building personnel; they are responsible for improving reading professional development and coaching for teachers and monitor, and assess reading achievement progress; they provide the positions they hold. and have the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective in coaches, or literacy coaches, must be appropriately prepared because there are no agreed upon definitions or standards for little consistency in the general competence of coaches, in part variability in the job descriptions for these coaches. Some reading coach tutors who work with students are also called degrees and reading specialist certifications. In some schools, while others are school district employees with master's coaches are volunteers with no specific training in reading, 2003 (International Reading Association, 2004). It gives a sense of how good professional development is. Coaching provides ongoing consistent support for the implementation in schools labeled by No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Excellence Act of 1998) (International Reading Association, 2000), and if reading professionals are serving in these roles (regardless of their titles), these responsibilities are the responsibilities of reading specialists in this position statement we address reading coaching as a (1) instructional, (2) evaluative. It gives a sense of how good professional development is.

References
Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center. (2002). The research base for the California comprehensive assistance center project for ongoing professional development. Los Angeles. Author.
With the recent heavy focus on reading achievement at federal, state, and local levels in the United States, the role of the reading specialist has changed. Although reading specialists function in many roles, including remedial teacher, staff developer, supervisor, and mentor, the balance of their activities has shifted away from direct teaching and toward leadership and professional development roles. In fact, reading specialists working in exemplary schools, in addition to providing direct instruction, are increasingly serving as a resource to classroom teachers to achieve specific professional development goals. These responsibilities are the responsibilities of reading specialists (see International Reading Association, 2000), and if reading specialists are serving in these roles (regardless of their titles), they must meet the standards for reading specialists/literacy coach as indicated in the Standards for Reading Professionals, Revised 2003 (International Reading Association, 2004).

However, in many cases reading professionals employed in these new roles are specifically focused on coaching classroom teachers and supporting them in their daily work within a specific school building or buildings. These reading professionals do not supervise or evaluate teachers but rather collaborate with teachers to achieve specific professional development goals. Ideally, these reading coaches would meet the standards for reading specialist/literacy coach in Standards for Reading Professionals; Revised 2003 (International Reading Association, 2004).

Definition of Reading Coaching

In this position statement we address reading coaching as a means of providing professional development for teachers in schools. Specifically, there is evidence that short-term, workshop-oriented professional development efforts do not result in changes in classroom practices or in student learning. Coaching provides the additional support needed for teachers to implement various programs and strategies. Ordinarily, teachers cannot meet these minimum qualifications without having completed several years of outstanding teaching; substantial graduate-level coursework in reading; and coursework related to presentation, facilitation, and adult learning. Reading specialists should supervise reading coaches who do not have reading specialist certification.
coaches as one component of their initiative. In several states, larger appropriations for reading improvement also have included funding for reading coaches. The basic assumption is that increasing the expertise of reading professionals available to work with classroom teachers at the individual school level would allow these teachers to learn more about reading and reading instruction and thus improve reading instruction and student achievement.

**What Do Reading Coaches Do?**

A reading coach “supports teachers in their daily work” (Dole, 2004, p. 462). There are many activities that reading coaches engage in, from informal activities—such as conversing with colleagues—to more formal ones such as holding team meetings, modeling lessons, and visiting classrooms. It is critical that reading coaches understand that coaching may range from activities that help teachers develop or increase their knowledge about a specific issue to activities that focus on implementation issues. The Figure identifies various levels of activities, from those that are more informal and “low risk” (e.g., assistance with assessment) to those that require the reading coach to provide feedback about teachers’ classroom practices (e.g., classroom visits) and are more “high risk” (Bean, 2004a).

