A LITERACY COACH’S HANDBOOK: COACHING STRATEGIES
TO IMPACT STUDENT LEARNING IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

A Project

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated with love and gratitude to my husband, Ed Conrado. It is my incredible good fortune to be married to a man as supportive of me as this man is. A dedicated middle school principal and enthusiastic educator, Ed understands the importance of education. He took care of our four young daughters on weekends and evenings while I pursued my undergraduate degree. He did the laundry, shopping and the myriad of other chores normally shared while I pursued my graduate degree. His pride and confidence in me kept me going on numerous occasions when I wanted to give up.

This work is also dedicated to my daughters; Emily, Molly, Sara and Katherine. I am grateful for their love, support and patience as I studied, stressed and stewed over research and writing.

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Finally, I’d like to dedicate this work to Edith Idolia Hanly Dooley, my late mother. The humor, intelligence, perseverance and tolerance that she modeled made me
the person that I have become. Because of her influence, I have accomplished the level of education that she wanted to accomplish, but lacked the opportunity. Thanks Mom!
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ABSTRACT

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With the increasing focus on reading achievement over the past decade at federal, state and local levels, there has been a rapid increase of literacy coaches hired to improve the reading expertise available to teachers and students at the school site level. The majority of these coaches have been hired to serve the primary grades because students are first learning to read at this level. Unfortunately, a large percent of students entering the middle grades do not have the skills necessary to comprehend core curriculum texts. Middle grades teachers often believe that students have come to them prepared to read and do not consider themselves as reading teachers equipped to teach literacy skills. A literacy coach can provide on-site staff development and coaching support to middle
school teachers which will positively impact the literacy skills of young adolescent stu-
dents.

This project has developed a handbook for middle school literacy coaches, based on current research, which was field tested at a small, rural Northern California middle school. The handbook lists desirable qualifications for and responsibilities of middle grades literacy coaches. The handbook also describes the characteristics of young adolescents, their literacy development, and teaching strategies that have been shown to be effective in engaging these students while positively impacting their literacy develop-
ment.

Survey results in the final evaluation of this project showed positive results from the middle school teachers included in the field testing. All teachers indicated that the services offered by the literacy coach were beneficial to their teaching and had a posi-
tive impact on student learning and literacy skills development.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

With the ever increasing pressure on schools to improve reading achievement, many schools have hired literacy coaches to provide on-site professional development for their teachers. The literacy needs of students change from primary school to the middle grades. When students leave primary school and enter the middle grades, they move from learning to read with narrative and nonfiction literature to reading to learn expository texts in their core subjects (Vacca, 2002). Many students have been unprepared for the new demands of this type of reading. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, it has been estimated that more than 10,000 literacy coaches will be needed in schools to support teachers working with adolescents who read below basic on standardized state testing (Sturdevant, 2003). These literacy coaches will need to be prepared and qualified to work with teachers of adolescent learners.

Middle schools vary in range of grade level configurations and can include a combination of grade levels between fourth and eighth grades. An upper elementary school can contain fourth, fifth and sixth grades. A junior high school can contain seventh and eighth grades, or sixth, seventh and eighth grades. For the purpose of this research project, a middle school student was a 10 to 14 year old student in fourth through eighth grades (Stevenson, 1998) and a middle school had the configuration of grades four through eight.
Effective literacy coaching involves collaborating with all teachers on staff, facilitating development of a school vision about literacy, and providing staff development that is literacy-focused and based on what teachers need to know in order to teach their students. The literacy coach also provides support for teachers through classroom observations and immediate feedback. This type of professional development is more effective than the one day or short term staff development workshops that are common in schools (American Educational Research Association (AERA), 2005; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Unlike the one-day or short term staff development opportunities, literacy coaches provide long term, ongoing support that helps teachers think more reflectively about how they can improve instruction to better meet the needs of the students in their classrooms.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to develop a literacy coach’s handbook that includes coaching strategies with supporting examples to use with teachers in the middle grades as the coaches develop their own literacy coaching program. The handbook includes methods for effective literacy instruction for both English learners (EL) and English only (EO) students in the middle grades and tips on cognitive coaching. There are three sections in the handbook: Basic Requirements for Coaches: Getting Started; Coaching: Fundamentals of Coaching and Middle Grades Students: Uniqueness of the Middle Grades.

Literacy coaching can be intimidating for both the coach and the teacher. Teaching can be an isolating profession with the teacher having nearly complete
autonomy in the classroom. Without feedback on their teaching, insecurity and defensiveness can develop. Teachers often feel threatened by the coach and do not want the coach in their classroom observing them teach. The coach’s role is not to evaluate the teacher’s job performance, but to collaborate with, support and help the teacher reflect on their craft with the goal of improving student learning. This handbook provides the coach with ideas to develop a trusting and supportive relationship with even the most reluctant teacher.

**Scope of the Project**

This project focused on the development of a literacy coach’s handbook for coaches working with teachers of middle grades students in grades four through eight. The handbook provides tips and strategies for cognitive coaching techniques to support the development of a trusting relationship with teachers and strategies for working with teachers reluctant to embrace the coaching model. There is also a section devoted to research based best practices for teaching literacy skills to English learners as well as to native English speakers.

The handbook in this project is intended to help coaches teach, model and reinforce good literacy teaching techniques for teachers with the goal of improved student learning.

**Significance of the Project**

An assumption of many middle grades teachers has been that students have learned to read in primary school and that they no longer need to be taught reading strategies. Middle school teachers often do not see literacy development as one of their
responsibilities (Vacca, 2002). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2004) produced a statement synthesizing current reading research which includes a definition of reading as “a complex, purposeful, social and cognitive process that requires readers to use their knowledge of spoken and written language at the same time” (p. 1). Readers must also “use their knowledge of the topic of the text and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning. Reading is not a technical skill acquired once and for all in the early grades, but rather a developmental process” (NCTE, 2004, p. 1). The developmental process of reading continues through the middle grades, high school and into adulthood.

Students in the middle grades need opportunities and support to read widely to gain experience and develop fluency. An effective literacy coach in the middle grades can help teachers move students to deeper understanding of text and increase their ability to generate ideas and knowledge for their own uses (Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997). Literacy coaching in the middle grades supports all teachers at their site in meeting the needs of students who cannot read the content textbooks. Coaches also help teachers differentiate reading instruction to meet the needs of all students and help create an active, engaging classroom environment. English Learners (ELs), in particular, need learning environments that create rich contexts for the development of language skills and conversational strategies. Making rich language comprehensible should be the central element when teaching ELs (Garcia, 2003). Literacy coaches help teachers become better at their craft and improve learning for all students.

At a small, rural middle school, the need for a literacy coach was recognized and the author, a reading specialist, was reassigned to the position, changing the focus
from literacy development for targeted groups of students to the staff development needs of an entire school. A student population of 87% ELs and a teaching staff of 80% EO (English Only), necessitated the strategic focusing of literacy efforts to meet the school’s unique needs. With the pressure of standardized testing and being in year four of program improvement, there was little time for the new literacy coach to research effective literacy strategies specific to middle grade EL and EO students as well as effective coaching strategies to use with the staff. A literacy coaching handbook focused on the needs of middle grades literacy issues would have been helpful.

The teachers at this middle school received intensive staff development in explicit, direct English language instruction methodologies to teach students phonology, morphology, lexicon, semantics and syntax. Some of the strategies can be used with EOs as well as ELs. The students were grouped by language level according to their most current scores on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). While all teachers had received the training, ongoing staff development was required to insure that teachers use the strategies effectively and continued to develop the methodologies.

The literacy coach worked with the classroom teachers in evaluating student assessments to see where the academic and/or language needs were the greatest and then brainstormed together to develop lessons to meet those needs. Literacy coaching involves going into classrooms and observing teachers to insure that their lessons meet the needs of students according to assessment data, and that effective teaching strategies are being used. Post observation conferencing provides the opportunity for reflection and dialogue between teacher and coach about the observed lesson. It takes time and skill on the coach’s part to develop the trust that is necessary to have an open relationship with
teachers so that the teachers will be comfortable with coaches in their classrooms and cooperative in the coaching process. The goal, again, is to impact student learning. The coach does not evaluate job performance; the coach is coaching teachers to be their best, much like a sports coach does with athletes.

A new literacy coach working with young adolescents faces many challenges and a handbook for literacy coaching will help the new coach understand and deal with these challenges. The handbook in this project addresses the difficulty of developing a trusting relationship between coach and staff with strategies to overcome these challenges and to handle difficult staff members. New coaches also need ready references to research based effective coaching strategies, teaching strategies and helpful resources. These are provided in The Literacy Coach’s Handbook.

Limitations of the Project

The handbook for this project was field tested in a specific small, rural Northern California middle school serving 10 to 14 year old fourth through eighth grade students. However, the handbook was developed based on national expectations for literacy coaching (International Reading Association (IRA), 2004; 2006) and can be used by literacy coaches working with teachers of young adolescents in any school setting in any state.

There are limitations and obstacles to implementing this Literacy Coach’s Handbook. First, this handbook was designed to be used by individuals who have a specialized background in reading and literacy development. It would be difficult to
determine how successful this handbook would be to coaches without this important background knowledge.

Second, this handbook was specifically developed for coaches working with middle grades teachers to improve listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of mostly English Learners.

Finally, literacy coaches are limited or empowered by the amount of administrative support that they receive. Literacy coaching can be successful if the teachers understand that the administrator and literacy coach share a vision of improved student learning and that both will be observing for specific practices in the classrooms. It is helpful if this vision is shared by the teachers and the practices are made clear to the staff along with the fact that the literacy coach’s job is to support their learning and implementation of these practices. The coach needs the support of the administrator, but the coach does not report teacher performance to the administrator. It is the administrator’s responsibility to observe teachers for job performance. If teachers perceive the literacy coach as an evaluator, trust in the coaching relationship will be difficult to build.

Definition of Terms

California English Language Development Test (CELDT)

An assessment given annually to students who are limited English proficient; determines the level of English language proficiency in listening, speaking reading and writing skills according to the English Language Development Standards.
**English Learners (EL)**

Students whose first language is not English and are in the process of learning English (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001).

**English Only (EO)**

Students whose first language is English.

**Literacy**

The ability to read and write to a proficient level.

**Literacy Coach**

Provides ongoing, supportive learning opportunities for teachers with a focus on improved instruction and increased student achievement (Casey, 2006) in core subjects as well as reading and writing. Literacy coaches are professionals who know their content area, have classroom experience, possess excellent interpersonal and communication skills, and know how to work effectively with adults (Frost & Bean, 2006; International Reading Association, 2004).

**Meta-Cognition**

The ability to think about one’s own thinking (National Middle School Association (NMSA), 2003).

**Middle Grades**

Grades fourth through eighth. Students in the middle grades are typically 10 to 14 years old (Stevenson, 1998).

**Para-Educators**

Usually non-credentialed individuals who assist the credentialed teacher with instructional duties in the classroom.
Pull-Out Program

A program that takes students out of their regular classrooms for short periods of time in order to give them reading intervention instruction, usually by provided by a para-educator.

Struggling Readers

Refers to youth with clinically diagnosed reading disabilities, as well as those who are English Learners, at risk, low achieving, un-motivated, disenchanted, and/or generally unsuccessful in school literacy tasks (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Proficient reading skills in primary grades do not automatically transfer to middle grades when students transition from children’s stories to more complex content area textbooks even though much attention and resources have been targeted in recent years to early reading instruction in the primary grades (Vacca, 2002). Middle grades teachers need support in understanding how they can learn the content of the curriculum they are teaching while at the same time improve student literacy. These teachers also need support to understand that teaching in their subject areas will be improved when they teach literacy skills related to the texts. Remarkable improvements are being reported by schools that have adopted the current practice of using literacy experts to coach content area teachers who lack the capacity and confidence to teach literacy strategies to students in their disciplines (IRA, 2006). The literacy coach must, however, be experienced with literacy development and qualified for the coaching position in order to develop a successful literacy program.

A literacy coach is a reading specialist who focuses on providing professional development for teachers by giving them the additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practices. They provide essential leadership for the school’s entire literacy program by helping create and supervise a long-term staff development process that supports both the development and implementation of the
literacy program over months and years. These individuals need to have experiences that enable them to provide effective professional development for the teachers in their schools (IRA, 2004).

According to the Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches (IRA, 2006), the best candidates for the role of literacy coach are good listeners and questioners who can develop trusting relationships with a variety of people and have strong reflective capabilities. There is evidence to suggest that the site-based, on-going, instructionally focused professional development that literacy coaches provide is more effective than sending individual teachers to workshops that do not address the specific needs of the school community (Casey, 2006; IRA, 2006). Even multi-day workshops often do not provide the support teachers need to help them think more reflectively about how they can improve instruction to better meet the needs of students in their classrooms (Bean & Isler, 2008). According to studies by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (2002), often after high quality training at workshops, the level of classroom application was approximately 5%.

Coaching can also reduce professional isolation and ensure integration of research-based practices in classrooms (Center for Cognitive Coaching (CCC), n.d.; Moran, 2007). Because the literacy coach is on site, the majority of collaborative work with the teachers happens during the school day in the classroom, where the need is greatest (Shanklin, 2006). These observations and the conferences that follow often lead to curriculum based conversations among the teachers, further reducing isolation.

The primary goal of literacy coaching is to improve student learning (Moran, 2007) by building teacher expertise (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Coaches must
distinguish coaching strategies to meet the needs of each teacher much like we are
asking them to meet the needs of each student in their classrooms (Kise, 2006). Moran
cites three essential principles of literacy coaching that should:

- consider collaboration as an asset
- value creative problem solving and self reflection
- develop a variety of professional learning opportunities to support adults in
  their development and use of specific knowledge, skills, and strategies (Moran, 2007).

