Center X Literacy Coaches: Evolving Role and Responsibilities

Nicole Gerardi

Occasional Report #25

SRM Evaluation Group
Marvin C. Alkin, Project Director

Graduate School of Education and Information Studies
University of California Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA 90025

Center X Literacy Coaches:
Evolving Role and Responsibilities

The SRM evaluation group work is a team effort directed by Professor Marvin C. Alkin.
This report reflects the effort of a number of team members.

Project Coordinator: Tarek Azzam
Interview Instrument Development: Tarek Azzam, Jenee Slocum, Nicole Gerardi
Data Collection: Tarek Azzam, Jenee Slocum, Nicole Gerardi
Data Transcription: Alexandra Coonce, Nicole Gerardi
Data Analysis: Nicole Gerardi
Report Writing: Nicole Gerardi
Report Editing: Alexandra Coonce, Nicole Gerardi

Center X Literacy Coaches:
Evolving Role and Responsibilities

Nicole Gerardi

With the changes in school reform and increasing accountability requirements, schools are looking for new ways to improve student performance and teaching practices (Schuch, 2004). In the past, schools have relied on teacher professional development workshops, lectures, and conferences led by experts in a particular field to provide new ideas and effective instructional techniques for the classroom. There were many problems with this approach to improving teacher effectiveness; mainly, the absence of follow up, and the lack of classroom support (Russo, 2004; Schuch, 2004). One of the ways schools are now addressing the needs of teacher development and improved student performance is through the use of literacy coaches.

According to the Oxford American College Dictionary (2002), literacy is defined as "(n.) the ability to read and write, competence or knowledge in a specified area," and coach is defined as "(n.) a tutor who gives private or specialized teaching." In this context, a literacy coach would be a person who tutors or trains someone, such as a teacher, in a specific content area in which the coach is competent. The coach then, is responsible for pushing the teacher to the next level in that particular area of expertise. An effective literacy coach supports teachers by encouraging them to become more knowledgeable about their instructional practices, as well as reflective and thoughtful about the impact of their teaching practices on students. Russo states that "coaches serve

as liaisons between research and practice, bringing the latest findings to where they are most needed—the classroom" (2004).

The concept of literacy coaches dates back to the 1920's and is rapidly gaining attention in the 21st century field of American education (Hall, 2004). What distinguishes literacy coaching from other types of teacher professional development, and what proves to be the most beneficial aspect of literacy coaching, is the *ongoing* professional development that is fostered with the teachers. Coaches are well versed in current instructional research, and work closely with teachers to raise student scores and improve student achievement. Coaches show teachers how and why certain pedagogical strategies substantially impact students and help them reflect on instructional practices (Guiney, 2001; Russo, 2004).

Furthermore, coaching is specifically designed with a particular school, teacher, and group of students in mind. Therefore, it is highly customized and individualized, with the opportunity to be most effective in addressing the learning needs of both students and teachers in a particular community (Guiney, 2001; Russo, 2004). In the era of high stakes testing, anything that offers increased accountability is welcomed into the school districts. Coaching, by its very nature, can provide instant accountability and feedback to teachers.

Although literacy coaches are increasingly in demand, there is no single standard definition of a literacy coach's role (Hall, 2004). There is much variation in who is called a literacy coach and what is labeled as coaching. The implementation of coaching varies from venue to venue, and therefore leaves much room for interpretation. Without explicit

standards guiding this type of work, coaches risk confusion in the field and the quality of coaching can be compromised.

In this paper, we will explore what it means to be a literacy coach working through UCLA's university based research center (Center X), in the urban schools of Los Angeles. Specifically, Center X is working with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), District 7.

Before delving into the perceptions and attitudes of the role and responsibilities of a literacy coach, as seen by coaches working in the field through Center X, it is vital to fully explore the relationship between Center X and the urban school district (District 7). This can help us to understand the vision that Center X and its employees are working towards achieving.

Center X

The first line that appears at the top of the homepage for Center X's website is a statement declaring the center to be a place "where research and practice intersect for urban school professionals." Hence the "X", symbolizing the stated intersection. Further reading of various pages and documents reveal that Center X provides intensive professional development, in partnership with various districts in the Los Angeles area. The professional development focuses on training in math, science, history, reading, literacy, and writing. In addition, the Center provides support for teachers coming out of the teacher education program, parents who wish to become more involved in the schools and community, and teachers who are working to become nationally board certified.

One of the Center's main objectives is to "demonstrate that schools and teaching for low-income, minority, or limited English proficient children can become rich, rigorous, socially just, and caring learning communities where all children learn extraordinarily well." One of the ways that the Center pursues this objective is by providing coaches who work with teachers to support and further training in the classroom. Currently, the Center is working with LAUSD District 7. There are over 30 Center coaches working with teachers on a daily and/or weekly basis within most district schools. In addition, the Center provides parent support, through the Parent Project, to help organize parents in an effort to increase involvement in their children's education.

