

The Middle School Literacy Coach: Considering Roles in Context

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Standards-based reform in education has placed an increasing emphasis on improving literacy instruction and student reading achievement (Elmore & Rothman, 2000). Over the last 15 years, the demand for literacy skills has increased, the current level of reading achievement remains stagnant, and the achievement gap between students of different demographic groups persists (RAND, 2002). The federal No Child Left Behind Act (2002) adds more pressure to raise student reading achievement by requiring that all children read at grade level by the end of grade 3. Yet while considerable attention is currently being paid to early literacy, adolescent literacy continues to experience an ongoing crisis (Conley & Hinchman, 2004). Research has revealed little about how to improve the reading of young adolescents, especially those who enter the middle grades behind their peers (Jackson & Davis, 2000). With a paucity of research on adolescent literacy, urgent questions remain about middle school literacy instruction and the kinds of professional development that may affect teacher learning and classroom practice at this level.

Professional development provides a crucial link between setting high standards and boosting student achievement (Elmore & Rothman, 2000). Although traditional approaches to professional development are largely considered inadequate in meeting teachers' learning needs in relation to new achievement standards for students (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; Elmore & Rothman, 2000), a number of innovative approaches have grown in popularity in recent years. Instructional coaching, one such approach, aims to provide long-term support for teachers learning and implementing new instructional strategies by providing reflective learning opportunities, over time, within real-world school contexts (Poglinco et al., 2003). In the content area of reading, specialists have begun to take on new leadership roles as literacy coaches. Responsibilities related to these coaching roles vary widely, from peer tutors to professional consultants to evaluation-oriented trainers (IRA, 2004). Yet despite the increasing popularity of coaching and the great potential it presents, there is little research documenting its effectiveness (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Nevertheless, with the pressures of reform weighing heavily on education improvement efforts, waiting for substantive research findings before implementing instructional coaching programs is considered infeasible (IRA, 2006). Instead, the recommendation is to research what already exists, asking questions important to practitioners and utilizing findings to inform practice. This paper, drawn from a larger study, follows this recommendation by considering two questions:

- What roles do middle school literacy coaches play in different school settings?
- In what ways do contextual factors, and the coaches themselves, affect these roles?

BACKGROUND

This paper draws upon three areas of research to better understand the role of literacy-related professional development in teachers' professional lives: teacher learning theories and research on professional development and coaching, theory and research relating to types of teacher knowledge, and research on adolescent literacy development and methods of instruction.

Teacher Learning

The situated learning perspective asserts that the contexts within which activities occur are integral to the learning that takes place within them (Putnam & Borko, 2000). From this perspective, teachers must be provided with opportunities to enhance knowledge and change beliefs as they learn new instructional approaches. These opportunities might include inquiry, reflection, examination of prior knowledge, and formation of professional discourse communities (Putnam & Borko, 1997). Wenger (1998) identifies networks and formal and informal groups in school settings as communities of practice, where teachers are engaged in social networks and group interactions beyond the relative isolation of the classroom (Lortie, 1975). Professional development programs, seen from the situated learning perspective, would need to be embedded in context, collaborative and intensive, and ongoing in nature to sustain growth in teacher learning and create change in instructional practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001).

Instructional coaching has the potential to promote a number of the traits identified by the situated-learning perspective. Currently, coaches appear to have been assigned two major responsibilities: teacher mentoring and literacy program advocacy (IRA, 2006). This dual set of responsibilities is consistent in the literature. Toll (2005), for example, defines literacy coaching in terms of mentoring teachers. Other definitions of coaching emphasize literacy advocacy over mentoring. Sturtevant (2003) defines literacy coaches as "master teachers who provide essential leadership for the school's entire literacy program" (p. 11). Literacy coaching seems to be a combination of mentoring and literacy-program responsibilities, and several researchers provide definitions of coaching that include both of them to some degree (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005; Coskie et al., 2005; Knight, 2004). What is unclear is how coaches might strike a balance between advocating a literacy program at the whole-school level and mentoring teachers in classrooms.

