

Hit the Ground Running: Ten Ideas for Preparing and Supporting Urban Literacy Coaches

**Camille L.Z. Blachowicz, Roberta Buhle, Donna Ogle,
Sharon Frost, Amy Correa, Jodi Dodds Kinner**

By using these 10 strategies, teachers and administrators can effectively prepare and support new literacy coaches to work in urban environments.

How do you support change in a district with over 600 elementary schools? This is the tough question that led the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to undertake a bold and innovative initiative. In 2001, collaborating with The Chicago Community Trust, a major philanthropic organization, CPS began to build partnerships with local universities, both public and private, to develop systemic approaches to literacy improvement for low-performing schools in a multiethnic system with over 75% of the students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch (Advanced Reading Development Demonstration Project, 2008).

Building on our university's nearly half-century of institutional work in preparing reading specialists, coaches, and other curriculum leaders, the Literacy Partners team of National-Louis University's National College of Education undertook a research and professional development project of which a central aspect was the preparation of reading coaches for urban schools. This was in response to requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) to increase the pool of highly qualified reading educators as well as a response to our research that coaches can make a difference in urban school literacy performance (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005).

We were asked to “hit the ground running,” starting with 10 low-performing schools of which three were an

even mix of African American and Hispanic students, five were primarily comprised of Hispanic students, and two were primarily comprised of African American students. In all but two schools, more than 92% of their students were eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch. Our team was made up of 10 professionals who were excellent teachers who volunteered and were approved by their principals to participate in on-the-job training as reading coaches for primary classrooms.

In the second year, we added eight more dedicated CPS educators for the upper grades, for a total of 18 coaches-in-training (teachers who would work as literacy leaders in the school as they were being prepared to meet the International Reading Association (IRA) standards for reading specialists [IRA, 2003]). Together these literacy leaders each worked with a total of between 500 and 800 teachers per year; we undertook a multiyear journey with them that resulted in a set of low-performing schools doubling the state gains in reading (DeStefano, Hanson, & Kallemeyn, 2005) and exceeding the average gains of the system (see Table 1).

The Importance of Coaches

Our yearly data collection included interviewing our participating school principals, coaches-in-training (those teachers who were functioning in a leadership role while they completed a credentialing program), district leaders, and teachers about the changes they observed in their schools and the impact of the presence and work of a trained coach-in-training. The coach's effect on the instruction and infrastructure of the school emerged as one of the top three influences for change cited by all participants, even in the first

year of the project. One principal noted, “Even though I work hard to be an instructional leader, it’s impossible for me to do everything needed. My coach is essential to my teachers...and to me.” This was echoed by a teacher in another school who said, “I’m so relieved to have someone to help me. Reading is so important and she [the literacy coach] is like a lifeline to me. She’s not there to evaluate me and tell me what I am doing wrong—she is there to help me do right!”

Along with our own research data, an independent evaluation also indicated that schools participating in the project increased significantly in their willingness to consult and work with a school literacy coach, improved in their awareness of best literacy practices, and were more likely to participate in collaborative activities within the school (DeStefano et al., 2005). In an earlier study of urban reading specialists, Tatum (2004) noted that there were many lessons still to be learned about coaching in an urban environment, hoping that these lessons would be shared by those actually in the trenches. Though our work has given us many insights, we feel these 10 are essential to our effort to effectively prepare and support new coaches to work in urban environments.

1. Build a Strong, Communal Knowledge Base

Based on research from the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human

Development, 2000) and other best practice research, both content and pedagogical, one of the most important issues is updating the knowledge base of each coach-in-training. Our state, Illinois, only requires one course in reading for basic teacher certification, so many teachers and coaches came to their positions with little formal conceptual knowledge or shared instructional frameworks. All of the partnering universities in this project are known for their high-quality programs, which meet the exacting standards of IRA (2003) and related accrediting bodies.

What we found was that two tweaks made knowledge building more relevant to the urban audience. The first was situating the professional development in the schools. This connected the faculty physically and emotionally to the context in which the coaches and teachers worked and also to the students they taught—in our case, primarily African Americans and Hispanics. Further, we met not only the principals, who were also engaged in this endeavor, but also the teachers, students, office managers, cafeteria ladies, and building engineers—all of the VIPs of the school world. We held our classes and professional development sessions in libraries, staff rooms, and auditoriums, so we were immersed in the school settings. In this way, we came to understand the assets and problems of each site and know not only the community of coaches but also the wider communities of the school, area, and district.

Table 1
School Gains of National-Louis University (NLU) Literacy Partners Schools on Illinois Standards Assessment Test 2002–2005 Compared to Matched Nonparticipant Schools

	2002	2003	2004	2005	Gain
Grade 3					
NLU Literacy Partners	44.5	45.8	50.1	54.8	10.3
Nonparticipant schools	38.1	39.6	44.1	44.2	6.0
Grade 5					
NLU Literacy Partners	37.8	38.5	45.1	50.4	12.7
Nonparticipant schools	39.0	40.7	43.3	41.1	2.1
Grade 8					
NLU Literacy Partners	50.7	47.3	60.0	61.0	10.3
Nonparticipant schools	56.2	52.1	55.4	59.8	3.8

This laid the groundwork for the second tweak: site embedding of the practices being examined, tried out, and reflected upon by members of each school community. In these professional experiences, the knowledge-building professional development sessions also included a team of teachers from each of the participating schools. These insights were collected and organized into the Literacy Partners CPS literacy framework, which was constructed over the first two years and is discussed in the next section. Coaches and their cooperating teachers also took us to their classrooms to show their work, and each class session focused on site-specific implementation. Nothing was detached; everything became relevant and connected.