These partnerships are established based upon a long term vision of creating systemic positive change in the schools and district. Each district meets with the Center to develop the methods and approaches to attain mutual objectives. The objectives typically focus on "strengthening curriculum, deepening teacher content knowledge, improving instructional strategies, understanding student learning and creating a college-going culture, which are all connected to improving opportunities for success in academic classes."

District 7

The schools that reside in District 7, formerly District I, represent an area with a majority Latino and African-American student population from low socio-economic status background (Census, 2003).

The former superintendent of District 7, Dr. Sylvia Rousseau, was hired by the LAUSD board to implement school reform in district schools. Dr. Rousseau's efforts focused on the philosophy outlined by Langer (1999) where the emphasis is on using

professional development to help teachers incorporate literacy instruction across the

content areas. Literacy is seen as the foundation on which all other content areas are built

(Langer, 1999). Langer argues that:

> Overall, higher performing schools seemed to focus on student's overall literacy learning, using the tests to be certain the skills and knowledge that are tested are related to and being learned within the framework of improved language arts instruction. They regarded tests as one of many literacy activities students needed to learn to do well, and believed that the underlying skills and knowledge needed to do well in the coursework, thus needed to be encompassed within the ongoing curriculum (p. 863).

To improve student performance, students must learn to not only read and repeat,

but also to comprehend and internalize what is being taught. This focus on literacy and

literacy strategies is the main push behind the District and Center X reform efforts.

Center X's role in this reform is to provide teacher professional development in

partnership with the district at the different school sites. To implement these reforms, the

Center needed to gain access to the schools and teachers, and, most importantly, to gain

the trust and buy-in from everyone involved. The visibility and Center X commitment

represented by he provision of literacy coaches is absolutely instrumental in making the

partnership goals between Center X and District 7 a reality.

The Case Study

In October of 2004, members of the Social Research Methodology (SRM)

Evaluation Group began interviewing literacy coaches that were working in District 7, on

behalf of Center X. Subsequently, some follow up interviews occurred. The conceptual

purpose of the interviews was to understand the coaches' perceptions and attitudes about

their role and responsibilities and to see changes as they gained more experience

throughout the course of the academic year. It was anticipated that the information

acquired would be of special interest to beginning coaches and perhaps to guide or inform current and future Center X coaches.

Since the study was designed to track the evolution of perceptions about roles as a literacy coach, seven coaches who specialize in science, social studies, mathematics and writing were identified. They were considered either "veteran," meaning they had been working in the program with Center X for at least one year (role had evolved), or "novice," meaning that they were just beginning their work (ranged between 1.5-2.5 months) (role un-evolved) with Center X. It should be noted that some of the coaches who were classified as novice had done similar work before in other districts and were not necessarily inexperienced as coaches in a general sense. Out of the seven coaches interviewed, three were classified as veteran and four were classified as novice. Throughout the paper, veteran coaches will be identified with a "V," followed by a number assigned to their interview. Likewise, novice coaches will be identified with an "N," followed by a number assigned to their interview. Secondary interviews will have "-2" following the original identifying characters. SRM Evaluation Group member Tarek Azzam conducted the interviews with the veteran coaches, and SRM Evaluation Group member Jenee Slocum conducted the interviews with the novice coaches. The interviews were subsequently transcribed and analyzed, comparing responses between veteran and novice coaches.

A year after the primary interviews were conducted in November of 2005, the novice literacy coaches were contacted for follow up interviews. Of the four initial novice Coaches, two were re-interviewed by SRM Evaluation Group member Nicole Gerardi. These interviews were especially informative for tracking changes in

perceptions and attitudes about the role and responsibilities of coaches. We were able to document the role evolution of a literacy coach and identify the two sequential stages they traverse through: 1) building rapport stage, and 2) building content literacy stage. The secondary interviews were also key in tracking changes that have occurred within Center X in the last year. Methods employed are summarized in Appendix 1, and the interview protocol is to be found in Appendix 2.

In general, it appears that the definition of the literacy coach role was somewhat ambiguous to novice coaches, while veteran coaches gave much more definitive answers regarding their roles. Novice coaches knew they were there to support teachers and address literacy, but found themselves spending most of their time building relationships and figuring out where their help was needed. They were spending more time acclimating to the school and to the needs of the staff rather than coaching. We will later address this issue, as we will see that part of the evolution of the role of coach includes a substantial amount of time in what we will call the "building rapport stage."

As could be expected, veteran coaches had built much stronger webs of interaction and support, and had more focused and explicative responses to what their role as a coach included. All literacy coaches understood that they were placed in schools to improve content literacy in their subject area by supporting teachers and helping create more effective instructional practices.

Who are the Coaches?- The literacy coaches, both veteran and novice, have a history rich with experiences working in education as principals, teachers, or mentors. Many of the coaches began teaching 10-25 years ago and remember not having a mentor or coach to guide them in their own practice. "When you are in the thick of [teaching]

9

you don't stop and reflect. I didn't have a coach. I never had a mentor. And, so this was

the perfect venue to start helping teachers who just got thrown into the fire" (V2).

