

# WASHINGTON STATE KAPPAN

*a journal for research, leadership, and practice*

*Instructional & Leadership Coaching  
Embedded Professional Development*



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**WASHINGTON STATE KAPPAN**

*a journal for research, leadership, and practice*

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## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

by Mary Lynne Derrington, EdD

Welcome to the second issue of *Washington State Kappan*, a journal for research, leadership and practice. Aligned with our mission, we strive towards a balance of research and application. Our parent journal, *Phi Delta Kappan*, provides a national perspective on issues, policies and trends impacting education. It is our editorial board's vision to create a similar journal but one which emphasizes the effect of these national trends, issues and policies on Washington State.

The focus of this issue “**Instructional and Leadership Coaching: Embedded Professional Development**” emerged from a discussion with a group of state educators on current topics of importance to educators. We then sought articles representing a wide variety of coaching perspectives which also emphasized our journal mission. The answer to the question, “What is coaching and who does it?” varies widely Reeves reports in a December 2007 Educational Leadership publication (p.89).

Yet, there is no denying the popularity and proliferation of this professional development model. In this issue, you will find many varied reasons and conditions explaining how and why coaching is effective.

Through the collection of articles in this issue, the authors present thoughtful ideas, recent research, and topics for discussion and debate which help to define instructional and leadership coaching in Washington State today.

In the first article, “Coaching for Instructional Improvement: Themes in Research and Practice,” the authors summarize major strands of research and pressing issues of practice associated with instructional coaching. They set the stage with background information on what is known, what is as of yet unknown, and what are directions for future inquiry.



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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by John W. Armenia, PhD, President, Chapter/Member Liaison, PDK WA

Washington's State Chapter has been recognized nationally for its vision, service, and leadership. This year, we received our permanent charter for Phi Delta Kappa International. Launched 3-years ago, Washington State is the first state chapter in PDK's 100 year history. During these three years, our journal, research conferences, and curriculum institutes have focused on “Safe Schools,” “Global Education,” and “High Performing Educators” with an emphasis on coaching and what great teachers do.

**Coaching supports novice and veteran teachers and administrators in their professional service and development!** It is our hope that this issue of the *Washington State Kappan* will bring you new understandings about coaching and how it applies to preparation, mentoring, and clinical supervision of new and experienced teachers and administrators. Effective coaching is complex and we are continuing to learn about how school systems can effectively

plan, implement, and sustain coaching programs and practices.

Washington State's experience with coaching training strategies and programs spans twenty-five years. We can credit Art Costa and Bob Garmston, who introduced “Cognitive Coaching” to school and district leaders in Puget Sound ESD workshops during the early 1980s following national and local demands for reforms in teacher supervision and instructional delivery in the Secretary of Education's *Nation at Risk Report*. Teaching linked to coaching creates one of the greatest feedback cycles possible in the professional teacher's career. The goal is to have the teacher and the coach work together to find and develop the teacher's best self.

My first coach, an expert helping teacher, worked



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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

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In “Rethinking Instructional Coaching in Terms of Teacher Change,” the author’s work with middle school literacy coaches points out the range of demands placed on them and suggests a multi-layered process of professional development that is focused on long-term teacher change.

The importance of leadership development and the inclusion of coaching is addressed by the authors of both articles “Instructional Coaching as a Leadership Development Pathway” and “Coaching New Principals for Success.” In “Bringing Science to the Art of Coaching in Education” a series of questions are addressed and the authors draw a clear differentiation between coaching and other helping roles such as mentoring, training and consulting.

A series of articles describes what coaching practices look like in action. In “The ‘Studio Residency’: A Job-Embedded Coaching Model,” the authors paint a vivid picture of a unique model implemented in the Highline and Marysville School Districts. Then the experience of practitioners in several other Washington School Districts is reported through interview data in “Sharing Best Practices for Student Performance: What Will Bring Teachers to the Table to Collaborate?”

We require and respect data to emulate outcomes. But what does it take to document changes in student outcomes as a result of coaching? In “Challenges of Evaluating Coaching,” the authors describe the difficulties inherent in documenting change and provide reality based guidelines.

Seeking to understand examples in the practices

of coaching, districts highly involved with coaching were asked to describe barriers encountered and success enjoyed when developing coaching opportunities and what advice they have for districts beginning to look at implementing instructional coaching as a professional development model.

Coaching is a relationship involving at least two parties. While almost all of the literature focuses on the coach, the article titled, “Leaders, Are You Coachable?” seeks to identify attributes of those who can readily be coached for continuous improvement.

A unique feature article, “Schools of Distinction: What makes them distinct?” provides a glimpse of the five commonalities that differentiate 86 Washington State schools from others regardless of demographics.

On behalf of the journal editorial board and the PDK Washington State Board members, we invite you to join in these important conversations on educational topics relevant today through reading or writing for the journal and attending our upcoming conferences. Please feel free to e-mail me with topic suggestions for future issues that we may explore through our focus on research, leadership, and practice.

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 ABOUT THE EDITOR

**Mary Lynne Derrington**, EdD, is Assistant Professor, Educational Administration, Department of Educational Leadership, Woodring College of Education; Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington. She is a former superintendent, principal, and teacher.  
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 .....

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Phi Delta Kappa is to promote high-quality education, in particular publicly supported education, as essential to the development and maintenance of a democratic way of life. The mission is accomplished through leadership, research, and service in education.

The Washington State Chapter is chartered for the purpose of furthering the mission of the association through forums, networking, professional development, mentoring, volunteering professionally, and leadership skill development.

The *Washington State Kappan, a journal for research, leadership and practice* provides members an opportunity to participate in the PDK mission through a focus on educational research and best practices concerned with leadership, issues, trends, and policy.

# Coaching for Instructional Improvement: Themes in Research and Practice

by Beth Boatright, PhD and Chrysan Gallucci, PhD  
with Judy Swanson, Michelle Van Lare and Irene Yoon

This article summarizes major strands of research and pressing issues of practice associated with instructional coaching. Here we set the stage for the Spring 2008 issue with some background information on what is known, what is as of yet unknown, and some directions for future inquiry.

## A PROBLEM OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

Having an array of content-specific pedagogical tools enables teachers to develop all students' learning and ultimately see that all students – not just

“What does this professional development activity have to do with my daily work?”

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Beth Boatright**, PhD, is a Research Associate at the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington (UW). Her recent research focuses on outcomes of professional learning opportunities in high school classrooms, which will be the topic of her forthcoming book, *Teachers' Professional Learning in the Context of High School Reform*. eeb2@u.washington.edu

**Chrysan Gallucci**, PhD, is Associate Research Faculty in the College of Education at UW, Research Director of CEL, and Program Co-Director of the Masters in Instructional Leadership degree. Publications include *Using sociocultural theory to link professional learning to organizational support in the context of school district instructional reform*, forthcoming, in the *American Journal of Education*; and *Converging reform "theories" in urban middle schools: District-guided instructional improvement in small schools of choice*, 2007, in *Teachers College Record*, with colleagues Michael Knapp, Anneke Markholt, and Suzanne Ort.

**Judy Swanson, Michelle Van Lare, and Irene Yoon**, are engaged in qualitative studies of CEL/district partnerships that focus on the work of instructional leaders and systemic instructional improvement across multiple school districts.



From left to right: Michelle Van Lare, Chrysan Gallucci, Irene Yoon, and Beth Boatright (not pictured: Judy Swanson)

those who traditionally do well – have the intellectual capacity to reach and exceed high standards. Professional development opportunities exist for teachers, but rarely address these central issues directly, or in effective ways that impact what happens in classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Here we have an unmistakable problem of *professional development* practice: the problem of relevance. Teachers rightfully ask, “What does this professional development activity have to do with my daily work?”

In response to this “relevance problem,” a new kind of support system is emerging. Aimed at bridging the gap between formal professional development and classroom implementation, instructional coaching has captured the attention of scholars and practitioners nationwide as a promising strategy for professional learning (Stein & D’Amico, 2002; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2004; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006; Marsh, Kerr, Ikemoto, Darilek, Suttorp, Zimmer, Barney, 2005; Gallucci, Boatright, Lysne, & Swinnerton, 2005; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). Here, coaching is based on the assumption that “close and continuing attention from an outsider, who brings new ideas and fresh eyes to the site of reform, can help school-based educators re-imagine, re-design, and renew their practice” in ways that improve the quality of all students’ learning (Marzolf, 2006).

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## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT COACHING AND HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When professional development takes teachers' experiences and work contexts seriously from its inception, when it considers teachers as more than consumers of knowledge but also engaged actively in inquiry, and when it aims for professional growth and collegiality, teachers are more likely to engage intellectually, socially, and emotionally with ideas, materials, and their work peers (Little, 1993). Simply, professional development that addresses the specific, daily needs of teachers and their students is more likely to produce changes in teachers' practice (Joyce & Showers, 1982). Furthermore, teachers benefit most "when their learning is reinforced over time through repeated and varied exposure to ideas and through interactions with colleagues, who can act as a resource for each other's learning" (as cited in Knapp, 2003, p. 121, based on Cohen & Hill, 2001; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Coaching has the potential to accomplish this, if orchestrated over the long-term, and focused on ongoing collaboration between professionals around a common problem of practice that they deem important.

Coaching utilizes a variety of pathways to help teachers, school leaders, and district leaders build school capacity for sustained change and improvement (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Principals and central office staff, for instance, may use leadership coaches to guide their classroom walkthroughs or planning meetings. At the classroom level, instructional coaching might look different; it could take the form of one-on-one support for teachers, or guided observation and debrief of their colleagues' teaching.

Due to varied roles and responsibilities of the job, however, defining coaches' work has proven difficult for researchers (as summarized by Taylor, 2008). Most definitions of coaching offer general approximations of what coaches do, such as, "use conversation skills, listening, curiosity, compassion, expertise, and problem solving to help others move toward their goals, hopes, and dreams" (McNeil & Klink, 2004) or "nonsupervisory/nonevaluative individualized guidance within the instructional setting" (Taylor, p. 12). And, while ambiguous, it is

possible that these generic definitions are the closest approximation to what coaches do, given the highly nuanced nature of the work. Coaching involves humans – in all of their individuality and unpredictability – who must navigate difficult issues of trust, communication, and inevitable differences of opinion.

Our observations agree with other scholars who suggest coaching can benefit educators by (a) promoting active reflection on current practices (Stein & D'Amico, 2002; Garmston, Linder, & Whitaker, 1993; Joyce & Showers, 1982), (b) teaching them how to apply new concepts to their unique work environments (Showers & Joyce, 1996; Neufeld & Roper, 2003), (c) building generative communities of practice (Showers, 1985; Lowenhaupt & McKinney, 2007), and (d) fostering professionalism among colleagues (Perkins, 1998; Garmston, 1987). Most important, good coaches maintain a humble stance on how hard the work of teaching really is. They reframe teachers' issues as part of a greater problem of practice that all educators struggle with: how to simultaneously push all students to their potential and cultivate their desire to learn.

## COACHING IN ACTION

When skillfully applied, coaching can provide productive learning environments for educators, particularly when it relates to a larger reform agenda and is embedded in actual work settings (Showers & Joyce, 1996). The Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington has developed programs to support instructional leadership and strengthen content knowledge in over 20 districts across five states. Associate Director Anneke Markholt explains the Center's rationale for including coaches in their partnership work:

We believe that if people just come and have their 'sit and git,' no matter how good the sit and git is, it's not real until you are side-by-side with somebody who can help you think through the skills and processes in your own site with your own teachers... You can't just have the [formal professional development sessions] without the coaching, nor can you have the coaching without the [professional development sessions].