This communal approach also meant that the ideas and strategies being explored naturally flowed back to each school, where they were discussed, coplanned, and tried out during the time between sessions, so that the ideas flourished in each school. Also, the learners began teaming and sharing their ideas and formed the first small learning communities in the schools. Escaping the silos of individual classrooms and beginning to make the work of teachers and coaches public is often very difficult in large urban systems where the safest tendency is sometimes to focus on one's own work. This communal, context-embedded, and site-situated approach brought coaches-in-training, teachers, and administrators together and started to build a culture of sharing and making one's work public, which is so important for a learning community.

2. Collaborate to Make the Curriculum Visible in New Ways

We were lucky to have the establishment of the Chicago Reading Initiative precede our work. This initiative (CPS, n.d.) proposed a balanced approach to curriculum and mandated sufficient time for this curriculum to be implemented across the grades. This allowed us to work with the strengths that were already visible and build on them, rather than starting from some ideal end point that would make connecting with current practice difficult. What our coaches and teachers didn't have, however, was a link connecting the theoretical principles to the enacted curriculum; guidelines for practice were also missing.

In our professional development classes and sessions, as the coaches and teachers built their

knowledge and practice base, we worked collaboratively with them over a period of many months to envision that curriculum as doable and to create the enacted curriculum. The coaches' and teachers' focus was on deciding what the enacted framework would look like in their school environment, what they would actually see in a classroom where best practices prevailed, and what materials and resources the teachers would need. At this point, we also developed a literacy framework with specific teaching priorities, activities, and resources provided. This was done over time and by grade designations, which provided a focus for teamwork with teachers in the schools and resulted in curriculum guides that brought the framework to life (see Figures 1–3).

3. Emphasize Culturally Relevant Instruction and Resources

Because the work was so site specific and in diverse schools, the issues of cultural relevance were foregrounded in all of the professional development, consistent with the work of Tatum (2004) and others (Brozo & Hargis, 2003). Studying multicultural literature and instructional materials was a part of the professional development curriculum, and the ordering of materials became a great exercise and vehicle for examining the resources at the school and stimulating conversations about appropriateness. Each school, as a part of their agreed-upon participation, set aside a budget for materials to support the project. Coaches led ordering teams within and across schools, surveyed and critiqued materials, and because budgets were limited, set up book rooms and shared collections of support resources, such as games and videos. This provided the coaches not only with ideas for structuring the integration of these materials with the curriculum guides but also with the resources to work on culturally relevant instruction.

These well-chosen, culturally appropriate materials, coupled with a consistent curricular framework, allowed the teachers to implement a culturally responsive curriculum more easily. The ordering process was an example of a gradual release of responsibility from facilitator to coach to teacher. The university facilitators originally took a leadership role, but it declined quickly as coaches developed a structure for judging materials and budgets as well as for working with teachers.

Figure 1
K-1 Literacy Curriculum Guide

K-1 INSTRUCTIONAL COMPONENTS
NATIONAL-LOUIS LITERACY PARTNERS



*Adjust for ½ day kindergarten
**Literacy Partner terminology

Instructional Components (Time allotments and grouping patterns in parentheses)	Reading First (RF) and Chicago Reading Initiative	A classroom visitor would see <u>some</u> of these... but <u>not</u> all of them at the same time... <i>(Sample performance indicators in parentheses)</i>	Materials	Resources <i>(A beginning list...)</i>
Scaffolded Independent-Level Reading** (20 minutes*) <i>(Reading individually or in pairs in A whole group setting)</i>	Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students selecting independent-level texts Students reading independent-level new texts Students rereading language experience texts Students rereading familiar texts Students sharing verbally after reading Teacher modeling & monitoring student book selections <i>(Running Records; ISEL K-1 Snapshots)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leveled texts (trade books, periodicals, poetry, basal selections) LEA texts/Chart stories Classroom library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading to Improve Fluency</i>, Maro <i>Reading Essentials</i>, Chapter 6, Routman <i>Guided Reading</i>, Fountas & Pinnell <i>Fluency</i>, Johns & Berglund
Extended Writing** (30 minutes*) <i>(Whole group or small group)</i>	Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared/interactive writing with teacher modeling, instructing, guiding, and monitoring all forms of extended (connected) writing Students engaged in connected extended writing (emergent for K): e.g., response to reading, content area writing, journals, and Writer's Workshop <i>(Writing samples [e.g., portfolio])</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word Walls Student Journals Writing Portfolio Writing Centers Computers/Word Processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Sat. class Writer's Workshop CPS Read/Write Well Basal series writing strand R.F. Modules <i>Every Child Reading</i>, Morris
Guided Reading (20 minutes per group*) <i>(Small groups)</i>	Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher modeling, instructing, monitoring and guiding Guided reading group reading texts at instructional level Students making their thinking visible through discussions Students not in groups: working at centers <i>(Running records; ISEL K-1 Snapshots)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leveled texts (books, periodicals, basal selections) Poetry LEA texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Saturday class <i>Guided Reading</i>, Fountas & Pinnell
Read-Aloud (30 minutes*) <i>(Whole group)</i>	Vocabulary Development and Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher reading aloud Teacher modeling vocabulary & comprehension strategies Students listening and responding <i>(Evidence of new vocabulary in oral discussions and writing; ISEL K-1 Snapshots)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality children's literature Quality children's non-fiction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Saturday class <i>Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms</i>, Blachowicz & Fisher <i>Bringing Words to Life</i>, Beck, et al.
Word Study (10-15 minutes*) <i>(Whole or small group)</i>	Phonemic Awareness and Phonics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher modeling, instructing, and monitoring Students engaged in word recognition/analysis activities (alphabet activities, spelling for sounds, word sorts, Making Words, Word Walls, sight words) <i>(ISEL K-1 Snapshots)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alphabet materials Word Sort materials Making Words materials Word Walls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Sat. class <i>Every Child Reading</i>, Morris RF modules Basal series word study strand
Shared Reading and Shared Writing (30 minutes*) <i>(Whole group)</i>	Phonemic Awareness and Phonics and Vocabulary and Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher reading aloud/thinking aloud to model word, comprehension, stages of writing, and spelling processes Children reading and following along as teacher reads and/or writes <i>(ISEL K-1 Snapshots)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overhead projector Big books & Charts Fiction, nonfiction, poems Language Experience Text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Saturday class <i>Every Child Reading</i>, Morris <i>Guided Reading</i>, Fountas & Pinnell