Having worked in a school for a significant amount of years, many of the coaches

felt that it was "time to move on" from being in the classroom everyday with students

(N3), and saw coaching as a way to remain connected to the classroom and "keep close to

education" (N2). "It seemed like a natural fit to get back in the schools and work with

teachers" (N4). Likewise, all of the coaches made comments about having a passion for

helping children, helping teachers, and improving education. One veteran coach summed

it up well by saying it was the "social justice component" that she liked (V3).

Having already worked in schools for some length of time, the coaches were

equipped with information, activities, and techniques that have proven useful and

effective in the classroom. "I look at it as an opportunity to share my enthusiasm, my

expertise, my whatever. A lot of young teachers could use some tips from people who

have been around for a while" (N3).

In all cases, previous experiences provided the know-how to deal with difficult

issues and situations that arise in schools.   Coaches say that being able to share those

ideas with new teachers is gratifying and will hopefully impact the overarching goal of

improving literacy in the schools. "It's the one-on-one. The personal. The best time is

when I am in the classroom. I want to feel like I have a job where I am making a

difference, where I am valued" (V1).

*Role Evolution- F*rom our discussions with the literacy coaches, we gathered that

the role of a literacy coach was somewhat ambiguous, especially in the beginning months

on the job. One coach even said, "I've never seen a written definition of what a literacy

coach is, and I don't know if there is one. Is there a definition of what a literacy coach is?" (N3). Because literacy coaching is a multi-faceted job with many layers of complexity, it was often a bit confusing for beginning coaches to fully realize their place in the schools.

Some of the coaches elaborated at great lengths about how they go about their job and what they think to be the purpose of their job. Most believe their job is to support and help teachers improve their teaching practices, but realize they must first lay the groundwork of trust and communication before addressing the literacy component. In essence, there are stages in one's role as a literacy coach. We were able to identify two distinct stages of the role: 1) building rapport stage, and 2) building literacy stage. In the building rapport stage, coaches focus on establishing good trusting relations with both teachers and school administration. Coaches feel it is imperative that they dedicate the needed attention to establishing good relations before moving on to stage two. The second stage is the building literacy stage in which coaches shift their focus to training teachers in effective teaching practices. The coaches also differentiated parts of this second stage: working one-on-one with individual teachers, and working with groups of teachers leading professional development workshops.

Each coach that was interviewed provided a slightly different and enlightening perspective on the role and responsibilities of a coach. For this reason, we will look at each individual coach's response to how they perceive their role. By focusing on each coach separately, we can begin to understand the complexities of the role and responsibilities and the factors that contribute to their success. We will begin with the novice coach responses and move through the evolution to the veteran coach responses.

(It should be noted that one of the coaches (N4) did not respond to this line of questioning, and therefore, will not be included in the following excerpts.)

> (N1) "We really have to help teachers. Standards-based instruction is a new way, for many of them, of teaching. So, we have to help them understand standards-based instruction, but we also have to help them deal with the challenges they face right where they are. When I started, I really concentrated on traveling around the schools and introducing myself to as many teachers as possible, in a kind way, to let them know that I'm here, as your coach and I'm going to support you. … Then I moved from there to setting up appointments with teachers and meeting with them. I started offering to co-teach and doing demonstrations. … I think our job is to help create as many good, strong, solid urban teachers as we can in L.A. … Changing attitudes, changing mindsets, changing the way in which teachers work. And also, just helping newer teachers survive."

> (N2) "Originally it was described to go in, preach the literacy, and make a difference with kids – grade-wise. I think it's more important that I gain the trust of the teachers before I start going in and preaching literacy. So, there are other priorities for the first few professional developments and the first few months that would make it easier for me to do the literacy portion. I needed to gain their confidence. … Number one is to help the teachers be more successful in the classroom."

> (N3) "I have found coaching to be a very multi-leveled, multi-faceted project. I think the first thing I had to do upon arriving here was build a trust between myself and the teachers, myself and the students, and myself and the administration. First I had to build trust with the teachers and show them that I am not their enemy, that I am there to help them. I am there to help make their classroom better and help them create an environment that will help get their children to where we hope to get them. Part of what I've found out, is that I've become a facilitator. … Providing professional development is part of our job, which I think is important. We also guide them to getting professional development and things they are not aware of. … Unpacking the standards. First of all, you're there to help them with lessons and professional development, and provide them with materials."

