

Coaching on Borrowed Time: Balancing the Roles of the Literacy Professional

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Four reading professionals share strategies for balancing the many roles, specifically those of literacy coach and reading interventionist, that fall under the title of specialized literacy professional in a school.

It is 7:30 a.m. on a Tuesday. Teachers do not have to be on campus for another 30 minutes, but a second-grade teacher and Alida (second author), the school's reading specialist, have a weekly meeting scheduled from 7:45 a.m. to 8:10 a.m. every Tuesday. Alida grabs her coffee, computer, and the handouts on guided reading that she plans to share with the teacher during their coaching conversation, and she heads down the hallway toward the teacher's classroom. After a brief but productive coaching meeting, Alida switches roles from literacy coach to reading interventionist to serve a small group of third-grade students identified as having dyslexia. Following this, she again puts on her coaching hat and meets with a first-grade teacher to assist in implementing a new word study program in her classroom. Immediately after working alongside this teacher, Alida retrieves a small group of first-grade students for intensive Tier 3 reading intervention. Next, she switches roles once again to assess a second-grade student for characteristics of dyslexia and compile the results so they can be shared with the campus 504 committee later in the week. Her morning ends in a meeting with the third-grade team of English language arts teachers. They work together to analyze a recent district assessment to plan for future instruction and reteaching.

Most of Alida's days follow a similar schedule of bouncing back and forth between the roles of literacy coach and reading interventionist. Lini (third author) and Alison (fourth author), who also served as their respective schools' reading specialists, agree that their role required them to assume various positions: not only coach and interventionist but also facilitator of professional learning communities, collaborator in grade-level curriculum planning meetings, trainer for campus professional development, and provider of numerous literacy-based

assessments. This hybrid role of interventionist and coach is not for the faint of heart. The successful balance demands careful planning, thoughtful time management, and a lot of flexibility.

A literacy coach, as defined by Toll (2014), is someone who "partners with teachers for job-embedded professional learning that enhances teachers' reflection on students, the curriculum, and pedagogy for the purpose of more effective decision making" (p. 10). Unlike other professional development models, literacy coaching, and thus the one-to-one conversations that occur between the classroom teacher and the literacy coach, meet the teacher where they are to move them forward in their literacy practices (Eisenberg, 2016; Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Shoniker, 2011; Toll, 2017). Through coaching conversations, teachers are encouraged to think deeply about their students, reflect on their classroom practices, and take ownership of problem solving for issues that arise in their literacy block.

Whereas literacy coaches primarily work with teachers, reading specialists largely work directly with students. According to the International Literacy Association (ILA; 2015), a reading specialist

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is an experienced educator with a strong background in literacy who provides instruction to struggling readers and promotes the literacy performance of a school. The main responsibility of most reading specialists is to provide intervention to small groups of struggling readers throughout the day. Helf and Cooke (2011) found that 66% of reading specialists spent 75% or more of their day delivering reading intervention to students. As reflected in the new 2017 ILA Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals, the roles that may be performed by a specialized literacy professional (SLP) have been differentiated and standards written for each (Kern et al., 2018). These roles fall under the “overarching or umbrella term Specialized Literacy Professional” (p. 4). Earlier sources have also pointed out that campus literacy personnel often serve in hybrid roles (Bean et al., 2015; Blachowicz et al., 2010; Hudson & Pletcher, 2016; ILA, 2015).