©National-Louis University, ARDDP, January 15, 2004. Used for instructional purposes only with this credit line.

4. Help Coaches-in-Training Define Their Roles Over Time

Cassidy and Cassidy (2005) noted that literacy coaching has become a hot topic, and much of the literature that contributed to the timeliness of this topic has revolved around defining the coach's role (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 2002; Frost, Buhle, & Blachowicz, 2009; IRA, 2003; Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001). Our model of the coach's role developed from the partners' collaborative multiyear effort to tease out the indicators of improving literacy in lower quartile, multicultural, urban schools. Over the course of the project, dimensions of school practice

indicating improving literacy instruction emerged across all schools and all participating projects (DeStefano et al., 2005).

We used these indicators, along with other work on the role of reading coaches, to construct an overview of the coach's role. For example, if an indicator of a school open to continuous improvement was an effective infrastructure for decision making about instruction, then we asked, What was the coach's role in assisting in the development and maintenance of this infrastructure? The literature on coaching and coaching roles noted above helped us separate the indicators into three areas (see Figure 4):

Figure 2
2-3 Literacy Curriculum Guide

GRADES 2 and 3 INSTRUCTIONAL COMPONENTS
NATIONAL-LOUIS LITERACY PARTNERS



****Literacy Partner terminology**

Instructional Components <small>(Time allotments and grouping patterns in parentheses)</small>	Reading First (RF) and Chicago Reading Initiative	A classroom visitor would see <u>some</u> of these... but <u>not</u> all of them at the same time... <small>(Sample performance indicators in parentheses)</small>	Materials	Resources <small>(A beginning list...)</small>
Scaffolded Independent-Level Silent Reading** (30 minutes) <small>(Reading as individuals or pairs [2nd grade] in whole group setting)</small>	Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students selecting independent-level texts Students reading independent-level text on their own Students sharing verbally after reading Students keeping a log of texts read Teacher modeling & monitoring student book selections <i>(Fluency Snapshot 3x per year; ISEL2, for 2nd grade)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leveled texts (books, periodicals, poetry, basal selections) Class-generated texts Newspapers Classroom library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading to Improve Fluency</i>, Maro (IRCJ) <i>Reading Essentials</i>, Chapter 6, Routman <i>Guided Reading</i>, Fountas & Pinnell <i>Fluency</i>, Johns & Berglund
Extended Writing** (30 minutes) <small>(Whole or small group)</small>	Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared/interactive writing with teacher modeling, instructing, guiding, and monitoring all forms of extended (connected) writing Students engaged in connected extended writing (response after reading, content area writing, journals, and Writer's Workshop) <i>(Writing rubrics; portfolios; ISEL2 for 2nd grade)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word Walls Student Journals Writing Portfolio Writing Centers Computers/Word Processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Saturday class Writer's Workshop CPS Read/Write Well Basal series writing strand R.F. Modules <i>Every Child Reading</i>, Morris
Guided Reading (20 minutes per group) <small>(Small groups)</small>	Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher modeling, instructing, monitoring and guiding Guided reading group reading texts at instructional level Students making their thinking visible through discussions Students not in groups: working at centers <i>(Running records; ISEL2 for 2nd grade)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leveled texts (books, periodicals, basal selections) Poetry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Saturday class <i>Guided Reading</i>, Fountas & Pinnell
Vocabulary Development (30 minutes) <small>(Whole or small group)</small>	Word Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher reading aloud Teacher modeling vocabulary and comprehension strategies, instructing, guiding, and encouraging word awareness/word learning Students using dictionaries/glossaries, and personal word collections <i>(Evidence of new vocabulary in oral discussion and writing; ISEL2 for 2nd grade)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality children's literature Personal spelling logs and vocabulary books Dictionaries/Glossaries Internet sites Software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Saturday class <i>Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms</i>, Blachowicz & Fisher <i>Bringing Words to Life</i>, Beck, et al.
Word Study <small>(Whole or small group)</small>	Phonics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher modeling, instructing, and monitoring Students engaged in word recognition/analysis (e.g., Word Sorts, Making Words, Word Walls) <i>(Running Records; ISEL2 for 2nd grade)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word Sort materials Making Words materials Word Wall materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Sat. class <i>Every Child Reading</i>, Morris & Slavin <i>Words Their Way</i>, Bear, et al <i>Word Matters</i>, Fountas & Pinnell
Shared Reading/Writing (30 minutes) <small>(Whole group)</small>	Phonics and Vocabulary and Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher reading/writing/thinking aloud to model comprehension and word-level strategies (phonics) and writing processes Teacher writing and spelling while thinking aloud to model phonemic awareness strategies <i>(Running records; ISEL2 for 2nd grade)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overhead Projector Chart Paper Read-aloud texts (quality children's literature and other texts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies from Sat. class <i>Every Child Reading</i>, Morris & Slavin

©National-Louis University, ARDDP, January 15, 2004. Used for instructional purposes only with this credit line.

