



## **READING COACHES AS AN IN-CLASS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

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### **Abstract**

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Professional development should be a career-long process in which teachers tweak their teaching methodology, practices, and style to meet student needs. Is there a better place to offer professional development opportunities than at “ground zero”? This paper outlines one school’s attempt to bring quality professional development to the classroom where teachers and students can see immediate results of professional development plans and receive instant feedback on proposed instructional practices and changes.

Reading specialists moved out of the reading room and into the classroom to offer perceptions and assistance through clinical observations, support, and immediate feedback in an effort to improve instructional delivery and student achievement. There are many research studies that discuss what makes a good reading coach, there are few studies that cite implementation results. Our primary school began using reading coaches as in-class professional development because teachers and administrators were frustrated by students’ slow progress. We believed change could be accelerated if we created a mentor program in which more experienced reading specialists could coach and mentor teachers as they took on new learning. Our goal was a self-regulated teacher that monitors and reflects on her own progress and is active within a community of learning established in throughout the school.

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### **Introduction**

#### **How Should Professional Development Help Teachers?**

Professional development should be a career-long process in which teachers tweak their teaching methodology, practices, and style to meet student needs. However, the truth is that formal, administration-run professional development has resulted in little or no positive effect on student learning. For teachers, professional development conjures up thoughts of long days, over-dressed consultants, and presentations barren of children (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). But its goal is noble: to improve student learning by giving teachers new instructional techniques and enhance the ones they currently use.

Is there a better place to offer professional development opportunities than at “ground zero”? In their classrooms teachers can see immediate results of professional development plans and receive instant feedback on proposed instructional practices and

changes. Experts agree: professional development practices in the classroom are the most important context for developing literacy education for teachers and students (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Traditional professional development opportunities such as one-day in-services or a summer institute have been found ineffective. In fact, professional development that lacks a direct link to improvement of a teacher's instructional delivery, in his/her unique teaching environment, is a waste of valuable instructional time. Because the classroom environment is critical for student achievement, successful professional development opportunities should focus on realistic classroom application of instructional methods and practices. In this age of accountability and standardized testing, student achievement is everyone's focus. Professional development geared to expanding theories of learning equips teachers with tools for direct instruction that result in student improvement. To create changes in instructional practices that result in student achievement, teachers need broad-based, on-going in-class professional development that includes demonstrations, discussions, and immediate feedback (Lyons and Pinnell, 2001).

Successful professional development must also incorporate the efforts of teachers, students, and administrators. Because teacher learning develops from reflective involvement with other learners, students, or peers, it makes sense to make professional development a cooperative effort among stakeholders (Sachs, 1999). A united approach results in enhanced learning for all members of a teaching community (DuFour, 2004; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). True change is an internal process that reflects mental reorganization of perceptions. This reorganization is accomplished through observations and experiences that challenge our existing knowledge and make us feel a bit uncomfortable (Dorn & Soffos, 2001).

Diaz-Maggioli (2004) states that teacher "behaviors are contingent on multiple factors that affect how teachers go about their daily chores" (p. 6). Factors that affect teaching include the school culture and the school curriculum, as well as professionalism. Sachs (1999) found that professionalism is an inclusive ideal that allows teachers to claim membership in their profession. Teachers' practices improve when they feel they are a part of their professional community. They learn more about the profession through interaction with peers and through professional development opportunities.

As a reading specialist and Reading Recovery teacher leader, I worked with teachers that tutored low achieving reading students in a one-on-one tutoring format—and tutored individual students, as well. I also offered on-going professional development sessions to the reading specialists and to classroom teachers. In addition to working individually with teachers or teams of teachers, I spearheaded professional development sessions for school-wide professional development at our primary school.

Our school is a targeted, assisted Title I elementary school located in a rural area of Virginia, USA. The K–2 student population of 350 includes 40 Head Start students. Approximately 25% of the students are of minority background, and 62% percent receive free or reduced-cost lunch. Each grade consists of six sections, and each grade level has an instructional assistant. Specialists in the school include a speech clinician, three special education teachers, one occupational handicap teacher, and a talented and gifted teacher. A "book buddy" program that pairs local college students with first- and second-graders is in place to provide additional reading practice for low-achieving students.

Starting an in-class model of professional development had been a topic of discussion for several years at our primary school. It was apparent that now was the time to pilot an in-class coaching model of professional development. Teachers were concerned about their students' lack of progress in literacy. Specifically, two classes of first-grade students were achieving well below the average for their age cohort. In addition, the first-grade class of special education resource students was reading well below grade level. Each teacher had different ideas about how to improve the low rate of progress, but they all agreed that any solution must be something they could see implemented not just hear about at a meeting.

