Considering Literacy Coaching Responsibilities in Terms of Teacher Change

Antony T. Smith
University of Washington Bothell

It turns out there isn't one way at all that works, so I'm constantly in this mode of monitoring, changing, and adjusting, cajoling, pushing, and prompting people to do more when things aren't working rather than giving up or falling back to some previous thing that makes the teacher more comfortable, which is a retreat usually from instruction
                  (Diane, Middle School Literacy Coach).

The complexity of literacy coaching can be daunting. Like Diane, coaches face a huge set of responsibilities as they work with teachers to improve practice and increase student learning. From mentoring new teachers to conducting demonstration lessons to facilitating professional development meetings, coaches get pulled in many directions at once. This complexity may fragment the coaching process, reducing the impact of the coach on classroom practice and student learning. What is needed, to keep all of the pieces together, is a conceptual framework to help organize the array of coaching responsibilities and to consider them in relation to the process of teacher change.

This brief describes a conceptual framework that situates a three-level trajectory of instructional coaching within a recursive process of teacher change. Coaches and others involved in coaching are encouraged to use this framework to discuss current work and to identify next steps in the process. With this purpose in mind, the framework is presented as a discussion guide, complete with a grid for jotting down notes on current coaching work and ideas for moving forward with the coaching process. Questions for study group discussions are also suggested.

In addition to the study guide, this brief provides an overview of the conceptual framework as well as specific examples of framework elements in practice drawn from work with three middle level literacy coaches. The goal is to help coaches and others engaged in coaching to consider the complexity of

the coaching process in a cohesive way and to help achieve balance between the many responsibilities that pull literacy coaches in different directions.

Conceptual Framework: Overview

The goal of literacy coaching is to affect teacher change and, ultimately, to impact student learning. Research suggests teacher change is complex, involving shifts in sociocultural norms and participation in discourse communities (Chin & Benne, 1969; Putnam & Borko, 1997; Richardson & Placier, 2001). Coaches work with teachers in a variety of ways to enact change, with responsibilities ranging from individual conferencing to facilitating study groups to presenting professional development workshops. These coaching responsibilities fall into two major areas: teacher mentoring and literacy program advocacy (Smith, 2006; International Reading Association, 2006; Walpole & Blamey, 2008).

Mentoring responsibilities include planning with, observing, and conferring with teachers. Some elements of this work align with the concept of mentor as a guide, "Offering expert assistance and professional support over an extended period of time" (Fishbaugh, 1997, p. 65). In practice, the mentoring responsibilities of literacy coaching also include elements of peer collaboration and support (Joyce & Showers, 2002) that position the coach more as colleague than expert. A common format for mentoring-responsibility work is the individual conference. The emphasis of these conferences is coach facilitation of teacher learning by listening, steering, planning, and scheduling (Toll, 2005). Overall, mentoring responsibilities focus on a range of roles that encompass literacy coach facilitation of individual teacher learning.

Literacy program advocacy responsibilities involve working at the school level to encourage teacher change through professional development and curriculum implementation. This work may occur in individual, small group, or large group settings. One specific focus of literacy advocacy may be to "work with all teach-

ers to understand and implement a schoolwide reading program" (Walpole & McKenna, 2004, p. 11). To move toward schoolwide literacy goals, the coach as literacy program advocate may work to facilitate team planning sessions or conduct after school professional development seminars. Overall, the focus of the coach as a literacy program advocate is to encourage teacher change at the schoolwide level.

Although this dual set of responsibilities is consistent in the literature, the emphasis on one set or the other varies from focusing on mentoring (Dole, 2004; Toll, 2005) to stressing leadership-oriented work (Sturtevant, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). It is unclear whether there is an optimal balance between mentoring and literacy advocacy, or whether there is conflict or agreement between these responsibilities. As illustrated in Diane's comment at the beginning of this brief, the work of literacy coaches constantly shifts, requiring frequent adaptations to maintain a sense of progress.

The conceptual framework described here addresses the complexity of coaching work by identifying a three-level trajectory in relation to the mentoring and advocacy responsibilities of literacy coaches. On the first level, coaches work as mentors to encourage teacher change through observation and discussion. They also work as advocates to help form teacher learning communities that support change (Lent, 2007). On the second level, coach-es focus on teacher implementation of new instructional skills as well as participation in teacher learning communities. On the third level, coaches provide sustaining support to create lasting teacher change (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996), encourage the development of teacher peer collaboration (Joyce, Calhoun, & Hopkins, 1999), and focus on their own professional development (Kalo, 2008; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). This trajectory is situated within a recursive process of change based on the concept of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983), a process that includes reflection, goal setting, and action. This framework, in situating the linear coaching trajectory within a recursive change process, illustrates the complexity of coaching and the need to support teachers over time as they engage in the change process to improve instructional practice.

