

**Probing the Influence of School Context on Coaching Activity:  
Two Contrasting Cases**

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## Introduction

The idea of coaching as a way to improve instructional practice and thereby student learning is being tested, though not often formally studied, in schools and districts nationwide. As with many educational improvement initiatives, the effects of coach-based initiatives are likely to depend on the degree to which actors carry out the prescribed work. Understanding these effects means understanding whether and what reform activities actually occur, how much they occur, and their overall quality. An interest in stronger versus weaker performances of the actual work of reform inevitably leads to the critical question of the conditions that shape the work. The latter question is the focus of this paper. We ask whether and the extent to which literacy coordinators leading the implementation of a Literacy Collaborative model in their schools engage in the work of one-to-one coaching and how this engagement is shaped by what the coaches bring to their role as individuals and by the school environment in which they work.

The population for this study is recent initiates into the role of coaching. Prior to joining Literacy Collaborative, most of the coaches had been full-time classroom teachers, and none had worked with their colleagues in the ways the coaching role requires. As a study of novices in the role, this work begins to provide perspective on who may be entering the role and why, the challenges they may experience in the role, and the characteristics that may allow them to meet those challenges. It also highlights the support novices need from within their school communities to accomplish the work, as well as the kind of training and support they may need from the reform organizations that sponsor them.

### Literacy Collaborative

Established in 1993, Literacy Collaborative is a comprehensive school reform program designed to improve elementary children's reading, writing, and language skills through school-based coaching. The program builds on 30 years of research and development grounded in the reading theories of Marie Clay (1979, 2004) and elaborated by Fountas and Pinnell (1996, 2006). Coaches receive rigorous training in the theory of literacy learning and how to teach children within Literacy Collaborative's instructional framework and work with teachers to improve their practices.

A key component of Literacy Collaborative is the training and support of school-based literacy coaches, who are teachers selected by their schools to lead instructional improvement according to Literacy Collaborative's model. Once trained, these coaches, also known as literacy coordinators, work with teachers to develop instructional practices within a framework of comprehensive literacy instruction. The overall goal is to improve the reading and writing achievement of all children in the school. Toward this end, coaches support teachers in becoming more *reflective practitioners* (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Schön, 1983). That is, they work with teachers to understand and become better observers of the reading and writing process and to analyze and make instructional decisions based on students' learning progress (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

## **Current Research Study on the Effects of Literacy Collaborative**

In our larger study, “Can Literacy Professional Development be Improved with Web-Based Collaborative Learning Tools?: A Randomized Field Trial,” we address the question of the overall efficacy of Literacy Collaborative. To do so, we employ a value-added quasi-experimental design in which change in students' learning over time in each classroom is assessed against baseline rates of growth in the classroom in Year 1 of the study. A random treatment-control design is used to address the question of supplemental effects, if any, associated with the use of a web-based tool of videos of classroom practice with on-line learning opportunities (Professional Development Support System or PDS<sup>2</sup>). Half of the coaches were assigned at random within a matched-school pairs design to access the web-based tool.

Eighteen schools participate in this four-year study. In Year 1 (2004-05), each school selected a teacher to participate in Literacy Collaborative training for 8 weeks distributed across the year. The 9 teachers randomly assigned to the PDS<sup>2</sup> group received additional training in the use of the web-based tool. In keeping with the Literacy Collaborative model, the future coaches taught full-time in their own classrooms during their training year (Year 1 of the study). They formally took on the role of coach in 2006, with a commitment to serve in the role through 2007-08, the fourth and final year of the study. Once in the role, they worked half-time as classroom teachers and half-time as coaches. They also led whole-group professional development sessions.

Data collection on the 18 coaches, 280 K-2 teachers in their schools, and the approximately 4,800 children<sup>1</sup> who were students in the teachers' classrooms is now complete through the first three years of the study.

### **Literature on Coaching**

Research in the last ten years provides strong evidence that teacher quality makes a difference in student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Cohen & Hill, 2000). A large body of literature suggests that the most promising professional development initiatives are school-based and emphasize collegial relationships and reflective examination of teaching practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Stein, Smith, & Silver, 1999).

There is a growing body of educational literature on coaching and on literacy coaching in particular. Most of it is descriptive and not grounded in formal quantitative or qualitative research. Walpole and McKenna (2004), Toll (2007), Blachowicz et al. (2005), Allen (2006), Casey (2006), and Bean and Carol (2006), for example, offer descriptions of the role of the literacy coach and how best to fulfill that role. The International Reading Association (2004, 2006) describes qualifications and ability standards for literacy coaches. In terms of evaluation studies, Neufeld and Roper (2003) used qualitative data to describe the actual work of coaches in four urban districts, including training, support,

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<sup>1</sup> The study involves large numbers of low-income (40%) and minority (30%) students.

and challenges. Poglinco et al. (2003) conducted a descriptive study of coaching in 27 schools that implemented a comprehensive school reform model. The most comprehensive evaluation of coaching conducted to-date is a three-year study by the Rand Corporation (Marsh et al., 2005). Two of three urban school districts they studied placed full-time English Language Arts coaches in all their schools. Marsh et al. examined changes in the schools' ELA proficiency percentages over multiple years. One of the districts with coaches showed “substantial” improvement in scores, while the other showed “limited” improvement.

None of the above studies examine individual student learning outcomes over time, link those outcomes to the particular classrooms in which students are taught, or examine the exposure of teachers in the classrooms to coaching and related professional learning opportunities. Our larger study is concerned with an empirical examination of this causal chain. The work that follows is an investigation into conditions that we believe will allow us to understand the effects of Literacy Collaborative on improvements, or the lack thereof, in the quality of teaching practice.

### **Case Studies of Coaching Activity**

In this paper, we present two case studies of coaching activity by coaches with particular characteristics working in particular school contexts. This is an *initial* exploration into the data we've collected and serves as an example of the application of our analytic framework. We have complete data on 16 of 18 coaches and schools in our larger study of Literacy Collaborative's effects. These relatively small numbers call for a case study approach to the data. However, as a note to the reader, we will not complete the analytic work and final interpretation on the two cases until we have made our way through all the cases. Thus, each individual case informs a larger perspective on characteristics of individuals and school context that are important in shaping the reform work, and this larger perspective may lead us to later revise our presentation of each individual case.

### **Why coaching activity?**

The larger study of Literacy Collaborative is an attempt to understand causation in an educational reform initiative. Does the implementation of the Literacy Collaborative model in schools lead to improvements in the quality of teaching? Do improvements in the quality of teaching lead to gains in student learning? Further, and perhaps more importantly, it seeks to understand variation in effects across students, teachers, and schools and to identify the conditions that may account for these variations. It is this kind of knowledge that can be useful in making decisions about the appropriateness of a reform effort for particular schools and the practitioners in those schools.

The work of this paper is concerned with the first part of the causal chain -- the implementation of the Literacy Collaborative model and the conditions that shape this implementation. For now, it omits discussion of improvements in teaching practice and student learning gains because the collection and analysis of these data are not yet ready for examination at the case level.