In the three responses from novice coaches in year one, it is very evident that the role of a literacy coach is quite complex and perhaps even confusing. The first response, from coach N1, highlights several activities a literacy coach would be responsible for. The response from coach N2 points out that the bottom line responsibility of a literacy coach is to help teachers succeed, but that as a coach, a significant amount of time is dedicated to building trust and support with teachers. In coach N3's response, we again see how complex the role of a literacy coach is perceived to be. Coach N3 believes that it is his job to improve the classroom environment and instruction, and that there are many

ways one could go about doing that. He also acknowledges the fact that building trust between himself and the administration, teachers, and students, was vital to his role as a literacy coach. Without trust, it would be difficult to have a forum for open communication between coaches and teachers. The responses from novice coaches in year one strongly support the idea that there are two stages in one's role as a literacy coach, the initial building rapport stage, and the ultimate building literacy stage.

The following responses are from the two novice coaches that were re-interviewed in year two after they had time to evolve in their role as a literacy coach working with Center X. The secondary responses are much more concise, similar to the veteran coach responses in year one.

> (N1-2) "We are here to help you grow and give you strategies and ideas that will help you to become a stronger teacher and help you understand the whole process of standards based planning. The biggest thing, as coaches, we are here to support, help, and push teachers. Challenge them!"

> (N2-2) "Last years job was just finding out what was wrong. There is a learning curve: It takes you 6 months to 12 months to get the confidence and to build the rapport with the teachers. … My goal this year was to actually implement the reading apprenticeship. I wanted to really focus on literacy."

In the responses from the novice coach secondary interviews, we notice distinct references to activities conducted to both build trust and support with teachers, and to develop more effective instructional practices for the classroom. Coach N2 explicitly discusses the transition one goes through as a coach, which directly points to the idea that the role of a literacy coach has two stages. Although both coaches touch on the value of building rapport with teachers, there was a greater focus on implementing strategies for building literacy. The major difference in responses from novice coaches from year one to year two was a shift in focus from building relationships to implementing literacy instruction. It was apparent that in year two, the two novice coaches had transitioned out

of stage one (building rapport), and into stage two (building literacy). Already in year two, the novice coach responses (now they would be considered veteran coaches) resemble the veteran coach responses from year one as we will examine with the following quotes:

> (V1) "The *role*, … it's just doing anything that's possible. Anything I can do to make their life easier that will not be outright enabling, is my job. … Creating the foundation of support with the server, and then taking the structure out, little by little until they're running it. So, if I'm doing my job well, I'm running myself out of a job in a few years."

> (V2) "The role is complex. What our role becomes is being able to synthesize everything that teachers know and have been told and is being thrown at them. And then, to give it back to them in a way that makes sense. It always takes that person who's just a little bit more *expert* in what you're doing to be able to guide you to that next level. So, the role becomes one of apprenticeship."

> (V3) "I do my job to service the teachers. … One of my goals is to increase student achievement."

The above responses demonstrate that the veteran coaches are in the building literacy stage. Their responses were very concise, focusing on doing whatever necessary to support and improve the teaching practices of teachers. Since they would have already established relationships with teachers in the school, they have moved out of the initial building rapport stage and perceive their role to be one of support and professional guidance for teachers.

The major difference between novice and veteran coach responses was that the novice coaches stated that they were to support the teachers and aid them in improving their practice, but also stressed the importance of initially building relationships with teachers and the school. Veteran coaches, on the other hand, focused on their responsibility to impart knowledge to the teachers about the standards-based curriculum and inventive pedagogical practices. Apparently, veteran coaches had already moved out

14

of the initial stage of gaining teacher trust and attaining buy-in, their responses did not focus on the relationship building aspect of the role.

Previous research done by Crane and Patrick (2002), on the role evolution of coaches, also identifies stages or phases of coaching. They describe the role of a coach as having three distinct phases: foundation, learning loop, and forwarding the action. The work done by Crane and Patrick validates our findings concerning role evolution with the coaches from Center X. According to their research, in phase one, the foundation, coaches are focusing on developing the building blocks of trust and open communication. Phase one, as identified by Crane and Patrick, corresponds directly to our "stage one," building rapport.

The next phase, which they call the learning loop, is very similar to our building literacy stage, where coaches focus on working one-on-one with teachers. In the learning loop phase, coaches work one-on-one with individual teachers, assessing the needs, goals, and strengths of the teacher and work together to improve instructional practice (Crane & Patrick, 2002).

The next phase, identified by Crane and Patrick, is called forwarding the action phase, where a coach assists a teacher in developing the skills to design a plan for reaching a goal, carrying out the plan, and then evaluating how well the goal was achieved. A coach would do this with the ultimate goal of eventually having provided enough resources and ideas so that the teachers can continue using reflective teaching practices on their own (2002).

In our study, we were able to identify a second half of the building literacy stage in which coaches were working with small groups of teachers and facilitating an open

15

dialogue where teachers could reflect on each other's practice and engage in a form of peer coaching. This second part of stage two, is very similar to the forwarding the action phase of Crane and Patrick because of the idea of promoting sustainability of reflective and responsive teaching strategies. The main difference is that Crane and Patrick's phase focuses on the one-on-one interaction of creating sustainability of reflective teaching, whereas our identified stage focuses on the idea that true sustainability will occur when a community of thoughtful teaching is formed and nurtured. We do not see part two of the building literacy stage as independent because we do not think that the building literacy stage could be completed until an exhaustive system for reflective teaching was built into the teachers' instructional practices.