- Instruction and the curriculum that organizes that instruction
- Professional development
- The development and maintenance of an infrastructure for continuous improvement and the development of a learning community

Over the course of the project, we worked with the coaches to organize our learning about the role by starting with the instructional outcomes they desired, matching that to the role of the coach, helping them marshal the essential knowledge they needed to carry out the role, and then field testing coaching

practices that produced the desired results. One of our strategies was to have our coaches-in-training periodically use a pie chart to describe the work they did that week. This helped them analyze their own work and helped us move them toward a balanced role.

We defined the balanced role as (1) working with teachers, (2) working with students, (3) working with other educational personnel (e.g., the principal, colleagues from outside the school district, and parents), (4) doing work related to their role (e.g., monitoring grants materials and attending meetings), and (5) other activities (e.g., lunch duty). Their goal was to make the first two items be at least 80% of their role and the

Figure 3
4–8 Literacy Curriculum Guide

GRADES 4 - 8 INSTRUCTIONAL COMPONENTS
NATIONAL - LOUIS LITERACY PARTNERS



**Literacy Partner terminology
* Time allotments reflect Chicago Reading Initiative guidelines; components may be integrated

Instructional Components <small>(Grouping patterns and time allotments in parentheses)</small>	Chicago Reading Initiative	A classroom visitor would see <u>some</u> of these... but <u>not</u> all of them at the same time... <small>(Sample performance indicators in parentheses)</small>	Materials	Resources <small>(A beginning list...)</small>
<p style="text-align: center;">Scaffolded Independent-Level Silent Reading**</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(30 min.*) (All reading individually in whole group setting)</small></p>	Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students selecting independent-level texts • Students reading silently on their own • Students keeping a log of texts/genres read • Students sharing verbally after reading • Teacher modeling, conferencing, and monitoring student book selections w/some oral reading checks <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(Fluency Snapshot 3x per year; student log of texts completed)</small></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade books (fiction and non-fiction) • Periodicals • Newspapers • Poetry • Classroom library • Students' native language texts when possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading to Improve Fluency</i>, Maro (IRCTJ) • <i>Reading Essentials</i>, Chapter 6, Routman • <i>Leveled Books for Readers: Grades 3-6</i>, Fountas & Pinnell • <i>Fluency</i>, Johns & Berglund
<p style="text-align: center;">Extended Writing**</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(30 min.*) (Whole or small group)</small></p>	Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher modeling, instructing, guiding, and monitoring all forms of extended (connected) writing • Students writing extended responses after reading • Students engaged in formal writing processes (e.g., brainstorming, drafting, editing, publishing and/or sharing, etc.) • Students writing informally (e.g., journaling) <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(Writing rubrics applied to student work)</small></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journals for students • Portfolios for writing • Writing Centers • Word Processing access • Resources for research projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publisher Writing Strand (basal) • Writer's Workshop • CPS Read/Write Well
<p style="text-align: center;">Comprehension Strategy Instruction</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(30 min.*) (Whole or small groups [whose membership may change])</small></p>	Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher modeling, instructing, and guiding comprehension strategies before, during, & after reading • Teacher conducting small group, guided reading lessons • Students reading texts silently on their own • Students making their thinking visible through discussions, post-its, think-alouds, graphic organizers, etc. • Students sharing verbally after reading <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(Diagnostic instruction [e.g., DRTA]; Extended Response Rubrics applied to student work)</small></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basal anthologies • Content area texts • Trade Books (fiction and non-fiction) • Periodicals • Newspapers • Response journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading Comprehension</i>, Blachowicz & Ogle • Generative strategies from Saturday class • <i>Book Club</i>, McMahon & Raphael
<p style="text-align: center;">Vocabulary Development</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(30 min.*) (Whole or small groups [whose membership may change])</small></p>	Word Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher modeling, instruction, guiding, and encouraging word awareness/word learning • Students using dictionaries & thesauruses • Students using personal word collections • Evidence of word awareness (e.g., word walls, etc.) <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(Evidence of new vocabulary in oral discussions and writing; personal word logs)</small></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal spelling/ vocabulary books • Thesaurus, Dictionary/Glossaries • Word Walls • Internet sites • Software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generative strategies from Saturday class • <i>Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms</i>, Blachowicz & Fisher • <i>Word Journey</i>, Ganske • <i>Bringing Words to Life</i>, Beck, et al.

©National-Louis University, ARDDP, January 15, 2004. Used for instructional purposes only with this credit line.

latter items 20% or less. It was important that coaches retain contact with children, with our preferred method of working in a push-in process in collaboration with teachers. This helps the coaches keep their skills sharp, serve as a model for others, and gain or retain the confidence of teachers, who see the coaches working alongside the teachers with the school's students. As the role was honed, we also helped the coaches communicate the role dimensions to their administrators and make themselves visible to teachers with a weekly schedule for all to see. Coaches shared their schedules and pie charts with us on a regular basis, so we could see how their roles changed and evolved

and provide solutions when roles became unbalanced or challenged by difficult problems.