The problem arises because the role of the reading specialist is ever changing, placing higher and higher demands on individuals who hold this title. In many schools today, SLPs are expected to not only provide intervention to students but also coach classroom teachers on best practices for literacy instruction (Bean et al., 2015; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). Literacy professionals in this blended role of reading specialist and coach often stated that there was simply not enough time in the day to effectively manage both positions (Hudson & Pletcher, 2016). Because of this, Galloway and Lesaux (2014) warned against literacy professionals taking on too many roles. Between student intervention groups, 504 meetings, coaching conversations, model lessons, and other duties (e.g., lunch duty, car/bus duty, planning family literacy events), SLPs are stretched thin; yet, some studies have shown that the dual role of reading specialist and literacy coach has contributed to the success of a school’s literacy program (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). Furthermore, Puig and Froelich (2007) believed that “if the literacy coach is to become an effective coach, he or she must teach and interact with students on a daily basis” (p. 46). The ILA’s recent publication of the 2017 Standards for the Preparation of Literacy

Professionals is an indication of the many facets of these kinds of positions within schools and school districts.

Therefore, it can be quite difficult to manage such a position. Without realizing it, SLPs can easily find themselves neglecting one role to complete the expectations for the other. As Galloway and Lesaux (2014) stated, “Successfully managing these roles demands consistent reflection on instructional practice and a continued interest in developing expertise” (p. 523). Because of this, two of the authors here conducted a yearlong study on literacy coaching that explored the ways in which coaches navigate coaching conversations with teachers (Pletcher, Hudson, & Watson, 2018). What emerged from that study was the matter of effectively fulfilling the role of reading specialist while also refining coaching skills. This article serves to share these ideas and strategies (see Figure 1).

PAUSE AND PONDER

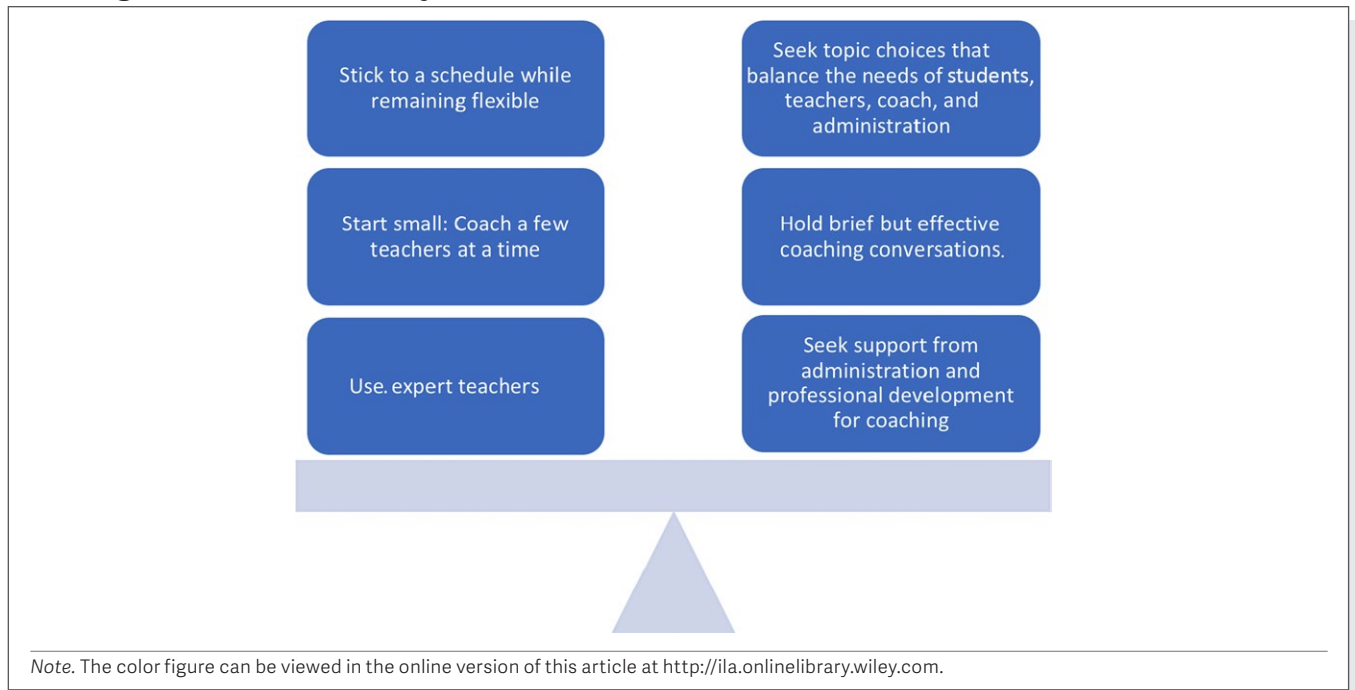
- If you serve in dual roles, what gets in the way of spending time coaching teachers?
- What supports do you need to juggle the multiple roles of a SLP?
- Which teachers on your campus might welcome individual coaching, and how might you approach them to get started?
- How will you plan to negotiate your ideas of what needs to be addressed in your school with teachers’ and administrators’ needs?