In developing these goals, we are asking teachers to become aware of and
often to change their educational beliefs. Unexamined beliefs can have unintended
consequences and many of our beliefs as educators developed from our own educational
backgrounds. Before creating a staff development plan, Kise (2006) recommends asking
the following four questions:

What are the teachers’ beliefs about how students learn?
How tightly are teachers’ beliefs tied to their own strengths as educators?
What are the teachers’ beliefs about their role in students’ success?
What else keeps teachers from trying new practices? (p. 11)

Often when teachers are experiencing problems with students in their
classrooms, it is because the students do not fit into the teacher’s educational beliefs.
Literacy coaches must carefully plan staff development to help teachers “understand
where their strengths and beliefs lock them into practices that limit their freedom to help
students to succeed” (Kise, 2006, p. 182). Kise (2006) also notes that teachers must work
from their strengths; being forced to overuse our weaknesses often leads to fatigue,
ilness and stress.
The purpose and roles of coaches must be thoughtfully considered and articulated before being implemented. Teachers will fail to embrace a coaching model if the literacy coach and the administrator are confused about the roles and responsibilities of the position. If the program is seen as an intervention for some, teachers will see the program as corrective in nature (Moran, 2007). Having a literacy plan or framework in which the staff, literacy coach and administrator have had input is necessary to clearly articulate the purpose and roles of the coach.

Characteristics of Middle Grades Students

The term ‘middle grades’ refers to fourth through eighth grades with students typically aged 10 to 14 years (NMSA, 2003). Students in early adolescence are often defined by sweeping generalizations such as rebellious to adults, obsessed with sex and uninterested in intellectual matters. Many descriptors are also used to refer to these young people: in-betweeners, transescents, pubescents, junior high kids, middlers, teenagers and emerging adolescents (Stevenson, 1998). Early adolescence is a remarkable period of growth and development in which young adolescents experience rapid and significant developmental change. Because these young people are going through immense physical and emotional changes on their journey from childhood to full adolescence, these sweeping generalizations and labels must be considered with caution or outright rejection if educators are to work with this group successfully (NMSA, 2003; Stevenson, 1998).

After three decades of working with, observing and contemplating young adolescents, Chris Stevenson recognized generalizations that can be trusted about this age group. In his book *Teaching Ten to Fourteen Year Olds*, Stevenson (1998) lists five
truismsthat have applied consistently to students he came to know well. These truisms are that every child wants:

- to believe in himself or herself as a successful person
- to be liked and respected
- to do and learn things that are worthwhile
- physical exercise and freedom to move
- life to be just. (pp. 4-7)

During these tender years, children are beginning to confront new realities and complexities of the actual world in ways that are different from anything previously known to them. Their moods and emotions can fluctuate wildly from bold to conservative, wise to innocent and curious to subdued (Stevenson, 1998). Because of this fluctuation of moods and emotions, adolescence is often described as a period of storm and stress (Finders, 1997). Young adolescence is an emotionally turbulent time which often makes these students challenging to work with in a school setting.

The body undergoes more development during early adolescence than at any other time except the first two years of life. While young adolescents mature at varying rates of speed, their development includes overlapping and interrelated characteristics of physical, intellectual, emotional/psychological, moral/ethical and social domains (NMSA, 2003). Young adolescents’ physical growth in height, weight, internal organ size and skeletal and muscular systems is accelerated and uneven, with growth spurts occurring about two years earlier in girls than in boys. These body changes can be highly disturbing to the individual. Bones grow faster than muscles during this period often causing coordination issues and actual growing pains. Fluctuations in basal metabolism cause these youth to experience periods of restlessness and listlessness and ravenous appetites (NMSA, 2003; Stevenson, 1998). These physical changes often make young
adolescents self-conscious, which can affect their classroom participation and performance.

Although not as visible as physical development, intellectual development in young adolescents is just as intense and these young people exhibit a wide range of intellectual growth. Young adolescents are eager to learn about topics that are interesting to them, prefer active learning experiences and interactions with peers. These students generally progress from concrete thinking to grappling with complex concepts and reflective thinking. Young adolescents are extremely curious and are interested in a broad range of interests, though many of these interests are short lived. Young adolescents are curious about adults and observe adult behavior closely. They also develop an improved ability to consider the future, anticipate needs and develop personal goals (Finders, 1997; NMSA, 2003). If these emotionally sensitive students have not developed the literacy skills necessary to be successful with the texts they encounter, the students often begin to lose motivation for school and become labeled ‘poor’ or ‘struggling’ readers, which affects their behaviors in and out of school (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009). Students tend to believe that their achievement is directly related to their ability (Taylor & Collins, 2003) and rather than feeling respected and successful, students who struggle with literacy tend to feel like failures.

Moral/ethical development is associated with a person’s growing ability to make principled choices (NMSA, 2003). Young adolescents are transitioning from a self-centered perspective to having consideration for the rights and feelings of others. They tend to be idealistic, have a strong sense of fairness and are moving away from wholesale acceptance of adult moral judgment toward the development of their own personal
values. Young adolescents are often keenly aware of flaws in others, but are hesitant to acknowledge their own flaws (NMSA, 2003). These students can be quite different in a group of their peers than they are in one on one situations with adults because peer acceptance and fitting in with a group are very important to young adolescents. The same student can be polite and respectful when talking individually to a teacher and then be surly and disrespectful to the same teacher while with peers.

The quest for independence and identity formation characterize the emotional and psychological development of early adolescence. This is a time when young adolescents are searching for an adult identity while still wanting adult acceptance and peer approval. They are often erratic and inconsistent in behavior and highly sensitive to criticism. Teachers can encourage young adolescents to try on new reader identities and expand their vision of who they are and who they can become (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; NMSA, 2003). These students need the adults in their lives to help them develop a positive identity and a sense of hope for their future. Teachers can help their young adolescent students develop a positive identity and to believe in themselves by believing that their students are capable learners,

Social maturity often lags behind physical and intellectual development, typically resulting in overreaction to social situations, ridiculing others, and feeling embarrassed. The young adolescent’s social characteristics include a strong need to belong to a group. Peer approval becomes more important as adult approval decreases which often leads to rebellious behavior toward adults. Many of the natural challenges adolescents face, including curiosity about new ideas and the ‘adult’ world of sex, violence, and drugs can be exaggerated in lower-performing, frustrated students (Taylor
& Collins, 2003). While young adolescents can be moody and argumentative, they still need affirmation and respect from the adults in their lives.

Research Based Effective Teaching Practices

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners

Young adolescents vary substantially from one another in sophistication of reasoning, special talents or abilities, attention span, preferred modes of learning, personal interests, and facility with oral and written language. It is common to have students who have exceptional intellectual abilities sharing a classroom with students who struggle to achieve a functional degree of facility. Because of this wide range of variability of what is normal among young adolescents, an effective instructional program would include a balance between direct instruction and differentiated instruction using a variety of learning activities in which the teacher’s role is to respond where help is indicated according to the needs of individual learners (Stevenson, 1998). Middle grades teachers must rethink the ‘one size fits all’ classroom with the teacher in front of the class lecturing and dispensing knowledge to the students.

A literacy development program must be designed around researched and evidence based strategies for instruction and achievement to ensure a better chance at success for all students. Research indicates that an individual teacher can have a powerful effect on student learning (Marzano, 2007). There is a wide variety in quality of instruction among teachers within any school site. Teachers who are most influential on student learning show that they care about students. They help students to understand and solve their personal and academic problems. Influential teachers are excited about what
they teach and modify instruction to the individual needs, motives, interests, and abilities of students. They have high expectations for their students while using motivation and effective strategies when they teach, including clarity in stating problems, use of concrete examples, analysis of abstract concepts and application of those concepts to new contexts (Ruddell, 2009; Marzano 2007). Highly effective teachers use instructional strategies with clear goals, plans, and assessments; they have in depth knowledge of their content area and teaching processes. They also foster students’ motivation to explore, discover and succeed (Ruddell, 2009). Effective teachers have the best interests of all of their students at the core of their teaching and believe that their diverse student population has the ability to learn.

In cooperative learning, students are grouped for learning situations and allowed to experience content as viewed from multiple perspectives. Group discussions give students opportunities to rehearse and construct connections before they must answer questions, write a report or give a presentation. Students’ brains are engaged when they are actively involved in classroom conversations and discussing information with others. Small groups compel every individual to be an active participant in sharing ideas and constructing interpretations. When carefully implemented, cooperative learning invites students to set their own goals, pursue their own questions, and conduct their own inquiries. Genuine collaborative learning provides practice in democracy, community and shared responsibility. Small group settings also allow the teacher to meet more of the individual needs of the students (Hollas 2005; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Tovani, 2004). This type of collaborative learning supports young adolescents’ desire for active learning in a group environment.
Reinforcing effort and providing recognition can help students learn one of the most valuable lessons; the harder you try, the more successful you will be. Providing recognition for reaching goals not only increases achievement, but it heightens motivation as well (Marzano et al., 2001). Careful consideration must be given to any reward system, however, because repeated references to tests, grades, prizes, or other external rewards are likely to diminish creativity and motivation in students (Starko, 2005). Recognition can be as simple as a smile or a thumbs up from the teacher, or can be given in the form of praise for specific behaviors.

Thoughtful practice builds confidence (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Homework and practice are necessary in order to learn knowledge of any type. Modeling is necessary for any new skill but should be kept to a minimum; just long enough to get the point across. Effective use of instructional time would be to spend the majority of the time on guided practice where students can receive the best support from the teacher as the students move towards independence. Students are then ready for collaborative and/or independent practice. Research on homework has demonstrated that effective teachers establish and communicate a homework policy, design homework assignments that clearly articulate the purpose and outcome of the assignment and, using varying approaches, provide feedback to the students regarding their homework (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001). If students do not receive feedback on their homework regularly, they do not see the value in completed the assignments. Practice in class and through homework help to cement the skills being taught into the students’ skill sets.
Middle grades teachers must do everything possible to enhance the probability that every student will be successful as the teacher’s gradually but deliberately help their students become more responsible for themselves and their own learning.

**Thinking about Thinking: Meta-Cognition**

In addition to effective influential teachers and a battery of research based teaching practices, attention must be given to the students’ experience, ensuring that they are engaged in effective learning activities. Matching strategies to one’s purpose involves meta-cognitive knowledge (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007), which is an awareness and understanding of how one thinks and uses strategies.

Setting objectives and providing feedback uses goal setting and feedback in a precise and sophisticated manner to engage the meta-cognitive system of thinking. Student engagement and motivation are more likely when students understand the goal of each lesson and the relevance of the material, receive clear, consistent feedback, have the opportunity to solve a problem or work together; and have the opportunity to study content of interest to them (Marzano et al., 2001; Starko, 2005). Activities that have meaningful goals and feedback allow students to know whether they are approaching their goals.

Identifying similarities and differences are mental operations such as comparing, classifying, and creating metaphors and analogies. These are considered to be the “core” of all learning and are basic to human thought (Marzano et al., 2001). Young adolescents need many opportunities that require them to compare and to organize their experiences into systems of classification to stimulate higher-order reasoning (Stevenson, 1998). Metaphorical and analytical thinking starts with making connections and involves
taking ideas from one context and using them in another context to create a new synthesis, transformation or perspective (Starko, 2005). Opportunities to use these skills of classification and higher order thinking can be enhanced through literacy building activities and applied to other core subjects such as science and math.

Questioning is a technique that helps students retrieve what they already know about a subject and activates their background knowledge, which is critical to learning of all types. Authentic questioning means asking questions with no predetermined answers and require higher-level thinking beyond the factual recall of information. Classrooms that resonate with authentic questions are cultivating creative thinking. Questions lead readers into the text and enable them to interact and find meaning. Generating questions is often a new concept to students because they have been taught that it is the teacher’s job to ask the questions and the student’s job to answer them (Gear, 2008; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001; Ruddell, 2009; Tovani, 2004). When students ask their own questions and search for answers, they are stimulating comprehension and interacting with the text to create meaning.

The process of creating theories that in the theorist’s mind explain circumstances is a hallmark of accelerating intellectual change. Hypothetical thought is the process of stating assumptions about causalities (Stevenson, 1998). The dynamics of knowledge restructuring implies tasks that require students to question their knowledge (Marzano, 2007). Generating and testing hypotheses can be applied to a variety of tasks that are applicable to many subject areas and allow students to examine their thinking regarding knowledge being learned. Systems analysis, problem solving, historical investigations, invention, experimental inquiry and decision making are tasks that involve
hypotheses generation and testing (Marzano, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001). The tasks are examples of strategies that engage adolescent learners because they actively involve the students in meaningful learning.

Thinking about Literature

An essential goal to actively involve and immerse young adolescents in literature is to bring their prior knowledge, life experiences and values into sharper focus. Explicitly engaging students in the creation of nonlinguistic representations stimulates and increases activity in the minds of students, which has a strong positive effect on their achievement. Using graphic organizers, generating mental pictures, drawing pictures and engaging in kinesthetic representations make content and the relationships among concepts and different lesson elements visually explicit (Goldenberg, 2008; Marzano et al., 2001). Using these strategies to build background knowledge is particularly effective with English language learners because these students often lack the language necessary to combine their thinking with the text to create new meaning.