The Literacy Collaborative model has multiple elements, including not only a literacy coordinator, but a leadership team, ongoing Reading Recovery services, and a requirement that teachers use specified literacy practices (a.k.a., the Literacy Collaborative framework) for a full 2 ½ hours each day. It is a multi-year initiative during which teachers must participate in 40 hours of formal professional development sessions the first year, 20 hours the second year, and 10 hours the third year. Teachers are to receive in-classroom coaching every two weeks. The responsibilities of literacy coordinators are threefold: to teach literacy in a classroom half-time, coach teachers, and lead professional development classes. The model is school-wide. This means that all teachers are expected to participate in reform activities and that the leadership team has signed an agreement with Literacy Collaborative indicating intent on the principal's and teachers' part to comply with the model's requirements. It also means that Literacy Collaborative considers the improvement of instructional practice to be a community effort in which individual learning occurs through and with one's colleagues.

Of these many elements, Literacy Collaborative regards the one-to-one coaching as key to improvement in instructional practice. Participation in formal professional development workshops alone has not been found to change teaching practice. The premise behind this reform effort is that a qualified person needs to go into classrooms and work directly with teachers to develop their practices. However, this activity needs to be integrated with formal professional development. The strategy is to build expertise at the school level through a combination of formal professional development and coaching over an extended period of time.

Because coaching in this model holds a central role, we have chosen to explain the literacy coordinator's level of coaching activity in our case analyses. Also, because coaches and the work of coaching are relatively new to schools, a focus on coaching provides insight into the school-level organizational and normative challenges that a model such as Literacy Collaborative is likely to encounter in schools.

### **Engagement in the role of the coach**

We are guided in our analysis by a conceptual framework based on activity theory (Bryk, et. al., 2006). This theory assigns the actor and her work activity, in this case coaching, a central role in the analysis. In our elaboration of the theory, the actor engages in the role of coach to a greater or lesser extent based on her **self-interest** in the role and sense of **self-efficacy** in carrying out the role.

We are interested in explaining the staff developer's decision-making in taking on the role and what this might tell us about why her coaching activity is at the level we observe. We consider three kinds of self-interest: moral, instrumental, and hedonic. An actor motivated by moral self-interest, for example, might focus on the ways a professional development initiative would benefit students and their learning. One motivated by instrumental self-interest might be interested in personal career advancement. One motivated by hedonic self-interest may particularly enjoy various aspects of the work itself or value the social connection one experiences in taking on or doing the work. Self-

efficacy refers to one's sense of being able to actually do the work. We hypothesize that self-interest and self-efficacy together influence engagement in an innovative role such as that of a school-based coach and that a positive level of both need to be present for engagement to occur. If an individual does not feel able to do the work (low self-efficacy), however, engagement may still occur if the individual perceives she will be adequately supported in learning and doing the work.

We theorize that the coach's self-interest and self-efficacy may be shaped by her prior professional experiences and her characteristics as a teacher. The professional experiences and expertise we examine are in two areas: **children's literacy education** and **adult education**.

Teacher characteristics provide additional information about the ways each coach thinks about and approaches her work as a professional educator. These include beliefs about student learning as reflected in classroom practices, orientation toward innovation, and personal conceptions of role responsibilities. We detail these further as follows:

- **Classroom practices** include the extent to which the coach uses reform literacy practices and student learning is supported through discourse in the classroom. Knowledge of these supplement our knowledge of the coach's experience in literacy.
- We might expect that someone with a positive **orientation toward innovation** would tend to engage in the role of literacy coordinator. To consider this orientation, we examine whether a teacher tends to engage in innovation. We also look at her sense of commitment to her school community. Commitment can drive a willingness try new practices during a school-wide effort to improve instruction. Finally, we look at her sense of efficacy in motivating student learning. Teachers who believe they can motivate student learning may be open to innovation. They stand in contrast to teachers who feel that negative external influences on children are too powerful for them to make a difference.
- In examining **personal conceptions of role responsibilities**, we focus on the coach's expectations of herself as a teacher. These include expectations around her own learning, professional responsibilities with regard to her colleagues on matters of instruction, and the extent to which she opens up her practice for others to observe, comment on, and influence. They also include the use of evidence external to her personal observations to inform her practice. The typical normative environment of schools may shape this set of conceptions toward an over-reliance on trial and error in the development of practice, toward being private about one's practice, and toward a reluctance to exert one's influence to improve the practices of other teachers. It may also tend to make inviolable the role of teacher discretion in making judgments about students and their learning. Our set of measures for this concept probes the individual teacher's expectations of herself against these norms.

The framework also accords a central role to aspects of school context in shaping activity,

including the school's social organization, principal pressure and support, teacher norms, social networks, and structural features such as school size. By school organization, we refer to:

- loosely-coupled schools in which the principal relies on a laissez-fair style of leadership and teachers tend to have a great deal of autonomy in making decisions concerning their classroom instruction and their own professional development; and
- schools organized around professional community in which principals are strong instructional leaders and teachers share a commitment to student learning and work together to improve instructional practice. Teachers cede their autonomy to achieve coherence in instruction across classrooms and grades.

A third organizational model is bureaucratic. It is not clear at this time that any of the 18 schools in the study fit this model.

## **Method**

We have chosen two cases for this paper. Neither of the coaches in the cases had strong self-interest or a strong sense of self-efficacy in the role when they started the work. Yet, they are achieving quite different levels of coaching. These two cases together allow us to explore the difference that school context can make in coaching activity.

We have chosen to focus on the 2006-07 school year to describe the literacy coordinator's coaching activity. This was each coach's second year in the role. By this point, the coach was beyond the start-up phase when coaching might have been slowed due to demands of taking on a new role. The data on coaching activity for the second year is also complete and has been confirmed with each literacy coordinator.

The source of our data on coaching activity is **monthly work logs** in which the coaches record information about their formal professional development sessions and coaching sessions. From these logs, we know the total amount of coaching the literacy coordinator accomplished and how much she coached each kindergarten through second grade (k-2) teacher over the course of the 2006-07 year.

We have created categories to characterize amount of coaching on a per teacher basis. This allows us to examine the distribution of coaching activity across teachers. Based on these categories, we are able to describe a modal pattern of coaching for the literacy coordinator and the variation around this pattern. The 6 categories are:

1. No coaching
2. Low or thin coaching (1 to 4 times during the year)
3. Moderately low coaching (5 to 6 times during the year)
4. Moderate coaching (approximately once a month or 7 to 9 times during the year)
5. More intense coaching (approaches expected level of intensity or 10 to 15 times)
6. Intense coaching (at or above expect level of intensity of 16 or more times)

We have a variety of measures we can use to explain coaching activity. These include:

**Measures at the individual level**, i.e., they inform us about individuals. They include coach self-interest and self-efficacy, prior experience, background characteristics, and literacy practices. We have a similar set of measures for teachers. These measures are based on survey responses in which coaches and teachers report on themselves. These surveys, completed in the first few months of the 2005-06 school year, describe the coach and teachers at the start of the initiative. Most of the measures were developed through Rasch analysis, based in Item Response theory (Wright & Master, 1982). Some measures are composites of responses to survey items. A few additional measures are composites that include ratings by research staff on coach background experience as recounted in interviews with coaches.

Note that in the following case studies we compare scores for individual coaches on *coach-specific* measures to the group of 18 coaches (17 when data is missing). We compare scores for individual coaches on *teacher* measures (i.e., teacher characteristics) and median scores for individual schools on *teacher* measures to all the k-2 teachers in the study in Year 2. The number of teachers represented in these comparisons is approximately 200.

