Middle and High School Literacy Coaches: A National Survey

Literacy coaches have many questions about their role in middle and secondary schools, and that has implications for teacher education and professional development.

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This study examines the actual and potential roles of secondary literacy coaches outlined in the *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches* (International Reading Association, 2006). Because the standards themselves are new, we wondered if acting secondary coaches in the United States met the qualifications and participated in the activities described in the standards. In addition, we wanted to know what secondary literacy coaches identified as their own professional learning needs within the context of the standards. Beyond the standards, we wondered what personal qualities these coaches considered essential and how secondary coaches could be supported through professional development.

Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches

In an unprecedented partnership, the International Reading Association (IRA), the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Science Teachers Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies created standards for middle and high school literacy coaches. The standards require secondary literacy coaches to assume the following roles: (a) collaborators, (b) job-embedded coaches, (c) evaluators of literacy needs, and (d) instructional strategists in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies (IRA, 2006).

The standards categorize the first three roles—collaborators, coaches, and evaluators—as leadership roles within the middle or high school setting. As a collaborator, a literacy coach must work effectively with a school's literacy team while establishing productive relationships with the school's staff. The coaching role involves mentoring teachers on an individual, team, or building level, providing professional development to improve literacy strategies being implemented. Moreover, an effective coach observes and provides nonevaluative feedback of teachers' implementation of reading and writing strategies. Finally, as an effective evaluator of literacy needs, a coach must assist schools

in the selection, use, and interpretation of assessments to make informed decisions about the literacy needs of students.

The standards that align with leadership skills address more generic standards that apply to literacy coaching as a whole; the content area standards address the unique challenge that middle and high school coaches face. Secondary coaches must understand how and why content area learning in English, mathematics, science, and social studies interacts with literacy strategies (IRA, 2006). According to the standards (IRA, 2006), secondary coaches need a breadth of content knowledge that enables them to provide appropriate support to content teachers and to improve academic literacy in each core subject area.

Research on Literacy Coaching

Research on literacy coaching at the elementary level indicates that effective coaches fulfill multiple roles (Shanklin, 2006; Toll, 2005; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). As professional developers, coaches provide training one-on-one or to groups of teachers on a variety of topics including assessment, curriculum, literacy strategies, and research-based practices (Toll, 2005; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Informing their professional development, coaches serve as assessors, making careful choices about appropriate assessments, helping administer assessments, and using the data to inform classroom practice (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). To encourage application of ideas from professional development, coaches function as observers and modelers. Coaches observe teachers using literacy strategies and offer informative, confidential feedback to facilitate teachers' reflective practice and improvement (Toll, 2005; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). As modelers, coaches model literacy strategies and research-based practices in the classroom as the teacher observes (Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

Effective literacy coaches may also go beyond the role of on-site professional developers. As planners, coaches work with teachers to develop comprehensive lesson plans and ways to differentiate instruction to meet the specific needs of individual students (Walpole & McKenna, 2007). Planning also may involve working closely with principals to consider the specific literacy needs of their schools (Shanklin,

2006; Taylor, Moxley, Chanter, & Boulware, 2007). Part of school-level planning requires coaches to be curriculum experts, initially helping to choose appropriate resources for a school and then knowing how to use them effectively (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Additionally, coaches may also manage shared resources, including book rooms and professional libraries (Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

While fulfilling each of these roles, successful coaches also forge collaborative, trusting relationships with key stakeholders such as teachers, principals, and superintendents (Toll, 2006). When working with teachers, successful coaches know how to maneuver between colleague and expert, walking a delicate line between the two. Coaches are often asked to serve as a liaison between district and state-level administration, communicating policy, data, and implementation progress clearly (Sturtevant, 2003; Toll, 2006). Therefore, coaches must draw from an arsenal of personal attributes, including good communication skills, a sense of humor, and trustworthiness.

Although certain roles of coaching at the elementary and secondary levels overlap, others do not. Several researchers have argued that coaching in the secondary setting is completely different than coaching in the elementary setting (Riddle-Buly, Coskie, Robinson, & Egawa, 2006; Snow, Ippolito, & Schwartz, 2006). For example, coaches at the secondary level often struggle to justify their existence to secondary teachers who may or may not believe that reading and writing can build knowledge in their content area (Schen, Rao, & Dobles, 2005). Furthermore, secondary coaches must have a thorough understanding of adolescents and secondary school culture (Sturtevant, 2003). In addition, while elementary coaches help teachers begin initial reading instruction, secondary coaches have the unique responsibility of helping teachers instruct students who may be far behind where they should be in reading development (Riddle-Buly et al., 2006).