Stick to a Schedule While Remaining Flexible

Serving in a hybrid position of reading interventionist and literacy coach can be hectic. It is essential to develop a schedule that allows SLPs to best meet the needs of both teachers and students being served through intervention. Additionally, time must be set aside for assigned duties, paperwork, and assessment administration. Developing and adhering to a schedule helps SLPs prioritize and balance all of their responsibilities (National Reading Technical Assistance Center, 2010; Puig & Froelich, 2007) and “make the best use of [their] time” (Frost, Buhle, & Blachowicz, 2009, p. 18). Although a consistent schedule is key to developing purposeful work with teachers, SLPs must remain flexible as assigned tasks may change throughout the year (Bean & Kern, 2018; L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010).

Alida learned these things during her first year serving in a hybrid role. She attempted to schedule intervention groups, modeled lessons, and coaching conversations back-to-back every single day. Her schedule was so jammed that she found herself sprinting from one end of the building to the next, trying to get to where she needed to be by a

Figure 1
Balancing the Roles of the Literacy Professional



certain time. Although she had good intentions, this schedule was flawed for several reasons. First, Alida was exhausted both mentally and physically. Second, she never felt fully prepared for anything because she was inadvertently rushing through everything and trying to juggle too much at once. About halfway through the year, she realized that she needed to take a step back, and she began to reflect on ways to make the hybrid role of interventionist and coach more manageable. This concurs with the findings of Stephens et al. (2011), who determined that working with too many teachers at one time hinders the support that the coach is able to provide each teacher.

This is one of the factors that led Alida to her decision to focus on only three teachers at a time (discussed in a subsequent section). Furthermore, she looked at her schedule across one week and realized that scheduling time with teachers can be tricky. First, Alida plugged in the set reading intervention times for each grade level, knowing that these times were nonnegotiable. Next, she examined the schedules of the three teachers she would coach. She found pockets of time in her schedule where she could set aside 20 to 30 minutes to be present in their classrooms each week. This could be for a

model lesson, observation, or coteaching; Alida and the teacher would decide on the facet of coaching work later. Knowing that teachers are more apt to be open and honest during conversations with an SLP rather than an administrator or consultant (Lapp, Fisher, Flood, & Frey, 2003), Alida acknowledged the importance of the coaching conversation in guiding change in teachers' practices and beliefs (Knight, 2011; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Stephens et al., 2011; Thomas, Bell, Spelman, & Briody, 2015). Therefore, she worked to find at least a 15-minute time period that she could devote to weekly conversations with each of the three teachers. These coaching conversations usually occurred in the mornings before students arrived. As Alida scheduled these coaching times, she thoughtfully examined her schedule to verify that she was not overdedicating herself. She reflected, "Do I have busy days? Yes, but I am also ensuring that I have time built in during the week for my own professional development and planning." She used this time to create intervention lesson plans, complete paperwork, plan for coaching conversations, and administer dyslexia and other literacy assessments as needed.