**FIGURE**

**Coaching Activities (Levels of Intensity)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(informal; helps to develop relationships)</td>
<td>(more formal, somewhat more intense; begins to look at areas of need and focus)</td>
<td>(formal, more intense; may create some anxiety on part of teacher or coach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conversations with colleagues (identifying issues or needs, setting goals, problem solving)</td>
<td>- Co-planning lessons</td>
<td>- Modeling and discussing lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Developing and providing materials for/with colleagues</td>
<td>- Holding team meetings (grade level, reading teachers)</td>
<td>- Co-teaching lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Developing curriculum with colleagues</td>
<td>- Analyzing student work</td>
<td>- Visiting classrooms and providing feedback to teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Participating in professional development activities with colleagues (conferences, workshops)</td>
<td>- Interpreting assessment data (helping teachers use results for instructional decision making)</td>
<td>- Analyzing videotape lessons of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Leading or participating in Study Groups</td>
<td>- Individual discussions with colleagues about teaching and learning</td>
<td>- Doing lesson study with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Assisting with assessing students</td>
<td>- Making professional development presentations for teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Instructing students to learn about their strengths and needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptions of reading coaches usually draw from the work of Joyce and Showers (1996), who identify five kinds of professional development experiences: (1) theory, (2) demonstration, (3) practice, (4) feedback, and (5) in-class coaching. Although there is little research evidence related to reading coaches, there are many projects focused on reading coaching that provide program descriptions (see, e.g., Bean, 2004b; Lapp, Fisher, Flood, & Frey, 2003; Morgan, Saylor-Crowder, Stephens, Donnelly, Deford, & Hamel, 2003; Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center; 2002; Sturtevant, 2003; Vogt & Shearer, 2003). There is a great deal of overlap in these descriptions, for example, the provision of demonstration teaching, observation, and feedback according to some professional development model such as clinical supervision, peer coaching, or cognitive coaching. Although reading coaches engage in a full range of activities, it is the in-class coaching that distinguishes the role of the reading coach.

Vogt and Shearer (2003) distinguish two levels of reading coaches: (1) the building level and (2) the school district level. South Carolina distinguishes between building-level coaches and regional coaches (Morgan et al., 2003). In general, the distinction is one between reading coaches who work directly with classroom teachers and reading coaches who coach other reading coaches. As stated previously, reading coaches who do not meet the Association’s standards and who do not hold a reading specialist certificate should be working under the supervision of a reading professional who does meet those standards and holds a reading specialist certificate.

**What Must Reading Coaches Know and Be Able to Do?**

Because the primary role of reading coaches is to provide support to classroom teachers for classroom reading instruction, it is essential that they be excellent classroom teachers themselves. Their successful teaching experiences should include teaching at the levels of the teachers they will coach. That means that elementary school reading coaches should have successful teaching experiences at both the primary and intermediate levels, middle school reading coaches should have successful teaching experiences at the middle school level, and high school reading coaches should have successful teaching experiences at the high school level. Ideally, the documentation of successful teaching should include positive outcomes for student achievement.

A second requirement is that reading coaches should have in-depth knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction. Reading coaches cannot be expected to help classroom teachers improve reading instruction and student reading achievement if the reading coaches lack knowledge of the range of effective instructional methods, materials, and practices that can be employed at the levels they coach. Reading coaches must be knowledgeable about reading acquisition and development so they can aid teachers in planning instruction that meets the needs of all the students in the teachers’ classrooms, and reading coaches must be able to help teachers with classroom assessments that can indicate reliably what those needs might be.

This knowledge can be gained in many different ways, including completion of a master’s degree in reading that leads to reading specialist certification; ongoing professional development work; intensive, yearlong training for newly employed reading coaches in a school district; and/or enrollment in a reading specialist certification program.

A third requirement is that reading coaches have experience working with teachers to improve their practices. For example, reading coaches may have been involved in professional development experiences during which they participated in and/or led teacher study groups or teacher book clubs. In addition, reading coaches should be accustomed to reflecting on their own practices and making adaptations that improve instruction.

A fourth requirement is that reading coaches should be excellent presenters and be familiar with presenting to teacher...
coaching interventions. Moreover, if the reading coaches are to be successful in developing their own knowledge and skills, and thus their effectiveness as reading coaches.