Through discussions and surveys, classroom teachers asserted that the present professional development opportunities were not supplying them with the support they asked for during classroom instructional sequences. They said the present model presented a topic to the whole faculty was not relevant or user-friendly for individual teachers or their individual teaching situations. They wanted in-class support from reading experts. They wanted reading team members to model strategic reading practices in their classroom with their students, they wanted feedback and support while attempting new teaching practices, and they wanted time to plan and team-teach with the reading team personnel. The classroom teachers were telling the reading team and the principal they wanted reading coaches in their classroom.

### **Rationale**

One way to achieve the recommended model of professional development is for a coach to mentor a teacher by working within the classroom to offer the teacher professional development and instructional support the moment it is needed. According to Fletcher (2000), mentoring can simultaneously empower and enhance practice and unblock ways to change by building self-esteem, confidence, and a readiness to engage in constructive interpersonal relations with a peer coach. Coaches model practices, talk with classroom teachers, participate in planning for individualized student instruction, and team-teach. The coach is available to work with the teacher in real teaching situations and can individualize coaching advice to a classroom teacher's unique situation.

Mentoring and coaching allow both professionals to grow as they engage in a series of learning that enriches practices. Mentoring is not done *to* an individual, it is done *with* them (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). It should involve adapting a strategy and developing awareness of what needs to be accomplished in the light of feedback and reflection (Tomlinson, 1998). Mentoring harnesses personal strengths through interpersonal strategies and awareness sessions between mentor and teacher. It can have a lasting effect on the mentor and the mentee, and it is a social constructivist endeavor that permeates the entire learning community (Clay, 1991, Darling-Hammond, 1998, Dole, 2004, Fletcher, 2000).

But whom should schools establish as a mentor or coach? Reading specialists/Reading Recovery teachers as reading coaches within classrooms provide professional development that "supports teachers in their daily work-planning, modeling, team-teaching, and providing feedback on completed lessons in collaboration with classroom teachers in the school" (Dole, 2004, p. 462). Using reading coaches as a professional development model is supported by numerous studies and is advocated in the professional development literature as being successful (see, for example, Dole, 2004;

Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Camilli & Wolfe, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000, Lyon & Chhabra, 2004; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000; Wilson & Daviss, 2004). Lyons and Pinnell (2001) suggest that the role of a reading coach be broad-based and on-going. They found that a system of interrelated components that include demonstrations, discussion, and in-class coaching make professional development usable and relevant for classroom teachers.

Although research discusses what makes a good reading coach, there are few studies that cite implementation results. Our primary school began using reading coaches as in-class professional development because teachers and administrators were frustrated by students' slow progress. We believed change could be accelerated if we created a mentor program in which more experienced reading specialists could coach and mentor teachers as they took on new learning. Our goal was a self-regulated teacher that monitors and reflects on her own progress and is active within a community of learning established in throughout the school.

To achieve this goal, professional development must 1) be directed in the classroom; 2) offer teachers practical ways to improve their instructional practices for increased student achievement; 3) incorporate the views of other teachers, students, and administrators; and 4) increase teachers' sense of professionalism. These improvements will help teachers view professional development positively, which in turn will also increase its effectiveness.

## **Methodology**

### **Our Model Structure**

As a response to the problem, during a year of faculty meetings and team meetings, we formed an administrative team composed of reading specialists, a lead teacher, and the principal. This team started by researching professional development models about the positive impact of reading coaches. We met weekly at first, reviewing assessment data, discussing notes taken at grade level meetings, reviewing teacher surveys about professional development concerns, and discussing how we could use all the data to improve student progress through improved teaching environments.

After reviewing research studies regarding the success of reading coaches and of continuous professional development that used coaches long term, visits to schools that used reading coaches, and discussions with faculty at meetings, the school faculty and administration agreed that using reading coaches in the classroom was a natural extension of the Title I in-class model already in place. We were focused on student achievement and lasting improvement in teaching practices as we decided to begin a half-year pilot using reading coaches in two regular education classrooms. Also because our school was fully implemented for Reading Recovery, two of our Reading Recovery teachers could use half their day to perform coaching duties.

By researching various models of professional development, such as the U. S. Department of Education study (2000), I found that instant feedback is most beneficial to teachers. Also, Diaz-Maggiloli(2004) and Scabs (1999) found that teacher behaviors are profoundly affected by the focus of their peers and the culture of the school; thus, having professional development that increases teacher skill while working with the goal of increased student achievement for the entire student body correlates well with published

research findings. In addition to being concerned about what kinds of impact the research studies had on the school and learning in the classroom, Clay (1993) and Fountas and Pinell (2001) found reading coaches and those that offer in-class coaching programs must receive quality professional development that is on-going and focuses on improving coaching skills as well as teaching skills.