Beyond responsibilities, a number of coaching models have been suggested in the literature. While at one end of this range is the model of coaching as facilitating team planning with minimal observation and evaluation (Joyce & Showers, 2002), and at the other end of the range is the model of coach as supervising and evaluating teachers (Anderson & Pellicar, 2001; Glickman, 2002), much of the literature focuses on models of coaching existing somewhere between these two extremes. A number of studies, for example, have examined coaches working as consultant, where the coach is available to provide teachers with advice or expertise to improve instructional practice (Hasbrouck, 1997; Hasbrouck & Christen, 1997; Tschantz & Vail, 2000). Another set of studies examined peer coaching, where the coach works in a community

focused on new skills, peer feedback, and self-reflection (Gottesman & Jennings, 1994; Joyce, Calhoun, & Hopkins, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 2002). While suggesting overall effectiveness, research on these coaching models tends not to address how middle-school contexts might affect the process or how coaching efforts might influence whole-school literacy plans. Within middle school contexts, it is uncertain how different models of coaching and the mentoring and literacy advocacy responsibilities of coaches might work in concert or in conflict as the coach goes about her daily work to improve literacy instruction.

Teacher Knowledge

Coaching addresses several types of teacher knowledge, including subject matter, pedagogical content, practical, and personal practical knowledge. Each of these types, embedded in context, has the potential to be influenced through coaching, and in turn to influence teachers' classroom practice. In this study I have utilized the metaphor of the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) as a way to organize concepts of teacher knowledge as they relate to the coaching process. This landscape exists at the intersection of theory and practice and is comprised of two places, the in-classroom place where teaching activities occur and the out-of-classroom place where teachers encounter "abstract talk about abstract policies and prescriptions" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 67). Coaching holds promise as a mechanism for bridging the gap between these two places on the landscape and for addressing the dilemmas teachers face in the difficult process of acquiring knowledge in the abstract out-of-classroom place and implementing it in the practical in-classroom place of daily activity.

Middle School Literacy

Three elements of middle school literacy programs and instruction are particularly relevant to the subject-matter contexts in which literacy coaches do their work. The first element is the range of literacy programs at the middle school level. Adolescents experience a variety of literacy settings over the course of a school day, from language arts to remedial reading to no reading instruction at all (Irvin & Conners, 1989; Witte & Otto, 1981). Coaches involved in school-wide professional development plans would need to navigate across the array of literacy settings experienced by students as they work with a variety of teachers.

Second is the element of content area reading, where students are expected to read and understand various subject-matter reading materials without necessarily being taught strategies for learning new content (Irvin, 1998). Many teachers do not feel there is a coordinated effort to teach reading skills in content-area classes (Gee & Forester, 1988). Coaches may face issues of inadequate preparation of content-area teachers to teach reading, or of resistance to spending class time in science, math, or social studies classes to teaching reading skills and strategies.

Third is the element of instruction, especially in relation to higher-level thinking and reading comprehension strategies, neither of which may be consistently taught at the middle school level (Dole, 2000; Langer, 2001). Coaches may face this gap between instructional theory and classroom practice when working with teachers to affect learning and improve instruction. While some studies identify effective literacy interventions for young adolescents, such as the direct teaching of comprehension strategies, a thematic and integrative focus across content areas, and an element of student discussion or interaction (Chinn, Anderson, &

Waggoner, 2001; Joyce, Hrycauk, and Calhoun, 2001; Loranger, 1999), these specific strategies may not be part of the classroom practices of many middle school teachers. Coaches working to improve literacy instruction in middle schools may encounter challenges relating to all three of these issues. In sum, the literature on teacher learning, forms of knowledge, and issues of middle school literacy form a compelling backdrop for examining the instructional coaching process in context.

METHOD

Participants and Setting

To study the work of literacy coaches in context, I designed a multiple-case study (Yin, 2003) examining the work of three coaches in two school districts in the Western United States. See Table 1 for demographic information on these districts. Each case was shaped in terms of conceptual, social, physical, and temporal boundaries (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As researcher I positioned myself as a participant observer, moving across the continuum between the roles of participant and observer (Patton, 2002) as dictated by the particular contexts and situations I encountered while observing the coaches.

Table 1. District Demographics

District	Enrollment	Free/reduced Price lunch	Transitional Bilingual	Special Education	Meeting Reading Standard	Classroom Teachers	Years Teacher Experience
Stevens	46,000	42.2%	12.7%	12.4%	63.2%	2,680	11.9
Wallace	16,000	18.6%	8.8%	9.7%	84.3%	920	10.1

The first coach, Grace, (all names in this study are pseudonyms) was a literacy coach at Adams Middle School, an urban school, grades 6-8, in the Stevens school district. She had spent the past several years working as a literacy consultant in the district's central curriculum department. Grace's full-time position was one of three in the district funded by a private foundation. This foundation had a five-year grant to the school district, the aim of which was to increase the reading achievement of students at three of the district's lowest-performing middle schools as measured by statewide achievement tests. This was Grace's second year as literacy coach. Diane, the second coach participant, was also funded by the grant. She had a strong background in literacy, having worked as a reading specialist and literacy consultant at both middle and elementary levels. This was her second year as literacy coach at Jefferson Middle School, which, like Adams, was located in the Stevens school district.