**Measures at the school level**, i.e., they inform us about the school as a whole. These measures, based on survey responses in which teachers reported on their school community, describe the school at the start of the initiative. Also Rasch measures, they have been combined into four composites that describe critical aspects of school context, which have been linked to improvements in student learning in other research studies. These aspects are school leadership, professional community, teacher orientation to change, and trust relationships.

Note that we have school context measures for 17 of 18 schools.

**Measures based on the observations of the Literacy Collaborative trainers** who worked with the coaches. These describe coach expertise in the Literacy Collaborative instructional framework and the quality of coaching. The trainers evaluated the coaches' teaching skills in their first year in the coaching role using the Developing Language and Literacy Teaching (DLLT) rubrics, an observation instrument designed to measure expertise in balanced literacy practices. These are the same rubrics we use to measure change in teaching practice in the larger study. The trainers also completed a rating scale of coaching quality based on their observations during two sites visits in the first year each coach was in the role. The data too are all Rasch measures.

**Interviews with each coach** on their work and its progress, including their decision-making in taking on the role. The first hour-long interview occurred in fall of 2005 at the start of the initiative only a few months after the surveys were administered. The second interview occurred in the spring of 2007 toward the end of the school year in which we examine their coaching activity. The conceptual framework above guided the writing of the analytic memos on the interviews that we then used in the following cases.

## Laura at Trident School

### Engagement in the Role: Coaching Quantity

In the 2006-07 school year, the second year in which she was in the role, Laura coached 12 k-2 teachers between 1 to 4 times each over the course of the year. She was not working school-wide in the sense of reaching all k-2 teachers – 4 teachers (25% of the staff) did not receive any coaching. Of the 12 teachers, Laura coached them a fairly uniform amount, not singling out any teacher with whom to work intensively. Thus, no teacher was coached more than 4 times.

In terms of her modal level of coaching and the distribution of coaching across teachers in Trident School, Laura's coaching activity places her second from the bottom of the 18 coaches (see Figure 1). The total number of coaching sessions Laura engaged in for the school year was 47, the fifth lowest total in the group and -.65 standard deviations below the mean.

In this analysis, we seek to understand engagement in the role as indicated by the level of coaching activity. Nonetheless, it is informative to also consider the quality of coaching as a separate dimension that provides a more complete picture of the work of the coach. Based on the observations of Laura's trainer, Laura received an average *coaching quality* score of .16 standard deviations, placing her in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quartile for the group. Laura's score indicates that her trainer perceived her professional knowledge of literacy learning and related observational skills to be fairly strong. Laura was also able to engage teachers in conversations about their practice. An area of some weakness for her was coaching teachers to draw connections between student learning behaviors and teaching practice.

How can we account for the coaching we observe at this school? More specifically, why are 25% of the teachers not being coached? Of those who are being coached, why is the level of coaching uniformly low? There is only one other school where coaching does not achieve at least a moderate level for at least one teacher, and in that school, implementation failed altogether. While we do have a case of implementation here, the data suggest that, in terms of coaching activity, this implementation is rather thin.

In exploring this case, we first consider both the background characteristics that Laura brought to the role and Laura's self-interest and self-efficacy discernments in taking on the role, as well as how these may have been shaped by her background characteristics. We then consider the school context in which Laura works to see how it may have affected coaching activity. Finally, for a more complete perspective, we discuss how Laura herself might explain the low level of her coaching.

FIGURE 1: Modal level and distribution of coaching across teachers in each school over the 2006-07 school year

				LEVEL OF COACHING ACTIVITY					
				X-number indicates coaching occurred at the specified level for the specified number of teachers. Bold text indicates modal level.					
SCHOOLS	# K-2 tchrs eligible for coaching	Total # coaching sessions in school	Coaching activity is schoolwide (k-2)	No coaching	Low - thin coaching (1-4 times)	Moderately low coaching (5-6 times)	Moderate coaching (~ 1/month or 7-9 times)	Coaching approaching expected level of intensity (more than 1 per month or 10-15 times)	Coaching at expected level of intensity (2 per month or 16+)
<b>Schools mixed in size (13)</b>									
School 1	25	9	no	<b>X - 10</b>	X - 5				
<b>Trident School</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>X - 5</b>	<b>X - 11</b>				
School 3	14	44		X - 1	<b>X - 10</b>		X - 2	X - 1	
School 4	15	63	yes		<b>X - 10</b>	X - 5			
School 5	12	73	yes		<b>X - 4</b>	X - 3	X - 3	X - 2	
School 6	8	48	no	X - 1	X - 1	<b>X - 4</b>	X - 1	X - 1	
School 7	15	103	yes		X - 2	<b>X - 7</b>	X - 5	X - 1	
School 8	14	76	no		X - 3	X - 5	<b>X - 6</b>		
School 9	12	69	yes	X - 1	X - 2	X - 3	<b>X - 5</b>	X - 1	
School 10	9	76	yes				<b>X - 7</b>	X - 2	
<b>Riverside School</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>yes</b>			<b>X - 2</b>	<b>X - 5</b>	<b>X - 5</b>	X - 1
School 12	24	167	no	X - 10 *			X - 1	<b>X - 13</b>	
School 13	8	108	yes					<b>X - 5</b>	X - 3
<b>Smallest schools (5)**</b>									
School 14	6	36	yes			<b>X - 5</b>	X - 1		
School 15	4	49	yes			X - 1	<b>X - 2</b>	X - 1	
School 16	4	43	yes					<b>X - 4</b>	
School 17	4	59	yes					<b>X - 2</b>	<b>X - 2</b>
School 18	5	85	yes					X - 1	<b>X - 4</b>

\* At School 12, of the 10 teachers not receiving coaching in 2006-07, 8 appear to have entered an initial coaching class and to have begun receiving coaching the following year. The other 2 were no longer at the school. This pattern reflects high staff turn-over and a phasing in of new teachers into the initiative.

\*\* The smallest schools are separate for purposes of analysis. One might expect the pattern of coaching to look different here, with all teachers being coached at the highest level.

## Individual Coach

We begin by examining what a variety of measures tell us about Laura just after she completed her training and had begun to work in the role (see Table 1). We look to the interview data to further understand her decision to become a coach. This will shift our attention to understanding more about the teachers, leadership, and organization at Trident School.

### Professional experiences and expertise

**Experience as a literacy educator.** Laura has a strong background in supporting children in the learning of literacy skills, averaging 1.20 standard deviations above the mean for the 17 coaches on a composite measure of *background literacy training and experience*. This score in part reflects that she was trained as a Reading Recovery teacher. Her experience is also apparent in an omnibus measure of her performance on eight components of *balanced literacy practices*. At .50 standard deviations above the mean for the coaches, this measure is based on the ratings of her classroom practices by Laura's trainer on a set of language and literacy teaching rubrics. Laura's score indicates that she was skilled in almost all of the 51 practice elements described on the rubrics.

**Experience as an adult educator.** Although Laura was experienced working with children, she had not had similar professional experiences working with other teachers. This is reflected in her score on a composite measure of her *professional development experience inside and outside her school* in which she averages 1.23 standard deviations below the mean. This lack of adult education experience is an important consideration in this case.

