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## ABSTRACT

School districts use a variety of professional development initiatives, many of them successfully. However, many teachers either endure the initiatives and return to their old ways after the initiatives are over, or they close their doors and ignore them altogether. Consequently, sustaining or growing the results of these initiatives is challenging. This study examines one Midwestern metropolitan school district's coaching initiative through the eyes of four coaches who described the perceived success of the initiative, their roles as coaches and their perceptions of what was needed to sustain that success after returning to their classrooms. Data were gathered via an online survey, documents provided by the district administration, and individual interviews with the coaches. Results indicated that coaches felt there was a need for continued support from various networked resources following the initiative in order to sustain or grow the results. (Contains 26 references.) (Author/SM)

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RUNNING HEAD: Sustaining Success

ED 482 676

**Today's Coaches Prepare Tomorrow's Mentors:  
Sustaining the Results of Professional Development**

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## Abstract

School districts use a variety of professional development initiatives, many of them successfully. However, many teachers either endure the initiatives and return to their old ways after the initiatives are over, or they close their doors and ignore them altogether. Consequently, sustaining or growing the results of these initiatives is challenging. This study examines one Mid-western metropolitan school district's coaching initiative through the eyes of four coaches who described their roles as coaches, the perceived success of the initiative, and their perceptions of what was needed to sustain that success after returning to their classrooms. Data were gathered via an online survey, documents provided by the district administration, and individual interviews with the coaches. Results indicated that coaches felt there was a need for continued support from various networked resources following the initiative in order to sustain or grow the results.

It is impossible to learn everything there is to know about teaching during one's teacher preparation program. That is why districts provide professional development opportunities for their teachers. However, more often than we would like, teachers either ignore these opportunities or they quickly return to their old ways of doing things after the training is over. The challenge is in ensuring that the results of professional development last far beyond the length of the specific initiative or training opportunity. This research is about how to use professional development in such a way that individual teachers might positively impact student learning and achievement. Although this research is based on the perceptions of a small group of participants ( $n = 4$ ) from one Mid-western metropolitan school district, the findings suggest how we might sustain or grow the results of future professional development initiatives.

#### *Project Background*

With the assistance of a funding grant from an outside agency, Midwest Metro (a pseudonym) recently implemented a 3-year professional development initiative by providing each of its schools with digital age literacy coaches. Professional coaching is not entirely new to this school district. Technology coaches had been working with teachers in all Midwest Metro schools since 2001 to assist with technology integration efforts. In addition, an IREAD grant had previously sponsored two reading coaches for two of the district's elementary schools.

The goal of the newest initiative was to place digital age literacy coaches in the schools to work with teachers in the development and use of digital age teaching strategies. The ultimate goal of the initiative was to prepare students to thrive in a knowledge-based, digital world. These digital age skills, adopted from the enGauge 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001), focus on developing four types of literacies (basic, visual, technological, and informational) using conventional and technology-based media. Digital-age skills also include reflective thinking and the continued development of higher-order cognitive processing skills such as analysis, inference, synthesis, and evaluation.

The system of checks and balances in place for overseeing this professional development coaching initiative included a professional development council, a digital-age advisory group, and an outside consultant. Scheduled periodic evaluations and assessments included NCREL's enGauge assessments, attitudinal audits, and instructional audits.

With the coaching initiative underway for almost a year, and the coaches having completed one full semester in their new positions, it was time to gauge how the initiative was developing. This would inform administrators about potential changes needed in the implementation and help them prepare for long-term professional development following the initiative.

### Review of the Literature

It is generally agreed that professional development is necessary in today's educational system where fast-paced changes present challenges to teachers who are responsible for maintaining high levels of student achievement. However, it is not agreed on what method is most effective for achieving this goal (Guskey, 1995; Lee, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003; Renyi, 1996). Various types of training programs and professional development approaches have been tried and tested throughout the years, many of them with great success. The U.S. Department of Education (2000) published a report describing some of the professional development approaches that have been linked to outstanding student achievement. These approaches included, but were not limited to, group problem solving, advanced degree programs, teacher self-assessment, coaching, and mentoring.