Michelle, the third coach, was a language arts curriculum and technology coach for all seven middle schools in the Wallace school district, an increasingly diverse, medium-size district ten miles outside an urban center. Her primary responsibilities were to support language arts teachers with the implementation of newly adopted district curriculum materials and to provide assistance in using

classroom-based and curriculum-related technology. Although Michelle had been a middle school language arts teacher in this district for seven years, this was her first year in this newly created coaching position. Each of these coaches, working in a range of contexts, provided a unique case within the overall study of the coaching process.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection occurred over a five-month period. I observed each coach for three one-week visits, with a break of at least one week between visits. During these observations I followed the coaches throughout the day as they interacted with students, teachers, administrators, and district personnel. Interviews of coaches, teachers, and principals, as well as written reflections of the coaches, were additional data sources for this study.

Initial data analysis included the two-part approach of categorical aggregation and direct interpretation (Stake, 1995). To address the first approach, I looked across the data for patterns in coaching roles and actions in various contexts, developing a set of thirty-six codes aggregated into five general categories. By clustering and analyzing coded data segments in relation to these identified categories, I was able to highlight and consider patterns across the cases of coaching. To address the second approach, direct interpretation, I reviewed coded data segments in a secondary process to highlight additional themes as well as to pull apart differences across the cases of individual coaches. This process allowed for additional themes, not immediately apparent in the first approach, to emerge.

A subsequent step in data analysis was to use the technique of constructing composite biographies (Connolly, Clandinin, & He, 1997) to compile composite narratives of each literacy coach in order to vividly portray their experiences within the school contexts they encountered.

To construct a two-day narrative for each coach, I sorted data segments pertaining to each coach into categories of coaching roles and related tasks comprising these roles. The composite narratives constructed from these data segments accurately reflect the amount of time coaches spent in various roles, and were a way to cohesively and vividly present data drawn from multiple interviews and weeks of observation. In the next section I will present themes relating to coaching roles and contexts, as well as two episodes from one coach's composite narrative to illustrate the coaching process in context.

FINDINGS

Coaching Roles

Roles coaches assumed fell into two categories, classroom instructional and school-related. The first category, *classroom instructional*, was narrowly-focused, including only roles and tasks related to issues of instruction and classroom practice at the teacher level. The second category, *school-related*, contained a broader range of roles and tasks connected to school issues or events in general but not

necessarily to issues of daily classroom work. These categories are significant in two ways. First, they run parallel to, but are not synonymous with, the mentoring and literacy-advocacy responsibilities of coaching identified in the literature. Second, they suggest ways coaching may affect teacher learning at different levels, from individual mentoring sessions to large-group meetings. While

Table 2. Classroom Instructional and School-Related Roles: Percentage of Total Observed Time

	Instructional	School
Diane	43	57
Grace	37	63
Michelle	33	67

each coach spent time working on role-related tasks in both of these categories, the amount of time allocated to one or the other varied. Table 2 shows the percentage of total observed time each coach spent working within these two categories.

Classroom instructional roles were comprised of tasks such as planning with a teacher, co-teaching, or observing

lessons. As indicated in Table 2, all three coaches spent some time on these tasks, with Diane spending the most time working in classroom instructional roles.

Table 3 looks specifically at the percentage of total observed time each coach spent in different classroom instructional roles. Each coach's role profile was unique. Diane, for example, spent approximately half of her classroom instructional time either observing or working with teachers while students were in the room. Grace spent much less time on this sort of class-session work, and Michelle did not observe or co-teach once during the weeks I observed her. She did, however, spend time in the role of district liaison, translating district mandates and requests into language teachers could incorporate into their daily work with students.