The stages imply that it will take time for any beginning coach to realize their role as a literacy coach. The stages must be approached in succession and when all three parts have been addressed, the job of a literacy coach be fully realized and completed. A coach will have to build relationships within the school before concentrating on literacy instruction with individual teachers and groups of teachers. This will take a substantial amount of time, and that time will vary depending on the amount of support available to coaches from the administration and teachers.

Now that we have identified the stages of the evolving role of a literacy coach, we can see how it would be easy to experience a little confusion about one's role or responsibility in the field. Most explanations of what literacy coaches do, stress the building literacy component and fail to mention the vital first stage that must receive full dedication before advancing. When trusting relationships have been created, a coach can approach a teacher and provide constructive feedback that will more likely be used.

16

A Day in the Life of a Literacy Coach- We asked the coaches about the activities that they engage in while on campus. The answers were extremely diverse, with one thing in common: coaches will complete just about any task that needs to be done, with those tasks varying from day to day, moment to moment. Coaches were available to teachers at anytime via e-mail, phone, office visit (where possible), and appointment. A general list of activities a literacy coach might engage in includes: listening, observing, planning, organizing, helping develop classroom management strategies, helping increase the use of a wide range of activities and instructional media, helping to increase student engagement, providing resources, and supplying materials.

Because of the diversity in response to this question, we have included some key parts of the interviews to further enrich understanding of the extensive daily practices of a literacy coach. We will first look at responses from novice coaches and then from veteran coaches.

> (N1) "Most days I have appointments set to meet with certain teachers. I leave a little space left open so that I can pop in on people and see how they're doing."

> (N1-2) "What I try to do in a typical day is spend time with at least 3-4 teachers, either planning with them, doing an observation, providing them with feedback, or giving them strategies for instruction. … Then, there are times when the administration will ask us to do things. They will have a concern or issue and they will call us together, and that might change my plan for that particular day. So, that's what a day looks like; getting into classes, working with teachers during conference planning time, meeting with teachers, observing, giving feedback, and doing demonstrations."

> (N2-2) "Usually, I go in and do the first two periods of the day for the teacher. Then, they do the rest. They get a chance to see it a couple of periods. I usually get them to participate with the kids. …. Starting next week I'm having [a teacher] give me a weekly syllabus of what she is doing. I want to sit down and go over it before, so I can ask: How are you going to do this? Are you going to put them in groups? Do it individually? We are going to try to be proactive and head off the problems before they arise and not let her get frustrated and feeling that way in the class."

In year one, novice coaches did not give very concrete answers as to what they did on a daily basis. Their abstract answers were probably due to the fact that the

coaches were just getting settled in the job and had not yet established an efficient

routine. In year two however, novice coach responses indicated an established routine

that coaches employed on a daily basis. As time in the field increased, literacy coaches

begin engaging in a diverse group of activities in a more systematic way.

The following responses are from veteran coaches:

(V1) "What I do? Anything and everything! That is: getting keys for the teachers, working with the administration to get them time and money, working on Saturdays, designing professional developments, helping them, having them come over to my house on weekends to download stuff, and creating CD's for them."

(V2) "Today I was a counselor. I was talking to kids and doing some conflict resolution. I need to be able to do it and see if it works. Unless I talk to those kids, and deal with them in the classroom, I can't help the teacher. Then I can say – okay, this is what I tried, try this."

Of particular interest here is the fact that coach V2, prefaces her statement with

"today." This implies that the job changes from day to day and that there is no 'normal'

day. Likewise, coach V1 stresses that she will do "anything and everything" necessary to

support teachers. It is evident from both responses that coaching activities will vary from

day to day.

As can be seen from the above responses, a day in the life of a literacy coach is

never slow. There are diverse responsibilities and an abundance of work to be done.

Constantly, coaches have to switch gears and provide yet another service to teachers,

students, or the school. A coach must be flexible and responsive to the needs of the

teachers, and more than willing to get involved, hands on, in the classroom. Most

importantly, a coach must be willing and able to do whatever needs to be done to

improve the environment of the teachers and students, no matter how seemingly mundane

or unimportant that task may be. It is often the little things that coaches can do that have

the biggest impacts in helping teachers to succeed.

Priorities- Generally, when the coaches were asked about their priorities as a literacy coach and who they felt most responsible to, they answered, often very quickly and with a chuckle, the teachers. "Teachers first. Their needs. That's who I am there for" (V1). Another coach responded, "The way I view my job is that, the teacher's job is to service the students. So, I do my job to service the teachers. My main focus is the teachers" (V3).

Two of the coaches responded that their primary responsibility was to the students. "I think that every adult in this school is there for one reason, and that reason is the child" (N3). One of the coaches explained her perspective on priorities by stating "At a philosophical level, I am most responsible to the students. The way that I deliver that is by being responsible to the teachers and the staff" (V2).