Unfortunately, research on literacy coaching at the secondary level is extremely limited. More research is needed on the actual roles and duties of secondary literacy coaches to assess the extent to which coaches at the secondary setting are fulfilling the roles described for them in the standards, evaluate the impact of literacy coaches on teacher and student

performance, inform the work of professional developers who prepare coaches, and advise principals who work closely with coaches. A first step in research on coaching effectiveness is to document what literacy coaches do at the secondary level. To our knowledge, only one other survey has addressed the gap in the current research literature available on the roles literacy coaches fulfill in secondary settings (Roller, 2006). However, this study was not focused exclusively on secondary coaches; only 24% of participants worked at the secondary level compared with 76% at the elementary level. Therefore, it was our aim in this study to describe the actual roles performed by middle and secondary literacy coaches exclusively to assess the appropriateness of the standards and to contribute to the knowledge base surrounding secondary literacy coaching.

The Current Study

Given the complexity of the standards for secondary coaches, we wondered whether current coaches are prepared to fulfill activities as collaborators, coaches, and evaluators that the standards outline. Moreover, with the emphasis the standards place on secondary coaches as "skillful instructional strategists" (IRA, 2006, p. 5) in the areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, *and* social studies, we wondered whether coaches currently working in the field felt qualified to coach teachers of multiple content areas. Therefore, we sought a sample of current coaches in the United States and explored their educational background, their teaching experience, their specific coaching preparation, and their roles and responsibilities, using language taken specifically from the standards. In addition, we asked the coaches to share insights about their own professional development needs and to provide advice for those considering a career in middle and high school coaching.

Method

The study employed a web-based national survey of practicing middle school and high school coaches to collect information about their qualifications and roles. Survey items were tested in a small pilot study in the fall of 2006 and then collected in a three-week period in January of 2007.

Researchers

It is important to say a few words about who we are as researchers, as our frame of reference shapes how we conducted this research. The first author is an early childhood literacy coach. The second author spent several years as a secondary literacy coach in an urban setting. The third author was also a coach and now serves as a researcher designing and providing professional development for literacy coaches working in elementary school reform initiatives. Collectively, our experiences as literacy coaches and working with literacy coaches have placed us in a position to consider the multifaceted roles of the secondary literacy coaches who are the subjects of this research.

Sample

Using a data retrieval firm, we located potential participants currently working in middle and high schools in the United States. Given that the role of literacy coach is relatively new, we had to consider different descriptors that might be used by coaches. We purchased a potential sample ($n = 8,561$) of individuals who listed their jobs as literacy coordinator, literacy/reading coach, reading specialist, or reading teacher. Potential participants were forwarded an e-mail that included a letter describing the project and a link to an online survey. Participant rights were protected in that no survey responses could be linked to any personal contact information.

Given the exploratory nature of this study and the difficulty we had in identifying a sample of individuals who classify themselves as middle or high school coach, no rewards were offered for participation; we assumed that our sample, identified only through an online service, would include many individuals who were not actually literacy coaches—including those who were athletic coaches.

For this reason, it is more appropriate to gauge response rate based on those who actually opened the survey; they were able to first see its purpose and then decide whether they had received the e-mail in error. Of the 443 potential participants who viewed the online survey, 147 (33%) coaches completed the survey. Given that the nature of the survey was anonymous, demographic data on participants in our study, other

than the educational background questions asked in the survey itself, is unavailable.

Survey Design

The 25-item online survey comprised forced-choice and open-ended questions (see Figure 1). In all cases, the forced-choice items were derived directly from the language of the standards (IRA, 2006). Respondents were asked to indicate which responsibilities among multiple choices outlined by the standards (IRA, 2006) they had participated in as a coach in the most recent academic year. For example, one forced-choice question asked participants: "In which activities have you participated to prepare for your role as a literacy/reading coach? (Check all that apply.)" Several choices were given from which participants could choose multiple responses. Open-ended prompts asked current coaches to reflect on advice they would give to future coaches and designers of professional development for secondary literacy coaches. For example, one open-ended question asked participants: "What do you consider your primary role or responsibility?" The survey included open-ended questions about coaches' educational backgrounds and teaching experiences, coaching preparation, roles and responsibilities as collaborators, coaches, and evaluators, and finally, open-ended questions on their professional dispositions.