Although there is no agreement on which method of professional development provides the best practice, it has become apparent that there is a need for strong professional development that goes beyond a one-time workshop, a day-long seminar, or a 2-week training session toward something that is woven into the everyday practices of teachers (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). In addition, there is an emerging consensus about what qualities it takes to make professional development effective (Guskey, 1995; Lee, 2001; Little, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). For example, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) stated: "A coordinated system of teacher recruitment, quality teacher preparation, clinical practice, induction, mentorship, and

continuing professional development, with accountability built in at each stage, is essential for ensuring high-quality teaching for all students” (p. 143). Other qualities include creating a learning community with supportive leadership, offering an optimal mix of methods based on the contexts and experiences of teachers, and having the capacity and flexibility to continue over extended periods of time.

Two approaches to professional development that seem to embody these qualities are coaching and mentoring. Coaching and mentoring are terms that often are used interchangeably; however, there are differences between the two. One difference is that, in practice, coaching, although it can last for extended periods, is temporary and often an inherent part of the role and responsibilities of a mentor whose job is long-term (Jones, 2001; Williams, 2001). A subtle yet important difference between coaching and mentoring described by MacLennan (1995) is that mentoring is a relationship with someone to learn *from*, whereas coaching is a relationship with someone to learn *with*. MacLennan also pointed out that someone can unknowingly be a mentor but no one can unknowingly be a coach.

Professional development coaching has been defined as, “Hands-on, in-classroom assistance with the transfer of skills and strategies to the classroom” (Joyce & Showers, 1980, p. 380). Similar definitions have evolved as various types of coaching have been identified and applied in practice. Different types of coaching include, but are not limited to, peer coaching, cognitive coaching, executive coaching, and team coaching. Even within particular types of coaching, there are evolving definitions, and there are differences between those definitions that are found in academic literature and those found in practice (Carter, 2001; Garmston, 1992; Showers & Joyce, 1996).

Cognitive coaching was adopted by Midwest Metro as the preferred approach to professional development for the Digital Age Literacy Initiative. Garmston (1992) defined cognitive coaching as “a commitment to the development of the mind of the teacher as a central focus of a school’s staff development program, and the promotion of a new school culture in which collegiality, risk taking, honest communication, and experimentation are continuing expressions of school renewal” (p.175). Cognitive coaching follows a non-judgmental process that is based on a pre-conference (plan), observation (practice), post-conference (reflect) format. After gaining the trust of the teacher being coached, the coach

works in the capacity of a critical friend in helping the teacher to analyze his/her own teaching practice (McLymont & Costa, 1998).

Regardless of the type of coaching used, one recurring concern relates to the ability to achieve long-term effectiveness. According to many educators (Cochran & DeChesere, 1995; Swafford, 1998; Veenman & Dennessen, 2001), coaching needs follow-up support or some other form of professional development to sustain initial results. Carter (2001) noted that coaching is a temporary approach to professional development and is not intended to be a lifelong commitment.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The definition of coaching is still evolving. Jones (2001) indicated that coaching is a short-term solution, and that the success of coaching, by itself, is not easily sustained. Given the continued evolution of the definition of coaching, it made sense to start the evaluation of Midwest Metro's coaching initiative with how the coaches, themselves, defined coaching and what they thought it took to be successful. By identifying the skills, qualifications, and characteristics coaches perceived as necessary for being successful, then it might be possible to hire teachers with these critical characteristics and then utilize them in future professional development initiatives. Also, because of the connection between coaching and mentoring, faculty who have these skills, qualifications, and characteristics should be better prepared to work with new faculty as well as current colleagues, and flexibly to adapt to changing educational requirements.

The overarching question for this study was: "What does it take to be a successful professional development coach?" Under this question, the study explored two particular areas. The first area related to the skills, qualifications, and characteristics that coaches saw as critical to their perceived levels of coaching success. The second area was the coaches' perceptions of what future preparations might be needed to support faculty after the coaches returned to their classrooms. Specific questions that guided data collection and analysis were:

- How do coaches define coaching?

- What skills, qualifications and characteristics do the coaches believe are necessary for being successful?
- What factors do the coaches perceive as being critical for success?
- What do the coaches believe will be necessary to sustain or grow the success of the coaching initiative?

### Methodology

This study was part of a larger study that used a qualitative case study design to examine the professional development program, as perceived by the coaches. Specifically, survey and interview data were collected to determine participants' perceptions of how successful the initiative had been to that point in time and what participants believed was needed in order to be successful. The smaller study also used a qualitative case-study design. The purpose of this smaller study, as described above, was to examine, in depth, four coaches' definitions of coaching, their perceptions of their success as coaches, and their ideas about what would be needed to sustain or grow the outcomes of the initiative after returning to their classrooms.

