart for coaching roles for future work
- Copy of Coaching Study Form #4: Action plan/prioritizing coaching functions to meet teacher needs

Directions for the activity

STEP 1: Participants first identify coaching roles that are the most beneficial by individually ranking the functions “most beneficial” and “most in need to be prioritized” for future work. (Use Coaching Study Form #1: Setting Priorities).

Note: School teams may include additional functions as appropriate, with participants separated into “job-alike” groups (e.g., teachers, coaches, administrators); this should be accounted for in Steps 2–4 with additional findings recorded on separate forms.

STEP 2: Participant responses are collected to produce a group tally. Based on the tally, the percentage of tallies for “most beneficial” and “most in need to be prioritized” are computed, then ranked in order by percentage, 1= highest percentage (*Find* Coaching Study Form #2: Tally Chart for Setting Priorities.) Use multiple charts if more than one “job-alike” group is participating.

STEP 3: In either small groups or as a whole group, participants format, review, and discuss group rankings, focusing on the two coaching roles most frequently identified as “need to be prioritized.” Using chart paper, identify the two coaching roles. Participants brainstorm key features. (Use Coaching Study Form #3: Prioritizing Coaching). Participants are encouraged to be as specific as possible, identifying what the roles should look and sound like.

Sample chart

Role to be prioritized to meet needs	Key features
Professional Development	Grade-level training during team meetings Suggested Topics: Advanced Morphology

The following quotation may be useful to help participants refocus coaching priorities from building coaching expertise to interact with teachers more.

Keep in mind that teachers who wish to continually improve their craft never lose their need to be coached. And, interestingly, the coach need not be a more expert performer than the person being coached. Technical expertise frequently is less relevant than the ability to enable or empower people to move beyond their performance.

Costa, A. L. & Garmston, R. J. (1994). *Cognitive coaching: A foundation for renaissance schools* [pp. 5–7]. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

STEP 4: Reflecting on the charts with the identified coaching roles that “most need to be prioritized,” participants (or a subgroup of participants) develop an action plan to identify future priorities for coaching at the school level. The plan requires a description of strategies, action steps, external and internal supports needed, and a timeline for implementation. In addition, measurable outcome indicators should be identified to show that the plan has succeeded. (Use Coaching Study Form #4: Action plan—Prioritizing coaching functions to meet teacher needs).

Coaching study form 1: Setting priorities/coaching roles

Directions: Teachers identify what coaching roles are most beneficial to them, and which coaching roles need strengthening to further support their teaching from the coach role categories listed in the table below:

- Check [✓] the top four “most beneficial” roles your coach provides.
- Check [✓] the top two areas that you perceive as “most need to be prioritized” in future work.

Coach role categories:	Most beneficial	Need prioritized
	Top four	Top two
Demonstration lessons		
Instructional strategy expertise		
Resources and supplementary materials		
Professional development		
Motivation and encouragement		
Curriculum program implementation knowledge		
Assessments and data analysis assistance		
Observation and feedback		
Reading research expertise		
Planning and collaboration support		

Coaching study form 2a: Setting priorities/tally chart for most beneficial

Directions: Combine teachers' priorities from form 1 and place tally marks by each category for "most beneficial"—only four tallies per participant. Note: Have "job alike" participants work on separate tally charts. Add the total number of tallies for each category. Add the total number from all of the categories; and divide by the sum to find the percentage of tallies for each category. Then, rank order each category from highest percentage to lowest percentage.

Coach role categories	# Tallies (most beneficial)	Total for category	%	Rank order
Demonstration lessons				
Instructional strategy expertise				
Resources and supplementary materials				
Professional development				
Motivation and encouragement				
Curriculum program implementation knowledge				
Assessments and data analysis assistance				
Observation and feedback				
Reading research expertise				
Planning and collaboration support				
Overall total			100%	

Coaching study form 2b: Setting priorities/tally chart

Directions: Combine teachers priorities from form 1 and place tally marks by each category for “need to be prioritized”—only two tallies per participant. Note: Have “job-alike” participants work on separate tally charts. Add the total number of tallies for each category. Add the total number from all of the categories; and divide by the sum to find the percentage of tallies for each category. Then, rank order each category from highest percentage to lowest percentage.

Coach role categories	# Tallies (need prioritized)	Total for category	%	Rank order
Demonstration lessons				
Instructional strategy expertise				
Resources and supplementary materials				
Professional development				
Motivation and encouragement				
Curriculum program implementation knowledge				
Assessments and data analysis assistance				
Observation and feedback				
Reading research expertise				
Planning and collaboration support				
Overall total			100%	

Coaching study form 3: Chart for coaching roles to be prioritized for future work

Directions: Use chart paper with the headings shown below:

Role to be prioritized	Key features

Coaching study form 4: Action plan/prioritizing coaching functions to meet teacher needs

Directions: Develop an action plan to address your identified priorities for the school year.

Priority	Strategy (general statement)	Action step(s)	External or district supports needed	Expected outcome (measurement of success)	Implementation timeline
1.					
2.					
3.					



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