

CCLD RESEARCH BRIEF

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Literacy Coaching in Practice: Kentucky's Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project

By Patricia J. Kannapel

Literacy instruction has long been the domain of elementary school and language arts teachers. In recent years, this scenario has begun to change amid the realization that many adolescents are arriving in upper elementary, middle school, and high school without the literacy skills they need to succeed. Results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that 69 percent of eighth graders and 65 percent of twelfth graders were reading below the proficient level; and 69 percent of eighth graders and 76 percent of twelfth graders were writing below the proficient level (Learning Point Associates, 2005).

The picture is equally grim in Kentucky, where in 2004 on the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) 40 percent of middle school students and 66 percent of high school students scored below the proficient level. These data make clear that literacy must be a concern of *all* teachers, for how are they to convey their subject matter to students who do not have the necessary literacy skills?

The findings on adolescent reading achievement have merged with current thinking on the most effective ways to help teachers change instructional practices, resulting in a push to train highly skilled teachers to serve as literacy coaches in their

districts and schools. Literacy coaches work directly with teachers across content areas to help them incorporate literacy instruction into their classrooms.

The rationale for literacy coaching is based on research on professional development, which has found that the most effective, professional development is sustained, ongoing, and intensive. Moreover, if teachers are to change instruction, they need support in the classroom from someone who is not a supervisor who can observe, discuss their efforts to change instruction, and demonstrate new ways to teach students (International Reading Association, 2006; McDiarmid, 1994; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poginco et al, 2003).

Following national trends to strengthen literacy instruction for adolescents, Kentucky's General Assembly enacted legislation in 2005 to develop a statewide program to train literacy coaches to assist teachers of grades 4-12 in incorporating literacy instruction into their classrooms. The Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project (ALCP) was originally funded for four years, with the intent to train up to 20 coaches at eight regional university sites each year—potentially resulting in the training of 500-plus literacy coaches across the state. The legislature provided funding

for the training program and materials for coaches; school districts were required to fund the literacy coach position. The requirement that districts fund the position, coupled with state budget cuts and mandated salary increases, resulted in low participation in ALCP. Only 48 teachers applied and were accepted into the program in the first two years. A state budget shortfall in 2008 brought an early end to the program, so that no additional literacy coaches will be accepted into ALCP.

While ALCP did not realize its full potential, it is important to share the experiences and lessons learned from Kentucky's effort to implement a statewide literacy coaching program. This research brief shares findings from the first two years of the ALCP. The research focused specifically on the nature and quality of the selection, preparation, and support for literacy coaches; roles and responsibilities assumed by literacy coaches; factors that facilitated and hindered the work of coaches; and the impact of coaches on teacher practice and on students. Findings are based on observations of training sessions for coaches; interviews with ALCP staff and institute directors, literacy coaches, principals, and teachers; site visits to 12 ALCP schools; review of documents and web sources; surveys of teachers in ALCP schools and a set of comparison schools; and analysis of state test results for ALCP schools and comparison schools.

Collaboration leads to an effective training and support for literacy coaches.

The training and support program for Kentucky's literacy coaches was created through a collaboration between the Kentucky Department of Education and the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development (CCLD), a collective of eight state universities, based at the University of

Kentucky. CCLD had a history of working with teachers on literacy instruction through other literacy initiatives. Through prior work, CCLD had established a network of university faculty with expertise in research-based literacy practices, and experience working with classroom teachers. Systems were already in place for providing professional development to teachers at these regional university sites.

CCLD enlisted a team of university faculty to serve as directors of the regional ALCP institutes. These directors, together with representatives from the Department of Education, developed the format and content for a preparation and support program for literacy coaches. The collaboration resulted in buy-in from both the Kentucky Department of Education and university leaders, as well as enthusiastic implementation by university-based institute directors.

To ensure that coaches' preparation was of high quality and consistent across regional sites, ALCP staff and institute directors adopted the International Reading Association's *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches* (2006) as a framework for coaches' preparation and work in schools. In addition, project planners developed a set of "essential questions" to ensure that coaches' preparation addressed areas that the group, collectively, believed to be important.