### Characteristics as a teacher

**Teacher practices.** Laura's background is mirrored in her scores on the teacher measure of *reform literacy practices*. Thus, she uses reading and writing practices consistent with the Literacy Collaborative framework frequently. Laura's score on the measure of the *quality of student discussion* in her classroom was relatively low, however. Together with the measure on *self-efficacy in motivating students to learn*, discussed below, we have information about teacher-student interactions in general. The scores suggest that this may have been an area of weakness for Laura.

**Orientation toward innovation.** The data on Laura's orientation toward innovation are quite mixed. Laura identifies herself as someone who engages with and spreads innovative practices, according to our measure of *engagement in innovation*. Indeed, she scores in the top quartile of k-2 teachers in the study. Laura's score here is consistent with her decision to embrace the innovation of Reading Recovery after she experienced the limitations of more traditional instruction using basals, "I felt like there must be something more." Laura's *school commitment* score, however, places her in the bottom quartile of k-2 teachers in the study. This is a measure of whether a teacher likes working at the school, feels loyal to it, and would recommend it to parents. Also Laura's

score on the measure of *self-efficacy around motivating students to learn* placed her in the bottom quartile of k-2 teachers. This is particularly noteworthy because Reading Recovery teachers are trained to work effectively with the lowest learners in a given population of students.

**Personal conceptions of role responsibilities.** On a measure of *conceptions of individual learning*, we see that Laura quite actively seeks out professional learning opportunities for herself, including those beyond her school community. Her score places her in the top quartile of teachers. We see that Laura is moderately strong on the measure of *conceptions of using evidence*, scoring in the middle of the pack for k-2 teachers. Her score indicates that she reflects on her students as learners and uses test data to inform her practice, though not to the point of actually questioning her informal observations if they disagree with objective evidence. Through the measure of *conceptions of influencing colleagues*, we see that Laura considers it her role to respond to a colleague who needs help with instructional practice. There is, however, very little evidence that Laura had any recent experience with opening up her practice and classroom to the observation of others or visiting other classrooms for the same purpose. Her score on the measure of *deprivatization of practice* places her in the bottom quartile of teachers.

Just prior to taking on the coaching role, Laura worked as a Reading Recovery teacher and a teacher in the school's extended-day kindergarten. She referred to this "half-and-half" position as a "unique job" within the school community. In taking on the coaching role, she was to take on another unique job, this one focused on working with adults. Our evidence suggests this was not an area of strength for Laura.

### **Self-Interest and Self-Efficacy**

Here we examine Laura's self-interest in taking on the role of the coach and her self-efficacy around working one-to-one with teachers on their practice. We use interview data to support and elaborate on the survey data.

**Self-Interest in the Role.** Laura's self-interest in the literacy coordinator role was low compared to that of the other coaches in the study. Her score on the measure of *self-interest in the literacy coordinator role* was 1.16 standard deviations below the mean for the 18 literacy coordinators. The score indicates that although Laura felt she was helping to improve student learning in her school, she did not have a strong interest in taking a leadership role in her school or working with teachers to improve their practice. Her self-interest seems to be shaped by the particular combination of background experiences and characteristics (strong in the area of children's literacy but weak in the area of working with adults) we discussed earlier. Interview data confirm that it was Laura's concern for students that led in large part to her interest in taking on the Literacy Coordinator role:

"...Reading Recovery was so frustrating because we'd send these children back into the classroom with the basal and they would bomb. They were unsuccessful because the teacher didn't understand. Nobody blamed the teacher, but the teacher didn't know what he needed and where to help him."

**Table 1: Coach Background and Characteristics**

<b>Coach Specific Measures</b>	<b>Laura</b>	<b>Carol</b>		
Self-Interest in Role - Rasch Score	-1.28	-0.13		
Self-Interest in Role - STD	-1.16	-0.69		
Self-Efficacy in Role - Rasch Score	-3.38	-1.35		
Self-Efficacy in Role - STD	-1.78	-1.06		
Background literacy training and experience	1.20	0.13		
PD experience inside & outside school - Composite	-1.58	0.18		
PD experience inside & outside school - STD	-1.23	0.97		
Adult Education Experience - Composite	-0.15	0.34		
Teaching Practice Expertise - Rasch	1.24	-0.16		
Teaching Practice Expertise - STD	0.50	-0.74		
Coaching Quality - Composite	0.19	-0.41		
Perceived Support for Literacy Collaborative - Rasch	-1.40	1.20		
Perceived Support for Literacy Collaborative - STD	-1.63	-0.20		
Relational Dynamics between Principal and Coach - Composite	0.65	0.65		
<b>Teacher Characteristic Measures</b>	<b>Laura</b>	<b>Trident teachers k-2 (median)</b>	<b>Carol</b>	<b>Riverside teachers k-2 (median)</b>
Background literacy training - composite	1.35	-.15	0.11	.75
Reform literacy practices - Rasch	3.87		3.87	
Reform literacy practices - STD	1.57	-.70	1.57	.57
Quality of student discussion - Rasch	-0.19		1.52	
Quality of student discussion - STD	-0.65	-.13	0.80	-.13
Engagement in innovation - Rasch	3.37		3.37	
Engagement in innovation - STD	1.40	-.59	1.40	.05
School commitment - Rasch	5.95		10.00	
School commitment - STD	-0.82	-.04	0.98	.98
Self-efficacy in motivating student learning - Rasch	5.38		6.68	
Self-efficacy in motivating student learning - STD	-1.03	.10	-0.44	-.44
Conceptions of own learning - Rasch	3.46		2.31	
Conceptions of own learning - STD	2.62	-.20	1.65	-.20
Conceptions around using evidence - Rasch	2.28		2.04	
Conceptions around using evidence - STD	-0.20	-.62	-0.38	-.03
Conceptions of influencing colleagues - Rasch (Negative measure)	-1.12		0.01	
Conceptions of influencing colleagues - STD (Negative measure)	-0.31	.37	0.13	-.58
Deprivatization of practice - Rasch	-0.49		0.92	
Deprivatization of practice - STD	-0.70	-.33	0.79	.03

The interview data also confirm that Laura's reluctance in embracing other aspects of the role were rooted in feelings about working with the adults in her school. Laura said that she always "wanted a literacy coordinator" in the school, that she "wanted somebody to work with," but "I didn't want to be IT." She explains, "It took me months to decide.... I had a sense that a lot of classroom teachers really didn't think Reading Recovery worked.... I didn't feel like I had any credibility with anybody here and I certainly didn't know anything to tell them that they could do. They were doing everything they could do. It was a really tough decision, it was very difficult. It came down to nobody would do it and if we weren't gonna go forward with this, what good would it do to teach Reading Recovery?"

Note that in saying, "I certainly didn't know anything to tell them that they could do," Laura expresses a lack of confidence in herself.

**Self-Efficacy in the Role.** Laura's self-efficacy is even lower than her self-interest compared to the other coaches in the study. Her score on the measure of *self-efficacy in the literacy coordinator*, at 1.78 standard deviations below the mean, means that she was, at best, only "somewhat confident," rather than "confident" or "very confident," in working one-to-one with teachers in the various ways required of the role. It further suggests that she may have been "not at all confident" in actually coaching teachers to improve their practice. This is entirely consistent with what we might expect from someone with virtually no experience working with adults.