Although other teachers continued to seek out her assistance, Alida's schedule remained devoted

to the three focus teachers with whom she had chosen to work at the beginning of the year. Part of being an effective literacy coach is having an open-door policy and seizing every available moment with teachers (L’Allier et al., 2010). Thus, Alida fit in time to work with other teachers as she was able. This usually meant conversations while walking together in the hallway, brief phone calls or even text messages before or after school, lengthy email exchanges, or discussions in the teachers’ lounge over lunch. Occasionally, if the teacher requested it, she squeezed in a modeled lesson in the classroom between intervention groups, although this was sometimes at the loss of part of her conference period. See Figure 2 for Alida’s schedule.

Figure 2
Alida’s Schedule

7:30–8:00	Coaching conversation with classroom teacher (before school hours)
8:10–8:40	Morning duty (bus, hallway, car rider, etc.)
8:50–9:20	Third-grade dyslexia intervention
9:30–10:00	Classroom coaching (modeling lesson, observing teachers, coteaching)
10:00–10:30	First-grade Tier 3 reading intervention group
10:30–11:00	Kindergarten Tier 3 reading intervention group
11:10–11:40	Classroom coaching (Tuesday/Wednesday only); conference period or administration of dyslexia assessments as needed (Monday/Thursday/Friday)
11:50–12:20	Fourth-grade dyslexia intervention
12:30–1:00	Lunch
1:00–1:25	Conference period or administration of dyslexia assessments as needed
1:25–1:55	Second-grade Tier 3 reading intervention group
2:00–2:30	Classroom coaching
2:40–3:10	Third-grade Tier 3 reading intervention group
3:20–3:50	Fourth-grade Tier 3 reading intervention group
3:50–4:10	Dismissal duty

Note. Campus 504 meetings, RTI meetings, and parent conferences are scheduled as needed.

Seek Topic Choices That Balance the Needs of Students, Teachers, SLPs, and Administrators

It is important to us as SLPs that we balance our professional development agenda with those of our teachers. Because we spend large amounts of time in teachers’ classrooms, both formally and informally, we take note of things that we would like to explore further with teachers and issues that may need attention. We are always storing these items away for future professional development sessions, possible grade-level planning topics, or one-to-one coaching conversation meeting topics. School and district administrators also offer ideas for literacy topics that will be the focus of these venues. Teachers are often the passive recipients of information that others feel is most appropriate for them at that time and receive very brief professional development sessions (Crafton & Kaiser, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010), or as Eisner (2017) referred to it, “sending [teachers] out every 6,000 miles to be ‘in-serviced’ by a stranger” (p. 319). However, offering teachers opportunities to choose what they want to study can be quite powerful, and they may be more vested in the process and may apply their learning more readily.

At the beginning of each school year, Lini sends out a balanced literacy components survey to her teachers as a Google Doc (see Figure 3). This survey serves several purposes, the first of which is to stress the importance of balanced literacy implementation in the classroom. Also, when teachers see a survey about this topic at the beginning of the year, they will most likely assume that it is a focus of the school! Lini also provides a description of each balanced literacy component on the survey so teachers who are not familiar with that component or need a refresher have something to which they can refer before responding to the item. Finally, teachers indicate on the survey their level of experience with each item: “No knowledge”; “I have a basic knowledge, but I’m struggling to implement it”; “I try to implement this knowledge and skill effectively”; or “I consistently implement and use this knowledge and skill effectively.” This helps Lini target each teacher’s zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and prioritize her work with each teacher, thus avoiding addressing the components with which teachers are already comfortable.

In mid-September, after teachers and students have a few weeks to settle into their classroom routines, Alison emails teachers a link to a Google Doc form that asks about instructional support (see

Figure 3
Balanced Literacy Components Survey

Please rate your understanding of the components of balanced literacy. Staff development will be planned based on the surveys. Thank you so much!

Word Work (Phonological/Phonemic Awareness)

- No knowledge
- I have a basic knowledge, but I'm struggling to implement it.
- I try to implement (2 or 3 times a week) this knowledge and skill effectively.
- I consistently implement (4 or 5 times a week) and use this knowledge and skill effectively.