As teacher leader, I was able to provide the quality of support and professional development training needed for the reading coaches. Coaches were able to refine their theory of learning and be “actively involved in a social construction of knowledge” (Lyons, 2003, p. 168). The realization that coaches needed professional development was a consideration that went hand in hand with the professional development the reading team was already receiving. Professional development for the coaches was one area that would not cause any problems or additional planning because it was already in place.

The classroom teachers, reading team members, and the administrative team wanted to provide a uniform set of literacy strategies for all students regardless of their achievement level. The team decided to make use of the stratified ability grouping already in place. This type of grouping would allow the reading specialists/Reading Recovery teachers to reach the low-achieving students by going into three classrooms. Because all classroom groups were required to group students into guided reading groups, the reading team members quickly identified weak areas of instruction and were able to plan coaching that targeted teacher strengths and weaknesses.

The primary responsibility of the coaches was to model effective reading instruction. A secondary responsibility was to provide constructive feedback and offer instructional support as the classroom teacher began teaching guided reading groups and literacy centers. The final classroom responsibility was to team-teach to provide a flexible scaffold that assists teachers in mastering new instructional competencies.

As the teacher leader, I mentored and guided reading coaches as they observed teachers. I offered practical learning theory on adult learners and offered feedback after observing the reading coach working with classroom teachers. I met with the reading coaches informally to discuss their work in the classrooms and share instructional practices and concerns. The reading coaches also took advantage of informal opportunities such as lunch time to discuss their work with classroom teachers. Formal reading team meetings occurred bi-weekly, which included the principal of the school and a look at individual student progress. Reading coaches were given opportunities to share concerns and develop instructional plans with assistance from the principal and teacher leader. Coaches dialoged their successes and concerns with the reading team and with classroom teachers. The sharing of successes and concerns and seeking input from members of the reading team and other staff members encouraged cohesiveness and collaboration between members of the support staff and classroom teachers. Resource personnel and reading teachers were not seen as those teachers that teach reading “down the hall.” Instead, teachers worked together in a cycle of questions that promoted deep team learning, and this learning led to student achievement (Dufour, 2004).

Our primary school was a perfect place to try an in-class professional development model because we already had an in-class Title I program set up and had three specially trained reading teachers available to work with teachers. Classroom teachers already had a positive relationship built with the reading teachers and were asking for additional help from them in their classrooms during reading instruction. The

first grade teachers at our school were very influential in the decision-making and selection of a reading coach program for professional development.

The size of the school, only primary grades, was a good reason for selecting a reading coach model because guided reading was already being used in the classroom, so materials were readily available and teachers already understood and practiced strategic reading instruction and assessment. The classroom teachers came and observed many individual tutoring sessions held by the reading specialists and were very enthusiastic about using the instructional methods they observed. The first grade teachers wanted their whole class of students, no matter the level of achievement, to receive the quality literacy instruction they observed during the reading specialists' individual tutoring sessions.

Another good reason to run this study at this primary school was because the school was already identified as a school that did not produce third grade students that made adequate yearly progress (AYP) when tested during their third grade year for the No Child Left Behind mandates of achievement. Our primary school serves grades kindergarten through second, but our instruction is evaluated by student performance on a standardized Standards of Learning test administered in third grade.

Coaches were chosen from the existing staff of reading specialists. There were three Title I reading teachers with a Master's degree in reading, one Title I teacher trained and experienced in tutoring one-on-one who currently had an established working relationship with classroom teachers and students, and myself, a reading specialist trained as a teacher leader. All members of the reading team had worked with the students and teachers at our school for more than two years and had established positive working relationships with classroom teachers through professional development presentations, in-class modeling, tutoring of students, and sharing of materials and teaching methods.

In addition to being Title I reading specialists, the reading teachers were trained in Reading Recovery. The teachers chosen as coaches were already working with small groups of students within the targeted classrooms. In addition, the two Title I/Reading Recovery teachers had flexible schedules which enabled them to work with teachers in classrooms, have time for planning with classroom teachers, and attend their professional development meetings. Further considerations for selecting the two Title I/Reading Recovery teachers as coaches were their advanced training; they were already involved in on-going professional development directed at literacy instruction, they had an established positive relationship with the classroom teachers, the students knew them and had worked with one of them in kindergarten, and they were interested and excited about the coaching model.