We have seen that Laura took on the role in part because she believed teachers' practices needed to improve. Laura had strong moral, but weak instrumental and hedonic self-interest in the role, which perhaps was not enough for her to take on the role. Yet Laura explained that her school principal also pressed her to take on the role. Laura may have had a low sense of self-efficacy, but she may also have felt that she would be supported in the role. Our discussion of principal leadership later supports this idea.

Overall, we see in Laura an individual who has developed expertise in working with children to teach them to read and write. Laura's inclination to engage with innovation would lead her to develop this expertise, as would her conceptions of her own learning. Laura's overall orientation toward innovation, however, may be weakened by a low sense of commitment to her school and also her own lack self-efficacy in motivating student learning. We also wonder about the effects her lack of confidence in her ability to work with children had on her confidence in working with colleagues to improve their instruction.

Laura's lack of experience working with adults is a sign that Laura might have perceived the work of coaching to be particularly challenging. Laura had no prior experience working with teachers. This seems to have directly shaped both Laura's self-interest in the aspects of the role that involved working with adults and her self-efficacy in the role. It seems plausible that a coach with low self-interest and self-efficacy in the role would not engage intensively in the hard work of one-to-one coaching.

We next turn our attention to a discussion of the school in which Laura was expected to advance improvement in literacy instructional practices to better understand the situation behind Laura's reticence. We also ask how aspects of the school context may have helped lead to the pattern in the coaching we described earlier, including the non-participation of several teachers in coaching.

### **School Context**

Our discussion to this point has focused entirely on Laura as an individual. Some of the data we've discussed, however, indicates that aspects of the school context may have influenced Laura in her decisions and activity. For example, Laura said that she believed that a lot of the classroom teachers really did not think Reading Recovery worked. Laura, in the role of literacy coordinator, would be attempting to introduce into regular classrooms practices that were guided by the same theoretical orientation as Reading Recovery, i.e., understanding students as learners and gearing instruction to advance their learning in ways that moves children toward independence as readers. Through her comment, Laura implies that teachers at Trident School would not be open to this orientation. In agreeing to take on the role of literacy coordinator, Laura was committing herself to work with teachers whom she believed would not welcome her efforts, a difficult choice to make. Laura's score on a measure of *perceived support for Literacy Collaborative*, which was 1.63 standard deviations below the mean for the 18 coaches, indicates that Laura expected that teachers would not be interested in trying Literacy Collaborative practices and a number would be resistant.

There are other clues in Laura's individual story that raise questions about school context. Laura's comments about perceptions of her credibility hint at a lack of respect and unity among the instructional staff. We might ask why Laura's *school commitment* score is so low and if her low score on *deprivatization of practice* indicates that she was *unwilling* to allow colleagues to enter her classroom and to visit their classrooms or if this was simply something not done within Trident's teacher community. We should also recall that four teachers did not receive any coaching at all.

### **Teachers and base-state literacy practices**

Laura was responsible for working with 16 k-2 teachers. Eleven, or 65%, of these teachers had worked at the school for 10 or more years when Laura began coaching. Only 25% had worked there for 6 or fewer years. Laura counted herself among the newer teachers in the school. The highest formal education achieved by 75% of the teachers on the school's faculty, and by Laura, was a bachelor's degree. Only 4 of the 16 k-2 teachers had received advanced degrees.

Trident's k-2 faculty was composed primary of veteran teachers who the data suggest had little, if any, prior exposure to the reform literacy practices. The median standardized score for individual teachers on a measure of *reform literacy practices* was  $-.70$ , which was in the bottom quarter of all teachers in the study. We learn directly from Laura that before she began leading the Literacy Collaborative initiative in her school, the teachers

taught using basals. The survey data confirm this, indicating that 70% of the k-2 teaching staff used basals at least one to two times per week. The use of basals can successfully be integrated into balanced literacy instruction. However, Laura’s pat description of literacy practices in the school before Literacy Collaborative -- “everybody used the basal” -- suggests a uniform reliance on a traditional basal instructional plan in which teachers follow a prescribed sequence and pacing of lessons as opposed to making decisions based on evidence of student learning. In support of this interpretation, the median standardized score for teachers at Trident on the measure of *conceptions of using evidence* was .62 standard deviations below the mean. This median was close to the bottom quartile for all k-2 teachers in the study. In looking at the median score on *engagement in innovation* we see that it too is not far from the bottom quartile of teachers in the study. Together these data on the teachers substantiate Laura’s concerns and her perceptions of the teachers.

**Table 2: School context**

<b>School Measures</b>	<b>Trident</b>	<b>Riverside</b>
Leadership and program coherence - Factored composite	-0.64	1.12
<i>Instructional leadership - STD school mean</i>	-0.59	0.68
<i>Program coherence - STD school mean</i>	-0.57	1.37
Professional community - Factored composite	-1.21	0.99
<i>Expectations for student learning - STD school mean</i>	-1.18	1.37
<i>Reflective dialogue among teachers - STD school mean</i>	-0.16	0.05
<i>Collaboration around instruction - STD school mean</i>	-0.92	1.07
<i>Collective responsibility for student learning - STD school mean</i>	-1.89	0.91
Teacher orientation to change - Factored composite	-0.58	2.05
<i>School commitment - STD school mean</i>	0.19	1.85
<i>Teacher willingness to innovate STD school mean</i>	-1.24	1.85
Trust relationships - Factored composite	-0.91	0.70
<i>Teacher-principal trust</i>	-0.50	1.01
<i>Teacher-teacher trust</i>	-1.74	0.39
<i>Teacher-parent trust</i>	-0.04	0.44

### **Teacher norms**

We have highlighted several survey measures that, when taken together with Laura’s reports, describe Trident’s k-2 faculty as traditional in their instructional orientation. Although median scores on most other survey measures for Trident’s faculty are near the

median for all k-2 teachers in the study, two additional measures stand out (Table 1). The median score on *deprivatization of practice* is notably low for the group of 18 schools. The median score on *conceptions of influencing colleagues* is relatively high (as a negative measure, higher scores here indicate weaker beliefs in one's responsibility to influence colleagues). These two scores suggest that the work culture at Trident School, at the start of the initiative, tended to be private. Related to this, a strong assumption of teacher autonomy in matters of classroom practice likely was dominant. This may help explain why Laura did not coach 4 teachers at all. We provide further evidence with regard to these teachers when we discuss principal leadership.

### **Professional community**

We see a weak professional community in the school at the start of the Literacy Collaborative initiative, particularly with regard to the focus on student learning. In comparison to the 17 other schools, the school context measures for Trident School tend to be low, typically over .50 standard deviations below the mean. However, among the general low level of scores, the standardized score on *professional community* (-1.21) stands out as particularly sub-par. In looking more closely at this composite measure, the mean standardized score on *collective responsibility for student learning* is 1.89 standard deviations below the mean and the score on the measure of *expectations for student learning* is also over one full standard deviation below the mean for the group (see Table 2).

The survey data also inform us that trusting relationships among teachers, an important foundation for building professional community, were not in place at the start of the initiative. In examining the trust composite, the mean standardized score on trust between teachers is -1.74, much lower than the score on trust between the principal and teachers (-.50). The measure of teacher-teacher trust may in part reflect a school that has not yet or has just begun to challenge the traditional egg-crate organization of schooling in which teachers work in isolation in their classrooms with few opportunities to interact. Trust depends on social exchanges, which in such traditionally organized schools are limited.