Analysis

Descriptive data were computed for educational background and for appropriate items involving teaching experience, coaching preparation, and roles and responsibilities. Qualitative data analysis involved multiple steps. First, two authors grouped open-ended questions together based on concept. Once the questions were grouped, individual responses to the questions were broken into idea units, which were coded using an inductive process of comparing and contrasting. When uncertainty in coding occurred, the two authors would discuss the codes and data until a consensus was reached. Codes were then grouped, named, and defined. A codebook was created to organize the codes into categories. For example, several codes—analyst, collaborator, differentiated supporter—emerged from analysis of the data and were organized into the "Roles" category. Other codes such as optimist and learner fell under the

"Personal Attributes" category. The two authors then returned to the data to review the idea units within each category to check the internal validity of the coding. As an additional check, the third author—who had not been a part of the initial coding—recoded the data using the codebook. Any discrepancies between the initial coding and recoding were resolved through discussion and group consensus. Remaining categories were collapsed to represent the recoded data, and the codebook was rewritten to reflect the changes.

Results

Our results begin with descriptive data on the educational background, teaching experience, and preparation of the coaches. We then provide frequency data on the roles and responsibilities of coaches as collaborators, coaches, and evaluators, followed by coaches' reports on areas in which they need more support. Finally, we share themes in the coaches' reports about the personal attributes they consider essential for coaching and the advice that they give to future coaches.

Qualification and Background of Coaches

According to the standards, literacy coaches at the secondary level are expected to have either a master's degree with an emphasis in reading or a reading certification endorsement (IRA, 2006). To understand the qualifications of our participants, we asked them to report their educational background, number of years of teaching experience, and any reading specialist or reading certification endorsements they held. (The requirements for reading certification endorsements vary by state but generally involve teaching experience, additional graduate course work, and successful completion of a state assessment.) In addition, we asked the participants to differentiate which content areas they had taught at the secondary level and the amount of time they had done so. Table 1 presents frequency data on participants' educational background. Note that respondents could report multiple degrees. Almost all (94%) respondents reported undergraduate degrees in three areas: English education, elementary education, or areas outside education. Seventy-six percent were certified in their states, 48% reported reading specialist certification, and 40% reported a master's degree in literacy.

Figure 1   Online Survey

Educational background

1. Check all that apply:
   - ❏ I have a bachelor's degree in something other than education.
   - ❏ I have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.
   - ❏ I have a bachelor's degree in elementary education.
   - ❏ I have a bachelor's degree in math education.
   - ❏ I have a bachelor's degree in science education.
   - ❏ I have a bachelor's degree in social studies education.
   - ❏ I have a bachelor's degree in English/language arts education.
   - ❏ I have a bachelor's degree in special education.
   - ❏ I have a bachelor's degree in music, art, or physical education.
   - ❏ I have a teaching certificate for the state in which I teach.
   - ❏ I have a master's degree with an emphasis in literacy.
   - ❏ I have a master's degree with an emphasis in something other than literacy.
   - ❏ I have a reading specialist certificate.
   - ❏ I have a master's degree in education emphasizing something other than literacy.
   - ❏ I have a PhD or EdD.

Teaching Experience

2. For how many years have you been a coach?

3. Do you coach full-time (e.g., it is your only job) or part-time (e.g., you also teach students every day)?

4. How many years of classroom teaching experience do you have?

5. If you are a reading specialist, how many years have you worked as a reading specialist (e.g., teaching struggling readers daily)?

6. How many years of teaching experience do you have at the middle or high school levels as a classroom teacher?

7. If you have middle or high school classroom experience, which content areas have you taught? (Check all that apply.)
   - ❏ English/language arts
   - ❏ Foreign language
   - ❏ Math
   - ❏ Science
   - ❏ Social studies
   - ❏ Other, please specify

8. In which building level(s) do you serve as a literacy/reading coach?
   - ❏ Middle school
   - ❏ High school
   - ❏ Both

9. How has your role been defined by your district?

10. How has your role been defined by your principal(s)?

11. What do you consider your primary role or responsibility?

12. Approximately how many teachers do you work with each school year?

Coaching Preparation

13. In which activities have you participated to prepare for your role as a literacy/reading coach? (Check all that apply.)
   - ❏ Graduate-level course(s)
   - ❏ National conferences

(*continued*)

Figure 1   Online Survey (*continued*)

❑ State-level professional development
❑ District-level professional development
❑ Professional reading
❑ Study groups
❑ Work with literacy coach mentor
❑ Other, please specify
❑ None of the above

14. Out of the above activities, which 3 activities do you feel have helped you develop the most as a literacy/reading coach?