Beyond their responsibility to the teachers and students, coaches answered that they were responsible to the various entities including: Center X, Dr. Rousseau, the school district, and the school's administration. There was no significant difference in the way veteran and novice coaches answered the line of questioning pertaining to priorities as a literacy coach. All coaches seemed to view their role as a support system for teachers to improve the education of children.

There was a slight modification in response from one of the coaches that was re-interviewed. His original response was that his primary responsibility "first would be the teachers… what can you do to help them in the classroom. Then probably next comes the kids. Third would be Center X" (N2). During the secondary interview, he refined his answer by focusing on a specific problem he spends a lot of time trying to improve, his "number one responsibility is teacher retention" (N2-2). Here we can see that as he

gained more experience in the field, his priority at work narrowed in on a specific problem concerning the teachers. The other coach that was re-interviewed retained his original belief that his main responsibility was to "the teachers. That's my job" (N1-2).

Support- We asked the coaches several questions about the support network that *they* relied on. We were interested in knowing more about the relationships coaches had with one another, Center X, the schools, and the teachers. Here we found much variation in responses. In general, veteran coaches had a much denser support network built up compared to the novice coaches, as could be expected from more time in the position. There was one constant in all of the coaches' responses: Robin, the project leader liaison between the coaches, Center X, and the schools. Other than Robin, the list of people that were relied on for support was highly individual and quite extensive. Each coach constructed a web of support, identifying all the people they had grown to rely on in their practice for various reasons. It was very obvious that the building of support relationships was absolutely vital to the success and effectiveness of coaching.

There was a consensus that "Center X colleagues" (N4) were relied upon for support. Each coach agreed that they were connected with the other coaches and felt like they were team players.   "We have a common goal – to make the system better, to make it work. And it's a very collegial group" (N3). In the secondary interviews, responses simply became richer with detail as the support network grew concurrently with experience in the field. Overall, coaches felt that they had the support that they needed.

Challenges- There were several issues of concern that were reiterated by coaches during the interviews. Here again, there was little difference between the responses of veteran versus novice coaches. One of the primary issues of concern was meetings.

Attending multiple meetings often takes time away from coaching. "What I'm finding is the frustration of attending meetings is taking away from all the other things. It kills you" (N3). Overall, it is felt that there are too many meetings with the district and too few meetings with Center X and other coaches, within and across content areas. More meetings within Center X were desirable because they would give coaches time to collaborate with other coaches, ideas about new research and practices, and opportunity to practice coaching in difficult situations.

Repeatedly we heard, "I do wish we had more time to collaborate" (V3), or, "I would just like for us to meet and coordinate things together more consistently as a group" (N1). "One of the things that we need to start doing in the little weekly meetings for ourselves is just practice the coaching. How do we approach teachers and what do we say? What is their reaction? What would we have needed more of before going in? It is more examples of what coaching looks like, it's problem solving strategies" (V2). Because the coaches are seen as experts in their field, it is important that they are prepared and well practiced in the delivery of their teaching tips and techniques. Therefore, they need to have time set aside to be able to practice coaching and to collaborate with other coaches. "Having talking time in between our information part of the meetings has been very beneficial" (N4). One idea presented by a coach, was to have the "whole team get together and go to a retreat" (N3).

Another key issue of concern for a few of the coaches was the use of cell phones. One of the coaches told us, "I was told that we were going to be paid back for our cell phone usage, and to turn in the cell phone bill. So, I turned it in for the first couple of months and never saw a penny" (V1). Another coach, when asked what could be done to

better support her efforts, commented, "One way to be supportive is by actually giving us cell phones. My cell phone bill is killing me! It's just astronomic!" (V3). The coaches informed us that in many cases, the cell phone would be the best or only way to reach them since they try to be available to teachers at any and all times. The use of cell phones on school campuses, however, was not universal throughout the district, as some areas did not have reception.

The last issue of concern that was repeatedly addressed by the coaches was the availability of an office space on-site at the schools. "I wish the administration at the schools would set more of a precedent, and maybe even set an office aside" (N2). We were told that it was really imperative to have an accessible home-base within the school, where teachers could easily consult the coaches. An office space signified acceptance by the school of the coaches being long-term fixtures vital to the teachers and the success of the school. Having a central location on campus would also make the coaches more accessible to teachers, administration, and other coaches.

The biggest change that was seen in responses from the coaches that were re-interviewed in year two was a switch in focus of what could be done differently by Center X, to what could be done differently by the school or the district. The issues became more job specific. For example, one of the coaches discussed how there was a group of literacy coaches from Johns Hopkins hired to serve a similar function. He said, "They don't have a good firm grasp on what's going on in L.A. Unified" (N2-2). He disagreed with the school's decision to hire the group of coaches and felt that the work they were doing was conflicting with the work of the already intact group of coaches at the school.