In this case, we have reason to believe that the challenge to a traditional organization had just begun at Trident. Laura describes a school community in flux. In her interview in fall of 2005, she explains that in the school's recent history, four elementary schools were combined into one, which led to problems unifying the faculty. She sees the current changes in the school, of which Literacy Collaborative is part, as a turning point. Certain staff members are leaving and those remaining are on "the same page." "It's just exciting," she says.

### **Principal leadership and the working relationship between coach and principal**

In looking at school leadership, we can see quite clearly that the school's participation in Literacy Collaborative represents a challenge to traditional literacy practices and teacher autonomy. From the actions of the principal, we can infer that he is seeking to bring new

instructional practices and new attitudes toward professional growth into the school. As mentioned, it was the principal who persuaded Laura to take on the role of coach. According to Laura, the principal also over-powered faculty reluctance to engage in literacy instructional reform:

“Well, the principal’s philosophy is that you can’t really know what you don’t know until you just go. When we started this..., people would say, ‘Well, where are you going to get the money to train somebody and where are you going to get money to buy books...?’ He just keeps saying, ‘We’ll find a way when we need to. When we get there, we’ll figure it out.’ So he sort of believes in, ‘Let’s just keep going and see where we go.’”

As the initiative developed, the principal has supported Laura in critical ways in her work with teachers. In particular, she reports that he helps bring “some of the negativity down,” applying pressure to reluctant teachers by saying:

“This is the direction we’re going and this is our philosophy and if this doesn’t match for you, please be aware that we support you in your learning and if still isn’t right for you, then you need to find another place to work.”

Many principals would be reluctant to go this far. Recall the four teachers who received no coaching in 2006-2007. Two were at the school for more than 15 years and two for more than 10 years. Three of these teachers were gone from the school the following year. Laura predicted this would happen in her first interview in the fall of 2005.

“I really think it’s going to force some teachers to retire. I think that there are a few that are feeling the pressure of ‘I need to get better at this job,’ or ‘No, I don’t want to get better. I want to get out.’”

We know from Laura’s spring of 2007 interview that two teachers who would not allow Laura in their classrooms did indeed retire the following school year. It is possible that the third left because she was not interested in participating in the reform. The fourth received coaching the following year, suggesting that she was responsive to the principal’s pressure to participate.

Laura reports that she and the principal have “a really great relationship.” She says she is unsure what else he could do for her that he has not done. In addition to communicating clear expectations to faculty about their participation in Literacy Collaborative, the principal has placed Laura in charge of a large budget and she says she able to work productively with the principal around money issues. The principal has also ensured that structures are in place for the literacy initiative, mandating a two and a half hour literacy block. Laura’s composite score on *relational dynamics between principal and coach around advancing the Literacy Collaborative initiative* is the highest possible score. at .65 (standard deviations).

At the start of this case, we noted that in terms of coaching activity Trident was second only to our one case of non-implementation, implying that Trident might be similar to this other school. However, the evidence tells a different story. The school's current leadership is introducing reform in both instructional practices and the ways individual teachers are expected to relate to their colleagues. From this vantage point, the level of coaching activity may not tell the story of "not enough coaching," but rather the story of a coach having begun to reach most of the faculty with new practices and expectations. The school is making a concerted effort at reform, made clear by the fact that teachers who do not engage in coaching leave the school. In the ranking of coaching activity in Figure 1, we don't take into account the starting place of the schools and the kind of progress that might be expected. How much progress would be reasonable to expect at a school such as Trident given the base state of its instructional practices and organization?

### **Relationships between coach and teachers**

Even with the principal's support, Laura finds her role difficult. She describes herself as feeling "alone in the boat most of the time." Though she feels she has strong support from some quarters, she also reports that "you take a lot of ridicule." In explaining this ridicule, it is clear that Laura, in her role as coach, finds herself confronting a teaching culture in which her motives are suspect. She mimics what she believes to be the teachers' attitude toward her: "What is she going to get out of it? Who does she think she is? Why does she have so much power now." Laura tells stories of open resistance by some teachers. She describes herself as "a target" by virtue of her role.

Laura's reports of the challenges in her relationships with teachers suggest that the problems she has with teachers stem entirely from normative expectations. On a personal level, she reports that teachers are "supportive of me in that they like somebody with a sense of humor and isn't too serious."

The evidence presented in this case leads us to question whether and how Laura's understandings of the teachers and their practices shaped her work. Laura's experience seems strongly colored by her expectations that teacher would be resistant, but resistant teachers in her school were only part of the story. Laura reports in the second year that 80% of the staff is "more than just on board.... They're doing it because they believe it's the right think and they love it." Laura describes these teachers as excited about learning the new practices. Given this, one might wonder why the experience of being a coach is so lonely for Laura. Would a different understanding of the teachers and her work with them have led her to approach them in different way, one that might have better facilitated the work and allowed her to feel better about her work with them? Laura is trained to "shift" teachers in their thinking about instruction. What might have shifted Laura in her thinking about her work with teachers?

We have good evidence that Laura has been challenged by powerful norms that make it difficult for someone in the new role of "coach" to enter teachers' classroom and work with teachers to improve practice. It seems possible that this has put a damper on the level of coaching activity at Trident by making Laura's work harder. A key question,

however, is how is Laura is responding to these challenges. We address the question of Laura's response after we consider Laura's own perspective on her coaching activity.

### **The Coach's Perspective**

How would Laura evaluate the level of her coaching activity and how would she explain it? In her interview in spring, 2007, Laura said, "It's too many people for one coach and I know I'm not effective when it's watered down and I only get to you only four times a year. It's just not good. It's not enough." Laura herself believes that she should be coaching more intensively and cites school size as the reason she isn't. Looking across the schools in our study, school size does seem to influence coaching activity, though we have more work to do to really understand how. We do know, however, that it is not a simple relationship of bigger school, less coaching per teacher. In comparing the level of Laura's activity only to that of her peers who are coaching 12 to 15 teachers (see Figure 1), we see it is still low. Several of these coaches are coaching at a moderate level of about once a month per teacher.

Another reason that Laura might give to explain her thin coaching is time. Compared to her peers, it may indeed be the case that more of Laura's time is spent on activities other than coaching and professional development classes. Laura struggles with role boundaries:

"When you become the literacy coordinator, you're automatically put on every committee in the school. So you're on the district Literacy Committee, you're on the Language Arts Committee.... Fundraising is tremendous, the amount of fundraising you have to do. There isn't an assistant to help with the book room. In a school with six and seven sections (classrooms) in each grade, the bookroom is a library in itself. So all of that is my job and that isn't clearly defined."

Laura describes a variety of other ways in which her time to work with teachers is limited, including teachers' schedules, student testing, and our research study, which requires her to support data collection activities. About the latter, she says "the paperwork has buried me." As part of her committee work, she is charged with writing standards for the school that align with the school's instructional practices and curriculum. She also oversees purchasing to support literacy instruction in the school.

It is quite possible that Laura's responsibility to do all this other work is limiting the amount of coaching she does. Other detailed case studies will allow us to consider the impact of "other responsibilities" on coaching. Certainly, this factor becomes part of the portrait of the coach, the principal, and the teachers.