Summarizing and note taking both require students to condense information into a synthesized form. Note taking helps students to visualize and remember what they’ve read. Summarizing during reading means to pull out the most important information and put it in the reader’s own words. When readers summarize, they sort through large amounts of information to extract essential ideas. Synthesizing happens when the student merges the information with their own thinking and shapes it into their own thought (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001). Summarizing can add to
or reinforce students’ existing knowledge, and summarizing can build new meaning and understanding for students.

**Thinking about Words**

Systematic vocabulary instruction is one of the most important instructional interventions that teachers can use at all grade levels, especially with low achieving students, using the following generalizations:

- Students must encounter words in context more than once to learn them.
- Instruction in new words enhances learning those words in context.
- One of the best ways to learn a new word is to associate an image with it.
- Direct vocabulary instruction works.
- Direct instruction on words that are critical to new content produces the most powerful learning (Marzano et al., 2001, pp. 124-127).

Some researchers claim that direct vocabulary instruction is ill advised because there are so many words in the English language to learn and the major means of vocabulary development should focus on learning words in context (Marzano et al., 2001). While it is true that words are learned in context while reading, research shows that it occurs in small increments (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). Teachers must create a language-rich environment with lots of reading, talking and writing with varying levels of direct vocabulary instruction (Allen, 1999), and that instruction must change depending on the degree to which students are able to access a given word.

**Fundamentals of Coaching**

Coaching is a form of leadership. In *Everybody’s a Coach*, Don Shula, professional football’s “winningest” coach, writes that to be an effective leader one must earn respect by not being concerned with popularity. Coaches who are concerned with being popular will hesitate to make tough decisions that could make people mad and
threaten their own popularity. The fact that a coach must push people to go beyond themselves and push their limits means that the coach will be doing unpopular things. People must see that the coach is not motivated by their own ego but by their desire for the people they lead to be their best. Being a great coach means sacrificing popularity and being liked for doing the right thing so that the coach is respected (Shula & Blanchard, 1995). Internationally recognized sport psychologist Rainer Martens writes that excellent coaches become students of people and must develop the interpersonal skills needed to move people to action. Martens adds that “communication skills are the key to excellent coaching; talking, listening, negotiating, encouraging, and consoling. Coaching is as demanding of communication skills as marathon running is of conditioning skills” (2004, p. 36). In their book, *A Passion for Excellence*, Tom Peters and Nancy Austin (1985) describe coaching as:

Face to face leadership that pulls together people with diverse backgrounds, talents, experiences and interests, encourages them to step up to responsibility and continued achievements and treats them as full-scale partners and contributors. Coaching is not about memorizing techniques or devising the perfect game plan. It is about really paying attention to people – really believing them, really caring about them, really involving them. (p. 326)

Literacy coaching is similar to the coaching of a sports team; both jobs involve leading, instructing, and inspiring people to do things better than they thought they could do on their own. The underlying rationale supporting the need for reading coaches is like that of coaches in sports who assist and support athletes as they learn. Coaches are sometimes cheerleaders and sometimes critics. Similarly, reading coaches support and guide classroom teachers and act as mentors and assistants (Dole & Donaldson, 2006). Sports coaches motivate players to work hard and prepare to play as a
team to win games (Shula & Blanchard, 1995) while literacy coaches motivate people to work hard as a team to achieve literacy goals (Taylor & Collins, 2003).

Successful coaching has more to do with the coach’s own beliefs because beliefs are what make things happen. Leaders today must start with a strong vision and a set of positive beliefs that support that vision because without them the people they’re coaching will not only lose, they will be lost (Shula & Blanchard, 1995). This idea of beliefs supports Kise’s (2006) writing about literacy coach’s encouraging teachers to become aware of their beliefs about education, but Shula and Blanchard (1995) takes it a step further when he discusses the coach’s belief system as well.

**Cognitive Coaching**

In an effort to motivate teachers to do their best to improve student learning, it is important that literacy coaches help them become aware of their own beliefs about education. One method that coach’s can use to bring out the best in teachers is Cognitive Coaching. The Center for Cognitive Coaching (n.d.) defines cognitive coaching as:

> a supervisory/peer coaching model that capitalizes upon and enhances cognitive processes. It is a set of strategies, a way of thinking and a way of working that invites self and others to shape and reshape their thinking and problem solving capacities. Cognitive coaching enables people to modify their capacity to modify themselves. (Overview of Cognitive Coaching, para. 1)

One of the primary roles of a cognitive coach is to assist a teacher in connecting thought with practice. Often a teacher knows and understands best practices, but is not always aware of how effectively these practices are being put into action. A cognitive coach can facilitate the thinking processes which lead to improved practice by strategically asking questions and carefully listening to a teacher's understanding of best teaching practices and self-evaluations. Coaches facilitate the thinking process by asking
the teacher how things are going with a particular lesson or student, what’s going well in their own learning about and teaching of content and processes and what’s going well for the teacher with student learning in the content area/s? The coach can also help to connect thought with practice by asking the teacher what he or she thinks is causing things to go well (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Helping teachers think about what the contributing factors are to their successful lessons will enable them to consciously replicate their successes in other lessons.

Cognitive coaches encourage reflection by helping teachers summarize their impressions, recall data, analyze contributing factors, construct new learning and applications, and reflect on thinking (Costa & Garmston, 2002). In cognitive coaching it is the person being coached, not the coach herself, who evaluates what is weak or strong, appropriate or inappropriate, effective or ineffective about their work, which leads to enhanced performance (CCC, 2008). When a coach helps the person being coached to come to their own conclusions about an issue, the person being coached takes responsibility for their conclusions, rather than blaming the coach for forcing them to change.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose in developing this project was for middle school literacy coaches to use the research-based best practices for coaching and literacy development, provided in the handbook that this project developed, as the coaches work with teachers to adopt and practice effective teaching strategies to positively impact student learning. To begin this project, the researcher met with her principal to discuss the benefits of creating a literacy coaching position at their small, rural middle school. Together the researcher and administrator read current research on the effectiveness of literacy coaches on staff development and improving the literacy skills of middle school students. The principal decided to change the researcher’s position from reading specialist, working with small groups of students, to the position of literacy coach, working with the teaching staff to improve literacy instruction school wide.

Next, the researcher interviewed literacy coaches in surrounding districts to learn how those coaches set up and ran their coaching programs. The researcher asked how the literacy coaches began their coaching programs, the degree of engagement from teachers in their literacy programs, which services the literacy coaches offered the teachers and what evidence the literacy coaches had that their programs were effective.

The researcher then began reading current articles, books, journals and web sites about literacy development, characteristics of young adolescent learners,
characteristics of adult learners, coaching strategies, literacy coaching, cognitive coaching and effective teaching strategies for young adolescents. This research informed the researcher’s job as literacy coach while she began developing a coaching program to work with the teachers at her school. The research also informed both the literature review for this project and the handbook in the project.

Finally, the researcher conducted two surveys to inform this project, a mid year survey and an end of the year survey. The surveys asked the teachers to rank the benefits to them of the services offered by the literacy coach. The services offered by the literacy coach that were included in the surveys are described in the coaching section of the handbook.

Idea Development

The idea to create a literacy coaching handbook for this project came about as a result of the researcher’s job as reading specialist at a small, rural middle school in northern California. The student population of the school is 82% Hispanic and 78% low socio economic status. These subgroups have consistently scored below proficient on state assessments which has qualified the school for program improvement for the past four years.

As reading specialist the researcher’s job was to provide direct instruction to small groups of the most struggling readers for forty-five minutes a day. The researcher worked with students in fourth through eighth grades, usually in groups of five to eight. Another responsibility of the researcher was to train and supervise instructional assistants to work with small groups of students who had less severe reading problems. The
students who received intervention from the reading specialist and instructional assistants made good growth but the researcher was concerned about the students who didn’t receive reading intervention and were struggling with the grade level curriculum that was being presented by their classroom teachers. The teachers work from an assumption that their students come to them prepared to read at or near grade level. The middle grades language arts curriculum that the teachers are required to teach is rigorous, fast paced, and based on expository texts. The students need to learn new strategies to access and understand the curriculum (Stevenson, 1998; Taylor & Collins, 2003). Because of the frequent turnover in administration, the school has lacked an instructional leader to provide staff development and resources to support the classroom teachers and students to continue to positively impact teaching and learning. The teachers have been working in isolation with little or no collaboration. Out of frustration with poor student performance, the staff would blame the students and their families for being unmotivated and not taking their education seriously. There appeared to be a downward spiral of frustration among the staff and the students, creating a similar affect on test scores.

Support

After reviewing testing data with the principal, the researcher suggested that the reading specialist position could have a more profound impact on student learning if the position was changed to that of a literacy coach supporting teachers in their classrooms as they implement effective teaching and classroom management strategies (IRA, 2004, 2006). After reading literature and research on literacy coaching the principal agreed that the reading specialist should work as a literacy coach. The
researcher and the principal worked together to develop a job description, a plan of action, and a literacy coaching program for the literacy coach position for their small, rural northern California middle school.

To prepare for the literacy coach position the researcher met with other reading specialists and literacy coaches in neighboring districts to discuss their job descriptions and responsibilities. The researcher also read many books and journal articles on coaching and developed a list of goals. This was good background knowledge, but a handbook with examples of coaching situations and research based best instructional practices to provide to middle grades teachers would have been very helpful.

The content of this handbook was created by a literature review of current research conducted by experts in the fields of literacy coaching, fundamentals of coaching, cognitive coaching, characteristics of young adolescents, effective teaching practices for literacy development of all students, including ELs, and best practices used by successful middle schools. The research has informed the development of the literacy coaching model implemented by the researcher as well as background knowledge for the literature review in this project. The researcher then used these practices while working with teachers, which provided the opportunity to field test the coaching practices before including them in the handbook. The goal was to create a handbook that middle grades literacy coaches and administrators can refer to as they develop a literacy coaching program of their own.
Surveys

To help inform this project and the researcher’s own literacy coaching work, the middle school staff completed a mid year and an end of the year ranking format survey to apprise the coach of the teachers’ needs for coaching support. The surveys also offered an opportunity to gather the teachers’ opinions and feedback on whether or not the literacy coaching position was useful to the teachers as they worked to impact student learning. Copies of the actual surveys can be found in Appendix B of this project.

On the surveys, the teachers were asked to rank a series of services provided by the literacy coach. Teachers were asked to rank the benefit of each service to them by assigning a number, one through five; one being least beneficial and five being most beneficial. The same questions were asked on both the mid year and the end of year surveys because the researcher wanted to know if any services became more helpful to the teachers over the course of the school year. Of the eleven teachers on staff, ten responded to the first survey (one teacher was out on maternity leave) and eleven responded to the second survey.

Following are the services that were ranked on the surveys:

1. Planning lessons together
2. As a resource for information, materials, lesson ideas, etc.
3. Modeling lessons in your classroom
4. Release time to observe colleagues teaching
5. Providing feedback on your instruction
6. Other: Is there another service provided by the literacy coach that you would like to rate?
Teachers were also asked to indicate their preference for method of observations:

- Prefer drop in observations
- Prefer scheduled observations
- Prefer either drop in or scheduled observations

Table 1 shows a summary of the results of both the mid year and end of year surveys. The first column lists the services provided to the staff by the literacy coach. The next five columns display the number of teachers who ranked the service with numbers one through five, one being least beneficial to the teacher and five being most beneficial. For ease of comparison, the first number in each column is the score from the mid year survey and second number is the score from the end of the year survey.

Analysis of the Survey Results

1. **Planning lessons together.** Forty percent of the responses on the mid year survey and 60% of the responses on end of year survey were above a four ranking. This service received the lowest ranking in benefit to the teachers. This service was also the least used by teachers during the first year of the literacy program. The potential for impacting student growth with collaborative lesson planning is great and the literacy coach began using this service with more teachers during the coaching cycle. This service will be included on future surveys regarding the literacy coaching program.

2. **Resource for information, materials, lesson ideas, etc.** One hundred percent of the responses on the mid year survey and 90% of the responses on the end of year survey were ranked four and above. It was not surprising that teachers would rank this
Table 1

Staff Survey Regarding Literacy Coaching: Comparing Mid Year Survey Results and End of Year Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services provided by Literacy Coach</th>
<th>Number of teacher responses to ranking of service 1 (least) to 5 (most beneficial)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning lessons together</td>
<td>mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a resource for information, materials, lesson ideas, etc.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling lessons in your classroom</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release time to observe colleagues teaching</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing feedback on your instruction</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: any other service provided and not included on survey</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation preference</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drop in observations</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled observations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both types of observation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

service as beneficial because this service requires the least change in thinking or teaching on the teacher’s part. As the coaching program progressed, this service became less
available due to time constraints on the coach’s part as modeling lessons, observations and pre/post modeling and observation meetings increased.

3. **Modeling lessons in your classroom.** Seventy percent of the respondents for mid year and 60% of respondents for end of year gave this service a ranking of four or greater. This service had the lowest overall ranking for mid year, which could be due to the fact that modeled lessons weren’t widely offered until later in the year after the literacy coach had time to practice teaching the lessons. The researcher will include this service on future surveys because modeling was used more by teachers and the service appeared to be of more benefit in the second year of the coaching program.

4. **Release time to observe colleagues teaching.** On the mid year survey, 70% of the respondents ranked this service a four or better. On the end of the year survey 90% ranked it a four or better. This service gained in popularity as teachers used the service and realized its potential benefits on their teaching. When teachers observe each other teach meaningful lessons, curriculum based conversations increase among the staff and the feeling of isolation begins to ease.