### *Role of Researchers*

Utilizing their partnership with a large research-based Mid-western university, the administrators at Midwest Metro and two university faculty agreed to use the digital age literacy initiative as a context for research for a graduate student course about issues and methods in educational research. The research team consisted of two faculty members and seven graduate students.

Students were either master's (n = 1) or doctoral (n = 6) students with backgrounds working in K-12 classrooms and the corporate training environment. The role of the graduate student researchers was primarily to obtain demographic and relevant background information about the participants, interview a subset of participating coaches within the school district, analyze data obtained for individual portions of the research, and report their respective findings.

In addition to the overarching research question, each graduate student researcher developed his or her research question for a related individual study. The first author of this study is a doctoral student



with previous experiences in both corporate training and K-12 curriculum planning. The focus of her efforts was on the coaches' perceptions of what may be needed to sustain the success of the coaching initiative after the coaches return to their classrooms.

#### *Description and Selection of Site and Participants*

Midwest Metro is a large metropolitan school district made up of 18 schools: two kindergartens (considered one school), ten elementary schools (grades 1-5), three middle schools (grades 6-8), an alternative school (grades 6-12), two high schools (grades 9-12), and a career center. There are approximately 1000 teachers serving a K-12 student population of almost 16,000.

In preparation for the coaching initiative, the administrators, faculty, staff, parents, and students of Midwest Metro, along with community leaders, spent several months planning a framework for the initiative, and discussing staffing requirements and milestones for implementation. The call went out within Midwest Metro schools for interested teacher applicants to fill thirty-one positions of digital literacy coach and three positions of lead coach, one each for elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Coaches/coach leaders were hired just before the end of the 2002 academic school year. They began their training during the final few weeks of that semester. Training continued for a period of four weeks during the summer months and the coaches were prepared to start working with faculty when school resumed in the fall. Between April and October 2002, all coaches had received over 190 hours of training in addition to on-going training sessions that continued every Friday throughout the school year.

Participants for this study included four digital age literacy coaches. Three of the four coaches were female. The average age of these coaches was 38, and the average number of years these coaches had been teaching was 11.5. All four coaches had received professional development in some form during their teaching years. Three of the four coaches had not only participated in various types of professional development (conferences, seminars, workshops) but also had provided or been responsible for leading professional development training and disseminating information to other teachers. In addition, all of the coaches had either received specialized outside training related to their content area, methods, or instructional strategies, or they had received certifications from various training programs. Two of the

coaches had received intensive outside training at a Teacher Leadership Academy over an extended period (approximately two years), and one coach had returned to school to earn a licensure endorsement in special education (gifted and talented). Two coaches had a Masters degree.

The sites for this study included two different schools within Midwest Metro. Three of the four digital literacy coaches in this study worked in a high school setting where there were more than 120 teachers to serve a student population of approximately 2,200. The other site was an elementary school (grades K-5) with a student population of almost 700 being served by 38 teachers. The three high school coaches worked in the same building while the elementary coach was the only digital literacy coach in her school. All coaches were interviewed in the schools where they worked. Observation data were collected both in the schools where the coaches worked and in the location of their regular weekly training sessions.

#### *Data Collection*

Demographic and baseline information about facilitating change were gathered via an online survey. The survey, which had been adapted from the *Change Facilitator's Stages of Concern Questionnaire* (Hall, Newlove, George, Rutherford & Hord, 1991), asked coaches to rate their perceptions of 35 statements using an 8-point scale ranging from “irrelevant of me” (1) to “very true of me now” (8). The results indicated what concerns each coach had regarding the coaching initiative and estimated their levels/types of concerns related to the change process based on seven stages of change: awareness, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration and refocusing. In addition to questions about concern, the survey was modified to gather background information.

Coaches' perceptions of the key issues of this study were gathered through individual interviews. Each interview was audio taped and later transcribed. Participant verbatim language was used based on direct transcription from the audio tapes in analyzing qualitative data from the interviews. Clarifications that were needed were obtained via email correspondence with the coach participants.