The ALCP model for preparing coaches combines an intensive summer institute experience with on-the-job training, coupled with ongoing support. The centerpiece of literacy coaches' preparation is an eight-day summer academy held at regional universities for two consecutive years. Participants also attend a two-day content literacy professional development program

sponsored by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). Throughout the academic year, literacy coaches participate in monthly professional development or coaching networking sessions. Many of these sessions involve attendance at state and national conferences, but at least two sessions occur at regional university sites and are planned by university institute directors.

Participants earn six hours of graduate credit each year they participate in the project—three hours for each summer institute and three hours for school-year activities. Over the course of the two-year program, then, participants earn 12 hours of graduate credit.

Summer institutes and school-year sessions focus on coaching and mentoring skills, strategic planning, effective literacy instruction, literacy assessment, differentiated instruction, and professional learning communities. In their second year, literacy coaches design and implement an action research project. This preparation program appears to have been highly effective. Literacy coaches who have participated in ALCP report that they have felt well-prepared for their roles. Evaluations completed at the close of the summer institutes have been overwhelmingly positive. Participants especially valued the wealth of resources and literacy strategies they received, exposure to professional literature, and the opportunity to network and develop a support group among coaches and institute directors. One coach elaborated:

Just the networking [and] the books; I have read more professional trade books in the last two years than I did my whole undergraduate year. It has made me almost obsessive about getting my hands on everything I can read. I just want more. I

am realizing that the more I know, it makes me better at what I do.

Literacy coaches focus on instructional change in the classroom.

The work of ALCP literacy coaches in schools was shaped by the IRA standards around which their preparation was framed. These standards focus on assisting the school and individual teachers with strategic planning around literacy; providing practical literacy instruction support to teachers individually and collectively; assisting with literacy assessment, planning, and analysis; and supporting literacy instruction in the four main content areas of English/language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science.

Drawing on this framework, ALCP literacy coaches gave primacy to providing practical instructional support to teachers. The most common approach was to work one-on-one with teachers. A typical strategy, and one teachers greatly valued, was modeling literacy lessons and activities in teachers' classrooms. Coaches reported that a successful structure for demonstration lessons was to demonstrate the lesson with the class, leave the teacher to implement the lesson, then return near the end of the day to observe the lesson and provide feedback.

Coaches also assisted teachers with lesson planning through one-on-one conferencing. These planning sessions often occurred at the request of teachers who wished to incorporate a writing activity or appropriate literature into their lessons. Coaches frequently searched for and provided teachers with instructional materials to support literacy in the classroom. Several coaches also conducted observations in teachers' classrooms in order to determine how to assist them in incorporating literacy activities into their instruction.

While these sorts of activities could be viewed as threatening to teachers, ALCP coaches typically worked with “volunteers” initially, expanding their reach as other teachers heard that the coach had something to offer. This approach allayed teachers’ fears; many came to value the literacy coach’s help:

She doesn't come in and take over; she eases in with an idea. It is her manner, and I value her opinion and it is not threatening. It is not that I am doing anything wrong. She is trying to help and strengthen what I am doing (seventh grade social studies teacher).

I was really nervous the first day she came in. It took about a month to get over that. But now I don't care. “Come in watch me. Tell me if I am doing something wrong, I'll make it better.” There is always room for improvement (fifth grade teacher).

In addition to working with teachers one-on-one, coaches shared strategies and resources with groups of teachers or the entire faculty. Some coaches, for instance, led book studies; others offered mini-sessions during faculty meetings, or shared strategies during team or department meetings. Still other coaches provided more formal professional development before or during the school year. Many coaches worked at the team, department, or school level to facilitate strategic planning around literacy. Coaches also assisted teachers in selecting and using literacy assessment tools and in analyzing results of literacy assessments. Most of the coaches provided teachers across the school with links to research and resources, often via email, at faculty meetings, or through newsletters.

Generally, teachers found the one-on-one coaching the most valuable because it was tailored to their needs. Many teachers also valued professional development and the coaches’ work with small groups, but others reported that this sort of coaching was not tailored to their needs, covering material or strategies with which they were already familiar; many reported that they simply did not take time to review resources left in their mailboxes or sent via email.

Coaches received high ratings from teachers for promoting productive relationships by respecting confidentiality, demonstrating positive expectations for student learning, responding promptly to requests for help, inspiring trust and respect, and managing time and resources effectively. Second-year coaches received somewhat higher marks than first-year coaches, indicating that trust and rapport builds the longer coaches are in place.