One of our greatest discoveries was the importance of the coach's role in helping to develop, support, and maintain a literacy infrastructure in the school, which allowed growth to take place. More traditional role descriptions have emphasized the role of the coach with the individual classroom teacher or as a professional developer of content and practice knowledge for staff. In the low-performing schools with which we worked, few, if any, had literacy committees, and some did not even have grade-level teams. If a literacy committee existed, it often consisted of the principal and one

Figure 4
Coach's Role

National-Louis University Literacy Coaching Model			
Desired Coaching Outcomes	Role of the Coach	Essential Knowledge for Coaches	Essential Practices for Coaches
<p>Instructional outcomes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> rich literacy environments in school and classroom well-organized and managed literacy curriculum and instruction in school and classrooms effective assessments and use of assessment data differentiation of instruction problem-solving approaches 	<p>The coach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> helps develop rich literacy environments at a building and classroom level helps develop, maintain, and manage well-organized literacy curriculum and instruction at school and classroom levels helps develop, maintain, interpret, and use assessments and assessment data supports differentiated instruction demonstrates, observes, guides, and problem solves in classrooms with teachers and students stays connected to students and student learning by maintaining some direct interactions with students 	<p>Essential knowledge includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the conducive climates needed for literacy learning how readers and writers develop the nature and structure of developmental reading programs the nature of sequenced, cohesive, and balanced literacy curriculum methods of instruction, and differentiation organization of literacy materials at classroom and school level appropriate formative and summative assessments instructional problem-solving strategies 	<p>Coaching is provided to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> flexible grouping to differentiate (i.e., small, whole, individual) implementation of instructional strategies for writing, vocabulary development, comprehension, independent-level reading, word study, inquiry learning, literature circles, guided reading, and read-alouds administration and interpretation of assessments for planning, instruction, problem-solving, and progress monitoring the intelligent and selective use of published materials and other instructional resources
<p>Professional development outcomes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> directed, and organized professional development in literacy for teachers and administrators professional communities of educators who engage in reflective practices and who problem solve around literacy 	<p>The coach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> initiates, directs, and organizes literacy professional development for teachers and administrators develops personal and professional resources to promote self-analysis helps establish a professional community of educators who engage in reflective practices and problem solve around literacy acts as a resource for all members of the school community: students, teachers, administrators, parents, volunteers, and paraprofessionals 	<p>Essential knowledge includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> forms of adult learning styles, modalities, and how to develop a professional voice ways to encourage discussion forms of professional collaboration trust-building and problem-solving strategies how to build communities an understanding of self-inquiry and how to plan for one's own professional development 	<p>Coaching is provided to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> differentiated professional development study groups and book clubs grade-level and building-level literacy team meetings development and use of laboratory classrooms opening and maintaining a literacy resource center ongoing maintenance of a professional library collecting local samples of best practice in the form of student work, videos, and resources communication of professional development opportunities networking and professional memberships
<p>Infrastructure outcomes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> structures for developing, maintaining and monitoring school literacy curriculum and practices plans for supporting and sustaining continuous improvement regular, routine communication and problem-solving about literacy and literacy decisions with administrators, teachers, parents and district and state personnel 	<p>The coach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> works with principals and teachers to develop plans needed to support and sustain continuous improvement in literacy works with principals and teachers to build structures that develop, maintain, and monitor literacy curriculum and practices ensures effective, regular communication and problem-solving about literacy and literacy decisions with administrators, teachers, other school staff, parents, district, and state personnel advocates for literacy in the school and community by spotlighting and celebrating achievement, innovations and growth 	<p>Essential knowledge includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> knowledge of school-change models and sequences of change knowledge of school-planning processes for literacy ways to conduct a needs analysis how to develop literacy curriculum modes of communicating an understanding of the power of motivation and engagement how to implement backward and forward planning 	<p>Coaching is provided to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> determining school literacy needs development of a school plan for literacy integration of district mandates with local needs development of a model to sustain literacy growth routinely scheduled meetings with administration, teachers, grade levels, etc. organization of district and local assessment for analysis and effective use determining needs and evaluating progress planning, prioritizing, and maintaining a long term and short-term public schedule maintaining all building literacy records to facilitate future actions evaluating school literacy progress

knowledgeable teacher. Working with the principals and teachers to create school literacy teams (SLTs) as well as supporting grade-level teams in literacy problem solving were cited most frequently in all interviews, surveys, and logs as contributing to the building of a learning community in our schools and as contributing to school literacy improvement.

5. Support Coaches in Developing a Model for Goal Setting and Coaching Cycles

One of the biggest pitfalls for a developing coach is being asked to do everything—and wanting to do

everything—at once! Developing a model for goal setting with coaches is critical if they are to take the knowledge they built and tie it to regular practices that matched what teachers were expected to do. Once the curriculum was in place, we helped our coaches use it for needs analysis and goal setting.

Besides understanding and specifying their role components, we wanted to help our coaches set goals and understand the knowledge and practice base relevant to their role and the observable changes they should watch for. Many of them were making the transition from being a teacher with personal excellence to becoming a coach and supporter of other

adult learners. So we did goal setting with our coaches, using four guiding questions that were based on the coaches' analyses of school needs:

1. What outcomes do you want to focus on?
2. What is your role in achieving those outcomes?
3. What knowledge is essential to perform your coaching role?
4. Given this essential knowledge, which instructional, professional development, and infrastructure practices will you support?