In order to keep interview questions consistent between researchers, the team of graduate students spent time developing the interview protocol. Graduate student researchers worked in groups to develop questions for inclusion in the interview protocol. The group discussed three or four compiled lists of

questions and came to consensus on which questions to include being sure to include questions that addressed each of the individual researchers' interests (e.g., characteristics of coaches, definition of successful coaching, technology's role in coaching, and sustaining the outcomes of the coaching program) in addition to including questions for the group project.

The interview protocol was piloted during the first two days of interviews. After the first two days, the research team met and discussed any concerns they had about the interview protocol. As a result of this discussion, one question was added to the protocol and another question was clarified. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded for analysis. Any handwritten notes made by the interviewers were also transcribed and included with the audio transcript.

In addition to online surveys and interviews, observations were conducted by the course instructor during some of the regular Friday training sessions. The instructor also attended occasional meetings with Midwest Metro administrators. All observation notes and correspondence were retained as additional data that could contribute to the findings of the research. Other sources of data included materials provided to the research group by the Midwest Metro administrators, including training materials and project status reports to the funding agency.

#### *Data Analysis*

After transcribing audio tapes, inductive data analysis began using methods described by McMillan and Schumacher (2001). In looking for patterns presented in the data, coding of the interview transcripts began with a search for recurring words, phrases, ideas and themes that captured the coaches' ideas about the progress of the coaching initiative and their perceptions of what it takes to be a professional development coach. Additional coding was done in response to the individual research question about sustaining the success of the coaching program. Transcripts were searched for words, phrases, and other indicators of how the coaches thought the success of the program might be sustained and what characteristics, qualifications, or types of support would be needed to achieve that outcome. Observation notes and open-ended survey responses were coded and analyzed in the same manner. Likert scale questions from the survey were analyzed by calculating the means related to each subscale.

### *Issues of Validity and Reliability*

The authors of the *Change Facilitator's Stages of Concern Questionnaire* (Hall, et al., 1991), provide coefficients of internal reliability for each stage of concern measured by the survey: Based on 750 participants, they report the following alpha-coefficients for stages 0 - 6: .63, .86, .65, .73, .74, .79, and .81, denoting moderate subscale reliability.

To provide consistency in the reporting of findings based on the overarching research question and the various sub-questions generated by the individual researchers, the researchers met as a group, reviewed the questions included in the interview protocol, and came to a general consensus about the coding scheme used for analysis of qualitative data. If the majority of the researchers had the same type of response to any particular question, then additional, more specific coding was devised for that kind of response. After testing the original coding scheme, the researchers met again and made revisions to the scheme as necessary.

In an effort to enhance validity, participant verbatim language was used based on direct transcription from the audio taped recording of the interviews. Member checking via email correspondence was used to clarify any possible misinterpretations of participants' statements, and multiple researchers agreed on the interpretation of descriptive data in the reporting of that data. Additionally, this research incorporated a triangulation of data through interviews, observations, and surveys.

### Results and Discussion

The focus of this report is on what coaches perceive as necessary in order to prepare for the role they will take after the coaching program is over and what will be necessary in order to sustain the success of the coaching program after coaches return to their classrooms. The findings in this case are based on the coaches' (n = 4) interview responses, survey data, and input from observations.

#### What does it mean to be a coach?

In general, the coaches defined coaching as a two-way relationship with the ultimate goal of improving student achievement. One coach said, "It's not a program that's the latest new thing. This is

just good sound practices in the classroom.” Another coach indicated that coaching is not something that is implemented overnight. It takes time to cultivate credibility in the position and build trust in a relationship before coaching can be effective. This high school coach expressed that the teachers who participated in professional development did so because they knew what it was all about and they wanted to be there, whereas others, if not most teachers, perceived coaching as just another professional development process to be endured, and so they stayed away if at all possible.

Coaches used the terms guiding, consulting, and supporting to describe the coaching process. Other terms are included in Table 1. Although two coaches indicated that coaching was “reacting,” all four coaches agreed that coaching was in a continuous state of flux. They called it “dynamic” and explained that a coach needed to be “willing to change on a dime” and use a “system of real-time prioritization” as they faced an “unpredictable stream of events.”

Insert Table 1 about here

All four coaches indicated that they were growing themselves through professional reading, researching, study groups, or correspondence with teachers and other coaches. They were not only working on their own growth plans but on professional development and growth plans for teachers they were coaching. Often the coaches worked one-on-one with teachers as they cultivated relationships, collaborated on tasks, coordinated school visits, or worked on other problem-solving tasks. As one coach stated, “Anyone we work with will tell you the value in our being here, the quality of experience that they’ve had with us, and the desire to reuse us whenever possible.”