Coaching support focuses on general literacy strategies across content areas.

The legislation that created ALCP requires that literacy coaches work with teachers of grades 4-12 in the content areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. The IRA coaching standards also specify that literacy coaches should have deep understanding of literacy and provide support in each of the four content areas.

The majority of ALCP coaches followed project guidelines and worked with teachers across content areas. Coaches based in elementary schools focused on teachers of grades 4 and 5, including special education teachers. Middle and high school coaches spent more time with language arts teachers than those in other content areas, but teachers of other content areas were consistently involved with literacy coaches,

as well. Some middle and high school coaches also worked with teachers of elective subjects.

Coaches' work in schools, consistent with their training, focused on general literacy practices that could be applied to all content areas rather than content-specific activities. Typical activities with content area teachers included effective approaches to teaching content-specific vocabulary, incorporating writing activities, and familiarizing students with textbooks formats and structures.

Teachers in ALCP schools appeared to feel satisfied with the level of content-specific knowledge coaches had; 90 percent of teachers agreed that their coaches understood the specific reading and writing demands and processes in their content areas. These findings suggest that, at least in the early stages of literacy coaching, deep knowledge of each content area may not be necessary for coaches to effectively assist content area teachers in incorporating literacy into their instruction.

Coaches provide support, not evaluation.

It is important that coaches play a supportive rather than evaluative role in classrooms. If dialogue and interactions between coaches and teachers are free of judgment, teachers are more likely to feel safe working with the coach and will be more open to the changes the coach is trying to facilitate (Bean & DeFord, N.D.; Buly et al, 2006; Fisher, 2007; Joyce & Showers, 1996; Shanklin, 2006; Toll, 2005).

In the vast majority of ALCP schools, it was reported that literacy coaches understood the difference between coaching and supervision, and had effectively communicated this to teachers by their behavior and attitudes. In survey responses, 91 percent of teachers agreed that their

coaches inspired trust, communicated respect, and were non-judgmental. An elementary teacher, when asked if she felt the coach's role was more supportive or evaluative in nature, commented:

I don't feel [the coach is] evaluative at all. I'm sure she does evaluate what we are doing, but she never makes it feel like that. She does not have that hovering quality.

There were a few schools where the close relationship between the coach and principal, and the nature of their communications, may have created a level of distrust among teachers. The principal in one of these schools commented on the delicate balance coaches must find in providing support and communicating with the principal without being perceived by teachers as playing an evaluative role:

I worry about that more than anything else. It has been a benefit because the teachers know she has my ear. I think in the long run that will be more beneficial than a hindrance because we have had such a building-wide push to improve scores that I think the staff has seen the two of us on the same page. Some teachers may be less likely to speak candidly to her about frustrations they may have with me or the motives of our work because they may be concerned about that. I do worry about that.

Virtually all literacy coaches were viewed as helping principals support literacy efforts in the building, and sometimes as facilitating communication between teachers and the principal. In many cases, the literacy coach served as *the* literacy leader in the building, effectively taking this responsibility off the principal. A sixth-grade science teacher told of how the literacy coach had facilitated communication with the principal about

literacy strategies the teacher was using in the classroom:

She has helped me out on at least one occasion. A principal was doing a walk-through and told me to cut the fluff, and it was a reading assignment, one of the ones we were doing the text connections. [The literacy coach], on my behalf, explained that is not fluff, that is reading in the content area. That did the trick.

In sum, it appeared that the majority of ALCP coaches were skilled at building trust and rapport with teachers, and at displaying a host of interpersonal and organizational skills that contributed to their effectiveness. While there were reports of a minority of reluctant teachers at some schools, most principals and teachers were reportedly receptive to the work of coaches.

Literacy coaches influence teachers' classroom practice.

Research and guidelines on literacy coaching make clear that the most appropriate measure of a coach's effectiveness is change in teacher practice (Fischer, 2007; IRA, 2006; Toll, 2005). Evidence from year 2 of ALCP suggests that literacy coaches had, indeed, influenced both the attitudes and instructional practices of the teachers with whom they worked. Literacy coaches, principals, and the teachers themselves reported that teachers were using literacy strategies learned from the coach. During the researchers' site visits to schools, nearly every teacher interviewed could describe a strategy learned from the coach that they had used in their classroom, with positive results.