### **Choosing the Coaches**

The reading specialists chosen for coaches held advanced graduate degrees in reading and received specialized training in the assessment and the instructional cycle needed to develop lessons for low-achieving students. In addition, the reading coaches are certified Reading Recovery teachers. All reading teachers meet requirements established under Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) 2000 federal guidelines defining highly qualified reading teachers. The focus under the new ESEA means instruction in the classroom is considered of foremost importance (Dole, 2004). Reading instructional strategies used to teach reading must be "scientifically based and be based on programs shown to be effective though (a) the use of rigorous, systemic

and empirical methods; (b) adequate data analysis; (c) reliance on measurements that provide valid data across evaluators and observations; and (d) acceptance in peer-referred journals” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) and *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Effective and efficient assessment techniques that guide instruction and enable the monitoring of student progress are other critical features of ESEA 2000.

Our primary school housed six first grade classrooms. Each class had average of 16 students in each class. Each class was grouped according to their reading level as established by a standardized reading assessment. The classes were mostly Caucasian, middle-class students. The classes were monocultural in nature with only one African American child and one Asian child. One of the classes only had two girls with the remainder being boys, but the other classes were populated evenly with both boys and girls (allowing for student attrition during the school year).

Two classes had two or fewer students that did not reach the benchmark established by our school division. Four classes had an average of seven students that did not meet the benchmark. The four classes with the larger number of students not meeting the benchmark included 18 students that were reading or performing at levels considered below level for first grade at this school.

Table 1.1 gives student reading levels before the study intervention

**Students that Didn't Meet the Benchmark  
Before the Intervention**

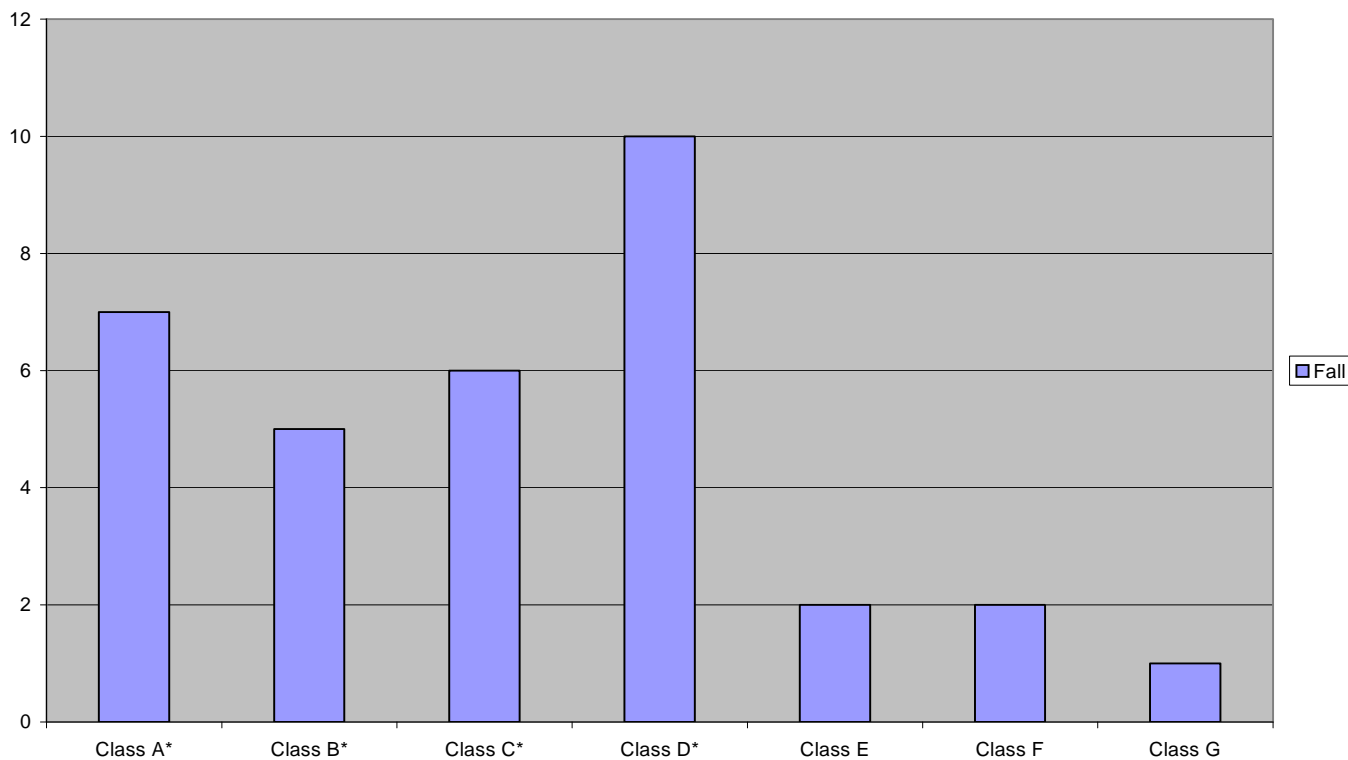


Table 1.1: Reading Levels (0= Readiness or before Pre-Primer in grade 1)