Readers' Workshop: Read-Alouds

- No knowledge
- I have a basic knowledge, but I'm struggling to implement it.
- I try to implement (2 or 3 times a week) this knowledge and skill effectively.
- I consistently implement (4 or 5 times a week) and use this knowledge and skill effectively.

Readers' Workshop: Shared Reading

- No knowledge
- I have a basic knowledge, but I'm struggling to implement it.
- I try to implement (2 or 3 times a week) this knowledge and skill effectively.
- I consistently implement (4 or 5 times a week) and use this knowledge and skill effectively.

Readers' Workshop: Guided Reading

- No knowledge
- I have a basic knowledge, but I'm struggling to implement it.
- I try to implement (2 or 3 times a week) this knowledge and skill effectively.
- I consistently implement (4 or 5 times a week) and use this knowledge and skill effectively.

Readers' Workshop: Literacy Workstations

- No knowledge
- I have a basic knowledge, but I'm struggling to implement it.
- I try to implement (2 or 3 times a week) this knowledge and skill effectively.
- I consistently implement (4 or 5 times a week) and use this knowledge and skill effectively.

Readers' Workshop: Conferencing During Independent Reading

- No knowledge
- I have a basic knowledge, but I'm struggling to implement it.
- I try to implement (2 or 3 times a week) this knowledge and skill effectively.
- I consistently implement (4 or 5 times a week) and use this knowledge and skill effectively.

Writers' Workshop: Minilessons

- No knowledge
- I have a basic knowledge, but I'm struggling to implement it.
- I try to implement (2 or 3 times a week) this knowledge and skill effectively.
- I consistently implement (4 or 5 times a week) and use this knowledge and skill effectively.

Writers' Workshop: Conferencing

- No knowledge
- I have a basic knowledge, but I'm struggling to implement it.
- I try to implement (2 or 3 times a week) this knowledge and skill effectively.
- I consistently implement (4 or 5 times a week) and use this knowledge and skill effectively.

Figure 4). This creates a paper trail for both her and the teachers to keep their calendars organized. It also provides for Alison the details of what she will be doing while in their classrooms, as the teachers are prompted to be specific about the topic and perhaps the materials they would like Alison to use. Again, teachers see the items on this form and are immediately aware of their options for coaching and coteaching.

Another coach in the district uses a similar form, a "coaching menu" (see Figure 5) that lists more choices for the teacher than the instructional support form and could be a more helpful tool to use during the middle and end of the year. On this form, teachers are able to indicate the exact kinds of coaching support they want and areas on which they want to focus. It is worth noting that these surveys are

Figure 4
Instructional Support Form

1 Name: _____

2 Please choose what you would like me to do while I'm in your room.

- Model whole-group lesson
- Pull a small group
- Confer with students
- Other: _____

3 If you want me to teach a whole-group or small-group lesson, please give me more information about what to teach or about the group you'd like me to pull. If you want me to confer, let me know if this will be during readers' workshop or writers' workshop. If you chose other, please be specific.

Figure 5
Coaching Menu

I look forward to partnering with you to continue advancing student learning. The following menu lists ways that we might collaborate together.

Teacher Name: _____

Team Goal: _____

Individual Goal: _____

Days/Times: _____

Please choose the methods of collaboration and learning that work best for you.

- Coach teaches a strategy in class; teacher watches and gives feedback.
 - Teacher teaches a strategy in class; coach watches and gives feedback.
 - We coplan a lesson.
 - We coplan and coteach a lesson in your class.
 - Coach supports PLC progress.
 - We informally discuss topics of your choice and brainstorm next steps.
 - Coach offers short workshop opportunities.
 - Coach arranges for colleagues to observe one another or participate in instructional rounds.
 - We explore data together.
 - Coach assists teacher in developing/finding resources or research.
 - Teacher has practices to share; coach helps teacher develop a strategy to share with colleagues.
 - Other: _____
- _____

Choose any areas you would like to target.