In addition, several principals, teachers, and coaches commented that teachers of all grades and subjects were beginning to appreciate the importance of literacy, and

were becoming more adept at integrating literacy into their instruction. An upper elementary teacher commented on how the literacy coach helped her understand the importance of literacy:

She has given me an interest in literacy as a whole. I was one of those people saying, "They can read;" but not realizing there were so many aspects of being literate, and so many ways to be illiterate; like listening skills or making word connections or word families that I thought just happened. So I watch for that now, and I really think I am a better elementary teacher. She has helped me understand that... Now I can see the process they go through to get these skills, and I can aid and abet them in acquiring the skills.

A survey administered to teachers in ALCP schools and a set of demographically similar comparison schools revealed several aspects of the literacy environment that differed by statistically significant margins in the two types of schools. Specifically, higher percentages of teachers in schools with coaches than in schools without literacy coaches reported that:

- Their schools had literacy committees, conducted school-wide literacy needs assessments, developed literacy plans, and regularly monitored the plans;
- They had received professional development or assistance in improving student reading skills and developing writing assignments in their content areas;
- They received help at least once a month selecting instructional materials to support literacy instruction, and developing and administering classroom literacy assessments;
- They attended meetings or professional development on the topic of literacy at least once a month; and,

- They were provided evidence-based research on effective literacy strategies at least once a month.

While the survey data do not address whether teacher practice changed as a result of these activities, the fact that there were clear differences between the two kinds of schools suggest that an environment conducive to changes in teachers' literacy behaviors was created in schools with ALCP coaches.

There were a number of literacy-related activities listed on the survey for which results were *not* significantly different in schools with literacy coaches vs. schools without literacy coaches. These activities included the frequency with which teachers used literacy strategies in their classrooms, requested and received help with literacy strategies, were observed and given feedback on literacy instruction, and observed demonstration lessons on literacy. The lack of differences was somewhat surprising, given that we would expect to see greater frequency of such activities in ALCP schools. The results may be explained by the fact that about 80 percent of teachers at non-ALCP schools indicated that their schools were implementing another type of literacy support program.

These findings suggest that, as awareness of the need to address adolescent literacy has grown across the state, a larger number of schools and districts have begun implementing literacy programs. Literacy coaching is one of many strategies that schools might implement. Our data indicate that schools not using literacy coaches are likely to implement alternative literacy programs. These trends will make it increasingly difficult to sort out the effects of literacy coaches or other interventions on teaching practice and student achievement.

Nevertheless, it is encouraging that many schools are taking steps to improve literacy instruction.

Literacy coaching impacts student classroom learning, behavior, and attitudes.

When academic intervention programs of any type are implemented, there is a great desire to see results in the form of improved student test scores. Scholars of literacy coaching, however, caution that the impact of literacy coaches on student achievement is indirect, and may take three to four years to observe (Fisher, 2007; IRA, 2006; Toll, 2005). Coaches concentrate on working with teachers, with the goal of improving teacher practice so that student achievement improves. The process of school-wide teacher improvement, however, can be expected to be gradual. In middle and high schools in particular, even second-year coaches may not have had the opportunity to work with all teachers. Therefore, significant effects on student achievement may take several years, especially in large schools.

As this report was written, state test data were available only for tests administered in spring 2007 when coaches had not completed their training, and had been at work in their schools for less than a year. Not surprisingly, there were no significant differences in test score gains between ALCP and non-ALCP schools at that point.

Even so, literacy coaches, principals, and teachers reported that literacy coaches had already had a positive impact on students in the following areas:

Student achievement on school-based assessments. School-level sources in 19 of the 28 schools in which interviews were conducted reported that they had seen

improvements in reading and/or writing scores on school-based, formative assessments. A high school principal who was in the second year of having a literacy coach remarked:

Our sophomores' reading [scores] went up to 93. We have seventh graders who were 75 percent below level, and we have cut that in half. There are programs that you see no improvement, but with [the literacy coach], this school sees improvement. Is it 100 percent the literacy coach? I don't think so, but I think she plays a large part in getting teachers to do these reading strategies.