15. What advice would you give future designers of professional development for literacy/reading coaches?

Roles and Responsibilities

16. As a **collaborator**, check all the activities that you have participated in during the most recent school year.
❑ Assisted the principal in developing a literacy team.
❑ Collaborated to conduct an initial schoolwide literacy assessment.
❑ Facilitated small- and large-group discussions with teachers about students' skills.
❑ Communicated the findings of the initial schoolwide literacy assessment to staff and other stake holders.
❑ Developed and implemented a literacy improvement plan.
❑ Helped align curriculum to state and district requirements.
❑ Conducted ongoing evaluations of literacy improvement action plan (or school improvement plan).
❑ Managed time and/or resources in support of literacy instruction.
❑ Showcased effective strategies employed by content area teachers.
❑ Listened and responded to the needs of students.
❑ Listened and responded to the needs of staff.
❑ Listened and responded to the needs of parents.
❑ Understood and respected issues of confidentiality.
❑ Responded promptly to requests for assistance from teachers.
❑ Facilitated discussions on issues in adolescent literacy.
❑ Demonstrated positive expectations for students' learning.
❑ Applied concepts of adult learning and motivation to the design of professional development.
❑ Encouraged the reading specialist to serve as resource for the content area teachers.
❑ Kept administrators informed and involved in literacy efforts.
❑ Remained current with professional literature on the latest research.
❑ Examined best practices.
❑ Examined curriculum materials.
❑ Met regularly (at least once a month) with other coaches in the school or district.
❑ Attended professional seminars, conventions, and other training in order to receive instruction on research-based literacy strategies.
❑ Attended professional seminars, conventions, and other training in order to receive instruction on how to work effectively with adult learners.

17. Out of the above activities, rank the top 3 activities with which you believe you need the most support in terms of your future professional learning.

18. As a **coach**, check all the activities you have participated in during the most recent school year.
❑ Worked with teachers individually, providing support on a full range of reading, writing, and communication strategies.
❑ Worked with teachers in collaborative teams, providing support on a full range of reading, writing, and communication strategies.
❑ Worked with teachers in departments, providing support on a full range of reading, writing, and communication strategies.
❑ Assisted teachers in the analysis and selection of content area texts and instructional materials that meet the diverse needs of students.
❑ Assisted teachers in developing instruction designed to improve students' abilities to read and understand content area text and spur students' interest in more complex text.
❑ Provided content area teachers with professional development related to metacognitive reading strategies.

(*continued*)

Figure 1 Online Survey (*continued*)

❏ Facilitated professional development related to instructional strategies for literacy that content area teachers could adopt and adapt for their classrooms.

❏ Explored with content area teachers cross-cultural communication patterns in speaking and writing and their relationship with literacy skills in English.

❏ Developed a repertoire of reading strategies to share with and model for content area teachers.

❏ Helped determine which reading strategies are best to use with the content being taught.

❏ Assisted teachers with improving writing instruction, student writing, and appropriateness of writing instruction and assignments.

❏ Facilitated professional development related to strategies to help students analyze and evaluate Internet sources.

❏ Linked teachers to current evidence-based research to help make research more tangible and applicable.

❏ Observed and provided feedback to teachers on instruction-related literacy development and content area knowledge.

❏ Ensured teacher observations are nonthreatening (used as a tool to spark discussion).

❏ Regularly conducted observations of content area classes to collect informal data on strategy implementation and student engagement.

❏ Before and after observations, engaged in reflective dialogue with teachers.

❏ Demonstrated instructional strategies.

❏ Provided ongoing support to teachers as they try strategies out themselves.

19. Out of the above activities, rank the top 3 activities with which you believe you need the most support in terms of your future professional learning.

20. As an **evaluator**, check all the activities that you have participated in during the most recent school year.

❏ Led faculty in the selection and use of a range of assessment tools in order to make sound decisions about the students' literacy needs.

❏ Developed a comprehensive assessment program that uses both informal and formal measures of achievement.

❏ Set schedules for administering and analyzing both formative and summative assessments.

❏ Aided in the design and/or implementation of formative assessments to determine the effectiveness of a strategy.

❏ Helped teachers standardize the scoring of writing and other literacy measures.

❏ Reviewed current research and trends in assessment methodologies.

❏ Conducted regular meetings with content area teachers to examine student work and monitor progress.

❏ Introduced content area teachers to ways to observe adolescent's literacy skills.

❏ Introduced content area teachers to ways to observe ELL's language development progress.

❏ Helped teachers analyze trends in content area achievement tests.

❏ Helped teachers use the analysis of various assessment results to determine which strategies will support higher achievement.