Three coaches mentioned that they spent time doing model lessons or providing teaching demonstrations to the teachers they coached. Three of them also said that appointments or meetings were a big part of their day. Two coaches mentioned spending time planning workshops or assisting with planning other types of professional development opportunities for teachers.

#### *Skills and Characteristics Needed to be Successful*

Through their responses to various interview questions, the coaches identified skills and characteristics they felt were essential to performing as coaches. Collectively, these skills and

characteristics represented the need to have an open mind to an evolving understanding of how to “do” professional development. Two coaches focused on how much of their practice was based on reading and researching and how their reading now covered a wider spectrum of content and was more “zoned into what other teachers need.” One of these two coaches commented, “My knowledge base has grown exponentially, which has made me better.”

Although all coaches mentioned the need for coaching relationships to be built on trust (i.e., “it’s a deeply trusting relationship you have”), three of the coaches discussed the importance of working in small groups or one-on-one with teachers and how the relationships were more collaborative. “They discuss. They talk. They reflect. They review. They share. They talk more.” An understanding of group dynamics, strong interpersonal communication skills, and leadership skills were keys to success in working with classroom teachers.

“One of my greatest strengths is my ability to put others at ease,” remarked one coach. Another commented, “I’m trained to bring that negative spiral where they just want to complain back into a positive, forward moving discussion.” Two coaches specifically noted that their experiences in working with small groups or one-on-one with teachers helped them feel more comfortable when talking to administrators or speaking in front of their peers. They felt these experiences gave them practice in writing “a very clear and concise e-mail,” and improved their overall communication skills.

One coach mentioned the increase in “my own self reflection ... maybe I’m not better at it; I just spend more time at it.” This coach felt that self reflection was a necessary coaching skill. In addition, it was mentioned that coaches need “a little bit of humility, a sense of humor ... those two things are imperative,” and that each coach should have a willingness to start a conversation and realize that at any given time he/she might be wrong.

Among other skills and characteristics needed to be successful, coaches identified flexibility, leadership skills, and the ability to “recognize the small successes when they happen” as essential (see Table 2). They also suggested that a coach needs the ability to debrief, to reflect, and to process aloud with somebody else acting as a sounding board.

Insert Table 2 about here

### *Perceptions of Confidence in the Coaching Role*

Having identified essential skills and characteristics, two coaches said that they felt pretty confident in their roles so far. Another coach felt “today: thirty percent” and explained that confidence in the role of coach varied from day to day. The fourth coach felt very confident. However, the coach who felt very confident added, “What I’m not confident about, however, is how much opportunity I’m going to have in those situations [...] I can help someone help themselves when they’re willing. And so what I’m working on right now is – how to increase the willingness; how to help this culture shift to one that values [teachers’] own learning above all other things.”

### *Factors Impacting Success*

All four coaches felt they had been successful so far in the program. They based this judgment on written or verbal feedback from teachers. One coach also mentioned that there had been some work done on vocabulary acquisition strategies and that the student data that were collected initially showed growth. The coach considered this growth another sign of success.

The coaches identified the factors necessary for success. These included having a manageable workload with realistic expectations, supportive leadership at the school and district levels, and a broad and growing “knowledge base with the skill set for finding appropriate vehicles for bringing the knowledge across.” In addition, all coaches agreed that in order for them to be successful they needed an external support system of meeting with other people either through their regular weekly meetings or through “a triad of people... meet with two other coaches every other week... one person is strong in one area and another person is strong in another area... people to bounce ideas off of...or get suggestions from.”

All four coaches also mentioned the need for supportive leadership. However, while some coaches expressed this need based on perceptions of a positive support system already in place, others based this on perceptions of inadequate administrative support.

In addition, three coaches mentioned needing to allot their time differently. One coach specified needing to spend more time with teachers instead of spending it in weekly training sessions. Another of these three coaches discussed the need to focus more time working with the administrative personnel in support of the initiative. These comments are reflective of the results obtained on the survey subscale of collaboration which had the highest mean subscale score ( $M = 6.15/8.00$ ) for the four coaches interviewed.