The result of this chunking and integration helped us use our model of the coach's role and responsibilities to select foci for coaching cycles. For example, the understanding and implementing of guided reading was one coaching cycle that many of our coaches used. Over the period of a quarter, they enlisted teachers who saw this practice as a need and planned a series of professional development and classroom support sessions with this focus. The goal analysis helped the coaches select what to focus on, when, and for how long. At the end of this time frame, the coaches and teachers re-evaluated and continued with this goal or added another focus for coaching. As Tatum (2004) so cogently described, urban schools have special dimensions and demands for the literacy coach. So we had to consider how to use this role definition with developing urban coaches, and to do that, we needed to look more closely at their development.

6. Build Understanding That Development as a Coach Has Recursive Phases

Our intimate weekly contact with our coaches and our reading of their journals helped us understand their phases in development and something about the coaches' natures. These shifts were parallel to those observed in the development of coaches trained in more traditional settings (Blachowicz et al., 1999):

- *Survival* ("I don't really know what I'm doing and have to organize a plan to work while I figure this out." "I feel like I am starting over with everything every day!" "I don't know enough about guided reading to help someone else do it.")

- *Developing craft knowledge* ("I know how to do guided reading with students, and now I have to figure out how I can help others do this.")
- *Developing differentiation ability* based on the needs of the stakeholders ("Some teachers have the process down but not the materials. Others are good at selecting the materials but don't use them most effectively. I have to work differently with those two groups.")

Awareness of these phases led us to analyze the interviews and journals of the coaches-in-training to find the support that proved most essential in each category.

One thing we found was that these phases were recursive; when a coach began to work in an unfamiliar area, the coach often reverted to an earlier phase. For this reason, we have used the term *phase* rather than *stage*. Although a coach may have been able to differentiate teacher support in the area of emergent writing, for example, the coach may have been at the survival or craft phase when she began working with middle-grade teachers on math-content reading strategies. This helped us differentiate in our work of providing support for coaches and also allowed us to pair up coaches with different areas of strength.

7. Provide Facilitation That Differentiates for Coaches-in-Training

Like the teachers, students, and administrators with whom the coaches-in-training worked, they also had different profiles. Some had well-developed skills for working with colleagues but an underdeveloped knowledge base of current literacy practices. Other coaches-in-training had superb knowledge bases without experience working outside their own classrooms. Still other coaches-in-training were gifted in working with parents and administrators but had not developed curricular knowledge and philosophies.

Essential to our process is helping the coach integrate a strong knowledge and practice base. Developing the knowledge base is actually the easiest to do, and doing it within a site-specific context makes the learning more durable. Our coaches-in-training became literacy partner scholars and participated in graduate study reflecting IRA's standards for the reading specialist (2003). The difference here was that the instructors for the courses also acted as school facilitators for the coaches, along with other

facilitators who were both master coaches, university faculty, and experienced district educators. The instructors were intimately connected to the schools, and all assignments and experiences were shared, discussed, critiqued, and perfected in the cohort study time. The facilitators also emphasized and helped with the design of coaching cycles, which were topically organized to keep the coaches-in-training from taking on too much at once.

At the same time that they were developing their own knowledge and practice base, the coaches were developing professional development and coaching strategies to try out their ideas and practices and share them with other coaches. In some sense, this allowed the coaches to take the stance of a colearner rather than expert, which made the experience more interactive. Essential to this process was the support of a facilitator who acted as support and mentor. The facilitators used the same gradual release of responsibility model (Duke & Pearson, 2002) that we hoped teachers would use with their students.

First, the facilitator demonstrated a presentation or coaching process, then the coach-in-training and facilitator carried out the process one or more times together. The coach then did the presentation or coaching process alone, with the facilitator providing feedback.

Each of these steps involved planning, problem solving, debriefing, and refining, in which the facilitator was an essential and more knowledgeable “other.” At each developmental level, we found some aspects of facilitation that were reported as useful by many of the coaches, with a few generic categories of concern. At each phase, the coaches-in-training set goals and continued to build their knowledge and practice base to meet the ever-changing demands of the coaches with whom they worked.

At the survival phase, facilitators were most useful in helping to set reasonable expectations, construct schedules for coaching cycles, design basic communication methods and expectations of working with administrators and teachers, and design initial

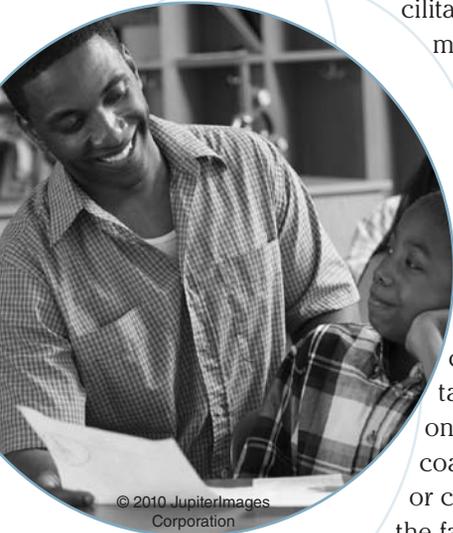
prototypes of professional development with the facilitator as a copresenter. At the craft development phase, facilitators helped with goal setting and dealing with resistant teachers and acted as a planning support during the coach-presented professional development. When the coaches began to focus on differentiation, the facilitator focused on building a repertoire of ways to achieve similar goals, so that every teacher was not expected to work the same way. This required special attention to listening to teachers and to focusing on the importance of student learning rather than teacher change.