In year two, both coaches stressed the importance of teacher retention and the lack of it at their schools. "It is tough because we have high turnover rates, and we get new teachers, people who move on, people who are retiring, people who are not rehired" (N1-2). This coach went on to discuss how, because of the nature of his job, all the training that he does becomes obsolete if the teacher leaves the next year. The process starts all over and he begins training and supporting another teacher who will most likely end up leaving. If there is little continuity with the staff, then the problems with teachers in the school may resurface. The other coach told us that there is "almost a 50% turnover" (N2-2) at his school, and also went on to discuss how that makes his job frustrating because the work he does will not be sustained in the school when a teacher leaves. "We work for a year or two, with those teachers, then, they're gone. Half new ones come in, and we have to do the same exact thing, starting over and over" (N2-2). Not only does it make it frustrating when newly trained teachers leave the school, but also when the new inexperienced teachers come in as replacements. He was very passionate about this topic and said:

> "We've got half the teachers new teachers with less than 3 years of experience. Some of them aren't very good at their content area. Some of them aren't very good at control and classroom management. Some of them have those down pat, but they are dull and dry and boring and they don't know how to engage the kids. You also have these old recalcitrant teachers who are not going to change their ways, and they are not going to try anything new." (N2-2)

We can see that the challenges faced by the coaches are very extensive, even on the teacher training level. Not only is it frustrating to work with a teacher and then have them leave, but also to have a teacher who is on either polar end of the experience spectrum and resistant to change.

One of the coaches made a comment about the availability of the staff working at Center X. "One of the bad things about Center X is that all the leaders are so busy doing so many things. It is hard to get any time where you can sit down and have some time to talk, go over things, and to feel like they are really listening and you are really being heard" (N2-2). He felt that the support system was there for him, but that the leaders at Center X were so swamped with work that they had little quality time for discussions that were not of dire importance. It was believed that having more time to address minor issues of concern, or ideas for change, would be appreciated and perhaps even beneficial for the coaches.

Positive Changes Made

In the past year, since the original interviews were conducted, there have been several significant changes within Center X and within the schools, where the returning novice coaches have been working. Both of the coaches had originally commented on how they really needed an office space on campus. Not having an office space makes it difficult "because it makes it hard to establish a relationship with the teachers and the administration" (N1-2). Since last year, both coaches now have a space set aside for them on campus, which has been very beneficial.   "I think having an office that we share helps so much because that is our central planning and gathering point" (N1-2).

Not only did the coaches originally discuss how it would be helpful to have an office space, but also how it would be helpful to be stationed to work in one school, and one school only, as opposed to working in several schools throughout the week. This year, both of the coaches are working full-time in one school, and because of it, have

been able to become much more involved and effective in their role as a literacy coach. More time is now spent in the classroom focusing on literacy components of instruction. This shift coincides with, and could partly be due to the fact that solid relationships had been built with the teachers, and therefore more time was available for building literacy.

Another significant change that has occurred within Center X has to do with the quality of the meetings for the coaches. Last year, many of the coaches had wished that they had more collaboration time and more instructive meetings with other coaches. In the secondary interviews, one of the coaches discussed how Center X "is doing more collaboration, and changing the professional developments so they are more informative , and so we get more out of them" (N2-2). The other coach commented on how the past summer provided much time for collaboration with the other coaches within Center X. "We had some really good professional development this summer that was facilitated by a group called Dialogue Consultants. They just got us talking, and as a result of us really talking about some of the issues that we were having as a staff, changes are starting to be made" (N1-2). One of the main changes he was talking about was that there was more of an efficient and directed communication system within Center X.

Another important change was the distribution of "Roles as a Coach," which was several pages describing the complex role of a literacy coach and focusing on activities an effective literacy coach dedicates time to. The main goal as prescribed by the Center X handout is to "Improve content literacy through the implementation of effective instructional practices." This helped clear up some of the ambiguity new coaches were feeling about their responsibilities as a coach. Both coaches were very excited about the changes taking place and felt that as coaches, they were being listened to and were more

appreciated. Both the schools and Center X were collaborating with them to improve their working environment.

Lessons Learned

There are several things that we learned from conducting the interviews with the veteran and novice coaches. On a very basic level, we learned that to have the greatest impact as a coach, one needs to be stationed in a single school. Splitting time between schools takes away from important activities like literacy instruction and building support networks. In addition, increases in the quality of meetings and professional development held for the coaches, has been both helpful and necessary.

The most substantial finding was that it takes time to fully make sense of one's role as a literacy coach. There are distinct stages of role development that one must go through. In stage one, the coach will spend most of his or her time building rapport with the school, administration, and teachers. In stage two the coach will focus first on thoughtful literacy instruction one-on-one with individual teachers, and then, will focus on sustaining thoughtful literacy instruction by leading professional development with groups of teachers and fostering a reflective teaching environment. In order for a novice coach to identify and come to understand the context of working as a literacy coach, he or she must spend considerable time within the context, interacting with people, observing behaviors, and watching the method of operations.