While researching the CEL-district partnerships, we had opportunities to speak with scores of teachers, principals, and literacy coaches in Washington state about how coaching is enacted. Teachers mentioned that working “right here with the kids, trying it on in real time” was important to them:

How to describe it—you’re in the classroom. You’re not watching a videotape of somebody teaching. You’re right here in the moment saying, “Why did you do that?” ... We’re in the classroom, sitting down with a real student talking to them about their reading and then immediately going back together and sitting and saying, “here’s what I saw,” and “what did you notice?”

### LOOKING AHEAD:

#### QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While we know a little about coaching structures and some of its possible benefits, many questions remain. Not surprisingly, scholars and practitioners question the extent to which coaching shapes student learning over the long haul. To answer this, longitudinal studies of larger scope may be in order. And yet, an emergent strand of inquiry directs our attention to the idea of “coaching content knowledge.” Educators are beginning to ask about the nature of what coaches must know, and how coaches learn to improve their craft. They are asking:

1. What knowledge is needed to coach teachers? What is the specific knowledge required to coach science teachers? Reading specialists? Algebra teachers? How much and what kind of content knowledge is enough for a person to become a coach?
2. What do coaches need to develop their own learning?
3. How might learning theory inform our understanding of how teachers and coaches engage in instructional coaching? (Gibson, 2005, and Gallucci, in press, provide initial examples)

Other questions involve the sustainability of ongoing coaching interventions, given its heavy reliance on human (hence, expensive) resources:

1. How long does coaching need to last to reach

a sustainable level of continuous progress? Is there ever a point when external expertise is no longer needed?

2. How can such an expensive form of professional development be applied on a large scale? What about tending to immediate accountability requirements (e.g., WASL)?

None of these questions suggest simple solutions. As more and more school districts invest in instructional coaches to help teachers learn to teach all students to higher standards, a coherent, rigorous research agenda is needed to assess the impact that coaching can have on changing teacher practice. This kind of research agenda has the potential to strengthen our understanding of how coaching might ultimately shape the quality of teaching and learning in Washington’s public schools.

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# Rethinking Instructional Coaching in Terms of Teacher Change

by Antony T. Smith, PhD

The growing popularity of instructional coaching is striking. In the area of literacy, for example, demand for coaches has been strong as schools hasten to produce highly qualified teachers and to boost student test scores (Dole, 2004; Toll, 2005). The purpose of instructional coaching, in literacy and other subject areas, is to improve instruction and increase student achievement. While this purpose seems clear, the process of coaching is



complex. Educators and researchers have raised questions about the work coaches are

supposed to do, the kinds of change they are expected to foster, and the manner in which coaching should be implemented in schools. Recently, a literacy coach at a conference was heard exclaiming, “I just want someone to tell me, what am I supposed to do all day?” (Dole & Donaldson, 2006). This question reflects the rapid growth of instructional coaching, its range of responsibilities, and the variety of ways the coaching process has been implemented in school settings.

In my ongoing case-study research I have focused on the work of middle school literacy coaches, exploring the ways that they engage in the instructional coaching process. In this article I observe that the range of demands placed on coaches may lead to a fragmentation of the coaching process. I then suggest a conceptual model of coaching that aims to increase effectiveness by rethinking instructional coaching as a multi-layered process of professional development that is focused on long-term teacher change.

## INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

Instructional coaches have been assigned two major sets of responsibilities: working with individual teachers on classroom practice, and facilitating school-level professional development (IRA, 2006). These responsibilities are consistent in research (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005; Coskie et. al., 2005), and are supported by my ongoing observations in schools. I have labeled these two sets of coaching responsibilities *mentoring* and *instructional advocacy*. Mentoring includes observing, conferring, and planning with teachers. Instructional advocacy involves working at the school level to facilitate professional development and foster curriculum implementation.

Mentoring responsibilities are intended to emphasize one-to-one work with teachers such as identifying areas of growth, assisting with the implementation of new instructional strategies, and facilitating the further development of teaching skills. One literacy

The purpose of instructional coaching, in literacy and other subject areas, is to improve instruction and increase student achievement.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Smith** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Washington in Bothell. He studies professional development, instructional coaching, and literacy assessment, including fluency, retelling, and comprehension measures. He was the recipient of the 2006 Student Outstanding Research Award, from the National Reading Conference, for a paper titled *The Middle School Literacy Coach: Considering Roles in Context*, recently published in the 56th Yearbook of the National Reading Conference (Oak Creek, WI). [ansmith@uwb.edu](mailto:ansmith@uwb.edu)

coach I observed, for example, mentored a teacher by planning lessons with her. Another coach conducted a goal-setting conference, observed a lesson, and held a follow-up conference with the teacher after school. This mentoring work, seemingly central to the coaching process, took up less than one third of the coaches' weekly time, as calculated from observations of literacy coaches in school contexts (Smith, 2006).

So what else were the coaches doing? They found themselves engaged in other sorts of support work that did not involve mentoring. One coach was asked by the principal to tutor individual students, while another was directed to fill in as a substitute teacher. Another coach was regularly asked by teachers to photocopy test preparation materials for the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). These sorts of tasks kept the coaches from spending much of their time mentoring teachers.

Instructional-advocacy responsibilities are intended to facilitate school-wide participation in the coaching process, so that teachers in many subject areas may focus on improving their literacy instruction. This is vital at the middle and secondary levels. The literacy coaches I observed spent a majority of their time on school-level tasks, but less than one fourth of this time was spent on instructional-advocacy work such as promoting the implementation of reading-strategy instruction through professional development or department meeting discussions. Larger amounts of time were spent on general office work, file organization, and data and testing management.

### SUMMARY

Altogether, the coaches I observed spent only about half of their weekly time on work that was related to the purpose of instructional coaching—to improve instruction and increase student achievement. All three coaches were dedicated professionals who expressed the desire to spend more time mentoring teachers and facilitating professional development, but they were prevented from doing so by work not connected to the purpose of coaching. This off-target



work reduced the effectiveness of these coaches and suggests a fragmentation of the coaching process itself. A conceptual model of instructional coaching is needed, one that keeps mentoring and instructional-advocacy work focused on the purpose of coaching.

### A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

I suggest rethinking instructional coaching in terms of teacher change. The process of teacher change is complex and ongoing, involving shifts in socio-cultural norms and participation in discourse communities (Chin & Benne, 1969; Putnam & Borko, 1997; Richardson & Placier, 2001). Of particular importance to coaching is situated learning theory, which asserts that the contexts within which activities occur are integral to the learning that takes place within them (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Seen from this perspective, the coaching process would need to be embedded in context, collaborative, and ongoing in nature in order to positively affect teacher change. With this in mind, I have developed a three-level model of instructional coaching that emphasizes the collaborative and sustained nature of the coaching

Instructional-advocacy responsibilities are intended to facilitate school-wide participation in the coaching process...

continues on page 8

process in terms of continual teacher change. The work of the coach on each of these three levels includes both mentoring and instructional-advocacy responsibilities. The goal of this model is to increase the effectiveness of instructional coaching by focusing coaches, teachers, and principals alike on improving instruction and increasing student achievement.

#### LEVEL ONE: INITIAL STEPS

On the first level the coach works to encourage teacher change through observation and discussion and to help form teacher-learning communities. Mentoring responsibilities at this level would include having conversations with teachers about literacy instruction and building a level of trust necessary to engage teachers in the change process. Working as an instructional advocate, the coach would facilitate conversations with small groups of teachers to explore ways they might support each other as teacher-learning communities engaged in the change process.

#### LEVEL TWO: NECESSARY SUPPORTS

On the second level the coach focuses on teacher implementation of new instructional strategies and participation in teacher-learning communities. As mentor, the coach would plan, observe, and debrief with teachers as they work to implement new instructional strategies. As instructional advocate, the coach would meet on a regular basis with small teacher-learning communities engaged in the change process.

#### LEVEL THREE: ONGOING EFFORTS

On the third level the coach seeks professional development for continued growth and encourages the development of teacher peer collaboration. As mentor the coach would attend district, regional, and national professional development opportunities to continue the learning process. As instructional advocate, the coach would help teacher-learning communities become self-sustaining in their ongoing efforts to engage in the change process to improve instruction.

#### CONCLUSION

Coaching has the potential to improve instruction and to increase student achievement. To realize this potential, coaches, teachers, and administrators

must rethink the coaching process in terms of teacher change. The conceptual model I suggest attempts to rethink instructional coaching by organizing responsibilities on three levels aligned with the continual process of teacher change. Now is the time to focus on boosting the effectiveness of instructional coaching, shifting the question from what coaches should be doing all day to, "How can ongoing teacher change be supported by the instructional coaching process?" Ultimately, instructional coaching must be effective as well as popular.

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# Bringing Science to the Art of Coaching in Education

by Heather Knight, Kathleen Stinnett and Jack Zenger

Coaching as a method of professional support for teachers and leaders is sweeping Washington State. This should come as no surprise considering that 10 out of 10 school districts in the Effective Districts Study use coaching (Abbott, Baker, & Stroh, 2004).

We define leaders broadly in this article as teacher leaders, principals, TOSAs, and instructional coaches who work with staff to transform student learning. We examine research that supports the impact of coaching in organizations, and discuss effective research-based practices common to all coaching models.

The definition of coaching blurs with many other helping roles in our field—

mentoring, training, consulting; these are all relevant forms of support, but the purpose and process utilized is fundamentally different from that of coaching. The essential difference lies in who takes ownership for the learning of the individual. The primary purpose of the coaching relationship is to empower adult learners to take the actions needed to achieve in their own professional growth goals.

Coaching is an empowering tool that puts the coachee squarely in charge of his or her own growth. The coach supports the coachee in developing his or her expertise then develops meaningful attainable action plans. The action plans are then monitored and measured for results; perhaps through training, professional reading, seeking the advice or input of colleagues and professional organizations.

Coaching is relatively new to the education community, thus few studies exist compared to other disciplines. However, careful analysis of those few studies, as well as analysis of studies from other fields, lead to the belief that coaching, done properly, enhances the structure of organizations and their attainment of desired goals.

This paper attempts to reach out and tap into the relevant research that addresses our key questions and issues. Specifically, we seek to answer the following questions:

1. What are the research-based benefits of coaching?
2. What are the essential coaching strategies and skills needed to maximize coaching effectiveness?
3. How can the coaching process be more consistent?



Heather Knight

...participants who received coaching support and follow-up implemented the new skills at a rate of 80–90%.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## **Q1: What are the research-based benefits of coaching?**

We look first at research conducted by Zenger-Folkman (ZF) (2007). Using a 360-degree-feedback process, ZF works within corporations and public agencies to calculate effectiveness of leaders who act as coaches for those they supervise. Analysis of hundreds of thousands of these 360-degree-feedback instruments sheds light on the effectiveness of coaching.

Analysis of leaders who were most effective in coaching resulted in a clear correlation between a leader's coaching effectiveness and his or her impact on the performance of those they supervised. Consistently, the data also show strong correlations between a leader's coaching effectiveness and the measurement of employee commitment and engagement.

ZF's conclusions about the impact of coaching are significant to answering the challenge of raising student achievement. They found:

- Effective coaching increases employee satisfaction.
- Employees feel they matter in their work and are more connected to their leaders.
- Employees are willing to go the extra mile to meet goals of their organization.
- Employees are more aligned with their organization's goals.