21. Out of the above activities, rank the top 3 activities with which you believe you need the most support in terms of your future professional learning.

22. Check all that you feel competent in:

❏ Developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in English/language arts.

❏ Developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in mathematics.

❏ Developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in science.

❏ Developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in social studies.

23. In which area do you feel the need for greatest improvement?

❏ Developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in English/language arts.

❏ Developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in mathematics.

❏ Developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in science.

❏ Developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in social studies.

Professional Dispositions

24. What are the 3 most important personal attributes you believe a middle/high school literacy/reading coach should have in order to be successful?

25. What advice would you give future middle/high school literacy/reading coaches?

Table 1   Educational Background

Education	Number (N = 147)	Percentage
BA/BS English education	51	35
BA/BS elementary education	45	31
BA/BS outside education	41	28
BA/BS social studies education	8	6
BA/BS early childhood	6	4
BA/BS special education	6	4
BA/BS music, art, or physical education	4	3
BA/BS science education	2	1
BA/BS math education	0	0
State teaching certificate	109	76
Reading specialist certificate	69	48
Master's degree in literacy	58	40
Master's degree in education area	44	31
Master's degree in an area outside education	27	19
Doctoral degree	7	5

Note. The numbers reported are not mutually exclusive.

Participants also described their current work: 37% of the respondents coached in a middle school, 46% coached in a high school, and 17% served in both a middle and a high school. Coaches reported a mean of 19 years of classroom teaching experience, with a range of 2 to 40; 15 of those years, on average, were at the middle or high school level. When we queried the coaches about the content areas in which they had taught, we allowed for multiple responses. Therefore,

our percentages, if added together, yield more than 100%. Eighty-five percent had taught English/ Language Arts, 8% had taught foreign language, 18% had taught math, 11% had taught science, 23% had taught social studies, 53% also indicated teaching experience in areas other than these. Those who were reading specialists reported 13 years in that job. The mean number of years reported in coaching was 8.

Coaching Preparation

The standards maintain that literacy coaches undertake measures to strengthen their own professional knowledge (IRA, 2006). These measures may include participating in one of seven activities outlined by the standards and listed in Table 2.

Table 2 provides frequency data on the specific preparation that participants underwent prior to becoming and while serving as a literacy coach. The final column of data identifies the activities that these coaches reported as most helpful to their development. Of the seven activities specified in the standards, coaches reported participation in an average of 54%. Graduate-level coursework, district-level professional development, and professional readings were included in coaching preparation of most of the respondents.

Role Definition

To understand the extent to which secondary literacy coaches are actually being asked by their principals to fulfill the roles and responsibilities outlined

Table 2   Coaching Preparation

Activity	Number (N = 147)	Percentage	One of the three most helpful
District-level professional development	107	74	26%
Graduate-level coursework	102	71	41%
Professional reading	100	69	32%
State-level professional development	84	58	19%
National conferences	73	51	24%
Study groups	46	32	13%
Work with mentor	37	26	17%
Other	34	24	21%
None of the above	6	4	0%

Note. Items are listed in order of occurrence.

by the standards, we asked coaches to report on how their role has been defined by both their district and their principal. Participants provided open-ended information to this prompt. Frequency data show that 90 responses, or 74%, indicate that the role remains undefined. Eighteen responses, or 15%, indicate that the district, with no input from the coach, defined the coaching role through a top-down construction. Finally, we noted 13 responses, or 11%, that indicate the role was defined through a collaborative process between the district and the coach.

Roles and Responsibilities

The standards outline specific activities undertaken by coaches within three broad roles: collaborators, coaches, and evaluators. We report on each of the roles separately in the order in which it is included in the standards. Participants provided frequency data on their activities as collaborators, as coaches, and as evaluators. For these items, participants were asked whether they had engaged in any of these activities in the past year; all respondents reported multiple activities. The final column in each table indicates those activities for which the coaches reported that they need more support; in this case, they were limited to three responses.