Changes in perception occur as experience as a literacy coach increases. Some of the change in perception is due to the job experience itself (i.e. the need for building rapport, before focusing on literacy coaching, but part of it is due to the lack of

26

information given to coaches as they start. There was an overall feeling that the job description was not very clear and therefore, their initial perceptions were not as guided as they could or perhaps should be. As noted before, Center X has partially addressed this problem with the distribution of "Roles as a Coach" literature. Many of the changes in perception of roles and responsibilities will be expected with any new literacy coach entering the field. However, with greater direction from coaching administration, there should be less confusion and a greater focus on what the role of a coach is and how that role naturally progresses. The importance of presence in the field cannot be understated. It is the relationships that coaches build that really enable them to transfer their knowledge to teachers with the hopes of improving the educational experience of students and improving student performance.

Next Steps

It is very clear that there has been significant progress in the way that literacy coaches operate and in the support they receive. We have documented the changes enacted prior to the final write up of this report. However, the information can still be instrumental in shaping the way new coaches are informed and initiated into the Center X coaching community. In the areas where change has been implemented, the comments from the coaches reinforce the importance of these changes. In the areas where change has not occurred, comments from the coaches can serve to highlight issues of concern for future attention. We hope that our findings can be used to improve the working environment for both Center X coaching staff and Center X coaches, and perhaps initiate a forum for further inquiry into the evolution of the role and responsibilities of a Literacy Coach.

Appendix 1

<u>Methods</u>

The evidence used in creating these case study findings included standardized, open-ended interviews:

1.) Three 1 hour interviews with veteran literacy coaches in year one. To protect anonymity, coaches are referred to as V1, V2, and V3. Veteran coaches are referred to as female in the paper.

2.) Four 1 hour interviews with novice literacy coaches in year one. To protect anonymity, coaches are referred to as N1, N2, N3, and N4. Novice coaches are referred to as male in the paper.

3.) Two 1 hour interviews with continuing novice literacy coaches in year two. To protect anonymity, coaches are continued to be referred to as N1-2 and N2-2 (retaining same assignment as previous year).

Appendix 2

<u>Interview Protocol</u>

Purpose: The conceptual purpose of this interview is to see if there is a change in coaches' perceptions and attitudes about their role and responsibilities as they gain more experience throughout the course of the academic year.

Type of interview: ***Standardized, open-ended interview***

Primary Questions followed by *secondary* (or follow-up) questions:

1. Please describe what you believe to be your role as a coach?
    a. What are some of the reasons you decided to become a coach?
    b. What are the things you enjoy about coaching?
    c. What are some of the things that you would like to see changed or improved?
    d. How would you describe the goals of this partnership?

2. What are your priorities as a coach?
    a. Who do you feel responsible to?
        i. The school?
        ii. The center?
        iii. The teachers?
        iv. The students?

3. How do you go about doing your job (specific examples)
    a. How accessible are you to teachers?
    b. How often do you meet with teachers?
    c. How often do you communicate with teachers?
    d. What is, typically, the best way to contact you at a site?
    e. What topics do you focus on during coaching sessions?

4. Who do you rely on for general support?
    a. The center?
    b. The school?
    c. The teachers?

5. How connected do you feel to other coaches in the same content area? Same school? Other coaches at the center?
    a. Do you feel that you are working as a team?
    b. Do you feel that you can ask other coaches for help and/or support?
    c. Do you have any ideas or suggestions for increasing the sense of teamwork amongst coaches?

References

Crane, Thomas G., & Lerissa Patrick. (2002). *The Heart of Coaching: Using Transformational Coaching to Create a High-Performance Culture* (2nd ed.). San Diego, CA: FTA Press.

Hall, Barbara. (2004). "Literacy Coaches: An Evolving Role." *Carnegie Reporter*, Vol. 3, No.1. Retrieved from http://www.carnegie.org/reporter/09/literacy/

Guiney, Ellen. (2001). "Coaching Isn't Just For Athletes: The Role of Teacher Leaders." *Phi Delta Kappan*, V.82, No.10, 740-743. Retrieved from http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0106gui.htm

Langer, J.A. (1999). *English Instruction in Schools that Beat the Odds: Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well*. Report Series 12014. Albany, NY: National Research Center English Learning & Achievement. OERI Grant No. R305A960005.

Lindberg, Christine A., ed. (2002). *The Oxford American College Dictionary*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Russo, Alexander. (2004). "School-Based Coaching: A revolution in professional development-or just the latest fad?" *Harvard Education Letter*, July/August. Retrieved from htpp://www.edletter.org/past/issues/2004-ja/coaching.shtml

Schuch, Linda, ed. (2004). *Reading First Coaching: A Guide for Coaches and Reading First Leaders*. Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates. Retrieved from http://www.ncrel.org/litweb/coaching/coachesguide.pdf

U.S. Census 2003. Retrieved from http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0644000.html

www.centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/ (Center X Website).