- Assessment (formative/summative) grading
 - Any part of the balanced literacy structure: minilessons, independent work time, sharing
 - Resources
 - Lesson planning for the instructional framework
 - Professional learning (research info, instructional rounds, observing other teachers, etc.)
 - Reading instruction: strategies, teaching points, student-centered
 - Writing instruction: strategies, teaching points, student-centered
 - Small-group instruction (guided reading, strategy groups, group conferring)
 - Word work instruction
 - Curriculum support
 - Other: _____
- _____

self-reported and that the SLP is still advised to frequently observe classrooms for areas in which teachers are either under- or overestimating their abilities.

Start Small

During our first years serving in the hybrid role of reading specialist and literacy coach, each of us tried to take on way too much. We wanted to serve everyone equally and had similar strategies of setting a goal to work with at least one teacher in each grade level in our school once per week. Additionally, we wanted to provide support to every teacher in the grade level, so we varied the teachers that we worked with each week. Although we considered this a somewhat solid plan, it turned out to be a disaster. Wall and Palmer (2015) found that “overwhelming commitments and competition for teacher time often removed the chance for deep reflection” (p. 628). Although we had the best intentions, this schedule offered few meaningful coaching conversations with our classroom teachers. Therefore, neither classroom literacy practices nor student performance were being affected, let alone improved or enhanced. We knew there had to be a better solution. Thus began our journey of working alongside fellow literacy coaches to reflect on ways to solve this dilemma.

For example, during her second school year, Alida decided to focus on just three teachers. Allen (2016) has suggested this strategy of starting a coaching initiative with a small group of teachers; many literacy coaching articles (Jones & Rainville, 2014; L’Allier et al., 2010; Wall & Palmer, 2015) also call SLPs to engage with teachers and personalize their learning. Alida chose one first-year kindergarten teacher and two teachers who had teaching experience but were new to the campus and district. She established consistent weekly meetings with each teacher so she could create the space for coaching conversations. Furthermore, she and her teachers decided on a time each week when she would support them individually in their classrooms. The level of support varied from observing and modeling lessons to working with small groups of students in the classroom, depending on the teachers’ needs.

As the year progressed, the three teachers to whom Alida devoted her time evolved in their literacy practices. As she gradually released coaching one teacher, she would find a new candidate open to the coaching process, continuing to dedicate uninterrupted time for coaching conversations to only

three teachers at a time. For example, as Alida moved away from coaching the kindergarten teacher about halfway through the year, she began meeting with a fourth-grade teacher for weekly coaching conversations. This cycle allowed her to engage in meaningful coaching conversations with the three teachers with whom she was working at any given time.

Use Skilled Teachers

Knowles (1968), one of the fathers of adult learning, believed that “better learning takes place when you involve the learners in teaching each other” (p. 352). Based on this assumption, it is wise for literacy coaches to use especially skilled teachers of reading and writing on their campuses to assist in the coaching process. Allen (2016), who viewed the literacy coach as a secret weapon for cultivating teacher leaders, asserted, “We need more teachers working and talking together in buildings as leaders to get the work done” (p. 168). Nurturing expert teachers can be accomplished in a number of ways.

One method for capturing and using the knowledge of such teachers is to video record their teaching, with permission. This method has several purposes. First, this recording can be shared with others as a lesson example; it is difficult for literacy coaches to conduct and record a large number of model lessons in classrooms themselves. Second, the teacher being recorded will be empowered and will also most likely reflect on their teaching as a natural consequence of appearing on camera. Third, classroom teachers are usually more familiar with their own students than are their literacy coaches, which creates a more natural setting for the lesson.

Another method that coaches have successfully used is to provide classroom teachers with coverage of their classroom—from a paraprofessional, another staff member, or the coach—for a short period of time. During this time, classroom teachers can visit their colleagues to observe lessons and debrief afterward. In each of these scenarios, the SLP can use the lesson observations, whether live or video recorded, as an impetus for debriefing sessions.