Selection of first grade classroom groups began in the spring of the kindergarten year. Students were placed in groups according to scores from the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), instructional text reading level, and teacher recommendations. Children were selected and placed in classrooms by kindergarten teachers, reading specialists, and the principal. The support teachers and guidance counselor later scrutinized the groups and made suggestions. The principal and guidance counselor matched student groups with teachers to form the classroom assignments. Children with a low text-level reading score, low letter recognition, low sound-to-letter matching, low oral language skills, or a demonstrated lack of one-to-one correspondence with text were referred for further assessment.

Instructional reading levels were determined by running records of oral reading throughout the school year. Two times during each marking period, student scores were collected. Reading specialists and administrators were able to identify students in need of further interventions and classrooms where instruction was not having the desired student outcomes.

### **Match the Coach with the Team**

Reading coaches worked in classrooms where students with the lowest scores on assessments were placed. Reading coaches and selected teachers had histories of positive



working relationships. Reading Recovery students for both rounds of tutoring were members of the classes chosen to work with the reading coaches and Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers already had established communication lines and a firm base for professional discussions regarding teaching practices. Teachers and coaches were comfortable discussing teaching practices and working in the same class with students, and both teachers and coaches were able to observe one another's teaching and discuss concerns freely and easily. The coaches were not thought of as evaluators.

We focused on the following questions as we went about implementing in-class mentoring: What makes an effective reading coach? How do coaches spend their time in the classroom? How much demonstration teaching versus team teaching, direct observation, and giving feedback should coaches do? What training do reading coaches need? What are the leadership requirements for implementing reading coaches as professional development? What evidence will be collected to assure the reading coach is making a positive impact on teachers and student achievement?

Coaches spent an hour in classrooms a minimum of three times per week. Initially coaches spent a large percentage of time on modeling good instructional techniques and strategic prompting. For example, a coach modeling how to prompt students for active problem solving instead of inducing a child to "get the right word" used prompts such as:

- Read that text again and think about what word would make sense with the story.
- What word could you use that would sound correct with our language?
- Use a word that looks close to the word you see in the text.

Students were placed in levels according to the system developed by Fountas and Pinnell (1996, 1999) and the Reading Recovery book leveling guide of 2003. Levels A-H correspond with kindergarten through the beginning of grade two in the Fountas and Pinnell hierarchy. Levels 1-20 correspond to grade one in Reading Recovery. Classroom teachers were familiar with the leveled texts from Fountas and Pinnell and used these books in their classroom libraries.

In addition to attention to the group of students and use of the basal, the school adopted the use of book baskets. The book baskets contained books at the independent reading level, and the served as a resource to ensure each student had plenty of opportunity to practice strategic reading skills.

Selection of reading material became critical for students to continue to feel they were able readers. Basal readers were available and are the division-suggested instructional reading materials. Most children were able to read leveled texts in addition to the basal and trade books that were also available in the classroom. A book room stocked with leveled books from Wright Group and Rigby was readily accessible to all teachers. The core reading materials became a mixture of basal readers along with books used in small group intervention. Students had leveled books that could be used for re-reading, guided instruction, and independent reading requirements. These books provided picture support for text and complete stories which could be read in a relatively short time span. Leveled texts were also used to increase phrasing and fluency in reading. Strategic reading skills taught using leveled texts were linked to reading done in the basal texts.

Important to the project was a half-day in-service session for each grade level in the school on how to identify characteristics of leveled books and how to match skills with text gradients. Each teacher was given sets of books to place into levels under the guidance of a reading specialist using the Fountas and Pinnell list of characteristics.

### **Results**

The use of running records, leveled books, and guided reading instructional strategies are the accepted approach to reading instruction throughout the school division. Because of the acceptance of guided reading instructional practices and teaching strategies, the meshing of the school reading instruction initiative and Reading Recovery teaching practices was an easily accomplished task. The selected coaches were already accepted and regarded as excellent reading teachers, so having the classroom teachers, administration, and other staff accept them as reading coaches was not an unrealistic goal.

