

## Coaching to Support Adolescent Literacy

### The question:

**How does coaching support literacy learning and achievement of adolescent learners in your school?**

### The answer:

**There is a growing body of professional knowledge on the impact coaching has on professional growth. Coaching supports job-embedded professional learning. When professional learning is embedded, it builds classroom practice and a school culture that improves student achievement.**

#### What is a literacy coach?

A literacy coach is a teacher who partners with other teachers to refine classroom practice for the purpose for improving literacy achievement. This work is supported by coaches' knowledge and skills to:

- build and develop professional relationships
- support adult learning and professional growth
- connect classroom practice with improvement planning
- lead instructional practice

The central goal of all literacy coaching programs is to improve student learning.

### School-based or board-level coaching can support principals in:

#### 1. Setting goals

A principal aligns school targets with board and provincial targets.

The coach can help by working with colleagues to bridge individual professional learning goals with school and board plans. A literacy coach is knowledgeable in research-affirmed instructional approaches.

#### 2. Aligning resources with priorities

A principal must ensure that learning is at the centre of planning and resource management.

The literacy coach has knowledge of literacy resources and has a sound understanding of the importance of emerging technologies and their relevance to adolescents. The literacy coach works collaboratively with colleagues to make sure that learning is at the centre of planning and resource management.

**For principals considering establishing the role of coach in their schools, the *Framework for Literacy Coaches* provides practices, skills, knowledge and attitudes that can be used to identify potential leaders for the role.**

#### 3. Promoting collaborative learning cultures

A principal promotes collaborative learning cultures.

The coach can support this process by promoting shared knowledge and by engaging colleagues in a coaching cycle (e.g., co-planning, co-teaching, co-reflecting).

By networking and collaborating with principals, the literacy coach helps in building a collaborative learning culture within the school and actively engaging with other schools to build effective learning communities.

Coaching is based on relationships of trust; these relationships are encouraged and invitational rather than forced and mandated.

As a principal works to build and sustain collaborative learning cultures centered on improved outcomes for students, the coach supports change over time by collaborating and networking with peers to foster a culture of co-learning. The coach is a teacher-leader who fosters other teacher-leaders.

## 4. Using data

Using data, a principal ensures a consistent and continuous school-wide focus on student achievement.

A principal may decide to include the coach on the school team to gather and analyse assessment data; in this way, the coach supports the principal in building staff confidence and a sense of efficacy with the use of data.

The coach works with colleagues in all subject areas to identify literacy needs of their students based on classroom assessments. The coach assists teachers in interpreting the assessment information, selecting appropriate instructional strategies, and supporting classroom implementation through modeling and co-teaching.

“Adolescent literacy is a shifting landscape where the heights get higher, the inclines steeper and the terrain rockier. Literacy demands change drastically ... secondary grade students are expected to learn new words, new facts, and new ideas from reading, as well as to interpret, critique, and summarize texts... The literate practices embedded in these tasks, combining literacy skills and content knowledge, are often invisible (or taken for granted) and yet require a high level of sophistication.”

*Time to Act, Carnegie Report, 2010*

## 5. Engaging in courageous conversations.

A principal encourages colleagues to take intellectual risks.

One of the practices of the literacy coach is to work with teachers to set goals that are not only ambitious and challenging, but also realistic and achievable. Questioning to evoke and expose thinking and promote reflection is a necessary

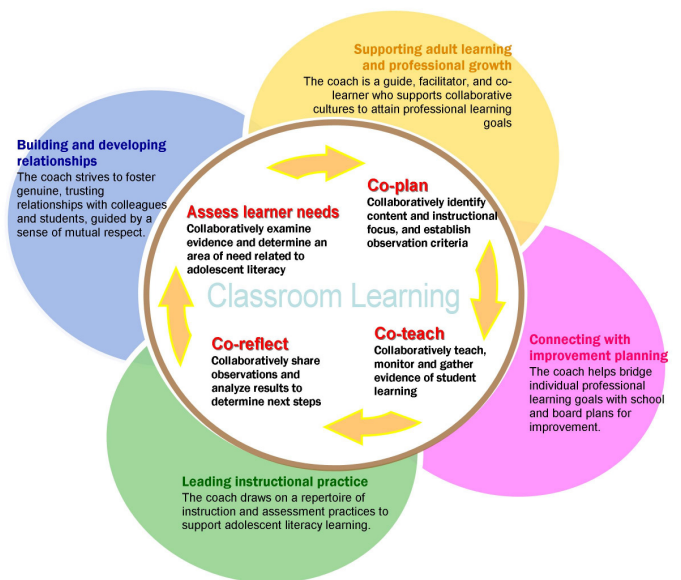
“Professional development, delivered as sustained, job-embedded coaching, maximizes the likelihood that teachers will translate newly learned skills and strategies into practice.”

(Joyce and Showers, Neufeld and Roper as quoted in *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches*)

aspect of change conversations.

The literacy coach encourages colleagues to take intellectual risks within non-evaluative, non-judgmental working relationships.

## Literacy Coaching Cycle



The literacy coaching cycle is a process of assessing learner needs, co-planning, co-teaching, and co-reflecting, and this work is supported by coaching practices and competencies.

Through the coaching cycle, teachers deepen their professional knowledge and practice, thereby improving the achievement and learning of the students in their class.

## References

- Drago-Severson, Eleanor. (2009) *Leading adult learning: supporting adult development in our schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin & NSDC.
- Hall, Pete & Simeral, Alisa. (2008) *Building teachers' capacity for success*. Alexandria: ASCD.
- Knight, Jim. (2007) *Instructional coaching: a partnership approach to improving instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Toll, Cathy A. (2006) *The literacy coach's desk reference*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Literacy GAINS has developed a coaching framework. This framework describes the practices, skills, knowledge and attitudes of coaches. This coaching framework represents an ideal, and recognizes that coaches with various experiences will be involved in on-going learning as they are developing these competencies as coaches.