Improved classroom performance. Another common response, heard from coaches, principals, and/or teachers in 18 of the 28 schools where interviews were conducted, was that student reading and writing skills in the classroom had improved. A middle school math teacher remarked:

I think it is hard [to measure the coach's impact on students] because it is indirect. If the coach is highly effective, your test scores will show it, but teaching is seed planting, so I see the effect...It is not like, Wow, here is a before and an after. I think it is process, the things that make a difference are long term, but I think [literacy coaching] has started a lot of that.

Increased student enthusiasm and motivation. Coaches, principals, and/or teachers in 18 of 28 schools said that one sign of the coach's impact on students was the increased level of student enthusiasm and motivation for reading and/or writing. A seventh grade math teacher commented:

Just by her being able to give me different strategies; that has been transmitted to the students. Is she in here impacting them on a

daily basis? No, but what she does with me transfers to them.

Increased use of reading strategies. Coaches, principals, and/or teachers in 14 schools reported that they had observed students using reading and/or writing strategies that the literacy coach had demonstrated and that teachers had begun using. Sources in another three schools commented that students were more aware of their own literacy and skills levels.

Numerous factors can support the literacy coach's work.

Literacy coaches do not work in a vacuum. Numerous factors may influence their ability to effectively perform literacy coaching activities. The factors that contributed most prominently to the effectiveness of ALCP coaches were the training and support they received through ALCP, the thoughtful selection of literacy coaches by district and school administrators, and on-the-job support coaches received from principals.

Training and support for coaches. ALCP coaches reported that the training and support they received contributed strongly to the success they experienced at their schools. The project provided coaches with an understanding of their role, a wealth of strategies and resources, and a support network within their regional groups. They received at least monthly follow-up support, and strengthened their skills and knowledge at professional conferences. Coaches were given substantial funds to spend at their schools or on their own professional development. These funds enabled the coaches to purchase materials for teachers; to provide books, refreshments, and/or stipends for book studies and other professional development activities; to purchase laptop computers and projectors to

assist with presentations; and to develop professional libraries.

Thoughtful selection of coaches. The selection of coaches can make or break the success of the program. It is critical that coaches have the necessary leadership and interpersonal skills and are respected by their peers. Within ALCP, the selection of coaches occurred primarily within local schools and districts. The project provided a list of qualifications that emphasized successful experience in the areas of leadership and working with adult learners. A strong literacy background was not required. The majority of coaches reported that they were urged to apply by their principals or a district administrator. In these cases, there was often not an application process. Principals or district administrators learned of the project and identified the person they thought would be appropriate for the position.

While ALCP exercised virtually no oversight over selection at the local level, the selection process seems to have been effective on at least two fronts. First, because district or school administrators were involved in selecting literacy coaches, the majority of coaches enjoyed the support of administrators. Second, administrators appear to have selected coaches whom they knew were respected by their peers—a characteristic that has been shown to be an important factor in coaches' later success (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Toll, 2005).

In many cases, coaches had been teachers in their schools prior to assuming the position of literacy coach. While this situation may sometimes work against a coach (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Toll, 2005), the research team did not encounter any such scenario. In all cases among ALCP coaches, the prior relationship enhanced the work of the coach

because teachers in the building respected the coaches and believed they were right for the job.

The majority of ALCP coaches did *not* have the extensive background in reading that is recommended by the International Reading Association (2007). Even so, the great majority of coaches were well-received and highly regarded by teachers and administrators in their schools. This suggests the importance of hiring literacy coaches with a strong work ethic and good interpersonal skills. These kinds of qualifications may be even more important than a strong reading background, particularly when an intensive training program is available to coaches. Such training programs can bolster coaches' reading background and tools, but would be less likely to be able to build the requisite interpersonal and leadership skills.