Even though all coaches considered themselves and the coaching program a success so far, three of them also mentioned some challenges. One coach noted:

There have been coaching situations where I've been working with somebody on an idea or a project where it just fell apart... came unraveled for things that are out of my control. And no amount of follow up probably would have fixed it. I don't look at those as failures because in a large part, what that person experienced was thinking through something with another person so they felt that power of collaboration – even though it didn't work. So that's why I'm not saying it's one hundred percent successful.

Another coach specifically said that it could not be called a failure, but that there was a need to move more into other content areas: "I've got a whole lot to offer Math and Science and Social Studies. [...] That's where I would like to see us be more effective." When speaking about the difficulties a coach faces in establishing relationships with content area teachers, particularly at the high school level, one coach expressed the following.

We [teachers] do all of our thinking, all of our acting, all of our decision-making behind closed doors, by ourselves. There's not time, nor is there a cultural norm to come out of our rooms and ever talk about anything that we'll do with anyone else with the rare exception of our buddies. You might have a couple of buddies that you gain trust with that you'll talk to about things, but to make that a part of the routine of teaching – we've got a ways to go at that. And so gaining trust as a coach, when you're thrown into that type of culture, where people aren't used to talking to one another – the people aren't



used to even honestly evaluating their own performance – that’s just not a part of how we do things. ...and so when you’re told as a staff member, “Okay now you have these coaches that will help you reflect about your normal teaching practices,” that doesn’t compute. That makes no sense to you. And it’s also mighty threatening too.

### *Sustaining Success*

After considering their own work, their perceived levels of success for both their roles as coaches and the coaching initiative, and what they felt were essential skills, qualifications, or characteristics for achieving success as a coach, the coaches were asked what they felt was needed in order to sustain the success of the program after they returned to the classroom. One of the coaches prefaced the response to this question by saying, “When we get back in the classroom, hopefully we will have started something that sustains itself. ... Things that we will have started include an ever so slight shift in the culture towards collaboration and towards self directed professional development.”

In planning for the future, the coaches listed personal plans that included staying on top of research, continuing to participate in learning communities, and pursuing certification as a mentor. Three of the coaches mentioned the planned availability of a supportive website for teachers within the school system. All of them had images of continuing to work as a coach, consultant, resource, trainer, collaboration coordinator, or teacher leader of some sort. One of the coaches envisioned “working more... a lot more... with new teachers rather than staying in my classroom.” Another coach imagined doing more for internal professional development efforts and sounded hopeful while commenting, “Maybe I’ll have some avenues opened up that I can go into other buildings and do things.”

When asked, specifically, what they thought would be needed to sustain or grow the results of the coaching program, the responses focused on two issues. The first issue was the use of a professional development website that was being developed as a performance support tool. The second, and perhaps the most important, was the utilization and networking of teachers. Comments from the coaches included: “Help the teachers become those staff development people so that it’s not just me - that they are able to

carry on when I'm gone," and "Look to people that can be just as good as leaders as myself but haven't been given the opportunity."

Coaches were also asked what they thought the administration could or should be working on in order to sustain the success of the coaching initiative. Coaches responded that the administration should be trying to figure out how to use the coaches after the initiative so that the work done and progress made "doesn't just disintegrate with us as we go back into the classroom." Coaches unanimously agreed that part of the planning on the part of the administration needed to include collaborative efforts, which is again reflective of the survey results. In particular, this was reflected in the collaboration subscale item, "Working with administrators and other change facilitators in facilitating use of this initiative is important to me" ( $M = 6.67/8.00$ ).

In addition, the coaches agreed that administrators should continue working on the development of a learning community, establishment of a network of human resources within the school, and allowing time for key resource personnel to meet on a regular basis. As one coach stated it, "The way the website's developed is that they go from just *looking* at some text to the ultimate, which is *interacting* with a mentor and *trying* things in their class."

### *Summary*

Even though the coaches' definitions of coaching were still evolving and somewhat different from each other, they perceived that they have most of the necessary skills, are confident in their roles as coaches, and feel mostly successful in the performance of their jobs as digital age literacy coaches. However, as Phillips (1998) described, the most difficult part of coaching is trying to teach or coach someone who does not want to be coached. The Midwest Metro coaches in this study agreed. Furthermore, the coaches had concerns about collaboration efforts and how they might sustain the success of the coaching initiative after they returned to their classrooms.