Another compelling reason to use coaching comes from the Joyce and Showers research (1996). They examined the effectiveness of professional development in terms of its actual impact on changing behavior and student learning. They found that participants who received coaching support and follow-up implemented the new skills at a rate of 80–90%. Conversely, in trainings where coaching and follow-up were not provided, implementation rates fell to below 20%. Thus, concluding that coaching dramatically increases the likelihood that new skills will be applied on the job.

## **Q2: What are the essential coaching strategies and skills needed to maximize coaching effectiveness?**

To answer this we turn to the work of counselors and therapists. However, we are not suggesting in any way that educational coaches perform the same role as therapists.

The differences between the therapist and the coach are enormous. However, both seek to transform human behavior.

Research from the world of counseling and therapy suggest that two important actions can have a significant impact effectiveness:

1. Asking the client what he or she would like to discuss.
2. Asking the client for feedback at the end of each session.

The first action implies that the coach should talk about things that are of greatest interest and value to the person being coached. While this concept seems obvious, our experience is that most leaders feel it is their responsibility to set the agenda in coaching conversations.

Allowing the person being coached to select from a variety of choices—choices they feel are important—increases the likelihood that they will take action and continue to work with that coach. To this end, a checklist may ensure that the conversation is focused on topics most important to those being coached. The coachee should review the topics on that list, and come to the first scheduled coaching session with four or five selected topics. By doing this, the coach sends several important messages to the coachee:

- The coach wants the person being coached to feel secure in the process.
- The coach respects their wishes.
- This is not just an isolated event, but the beginning of a long-term coaching relationship designed to benefit the coachee.

We are not suggesting that the coach should never suggest a topic; indeed, we recommend it strongly. However, when topics discussed are selected by the person being coached, success rates goes up.

The second action, asking for feedback demonstrates that when immediate feedback is asked for and received, attrition rates were cut in half, and effectiveness increased Duncan and Miller (2008).

In addition to providing indispensable reflection on the work at hand, asking for feedback communicates that the coach is vested in a collaborative process, and that input is valued and essential. Feedback may also reveal issues that would not have otherwise been uncovered.

The implication is that when coaches open themselves to personal feedback, more effective coaching discussions result and people are more likely to seek them out for coaching in the future. Thus stronger relationships are built and become a foundation of long term success.

When these two relatively simple actions are implemented the likelihood increases that the client will take action and also continue working with in the relationship (Duncan and Miller, 2008).

### **Q3: How can the process of coaching be more consistent?**

Due to the nascent nature of coaching in education, there are inconsistencies in the quality and effectiveness of coaches. The field is attracting people at a rapid rate, with varying levels of training and experiences specific to the role of coaching.

In order to guarantee effective coaching, coaches need training and opportunities to practice facilitating effective coaching conversations. Good coach training aligns with the standards of the ICF (International Coaching Federation), and focuses on effective questioning and listening skills in order to thoroughly discover the situation from the coachee's point of view.

Additionally, educational leaders should be provided with a clear framework of fundamental elements that can be addressed in each coaching conversation. This framework may be as simple as the following:

1. **Focus the Conversation**, explain what is hoped for in terms of outcomes, issues of confidentiality, and what role each person will play.
2. **See and Explore the Current State**, clarify the current situation as seen by the person being coached.
3. **Bridge to the Desired Outcomes**, the coach helps the person to think about what ideally would occur from that person's point of view.

4. **Form Clear Commitments and Action Steps**, lay out a clear, specific, doable plan with completion dates, that will enable the person being coached to achieve his or her goal.
5. **Monitoring for Results and Accountability**, check in to see how things are going. Establish how success will be measured and tracked—then measure it!

By using a framework, the coach creates ideal conditions for success.

### **CONCLUSION**

Coaching, like the broader disciplines of leadership, will always contain many characteristics of an art form. No two people will practice it in exactly the same way. However, through careful examination of existing research on the impact of successful coaching, it is possible to formulate specific frameworks to increase the consistency and quality of coaching in the educational setting.

The world of coaching in education can gain a great deal from embracing good ideas and practices from many sources, including the helping professions. In this way coaching in education may contribute to the educational community.

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# Challenges of Evaluating Coaching: Pitfalls to Avoid

by Marsha Riddle Buly, PhD, Tracy Coskie, PhD, LeAnne Robinson, PhD, and Laurel Disney

Over the past several years we have been interested in the growing phenomena of instructional coaching. We noted positive trend data in our regional schools where instructional coaching had been carefully implemented and supported, particularly at the elementary level. As we began to research needs related to the move of instructional coaching for literacy into the middle schools, we wondered how we could document teacher change and student growth that might result. Throughout our investigation, we grappled with many challenges. By sharing these challenges, our hope is that others will embark on more successful journeys toward documentation of what works and what does not work in the world of literacy coaching.

Our most recent attempt to research literacy coaching started with what we thought was going to be a natural quasi-experimental design. We were excited to learn of a district with four middle schools. Two of the middle schools were going to begin literacy coaching and each school had selected two teachers who would serve as coaches. The other two schools were scheduled to join in the coaching initiative the following year.

Soon after the district had approved our study, unfortunate obstacles quickly arose. We found that the district coaches, teacher leaders, and we, the researchers, didn't share a common vision of instruction as we had initially thought; the assessment data we expected wasn't delivered as promised, and we found it difficult or impossible to schedule observations. In addition, while we were researching, one of

the schools added training and implementation of an additional literacy innovation with money from a local club.

Although challenging, these obstacles could have been surmounted. However, upon conclusion of the first year, we were faced with a barrier that was not passable; the unexpected closure of one of our two experimental schools which resulted in a disbursement of students, teachers, and literacy coaches into the remaining three middle schools. Any possibility of tracking individual student progress within each school was now void. We attempted to continue documenting the change in teachers, but realized that we were not going to be able to link changes to student outcomes. Given the expense of studying a distant district with little hope of results, we made the painful decision to cut our losses. As a result, we were unable to demonstrate the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of literacy coaching as a means for instructional improvement or student outcomes even for this one district.

As we look back, we realize that our lessons learned may help others to succeed. We identified the following list of elements to consider before, during and following a similar evaluation process.

## BEFORE

1. Have a clear vision of powerful literacy instruction shared with the district, principals, and the coaches.
2. Identify and list the agreed upon components of powerful literacy instruction so that they can be uniformly tracked in observations and interviews.
3. Add a control school, but ensure there is not more than one unique initiative occurring at that school
4. Obtain support of the district and school administrators to minimize additional initiatives during your investigation.
5. Plan for qualitative measures, such as principal

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Marsha Riddle Buly**, **Tracy Coskie**, and **LeAnne Robinson** are all Associate Professors of Education at Western Washington University. The three shared editorship of "From the Coaches Corner" for NCTE's Voice from the Middle from 2004-2006. **Laurel Disney** is a doctoral student at Michigan State University who worked as a research observer with the WWU team.

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perceptions of the level of literacy implementation within classrooms.

6. Identify a person in the school responsible for tracking data and ensuring that it is collected appropriately, especially if teacher tests are used.
7. Develop an agreement at the school or district to cohort students for 2-3 years in order to manage other factors that may affect student achievement.

#### **DURING**

8. Maintain the calendar for data collection.
9. Review data on a regular basis to ensure it is being properly managed and will be useful.
10. Meet with administrators and coaches to keep everyone on the same page. Use the opportunity to share preliminary data.
11. Carefully track additional initiatives or events that may be impacting coaching, student literacy achievement, or your ability to collect data.

#### **AFTER**

12. Plan steps to include outside perspectives on the information gathered.
13. Share findings with stakeholders before going

public to check for errors and to celebrate accomplishments.

14. Carefully plan how and with whom the data will be shared.

To make decisions about implementing or maintaining innovations such as literacy coaching, districts and schools want to know if it makes a difference in teacher effectiveness and, ultimately, student achievement. Yet the reality is that it can be very difficult to document these changes, thus districts and schools must make decisions without sufficient information. As a result, ineffective interventions may be left in place and effective innovations may be tossed out in favor of some other equally untested approach.

We continue to have little concrete evidence of the direct effectiveness of literacy coaching, particularly at the middle and high school levels. In this short piece, we have offered a list of points to consider from our own retrospective examination of challenges we encountered. We hope that our brief story and lessons learned will help those of us with an interest in effective instruction to design efficient and careful evaluations of what could prove to be a very beneficial innovation for professional development.

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#### **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

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with me more than 30 days in two to four day sessions during my first year of teaching in Bakersfield, California. During my principal (Gonzaga University) and superintendent (Washington State University) internships I received professional leadership mentoring and coaching.

Coaching is and has been about helping new and experienced professionals meet the challenges they face as well as improve their working performance. It begins and ends with one-to-one dialogue that is data-based and focused on what research shows conclusively that coaches are essential to the growth and development of teachers and administrators as well as students. The cycle of feedback and personalized support that a mentor and coach can provide is significant is supporting and retaining new and experienced professionals in their emotional and technical skill and knowledge development. The contributors to

the journal and presenters at the July 28<sup>th</sup> Coaching Institute provide empirical research and commentary on a wide spectrum of programs and issues. It is our hope that this journal will be of great value to you. Remember, it is not so much as "...what we know..." it's how we use our knowledge and skills."

#### **REGISTER FOR JULY COACHING INSTITUTE**

This Spring 2008 issue of Washington State's Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa and our Summer Institute (July 24, 2008) are designed to provide you with unique opportunities to study and hear from educators who learn from colleagues who are implementing coaching programs that are grounded in theory and action research. Please enjoy this journal and join us at the Coaching Institute of 2008. Meet the authors and interact with educational leaders who are caring and daring coaches and innovators. Register at our website: [www.pdkwa.org](http://www.pdkwa.org).

# Instructional Coaching as a Leadership Development Pathway

by Tara Nesson, PhD Candidate, and G. Thomas Bellamy, PhD

Coaching and other teacher instructional leadership roles have grown quickly in Washington and nationally, reflecting confidence in teachers as an important source of influence for their colleagues. While most of the literature on coaching has focused on the impact on teaching and learning, research on leader development across organizations suggests a second benefit as well—the impact of these assignments on the coaches themselves. To explore this second benefit, we describe learning opportunities that coaching creates for the coaches themselves, and then suggest how these roles could contribute to leadership development in school districts and universities.



G. Thomas Bellamy

## INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING AS LEADER DEVELOPMENT

Every organization depends on leaders who set the direction for collective work, create alignment in group efforts, and maintain commitment to goals and values. As the challenges facing an organization become more complex, so does the need for leadership that is widely distributed and leaders who are constantly learning. Research from many organizations echoes what educators recognize as job-embedded professional development and points to job experiences as a primary source of learning about leadership. Drawing on interviews with successful and derailed executives, case studies of successfully led companies, and evaluations of leadership development programs, this literature identifies developmental job assignments, or challenging new responsibilities, as central in helping individuals develop leadership skills.

Of course, new job responsibilities do not always result in new learning. Those that do stretch people and push them out of their comfort zones, assign them responsibilities outside previous experience, make their results visible to peers and supervisors, and require them to respond in ambiguous situations where they establish new relationships and exert influence without formal authority (Ohlott, 2004).

While risks always exist when applying ideas from other organizations to schools, two considerations support a careful look at possibilities suggested in this literature. First, widespread concern about the supply of qualified school leaders has focused attention on how principals are prepared, particularly with respect to their leadership for instruction (Southern Regional Education Board, 2006). Second, the striking similarity between features that make job assignments “developmental” and the work of instructional coaches suggests opportunities for schools to develop leaders from within.

Every organization depends on leaders who set the direction for collective work...

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### Coaching as leader development.