Table 3. Classroom Instructional Roles: Percentage of Total Observed Time

	Teacher resource	Class-session resource	Student tutor	District liaison	Substitute teacher	Percent of total time
Diane	22	21	0	0	0	43
Grace	10	8	12	0	7	37
Michelle	24	0	0	9	0	33

Grace, on occasion, had to fill in for absent teachers when not enough substitutes could be found. Although this role put her in the classroom, it restricted her time and prevented her from engaging teachers in the coaching process. Overall, while classroom-instructional coaching roles seemed to have the potential to impact teacher learning, this potential did not often materialize.

Table 4. School-related Roles: Percentage of Total Observed Time

	Professional developer	Principal assistant	Lunchtime librarian	Tour guide	Office worker	Percent of total time
Diane	20	11	2	0	24	57
Grace	16	14	0	6	27	63
Michelle	34	0	0	8	25	67

All three coaches spent a majority of their time working on tasks associated with school-related roles. Table 4 shows the percentage of time spent in each of five observed school-related roles.

The role of professional developer included tasks such as planning or leading professional development or department-level meetings. While this particular role may have contributed to the coaches' literacy program advocacy goals, the impact of such efforts on teacher learning was unclear.

The remaining four school-related roles did not seem to have much to do with either the literacy-advocacy or mentoring responsibility of coaching. While assisting the principal with administrative matters or handing out books to students as a lunchtime librarian may have been useful roles at a school level, they were not connected to issues of instruction. Two of the coaches were asked to serve as tour guides for groups of teachers visiting from other districts. Most surprisingly, all three of the coaches spent a majority of their school-related role time doing office work, everything from sifting through email to making copies and organizing binders of testing materials. Overall the coaches spent approximately 30% of their observed time on peripheral tasks that seemed disconnected from either mentoring or literacy program advocacy. While at times the coaches appeared to choose these tasks, mostly it seemed as though peripheral tasks were piled upon them. A number of contexts appeared to have an impact on how the literacy coaches ended up spending their time.

School Contexts

In this study, coaching roles were influenced by a number of school contexts including organizational factors, school and classroom climate, and principal and coach relationships. It was clear that the coaches worked within complicated school structures, and organizational factors relating to these structures impacted the coaching process. Michelle's position, for example, required her to visit all seven middle schools in the district. Being a somewhat large district geographically, she ended up spending a great deal of time in her car, thereby reducing her capacity to mentor teachers on an ongoing basis. Diane, although spending all of her time at one school, also had trouble finding time to work with teachers, as the school's class schedule clumped all of the language arts classes together and kept her from observing and conferring with more than one or two language arts teachers each week. Establishing time to work with teachers was a struggle, and all three coaches indicated they wished their schedules were more stable and could involve more time in classrooms.

School climate also impacted the coaching process. A negative school climate made it difficult for Grace and Diane to gain access to classrooms or engage in conversations with teachers. Grace, for example, had experienced some resentment by staff members who considered her job an unnecessary luxury, and this appeared to discourage her from contacting teachers or observing in classrooms. Diane worked in a decidedly more negative environment, waging daily battles to gain access to classrooms and engage teachers. She did visit classrooms on occasion, but teachers were so noticeably stressed that Diane found herself observing and not coaching. Michelle, in contrast, did not encounter negative school climates, but she did face the challenge of being perceived as a district spy. This may have influenced her tendency to set up shop in a school's library, announce her presence via email, and do quiet work while waiting for teachers to come see her (rather than to visit classrooms unannounced). For all three coaches, initiating the coaching process was a struggle.

Principals exerted considerable influence over the working lives of coaches. Grace's principal, for example, seemed to treat her as a member of the leadership team, asking her for professional opinions on a variety of administrative issues. This treatment may have exacerbated the resentment Grace felt from teachers. Diane, in contrast, felt unsupported in her work by her principal who was retiring at the end of the school year and did not provide administrative support for Diane's coaching efforts. Michelle's situation was different, as each of her principals saw her as a resource to be utilized according to the perceived needs of the school, so requests for assistance varied from working on public relations issues to conducting a series of language arts department meetings. For all three coaches it was clear that the influence of the principal was significant. The principal appeared to have a great deal of power in shaping the roles the coach assumed and the ways the coach interacted with teachers.

The contextual factors mentioned here seemed to affect the ways in which the coach went about her work and influence the balance (or imbalance) of time and effort the coach spent on classroom instructional, school-related, and peripheral tasks. With so many contextual factors shaping the coaching process, the coaching process played out differently for each coach in this study.