5. **Providing feedback on your instruction.** Eighty percent of the respondents gave this service a minimum ranking of 4 on the mid year survey and 100% gave it a minimum ranking of four on the end of the year survey. This service was ranked as the most beneficial service at the end of the year. This data was surprising feedback; the coach had assumed that this service would be ranked as lowest benefit to teachers because it was the most uncomfortable aspect of the coaching cycle for the teachers. The literacy coach’s interpretation of this data was that, while the teachers appeared to struggle with the observation and feedback cycle, they appreciated the information and
used it to inform their instruction. This data provided the greatest support for the literacy coaching program.

6. **Other: any other service provided and not included on survey.** There were no responses on either mid or end of year surveys. On future surveys, the researcher will change this to ask “are there any services that the literacy coach does not provide that you would like provided?” This would give the teachers an opportunity to have input into the services provided by the literacy coach.

**Observation Preference.** On the mid year survey, 50% of respondents preferred scheduled observations and 50% preferred either drop in or scheduled observations. On the end of the year survey, 10% of the respondents preferred drop-in, 40% preferred scheduled and 50% preferred either type of observation. This data showed that 50% of the staff was not comfortable with drop in observations. The fact that 50% of the staff was comfortable with drop in observations was encouraging to the literacy coach because before the survey, her assumption was that all teachers disliked drop in observations. On future surveys, the literacy coach will not include this question because walk-through type, drop in observations are part of the literacy coaching program and not an option.

Evidence of the impact of the survey on this project can be seen in the coaching section of the handbook. Teachers that the researcher worked with as literacy coach were apprehensive with the coaching program because they were uncomfortable with the observation/reflection cycle. Knowing the teachers were uncomfortable made the literacy coach apprehensive in her work. The teachers’ discomfort was taken personally by the coach; she thought that the teachers did not like the program, and worse, that they did not like her. In reflection, the coach’s interpretation of the teacher’s
discomfort with the program as a reflection on her personally was the coach’s own issue, not the teachers.’ The coaching relationship must be seen as a professional relationship. The coach realized that she must rise above peer relationships and become objective about the coaching program because the survey results show that the teachers considered the observation feedback to be quite beneficial to their teaching. The researcher advised in the handbook that it is difficult to develop trust and collaboration for the observation/reflection cycle to be effective, but it can be done and it is one of the most important aspects of coaching. The results of this survey gave the researcher the confidence to research, write and to field test the handbook in her work as a literacy coach.

The researcher’s evidence suggested that literacy coaching did have a positive impact on literacy development of middle grades students at a small, rural middle school in Northern California. The research conducted on effective coaching, understanding adult learning styles, and the characteristics of and effective teaching strategies for young adolescent learners not only informed the literature review and handbook in this project, the research also informed the author’s work with teachers of young adolescents. Interviews with the researcher’s principal and other literacy coaches gave necessary support and background information which also informed the researcher’s work as literacy coach and as researcher for this project.

Results of the ranking survey conducted by the researcher indicated that the teachers included in the field testing of the literacy coaching handbook found the services offered by the literacy coach beneficial to them as they worked to positively impact student learning. According to the survey, the least beneficial service offered by the
literacy coach was planning lessons together and the most beneficial service was providing feedback on their instruction. This survey was the most informative of the methods used by the researcher because the feedback from the teachers indicated that the coaching program was beneficial to staff and students. Although the survey feedback for the coaching program was positive, negative feedback would also have informed the program.

A final method used by the author is the inclusion of brief vignettes describing coaching situations. These brief illustrations offer an opportunity for active participation and discussion to teachers, coaches and administrators.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This project developed a handbook for literacy coaches to use with middle grades teachers while working to positively impact young adolescents’ literacy skills. Middle grades teachers often do not see literacy development as one of their responsibilities. Research shows, however, that at least half of the middle grades students in the United States cannot read well enough to comprehend grade level texts (Taylor & Collins, 2003; Vacca, 2002). Learning to read does not end in the primary grades; reading becomes more complex as students move into the middle grades and teachers need to help students understand difficult text (Tovani, 2004). Students in the middle grades need opportunities and support to read widely to gain experience and develop fluency.

The implications of this project for middle school literacy development are significant because the handbook illustrates the possible effectiveness of developing a literacy coaching program to support teachers working with middle grades students. When the teachers in the field study for this handbook participated in the literacy coaching program, their students’ literacy skills improved as evidenced in the students’ test scores on the California Standards Test and the California English Language
Development Test. With the support, encouragement and feedback from the literacy coach, the teachers became more confident, collaborative and less isolated in their teaching. With the teachers’ new confidence, the students’ confidence grew as well. Through literacy coaching, the teachers at a small, rural middle school in northern California, where this project was field tested, became more knowledgeable about the choices they made about the curriculum they taught and the strategies they used to teach it.

The handbook in this project includes a section with recommended requirements for literacy coaches, which will inform prospective literacy coaches and administrators as to the training and qualifications needed in a literacy coach. The next section of the handbook discusses the characteristics of middle grades students so that literacy coaches can help teachers understand what motivates the students they work with. Coaching strategies and the concept of working with adult learners are explored in the third section of the handbook. The final section offers research based best practices for teaching young adolescents. Literacy coaches can model these teaching strategies while working with middle grades teachers. Also included are short vignettes of actual coaching sessions or coaching issues and, at the end of the handbook, a list of recommended reading resources.

Overall, this project offers the potential to positively impact young adolescents’ learning through the use of literacy coaching to support the teachers and by using the plan/observe/reflect coaching model.
Conclusions

Through conducting research, field testing *Coaching in the Middle Grades: A Literacy Coaching Handbook* with actual middle grades teachers and reviewing the results of a survey about the effectiveness of the coaching services offered to these same teachers, the researcher has come to three conclusions. First, literacy coaching can be effective if the recommendations in the handbook are followed. After field testing the teaching and coaching strategies offered in the handbook, collaboration among the teachers increased, teacher and student confidence improved and test scores went up on the California Standards Test and the California English Language Development Test.

Next, it is necessary to understand the stages of adult development and adult learning in order to be successful at coaching. Through the research conducted to inform this project, the researcher learned that before a teacher can learn new ways of working with students, the teacher must understand their own belief system and personality type. The coach should also understand the teachers’ belief systems and personality types, which will enable the coaching process to have a profound effect on the teacher.

Finally, survey data indicates that the coaching program field tested for this project was more beneficial to the teachers than the researcher realized. Providing feedback on teacher instruction was ranked the most beneficial by the teachers. The researcher had been under the impression that the teachers did not like the observation/feedback cycle because the teachers were resistant to the process. The survey data revealed that the five services included on the survey that were offered by the literacy coach were all ranked as beneficial by the teachers. This led the researcher to
conclude that the literacy coaching program was beneficial and had positively impacted student learning.

Recommendations

Research, field testing the research, and the personal experiences and perspectives of the researcher have lead to the development of a handbook for literacy coaches, administrators and anyone wishing to develop a literacy coaching program. The following recommendations are offered to those who wish to use the handbook in this project.

First, although the handbook was field tested in a small, rural middle school in northern California, it is based on national standards and can be implemented in any school dealing with young adolescents.

Second, while the research for this project was extensive, there is a great deal more research available with more current information, depending upon when this handbook is being read. The researcher’s recommendation is to review current research on literacy coaching, teaching strategies and characteristics of young adolescents as well as reading the handbook in this project.

Third, a section on technology and literacy development would be of great benefit in a literacy coach’s handbook. Technology can be an effective teaching and coaching tool and there is a wide variety of technology based literacy development programs available. Technology offers creative ways to engage students in literacy development. An alternative to face-to-face conferencing with teachers before and after an observation would be to communicate through the computer using Skype, a video,
audio and instant message program. This conferencing method would help to save time for both the teacher and the coach, especially if the coach is servicing more than one school. Further research will be needed to explore the impact of video taping lessons for the coach to observe and provide feedback to the teacher over Skype.

Further research might also include replicating this project or designing a similar handbook for primary grades, high school and alternative schools. Ultimately, a scope and sequence guide could be created to insure proper articulation of literacy coaching needs at each educational level.


APPENDIX A
Coaching in the Middle Grades:  
A Literacy Coaching Handbook  
By Denise Conrado

Table of Contents

Introduction

How to Use the Handbook

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    Examples of Roles and Associated Responsibilities

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    Building Trust
    A Common Framework
    Coaching
    Coaching Strategies
      Trust and collaboration
      Demonstration lessons and modeling
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Section Three – Middle Grades Students
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    Effective Teaching Strategies

Resources for Further Reading

References
Introduction

A literacy coach provides deliberate and purposeful literacy leadership to teachers and administrators. The goal of literacy leadership is maximizing students’ literacy achievement by helping teachers work with students to become better readers, writers, listeners, speakers and thinkers (Taylor & Collins, 2003). In the past decade there has been concern about and heavy focus on reading achievement at federal, state, and local levels. In response to the concern about reading achievement and the achievement gap in the United States, there has been a rapid proliferation of reading coaches (IRA, 2004). The International Reading Association (2004) is encouraged by the increase of literacy coaches available to students and to teachers at the school site level, but warns that teachers designated as literacy coaches must be well prepared and have the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective in their roles (IRA, 2004). Teachers assigned the literacy coach position have a difficult time gaining the respect and cooperation they need to be successful without appropriate educational background, training and support.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide prospective or current middle school literacy coaches, or administrators considering hiring a literacy coach for young adolescents, with information that is based on current research that can be used in developing the literacy coach’s job description. The information in this handbook is also intended to help in strategically developing a plan of action to positively impact the literacy achievement of young adolescents. This handbook was field tested in a specific small, rural northern California middle school serving 10 to 14 year old fourth through eighth grade students. However, the handbook was developed based on national expectations for literacy coaching (IRA, 2004; 2006) and can be used by literacy coaches working with teachers of
young adolescents in any school setting in any state. The teaching strategies in the handbook are effective with all learners: English only, English learners and resource students.

**How to Use This Handbook**

The handbook has been organized in three specific sections designed so that the reader can begin reading the section that meets their greatest need or interest:

- **Section One – Needs and Basics** outlines the recommended basic qualifications of a literacy coach as well as the multiple roles and responsibilities that are often associated with the literacy coach’s position (IRA, 2006). Each qualification, role and responsibility is followed by an explanation and an example of what each looks like in the position of a literacy coach at a small, rural middle school in Northern California.

- **Section Two – Coaching:** discusses the fundamentals of literacy coaching which includes building trust, developing a common framework for discussing and dealing with literacy issues within the school, issues with and examples of coaching a staff, and coaching strategies to use when working with teachers.

- **Section Three – Students:** describes the unique qualities and characteristics of middle grades students, their literacy development needs and research based effective teaching strategies to use with middle grades students. This section is intended to be used by the literacy coach to help the teachers of young adolescents understand what motivates the students they are working with.
Section One – Needs and Basics

The literacy coach position is complex and challenging. Whether the middle school is rural or urban, struggling or flourishing, the literacy coach’s role is the same; to effectively communicate with, collaborate with and support the teaching staff as they work to positively impact teaching practices and student learning. It is helpful if the literacy coach has specific qualifications in order to accomplish the necessary goals of school improvement. This section will help a new literacy coach or an administrator looking for a literacy coach to define the coach’s job description.

Below is a list of prescribed qualifications, roles and responsibilities of a literacy coach developed by the International Reading Association (2006). The author has included examples and explanations for each of these qualifications, roles and responsibilities from her experiences as a literacy coach at a small, rural Northern California middle school, but the handbook is based on national standards and can be applied at any school for young adolescence. Vignettes of actual coaching situations have been provided to illustrate coaching techniques and to provide active engagement for teachers, coaches and principals. In these vignettes, the author has used pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the teachers and the literacy coach.

Qualifications of a Literacy Coach

Each qualification is in bold typeface and is followed by an explanation and example from the author’s experience to illustrate the necessity of each qualification.

Possess a broad knowledge of literacy development which includes literacy instruction and assessment, literacy acquisition processes and problems in literacy development (IRA, 2006).
Credibility for the literacy coach from the teachers is as important as the literacy coach’s knowledge and experience. If the teachers do not believe the literacy coach is qualified for the job, the teachers will be hesitant to participate fully in the coaching process.

In addition to a Professional Clear Multiple subjects Credential and English Supplementary Credential, the literacy coach in these examples possesses a Reading Certificate earned by 12 semester units of specialized study in the topics of the reading process, literacy skills development and deficiencies, literacy assessment, and intervention strategies. This area of study along with six years of experience working as a reading specialist with students in kindergarten through the eighth grade have provided the coach with a strong foundation in literacy. However, having experience and specialized courses does not mean that the literacy coach has an answer to every question or a solution to every problem. Experience and training do, however, give the coach credibility with the staff and administration as well as knowledge of resources that the staff and the coach can use to find answers.

**Possess strong leadership skills.**

The following are examples of tasks in which literacy coaches will be expected to be leaders:

- heading committees
- facilitating grade level, language level and staff meetings
- conducting staff development sessions focused on literacy development, English language development and assessment data evaluation
- coordinating site testing for state and local tests
• observing teachers and conducting pre and post observation conferences
• modeling lessons in classrooms and
• training instructional assistants and coordinating their duties.

Each of these tasks requires leadership skills such as group facilitation, decision making and mediating problems as well as diplomacy and professionalism. It is crucial, however, to distinguish between the role of the literacy coach and the role of the principal. The literacy coach is a facilitator and an academic leader who acts as a liaison between staff and the principal. The literacy coach is not an administrator (IRA, 2004; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). The coach evaluates individual teachers’ skills and then encourages, models, guides and makes suggestions to that teacher privately. The literacy coach does not evaluate the teacher’s skills for job performance evaluations; that is the principal’s responsibility.