Imperative to the success of a literacy coach, especially one serving in a hybrid role, is the understanding that this role is difficult to do alone. Although the one-to-one coaching conversation is a highly beneficial practice among coaches and teachers, overall school improvement will be limited if the knowledge and experience of expert classroom teachers is not harnessed

(Allen, 2016; Atteberry & Bryk, 2011). Pletcher (2012), a former literacy coach, told how she nurtured a classroom teacher's literacy leadership skills and, in turn, created waves of improved small-group guided reading teaching at one elementary school. Internal teacher leadership must be cultivated. This not only builds teacher capacity but also alleviates some of the demands of the SLP and empowers teachers.

Hold Brief but Effective Coaching Conversations

Because coaching has the potential to affect not only classroom practice but also student achievement (Bean et al., 2008; Toll, 2014), it is imperative that educators serving in a blended role of interventionist and coach find the time for individualized conversations with classroom teachers. After reflecting on our own coaching conversations with teachers, we concluded that a 12–15-minute conversation can be just as powerful as a 30-minute coaching conversation.

This awareness brought us relief when thinking about finding the time to schedule coaching conversations with teachers. Rather than setting aside an almost impossible 30- to 40-minute block of time or asking for a teacher's entire conference period, we realized that we could locate smaller time periods. Fifteen minutes also sounds much more appealing to busy teachers, whose planning times are already packed with other items.

One key to ensuring that short conversations are effective is to focus the discussion around a coaching point, an area in which the teacher wants to grow. Just as teachers strive to focus on one teaching point during a reading or writing conference with a student, Puig and Froelich (2007) suggested that coaches practice a similar technique with teachers. In a recent study that Bethanie (first author) and Alida conducted with literacy coaches, they found that the average coaching conversation was 12.5 minutes long (Pletcher et al., 2018). We also concluded that these coaching conversations were successful, as evidenced by immediate shifts in teachers' verbal and nonverbal actions and their responses to coaching during interviews.

Seek Support From Administration and Professional Development for Coaching

Critical to the success of the SLP is support from district and campus administrators. Principals and

other campus administrators should understand the purpose of SLPs and the many duties in which they engage. Steckel (2009) detailed key moves that two administrators made to enable successful coaching experiences for both the SLPs and teachers involved. Administrators need to help SLPs create a schedule that allows the SLP the flexibility to alternate between the roles of coach and reading teacher; time to engage in coaching conversations with teachers and time for developing themselves as coaches are both crucial aspects of the hybrid role. It is important to note that these critical supports may not have been as effective had the administration not been clear on the role of the SLP in their building. For this reason, SLPs are encouraged to formulate a job description with their administrator and revise it as needed to best match their given role on their campus. Frost et al. (2009) provided a comprehensive list of characteristics that might help SLPs and administration define the role by supporting literacy instruction through professional development and working directly with students. We realize that the amounts of time dedicated to each facet of the SLP role will vary from campus to campus, and Figure 6 includes a list of possible SLP role components.

Although an SLP might be a strong reading interventionist, they may lack the skills necessary to effectively coach classroom teachers. In this case, building

Figure 6
Sample of a Hybrid Literacy Professional Job Description

- Provide supplemental reading support with small groups of students.
- Administer reading assessments to students to support core and supplemental instruction/intervention.
- Meet regularly with individual teachers for coaching, including but not limited to modeled lessons, classroom observations, and coaching conversations.
- Engage with grade-level and/or content area groups of teachers for assistance with lesson planning and assessment analysis and/or to take part in professional learning community meetings.
- Present formal professional development sessions for school faculty.
- Engage teachers in informal professional development opportunities through discussions, book studies, and strategy studies.
- Set up a regular meeting time with administration to discuss goals for the campus, data analysis based on assessments, and your role in supporting teachers and students.