Composite Narrative: Diane, Day Two

What follows are two excerpts from day two of Diane's composite narrative, illustrating how she went about her work within middle school contexts. Although only about half of Diane's observed time was spent in classroom instructional roles working with teachers on issues of practice, both excerpts included here are from this category. They were chosen to illustrate the kinds of contexts Diane and the other coaches experienced and to demonstrate the challenge of engaging teachers in the coaching process.

Planning with Heather. Right after the morning bell, Heather, a special education teacher, arrived to talk with Diane about curriculum planning. Although Heather had taught before, her previous experience was with students with severe disabilities, so she found her current assignment, teaching language arts and social studies to eighth grade special education students, somewhat overwhelming. Heather felt she was floundering through each day not knowing quite what she should be teaching. Her hope was to work with Diane to come up with a basic structure for class time and an outline of what to teach for the next four months. Their conversation started at a basic level:

Heather: “So what exactly to teach?”

Diane: “Language arts block and social studies block.”

Heather: “I’ve been doing journals.”

Diane: “That’s assigning, not teaching. You could teach a writing strategy. Prewriting, making a list of topics or collecting words. Topics?”

Heather: “What’s your favorite article of clothing?”

Diane: “Let’s teach them nonfiction writing. How to tie a shoe. Shoot a basket. Read a how-to book and analyze it out loud to demonstrate.”

Heather: “Would this happen in one day?”

Diane: “No, I think it would take a whole week. On the first day you would demonstrate elements of how-to books. How to write directions. To know sequence. So break down the elements of it. Introduce a flow map. Have the group work together.”

Beyond deciding exactly what to teach, Heather wanted a predictable weekly schedule for her language arts period, to make sure students had a clear sense of structure and that she would have time to address necessary skills and strategies in literacy. Diane talked with her about essential components of language arts time, sketching these into a weekly calendar. During their conversation, Heather asked a number of seemingly tangential questions, but Diane kept their conversation focused on the scheduling of different literacy activities throughout the week. When their time working together had run out, Diane suggested a meeting in the near future to continue the conversation.

After Heather left, Diane reflected on the planning session. She said she knew Heather was rather inexperienced, especially in regard to language arts and social studies content, but that even though Heather was planning and teaching on a day-to-day basis, she had a number of good questions and was approaching her teaching situation in a thoughtful way. Diane hoped Heather would think about their talk, try some new things in class, and come back with additional questions.

Observing Beth. In the afternoon, after a meeting with the school principal, Diane felt the need to visit some seventh- and eighth-grade language arts classes to observe literacy instruction. She wasn’t looking for anything in particular but hoped to observe teaching and learning activities to identify professional development needs for teachers at her school. Still, Diane knew she should tread lightly: “The tricky thing is that nobody else is visiting classrooms, so I have to be careful to give positive feedback.” She went into classrooms as an observer, with little power to encourage change.

Beth had already begun her session of eighth-grade language arts when Diane walked into the room. She was introducing a writing activity she wanted students to complete in the next hour and a half. Some students were sitting at their desks, listening. Others were talking, throwing pens or bits of paper, or walking around the room looking for something to do. Diane headed to the back of the room, sat in an unoccupied seat, and began taking notes. Seeing a girl near her sitting backwards in her seat and talking with another student, Diane turned to her and asked what it was they were supposed to be doing. The girl handed a worksheet to Diane, saying, “Here, you can keep it. I’m not going to do it. I don’t care.” She explained that she thought writing was boring and that after

about fifteen minutes of work they could just sit and talk for the rest of the time. So why bother writing a pretend letter to a celebrity?

Meanwhile, Beth continued to talk about the worksheet activity, stepping a few feet down each row so that students might hear her above the noise in the room. After a few minutes of this, a girl sitting near the window shouted out, "Why are you like walking around and shit? You never get up from your desk. It's just 'cause these people are here you acting like you care."

Beth did not respond, but instead went and sat down at her desk. The girl who shouted was slouching in her chair with arms crossed. She snapped her gum loudly. The other girl, the one sitting near Diane, turned to Diane and said, "I'm going to a suburban high school next year, so I don't care what happens at this school. They have higher standards there, so I'll have to work harder but I'll learn more. This school is ghetto." Diane asked her what she thought she would do for the next hour of class. The girl thought for a minute and then said, "Sit and talk." Diane did not stay to find out.