In the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1, mentoring and school-advocacy responsibilities are mapped across the three levels of coaching, visually representing the trajectory. Figure 2 provides space for taking notes on current coaching work as it relates to the three levels of coaching. There is also space for brainstorming ideas to move forward with the coaching process. The following sections of this brief describe specific examples of responsibilities across the three levels of coaching and also provide a discussion guide for considering the concepts represented in the framework.
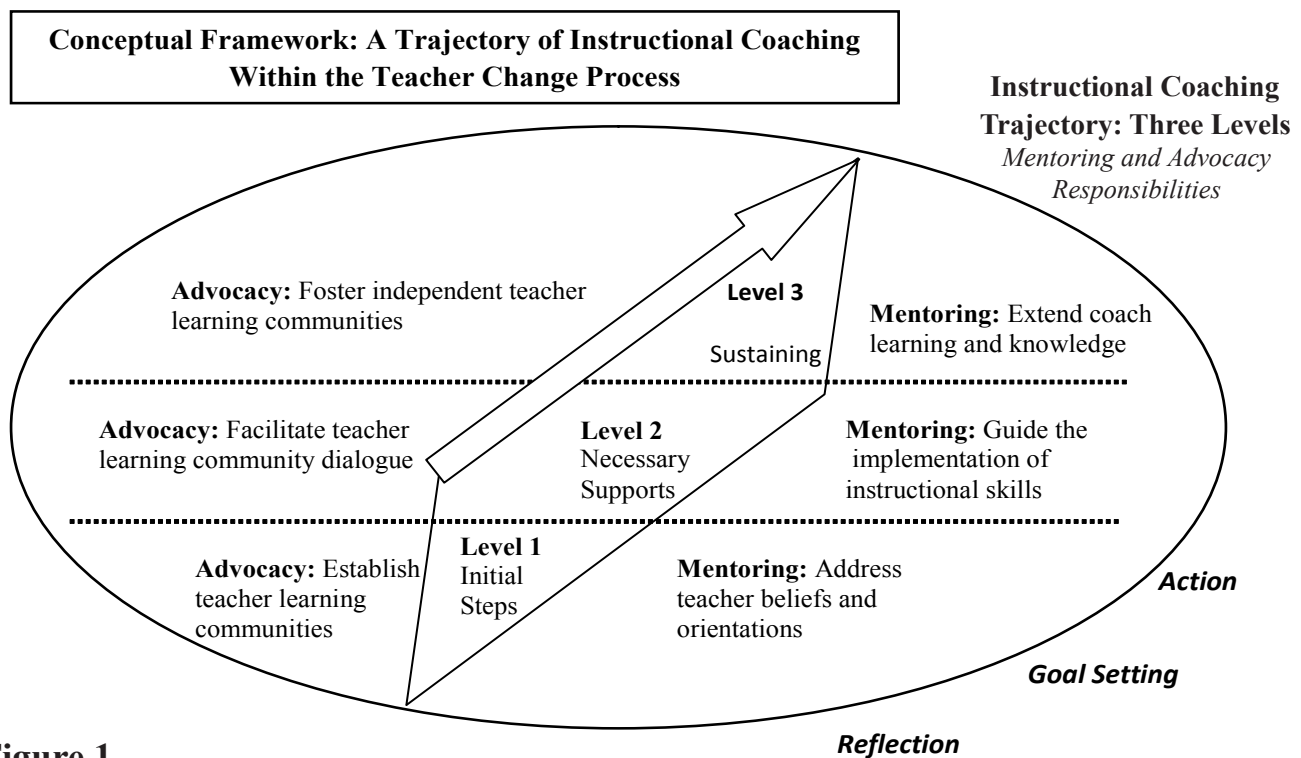

Conceptual Framework: A Trajectory of Instructional Coaching Within the Teacher Change Process

Instructional Coaching Trajectory: Three Levels
Mentoring and Advocacy Responsibilities

Advocacy: Foster independent teacher learning communities

Level 3
Sustaining

Mentoring: Extend coach learning and knowledge

Advocacy: Facilitate teacher learning community dialogue

Level 2
Necessary Supports

Mentoring: Guide the implementation of instructional skills

Advocacy: Establish teacher learning communities

Level 1
Initial Steps

Mentoring: Address teacher beliefs and orientations

Action

Goal Setting

Reflection

Figure 1

Teacher Change Process Across Levels

Current Work	Ideas to Move Forward
Level 1: Initial Steps	
Level 2: Necessary Supports	
Level 3: Sustaining Efforts	

Figure 2

Coaching Trajectory: Specific Examples

This section describes coaching responsibilities, mentoring, and advocacy, on each of the three levels of the instructional coaching trajectory identified in the conceptual framework. It also describes a specific example of each responsibility as observed in the work of three literacy coaches: Diane, Grace, and Michelle (all names are pseudonyms) (Smith, 2006). Following these descriptions are suggestions for using the framework as a discussion guide for considering current coaching efforts and future ideas. Suggested discussion questions are also included.