The literacy coach also helps teachers to develop their own leadership skills so that they can support the work of their colleagues.

**Experience working with adult learners.**

The changes in teaching strategies that a literacy coach attempts to implement with the staff require the teachers to learn new ways of thinking about teaching. Adult learning differs from children’s learning and there is a great deal of research available for literacy coaches to use to become familiar with the stages of adult learning. One resource is *SuperVision and Instructional Leadership: A Developmental Approach* by Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2007). This book has an excellent chapter on adult and teacher development within the context of the school. Understanding the different stages of adult
and teacher development will help the literacy coach to understand and deal with resistance on the part of the teachers to learning new teaching strategies and methods.

**Familiarity with fostering an atmosphere of inquiry among teachers.**

Offering book studies, discussion groups, and modeled lessons are a few ways to foster an atmosphere of inquiry among teachers (Walpole & McKenna 2004). The author started a language arts committee and opened it up to any teacher interested in discussing classroom issues related to their language arts program or to literacy in general. Teachers from fourth through eighth grades volunteered to meet twice a month outside of their school day because they wanted to have curriculum based discussions. At the time there were very few opportunities for the staff to meet across grade levels to ask questions and discuss strategies. The language arts committee was a dynamic, professional committee that drew teachers together in a shared atmosphere of inquiry and growth.

**Examples of Literacy Coaching Roles and Associated Responsibilities**

**Model instruction in teachers’ classrooms.**

Effective literacy coaching supports teachers as they implement new teaching strategies into their classroom instruction. One way to offer this support is by modeling lessons in the teacher’s classroom giving the teacher an opportunity to observe the new teaching strategy in action.

The rural middle school where this handbook was field tested adopted new methods to directly and explicitly teach English language and grammar, particularly to their English learners (ELs). The staff received extensive training on how to use the new methods. The literacy coach supported the teachers as they implemented the new methods into their instruction by helping them plan how they would teach the new
methods, then observed them teaching and gave them feedback on their instruction. Some teachers felt unprepared to use a new method, so the coach modeled teaching the method to the teacher’s students. This modeling gave the teachers an opportunity to ask questions while watching the method being taught in their classroom. As a follow up, the teacher and the coach taught a similar lesson together which gave the teacher an opportunity to practice with the coach’s support when needed during the lesson. The coaching support for the teacher continued with observations and feedback until the teacher felt confident with the new method and there was proof that the students were learning.

Mr. Moreno, an experienced sixth grade teacher, was not pleased about the new English language development program that his middle school had adopted and trained teachers with strategies to use in their daily teaching. Mrs. Wordsmith, the literacy coach, observed teachers regularly to monitor how they were doing with the new strategies, and each time she observed Mr. Moreno, he had one reason or another why he was not teaching the strategies. Finally, Mrs. Wordsmith met with the reluctant teacher and asked him how he felt about the new program. Mr. Moreno said that he was not happy because he had been teaching ELs for years and his own methods worked fine. When Mrs. Wordsmith reminded the experienced teacher of the low CELDT scores from the past few years, which had necessitated the new ELD program, Mr. Moreno reluctantly admitted that he was uncomfortable with the new program because he felt awkward teaching the strategies; he felt like he didn’t know what he was doing. Once Mrs. Wordsmith understood the problem, she and Mr. Moreno developed a plan of action. Together they created a lesson plan to use direct, explicit instruction to teach a verb tense study using the new strategies. Mrs. Wordsmith taught the complete lesson to Mr. Moreno’s class, while he watched, modeling how to require students to answer in complete sentences, partner talk, active participation, and checking for understanding while teaching the students how to construct a sentence using the past progressive verb tense. Coach and teacher met after the lesson and Mr. Moreno was so excited about watching his students’ reactions during the lesson that he was ready to try some of the strategies the next day. The students had actively participated in the lesson, were speaking in complete sentences and engaged in the entire lesson because of the new strategies that Mrs. Wordsmith had modeled for Mr. Moreno. Again, coach and teacher planned a lesson but this time Mr. Moreno and Mrs. Wordsmith taught the lesson together. By teaching together, Mrs. Wordsmith could teach a strategy in part of the lesson and then Mr. Moreno could practice the same strategy in
the next part of the lesson. When they met after the shared lesson, Mr. Moreno was very excited to try a lesson on his own.

Observe teachers and provide suggestions and feedback in one-on-one pre and post observation meetings.

Classroom observations by the coach provide the most potential for impacting teacher and student growth. The isolation of the individual classroom is broken down through coaching because professional development through coaching can happen during school hours in the classroom (Speck & Knipe, 2005). The coaching cycle includes a pre-observation meeting to discuss the lesson to be observed, the observation, then a post-observation meeting to help the teacher reflect on their teaching during the lesson. In all cases, the coaching must be supportive rather than evaluative in order to produce desirable changes in practice.

Classroom teachers are aware that new learning must be supported by modeling, coaching, and problem-solving components for the new learning to be practiced, reflected on, and integrated into regular use by the learner (Speck & Knipe, 2005). Teachers need the same type of support to learn new teaching strategies and methods. The focus of the middle school used to field test this handbook is English language development. The school has an agreed upon set of methods which the teachers have been trained to use to improve their students’ knowledge of the English language with the goal of improving their scores on state testing. When the school first began implementing these methods, the coach observed each method being taught by every teacher. Some teachers were more successful with the methods and required fewer observations and opportunities for reflection. Other teachers benefited from observing the coach modeling lessons in their classrooms with follow up
meetings to reflect upon aspects of the modeled lesson that the teachers would then include in their own lesson. Next, the coach would either teach the lesson with the teacher or observe the teacher teaching, each followed up with a meeting to give the teacher an opportunity to reflect upon their teaching.

During the post observation meeting the coach helps the teacher reflect on their teaching by asking questions such as,

- How do you feel the lesson went?
- Why do you think it was successful / unsuccessful?
- What were you thinking when you did/asked…?
- If you do (...) what do you think will happen?
- How do you think you will change the lesson the next time you teach it?
- How do you know the students learned the objective of the lesson?

The greatest benefit of the coaching cycle is the opportunity it gives teachers to work new practices into their everyday instruction and to observe and reflect on the impact the new practices have on student learning.

More detailed information about coaching is included in this handbook in the section titled Fundamentals of Literacy Coaching.

Mr. Moreno was feeling less reluctant about teaching the new ELD strategies his school had adopted because he was getting support from Mrs. Wordsmith, the literacy coach. Mrs. Wordsmith had modeled teaching the strategies to his class while Mr. Moreno observed, and then teacher and coach taught another lesson together. Following each lesson, Mr. Moreno and Mrs. Wordsmith met to discuss the instruction. Mrs. Wordsmith asked Mr. Moreno what he noticed in her instruction that engaged his students and got them participating in the lessons; could he see himself incorporating those strategies into his teaching? Finally, Mrs. Wordsmith observed Mr. Moreno teach a lesson and then asked him questions that helped him reflect on, or think about, his teaching. The first question she asked was, “how do you
Mr. Moreno mentioned things he thought he did wrong, like forgetting to require a complete sentence in student answers or not encouraging enough partner talk so students could practice language production. Mrs. Wordsmith was able to help Mr. Moreno think through his problems by asking him what he could do in his next lesson to increase language production. Mrs. Wordsmith only offered advice when Mr. Moreno felt stuck because his understanding of why the strategies are important and how to incorporate them into his teaching will be deeper if Mr. Moreno solves problems and makes conclusions on his own. When Mrs. Wordsmith asked Mr. Moreno how he knew the students had learned the objective of the lesson, he showed her student work that demonstrated their correct use of the grammar skill he had taught in the lesson. Mr. Moreno also showed Mrs. Wordsmith evidence that the new strategies were more effective than his old strategies in the sentences that the students wrote as a brief assessment at the end of the lesson. Mrs. Wordsmith and Mr. Moreno worked together for several weeks until Mr. Moreno was comfortable teaching all of the new ELD strategies on his own. Mr. Moreno became so adept at teaching the new ELD program that Mrs. Wordsmith would take other teachers to observe his techniques for teaching ELD.

Lead teacher inquiry groups around literacy issues.

The opportunities for literacy based inquiry groups include book discussion groups, literacy committee, language arts committee, grade level meetings, language level meetings and staff meetings as well as meetings with individual teachers.

The literacy coach at the small, rural middle school referred to in this handbook, has had success with a language arts committee dedicated solely to discussing teacher issues related to literacy in the classroom. This was an informal and voluntary committee that gave teachers the rare opportunity, at their site, to discuss issues and share concerns, ideas and strategies within and across grade levels.

Disseminate current literacy research findings.

As the literacy leader, the literacy coach is responsible for working with the staff at their site on current research of the most promising practices related to teaching adolescents reading, writing and content area skills. The literacy coach keeps up with current research
findings on literacy by reading journal articles and books. The coach shares information with the principal and teachers when the coach comes across research that the coach feels would be of interest or of benefit to them based on conversations or inquiries they’ve made. The principal and staff are very busy and have limited time to dedicate to reading research. Coaches often use what they learn about research findings during discussions at staff meetings and during pre and post observation meetings with teachers to help determine qualities of excellent literacy instruction.

**Problem-solve classroom literacy struggles and dilemmas.**

Successful coaching requires the breaking down of teachers’ isolation, which is difficult because many schools are organized in ways that isolate teachers. Teachers work within their classrooms with students and do not have a lot of extra time to interact with other teachers. Isolation provides teachers a territory that they can call their own and protects them from unwanted scrutiny, so teachers tend to guard their solitude. Teaching is intellectually challenging, complex and much too important to do in isolation, especially considering the increased academic performance currently demanded of students. With coaching, the isolation of the individual classroom is broken down because professional development happens in the classroom and during school hours (Speck & Knipe, 2005) and focuses on problem solving with the classroom teacher any literacy issues and dilemmas.

The observation cycle provides an opportunity for the teacher to discover, discuss and attempt to solve struggles and dilemmas that the teacher and the students have with classroom literacy instruction. When observing a teacher, the coach objectively notes exactly what the teacher says and does and the students’ reactions to the teacher. The coach is acting as a mirror that enables the teacher to ‘see’ or to reflect upon their own teaching.
Through the observation/reflection cycle, and with the coach’s help, the teacher often comes to realize the solution to a particular struggle or dilemma.

Besides observations and reflective conversations, a coach can help to problem solve classroom struggles and dilemmas with teachers by reviewing problem materials with the teacher and suggesting and or providing new or additional materials. Another effective coaching strategy is peer observations in which the teacher with a particular struggle and the coach observe a teacher who is successful at teaching that particular literacy skill followed by a reflective conversation. Teachers often appreciate the opportunity to watch each other teach and to learn from each other.

Mrs. Eyore, an experienced teacher new to sixth grade, struggled with an ELD method called syntax surgery in which students cut apart sentences and rearrange the words to create a new sentence that still carries meaning. She avoided using this method even though other teachers were getting good results using syntax surgery with their students. Mrs. Wordsmith, the literacy coach, had observed Mrs. Eyore struggle through a syntax surgery lesson and, in the post observation meeting, asked the teacher how she felt the lesson went. Mrs. Eyore was embarrassed because she knew the lesson went badly, but she didn’t feel like sixth graders needed the lesson, that it was too juvenile for them. Mrs. Wordsmith reminded Mrs. Eyore that syntax surgery was a method that the staff is required to teach and mentioned that another sixth grade teacher was having great success using it. Mrs. Wordsmith offered two choices to Mrs. Eyore: would she like to watch the literacy coach model teaching the syntax surgery to her students, or would she like to watch another sixth grade teacher, Mr. Moreno, while he taught the lesson to his class. Mrs. Eyore chose to watch Mr. Moreno because she wanted to see if his students were more enthusiastic about the lesson than her students had been. The principal covered Mrs. Eyore’s class while the teacher and Mrs. Wordsmith observed Mr. Moreno’s syntax surgery lesson together. At the post observation meeting, Mrs. Eyore admitted that she saw several teaching strategies used by Mr. Moreno that she had not thought about using with her sixth graders. Mrs. Eyore was also amazed at the level of engagement that Mr. Moreno got from his students during the lesson. Mrs. Eyore named 2 specific strategies that she would incorporate into her next syntax surgery lesson, which Mrs. Wordsmith observed and could see that Mrs. Eyore was quite pleased with her own progress. Mrs. Eyore excitedly shared her success.
with Mr. Moreno, which started a collegial collaboration that was mutually beneficial.

**Mediate among administrative goals, teachers’ goals, and students’ needs.**

Mediation requires a great deal of diplomacy and professionalism on the part of the literacy coach. The coach must help to implement administrative goals that can be unpopular with the teachers. It is possible to have situations where staff members are almost hostile to the coach because the staff doesn’t understand why they need to change their teaching. The administrator’s goal is to improve student learning in order to improve scores on the state standards and language tests. Busy teachers are often hesitant to implement additional changes in their instruction simply because it has been mandated. The literacy coach must be supportive of both the administrator and the teachers while carrying out mandated instructional and/or curriculum changes.

A coach’s focus is mainly on teacher growth as it relates to student learning. Mediation between teacher goals and student needs would need to happen if, for instance, a teacher is unwilling or unable to differentiate instruction in order to best meet the literacy needs of all students in a classroom. A need for mediation would also arise if a teacher is unwilling or unable to acknowledge and investigate why their class has consistently low reading scores. If the observation/reflection cycle does not result in teacher improvement, the coach must use a more direct approach and level with the teacher about the problem and work with the teacher on a solution. Only in a worst case scenario does the coach inform the principal about an uncooperative teacher. Often the principal will be aware of an issue that has been difficult for the literacy coach to mediate between a teacher’s goals and their students’ needs through the principal’s own observations of the teacher.
Review local assessment data.