The strategies and knowledge that brought classroom success are seldom sufficient when teachers become coaches. Like developmental job assignments, coaching often raises the stakes for success while also making work more visible. Coaches achieve goals when they influence other adults and sustain others' commitment to new practices, so new and different relationships with colleagues are required. A broader understanding of the school district is often needed as well in order to bridge gaps in communication about school priorities. Such challenges offer opportunities to learn and practice many leadership skills, depending on the specific assignments, the overall school situation, and the coach's interests.

### Possibilities for increasing coaches' learning.

How can coaching roles be made more useful for learning about leadership? The developmental job assignment literature suggests that schools:

- *Provide consistent support and feedback.* While current support for coaches in Washington is quite varied (Smith, 2006), literature on leadership development emphasizes regular feedback from supervisors or others with knowledge of the developmental assignment (Barrett & Beeson, 2002).
- *Help coaches set learning goals.* Setting goals fosters self-directed learning, so assessments that help coaches identify their leadership strengths and weaknesses could be a valuable addition to professional development related to immediate challenges of the coaching role.
- *Facilitate outside training.* The practical lessons learned from new job experiences are much more valuable when they are supported with specific skills and integrated into a more coherent understanding of leadership (Day, 2001).



### TOWARD A SYSTEMATIC PATHWAY FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Leadership development is both an individual and an organizational responsibility. From the perspective of an organization, individual learning from developmental job assignments, no matter how valuable, can be haphazard and disjointed. Additional planning and support are needed for

individual learning opportunities to match the organization's leadership needs. Not surprisingly, companies with the best reputations for good management are systematic in their use of job challenge to develop talent (Kotter, 1988), while those that claim the greatest need for leadership development do the least to support it (Conger & Benjamin, 1999).

In schools, so much is at stake for immediate results with every new administrative appointment that a systematic process for internal leadership development seems critical. For example, although an adequate supply of certified applicants exists for most principal positions, district administrators regularly report a crisis-level shortage of qualified candidates (Roza, 2003). Of course, we are not proposing that all leadership paths need to move out of the classroom and into principalship, and we are sensitive that teacher leadership is far more than a pathway to administration. However, schools do depend on some teachers to become principals, and this suggests systematic attention to what coaches learn from their assignments in addition to what they accomplish while performing them.

**Systematic use of developmental job assignments.** Used strategically, developmental job assignments give employees a wide variety of assignments and experiences in an effort to meet the long-term leadership needs of the organization (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). For example,

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Johnson and Johnson, a company known for leadership development, ensures that prospective leaders gain a series of experiences outside their areas of specialization and holds all supervisors responsible for supporting these individuals in their new roles (Fulmer, 2001).

**The need for partnerships.** Although many of the skills needed for a school's leadership roles are developed on the job, university programs share responsibility for preparing principals and administrators. Consequently, an effort to apply research on developmental job assignments to educational leadership involves both universities and school districts. But when their combined efforts are viewed as a single system, the process of leadership development seems disconnected.

In districts, high pressure for immediate results typically focuses coaches' efforts in specific areas of expertise and limits the breadth of experiences needed for leadership development. For their part, universities school leadership programs have remained quite separate from prior on-the-job experience. For several reasons, candidates enter principal preparation programs with quite varied skills and experiences, and this means that the curriculum can make few assumptions about candidates' earlier leadership development. This, in turn, results in pressure to emphasize applied skills for the practical aspects of principals' jobs (Murphy, 2007), even though university programs have neither time nor resources to duplicate what could be learned through earlier coaching assignments.

To test our conclusions about the disconnect between prior on-the-job learning and university preparation, we reviewed internet descriptions of all principal preparation programs in Washington's public universities and followed up with emails to clarify questions. While some programs reported enough applicants that they could use prior leadership experience as a factor in candidate selection, none showed

any systematic way to evaluate and certify the results of prior learning or any process for modifying program requirements as a result of earlier on-the-job leadership development.

**What strategies are suggested in the developmental job assignment literature?** The possibility clearly exists for a more systematic leadership pathway with closer links between a district's use of challenging job assignments and the university program's requirements. Possibilities include:

- *Create a long-term systematic plan for learning from developmental assignments.* One researcher estimates that it takes about ten years of well planned experiences to groom top leadership talent (Kotter, 1988). Support for long term development across different developmental assignments could be enhanced by new partnerships among district administrators and university programs for both leadership preparation and teacher advancement.
- *Balance the immediate organizational benefits of special assignments with their contribution to leadership development.* Coaching assignments can both improve instruction and support leadership development, but there is a natural tendency for administrators to repeat assignments in individuals areas of expertise and for teachers to seek out assignments with which they are already comfortable. To prepare teachers for the responsibilities of leadership, some mechanism is needed to encourage breadth of experience (Ohlott, 2004). A partnership that focuses attention on both immediate student-learning results and coaches' progress toward principal certification standards could provide one approach.
- *Foster peer support networks.* Individuals learn best in networks of support, and organizations depend on developing the capacities of teams, as well as individuals (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004). A mechanism that connects coaches with each other can support both goals, and this could be accomplished in a variety of partnership arrangements among districts, professional development organizations, and universities.
- *Coordinate academic and on-the-job learning*

To prepare teachers for the responsibilities of leadership, some mechanism is needed to encourage breadth of experience.

opportunities over the school year, so that coaches have more opportunities to integrate craft knowledge, theory, and beliefs about schooling into a coherent and structured knowledge base for their school leadership. This integration and structuring of knowledge is particularly important for adaptive performance and continued learning (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2001), and it is perhaps the most difficult to achieve without a coordinated system of leadership development.

### SUMMARY

Although most of the literature on the use of developmental job assignments to nurture leadership comes from organizations outside of education, its strategies have many similarities to instructional coaching in schools and its results seem relevant to current pressures on schools to adapt to rapidly changing expectations for leadership. The core idea is that job assignments play a critical role in leadership development. Used strategically, they create opportunities for individuals to build new skills while also helping organizations develop leadership from within. For education to take full advantage of the leadership growth potential of developmental job assignments, however, it will require new collaborations among school districts and university programs.

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# Coaching New Principals for Success

by Michael Silver, PhD

The principalship is a highly complex, demanding position and considered vital for a successful school. In order for all students to achieve, schools must have effective principals who are instructional leaders. Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Walstrom (2004) and Marzano, Waters & McNulty (2005) have concluded that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school. Yet, while principal leadership is considered essential for school success, support for new principals has only recently been recognized as important (Spiro, Mattis, & Mitgang, 2007).



Seattle University's Program for New Principals was created in 2006 to

provide structured support for new administrators through leadership coaching and on-going professional development. Supported by a grant from Washington Mutual, the pilot program pairs experienced leadership coaches with new administrators to smooth their transition. The goal of the program is to create a research-based, model program supporting new administrators through coaching, and to provide coach training and develop coaches committed to the success of new leaders.

Underlying the goal is a foundation of six guiding principles:

- The success of school improvement efforts is dependent on effective school leadership.
- Administrators need intense support in their early years on the job (induction) to master the managerial and emotional demands of the position and emerge as effective leaders who can guide their schools toward improved student achievement.
- Working with an outside coach is a desirable leadership induction model, as it may be difficult to establish a professional growth relationship built on trust and confidentiality with a senior administrator working in the same district as the new principal.
- Professional coaching requires the development of quality coaches. It involves learning new, sometimes complex, skills and understandings.
- Coaches need systems of support that provide the status, time, development, and recognition to function in this demanding role.
- Universities must take a fresh perspective by offering effective support for graduates as they transition to new leadership roles.

The Program for New Principals has three main components. Coaching support for new principals, support for leadership coaches of new principals and support for school-based internship supervi-

The pilot program pairs experienced leadership coaches with new administrators to smooth their transition.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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sors. With this program, each new administrator receives the services of a leadership coach for the first three years in a position, free of charge, and receives on-going professional development. Leadership coaches provide three-to-six hours of one-on-one coaching monthly, while maintaining frequent contact with new principals by phone and e-mail. They understand and support the needs of new administrators by using a variety of coaching strategies.

The program received a special project grant from the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to support two administrative interns who are completing the principal preparation program with leadership coaches for the 2007-08 school year. The goal of the grant is to improve the preparation of administrative interns for instructional leadership in schools. The impact of coaching interns will also be included in the program evaluation.

### **BLENDED COACHING**

The Program for New Principals draws on the research-based leadership coaching model developed at the New Teacher Center, University of California-Santa Cruz. The model, called *Blended Coaching*, was developed by Bloom, et. al. (2005), and combines a variety of strategies for the practice of leadership coaching. Five blended coaching strategies are described; they are: instructional, facilitative, consultative, collaborative, and transformational (Bloom et. al., 2005, pp. 51-97). According to Bloom et. al. (2005), coaching is “the practice of providing deliberate support to another individual to help him/her to clarify and/or to achieve goals” (p. 5); however, blended coaching strategies are targeted for leadership of instruction. The work enhances The Washington State Benchmarks for New Administrators and ISLLC standards.

With this as the framework and definition, leadership coaching training begins with a three-day workshop. After the initial training, leadership coaches attend four additional sessions throughout the year. Effective coaching relationships require other considerations, as trust and rapport are being built, including a shared understanding of coaching, confidentiality, commitments to openness, activities to be observed and mechanisms for data gathering

by the coach. Central to this model is the identification of coaches as individuals from outside the school or system with expertise in school leadership. Most leadership coaches are retired or experienced school or district level administrators. The coaches are chosen from a pool of applicants and carefully matched with novices based on the similarities of their respective school levels. Coaches are paid for working with each new administrator.

### **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

An outside team of evaluators is assessing the effectiveness of the Program for New Principals. The evaluation will help to determine whether the Seattle University program enhances the support of new administrators, influences and shapes leadership coaching practice, and alters the traditional role of site-based internship supervisors. The evaluation is guided by the following research questions: 1.) How do participants view the university-based program? 2.) What, if any, characteristics of this program appear to have the greatest influence on the support provided to program participants? 3.) How do program participants use the support they are provided in their individual practice?

First year research results of the Program for New Principals indicate that all of the program participants felt that the coaching program was a positive addition to the induction experience for new administrators (Silver et al., 2008). New principals viewed coaching positively and emphasized that it is both a valuable and unique form of professional development. Both coaches and new principals cited personalized support as one of the coaching model’s most significant assets. Participants viewed personalization as the ability of leadership coaches to tailor the support they provided to the new administrators to the circumstances in the school or to the specific challenges faced by new administrators. In addition, participants found various aspects of the program helpful and viewed it as a positive step toward providing increased support for new administrators. Leadership coaches viewed the cohort-based design of the program favorably, especially citing on-campus training featuring sharing ideas, getting feedback, and practicing coaching skills. New

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# Schools of Distinction: What Makes Them Distinct?

by Gene Sharratt, PhD, Greg Lobdell and Sue Mills

The Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) recently recognized 86 *Schools of Distinction* for their exceptional academic growth during 2001-2007. These 86 schools are economically, socially and ethically diverse as indicated in the boxed list below.

What distinguishes *Schools of Distinction* from other schools? How do *Schools of Distinction* compare to schools that made Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) and those that did not? These and related questions were at the center of a comprehensive study conducted by the Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE) during the fall and winter of 2008.

## SCHOOLS OF DISTINCTION DEMOGRAPHICS

- 51 elementary, 20 middle,  
15 high schools
- 31 greater than 50%  
poverty
- 14 non-white majority or  
multi-ethnic student  
population
- 48 Title I school-wide
- 17 more than double the  
state average of ESL  
students
- 21 districts greater than  
15,000 students
- 29 districts between 3,000  
and 15,000 students
- 36 districts smaller than  
3,000 students
- 23 districts less than 1,000  
students

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Gene Sharratt**, PhD, Director, WSU, Superintendent Certification Program;  
**Greg Lobdell**, Director of Research, Center for Educational Effectiveness; and **Sue Mills**, Executive Director, Center for Educational Effectiveness.