Let us return to the question of Laura's response to the challenges she experiences in working with teachers. Laura is in a role with multiple responsibilities – teaching reading and writing in a classroom of kindergartners, coaching teachers in their classrooms, and leading whole-group professional development classes. Also, as she pointed out, a

number of other responsibilities came to her by virtue of her position in the school. This leaves Laura in the position of making strategic choices about how she allocates her time.

It may be that although Laura complains about not having enough time to coach, she actually chooses to engage in activities that feel safer to her than coaching. In doing so she is able to tell herself and others that she does not have time to coach. This admittedly is speculative, though the speculation is consistent with the evidence we have on Laura's individual characteristics and the school's context. Also, evidence that might lead us to a different interpretation is lacking. Laura, for example, does not talk about investing her time in building rapport with teachers in order to develop more intense coaching relationships with them. She does not talk about resisting the "other responsibilities" so she can do more coaching.

We see that, even at the end of her second year, Laura defines the rewards of the role for herself primarily in terms of her classroom teaching (and benefits to students):

"If I ever were to move or to go to another school, it would be extremely difficult not to have a bookroom, not to have Guided Reading. I don't know what I would do. I probably wouldn't choose that school. So personally as a classroom teacher, it's fanatastic. It's the greatest gift the school has ever given anybody. I feel so lucky."

She continues to perceive the aspects of the role that involve working with and leading adults as "a drawback:"

"You take on another role [other than teacher] in the school and to accept that is hard. I never wanted to look like an administrator or to look like a boss and sometimes I feel like the teachers treat me that way.... It's hard to step into those shoes. And I also feel an extreme responsibility for the data.... I don't want to be the scapegoat.... If this doesn't work in three years, are they going to blame me? That's hard."

Laura remains uneasy in this her new role and somewhat tentative:

"Who knew it was going to be this involved and this scary and this deep.... I don't feel prepared. I just feel like I'm taking steps and I'm moving forward and if that didn't work, so I'm going to try something else."

Given the understanding of Laura we've reviewed heer, Laura's level of coaching activity may reflect, on the one hand, her sense of responsibility in doing the job. Thus she is coaching every teacher who is willing to be coached. On the other hand, it may reflect her sense of personal challenge in working with teachers and the realities at Trident's school context. Thus her coaching is uniformly thin.

## Conclusion

The question we return to now is whether the characteristics of this coach and the conditions in which she works, as described, *explain* the low level of coaching we observe. At this point, we can only say that together they provide a plausible explanation. When a coach is uncertain about working with adults and finds herself in the position of working with adults who question her role, she may engage in coaching at the uniformly low level we see in this case. Because of the complexities of school-wide change efforts, however, we need to construct other detailed case studies for comparison.

We need to remember too that not all the data is in on this case. Given the positive aspects of the case, such as the principal's leadership and support and the departure of teachers who did not support the reform effort, we should observe that coaching activity is more intense at Trident in the 2007-08 school year. If this does not happen, the case may be of a coach who did not develop into the role, raising the question of how Laura might have been better prepared to work in a school context that, although challenging, in many ways is typical of other schools and not the worst example. If coaching does increase, this may be a case of a coach who began to develop as an adult educator working under leadership intent on reforming a school. This would raise the question of what more there is to understand about Laura, her school context, and her training to explain this development.

### Carol at Riverside School

[Note that this case is not as well-developed as the previous case and does not yet reflect the perspectives of the multiple authors on this paper.]

#### Engagement in Role: Coaching Quantity

Carol coached 13 k-2 teachers. Most teachers were coached at least once a month or more. Only one was coached 16 times or more (expected amount). Two were coached at a moderately low level of 5 or 6 times.

In terms of her modal pattern (see Figure 1), Carol's coaching activity ranks her in the top third of the group of 18 coaches. The total number of coaching sessions Carol engaged in for the year was 128, the second highest total in our group of coaches and 1.5 standard deviations above the mean.

Carol received an average *coaching quality* score of -.34, placing her in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quartile of the group of 18 literacy coordinators. Carol's trainer perceived her professional knowledge of reading and writing processes and capacity to analyze teachers' thinking about these processes, to be in "early development." She also perceived, however, that Carol was able to engage teachers in conversation about their practice and areas that might need improvement, though she may not have fully supported them in connecting analysis of student learning with teaching practice. We have here, then, a mixed picture

of moderate strengths as a coach and some weakness, particularly in the area of expert knowledge of student learning.

What accounts for the relatively high quantity of coaching in this case (128 sessions), but not the intense level of 16 or more times per month per teachers, which is expected?

### **Individual Coach**

We begin by examining what a variety of measures tell us about Carol just after she completed her training and had begun to work in the role. We look to the interview data to further understand her decision to become a coach. Then we will shift our attention to understanding more about the teachers, leadership, and organization at Riverside School.

#### **Professional Experiences and Expertise**

**Experience as a Literacy Educator.** Carol was about average for the group of 18 literacy coordinators in this area. Her score on a composite literacy coordinator measure of *background literacy training and experience* was .13 standard deviations. She had a variety of coursework related to literacy under her belt and she had participated in district-sponsored professional development in reform literacy practices. Further, she had practiced Readers Workshop and Writers Workshop in her classroom for over six years. However, Carol did not have the more advanced training in literacy that some of her peers had, such as Reading Recovery or university-based training.

We see that, after Literacy Collaborative training, Carol did not achieve as high a score related to expertise in Literacy Collaborative practices as most of her peers. Her score on a measure of *balanced literacy practices* was .75 standard deviations below the mean, placing her in the bottom third of the 18 literacy coordinators. Carol's score indicates that she was skilled in about one-third of the practice elements described on the rubrics.

**Experience as an Adult Educator.** In contrast to her literacy background, Carol scored in the top quarter of the coaches in terms of the frequency with which she led professional development inside and outside her school. However, Carol's score on a composite measure of *adult education experience*, which includes a rating of her report of her adult education background in an interview, averaged .34, placing her more toward the middle of the group. In her interview, Carol described doing several presentations on inclusion teaching outside her school and presentations to her school's faculty on Literacy Collaborative. She had not held a formal role as an adult educator in which she was responsible for teacher learning over a period of time.

Overall, prior to Literacy Collaborative, Carol was primarily a classroom teacher who, largely because of her own interest, acquired some practical experience in balanced literacy practices. This experience led her into doing formal presentations in which she shared her understanding of these new practices with colleagues.

## Characteristics as a Teacher

**Background literacy practices.** Carol's self-reported practices place her in top 25% of teachers. Her score on the measure of *reform literacy practices* indicates that she had adopted key procedural and decision-making aspects of reform literacy practices. Her score on the measure of *quality of student discussion* indicates that, in her classroom, students were able to discuss ideas using evidence with each other and with her.

**Orientation toward innovation.** According to our measure of *engagement in innovation*, Carol identifies herself as someone who engages with and spreads innovative practices. She had been using two of the core practices of balanced literacy longer than anybody else in her school other than the Reading Recovery teacher. She had come to believe, "that was the only way to teach." Carol further describes herself as someone with a "willingness to change." Carol's *school commitment* score is the highest possible score. Although these two measures are strong, we see that Carol scored in the bottom quarter of teachers on the measure of *self-efficacy in motivating students to learn*.