Collaborator. Table 3 provides frequency data on the specific activities that these coaches engaged in to fulfill their role as collaborator. The standards identified 24 activities characterized as evidence of collaboration. On average, respondents reported participation

Table 3   Activities as Collaborator

Activity	Number (N = 147)	Percentage	Needs most support
Respected confidentiality	124	87	2%
Examined best practices	123	86	8%
Examined curriculum materials	123	86	0%
Responded to student needs	122	85	10%
Responded to staff needs	120	84	5%
Demonstrated positive expectations for students	118	83	1%
Responded to teacher requests	116	81	1%
Remained current with professional literature	108	76	9%
Attended professional development	108	76	10%
Communicated schoolwide literacy assessment data	107	75	0%
Managed time/resources	98	69	2%
Kept administrators informed	97	68	5%
Responded to parent needs	86	60	3%
Facilitated discussions on adolescent literacy	79	55	3%
Showcased content area strategies	76	53	2%
Aligned curriculum to state/local requirements	75	52	5%
Implemented schoolwide literacy improvement plan	65	45	7%
Applied concepts of adult learning to professional development	64	45	0%
Conducted schoolwide literacy assessment	58	41	1%
Conducted evaluations of action plans	59	41	1%
Developed literacy team	56	39	3%
Met regularly with other coaches	55	38	8%
Encouraged reading specialist to serve as resource	53	37	2%
Attended professional development on adult learning	45	31	1%

Note. Items are listed in order of occurrence.

in 62% of those activities. A large percentage (> 80%) reported evidence of specific aspects of collaboration: They respected confidentiality, demonstrated positive expectations for students, examined best practices and curriculum materials, and listened to and responded to students and staff.

Coach. Table 4 provides frequency data on the specific activities that these coaches engaged in to fulfill their role as coach. The standards included 19 activities in the role of coach; participants, on average, reported engaging in 46% percent of those in the past year. There was generally less consensus among our participants in activities described as coaching; no activity was used by more than 80% of the participants. There was a group of low-incidence activities, and they clustered around observation of instruction and providing feedback, assisting teachers with technology, and collecting data on strategy implementation.

Evaluator. Table 5 provides frequency data on the specific activities that these coaches engaged in to fulfill

their role as evaluator. There were 11 activities in this area; participants, on average, reported engaging in 27% percent of them in the past year; not one activity in this area was reported by even half of the coaches. Fewer than 25% of the coaches worked specifically with selecting a range of assessment tools or developing a comprehensive assessment program. Likewise, few engaged with teachers in analysis of student achievement on content area tests or review of student work for progress monitoring.

Personal Attributes. The standards indicate that ideal secondary literacy coaches are skilled listeners, problem solvers, and relationship builders. Participants provided advice, in the form of open-ended comments, about the personal attributes they viewed as most important to the success of a middle or high school literacy coach.

According to our coaches, the model secondary literacy coach is first and foremost an optimistic person. When confronted with challenges, he or she

Table 4   Activities as Coach

Activity	Number (N = 147)	Percentage	Needs most support
Worked with teachers individually	103	72	0%
Assisted teachers in instruction of content area texts	94	66	0%
Worked with teaching teams	89	62	3%
Demonstrated instructional strategies	87	61	3%
Provided ongoing support to teachers	86	60	10%
Worked with departments	81	57	1%
Developed repertoire of reading strategies	82	57	11%
Helped determine content-specific reading strategies	79	55	6%
Facilitated professional development in instructional strategies	73	51	4%
Assisted teachers to improve writing instruction	70	49	3%
Provided professional development in metacognitive strategies	69	48	1%
Helped select content area texts	61	43	1%
Observed and provided feedback to teachers	50	35	7%
Linked teachers to evidence-based research	49	34	0%
Ensured teacher observations nonthreatening	46	32	3%
Facilitated reflective dialogue	38	27	3%
Explored cross-cultural communication patterns	37	26	3%
Assisted teachers using Internet sources	25	17	1%
Regularly conducted observations of strategy implementation and student engagement	23	16	0%

Note. Items are listed in order of occurrence.

Table 5   Activities as Evaluator

Activity	Number (N = 147)	Percentage	Needs most support
Reviewed assessment research	69	48	10%
Helped teachers standardize scoring of writing	47	33	4%
Helped teachers determine which strategies support achievement	45	31	8%
Introduced teachers to ways to observe adolescent literacy skills	42	29	3%
Aided in implementation of formative assessments	40	28	6%
Set schedules for administering/analyzing formative and summative assessments	38	27	3%
Led faculty to select range of assessments	35	24	2%
Developed comprehensive assessment program	33	23	4%
Helped teachers analyze trends in content area achievement tests	38	22	3%
Examined student work with teachers	23	16	11%
Introduced ways to observe English-language learners' language development	20	14	6%

Note. Items are listed in order of occurrence.

draws from a personal arsenal of patience, resilience, and flexibility to persevere. As one participant stated,

> Coaching is a difficult position, and in some instances you get a lot of resistance...the math teacher doesn't necessarily think [he or she is] nor want[s] to be a 'reading' teacher. You have to find a way to 'sell' it to them—to make them buy into the idea that we are ALL responsible for the students' literacy.