## READINESS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In *Schools of Distinction*, over 75% of the staff report they believe all students can meet state standards, compared to 44% agreement from other Washington State schools. Staff also report strong willingness to work at changing the school for the better and willingness to address conflict compared to 55% elsewhere in the state. This theme centers on the premise of “moral purpose” and is reflected in a commitment to: “raising the bar and closing the gap of student achievement for all individuals, treating people ethically – adults and students alike, and improving the whole system” (Fullan, 2005, p. 68).

In *Schools of Distinction*, student learning is the concern and responsibility of everyone. These schools reflect shared beliefs and values, have clear and meaningful goals, and a clear vision of change. A focus on student learning goals, building consensus among staff for change, and removing distractions and competing programs that may interfere with reaching building goals, are common characteristics found in effective schools and districts (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004).

A strong readiness for improvement is also reflected in the belief that continuous improvement is part of a successful learning team. Among the *Schools of Distinction* this attribute was demonstrated in their focus on continuously improving teaching and learning, a commitment to inquiry, research, and best practices, and sharing their collective knowledge, methods and successful instructional strategies with colleagues.

## A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

A high level of trust and a willingness to address conflict and engage in collaborative problem solving are common characteristics in *Schools of Distinction*. These schools build a culture of commitment, collegiality, mutual respect, and stability. Aspects of this culture of collaboration include: high standards, trust, mutual respect, competence, and opportunities for peer support and collaboration.

*Schools of Distinction* exhibit high levels of collaboration with staff, students, parents and community stakeholders. They work together on what constitutes “effective instruction” and “essential content” and hold one another accountable for observable changes in classroom practice and student learning. Teacher actions in these schools includes planning, creating, researching, assessing, refining and working on instructional strategies together.

Relational trust was found to be a common attribute in *Schools of Distinction*. This trust was reflected in high levels of respect, a shared commitment to a clear and common purpose, a willingness and ability to address and resolve conflicts, a focus on measurable results and a mutual acceptance of responsibility and accountability for student learning outcomes. Bryk and Schneider (2002) conclude: “As a social resource for school improvement, relational trust facilitates the development of beliefs, values, organizational routines, and individual behaviors that instrumentally affect students’ engagement and learning” (p. 115).

## LEADERSHIP

Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom (2004) suggest school leadership strongly affects student learning, second in influence only to classroom instruction. “Principals play a vital and multifaceted role in setting the direction for schools that are positive and productive workplaces for teachers and vibrant learning environments for children” (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe,& Meyerson, 2005, p. 1).

Purposeful, data-driven, results-oriented and courageous were the words staff used to describe the characteristics of *Schools of Distinction* leaders. These staff reports their leaders exhibit a relentless focus on the central purpose of the school - continuous improvement in student learning. These leaders are actively involved in the improvement of instruction, highly visible, are knowledgeable regarding data analysis and the significance of using data to inform instruction.

The value of focused leadership was recognized in the study *School Turnarounds* (2007) as vigorous analysis of data, identification of key problems, and selection of strategies to address the central challenges typically identify these schools. Leaders in “turn-

## STUDY FINDINGS

- **Readiness for Improvement**  
Belief in student learning, willingness to change, openness to new ideas
- **Culture of Collaboration**  
High trust, problem solving, and willingness to address conflict
- **Leadership**  
Focused, results-oriented, data-driven, and stable
- **System Support for Improvement**  
Support for doing the hard work and having the hard conversations– data-driven
- **High Quality Instruction**  
Collaboration in instructional processes, design, analysis, and intervention

Staff in the *Schools of Distinction* rated these five attributes “substantially” higher than did staff from schools with similar demographics, regardless if they made AYP or not.

around schools” collect and work with staff in creating a school improvement action plan based on the data.

Fullan (2003) notes, “The moral imperative of the principal involves leading deep cultural change that mobilizes the passion and commitment of teachers, parents, and others to improve the learning of all students, including closing the achievement gap” (p. 41). This belief is supported by the study *Beat the Odds* (2006) in which the authors comment, “Principals help schools succeed not when they are flashy superstars, but when they stay focused on the things that truly improve schools and keep pushing ahead, no matter what the roadblocks” (p. 7). In *Schools of Distinction*, over 50% of the staff indicated that the principal is in the classroom observing instruction “on a daily basis.”

Tenure is a factor in building stability, which in turn leads to an increase in student learning. Within

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the *Schools of Distinction*, principals' tenure was longer than that of comparison schools. The importance of leadership stability was confirmed in the Waters and Marzano (2006) study which found leadership tenure is positively correlated with student achievement.

### SYSTEM SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT

*Schools of Distinction* developed an effective system to support their building improvement work. This support was demonstrated in high levels of parent and community involvement, focused professional development, system-wide alignment, and the use of data in the strategic allocation of resources. Parent and community involvement is supported in research in which schools that initiated partnerships with families are successful in sustaining connections that improve student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Increased stakeholder involvement is a priority in *Schools of Distinction* and reflected in parent and community involvement. This included involvement by all segments of the population including special education, ELL, racial/ethnic and economically disadvantaged families. These school-wide strategies resulted in meaningful parent and community activities and parent support for implementing strategies to close achievement gaps.

*Schools of Distinction* put these findings into action by recognizing that all parents, regardless of income, education, or cultural background, are involved in their children's learning and hold expectations that their children will do well. These schools focus efforts to engage families and community members in developing trusting and respectful relationships and make sure parents and staff understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise.

### HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION

*Schools of Distinction* ensure high quality instruction through curriculum alignment, program fidelity, data-driven instruction, collaborative lesson design and the use of multiple assessments to inform instructional decisions. This instruction is consistently implemented in every classroom and is supported through principal and peer coaching and observations.

Staff in *Schools of Distinction* emphasize principles of good instruction and communicate clear expectations on what to teach. These educators develop a common vision and understanding of quality teaching and learning. The *Beat the Odds* schools figured out ways to customize instruction and intervention so it exactly suited each student's needs. This study noted, "These schools are putting in place a whole set of interlocking practices and policies geared toward winning a marathon (instead of a sprint). It involves a vital cycle of instruction, assessment, and intervention, followed by more instruction, assessment and intervention" (p. 40).

Quality instruction in *Schools of Distinction* is characterized by: clarifying what each student is expected to learn, providing additional time and support for students who are not learning, and recognizing educational improvement is hard work and requires a long-term commitment.

### SUMMARY

The purpose of schooling is to ensure high levels of learning for all students. The values, attitudes and behaviors identified in the *Schools of Distinction* research is an essential component for dissemination of knowledge and best practices. Schools face enormous pressure to increase achievement for all students. This is especially acute in schools with traditionally large populations of struggling students. Educators are eager for school examples that beat the odds. We can learn from these schools, focus on the right things, and support conditions under which additional schools can develop and flourish. Lessons from Schools of Distinction offer this opportunity.

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# Sharing Best Practices for Student Performance: What Will Bring Teachers to the Table to Collaborate?

by Andrea M. Leary

“The tradition of teacher isolation is still so entrenched in schools that fostering meaningful collaboration is a significant challenge...”

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Across Washington state, teachers’ professional development training is transforming (DuFour & DuFour, 2007), from a feel-good model to results-driven accountability for student performance. This paradigm shift demands that teachers collaborate to leverage best practices. Accordingly, school districts are looking to coaches to strengthen professional development, improve student performance, and build professional learning communities.

Yet many teachers fear that accountability will highlight weaknesses as indicated in my interviews. Most teachers guard their teaching materials and avoid vulnerability, skeptical of any pay-

back for disclosing their practices and learning concerns. A principal, who considered himself an “enlightened education leader,” was confronted with the grim reality when not a single teacher from a faculty of over a hundred had taken advantage of release time for collaborating with colleagues. The tradition of teacher isolation is still so entrenched in schools that fostering meaningful collaboration is a significant challenge” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 118). The influx of new coaches hired to address these needs ask pivotal questions (Knight, 2007):

- What helps teachers overcome their fears of collaboration?
- What motivates them to collaborate on best practices?
- What are the implications for instructional coaches?

Looking for answers, I reviewed the research and interviewed Washington teachers and coaches.

## OVERCOMING FEARS OF COLLABORATION

Building a collaborative, peer-coaching environment requires simplicity, ease in implementation, resources, and time (Knight, 2007). These conditions create a cumulative effect of good experiences. Comments from experienced school district leaders indicate that they support the research through their actions. Mark Johnson, Superintendent of the Nooksack Valley School District notes that school districts must provide time for the reciprocal relationships required in coaching to develop. Paul Robb, Instructional Coach from the Seattle School District, adds that in his experience “Adults prefer working together. Making a commitment to work together and being transparent are keys.”

Experiencing successful collaboration opportunities breaks the barrier to collaboration.

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Once past their fears, teachers can begin to coach one another and collaborate toward best practices. Furthermore, “teachers must trust those who initiate change and believe that change can produce a positive force,” observed Pamela Robinette, School Coach for the Burlington Edison School District.

Through my discussions and interviews with leaders, I found three key motivators to collaboration: focus on specific needs; an inclusive atmosphere for sharing; and, with growing trust, authentic dialogue and reflection.

#### **MOTIVATION TO COLLABORATE ON BEST PRACTICES**

Focusing on specific needs and objectives eases tensions. Teachers collaborate when they have a “common problem of practice to focus on, such as an instructional framework, strategy, or lesson.” Mark Johnson underscored this and continued to say that a “reciprocal relationship between a system and school that provides both high levels of expectations and support for collaborative learning is required.” Solving problems together engages and empowers teachers, even those who feel isolated. Pamela Robinette added that “we have to show how we differentiate student learning, so collaborating in

and across departments is a must. We are moving away from the ‘I stand alone’ philosophy and real-

ize that we are part of a team and together we can make change happen.”

Sharing knowledge as peers means to give and take. A peer-coaching program requires equality between teachers and coaches, employing both top-down and bottoms-up approaches, with principals fully on board (Knight, 2007). Paul Robb advised that, “especially at the secondary level, teachers need to feel that there is inclusion in an open, safe environment where there is an affiliation with others. Adults need to see themselves as learners so that learning is a lever for change.”

Teachers and coaches I interviewed agree that collaboration is somewhat of an evolutionary process. Problem-solving toward specific objectives and building an inclusive atmosphere for sharing are initial steps toward collaboration. As communication and trust levels build, teachers create an atmosphere of authenticity. Everyone’s voice is heard, and dialogue and reflection are valued and appreciated. A trusting environment engenders rapport, and kindness (Knight, 2007). Finally, collaboration begins to resemble a learning community.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES**

The onslaught of instructional coaches invites scrutiny. Is this a quick fix, or will districts invest in research-proven coaching models that actually improve student performance?

“Coaching can lead to sustained implementation of new teaching practices in schools. The danger is that schools will implement school-based coaching too simplistically, underestimating the complexity of change initiatives” (Knight, 2007, pp. 26-27). Will instructional coaching translate collaboration on best practices into measurable results in student performance? While facing the hurdles of teacher collaboration, coaches must also broker trusting relationships between teachers, principals, and central office staff (Swinnerton, 2007).