Local assessment for literacy skills at the rural middle school used for this study includes the Scholastic Reading Inventory to measure comprehension, Curriculum Based Measure for reading rate, theme tests from the reading series and A Developmental English Proficiency Test (ADEPT) used to measure growth in English Language Development.

The literacy coach gathers the results from these assessments and compiles the data onto a spreadsheet each trimester. The data is shared with the teachers, and along with the principal, the staff determines which students need extra support with literacy skills. The school’s literacy action plan is developed and modified from the analysis of this assessment data.

Help create literacy plans for schools and individual teachers.

Once the assessment data has been analyzed, teacher input on student performance in the classroom is considered and a literacy action plan is developed based on student needs. The plan includes which students must be pulled from classrooms for strategic interventions and which teachers need support from the literacy coach to differentiate instruction with the goal of impacting student learning and moving students up to the next subgroup on the state standard’s testing.

Be familiar with a variety of formal and informal assessments.

It is important to have multiple measures of literacy development in an effort to get a clear picture of students’ growth and students’ needs. However, there is a wide variety of both formal and informal assessments available from which schools and districts may choose. If the literacy coach is working with more than one school, it will be necessary to
become familiar with how to administer and read the results of the assessment tools used at each site in order to disseminate assessment data with teachers.

Formal assessments include comprehension tests at the end of stories or themes, benchmark tests and reading fluency tests. Computerized reading programs such as Accelerated Reader and Scholastic Reading Inventory provide formal assessment in the form of a reading inventory test. Informal assessments include observing students as they work and writing anecdotal notes, collecting student work in portfolios to show growth over time and student interviews. Students holding up white boards with their answers or showing thumbs up or down to check for understanding during a lesson are also examples of informal assessments.

State standards tests are formal assessments that all districts must give. A working knowledge of the standards test and the release questions that precede the test can of great benefit when coaching teachers. The state standards must be at the core of the school literacy plan, which exemplifies the importance of having knowledge of the standards and the test.

Miss Brighteyes was a novice fourth grade teacher with great enthusiasm for her new profession and the students that she taught. She put a lot of energy and thought into her teaching and wanted her students to be as successful as possible. But, as spring approached, she became nervous and doubtful of her abilities as a teacher because she feared that her students would do poorly on the upcoming, difficult standards test. Also, she knew that her job performance would be judged heavily by her students’ scores. Miss Brighteyes had been working with Mrs. Wordsmith, the literacy coach, and finally confided in the coach about her big fear. Mrs. Wordsmith, who had observed Miss Brighteyes teaching and worked with her through their school’s coaching program, knew what a capable teacher she was and calmed the young novice by reviewing the fourth grade standards test release questions with her. Teacher and coach discussed test taking strategies that Miss Brighteyes could teach her students using the release questions such as reading all answer choices and eliminated the least likely answer before
making a final decision and rereading problems or text to find an answer. Mrs. Wordsmith asked Miss Brighteyes what other kinds of test taking strategies she used when she took tests while preparing to become a teacher and then encouraged her to teach her students similar strategies. Through this collaboration of teacher and coach, Miss Brighteyes gained confidence in her ability to prepare her students to do well on the standards test.

Following is a list of literacy assessments used at the rural middle school used to field test this handbook.

- California Standards Test (CST)
- California English Language Development Test (CELDT)
- A Developmental English Proficiency Test (ADEPT)
- Curriculum Based Measure (CBM)
- Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)
- Reading series assessment
- Student writing
- Observing students

Prepare feedback documenting changes in students’ literacy achievement for administrators, teachers, and perhaps students.

Data help to identify goals and to measure progress with the objective of data driven instruction. Data will not determine how effective a particular teacher is, but data does provide an opportunity to begin discussions that are based on fact, not on opinion or observation (Gabriel, 2005). Determining students’ strengths and needs is not a one-time event, ongoing assessment data are used to determine whether or not students are successful or struggling throughout the school year. The results of assessments are used to inform teaching practice. Teachers are busy and often have difficulty finding the time to
analyze data. Collecting, organizing and sharing assessment data at staff meetings is important support provided by the literacy coach because this helps the teachers focus on students’ successes and needs.

In the beginning of the school year at the rural middle school in this study, the author developed a spreadsheet with students’ scores from the most recent CST score, CELDT score, and their beginning of the year SRI and CBM scores. This information was sorted to show which students had the greatest literacy needs. SRI and CBM scores were added each trimester to compare scores to indicate literacy skills growth throughout the school year.

Table A-1 is an example of a spreadsheet developed to store data from school wide reading assessments for a fifth grade classroom at the middle school used in this study. The data had been sorted by student name, but students and teacher names have been deleted for privacy. The spreadsheet was used during a conference with the teacher to determine how her students were progressing and which students needed focused reading support.

Coach teachers in subjects other than literacy, i.e. English language development, math, science, and social studies.

Middle school literacy coaches must coach teachers in subjects other than their own expertise because literacy is necessary in all content areas. A literacy coach should have a strong background in language arts but must coach math, science, social studies and English language development teachers as well as language arts teachers. Students, in general, have less background knowledge of the vocabulary, concepts and subject matter in content classes and as a result, often find the reading work required in those classes
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particularly difficult. Therefore, a literacy coach must explicitly show teachers how to support literacy development in all of the content areas (Casey, 2006).

A literacy coach encourages content teachers to develop the same expectations for literacy development as reading, language arts and English teachers. These expectations include incorporating the processes for literacy – reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and thinking – into their classroom instruction. Literacy strategies include using graphic organizers, diagrams, pictures and vocabulary development to build background knowledge before reading the text. Abstract concepts in the core subjects’ textbooks can be made more concrete for deeper student understanding by using graphic organizers like sequence charts, cause and effect diagrams and concept maps after reading.

A literacy coach should be familiar with the state standards in any subject for which they are coaching.

Mr. Peabody had taught seventh and eighth grade math for five years before the literacy coaching program started at the middle school. When Mrs. Wordsmith contacted him to set a pre observation meeting, Mr. Peabody was rather short with her and wanted to know what a literacy coach could possibly do for him, after all, he taught math not reading. Mrs. Wordsmith politely explained that her job was to support all teachers in developing the literacy skills of their students and asked Mr. Peabody if any students struggled with reading word problems and directions. He reluctantly agreed to a pre observation conference. During the conference Mr. Peabody admitted that he was often frustrated because of what he considered laziness on the students’ part, “they just don’t read carefully enough to make sense of the problems!” he complained. Mrs. Wordsmith explained that during the observation she would observe him teaching the lesson and then observe the students doing the independent practice. She would watch for evidence of reading and how students managed the reading. During the observation, Mrs. Wordsmith noticed that Mr. Peabody read most of the word problems himself while he demonstrated the steps to solve the problems and did not explain or define vocabulary students might not be familiar with. During independent practice, several students struggled to understand the words in the word problems to the point that they became frustrated, disengaged and distracted other students with their behavior. Mr. Peabody also became frustrated with
the disruptive students and sent two of them to the office. At the post observation conference, Mrs. Wordsmith asked Mr. Peabody how he felt the lesson went. He responded that he was glad that another adult could see what a lazy, disruptive bunch of students he had. Other than the disruptive students, he thought that the lesson went well. Mrs. Wordsmith asked Mr. Peabody at what point in the unit had he introduced the new vocabulary that the students needed to know in order to understand the new formula and procedures. He replied that he didn’t need to teach the vocabulary because it wasn’t new, they should have learned the words the previous year. During this conversation, it became apparent that Mr. Peabody did not know how to introduce new vocabulary so that students would understand the words enough to know their meaning in word problems and directions. Once Mr. Peabody understood that his students would be more successful with math if they understood how to read the core vocabulary, he was open to designing a routine with Mrs. Wordsmith to explicitly teach math vocabulary to his students using research based strategies.

**Possess strong communication skills**

Good communication skills are the foundation of an effective working relationship between the coach and the teachers. When facilitating a study group, leading a staff development session, demonstrating a lesson, observing a teacher, or conferencing with a teacher or with the principal, effective communicate skills are crucial. Because situations for communication are endless in coaching and include writing emails, notes, observation feedback and letters, the literacy coach must use communication skills in writing as well as in person.

Useful communication skills in coaching are:

- careful listening for understanding and for misunderstanding
- developing and sustaining trust
- pausing and paraphrasing
- thoughtful questioning
- positive presumptions
• balancing advocacy and inquiry
• heightened awareness of what you and others are saying
• awareness of how your language affects others (Casey, 2006; Moran, 2007).

**Possess excellent presentation skills**

A literacy coach must present information in classroom demonstrations, staff development sessions, staff meetings, teacher conferences and parent meetings. Presentations can be stressful, especially when first starting out as a coach. Being organized, familiar with the materials and doing the background work necessary on the topic of the presentation will help the coach be more confident and comfortable presenting the information and, with experience the coach will begin to develop their own style.

**Possess excellent interpersonal skills**

Promoting productive relationships with and among teachers requires a literacy coach to become a student of people and to develop the interpersonal skills needed to move people to action (Shula & Blanchard, 1995). Interpersonal skills could be the most important skills to develop in order to get teachers to accept and to ‘buy into’ the coaching process. Sincerity, honesty and professionalism are important interpersonal skills to use in developing and maintaining a coaching program. Being nice just to get teachers to like the literacy coach can have a negative effect on coaching efforts. Literacy coaching is not a popularity contest; coaches need the respect and cooperation of the teachers more than their friendship. It is important for the coach to have a positive attitude when around the teachers they support. Suggested strategies for a literacy coach to build interpersonal skills to use with a staff are:
• address teachers by name and say ‘hello’ and ‘good morning’ with a smile
• have lunch in the staffroom and get to know the teachers
• ask about their family, their weekend, their hobbies, etc
• after observing a teacher teaching a particularly good lesson, the coach can ask permission to bring other teachers in to observe them teach a similar lesson
• admit when the coach is wrong or doesn’t know something
• acknowledge the teachers when they have taught the coach something
• respect the teachers’ time as much as possible.

Section Two - The Fundamentals of Coaching

Building Trust

In order to have an effective coaching relationship in which real growth can occur, there must be trust (Speck & Knipe, 2005). Building trust and open lines of communication with a staff takes time and careful planning. If the coach is hired from within a teaching staff to become the literacy coach, the coach must be prepared for the relationships with fellow teachers to change. If the coach is friends with teachers at their school, it will be necessary to establish some boundaries about what the coach and teachers might normally talk about. Confidentiality is key to building trust and the coach must keep what goes on in other peoples’ classrooms confidential (Gabriel, 2005). If the coach had been accustomed to criticizing the administration with teacher friends, it would be wise for the coach to cease that behavior because the coach will need to develop a positive working relationship with both the administration and the teachers. If the coach gossips with teachers about the principal, the teachers could wonder if the coach gossips with the principal about them,
which can compromise a trusting relationship. Coaches will often feel that they do not belong to any group and, in a way, the coach does not. Literacy coach is a unique position that has the feeling of a ‘no man’s land’ at times; the coach is not a teacher and not a principal but must work closely with both and put serious effort into earning and maintaining their trust.

Mrs. Wordsmith had joined the rural middle school’s staff as a reading specialist from another district and was considered an ‘outsider’ by the new staff. Staff members were apprehensive about and skeptical of the reading specialist position. The staff was comfortable with Mrs. Wordsmith taking a group of their most struggling readers to build the students’ literacy skills outside of the classroom, but the teachers did not see any need for support from the reading specialist to improve the literacy skills of the students in the classroom. Eventually Mrs. Wordsmith’s reading specialist responsibilities changed to that of literacy coach assigned the duty of supporting the same middle grades teachers to improve the literacy and English language skills of their students.

Whether hired from within or from outside of a staff, becoming a literacy coach can be difficult. Teachers questioned Mrs. Wordsmith’s use of time and resources, her qualifications and experience, and wondered who she was to think that she knew more than they did about teaching. Rather than tell the teachers the answers to these questions, Mrs. Wordsmith found it more effective to show them through her behavior. Mrs. Wordsmith had to build her credibility as literacy coach and prove that she was worthy of the teachers’ trust by:

- keeping confidences,
- maintaining a positive composure,
- letting them know that the coach was available to support them in their teaching practices, not to tell them what to do or how to do it
- being visible on campus, at assemblies, in meetings, in the staff room and in classrooms.

In order to be trusted, Mrs. Wordsmith understood that she must be trustworthy. It took over a year to build the literacy coaching program to the point that teachers sought Mrs. Wordsmith out to ask her questions and advice or for support in their classroom.
A Common Framework

Having a common framework and agreed upon goals also helps to build trust in the coaching process. Teachers at the rural middle school were accustomed to working in isolation. They would attend staff development meetings and then return to their classrooms to teach the way that they had always taught. The teachers had no idea what was happening in other classrooms. Observations were done by the principal for job evaluation once every other year. Then the school district adopted an English language development (ELD) framework with the goal of teaching explicit, direct English grammar and writing skills in order to move its large population of English learners (EL) to Re-designated fluent English proficient status. A framework was developed and all teachers received extensive training in teaching the ELD strategies. These strategies were foreign to the entire staff and were difficult for many to implement. Because the common framework had been developed, teachers began having conversations about common concerns. Through these conversations, the teachers learned that the problems they experienced in their own classrooms were similar to problems experienced by other teachers. The principal made it clear to the staff that the new teaching strategies the staff had learned would be taught in every classroom, and that the literacy coach would be observing and supporting the teachers as they used the strategies. The principal also informed the teachers that she would be observing them teach to see that the strategies were being taught. The teachers were apprehensive at first, but as the coach observed them, helped them problem solve and reflect on their practice, they began to trust the coach and eventually ask for the coach’s help and advice. The teachers have varying levels of comfort with being coached, but
having a common framework and goals helped to get the buy-in needed from the teachers in order for the coaching process to be successful.