For many participants, having an optimistic outlook enabled them to continue their efforts despite classroom teachers' reluctance to adopt literacy strategies.

In addition to optimism, participants discussed the need for coaches to be expert communicators and collaborators. A coach must be able to communicate with teachers effectively, a task which includes listening to individual needs and presenting ideas and suggestions for improvement. Related to communication skills, the coach must be able to collaborate. Participants stressed the importance of collaboration as a means of empowering teachers to incorporate literacy strategies into their own instruction: "Be more of a mentor—coaches aren't the 'fix-it' people. They should work WITH the teachers to develop what will work in the teacher's classroom."

Lastly, the model secondary literacy coach is both an expert and a learner. The coach comes to the job possessing strong background knowledge in literacy development and both content and content-specific literacy instruction; the coach draws from this extensive personal knowledge when problem-solving with teachers. For example, one participant explained,

> If you (as a coach) can recommend a specific book, strategy, etc., to a teacher and show the teacher how it would fit in with the content they are required to teach, then the teacher is much more likely to incorporate literacy strategies into their regular teaching.

Along with expertise in literacy instruction, the secondary coach continues to pursue his or her own learning. The coach is committed to learning new concepts and ideas relevant to literacy and content area instruction, actively pursuing venues for developing knowledge.

While personal attributes such as optimism, communication skills, and commitment to learning are necessary for coaching success, they are not sufficient. Participants indicated several areas that require strategic planning.

Advice for Future Coaches

Along with personal attributes that would be helpful to possess, participants offered advice about enacting

the role of secondary literacy coach. Consistently, participants urged future coaches to make conscious decisions about how they presented themselves to teachers. Based on their experiences, participants agreed on the importance of presenting oneself as a credible teacher. The credible teacher instructs students and teachers, establishing trust by fostering relationships. Moreover, background knowledge and expertise in literacy instruction lend credibility to this work.

In addition to being a credible teacher, current coaches recommended providing differentiated support to teachers based on need, rather than creating a one-size-fits-all professional development program. According to our participants, a coach who provides differentiated support plans and implements professional development, using effective techniques for adult learning to meet individual teachers' needs. One coach suggested, "Find what content teachers are doing. Then adjust strategies to tailor to that teacher. Sometimes the best way to lead is to find out where everyone is going."

Part of knowing how to support teachers comes from analyzing classroom- and school-level data. Participants report that an effective coach assesses the needs of the school, teachers, and students by examining test data. The coach collects and uses school- and student-level data to inform decisions about professional development and instruction. One coach commented, "I also analyze testing data for reading and prepare analysis of in-house and state testing data." Notably, while participants described the importance of being able to analyze and use data, they also indicated that analyzing data is the area in which they need the most support.

Finally, participants advise future coaches to be strategic leaders. They stress the importance of defining and advocating for a specific role from the very first day on the job. Many of the participants described performing jobs that had not been defined by their principal or their district; this lack of job clarity made it hard for the coaches to devote their time to supporting teachers, for they were often used in other capacities unrelated to literacy.

Advice for Designers of Professional Development

Going beyond the standards, we asked participants to provide advice to designers of professional development. The advice most often given by participants involved providing opportunities for collaborative professional development. Participants discussed the importance of having time to network with other literacy coaches, commenting on the necessity of common time to plan and discuss new research-based concepts. As one coach stated, "Have your reading coaches meet regularly to share and formulate strategies that work." Related to the concept of collaborative professional development, participants stressed the importance of professional development that is ongoing. The antithesis of the one-workshop approach, ongoing professional development includes "extensive follow-up throughout the year." Having opportunities to meet together regularly to share ideas, to discuss what works and what does not, and to commiserate on the challenges of the job helped participants immeasurably.

Participants also described the need for professional development focusing specifically on strengthening coaches' research-based knowledge of literacy strategies, content area literacy instruction, and effective adult learning techniques. Coaches discussed the need for professional development to introduce them to new literacy strategies, "stay current with the research and provide [coaches] with well-researched strategies." In addition, coaches need knowledge of content literacy strategies. Participants urged designers of professional development to "recognize that teaching secondary students is a lot different than teaching young, developing readers." Similarly, when working with teachers, coaches needed to know and use strategies that would motivate and engage adult learners: "PD [professional development] needs to address all the myriad issues of getting adults to adapt and change their professional practice. Understanding group dynamics is crucial, as is working with adult learners."