Although coaching is relatively new for schools and professional development programs, schools can and should rely upon the research that already exists. Effective strategies for coaching and professional development involve learning organizations where professional learning communities are part of the cul-

A peer-coaching program requires equality between teachers and coaches, employing both top-down and bottoms-up approaches, with principals fully on board.

and across departments is a must. We are moving away from the ‘I stand alone’ philosophy and real-

ture and mission of the school. “We will know a new era has dawned when educators engaged in the deepest and most meaningful learning won’t even recognize they are participating in professional development” (DuFour & DuFour, 2007, p. 27).

### A PLACE AT THE TABLE

Schools will need to invest the time, talent, and resources to make collaboration for best practices a reachable goal. Focusing on teacher needs, reasonable objectives, and collaborative problem solving will help to begin the process. Once it begins, early wins and positive reinforcement will build the momentum.

Teachers and schools will need to build professional learning communities creating an environment of safety, inclusion, sharing, trust, and authenticity. When teachers view themselves as learners, and all involved view themselves as peers, a culture of self-aware, reflective, best practices is more likely to develop. Keys to collaboration are suspension of the hierarchy and openness to learning, change, and growth.

Peer equality requires a top-down/bottom-up approach. Paul Robb put it succinctly in stating that the culture must be one of “inclusion that is affirming, open, and safe.”

As systems of accountability are put in place and expectations change, collaboration becomes a central strategy to facilitate best-practice instruction. The teachers, coaches, and leaders I interviewed and the

literature I reviewed indicate that teaching, learning, and good instruction are most likely to be successful in a culture of equality, openness, willingness to learn, and thoughtful reflection. Best practices are achievable with a commitment to building system-wide learning communities.

***Author’s note:** Educators from best-practice research and districts across Western Washington contributed to the analysis in this article. I would like to thank Mark Johnson (2006), Superintendent of the Nooksack Valley School District; Paul Robb, Instructional Coach from the Seattle School District; and Pamela Robinette, School Coach for the Burlington Edison School District, for their time and interview participation.*

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# Voices of Experience

## Renton School District: Professional Development Coaches

by Janet Regge and Karen Soine

### DEMOGRAPHICS

The Renton School District, located in the South Puget Sound, serves approximately 13,500 students in 5 high schools, 3 middle schools and 13 elementary schools. 43.3% of the students qualify for free/reduced meals. Staff number 397 elementary teachers (K-5), with 336 females and 61 males with an average of 11.1 years of teaching experience.

### BACKGROUND

In July 2005, Renton’s district improvement plan identified essential understandings related to professional development. One component of the plan included creating professional development coaching (PDC) positions at every elementary school. We were hired from a pool of experienced teacher leaders to launch this innovative, research-based professional development model. Our coaching model is funded by Basic Education, Title I, Title II, and I-728 monies.

### APPROACH TO COACHING

While we share a common title and purpose, our approaches are determined by the unique needs of our buildings. On any given day, you might find us modeling a math lesson, problem-solving with a first year teacher, preparing professional development activities for the entire staff, attending a grade level collaboration meeting or facilitating a book study. We meet bimonthly as a team of PDCs to provide support and focus for our work. These meetings are es-

sential for maintaining our morale and reinforcing our purpose in the schools; we celebrate successes and brainstorm solutions to individual challenges.

During our first year, we spent a large percentage of our time out of the building attending workshops on mentoring skills, data analysis, curriculum implementation and alignment, and assessment. Clear communication about our responsibilities and duties proved to be a challenge. Some teachers misunderstood our positions and felt threatened by our presence, while others welcomed the support and encouragement to grow professionally. We maintained our resolve because we felt supported by our district and building leadership, and we were united as PDCs in our commitment to improve student learning. We continue to work through these system challenges with the support of district leadership by building trusting relationships with teachers, clarifying our roles, and highlighting the powerful results of our collaborative work.

### SUCCESS IDENTIFIED

Our work with new teachers is rewarding. Through goal-setting, observation, problem-solving, and reflection we are able move teachers towards becoming autonomous. We foster community, continuity, and camaraderie among new teachers by hosting monthly district-wide trainings on topics of interest to them. An equally important facet of our position is creating opportunities for veteran teachers to reach their professional goals and the goals of the district. We team-teach lessons, provide resources and research to support the curriculum, and model effective teaching strategies. Just as teachers differentiate instruction for their students, we differentiate our professional development on the needs of our teachers.

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# From the Field

## Bellingham School District: Early Initiators of Instructional Coaching

by Sherrie Brown and Marsha Riddle Buly, PhD

### DEMOGRAPHICS

Located in Whatcom County in the Northwest corner of the state, Bellingham student population is 10,491. The district has three high schools, ranging in student population from 1,051 to 1,232 and a small alternative high school, in addition to four middle schools and thirteen elementary K-5 schools. 32.3% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Average teaching experience is 12.6 years.

### BACKGROUND

The Bellingham school district was one of the first in the region to explore instructional coaching. As early as 1994 an instructional coaching model, focused on literacy, was implemented in some schools after the school board approved a policy that financially supported, and expected, professional development. At about the same time 12 elementary teachers attended a summer institute titled *Literacy Learning in the Classroom*, offered by Richard C. Owen Publishers. The institute focused on developing teachers' understandings of literacy. In the bigger picture, the summer institute workshops were part of a professional development approach with reflective coaching as a central element. Following the summer institute, the teachers returned to their elementary schools ready to change the way they taught. They sparked interest in many peers and three more elementary schools implemented a professional development coaching model. One of these elementary schools, diverse in student population, faced with low test scores, and

concerned about the instruction and learning in the school, within the second year of implementing coaching began to see positive changes. The faculty attributed these changes including increased test scores to the coaching model. Additionally, the impressive gains sparked interest from other schools, resulting in a gradual spread of coaching across the district. The conversation between many teachers and the administrator began to focus on how learning occurs in terms of teacher instruction.

### APPROACH TO COACHING

As often happens in educational innovations, the district adopted a model and then tweaked it to make it their own. The greatest change occurred when the secondary schools adopted coaching in the early 2000's. The focus shifted from literacy to instructional coaching. Coaches were trained to work across content areas in the middle and high schools. This resulted in the current Bellingham Professional Development Coaching Model. The model incorporates aspects of the original R.C. Owens approach, the University of Santa Cruz new teacher mentoring program, Critical Friends, Cognitive Coaching, and Washington State's "Mentoring Matters."

There are three-tiers in the model: a school coach, a district coach, and an outside consulting coach. The school coach coaches teachers, the district coach coaches the school coach, and the outside consulting coach provides support for the district coaches.

Several elements are critical in the Bellingham Professional Development model. Among those are: 1) Coaching is based on teacher inquiry. The teacher being coached identifies a question to research or dig into regarding effective teaching and learning.

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# The “Studio Residency”: A Job-Embedded Coaching Model

by **Beth Boatright, PhD, and Chrysan Gallucci, PhD**  
with **Judy Swanson, Michelle Van Lare, and Irene Yoon**

Imagine having one day a month set aside for you and an expert coach to develop your professional skills. Imagine yourself studying a specific instructional issue that is anchored in your students’ learning needs, and that is something that you struggle to master each day. Imagine getting a chance to step back from the daily work of teaching to collect data on individual students’ reading comprehension or discussion skills, and “try on” a wide range of techniques at the hip of an experienced, qualified instructional coach.

## What does a studio residency model look like?

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### THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This article results from research on the CEL-district partnerships. In the fall of 2004, the authors initiated a qualitative research study into what, and how, a third-party support provider—the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington—engages districts in a collaborative teaching and learning partnership about instructional improvement. Using a three-year case study design, we collected and analyzed over 175 interviews and many more informal conversations, field notes from observations of over 135 district and school events, as well as artifacts from district, school, and classroom sources.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Beth Boatright**, PhD, is a Research Associate at the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington. **Chrysan Gallucci**, PhD, is Associate Research Faculty in the College of Education at UW, Research Director of CEL. **Boatright** and **Gallucci**, with the help of **Swanson**<sup>1</sup>, **Van Lare**, and **Yoon**, are engaged in qualitative studies of CEL/district partnerships that focus on the work of instructional leaders and systemic instructional improvement across multiple school districts in Washington state and California. Beth Boatright: eeb2@u.washington.edu

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Recent medical school graduates have the benefit of this kind of training when they are “in residency.” But teachers, principals, and central office leaders rarely get an opportunity to work side-by-side with skilled coaches or take risks in a controlled environment. Fortunately, this is beginning to change in Washington State. The Highline and Marysville school districts, for example, have begun to provide ongoing, job-embedded learning opportunities for their employees through a “studio residency” model.

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

In Highline, studio residencies are a joint enterprise of two schools. One hosts highly focused coaching activities onsite in a “studio” or “demonstration” classroom; the other sends staff to the first school to be “in residency” during these professional development activities. Each month they flip-flop so that teachers and leaders from both schools have a chance to host the studio classroom and travel offsite to observe others. The host teacher’s classroom serves as a “studio” for her and others’ professional learning.

Principals from both “residency” and “studio” schools typically observe these professional learning opportunities, as do many central office leaders. External expertise is provided by an external instructional consultant – contracted through the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington – who typically facilitates the studio residency work around a previously agreed-upon aspect of instructional practice.

Studio residencies can span multiple days across multiple settings within a host school. The format typically involves a pre-observation discussion, observation, and post-observation debrief. Participants may gather in a conference room to discuss a particularly vexing instructional issue, then silently observe this instructional issue in practice at the studio classroom, and then discuss their observations and possible next steps as a large group back in the conference room.

## A CASE IN POINT

We observed over 23 days of studio residencies in Highline between 2005 and 2007.<sup>2</sup> One in particular stands out as an example of expert-guided professional development that actively engaged educators at multiple levels of the district. In the spring of 2006, principals and teachers from three elementary schools, as well as instructional coaches, Highline central office leaders, and a CEL consultant (roughly ten adults total) studied how classroom “book clubs” might prompt authentic text-based conversations among fifth graders. For two days these adults “in residency” were released from their jobs to focus on a school-wide problem of practice.

### DAY ONE

Day One of this studio residency began with an observation of Laura (pseudonym), the studio teacher, as she did a Read Aloud of a mystery book with her fifth grade students.<sup>3</sup> The students sat on the floor as she read the book and periodically paused to ask the group questions about what they heard. Sometimes Laura asked the group of students to “turn and talk” to a partner about what they were thinking. Laura was teaching the characteristics of mysteries as a genre of literature. Lyn, the CEL consultant, sat next to Laura as she taught the Read Aloud.

Meanwhile, the adults in “residency” observed closely and took notes on what students were saying in their paired discussions. Switching between whole-group and paired discussions was intended to gradually release students from the guidance of the teacher and build their independence as thinkers. In doing so, it became clear that students could not yet build upon each others’ comments to produce a complex idea; the students needed more scaffolding. After class, the adults debriefed what they saw and decided to use Day Two to observe the same students in four-person discussions about a shared text. These “book clubs” were going to be a vehicle for strengthening students’ reading comprehension, as well as their abilities to participate in basic text analysis through group discussion. The adults agreed to do some of their own homework: to read about building productive book clubs in Lucy Calkins’ *The Art of Teaching Reading*.

### DAY TWO

Day Two began with an hour-long discussion among the adults about what authentic, text-based conversations might look like at the fifth grade level. Laura, still the studio teacher, excused herself early to begin teaching. Ten minutes later, the group of adults entered her classroom just as students were beginning to meet in their four-person book clubs. Whatever transpired in Laura’s classroom would be the basis for future discussions. No one expected perfection. In fact, Lyn reiterated that they were “just collecting data” on the students’ ability to hold text-based discussions.