Diane's experience as Jefferson Middle School's literacy coach had its high and low points. Planning with Heather, while time-consuming, came across as a positive experience. But her impact on Heather's learning was unclear. She spent time observing other teachers, but had few opportunities to interact with them, and considered some of the teachers at her school to be "uncoachable." Further, she didn't consider her principal to be able or willing to use her administrative authority to enact change. At the same time, Diane chose not to confront teachers or to assertively position herself to encourage reluctant teachers to work with her. When asked about how she felt about her job as a coach, Diane replied, "Sometimes I feel it's the best job in the world. I really enjoy it. And then there are the times I really wish I was doing something else."

SUMMARY

Diane's experience exemplifies the complexity of undertaking the instructional coaching process in middle school contexts. With the multiplicity of roles the coaches experienced and the contextual factors that affected their work, it was difficult to ascertain whether these coaches' efforts had much impact on teacher learning. The coaching process appeared to occur sporadically, falling short of its potential.

DISCUSSION

This paper considered the roles three literacy coaches assumed while working in middle school contexts and explored the ways in which these contexts impacted the coaching process. Two propositions relating to these issues emerge from the data.

Proposition one: Multiple coaching roles, influenced by a range of school contexts, fragment the coaching process

Coaches in this study assumed a surprising number of roles as they worked across contexts, seemingly breaking the coaching process apart into a series of disjointed bits. A number of these

roles appear tied to the two major responsibilities of coaching identified in the literature, teacher mentoring (Dole, 2004; Toll, 2005) and literacy program advocacy (Sturtevant, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). This finding is in line with the standards for middle and high school literacy coaches (IRA, 2006) that are evenly split between these two coaching responsibilities. The sets of roles relating to these two coaching responsibilities did not appear to play out well in practice, however, and some of the observed roles did not appear connected to coaching at all. This multiplicity of roles contributed to a fragmentation of the coaching process, raising the question of how viable instructional coaching is as a two-part model of professional development.

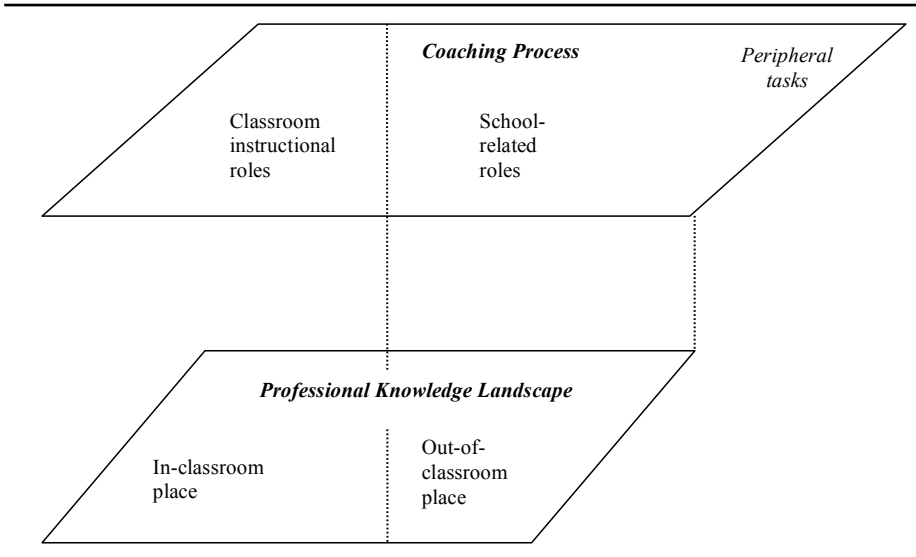
School contexts factored into this fragmentation. The complex structure of middle school complicated the work of the coaches as they struggled with academic departments, block periods, and teacher prep times. A negative school climate further impeded the coaching process, and the school principal was an additional influence on coaching, either lending support to the coaching process or neglecting the issue and leaving the coach to fend for herself.

An implication for theory is a need to minimize fragmentation by clearly establishing responsibilities and roles the literacy coach will be asked to assume, carefully considering how much time and energy should be spent on teacher mentoring and literacy advocacy. Although the ideal of simultaneously affecting teachers' professional development as literacy advocate and teacher mentor may sound promising (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005; IRA, 2005), in practice it seems to create confusion, interfering with the sort of ongoing and focused work with teachers that is considered powerful professional development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996). Administrators and coaches need to clearly identify a specific set of roles to be included in the coach's repertoire and make sure that these roles are carefully balanced to address both responsibilities of coaching so that adequate time and effort is spent on issues of teacher learning and classroom practice.