Coaching

A literacy coach is an instructional leader. In order to be an effective leader, award winning football coach Don Shula advises that a coach must earn respect by not being concerned with popularity (1995). Coaches must push people to go beyond themselves and to push their limits. People must see that the coach is not motivated by their own ego but by their desire for the people they lead to be their best. Being a great coach means sacrificing popularity and being liked for doing the right thing so that the coach is respected (Shula & Blanchard, 1995).

Although literacy coaches work with teachers and not football players, literacy coaches would do well to follow Shula’s advice. It is the responsibility of the literacy coach to go into teacher’s classrooms and watch them teach, help them to reflect on their teaching practices and to inspire the teachers to do things better or differently than they would have done on their own. Being observed makes many teachers uncomfortable, especially if they have been working in isolation with little or no feedback from administrators or coaches on their teaching practices (Speck & Knipe, 2005). If the literacy coach is concerned with popularity and being liked by the teachers, they will be hesitant to push for cooperation from the teachers.

Like a football coach must have a game plan, a literacy coach must have a literacy plan or a common framework from which to work (Gabriel, 2005). With a clear plan for improvement, the staff shares an instructional vision for the school (Speck & Knipe, 2005). The ELD framework that the rural middle school in this project developed makes it clear
that the staff must teach specific, direct and explicit English grammar strategies, the staff has been trained in those strategies and the principal will be looking for those strategies while observing the teachers. This ELD framework provided an opportunity for the literacy coach to begin working with all teachers to support them as they practiced implementing the new strategies. The coach began by working with teachers who supported the coaching process. The coach observed these teachers, gave them feedback on their teaching and helped them to reflect on strategies that worked and strategies that they felt insecure about. The literacy coach would model lessons in the cooperating teachers’ classrooms so that the teachers could see the strategy in action. This modeling was helpful to the coach as well because the coach also needed practice to become comfortable teaching the strategies. Eventually the literacy coach began working with all teachers on staff.

The reluctant teachers were not happy about having the coaching process ‘forced’ upon them and that made the coach feel anxious. There were teachers who felt that they were doing a fine job and didn’t understand why they needed to change. Some teachers had more teaching experience than the coach, which made them wonder what the coach could possibly teach them. The literacy coach’s response was to remind the teachers that this is the new school plan to positively impact student learning. The coach also reminded the teachers that the data review that led to the literacy plan framework revealed that the ELs had chronically low CST and CELDT scores, even though the teachers had been working hard to teach the students. Furthermore, the plan was developed from research based best practices for ELD and the administration would be observing them to see that the teachers were following the new framework in the plan. The reluctant teachers still did not like it, but they realized that they had no choice but to cooperate. As coach and teachers worked
together to positively impact student learning, several of the teachers welcomed the coach into their classrooms and sought the coach out to get advice or to tell of successes in their classrooms because of a strategy they tried after a coaching session. The teachers began having more curriculum based conversations, the students became more confident and happy at school and the scores on the CELDT and the CST improved after the school began implantation of their new framework with literacy coaching to support the implementation.

**Coaching Strategies**

**Trust and collaboration.**

Trust and collaboration must be developed for the coaching process to be successful. These are not easy conditions to establish because teachers’ experiences and understanding of trust and collaboration vary. The following strategies are provided to help literacy coaches build the necessary trust from the teachers in the coach and in the coaching process to create the environment of sharing and collaboration needed for an effective literacy coaching program.

An important strategy the literacy coach can use for developing trust with a staff is to believe that all teachers can learn and grow and that many of the teachers’ current practices are effective. It would be wise for the literacy coach, in developing a professional support system, to combine teachers’ knowledge and skills with what research provides in terms of new theories, ideas, or methods (Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

Additional strategies for developing trust are:

- keep confidences – observations and conferences are confidential between coach and the participating teacher
• be honest and ethical – being honest and ethical will develop trust and respect for the literacy coach

• honor teachers’ limited time – being organized and completely prepared for any meetings with teachers will show that you honor their time

• be friendly and visible – be where teachers gather informally, such as the office, halls and staff room

• be accessible to teachers during recesses and before and after school – this is when teachers have time to ask questions, receive clarification and share classroom successes

• be vulnerable, own up to mistakes – this shows that the coach is human and approachable

• be fair – put aside personal prejudices for the good of the coaching program

• be empathetic and supportive – teachers will trust the coach’s recommendations if they feel that the coach understands what they are going through (Gabriel, 2005).

• be a role model – people are watching you!

**Demonstration lessons and modeling.**

Teachers tend to feel more confident about trying out a new practice after they have observed someone else putting the new practice in action (Moran, 2007). Demonstration lessons, or modeling, by the literacy coach offers teachers the opportunity to see a literacy coach deliver a lesson, then to reflect on how the teachers might apply what they see in the lesson to their own practice.
There are three main purposes for the literacy coach to demonstrate lessons in a teacher’s classroom:

- to demonstrate a particular teaching method, strategy or content to teachers who are less familiar or less confident with the method, strategy or content
- to provide a common experience of teaching that can be the basis for discussion and developing practice
- to encourage teachers’ self-reflection and creative problem solving (Moran, 2007).

Showing teachers what instruction looks like and sounds like is vital to building trust and successful coaching because teaching with other teachers watching gives the coach credibility as an educator. In order for teachers to believe in the literacy coach, they need to see the coach as a capable teacher willing to take risks and to grow as a professional. The literacy coach brings pedagogical strategies to life for teachers to view, experience, analyze, and apply to their own teaching (Casey, 2006). It is important to communicate clearly to teachers that there is no such thing as a perfect lesson. Whenever the literacy coach demonstrates a lesson, the coach is doing the best work they know how to do at that moment, with room for revision and improvement to better meet students’ needs.

Often literacy coaches demonstrate lessons for teachers outside of the classroom for small and large group sessions designed to introduce materials and techniques during professional development. Literacy coaches also model new curriculum and reading materials because the understanding that the coach gains about the materials during modeling sessions is powerful. For coaches who choose to model new materials and curriculum in classes, collegial relationships with teachers develop quickly because the
coach receives feedback on themselves from the teachers, which starts the system for observation and feedback (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Once teachers realize that the coach is also learning but willing to put herself in the spotlight by being observed modeling lessons, the teachers become more willing to be observed by the coach.

As a middle school literacy coach, the author of this handbook often models lessons in classrooms. When the literacy coaching program first began at this middle school, the majority of staff members preferred to observe the literacy coach model a lesson rather than being observed themselves. There was much anxiety on the part of the teachers about being observed because they weren’t comfortable with the new teaching methods and some teachers weren’t convinced that changing the way they taught students was necessary. However, a school wide plan and framework had been developed based on data that indicated that the large ELD population at the middle school was failing. All teachers were trained and expected to teach the new methods. Implementation of the new school plan included the literacy coach first modeling a lesson in a classroom, then teaching a similar lesson with the teacher and finally observing as the teacher taught a lesson using the same method. After each session, the coach helped the teachers to reflect on their teaching and the affect the lesson had on their students. This model/observe/reflect cycle helped to build the teachers’ confidence in themselves and in the coaching process.

In working toward a positive learning environment for students and teachers, a literacy coach educates teachers through processes that lead to self-reflection. The goal of this self reflection is for teachers to eventually coach themselves by evaluating the effectiveness of their ideas and decisions in terms of student achievement. One process a literacy coach can use to help teachers become self reflective is the use of personality type
using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator tool. Research on personality type indicates several critical areas in which a teacher’s preferences and learning styles affect their decisions about teaching methodologies, subject matter, and assessment. Personality type helps teachers and coaches understand that their educational beliefs and decision making are tightly bound to their personalities (Kise, 2006). Glickman et al. (2007) explains that instructional improvement takes place when teachers improve their decision making about students, curriculum and teaching and that the process of improving teacher decision making is largely a process of adult learning. Therefore, research and theory on adult learning is an important component of the knowledge base for literacy coaching. For further reading about adult learning theory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator tool, the books by Kise (2006) and Glickman et al. (2007) that are cited in this handbook are listed in ‘Recommended Reading Resources’ at the end of the handbook.

**Observation and feedback**

Literacy coaches can focus their professional development efforts on the daily work of teachers by conducting formative observations. Formative observations are designed to help individual teachers examine and improve their own practice. Observation drives professional support and can help to establish a positive school climate if the teachers understand the purpose of the observations and the coach’s role as the observer. Several useful strategies to use in establishing a positive climate for observations are:

- never link professional development to evaluation; the coach’s role is to support the teacher – it is the principal’s responsibility to evaluate
- never make documentation of observations public – confidentiality is essential
have a pre-observation meeting to explain your commitment to confidentiality and ask the teacher what he or she would like you to see on which you will provide feedback. Tell the teacher exactly how the observation will be conducted and how and when he or she will receive feedback (Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

If the school’s literacy plan has prescribed teaching methods, the literacy coach will want to observe each teacher using each method. As with all observations, the following cycle should be followed:

- pre-observation meeting to discuss what to expect during the observation
- the observation where the coach observes for teacher behaviors and for student behaviors in response to the teaching
- post observation reflection meeting to help the teacher reflect on the observed lesson.

In the pre-observation meeting, the coach and the teacher can decide which type of observation method will be most beneficial. One type of observation is to observe teachers’ actions by time; simply develop a form with time intervals of five minutes down the left side and document the teacher’s activities and student responses next to the time the activities happened.

Another type of observation is by instructional method. When the author observes the teachers at the middle school, it is agreed upon at the pre-observation meeting which ELD teaching method from the school’s framework will be observed. During the observation the author watches for evidence of student participation, language production, and other specific elements prescribed in the framework. Other things to pay attention to while observing are:
• Does the lesson have a clear objective? Is the objective leading students to make meaning of the text or to communicate meaning in their writing? What is the purpose of the lesson?
• To what degree are students engaged in achieving the objective?
• How is the teacher checking for understanding and making necessary changes throughout the lesson?
• How are students being guided to independence? What have the students learned and what can they do as a result of this lesson (Casey, 2006)?

Whichever method of observation the coach and teacher agree upon, it is vitally important that the coach make nonjudgmental, specific comments. The coach is providing a script for the teacher of what is happening in the classroom which will give the teacher an opportunity to reflect on their teaching.

Feedback needs to be quick and to the point and can be in person or in writing. If the coach does leave written feedback, there should also be times when the feedback is given in person at a post observation meeting. At the post observation meeting, the coach helps the teacher to reflect on their practice by asking questions such as:

• what do you think went well in the lesson?
• what do you think went less well in the lesson?
• why did you decide to (use a particular strategy)
• how did you feel when...
• what evidence do you have that the students learned the objective of the lesson?
Asking open ended questions gives the teacher an opportunity to reflect on their thinking and determine for themselves the value of their decisions.

As literacy coach the author also does walk through observations. During these observations, the literacy coach drops in on a class for approximately 15 minutes to observe students, noting the level of engagement and the value of the work being done. Walk through observations provide more opportunities for reflective conversations with teachers about the impact their teaching is having on student learning (Taylor & Collins, 2003).

When observing a teacher, the coach objectively notes exactly what the teacher says and does and the students’ reactions to the teacher. The coach is acting as a mirror that enables the teacher to ‘see’ or to reflect upon their own teaching. Through the observation/reflection cycle, and with the coach’s help, the teacher often comes to realize the solution to a particular struggle or dilemma.

Another aspect of observing is peer observations. Peer observations are focused classroom observations that provide opportunities for teachers to observe their colleagues at work in order to illuminate the teacher doing the observing. The literacy coach facilitates the peer observation, which has a specific purpose aligned with the goals and objectives of the coaching program (Moran, 2007). The author of this handbook has facilitated peer observations for teachers who struggle with or are curious about particular methods. When peer observations were first implemented at this middle school, teachers were apprehensive because they felt awkward about having other teachers in their classroom watching them teach. The observing teachers also felt awkward because they felt like they were making the observed teacher uncomfortable. This was a symptom of the isolation experienced by the teachers prior to the literacy coaching program implementation. The teachers have
come to appreciate peer observations and the opportunities that the observations provide for collegiality and curriculum based conversations. Peer observations also offer teachers the opportunity to see teaching modeled by a variety of teachers and not just the literacy coach.