Level 1: Initial steps

Mentoring: Address Teacher Beliefs and Orientations

General description: Coaches have conversations with individual teachers about literacy instruction, classroom management, thematic units, and other areas of interest to the teacher. Coaches also focus on building relationships and establishing a level of trust necessary to engage teachers in the change process.

Specific example: Michelle meets with a teacher during her planning time, stopping by to see how things are going with the new reading curriculum materials and asking if she might be of assistance. Michelle confers with this teacher for a few minutes, making sure not to take up too much time. She promises to locate some additional materials for the teacher and suggests scheduling a meeting to discuss ways these materials might be used in class to emphasize reading strategy instruction.

Advocacy: Establish Teacher Learning Communities

General description: Coaches work to facilitate conversations with small groups of teachers to gauge willingness to collaborate and help brainstorm ideas of how teachers might support each other while involved in the change process.

Specific example: Grace schedules an after-school meeting for teachers interested in discussing student writing development. She facilitates a conversation focused on writing assessment and instruction, using samples of student work as a catalyst for discussion. Grace helps teachers brainstorm a list of strategies and activities they might be interested in developing and implementing to help students advance their writing skills.

Level 2: Necessary Supports

Mentoring: Guide Teacher Implementation of New Instructional Skills

General description: Coaches plan, set goals, observe, and debrief with individual teachers who are working to implement new instructional skills as part of the change process.

Specific example: Diane conducts a conference with a teacher to plan the first in a series of lessons on introducing reciprocal teaching. Together they plan a lesson that will introduce prediction, one of the four key strategies. They decide on a whole-class shared reading lesson as a way to demonstrate this strategy, agreeing that the students will need a number of lessons on each of the four strategies before transitioning to the small-group work that is central to the reciprocal teaching model. Later that day, the teacher implements the lesson while Diane observes. After school they debrief the lesson and outline next steps for the following day.

Advocacy: Facilitate Teacher Learning Community Dialogue

General description: Coaches meet on a regular basis with small groups of teachers who have decided to collaborate as part of their effort to enact change.

Specific example: Grace continues her series of meetings with a group of teachers interested in examining student writing and implementing new strategies and activities. Each teacher brings samples of student work for sharing, analysis, and discussion. Grace facilitates these discussions and helps teachers move through the process of describing and analyzing student work in order to identify next steps in writing instruction.

Level 3: Sustaining Efforts

Mentoring: Extend Coach Learning and Knowledge

General description: Coaches attend district, regional, and national professional development opportunities to deepen literacy knowledge and to support sustaining efforts to affect teacher change.

Specific example: Michelle attends monthly all-district coaching meetings to reflect on the coaching process and to receive professional development in mentoring skills, instructional approaches, and the use of technology. On this day they spend time reflecting on their latest efforts to help teachers interpret reading assessment data and use these data to inform instruction. Michelle also receives instruction on how to use the advanced features of the district's newly acquired whiteboard/projection technology, so that she can assist teachers in utilizing this technology to enhance literacy instruction.

Advocacy: Encourage Peer Collaboration in Teacher Learning Communities

General description: Coaches help small groups of teachers find ways to support each other in their effort to improve instructional skills as independent learning communities.

Specific example: Diane networks with several teachers who have implemented reciprocal teaching, to various degrees, in their classrooms. She facilitates several meetings where these teachers share their experiences and outline goals for further development of reciprocal teaching strategies. Once this group begins to function as a teacher learning community, Diane encourages the teachers to continue their collaboration by meeting independently to support each others' efforts.

Conceptual Framework: A Discussion Guide

The examples described in the cases of these three coaches illustrate the complexity of literacy coaching responsibilities. The conceptual framework showing the three-level trajectory of coaching within a process of teacher change may serve as a way for coaches and others to consider current coaching efforts and to discuss ideas for the future. Some suggested discussion questions for use with the framework are:

1. School-wide, where is our current coaching work in terms of the three levels of the trajectory?
2. With groups of teachers, what is our current advocacy work in developing teacher-learning communities?
3. With individual teachers, what is our current mentoring work in supporting changes in instructional practice?
4. What connections can we make between this mentoring and literacy advocacy work and teachers' recursive change process of reflection, goal setting, and action?
5. Given our current work and connections to teacher change, what are some ideas for moving forward along the coaching trajectory?

Conclusion

This framework aims to help coaches consider their work across mentoring and advocacy responsibilities in an effort to develop a cohesive school-wide picture of the coaching process. While it is essential

to move forward along the trajectory of coaching, it is also important to acknowledge and reflect upon the recursive nature of teacher change, especially as it relates to cycles of reflection, goal setting, and action in classroom contexts. This framework serves as a way for coaches, as well as others involved in the process, to conceptualize their current work and identify short- and long-term goals in terms of initial steps, necessary supports, and sustaining efforts. It offers a way to think about and discuss the complex sets of mentoring and advocacy responsibilities that are part of the coaching process, providing balance and cohesion to coaches' efforts to enact teacher change and improve student learning.

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