Proposition two: The coaching process only partially aligns with teachers' professional knowledge landscapes

The metaphor of the teacher's professional knowledge landscape illustrates the process by which new knowledge filters through the out-of-classroom place into the in-classroom place on the landscape. The transition between these two places is difficult for teachers who must interpret abstract information from the out-of-classroom place and implement this information in the in-classroom place without support (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Although instructional coaching holds promise as a way to assist teachers with this transition by bridging the conceptual divide between these two places on the landscape, the coaching process appears to be only partially aligned with teachers' professional knowledge landscapes, as shown in Figure 1.

Several factors appear to influence this misalignment. First, it is clear that classroom instructional and school-related roles relate to teachers' in-classroom and out-of-classroom places, but these terms are not synonymous, and tension exists between them.

Figure 1. The Coaching Process and The Professional Knowledge Landscape

Classroom instructional roles, for example, do not always align with the in-classroom place on the teacher's professional knowledge landscape. This misalignment seemed to contribute to the struggles the coaches experienced in initiating the coaching process or continuing to engage teachers in instruction-related discussions. Observing a teacher, for instance, would be considered a classroom instructional task. But it only aligns with the in-classroom place if the teacher and coach have the opportunity to meet and discuss the observation, connecting to instruction. Otherwise, the observation is a stand-alone task that does not affect teacher knowledge.

Similarly, school-related roles do not always appear to align with the out-of-classroom place on the knowledge landscape. While the coaches in this study worked on a variety of school-related tasks, from developing an online survey for students to photocopying test preparation booklets, these tasks did not often relate to issues of teacher knowledge. Tension between these sets of concepts appears to negatively impact the coaching process and to reduce the potential of coaching to affect teacher learning.

With regard to the process of teacher learning, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1996) emphasize reflecting, collaborating, and sharing as essential elements of bridging theory and practice. Coaches engaged in peripheral tasks seemed to be in no position to help teachers make this leap from theory to practice. As shown in Figure 1, peripheral tasks, taking up approximately 30% of the coaches' time, were disconnected from teachers' professional knowledge landscapes.

This proposition has two major implications. First, if the coaching process is to be defined in terms of teacher knowledge, the kinds of roles coaches are assigned should relate to the out-of-classroom and in-classroom places on the landscape, with particular emphasis on helping teachers incorporate knowledge from one place into the other. To effectively change the way they teach literacy, teachers must go through a process of acquiring knowledge about new ways of teaching and then transforming this knowledge into a usable form for classroom implementation (Clandinin &

Connelly, 1995; Shulman, 1986). The potential of instructional coaching may be more effectively realized if coaching roles were more closely focused on bridging the gap between out-of-classroom and in-classroom places on teachers' professional knowledge landscapes. This focus would also help reduce the amount of time coaches spend on peripheral tasks.

Second, for this alignment to be sustained, the coaching process would need to receive ongoing support to achieve lasting levels of change in learning and practice. Coach and teachers alike would need assistance to persevere within a potentially lengthy change process. This implication emphasizes programmatic longevity, something not always seen in professional development approaches. To affect lasting changes in teacher learning, the coaching process would need to be ongoing, sustained, collaborative, and embedded in context (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996). With these factors in place, the coaching process would perhaps be in better alignment with teachers' professional knowledge landscapes, thereby having a greater impact on learning and practice.

This study had several limitations. First, the sample was limited and may have only included coaches who emphasized certain aspects of the instructional coaching process. Second, I was the only observer in this study. Although I designed a staggered observation schedule to compensate and conducted interviews to provide additional perspectives, the cases of coaching were, in the end, my own interpretation of the events I observed. Finally, there is the probability that my presence as researcher influenced the data collection process and, possibly, the results of the study.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the roles literacy coaches assumed in middle school contexts. On the topic of daily coaching work, Dole and Donaldson (2006) noted overhearing a newly-hired reading coach ask a colleague, "I just want someone to tell me, what am I supposed to do all day?" pointing out that research has not yet provided a clear answer to this question. Coaches in this study, to answer the above question, did a great deal of work all day, experiencing such a variety of roles that the coaching process became fragmented, and work with teachers on issues of learning and practice was limited. Contextual factors contributed to this fragmentation, so that even when the coaching process seemed to be progressing, its impact was minimized. This paper suggests the potential of instructional coaching in middle school literacy, but also raises questions about coaching program implementation and effectiveness.

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