Lastly, participants suggested that professional developers also focus on practical knowledge. Practical knowledge included not only techniques in time management and organization for the coaches but also concrete, easily transferable teaching ideas that the

coaches could model for their teachers. As one participant advised, "balance theory with practical application in a classroom setting." Participants stressed the need for professional development that modeled classroom techniques: "Make it [professional development] hands on. Provide realistic experiences and applications."

Discussion

Recently, literacy coaching was deemed a hot topic for literacy research (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2008). Legislation such as Reading First, Early Reading First, and Reading Next has provided the necessary funding to bring literacy coaches to struggling schools. Standards such as those at the heart of this study have been set to guide coaches' work (IRA, 2006). Research has begun to study the effectiveness of literacy coaching on school reform efforts (Shanklin, 2006). Moreover, organizations such as the Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse have formed to disseminate resources and generate national focus on the impact of literacy coaching. Yet questions remain regarding who coaches are, what they do, and whether they are effective.

While research has begun to investigate elementary literacy coaching, far less is known about coaching at the secondary level. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore what some coaches at the secondary level are doing, what they would like help doing, and what they think future coaches should know. The experiences of our participants may have implications for coaches, school administrators working closely with coaches, providers of professional development for coaches, and policymakers. However, we realize that our sample was small and is not generalizable to all middle school and high school coaches.

A key finding supports prior research (Riddle-Buly et al., 2006; Snow et al., 2006), which has argued that literacy coaching at the secondary level is distinct from coaching at the elementary level. Secondary coaches serve larger numbers of teachers (because high schools are generally much larger than elementary schools) who serve more diverse groups of students (because achievement gaps widen over time) than elementary coaches. Moreover, participants discussed a challenge of convincing teachers specialized in the content areas that providing reading and writing support to secondary students was worthwhile. Given the unique nature of coaching at the secondary level, future coaches and designers of professional development should be cautious when drawing from research focused exclusively on elementary coaches.

Despite the standards (IRA, 2006), participants report that their roles and responsibilities remain relatively ambiguous at the school- and district-level. As a result, many secondary coaches expend a great deal of energy trying to create an identity. Because of the vague nature of the role, a range of preparedness exists among the current coaches. School administrators could facilitate the work of coaches by providing concrete expectations and discussing how they see the work of coaches as supporting professional development efforts. Moreover, policymakers could develop clearer descriptions for coaches so that all stakeholders know what to expect when a literacy coach begins work.

The most salient finding in our survey was the frequency at which coaches performed the three leadership roles targeted in the standards. Coaches reported participating in a wide variety of activities in the area of collaboration; however, they participated in fewer coaching activities and even fewer evaluation activities. The standards emphasize coaches' roles in schoolwide data analysis. A coach should know how to choose appropriate assessments, administer assessments, analyze assessment data, interpret results, and use results to differentiate classroom instruction and plan appropriate professional development for teachers (IRA, 2006). Yet participants consistently indicated data evaluation as an activity they did not participate in frequently and felt they could benefit from professional development opportunities. This finding is important given the federal emphasis placed on using student achievement data to monitor student progress and a school's adequate yearly progress and should inform designers of professional development. Future coaches will need to feel more comfortable in the role of data analyst; beyond professional development, university education programs training preservice coaches could build in more emphasis on evaluation.

When asked what advice they would give designers of professional development, participants were very clear about what they needed to learn and effective modes for their learning. In order for secondary coaches to fulfill the needs of secondary teachers, professional development must address strategies for infusing literacy into content areas. Participants indicated a high level of comfort with incorporating literacy strategies into the English language arts classroom but were far less confident about appropriate literacy strategies for mathematics, social studies, and science. In addition, participants need professional development on effective adult learning techniques for use in their own work with teachers. In terms of how they learn best, participants stressed the importance of comprehensive, ongoing inservice support and flexible graduate programs. Participants recommended that coaches seek opportunities to learn through traditional educational settings, national and state conferences, and state- and district-level professional development. Additionally, mentors and coaching networks provide much needed ongoing support. For our participants, every opportunity to learn seemed to improve their ability to coach.

Lessons learned from coaches currently in the field provide important insight for coaches and those working with coaches. However, the current study was exploratory in nature and limited by its reliance on self-report data. Future research could expand understandings of the roles of secondary literacy coaches found in this study through triangulation of self-report data, observation, and participant interviews. Important questions remain regarding the appropriateness of the coaching model for the secondary setting and the balance between literacy and content expertise a secondary coach should possess. However, participants from our survey testify to the potential promise of secondary coaching and the need to pursue future research on coaching.

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