Running records are accepted assessment measures and are used to gather data every marking period at our school. The district reading administrative personnel found worth in running record assessments and mandated that students in all schools use running records as one measure of student success. Running records analysis was used to place students in leveled books used for guided reading. The format and use of leveled books for classroom reading instruction and the format of Reading Recovery lessons are compatible for mentoring situations because they use the same basic instructional format and use the same teacher prompts. The instructional strategies used in the individual tutoring sessions of Reading Recovery and the guided reading strategies for small groups of students are identical. Reading coaches were able to concentrate on coaching teachers on the nuances of instructional practices such as quality book introductions with small groups of children, not on why a book introduction should be a part of their lesson. Coaches worked with individual teachers on how to match books to individual student needs, not on why leveled books and trade books are more authentic reading material than the basal. The coaches worked with teachers on how to use the basal reader as one source of reading material instead of as the only source of reading material. Coaches did not have to spend time teaching the why behind including writing in the curriculum but could instead spend time coaching teachers about the importance of teaching for the reciprocity of reading and writing.

There is not one set of coaching strategies that are guarantee to work with every student, but we found the types of coaching strategies that resulted in our students' success were using the easiest, most memorable, examples of errors, prompting to the error, using concrete examples designed to give students immediate success, and always building from "known to new." A typical coaching session would include a planning discussion, modeling of instruction or the coach observing a lesson, then a discussion of the lesson (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1** Coaching Sessions Components

<b>Objective and Activity</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Objective: Use of magnetic letters important for at-risk learners. Demonstrate principal of changing word beginnings to create analogies. Use of analogies in writing continuous text.	Classroom teacher expresses need for at-risk students to understand word work principal of changing initial parts to generate new word and use as an analogy to problem solve when writing anew work with the same spelling pattern..
Coach models use of magnetic letters. Teacher observes lesson. Coach demonstrates how to change the “first part” of the word for students. Students given letters and begin to generate new words from the pattern given. Coach instructs students to make a new word that works like the know word they have. Coach asks students to write one sentence stories using new words created from analogy. Coach asks students to write one sentence story with a new word they could make using spelling principal. Coach supplies magnetic letters for future classroom.	Student demonstrated ease of manipulating letters and generating words. One student demonstrated reversals of letters (teacher didn’t know this confusion). In writing students able to use magnetic letters to form needed word quickly and effectively. Teacher very impressed with skill level. Students able to use known words to get to new words that were not demonstrated without prompting.
After the lesson coach and teacher discuss lesson and implications for further teaching or learning. Coach and teacher discuss the next lesson when teacher will be the instructor and coach will observe.	Teacher very impressed with how easily students understood word principle and applied it to their writing. Teacher commented she didn’t realize a concrete model such as magnetic letters would allow such ease of student learning. Teacher impressed that students applied the principal to words not discussed in the lesson.

As clearly shown by the table (Fig. 1) on the next page, student achievement soared. In classes with reading coaches, only three of the eighteen students did not meet the PALS benchmark in spring 2003. It can be clearly seen students in class A, B, and C five students reached the benchmark with only a few months of this intervention. Classes A, B, C, and F made strides that improved reading and spelling skills. Reading levels in those classes improved as well. Most of the students gained a full year’s improvement for nine months of schooling.

Figure 1

	Targeted classes in bold* type	
	Fall 2002 Did not reach PALS Benchmark (39)	Spring 2003 Did not reach PALS Benchmark (39)
Class A*	7 N= 16	2 N= 16
Class B*	5 N=16	0 N= 16
Class C*	6 N=15	1 N= 17
Class D*	10 N=13	10 N=10
Class E	2 N=17	2 N=17
Class F	2 N=15	0 N=15
Class G	1 N=17	1 N=17

NOTE: PALS scores for students in Class D (special education resource) are included within their first grade class assignment above.

Reading levels dramatically increased as well (see Fig. 2). Students increased a full year (12 months' worth) of reading growth within the short span of time we were involved in the study. In a two-month time span, student achievement increased dramatically and classroom teachers told reading coaches that the way they were learning to teach was practical and immediate. They said that they could now offer the kind of instruction their students needed, right when students most needed the intervention. A few quotes are:

The coach and I discussed how to help with difficult to teach

children, and actually found some easy ways to change my current

instruction. It was easy to make the new changes.”

“The coach is able to provide expert insights during real teaching situations.”