Although the four coaches who participated in this study were hired for the same professional development initiative and received the same training, the variations in their definitions of coaching indicate that their perceptions of the coaching role are still changing. The term coaching means something

slightly different to each coach, but carries the underlying principle that the overall goal is to increase student learning and achievement.

Coaches are concerned about the future and how to sustain the success of what they are working hard to accomplish. They indicated that the keys to success are having an understanding of group dynamics, strong interpersonal communication skills, and effective leadership skills. However, they also indicated that they are lacking the tools they need to achieve overall success. Supportive leadership from administrators and a network of support or a system of materials and methods are the things that they need in order to achieve their goal.

### Implications

Data from coaches verify that coaches used a combination of methods and practices in order for their coaching to be successful. Literature has shown a need for combining various methods of professional development (Guskey, 1995). Coaches from Midwest Metro specifically mentioned the use of action research and the beginning development of a learning community. They also used workshops, modeling, and small group problem-solving in their coaching practice.

Results also expand on findings from Edwards and Green (1999) that hint at a transition from coaching to mentoring. In Edwards and Green's work this transition was demonstrated through the change in character of the coaches over an extended period of time. However, in the Midwest Metro study, the connection between coaching and mentoring was not only expressed through the coaches' perceptions of what would be needed in order to sustain or grow the results of the program, but also in some of the changes they had experienced in their skills and qualifications as a result of the coaching initiative.

Coaches in this study clearly indicated a need for support from school administration. This parallels the work of Garmston (1992) that suggested that even if using individuals with all the identified skills, qualifications and characteristics necessary for being successful coaches, coaching alone was not enough to bring about a lasting or revolutionary change and that it was the responsibility of the school to develop an environment or culture that supported the initiative.

Relating this back to the literature, a limitation on the success of coaching is when it is done in isolation or with little follow-up or support to sustain the results (Lee, 2001; Swafford, 1998; Veenman & Denessen, 2001). Since coaching is an inherent part of what a mentor does (Jones, 2001; Williams, 2001) and, as indicated by the coaches in this study, coaching requires some of the skills found in mentoring, this implies that the combined use of coaching and mentoring may be the solution to sustaining or growing the results of the coaching initiative.

In comparing what the literature says about mentoring with data obtained from the Midwest Metro coaches, we see in Table 3 that there is overlap between the key factors of coaching and mentoring. The only factor that has no commonalities between mentoring and coaching is the timeline factor. In the case of the Midwest Metro coaches, the coaching initiative was scheduled to continue for only a few years. After that time, the coaches would return to their classrooms.

Insert Table 3 about here

Following Megginson's (1988) suggestion that coaching and mentoring should be used along a timeline of performance improvement, Figure 1 suggests the relationship between coaching and mentoring as they progress along that continuum.

Insert Figure 1 about here

In Figure 1, professional development begins on the left with either mentoring or coaching. As we move from left to right, the two approaches merge because coaching skills and characteristics intertwine with those of mentoring, and mentoring includes having the skills it takes to be a coach. Because coaching is temporary and mentoring is long-term, the coach's role comes to an end. However the supporting role of a coach is carried throughout the remainder of the continuum as part of the job of a mentor, and coaching can be repeated as necessary.

If professional development through mentoring or coaching is addressed in stages, then this suggests that the strongest professional development would take place during the coaching stage. The mentoring stage can overlap with the coaching stage, and the mentor and coach roles can be filled by one person. The coaching is complete when the person being coached either exhibits targeted skills and

behaviors or demonstrates understanding of new knowledge (Carter, 2001; MacLennan, 1995; Veenman & Denessen, 2001). One can assume that the success of coaching efforts can be sustained through continued mentoring relationships following the end of a coaching program. In effect, this suggests that today's coaches are preparing tomorrow's mentors.

#### Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

This study of four coaches at Midwest Metro had several limitations, the foremost of which was the small number of participants. In addition, we did not examine administrators,' teachers,' or students' perspectives about the coaching initiative. With the ultimate goal of professional development being an increase in student achievement, it will be important to continue this study and examine the differences in student learning outcomes as a result of the initiative.