Principal support. Perhaps because many principals were involved in nominating teachers to participate in ALCP in the first place, the majority of coaches reported that their principals were supportive of their work. The extent to which principals were actually engaged in the work of the coaches, however, varied. The kind of support that seemed most likely to contribute to sustainability of literacy coaching came from principals who were actively involved in the work of the coaches, meeting and talking with them frequently both formally and informally. These principals tended to be instructional leaders at their schools. They provided input into how coaches should spend at least some of their time—for instance, asking them to target teachers in a particular grade level or subject area with perceived weaknesses. They might also ask teachers to share information or strategies at team meetings or faculty meetings, which the principals themselves

often attended. A middle school principal who was actively involved with the literacy coach described their working relationship:

She and I eat our lunch at about the same time. We touch base about twice a day, but there is no formality to it at all. It has worked out well, mostly because my goals and priorities right now are significant academic change, and she has an important role in that. We do walks, and we discuss the conversations she and I have with teachers, and the commonalities and differences in them. Teachers are required to turn in unit plans to me. I comment on them and forward them to her, and we both scrutinize them. We both meet with the teachers on a regular basis to help them as they work through the planning process.

Other principals supported their coaches but were not actively involved with the coaches' work. These principals were confident in the knowledge and skills of their literacy coaches and were happy to leave them alone to do their work. A middle school principal who was supportive, but less actively involved in the work of the literacy coach explained:

I have learned so much from [the literacy coach] and feel so much more informed. I am grateful to have her here to work with our staff and students... We interact probably weekly if not daily from touching base, email, collaborating on upcoming activities...[but] she is the one who goes out and makes herself available to our faculty and staff... She is so organized and proactive, I let her drive that bus. She keeps me informed and up-to-date.

Key factors hinder coaches' effectiveness. Just as situational factors can make the work of a coach easier, so, too, can circumstances present barriers to the coaches' work. In the

ALCP research, two factors were especially problematic for literacy coaches: being assigned to more than one school or more than one job description, and lack of meaningful support from the principal or district administrators.

Serving more than one school/role. ALCP guidelines specified that participants must be full-time literacy coaches, although they could hold other duties such as curriculum coordinator or writing portfolio cluster leader. The project also specified that the literacy coach must be a school-level, not district-level position. While the majority of schools and districts followed these guidelines, 10 of 44 coaches in year 2 of the project served more than one school or were required to play another role within their school. Even though this approach was in direct conflict with project guidelines, the low number of applicants meant that project leaders were in no position to turn away districts that wished to take advantage of the training opportunity. In at least two cases, ALCP participants served as literacy coach for one school, but had responsibilities in other schools (such as curriculum coordinator). One participant was a part-time literacy coach and part-time teacher. Coaches in these situations were challenged to influence the literacy practices of more than a few teachers—although the work was more manageable for the two coaches who served two small elementary schools (with fewer teachers) than for the eight coaches who served two or more middle and high schools.

While the part-time coaches appear to have done an admirable job trying to make a difference at their schools, survey results showed several statistically significant differences in the response of teachers from schools with full-time coaches vs. schools with part-time coaches. For instance, more

than 90 percent of teachers in schools with full-time coaches compared to 70-80 percent of teachers in schools with part-time coaches reported that their coaches were instrumental in establishing literacy committees, conducting school-wide literacy needs assessments, developing a school literacy plan, and monitoring the plan regularly. Similar disparities were noted for survey questions about the extent to which the literacy coach kept administrators informed, shared reading strategies with content area teachers, and helped teachers improve their skills working with literacy. Full-time coaches also received higher ratings than did part-time coaches for possessing a host of professional qualities, including inspiring trust, responding promptly to requests for help, and managing time and resources. Survey responses in one large school with a part-time coach were particularly negative; many teachers indicated that they did not even know who the literacy coach was.

These results suggest that the optimal model for literacy coaching is to have a full-time literacy coach in each school, as specified by ALCP. These findings will come as no surprise to anyone, but the realities of school and district funding may lead districts to try to get the most they can from a single literacy coach. Schools and districts will need to consider the maximum number of teachers that literacy coaches can support effectively.

Lack of meaningful principal and/or district support. A small number of coaches reported that district or school administrators did not support the concept of literacy coaching sufficiently to involve the coach in key activities, focus their work on literacy, or even to maintain the coaching position over time.

Even though the majority of coaches were satisfied that most of their work fell into the realm of literacy coaching, a few coaches had been given enough additional responsibilities that they felt it was hindering their effectiveness. Said one middle school coach: "Lunch duty and bus duty take up 1.5 hours every day when I could be with teachers." The same coach had also been asked to chair meetings to develop individual education plans for special education students. A high school literacy coach reported being asked to administer ACT and other diagnostic tests. The temptation for a few principals was to assign the coaches administrative duties that the principals could not get to themselves.