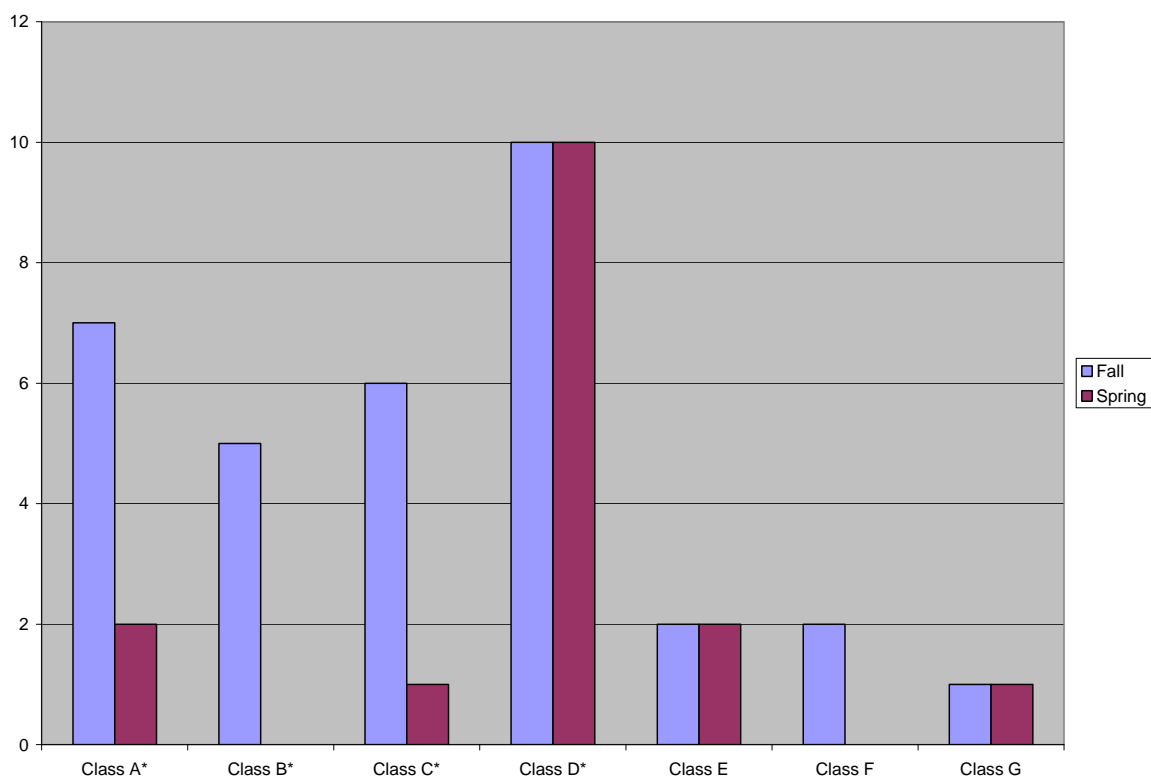
The teachers also told coaches they valued the immediate feedback so they could correct or continue their instruction in effective ways. Teachers and coaches discussed how smoothly students were

transiting from being passive to active learners. Classroom teachers mused about the same qualities in their teaching. One teacher said,

“Because I am concerned with the easiest, clearest, and most memorable place to teach and am concentrating on the positive aspects of what my students know, I feel the coaching has clarified my thinking and what I have learned allows me to tailor assistance to help me teach my children in a better way.” Another said, “Having a coach to give me instant feedback, even if it is only during reading time, is applicable to lessons I am teaching all through the day.”

One teacher said “the instructional day flew by because I was so involved with my students’ learning and not on planning ways to get through content.”

**Students that Didn't Meet the Benchmark  
Fall 2002/Spring 2003**



Only seven students performed at a below-average level in the three classes, and only three of the students in the three targeted classes did not achieve a passing score in a word inventory assessment on PALS. Students clearly demonstrated proficiency with text and an ability to apply various reading and writing strategies, indicating that a self-extending system for learning had been achieved.

Teachers who had said “I need to see how it looks” were now saying “I can use magnetic letters to teach spelling patterns as well as provide a mental model to students who need to learn how to learn.” During one observation and group work with magnetic letters, a classroom teacher jumped in and took over the lesson from the reading coach. She said she got so excited, she could not hold back. This is exactly the kind of enthusiasm and excitement that was the goal for the reading coaches.