The Association strongly recommends that only teachers who meet these five criteria act as reading coaches. This recommendation is based on evidence from Poglicco et al. (2003) that indicates great variability in the effectiveness of reading coaches depending on their background and training. These authors found that reading coaches were more or less effective based on their knowledge and skills, and that when reading coaches were not confident and knowledgeable, they had concerns about their role. For example, one coach remarked, “Our problem was that we weren’t really clear on the big picture of it. Yes we got training on this and that, but to be trained on it today to roll it tomorrow when you don’t understand it yourself, is very difficult.”

A principal noted, “The literacy coaches are just one step ahead of the teachers. It diminishes their credibility and there is the danger of no follow-up.” (p. 19). Even when reading coaches do meet the five criteria, they should be involved in ongoing professional development to strengthen their knowledge and skills, and thus their effectiveness as reading coaches. Moreover, if the reading coaches are to be successful in promoting changes in classroom practices, the expectations for the role of reading coach need to be clear to and understood by both the reading coaches and the school administrator, in addition to being supported by the school administrator.

Summary

Reading coaching is a powerful intervention with great potential; however, that potential will be unfilled if reading coaches do not have sufficient depth of knowledge and range of skills to perform adequately in the coaching role. Education reform is riddled with examples of potentially powerful interventions that have been too little developed. Whether or not such programs are successful depends on clear expectations for the role and the support of the school administrator. This is especially true for teachers who need support in developing their own knowledge and skills in order to provide effective coaching.

Recommendations

U.S. policymakers

- Continue to fund reading interventions that focus on professional development of classroom teachers.
- Provide support for the development of reading coaches, and insist that those providing such preparation be adequately trained themselves.
- Mandate that all policy initiatives that support reading coaches meet the Association’s standards for reading specialists/literacy coaches

State policymakers

- Use professional development funds to develop strong reading coaching interventions.
- Insist that reading coaches be well educated, with in-depth knowledge of reading and instruction and the range of skills necessary for effective reading coaching.
- Provide adequate supervision of and infrastructure for reading coaching interventions.

School boards

- Insist that reading coaching interventions are carefully conceptualized.
- Insist that the infrastructure to support reading coaching interventions is in place before beginning the intervention.
- Ensure that individuals hired as reading coaches have adequate initial qualifications and an ongoing program of professional development.

School district and building-level administrators

- Plan carefully before implementing a reading coaching intervention.
- Be sure that reading coaches are supervised and receive ongoing professional development.
- Provide principals with adequate training for understanding their relationships with the reading coaches.
- Support reading coaches as they, in turn, support classroom teachers in the daily work of reading instruction.

Reading specialists

- Insist that reading coaching interventions are supervised by certified reading specialists who meet the International Reading Association’s standards for reading specialist/literacy coach.
- Provide reading coaches with ongoing professional development.
- Facilitate the interaction of school district administrators, principals, classroom teachers, reading coaches, students, and parents.

Reading coaches

- Recognize that the position of reading coach requires one to be a lifelong learner.
- Strive to fulfill the role of reading coach in a professional manner, with respect for the work of others in the school (administration, teachers, etc.).
- Request support from administrators and teachers.
- Interact with other reading coaches as a means of reflecting on your experiences.
- Seek feedback from the educators with whom you work.

Classroom teachers

- Receive preparation that enables you to understand the role of the reading coach.
- Provide feedback to reading coaches in terms of how they have helped you and how they can improve their performance.
- Recognize that the role of the reading coach is to enable you to reflect on your work in a professional and nonthreatening manner.

It is the responsibility of every stakeholder to do whatever he or she can to ensure that reading instruction is sound and effective. Reading coaching and reading coaches are potentially powerful interventions that can improve reading instruction. Every stakeholder, together with the International Reading Association, must insist that these interventions are well planned, that personnel are well trained, and that the implementations include what is necessary for reading coaching and reading coaches to succeed.

References