There were indications of a tendency for coaches in their second year to take on more non-coaching responsibilities. During the coaches' first year, they and their principals were more sensitized to the need to focus the coaches' work on literacy. In their second year out of the classroom, some coaches had become more aware of school-wide needs and felt they should contribute their services when they could. Principals, too, seemed more comfortable in the second year asking coaches to take on additional duties. One elementary literacy coach, for instance, began providing a great deal of technology support to teachers, which may or may not be related to literacy. At least three coaches had been assigned new duties by their principals that were not strongly related to literacy instruction. As literacy coaches complete their training through ALCP and no longer receive external reinforcement for focusing their work on literacy, they may need to be even more vigilant about ensuring that administrative duties do not take precedence over their literacy work.

Lack of sufficient support from administrators could take a more onerous

form than assigning additional duties. In some cases, principals or district administrators were unwilling to continue funding the literacy coaching position. In one school, the principal had been struggling since the literacy coach left the classroom to find another teacher who could teach writing portfolios as effectively as the literacy coach had done before leaving the classroom. By year 2, he had decided that the school would benefit more strongly by moving the literacy coach back to the classroom to work directly with students. This principal shared his misgivings about dedicating a certified staff member to the literacy coaching position:

It took me awhile to learn the ins and outs of this literacy coach position. It is hard to get used to the idea that she could not work with students. As I understood it, the point was to work with teachers to reach more students, but for me, I would like for the ability to work with some students also on an individual basis. We have some students on low levels, and I think [the coach's] knowledge and ability could make some improvements with some of these students who are several grade levels below.

After the first year of coaching, two coaches lost their positions because of funding issues. At the end of the current year, at least three additional coaches from Cadre 1 and at least two from Cadre 2 will not have a literacy coaching position next year. In some of these cases, district or school leaders were not actively involved in the work of the literacy coach and may have not have fully understood the benefits. This suggests that coaches would do well to get administrators more involved in their work to ensure longer-term support. The project itself could also consider strengthening its outreach to administrators. An event for principals was offered in year 2 of the work, but more may need to be done. Only if administrators

fully understand the work of the literacy coach and its positive effects will they be likely to try to keep the position in place, particularly when budget cuts occur.

Funding the literacy coach position ensures commitment to the work.

The Kentucky General Assembly provided substantial funding to support training and resources for literacy coaches, but it did not support their salaries. Since ALCP's inception, project leaders and coaches have lamented that there were insufficient state funds to support the literacy coach position. The general feeling among project participants was that if the project supported the coaching position, many more teachers would have applied.

Now that funding for ALCP as a whole has been severely reduced, however, we must reconsider whether the lack of funding for the coaching position was a barrier or a facilitator. Had the project funded these positions from the start, it seems likely that few districts or schools would have been willing or able to assume responsibility for funding those positions when ALCP funding was cut. As it was, districts had to make a commitment to literacy coaching up front and as a result, the majority of ALCP districts and schools intend to keep the literacy coach in place even when ALCP no longer exists. Thus, the requirement that districts fund the literacy coaching position may be, in some respects, a facilitator of sustainability.

Implications of the ALCP research for literacy coaching

While research on ALCP is based on a relatively small number of coaches, we believe some of the findings may have implications for literacy coaching programs elsewhere.

Literacy coaching is a promising approach to instructional change because it goes directly to the classroom. Literacy coaching offers a form of embedded professional development with promise for bringing about real instructional change. Literacy coaches work directly with teachers both one-on-one and within professional learning communities to help them understand the importance of literacy, to demonstrate how to incorporate literacy assessment and instruction into their classrooms, and to support them as they implement new practices. This approach to teacher change is consistent with research on professional development, which notes that to change instruction, teachers need support from someone who is not a supervisor who can observe, discuss their efforts to change instruction, and demonstrate new ways to teach.

A collaborative effort of the state department of education and university faculty can be a highly effective approach to developing a literacy coaching program. This collaborative approach combines expertise of university faculty with the experience of K-12 education support staff. In addition, the involvement of university faculty helps link pre-service and in-service training for teachers, and reaches teachers across the state through regional training sites. Also, by drawing on university resources, the project does not have to seek and employ full-time institute leaders nor tax already overworked state department staff.