Further results from written comments on an evaluation and through anecdotal records taken by the teacher leader and administrator included the following: Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers already had established communication lines and a firm base for professional discussions regarding teaching. One practices classroom teachers said, “I couldn’t have learned how to teach all the strategies without having a coach right there to show me.” Another classroom teacher registered for additional classes in strategic literacy instruction and reorganized her room to accommodate independent reading. This teacher also included a new writing center to establish a clear link between reading and writing “just like my coach showed me how,” she said. Some written comments on a post study evaluation included the following comments:

- Having feedback and modeling improved my overall teaching.
- I can use what the coach and I learned in every part of my instruction.
- I didn’t know how easy teaching reading could be or how much fun!

Even though the reading coaches did not work with teachers for the entire school year, the classroom teachers’ theoretical knowledge and skills for reading and writing did dramatically grow. Coaches and teachers developed a repertoire of problem-solving strategies. Teachers had a tool belt of teaching strategies that included; prompts to activate student learning, magnetic letter knowledge to show as well as tell a student spelling stages, use of writing and reading reciprocity throughout teaching, a firm definition of what a self-extending reader looks like in the classroom, lots of books and teaching materials close at hand, and most importantly a refined ability to observe a student’s thinking during literacy instruction and learning. The reading coaches were considered trusted guides, not evaluators, which led to professional discourse for problem solving and began the involvement of all the teachers in the grade level, increasing the interest of all teachers in the building.

### **Conclusions**

The results suggest that immediate feedback for learners, in this case teachers, is crucial. Some tenets to learning are applicable to this study: (a) theory is learned in coordination with practice; (b) learning is a social process that needs many opportunities for dialogue; (c) teacher learning is supported by a knowledgeable reading coach who nurtures and scaffolds; (d) and over time, teachers in the classroom assume the responsibility for instruction that was co-constructed with the reading coach (Forbes and Briggs, 2006). Planning and implementing opportunities to teach in tandem, as this study offers, show that student achievement is positively impacted when classroom teachers

apply effective instructional tools. Using reading coaches along with a more traditional style of teaching literacy works hand in hand and compliments one style of instruction with another. Even if a teacher is not willing to have a coach in her room fulltime, just having dialog opportunities and working with peers will increase instructional techniques. For example, one classroom teacher in our study worked with a classroom teacher not included in the study, and they became team teachers. The teacher involved with the coach was able to work cooperatively with the teacher without the coach and group students from both classes into groups that better met student needs. Both teachers benefited from having a coaching situation and dialoging about theories of learning and teaching. Our reading coaches coordinated their efforts to focus on classrooms that included students that did not meet the benchmark at the time of the study intervention, but the knowledge and information learned in those classroom was not contained within the targeted room's walls. Teachers discussed, observed, and questioned what was going on with the coaching and learned from each other daily and throughout the length of the study. In the few months of our study, classroom teachers were refining and extending their knowledge about teaching low-achieving students for themselves as well as with their peers.

Because coaching is not a training model that is from a traditional background, there will be challenges and tensions to be acknowledged and negotiated over time. The principal and teacher leader are critical in planning with coaches and classroom teachers. By collectively constructing chains of reasoning while observing, analyzing, and discussing student-teacher interactions in progress, classroom teachers can develop a more comprehensive theory of learning and teaching (Lyons, 1994). Lyons and the results of this study suggest that social construction of teaching and learning methods can be done at any school with any student. All students and teachers come to school with the ability to communicate with other humans. The key is to combine experience of expert others with actual teaching situations and articulate understandings of student learning and achievement.

The results of this study lead to the next logical step: increased dialog among classroom teachers and support personnel, providing numerous leveled books to students so they will be able to read and learn at the appropriate level, and provide a knowledgeable coach to provide valuable dialog and feed back to classroom teachers during instructional time with students. Utilizing highly trained reading specialists already present in most school buildings is a way to implement professional development, utilizing reading coaches can happen almost immediately.

A reading teacher is not as effective if he/she is down the hall teaching without communicating with the classroom teacher. A reading teacher in the classroom sharing expertise, helping a classroom teacher develop tools of instruction and application, and providing feedback that encourages instructional decisions and actions based on observations and interpretation of a child's literacy performance can be achieved in any teaching situation. More action research on providing activity settings with ample opportunities for coaching that refines a classroom teacher's theory of literacy and learning are clearly worth the effort if accelerated and lasting student achievement is the goal.

Working with the teachers and students to increase reading achievement worked extremely well. We were not able to see the results of our intense work on the third grade

assessment until the year 2005 test results were made public. We were happy to see that the positive growth and amazing achievement the teachers and students made in our short study were realized in the test scores that the students earned in the years beyond our intervention. As of the 2005-2006 school year, our primary school students are making the correct adequate yearly progress as measured by Virginia's Standards of Learning test for third and fifth graders.



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