The facilitators also became conscious of the particular school cultures and the dynamics within the various school buildings. Some had new principals, some were experiencing change in teachers, and others had new coaches who needed to be supported in establishing themselves as part of the school staff. With the intense pressures to improve reading test scores, school literacy teams reflected tensions and demands. The need to be savvy and careful in establishing working relationships also highlighted the power of the facilitator’s weekly on-site school visit.

The university facilitators needed to be aware of the differences in the coaches they supported and be willing to approach them as individuals. Focusing on the idea that “change begins at home,” professional development was site-situated and used to develop a shared knowledge and practice base, assessment-informed instruction, and problem solving and work sharing in professional communities. The facilitator’s role, along with the supports mentioned above, was to work collaboratively with the coaches-in-training to align their roles with best practices, build the coaches-in-training’s sense of the school curriculum, and understand their own phases of development and those of their teachers. While sometimes modeling how to work directly with teachers, the university facilitators’ focus and goal were to support the coaches, so *they* could support the teachers.

8. Design Methods for Coaches to Build Teams Around Student Data and Shared Inquiry

As educators who prepare literacy coaches, we know the importance of student data and shared inquiry to our work (Bean, 2004; Paratore & McCormack, 2007). For many reasons, assessment and conversations around student data are keys to effective



© 2010 JupiterImages Corporation

coaching. First, assessment focuses the work on student progress, which takes the pressure off teachers who may feel that coaches are there to monitor the teachers and binds the teacher and coach together in a common cause. Second, instructionally focused assessment develops habits of close observation and highlights the critical elements of literacy development and instruction. This relates all coaching and staff development efforts to the framework for student learning and teacher instruction. Finally, the examination of student outcomes is essential to looking at the progress of a school improvement project (Vogt & Shearer, 2007).

Simple questions, such as those listed below, and other questions noted earlier can help focus thoughtful discussion and move it into action.

- How are we doing?
- What are we doing best?
- What do these assessments measure?
- What are we missing?
- Is this the best we can do?
- Where should we place more emphasis?
- What do we already do that we can do more of?
- Is there something we can do sooner in the year?
- Where can we place less emphasis?
- What is the most important thing for students to be learning now?

The students and their performance are always the focus, because everyone, coaches and teachers alike, have the common desire to make their students the best readers that they can be.

9. Help Coaches Balance Fidelity of Treatment With Formative Treatment

Urban schools often experiment with programmatic innovations that require fidelity of treatment, a requirement of scientific investigation to ensure that the treatment being studied is appropriately implemented. In unenlightened situations, this is sometimes applied to schools by having “checkers,” armed with checklists, watches, and pencils, observing in classrooms and insisting on the exact following of scripts, page-by-page instructions, and strict

timelines. Although we believe that close observation, evaluation, and reflection are essential to refining instruction, a strict, experimental view of fidelity of treatment conflicts with the differentiation that we know is required in all schools. This is especially true in urban schools, where the bands of performance are wider than in more homogeneous populations and there is more mobility of students.

We encourage our coaches to explore formative treatment, based on the model of formative experiment (Reigeluth & Frick, 1999; Reinking & Watkins, 2000) in which the teacher and coach set goals together, plan an implementation, and then observe instruction and measure progress before deciding on the next course of action. This approach is consistent with the notion of progress monitoring contained in current federal mandates and uses the data exploration model in conjunction with the curriculum frameworks and goal setting we explored earlier.

This perspective and process also helps coaches with their responses to system initiatives. For example, when an initiative involving reciprocal teaching was proposed, the teachers at one school described the current instructional process of PRC2 (Ogle, in press) being used in their classrooms, which involved summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting—the elements of reciprocal teaching. These teachers were exempted from the training and implementation of a second model, because they had one that worked.

10. Connect Coaches With the Wider Professional Community

Urban systems have lots of work to do and, usually, not enough people to do it. Our latest work was situated in administrative Area 6 of CPS, which encompasses 33 schools of great diversity. The area instructional officer is assisted by two area reading coaches (ARCs). These ARCs, in turn, support individual schools and carry out staff development across the area.

One part of our work was collaborating with these excellent professionals to plan staff development for district coaches and teachers who were delegated to attend. One of the most gratifying outcomes of the newly developed coaches was their support of other school coaches in their monthly meetings. These meetings transitioned from being directed by central office personnel to meetings where coaches, in collaboration with the ARCs, presented and shared with

one another. This aspect of our work is still under development, but it seems to provide coaches with an expanded vision of their professional roles and strengths.

Further, following their state licensure as coaches, we have initiated projects for these coaches to intern with us in our further professional development work, for post-master's credit. These internships will prepare the coaches to become adjunct instructors at our university, giving us the ability to scale up our work and coaches the opportunity to demonstrate their new knowledge and skills.

Although this in-district work can greatly expand the impact of excellent coaches, urban districts are insular, often just because of their size. With so many active, internal professional development opportunities, coaches are sometimes unaware of other models of work, issues, challenges, and solutions. We required our coaches to join relevant professional literacy organizations as part of their commitment, and we mentored them as members. First, we arranged for the coaches to attend local meetings, assisted with transportation, met with the coaches at the meetings, and helped them become part of the group. Later, our involvement evolved into involving the coaches in proposal writing, presentation, engagement in the larger state reading conference, and then attending and presenting at IRA's Annual Conferences.