An effective preparation program for coaches should include intensive institute experiences, as well as ongoing support and networking. ALCP coaches reported that the summer institute provided them with a starting point to their work, as well as a wealth of knowledge and resources. School-

year follow-up offered a support system and opportunities for ongoing professional growth. The high ratings of principals and teachers on the professional knowledge and skills of coaches suggests that the ALCP program was effective. These findings indicate that states and districts instituting a literacy coaching model should devote substantial time and resources to ensuring that literacy coaches are well-prepared for and supported in their work.

Strong interpersonal skills and work ethic are important qualities for literacy coaches. In programs that provide intensive professional development and support to prepare literacy coaches, selecting coaches with prior experience and background in reading may be less essential than selecting coaches with strong interpersonal skills, a successful track record of leadership and working with adult learners, and a solid work ethic. The preparation program itself can bolster coaches' knowledge of literacy, but is less likely to be able to build interpersonal and work ethic skills.

Working with teachers one-on-one can be a first step to school-wide change. To be effective, it is essential that coaches build trust and rapport. Personalizing the work through individual coaching appears to be an effective first step to achieving teacher buy-in and change, and may set the stage for coaches to later effect school-wide change through engaging teachers in strategic planning or professional learning communities.

Strategic decisions must be made about how many teachers literacy coaches can support effectively. Part-time coaches serving large numbers of teachers struggled to make a difference in the schools they served. Literacy coaching programs and school districts using literacy coaches

should consider how many teachers literacy coaches can effectively support. For instance, it may be effective to assign a literacy coach more than one small elementary school, but ineffective to ask a middle or high school coach to serve more than one school.

Administrators should be kept informed about and involved in the work of literacy coaches. Meaningful support from district and school leaders is essential to change and sustainability. Literacy coaching projects should include a professional development strand for district and school administrators. In addition, literacy coaches should not content themselves with only verbal support, but should work to fully involve district and school leaders in the literacy coaching program. Only if administrators with decision-making authority understand and see for themselves the positive effects of the model will they be likely to support literacy coaches in their schools or districts over the long term.

Further research is needed on the depth of content area knowledge literacy coaches need. The IRA standards suggest that literacy coaches need strong understanding of each of the four main content areas. Research on ALCP suggests that coaches were effective in focusing on general literacy strategies that could be used across content areas. Further research may help illuminate how much content knowledge coaches need, and the extent to which their work should focus on content-specific literacy strategies.

Conclusion

Kentucky's Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project enjoyed remarkable success in its first two years of operation in preparing a small number of literacy coaches to provide support to content area teachers in their

schools. The use of research-based materials and practices in training and supporting coaches resulted in consistent coaching practices across sites. The work of coaches was also consistent with current thinking about what literacy coaching should look like. The great majority of school staff who were interviewed or surveyed were quite positive about the work of the coaches, and early indications were that the coaches' work had begun to have an impact on teachers and students.

ALCP has been a well-funded, thoughtfully designed program that has shown strong potential for taking best instructional practices directly to the classroom through a staff person trained and dedicated to this goal. ALCP illustrates the potential of literacy coaching when there are sufficient funds to support it and when the coaches' preparation and support is thoughtfully designed. Unfortunately, funding cuts and policy changes prevalent in P-12 public education make it difficult to document whether literacy coaching leads to changes in teacher practice that will ultimately result in measurable and meaningful increases in student achievement.

About the Author

Patricia J. Kannapel is a consultant in educational research and evaluation. A former public school teacher, Kannapel has participated in educational research projects in Kentucky and across the United States since 1990. She has an M.Ed from the University of Louisville, and an M. A. and Ph.D in Anthropology from the University of Kentucky.

About CCLD

The Collaborative Center for Literacy Development (CCLD) was established in 1986 by the Kentucky General Assembly to support literacy development from early

childhood through adulthood. Operated by the College of Education at the University of Kentucky, the CCLD is a collaboration among the eight state universities and the National Center for Family Literacy. CCLD's mission is to promote literacy and address the diverse needs of all learners through professional development for all Kentucky educators and research that informs policy and practice.

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