**Book study groups.**

Literacy coaching makes professional development a continuous cycle of learning and improvement at the school site. Book study groups provide professional development and support outside of the classroom and establish a collegial climate for teaching and learning (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). These groups are more than a gathering of teachers to talk about a certain topic; they are serious forms of professional learning that are focused on instructional issues (Moran, 2007). For instance, the researcher participated in a book study group using Robert J. Marzano’s book *The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction* (2007) This book study was attended by teachers interested in classroom instructional strategies based on sound science and current research. This book was an excellent source for a book study because in it Marzano reviews the research base for the instructional strategies then provides practical suggestions for the implementation and assessment of each strategy (Marzano, 2007). During the bi-weekly meetings, teachers discussed how to use the strategies in the book in their own classrooms and then shared the results with each other after trying the strategies.
Section Three – Middle Grades Students

Uniqueness of the Middle Grades

Students in the middle grades are considered early adolescents, range in age from ten to fourteen and are typically in grades four through eight (Stevenson, 1998). The curriculum changes for these students as they leave the primary grades where they were learning to read using narrative text. Beginning in the fourth grade students are expected to read expository texts containing unfamiliar vocabulary which requires reading strategies that the students may not have mastered. Researchers and literacy specialists agree that learning to read does not end in the primary grades; reading becomes more complex as students move into the middle grades. Middle school teachers need to develop new strategies and skills for helping students understand difficult text (Tovani, 2004). Literacy coaches support teachers as the teachers develop strategies and skills that help students’ changing literacy needs in the middle grades as students continue to master literacy skills.

Students’ Characteristics

Early adolescence is a remarkable period of growing and developing in which young adolescents experience rapid and significant physical and emotional change. As children enter early adolescence, they begin to confront new realities and complexities of the actual world in ways that are different from anything previously know to them. Their moods and emotions can fluctuate wildly from bold to conservative, wise to innocent and curious to withdrawn. The body changes more during early adolescence than at any other time except in the first two years of life. Young adolescents mature at varying rates of speed and their development includes overlapping and interrelated characteristics of
Young adolescents are transitioning from a focus on themselves to having consideration for how others feel. They tend to be idealistic and have a new perspective on fairness. These students are becoming more reflective and introspective and tend to confront moral and ethical questions head on. They are moving away from complete acceptance of adult moral judgment to developing their own personal values. Young adolescents can be acutely aware of flaws in others, but are hesitant to acknowledge their own flaws (NMSA, 2003).

A middle school literacy coach must understand what motivates young adolescents in order to support the teachers working with this age group. The coach must also understand what motivates the teachers who work with young adolescents. The primary goal of literacy coaching is to improve student learning by building teacher expertise. Coaches ask teachers to differentiate their teaching to meet the needs of each student. However, before a coach can ask this of the teachers, coaches must differentiate their coaching to meet the needs of each teacher. In her book, *Differentiated Coaching: A Framework for Helping Teachers Change* (2006), Jane A.G. Kise explains that literacy coaches must carefully plan staff development to help teachers “understand where their strengths and beliefs lock them into practices that limit their freedom to help students succeed” (p. 15). Unexamined beliefs can have unintended consequences and many of our beliefs as educators developed from our own educational backgrounds. When teachers’ experience difficulty working with particular young adolescents, it could be that the teachers’ belief system is preventing them from understanding the students’
motivation. Before creating a staff development plan, Kise (2006) recommends asking these four essential questions:

- what are the teachers’ beliefs about how students learn?
- how tightly are teachers’ beliefs tied to their own strengths as educators?
- what are the teacher’s beliefs about their role in students’ success?
- what else keeps teachers from trying new practices?

A teacher who believes that students should be able to express themselves as individuals through engaging classroom activities might consider quieter students as underachievers who do not care. Disorganized students might make very organized teachers crazy. Teachers who plan long, hands-on units or simulations might think that students who lose interest in the unit have attention deficit. Each teacher has a set of beliefs about their teaching that can directly affect their interactions with their students. Negative student interactions make teachers’ jobs stressful. The relationship between teachers’ strengths and beliefs is very close. Teachers need to work from their strengths because being forced to overuse weaknesses often leads to stress and illness (Kise, 2006; Moran, 2007). A literacy coach can offer staff development to help teachers understand how their strengths drive their beliefs and how those beliefs might affect young adolescent students who are very different from them.

**Literacy Development**

As mentioned earlier, learning to read does not end in the primary grades; reading becomes more difficult when students enter the middle grades and teachers need to help students navigate complex text (Tovani, 2004). The wide range of variability of what is normal among young adolescents requires an effective literacy program that includes a
balance between direct instruction and differentiated instruction using a variety of learning activities. The teacher’s role is to respond where help is indicated according to the needs of individual learners (Stevenson, 1998). Young Adolescents are motivated by effective teachers who show that they care about their students and help them to understand and solve their personal and academic problems.

Middle school students need to engage in social interaction, have a strong desire to communicate and want to understand school experiences. Effective teachers understand these needs and desires and use them as part of their instructional objectives to maintain their students’ motivation.

The purpose of teaching young adolescents is to provide instruction that is responsive to their developmental needs, which means that teachers must be informed about the multifaceted development of their students. Too often teachers put a great deal of time, thought and effort into what and how they will teach their students, only to have mediocre to poor results. Out of frustration, teachers blame their students for being lazy and unmotivated. Sound general knowledge of students’ readiness to learn must be considered in decisions about what to teach and how to present material to the students. A great deal is risked when teachers present students with learning tasks that they are not ready to accomplish. Working from a literacy plan based on assessment data and developed into a common framework will help teachers to understand and to focus their literacy lesson planning on student development and readiness.

Because middle grades students are motivated by social interactions, literacy coaches can help teachers plan lessons that include activities that engage students in
group and partner work. Research by Robert B. Ruddell (2009) on motivation and engagement in literacy development indicates that:

- A prime motivation for students’ participation in reading instruction is the social dynamics of the classroom.
- Literacy instruction is most effective when students’ experience a high degree of social and intellectual engagement with the new concept or topic.
- A student’s background knowledge is more easily activated and engaged when the objective and expected use of the literacy learning experience is clearly established and understood.
- A critical instructional role that the teacher must play is to ensure that the literacy learning objective is established whether the objective is internally motivated and student determined or externally motivated and teacher directed.
- High motivation and positive attitudes toward literacy are critical to a student’s learning success.
- Highly effective teachers use motivating teaching strategies, understand where students are in the learning process, make material personally relevant, and use a process approach to intellectual discovery (Ruddell, 2009).

Figure A-1 lists additional strategies that effective teachers use.

All students will be assured a chance at success when they are taught from a literacy development program that is based on researched and evidence-based strategies for instruction and achievement.
Effective Teaching Strategies

Although not as visible as physical development, intellectual development in young adolescents is just as intense and these young people exhibit a wide range of intellectual growth. Young adolescents are eager to learn about topics that are interesting to them,
prefer active learning experiences and interactions with peers. These students generally progress from concrete thinking to grappling with complex concepts and reflective thinking. Young adolescents are extremely curious and are interested in a broad range of topics (Finders, 1997; NMSA, 2003). The significant intellectual, physical and emotional development that young adolescents experience happens at varying rates for each child. When considering literacy development for middle grades students, teachers must understand the multi-faceted development of the students. Because of their developing intelligence and maturity, working with young adolescent students can be quite rewarding if teachers take into account the fluctuating emotional development of their students while planning curriculum and teaching strategies.

Along with young adolescents’ development, research results on effective teaching strategies must be considered when designing literacy lessons. Research has shown that effective literacy teaching includes these key strategies:

- Direct instruction – provides modeling and teaches the literacy strategies that good readers use before, during and after reading.
- Student practice – imperative because it’s through reading and writing that students make improvements in these necessary literacy processes.
- Integration – involves the application of learning to the real world and the way that students derive meaning from the material they read and write.
- Consistent incorporation of the literacy processes of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking.
Explicit teaching and incorporation of literacy strategies.

Accountable independent reading every day (Casey, 2006; Ruddell, 2009; Taylor & Collins, 2003).

At least half of the middle grades students in the United States cannot read well enough to comprehend grade level texts (Taylor & Collins, 2003). In order to help all young adolescents become competent readers, middle grades teachers, regardless of their content area, need to explicitly teach their students the literacy strategies that expert readers use. For instance, expert readers;

- use reading strategies before they begin reading by analyzing the book jacket, looking at illustrations to make predictions, and brainstorming what they already know about the content of the book,
- continue to make predictions during reading about what will happen,
- concept organizers and one-sentence summaries also help readers make personal connections with the text to clarify and deepen understanding of what they are reading,
- after reading, developing story maps or sequence charts, developing factual and inferential questions and writing about how predictions before reading differed from the actual story help readers to analyze, summarize, and connect the current reading to other texts, other concepts, and the world outside of school (Taylor & Collins, 2003).

Teachers also model expert reading by reading out loud to students from texts above the students’ independent reading level. Reading aloud gives the teacher an
opportunity to introduce genres that students might not know and bring reading to life for even the poorest readers.

Modeling good reading skills is essential in teaching middle grades students to navigate difficult text. When a teacher can slow down their own thinking while reading difficult material and notice what they do while reading, the teacher will have a better understanding of what their students need to do in order to develop the literacy skills necessary for them to comprehend difficult content reading. To model thinking while reading, the teacher chooses a text challenging enough to model for students the same difficulty the students will face in their reading. As the teacher models what she does as a good reader to comprehend the difficult text, the teacher is modeling for her students that when understanding breaks down, strategies can be applied to consciously reconstruct meaning. Modeling reading strategies can help students learn to identify which strategies are best to use for specific texts they will be reading (Tovani, 2004). Through modeling and explicit, direct instruction, teachers can help readers develop reading strategies to the point that the strategies become automatic.

**Conclusion**

Literacy leadership is an ongoing cycle of learning and improving on the part of the literacy coach and the teachers being coached. To support the effort to improve the literacy skills of students in the fourth through eighth grades, this handbook has provided research based essential elements to develop a successful literacy coaching program for middle grades teachers and students. The coaching methods and teaching strategies in this handbook have been field tested by the author and found to be highly effective. Literacy coaching is both challenging and rewarding with a goal of school improvement.
The hope is that this handbook will be helpful to new coaches as they develop and implement their own ongoing cycle of learning and improving through literacy coaching, which will positively impact the teachers and students with whom they work.
Resources for Further Reading

*Standards for Middle and high School Literacy Coaches*
by the International Reading Association
Newark, DE: Author, 2006
ISBN: 0-87207-597-4

*This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*
by the National Middle School Association
Ohio: National Middle School Association, 2003

*Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High*
by Margaret J. Finders
New York: Teachers College Press, 1997
ISBN: 0807735604

*Teaching Ten to Fourteen Year Olds*
By Chris Stevenson
ISBN: 0-8013-1582-4

*Creativity in the Classroom: Schools of Curious Delight*
By Alane Jordan Starko, 2005
New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

*Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement*
By Stephanie Harvey & Anne Goudvis, 2007
Maine: Stenhouse.
ISBN: 9 781571 104816
How to Teach Reading to Elementary and Middle School Students: Practical Ideas from Highly Effective Teachers
By Robert B. Ruddell, 2009
Boston: Pearson
ISBN 10: 0-205-62542-8

Why Can’t We Get It Right? Designing High-Quality Professional Development for Standards-Based Schools
By Marsha Speck & Caroll Knipe, 2005
Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
ISBN: 0-7619-3908-3

Differentiated Coaching: A Framework for Helping Teachers Change
By Jan A. G. Kise, 2006
Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press
ISBN: 0-7619-3977-6

The Literacy Coach’s Handbook: A Guide to Research Based Practice
By Sharon Walpole & Michael C. McKenna, 2004
New York: The Guilford Press.
ISBN: 1-59385-034-4

Literacy Leadership for Grades Five Through Twelve
By Rosemarye Taylor & Valerie Doyle Collins, 2003
Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
ISBN: 0-87120-745-1

SuperVision and Instructional Leadership: A Developmental Approach
Boston: Pearson
References


Williams Upper Elementary School

Staff Survey Regarding Literacy Coaching
Mid Year Survey 2009

How is the literacy coach position helping you to impact student learning?
In an attempt to make the Literacy Coach’s position effective and meaningful to
the staff, I would appreciate your input.
Thank you! ~ Denise

Please complete this brief survey and place it in Denise’s box by March 11th.

What do you consider to be the most beneficial use of the literacy coach’s time with you?
Please rate the following literacy coaching services in terms of their potential to help you
impact student learning in your classroom.

Assign a rating of 1 to 5, with 5 being most beneficial and 1 being least beneficial.

| Planning lessons together | 1 1 2 3 4 5 |
| As a resource for information, materials, lesson ideas, etc. | 1 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Modeling lessons in your classroom | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Release time to observe colleagues teaching | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Providing feedback on your instruction | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Other: Is there another service provided by the lit coach that you
would like to rate? Name of service: | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Please check your preference:
I prefer drop in observations _______
I prefer scheduled observations _______
Both observation methods work for me _______

Your candid thoughts and all feedback are appreciated as I develop the literacy
coaching position to best fit the needs of our students and staff. This space is provided
for any additional comments. Please use the back of this form if necessary.
How has the literacy coach position helped you to impact student learning this year? In an attempt to make the Literacy Coach’s position effective and meaningful to the staff, I would appreciate your input. Thank you! ~ Denise

Please complete this brief survey and place it in Denise’s box by May 20.

What has been the most beneficial use of the literacy coach’s time with you? Please rate the following literacy coaching services in terms of their helpfulness to you in impacting student learning in your classroom. Space is provided at the bottom of this survey for you to write your comments and thoughts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning lessons together</th>
<th>1 1 2 3 4 5</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a resource for information, materials, lesson ideas, etc.</td>
<td>1 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling lessons in your classroom</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release time to observe colleagues teaching</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing feedback on your instruction</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Is there another service provided by the lit coach that you would like to rate? Name of service:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please check which coaching observation style has been most comfortable for you:
I preferred drop in observations _______
I preferred scheduled observations _______
Both observation methods worked for me _______

Your candid thoughts and all feedback are appreciated as we look forward to and plan for next year. This space is provided for any additional comments. Please use the back of this form if necessary.