These professional connections broadened the coaches' conceptions of their role. Some of our coaches have moved on to positions of greater responsibility within the district. Many have also joined our university's Reading Leadership Institute, a professional network that provides ongoing staff development and community for those who are also staff developers. Some have even undertaken doctoral work, and all belong to our electronic network, which keeps us in communication.

A Final Word

This article has only scratched the surface of the learning that has resulted from Literacy Partners' participation in the Chicago Literacy Initiative Partnership. This partnership has also built our knowledge base about:

- What facilitation in the schools has done to enrich university–school partnerships

- Which upfront guidelines help make the school–partner working relationship a good one
- How such partnerships enrich each of the partners
- What challenges coaches face in helping teachers adjust their instructional practices within the time and curriculum constraints they face
- How incorporating district professionals in university initiatives enriches that work

We are exploring and experimenting as we make our way through the processes involved in preparing excellent literacy coaches for urban schools.

Notes

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of The Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust, Chicago Public Schools, The Shaw Fund for Literacy, Dean Alison Hilsabeck of the National College of Education, and our NCE facilitators. We are also grateful for our partners in area 6—James Cosme, Carol Coughlin, and Kelly Jeffers—and all of our partnering teachers, coaches, and students. Finally, we would like to thank Peggy Mueller, Senior Program Officer of the Chicago Community Trust, who personally exemplifies the true meaning of the word *partner*.

References

- Advanced Reading Development Demonstration Project. (2008). Partnerships for improving literacy in urban schools. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(8), 674–680. doi: 10.1598/RT.61.8.11
- Bean, R.M. (2004). *The reading specialist: Leadership for the classroom, school, and community*. New York: Guilford.
- Bean, R., Cassidy, J., Grumet, J., Shelton, D., & Wallis, S. (2002). What do reading specialists do? Results from a national survey. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(8), 736–744.
- Blachowicz, C.L.Z., Fisher, P., Ivy, C., McAvoy, E., Owens, E., Anderson, S., et al. (1999). Reading specialists reflect: The value of one-to-one experiences in clinical training. In D.H. Evensen & P.B. Mosenthal (Vol. Eds.), *Reconsidering the role of the reading clinic in a new age of literacy: Vol. 6. Advances in Reading/Language Research*. Greenwich (pp. 101–131). CT: JAI Press.
- Blachowicz, C.L.Z., Obrochta, C., & Fogelberg, E. (2005). Literacy coaching for change. *Educational Leadership*, 62(6), 55–58.
- Brozo, W.G., & Hargis, C.H. (2003). Taking seriously the idea of reform: One high school's efforts to make reading more responsive to all students. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 47(1), 14–23.
- Cassidy, J., & Cassidy, D. (2005/2006, December/January). What's hot, what's not for 2006. *Reading Today*, 23(3), 1, 8–9.
- Chicago Public Schools. (n.d.). *Chicago Reading Initiative*. Retrieved February 9, 2009, from cri.cps.k12.il.us
- DeStefano, L., Hanson, M., & Kallemeyn, L. (2005, August). *External evaluation of the Advanced Reading Development Demonstration Project (ARDDP): Year three report to The Chicago Community Trust*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois.

- Duke, N.K., & Pearson, P.D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A.E. Farstrup & S.J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 205–242). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Frost, S., Buhle, R., & Blachowicz, C.L.Z. (2009). *Effective literacy coaching: Building expertise and a culture of literacy*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- International Reading Association, Professional Standards and Ethics Committee. (2003). *Standards for reading professionals*. Newark, DE: Author.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction (NIH Publication No. 00-4769)*. Washington, DC: National Institutes of Health.
- Ogle, D. (in press). *Partnering for content literacy: PRC2 in action. Developing academic language for all learners*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Paratore, J.R., & McCormack, R.L. (Eds.). (2007). *Classroom literacy assessment: Making sense of what students know and do*. New York: Guilford.
- Quatroche, D.J., Bean, R.M., & Hamilton, R.L. (2001). The role of the reading specialist: A review of research. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(3), 282–294.
- Reigeluth, C.M., & Frick, T.W. (1999). Formative research: A methodology for creating and improving design theories. In Reigeluth, C.M. (Ed.), *Instructional-design theories and models: A new paradigm of instructional theory* (Vol. II, pp. 633–651). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Reinking, D., & Watkins, J. (2000). A formative experiment investigating the use of multimedia book reviews to increase elementary students' independent reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35(3), 384–419. doi: 10.1598/RRQ.35.3.4
- Tatum, A.W. (2004). A road map for reading specialists entering schools without exemplary reading programs: Seven quick lessons. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(1), 28–39. doi: 10.1598/RT.58.1.3
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *No Child Left Behind*. Retrieved February 22, 2003, from www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb
- Vogt, M., & Shearer, B.A. (2007). *Reading specialists and literacy coaches in the real world* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Camille L.Z. Blachowicz, Roberta Buhle, and Donna Ogle are faculty at the National College of Education of National-Louis University, Chicago, Illinois, USA; e-mail cblachowicz@nl.edu, rbuhle@nl.edu, and dogle@nl.edu. Sharon Frost and Amy Correa teach at the National College of Education of National-Louis University and for Chicago Public Schools, Illinois, USA; e-mail sfrost@nl.edu and amy.correa@nl.edu. Jodi Dodds Kinner is the former Director of Literacy for the Chicago Public Schools, Illinois, USA.