Future research should compare the outcomes of this limited case-study to the rest of the coaches in the Midwest Metro school district. Future studies might look at the differences in contexts (multiple coaches per school versus individual coaches in a school), or look at differences between types of coaches (elementary versus high school). To answer the question about what it takes to be a successful professional development coach or what is needed to sustain the results of the initiative, a longitudinal study might present information about how coaching changes over time and what types of support are needed to sustain the results. A longitudinal study might also show that improved levels of student achievement taper off, level off, or decline at some point following the return of the coaches to their classrooms. This might then address the question of whether results of a successful professional development initiative are sustained or grown after an extended period of time following the initiative.

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Table 1.

*Terms Used in Coaches' Definition of Coaching.*

Term	( <i>n</i> )	Term	( <i>n</i> )	Term	( <i>n</i> )
Communicate	4	Study groups	4	Reacting	2
Dynamic	4	Appointments	3	Supporting teachers	2
Growing	4	Flexible	3	Collaborating	1
Reading	4	Modeling	3	Consulting	1
Researching	4	Guiding	2	Relationships	1

*n* = Number of coaches using the term.

Table 2.

*Skills and Characteristics needed to be a Successful Coach.*

Skill or Characteristic	(n)	Skill or Characteristic	(n)	Skill or Characteristic	(n)
Interpersonal skills	4	Reading	2	Humility	1
Communication skills	4	Realistic expectations	2	Leadership skills	1
Flexibility	4	Researching skills	2	Networking skills	1
Collaboration	3	Time management skills	2	Open minded	1
Recognize small successes	3	Understand group dynamics	2	Patience	1
Trusting relationships	3	Consistency	1	Presentation skills	1
Organization skills	2	Creativity	1	Professionalism	1
Humor	2	Honesty	1	Self-reflection	1

*n* = Number of coaches using the term.

Table 3.

*Comparison of Coaching and Mentoring*

Factor	Coaching <sup>a</sup>	Mentoring <sup>b</sup>
Focus	Focus on “how”	Focus on “how” and “why”
	Build performance	Building a career
	Quickly grasp knowledge, skills, and behaviors	Development of the individual
		Enhancing networking
Timeline	Temporary (a month to a few years)	Long term (a career or a lifetime)
Relationship	Advisor	Advisor
	Sounding board	Coach
	Trusted guide	Sounding board
		Supporter
		Teacher / Trainer
		Trusted guide, friend, partner, role model
Skills	Interpersonal skills	Interpersonal skills
	Communication skills	Communication skills
	Leadership skills	Coaching skills
	Organization skills	Multi dimensional skills (spiritual, intellectual, emotional)
	Presentation skills	
	Researching skills	Organizational skills
	Self-reflection	
	Time management skills	

*(table continues)*

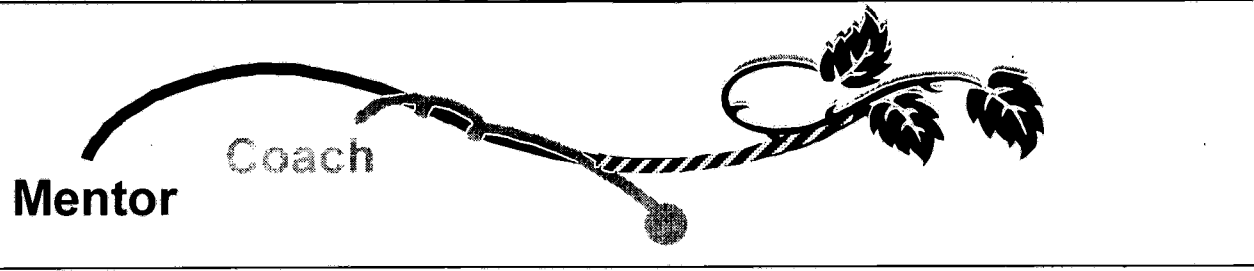
Table 3. (continued)

Factor	Coaching <sup>a</sup>	Mentoring <sup>b</sup>
Characteristics	Collaborative	Collegial
	Consistent	Honest
	Creative	Patient
	Flexible	Practical experience
	Honest	Reliable
	Open minded	Sense of humor
	Patient	Status within the school
	Professional	Subject competence
	Realistic expectations	Supportive
	Sense of humor	Tolerant

<sup>a</sup>Midwest Metro coaches. <sup>b</sup>Blank & Sindelar, 1992; Clark, 1995; Ganser, 1999; Jones, 2001; Megginson, 1988.

Figure Caption

*Figure 1.* The coaching / mentoring relationship: How coaching is sustained through mentoring.





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