As students settled into their book clubs, it appeared that some “conversations” were simply a mix of unrelated statements. One student would put an idea on the table, but get no response. Another student in the same book club would put forth a different idea, without building upon the first student’s idea. Groups were literally not on the same page; it seemed like students did not know how to get their peers to address their ideas – or were unaware that they were supposed to do so. Laura approached Lyn halfway across the room to chat briefly about this problem. Lyn agreed that this problem was occurring in multiple book clubs, and that the larger issue was getting students to “become accountable to their book groups.”

After class, the adults convened in the conference room to debrief. Lyn emphasized that there was a greater issue of accountability at stake:

*Lyn:* Students need to know that they are accountable to their book club, and that it’s everyone’s responsibility to keep track of the discussions.

*A teacher (from the visiting school):* Yeah! I want my students to care about what their peers are saying, but they’re not there yet either. (Addressing the group) What do you do about that?

Ensuing conversation led to a discussion of next steps for Laura, and some suggestions for professional reading on authentic text-based conversations at the elementary level. In this example the studio resi-

gency model allowed Laura to address a real problem of practice with her colleagues and principal in a non-threatening environment. The studio residency also provided a space for visiting teachers to gather ideas for their own professional development.

### DOES IT WORK?

We saw evidence that these studio residencies also prompted veteran teachers to rethink their practice. One explained that she had been formerly “lulled into a false sense of progress” with a seemingly high-performing reader. After participating as a studio teacher, she learned how to better identify and address students’ strengths and challenges in reading. She commented,

I think this is a new mindset for a lot of teachers. They always think of [*professional development*] in terms of, “Here comes another program.” But the whole approach to [*studio residencies*] is not a program. It’s, “How can we refine our craft? How can we get better and add to our knowledge base and be willing to take some risks?”

Forty-five miles to the north, the Marysville School District implemented what they call “studio days” in 2005 with the same literacy consultant from CEL.<sup>4</sup> One Marysville middle school teacher claimed that studio residencies helped him realize that he had been doing most of the work for students, by leading them to preferred answers. Through these professional learning opportunities, he learned that “students [*are*] actually able to look at their own work—that their biggest struggle [*is*] just hearing their own voice[s].”

Seeing such a visible influence of professional development on practice is rare, but our data lead us to believe that this type of job-embedded coaching has prompted teachers to “try on” new instructional techniques that are likely to improve learning outcomes for struggling students. Although the focus of our study was on teacher learning and not on the model’s impact on student achievement, it is clear that positive trends are emerging in the development of teachers’ content knowledge and their awareness of students’ learning needs. In situations where educational leaders reserved time and funds for a literacy expert to guide classroom-embedded profession-

al learning opportunities and also followed up with instructional coaching support between the studio residency events we observed teachers starting to develop new practices.

### BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF THIS MODEL

Powerful professional development can – and does – deepen teachers’ subject matter when it resides within a content domain (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Grossman, Stodolsky, & Knapp, 2004; Stodolsky, 1988). Furthermore, when teachers work on the problems of practice that arise in their own classrooms, they steadily accumulate new practices that are anchored in their own students’ learning needs.

What sets the studio residency model apart from most professional development offered to teachers is that it involves:

- real students and real problems of teaching practice,
- teachers released from their everyday responsibilities,
- external instructional expertise *as well as* teachers’ own knowledge about practice
- ongoing participation from building and district leaders,
- sustained participation with a group of people over several sessions a year.

The job-embedded nature of these professional learning experiences increases the likelihood that teachers will be able to transfer what they learn into their own classroom practices (Showers & Joyce, 1996; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). But the model is not without its challenges. Successful studio residencies require districts to fund teacher release time and expert consultant wages. The model also calls for a great deal of time and energy to sort out the logistics. Given these parameters, studio residencies tend to be intentional, well-planned events that are aimed at building the capacity of a few educators who could then be sources of expertise for others. However, the current push for increasing all students’ test scores sometimes makes such a large investment in a small group of people a hard sell.

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# Leaders: Are you Coachable?

by Gene Sharratt, PhD

Leadership coaching is a popular professional growth strategy. Although the longitudinal research on the impact of leadership coaching is scarce (Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas & Kucine, 2003), the emerging literature is favorable (McGovern, Lindemann, Vergara, Murphy, Barker, & Warrenfeltz, 2001). Leaders exhibit a positive reaction to coaching, and those who worked with a coach were more likely to set specific goals, share feedback, solicit ideas for improvement, improve self-awareness, and report strong job satisfaction



(Luthans & Peterson, 2002; Smither et al., 2003).

There is an array of literature focused on the attributes of effective leadership coaches (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; McManus, 2006; Nuefeld & Roper, 2003). Some recognized coach attributes include: skills in building relationships, providing meaningful feedback, listening, observing, and questioning skills, establishing trust and maintaining confidentiality.

The ultimate goal of leadership coaching is to have a positive impact on student achievement. Hargrove (1995) suggests coaches inspire people by helping them recognize the previously unseen possibilities that lay embedded in their existing circumstances.

While coaching skills are well known, little attention is given to the traits of leaders who can be coached to continuous improvement.

What does it mean to be “coachable?” What are the attributes of those leaders who can be coached to personal and professional skill development?

## ATTRIBUTES OF COACHABLE LEADERS

London and Smither (2002) report leadership skills are more likely to improve when leaders perceive a need for personal change. A strong personal readiness to embrace the benefit of coaching is essential for leadership improvement (McManus, 2006). Coachable leaders are aware of their own limitations and eager to learn and improve. These leaders seek advice and counsel, utilize multiple assessments from a variety of stakeholders, and persist in their efforts to implement identified changes. Coachable leaders demonstrate a strong need for continued personal growth and fulfillment. They work to realize their personal potential and seek learning experiences that contribute to their effectiveness.

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### COACHABLE LEADERS ARE:

- Committed to their personal and professional development.
- A lifelong learner.
- Willing to acknowledge the need for continued improvement.
- Able to accept and implement feedback from a variety of stakeholders.
- Persistent as they attempt new approaches to leading.
- Ready to challenge their present leadership beliefs.
- Eager to consider new possibilities in leading and managing.
- Willing to take risks and change behavior.
- Comfortable with not knowing “all the answers.”
- Not afraid to fail and demonstrate a willingness to learn from mistakes.
- Willing to let go of behaviors or beliefs that no longer work for them.
- Comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.
- Self-confident and willing to engage in a process of introspection.

Source: Barham and Wahl (2000)

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

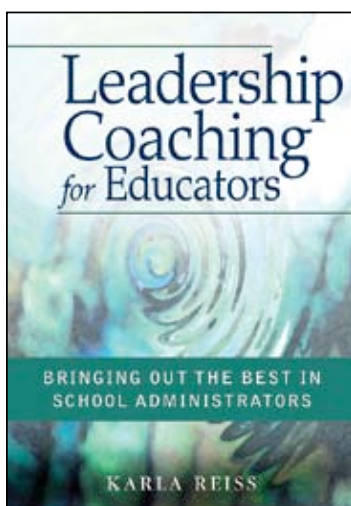
Gene Sharratt, PhD, is the director of the Washington State University Superintendent Certification Program. He is past superintendent of the Chehalis School District and regional service district, North Central ESD #171. He is a popular speaker, seminar leader, and author. His research interests include attributes of highly effective leaders, gender equity, and district and school improvement.

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Leadership Coaching for Educators: Bringing Out the Best in School Administrators

reviewed by Christine H. Hoyos and Kevin J. Shrum

Education has long been a profession of isolation; educators working together congenially and somewhat collegially. However, with the arrival of NCLB and the pressure to meet standards and AYP, educators are finding the need to open their doors to peers, share their challenges, and



Reiss, K. (2007). *Leadership Coaching for Educators*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Corwin Press.

receive feedback on their practice to improve student learning. Coaching is proving to be an effective way to support teachers in overcoming challenges to make improvements in teaching and learning. However, improvements in teaching and learning at the classroom level alone aren't enough to reach the goals of buildings, districts, and the educational system. In her book, *Leadership Coaching for Educators: Bringing Out the Best in*

*School Administrators*, Karla Reiss recommends coaching for every member of the organization including educational leaders. In order to reach the goals set by school districts, each member of the system needs individualized, differentiated support to overcome challenges and work toward their personal and professional goals for the good of the larger organization.

*Leadership Coaching for Educators* is written for anyone interested in pursuing coaching at the administrative and leadership level of education. The book provides an overview of coaching and highlights the necessary skills, processes, and mindsets that successful coaches need. It consists of eight basic chapters focusing on the purpose for coaching, mindset and attributes of a coach, core coaching competencies, strategies to break through resistance,

powerful coaching in action, and implementing successful coaching. The book lays a strong foundation for why coaching is an effective mode of professional development, particularly at the leadership level.

Coaching has proven effective in business and other private arenas, so why not in the arena of education? The author compares the effects of coaching to not coaching and sees coaching as a strategy to achieve peak levels of performance; a strategy for leaders to identify goals, and take action towards their goals with support and feedback.

A third of the book is dedicated to identifying and describing the Core Coaching Competencies: Setting the Foundation, Co-Creating the Relationship, Communicating Effectively, Facilitating Learning and Results. Once the core competency is named, the author breaks the competency down into sub-competencies, and describes each in-depth, with examples and tips provided. Clarity around the competencies for coaching support is emphasized as being essential to the success of coaching.

Karla Reiss knows that whether the need is performance improvement or professional growth, resistance to change is part of the process. A whole chapter is dedicated to strategies to break through resistance. The author contends that the reason for resistance must be uncovered for people to be able to move forward and make progress toward their goals. Among the sources of resistance are: limiting beliefs, assumptions, fear, judgments, and obstacles. Some of the strategies to break through resistance include:

- removing limiting beliefs and transforming them into positive thoughts,
- looking deeper at the assumptions people are holding onto,
- overcoming fear,
- reframing obstacles as opportunities.

The overall success of changing a system depends

[continues on page 34](#)

# Coaching and Mentoring First Year and Student Teachers

reviewed by Kari Henderson-Burke

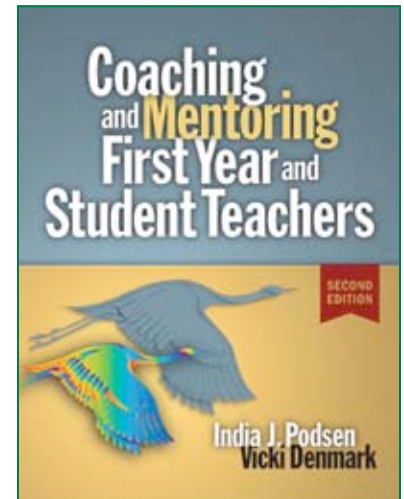
Many bright, enthusiastic, and passionate people train to become teachers. Sadly, in spite of the joys of serving in education, nearly half of all young teachers will leave the profession within seven years, most within the first two. Student teachers and first year teachers face complex and multi-faceted challenges that are not addressed in pedagogy-based teacher preparation programs. Novice teachers must navigate through overwhelming factors while learning to master instruction: difficult work assignments, unclear expectations, inadequate resources, isolation, and reality shock. Clearly, in order to retain excellent teachers, it is imperative that schools provide effective mentors to help new and prospective teachers survive and thrive in education. In their book *Coaching and Mentoring First Year and Student Teachers*, Podsen and Denmark have developed a program with a menu of supporting activities designed to assist novice teachers through their first, crucial years in the profession.