administrators might opt to transition the SLP back to the self-contained classroom. Although it is common for reading specialists to receive additional training on literacy practices and strategies for struggling readers, many professionals serving in a hybrid role have received little to no training on coaching strategies or the principles of working with adult learners (Bean et al., 2015). Researchers have suggested that coaches should receive professional development on discourse strategies used to promote critical thinking in teachers (Heineke, 2013; L’Allier et al., 2010). Because of this, SLPs, who may identify primarily as interventionists, need opportunities to participate in professional development on coaching. This can occur in several ways. For example, campus administration can provide funds for the coach to purchase professional texts on coaching or allow them to attend conferences that offer sessions on coaching. District personnel might host study groups of coaches across schools. Participation in these groups might include engaging in book studies or conducting peer observations

Coaches need, and deserve, to be coached themselves. SLPs, who are often viewed as literacy leaders, may benefit from continued support in the areas of adult learning, leadership skills, and the different coaching stances one can assume when working with teachers (Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Rainville & Jones, 2008). Some districts provide a coach or mentor for the coaches, a practice recommended by Bean and Kern (2018). These professionals meet frequently with new coaches, observe their coaching sessions with teachers, and engage in coaching conversations with the coach. Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, and Schock (2009) discussed the benefits of providing professional development for SLPs because it allows them to “refine their ability to facilitate coaching conversations with teachers at their sites” (p. 502). Alida, Lini, and Alison, SLPs who strongly agree with these practices, participated in a yearlong coaching cycle with Bethanie. During this time, the SLP video recorded two coaching conversations each with two classroom teachers. Reflecting on video recorded coaching conversations is a professional development activity that Gibson (2011) suggested is advantageous for developing successful coaching skills. Following each conversation, both the SLP and Bethanie, the coach, reviewed the video separately. The SLP reflected and took notes, and Bethanie took notes as well. Finally, the SLP and Bethanie met virtually to debrief the recorded coaching conversation. All of the SLPs believed that this “coaching of coaches” experience helped strengthen their coaching abilities.

Conclusion

Serving in the role of SLP can be overwhelming, especially because the SLP’s role varies from school to school (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007). Reflecting and acting on strategies of how to balance the role of reading interventionist and literacy coach successfully can be beneficial and can assist SLPs in creating an exciting, rewarding position in the school. Working with students for intensive reading intervention is a critical part of this role; however, we must not forget the potential power of literacy coaching on schoolwide literacy practices. Although these links have been difficult to show through research, Peterson et al. (2009) found that literacy coaching not only helped teachers improve their instructional practices but also increased student reading comprehension scores.

Those who find themselves serving as “leader, teacher, diagnostician, colleague, and change agent” (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014, p. 518) can make the role their own and develop a schedule that allots time to work with both students and teachers to enhance literacy learning across the campus. Flexibility, organization, and the study of coaching practices are key components of managing this hybrid role.

Although serving in a dual role can be challenging, SLPs in this position are fortunate. Having the

TAKE ACTION!

1. Review the new ILA standards for SLP preparation. How do those align with your role?
2. Locate other reading interventionists/coaches in your district and/or area and reach out to them to form a study and support group.
3. Reflect on your schedule to prioritize your responsibilities as an SLP and ensure that you are not overcommitting your time in any one area.
4. Schedule a meeting with administrators to discuss your role as an SLP and ways in which the administration can help facilitate a healthy balance between being a reading interventionist and being a literacy coach.
5. Develop a survey to determine the needs and/or wants of the teachers on your campus. Use the data compiled to guide coaching conversations and professional development activities with teachers.
6. Nurture skilled teachers’ leadership skills. Find ways to share teachers’ strengths with others in the building to cultivate building capacity.

opportunity to spend each day helping both students and teachers deepen their literacy knowledge reaps rewards found in no other role. Through thoughtful reflection and careful planning, SLPs who find themselves in the hybrid role of interventionist and literacy coach will be able to embrace the position and see the benefits of their work.

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