*Coaching and Mentoring First Year and Student Teachers* is written for potential cooperating teachers, peer mentors, administrators, college instructors, and staff developers who are interested in helping others enter and remain in education. Thus, somewhat ironically, the book was written to help new teachers, but actually provides high-level skill development for the mentor teachers who are responsible for scaffolding novices to independence.

The first four chapters of the book focus on the mentoring role as a sustained relationship between mentor and novice, where the mentor serves as both a role model and as an expert. Because so many leave education so quickly, the mentor must maintain these two roles and develop eight separate competencies in order to support the novice. The book provides aptitude inventories to measure mentor strengths and weaknesses in each of these eight competencies:

- understanding the coaching and mentoring role,
- promoting collaborative learning,

- nurturing the novice (cognitive coaching),
- developing performance coaching skills,
- modeling and coaching effective teaching standards,
- modeling and coaching effective classroom management standards,
- displaying sensitivity to individual differences among learners,
- willingness to assume a re-defined professional role.



Podsen, I., & Denmark, V. (2007). *Coaching and Mentoring First Year and Student Teachers* (2nd Ed.). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Each competency is clearly defined in a “competency statement” and then broken into analytical sub-competencies with activities and reflection exercises.

A majority of the book is made up of coaching activities for the mentor and mentee; each activity is relative to a specific characteristic and is interactive, reflective, and relational in nature. In addition to these activities, the appendices are full of practical resources such as forms, rating scales, and agendas. These are designed to provide a framework for separate meeting as well as long-term plans for improvement. Easily accessible and simple to use, the resources compliment the competencies but are not isolated to a single, specific competency.

The world of education is filled with complex difficulties that require analysis and experience to survive. Using the tools provided in *Coaching and Mentoring First Year and Student Teachers*, mentors will build lasting relationships with prospective and new teachers, and will increase the likelihood that novice teachers full of promise will stay in the profession and thrive through their early years. It is to the benefit of the entire educational community, in-

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LEADERSHIP COACHING FOR EDUCATORS

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greatly on the individual’s ability to change within the system. Reiss repeatedly reminds the reader that for change to occur, one must focus on change internally to get the external results desired.

In the last two chapters, Reiss offers practical guidance and provides resources for implementing successful coaching. The author provides her tool, The POWERful Coaching Framework™ as a structure for coaching. The framework is a five-part structure for conducting a coaching session. It consists of key elements that should be touched upon in every coaching session. Phases of the coaching relationship are explained to help coaches know what to expect from their coachees as change is implemented. Aligning goals and actions is addressed and a structure for action planning is provided. The use of assessment in coaching as a tool to provide data and measure progress is discussed. Recommendations and issues to consider in the planning stage of a coaching program implementation are shared by the author as well.

The book contains over fifteen pages of resources. The resources are referenced throughout the text to make each resource accessible to anyone wanting to implement coaching. In addition, a listing of various references is provided by the author for further reading.

Education has been an isolated profession. Coaching provides the support to de-isolate the profession and help all members develop professionally.

As Karla Reiss states on p. 201, “It is high time every school leader has access to skilled coaches to ensure that they perform at their peaks, to lead their schools and their systems to greater functionality and increased results.” *Leadership Coaching for Educators: Bringing Out the Best in School Administrators* serves as a resource for organizations that are ready to invest in people by embracing coaching to maximize the potential of each member of the system to achieve goals. To conclude Reiss states, “Coaching must be part of professional growth programs for all adults in the system: school leaders, teacher leaders, and teachers. Everyone will benefit.”

ABOUT THE REVIEWERS

**Christine H. Hoyos** and **Kevin J. Shrum**, Curriculum, Assessment and Professional Development Department, Instructional Teachers on Special Assignment, Bellingham Public Schools, Bellingham, WA.

COACHING AND MENTORING

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deed of our entire nation, to retain quality teachers, and solid mentoring relationships are a definitive way to help do just that.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

**Kari Henderson-Burke** has served in public education for the past 12 years beginning as a 6th grade teacher in Arlington, Washington. She is in her second year as a principal at Monte Cristo Elementary in Granite Falls, Washington.

**NOMINATIONS ACCEPTED FOR RECOGNIZING AND CELEBRATING “HIGH PERFORMING EDUCATORS”**

PDK’s Washington State Chapter is accepting nominations of “High Performing Educators” in the following categories:

- Outstanding Teacher Educator
- Outstanding Coach of Teachers
- Outstanding Leadership Educator
- Outstanding Education Researcher
- Outstanding Mentor (student teacher mentor, principal-intern mentor, and mentor of new administrators)

Nomination forms and criteria can be downloaded at: [www.pdkwa.org](http://www.pdkwa.org)

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## LEADERS: ARE YOU COACHABLE?

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### DISCUSSION

While there is considerable research on the skills of effective leadership coaches, literature is scarce on the characteristics of “coachable” leaders. There is a need for additional research on this topic. Existing evidence suggests that the major attributes of leaders who are coachable include: a strong personal readiness to benefit from continued professional growth, a comfort with risk-taking and setbacks, an openness to new ideas, a realistic self-awareness of strengths and limitations, a desire for lifelong learning, a willingness to accept and implement feedback from multiple stakeholders, a comfort with uncertainty and ambiguity, a strong sense of personal accountability, and a demonstrated willingness to persist in accomplishing identified goals.

### SUMMARY

Effective leaders are coachable. These leaders seek the assistance of coaches who exhibit successful coaching behaviors. They form collaborative partnerships with coaches who can support and guide them. Coachable leaders appreciate the art and science of coaching and make it an essential part of their continuous personal and professional career development. Are you coachable?

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## THE “STUDIO RESIDENCY”

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### END NOTES

- 1 From the educational consulting group, Research for Quality Schools.
- 2 Highline School District is located roughly ten miles south of Seattle. In October 2006 the district had 18,000 students, 55% of whom qualified for the federally subsidized lunch program.
- 3 The main idea of the *Read Aloud* is to guide students through texts that are above their independent reading level and teach them skills they can use to tackle new texts in the future.
- 4 In Marysville, studio days typically involve educators from only one school, hence the omission of the word, “residency.”

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## COACHING FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

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## COACHING NEW PRINCIPALS FOR SUCCESS

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administrators were highly appreciative of the program's three-year support commitment. Finally, interviews and observations conducted revealed that coaches were using the training they received with new administrators.

## COACHING LEADERS

Coaching new principals on the toughest challenges of the job fills a much-needed gap in supporting leaders in schools. Our coaches are enthusiastic to share their hard-earned experience and help emerging leaders think more strategically about how they can lead their schools toward higher achievement. When asked why they want to be coaches, most express a desire and opportunity to give something back to the profession. Coaches frequently comment that they wish there had been a similar program when they were beginning in an administrative career.

Universities, I believe, can take the lead in offering the level of support needed for new administrators who graduate from preparation programs.

Experienced administrators trained in research-based coaching skills provide new principals with on-the-job guidance in leadership, organizational development, communications skills, and more thus promoting the achievement of all students.

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## RENTON SCHOOL DISTRICT : PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COACHES

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To sustain the forward momentum of our work, we must explore strategies for balancing the need for continual change and improvement with the importance of recognizing and celebrating accomplishments along the way. As PDCs we can provide a support structure for new and veteran teachers by encouraging individual and group reflection, honoring the teachers' commitment to student learning, and sharing successes with one another.

Looking back over the last three years, we can identify strengths and areas for growth in our professional development model. If we could turn back the clock, we would have the district clearly com-

municate to all staff, from the beginning, the research and philosophy behind the new professional development position, as well as the plan and timeline for implementation. This up front, transparent, thorough communication would have demystified the transition to the new model of professional development. Although we had a rocky start, we are encouraged and fulfilled as we work alongside teachers to improve student learning. We are proud of the part we have played in helping teachers develop a taste for reflection, collaboration, and ongoing professional growth.

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## BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT: EARLY INITIATORS OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

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2) Coaches visit the teacher's classroom and observe based on the teacher's self-determined goal. 3) Learning between the coach and the teacher is focused "instructional dialogue;" a conversation that follows the observation. 4) Coaches support schools in understanding and moving forward on school and district goals outlined in the strategic plan. Although there are common elements in the district model, the elements are locally modified based on each school's population, goals, and staff needs. 5) The work is job-embedded and continuous.

In the first year, new coaches remain in their classrooms full-time and are coached as they practice and learn to work with others. During the second year, coaches continue to receive support and work further with colleagues. In the third year the coaches' role expands to support the analysis of school data and school-wide professional development.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Adrienne Nelson, the principal to first take the plunge into coaching, reports that coaching requires teachers to learn how to analyze their own teaching strategies through examining student work. Implementation is not effortless. Veteran coaches and the administrators offer suggestions: First, em-

phasize the non-evaluative, non-supervisory role of the coach. Second, carefully consider why you are embracing coaching and how you will involve the entire staff—without staff buy-in, it just doesn't work. The perspectives of all are important to successful change. Third, carefully decide how coaches will be selected. Experienced coaches believe that school nomination and a selection process from within the school, works best. The selected coach must be a teacher who has excellent instructional practices in place but equally, or perhaps more important, must be able to effectively work with others and garner respect from both fellow teachers and administrators.

As Michael Fullan so eloquently writes in *Change Focus*, "You can't have a learning society without learning students and you can't have learning students, without learning teachers." The Bellingham School District offers a vision of how coaching to support teachers in their instruction can directly increase each student's opportunity to learn.

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## Call for Article Submissions

### THE WASHINGTON STATE KAPPAN,

*a journal for research, leadership, and practice*

FALL 2008 ISSUE THEME –

#### **HIGH-PERFORMING EDUCATORS: WHAT MAKES A GREAT TEACHER?**

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION – **SEPTEMBER 8, 2008**

The single most important factor in children's education may be the quality of teachers. The fall issue of *Washington State Kappan, a journal for research, leadership, and practice* is on the theme **High-Performing Educators: What makes a great teacher?**

Manuscripts that focus on the attributes and characteristics of great teachers and are 800-1200 words will be considered. Do you have current research you wish to share describing high performing K-12 teachers? Selected articles should discuss research, leadership or practice and focus on Washington State.

The audience will include K-12 educators and faculty in higher education from throughout the State of Washington.

Send proposals and obtain additional author guidelines from the editor, [MaryLynne.Derrington@wwu.edu](mailto:MaryLynne.Derrington@wwu.edu). All papers will be subject to peer review and evaluated for connections to the theme, uniqueness of the contribution to the field, applicability to Washington State educators and adherence to manuscript guidelines.

#### WE INVITE YOU TO ATTEND

## Upcoming Conferences

easy Registration on [pdk.wa.org](http://pdk.wa.org)

#### **PHI DELTA KAPPA-WASHINGTON STATE'S INSTITUTE ON COACHING**

July 24, 2008, 9AM - 2 PM

at Gary And Carol Milgard Family Hope Center,  
Lakewood, WA. Registration \$20.

*Keynote Speaker:* Alison Olzendam,

Ph.D. Founder/President of

Powerful Teaching and Learning Group.

*"Bridging the Implementation Gap:*

*Research-Proven Strategies for Moving Teachers  
from Knowledge to Effective Application."*

#### **"HIGH PERFORMING EDUCATORS – WHAT MAKES A GREAT TEACHER?"**

The 2nd Phi Delta Kappa – Washington State  
*Research Conference for Teachers and Educators*

October 11, 2008, NOON – 5PM

at the University of Washington,

Waterfront Activities Center, Seattle, WA.

The second annual PDK Washington Chapter research conference will focus on the attributes and characteristics of great teachers. Do you have current research you wish to share describing high performing K-12 teachers? The audience will include K-12 educators and faculty in higher education from throughout the State of Washington.