**Personal Conceptions of Role Responsibilities.** On the measure of *conceptions of individual learning*, we see that Carol quite actively seeks professional learning opportunities for herself, including those beyond her school community. Her score places her in the top quarter of teachers. We see in her score on *deprivatization of practice* that Carol has had recent experience opening up her practice and classroom to the observation of other teachers, though she hadn't visited a colleague's classroom. Here too she scores in the top quarter of teachers. We see that Carol is near the median on the measure of *conceptions of using evidence*. Her score indicates that she reflects on her students as learners and uses test data to inform her practice, though not to the point of actually questioning her informal observations. She tends toward the norm in this regard.

The influence of typical school norms on Carol is most apparent in the measure of her *conceptions of influencing colleagues*. Carol may believe she should get involved if a colleague experiences instructional difficulty, but she also thinks she should wait for the colleague to ask for help and that the principal should actually be the one to address the problem. She scores near the median on this measure.

Carol's reports on herself are largely consistent with those of a person who has engaged in improving her classroom practice by adopting balanced literacy practices. Her low self-efficacy in motivating student is a bit curious and, at this point, its meaning is unclear. We return to it later when discussing teachers in the school. Carol's report on whether it is her role to influence colleagues raises a red flag because, in the role of coach, she will need to assert her influence.

## Self-interest and Self-efficacy

**Self-interest.** Carol's self-interest in the literacy coordinator role was fairly low relative to the other coaches in the study. Her score on the self-interest measure, at .69 standard deviations below the mean, places her in the lower half of the group. Her score

indicates that, in addition to working to help improve student learning, she liked the idea of taking a leadership role in the school to help teachers improve their practice. She did not, however, have strong self-interest in the role in the sense that she felt recognized for her expertise or comfortable actually doing the work.

By her own account, Carol's background in literacy instruction and learning directly influenced her self-interest in the role. She reported in her interview that she initially had "no intention of doing it." She gave the reason for this as, "I didn't have the Reading Recovery training and I felt like that was a huge piece you really should have in you were going to be literacy coordinator." Carol said about herself vis-à-vis the role that "I didn't think I was qualified." Carol's relatively low self-interest score seems to reflect this view of her own expertise.

**Self-efficacy.** Carol's self-efficacy was lower than her self-interest, placing her in the bottom quarter of the group, a full standard deviation below the mean. Her score suggests she felt confident only about providing instructional materials to teachers and, at best, only "somewhat confident" in all other aspects of her upcoming one-to-one work with teachers. Carol provides insight into this score when she comments in her first year interview that the "weakest" aspect of the Literacy Collaborative training experience for her was "the coaching piece. I didn't think there was enough of that..." In her second year interview, she reports a higher level confidence compared to her first year:

"I was really feeling my way on the coaching.... I feel like I'm better at looking at what they're doing and I'm always thinking about where I can give them a 'lift.' I think I'm better at that. I'm certainly not perfect and have a long ways to go. But I feel more confident with it."

It took direct experience in the role of coach for Carol to begin to develop a sense of self-efficacy. The kind of adult education experience she initially brought to the role was not sufficient to make her confident about coaching.

Carol agreed to take on the role of the coach only after both the principal and Reading Recovery teacher talked to her "a lot" and reassured her that she could do the job. Carol responded to their influence because "I wanted it for the kids. I knew it was right for the building and...nobody else was going to take it." In focusing on what was best for the students and the school, Carol acted in part on a sense of moral self-interest.

Carol also acted on instrumental grounds to further her own professional growth. Carol may have had a low sense of self-efficacy with regard to the role, but she came to see participation as "a great chance for me... I thought, 'Just think of everything I'll get to learn.'" As was true for about half the coaches in the study, Carol was attracted to the role by the training opportunity it represented. Thus, although Carol's self-interest score was moderately low, we see in the qualitative account that she had reasons to engage in the role that the self-interest measure, as constructed, did not tap, including advancing her own learning and development as a professional.

Carol's self-interest and self-efficacy scores are consistent with her background experience in literacy education and adult education. One might expect that someone who accomplishes the amount of coaching she does would have higher scores. We see in this case, however, an example of a particular combination of self-interest and self-efficacy discernments leading to engagement with the role. Carol may have lacked a sense of self-efficacy, but she perceived that she would be supported in learning aspects of the work for which she felt ill-prepared. Also she felt supported in taking on the role by school leadership. These appeared to have made a difference for her in her decision-making.

We will next look more closely at the social environment at Riverside School. Carol may have been doubtful about her own expertise, but she did not express concerns about what working with the teachers in the school would mean for her.

## **School Context**

### **Teachers and base-state literacy practices**

Carol was responsible for working with 13 k-2 teachers. 60% of the teachers had been at the school for 10 years or more. Carol could count herself among this group. The highest level of formal education achieved by 80% of the staff, as well as by Carol, was at least a master's degree. Our measure of *background literacy training* reflects this high level of education relative to other teachers in the study. The median score of Riverside teachers on this measure was in the top quartile of scores for all teachers in the study. Carol's score, at the median for all teachers in the study, indicates she had less training than many of her colleagues.

Riverside's k-2 faculty had some exposure to the reform literacy practices. They had been introduced to guided reading about seven years prior to the introduction of Literacy Collaborative and, according to Carol, most had been using the practice in their classrooms for the previous three years. This is confirmed by the surveys. The median standardized score for individual teachers on a measure of *reform literacy practices* was .57, which was in the second quartile of all teachers in the study.

The school saw itself as taking its reform efforts to the next step through Literacy Collaborative. Although teachers had received district training in new reading approaches, Carol observed that "some of us still come away with a different understanding and so we wanted it to be standard across all the grade levels and our eventual goal is to train a 3-5 person [team] that will be coherent throughout the building." The school's concern for program coherence is reflected in a measure of this school context feature. Riverside School had the highest *program coherence* score of the 17 schools, at 1.37 standard deviations above the mean. This was a school where teachers thought curriculum, instruction, and learning materials were well-coordinated across grade levels, indicating that leadership paid attention to this organizational issue.

## Teacher norms

Notable among measures related to norms is the median score on *conceptions of influencing colleagues*: it was in the third quartile of all teachers in the study. This is a negative measure so low scores here indicate a stronger sense of responsibility to influence colleagues around matters of instructional practice. Carol's score on this measure was actually well above the median for her school. In this case, we see a coach who may have had to go through more of a normative shift than the teachers she coached with regard to her role. Carol seems to describe acceptance on their part when discussing her own discomfort. "I am kind of in the role of supervising them. It just feels awkward because they are my friends. A lot of them are my co-workers. And they are happy that I took the job and they are glad it's me. They have a comfort level."

## Organizational supports for student learning

Riverside School had strong organizational supports for student learning, including instructional leadership, professional community, and teacher orientation to change. Scores on composite measures of these features are all one standard deviation above the mean for the group of 17 schools. Riverside notably stands out from the group in terms of *teacher orientation to change*, which is a composite measure of *school commitment* and *teacher willingness to try new ideas*, scoring 2.05. This score is over one standard deviation above the schools with the next highest scores.

There is a curiosity in the data, however. The median score of k-2 teachers at Riverside on the measure of *self-efficacy in motivating students to learn* is in the bottom quartile for all the teachers in the study. (We noted a similar curiosity in our analysis of Carol's background. Carol's score on this self-efficacy measure is, in fact, the school's median score.) At the same time, we can see that as part of the composite measure of *professional community*, the faculty's score on *expectations for student learning* is the highest in our group of schools. These two scores are not necessarily in conflict because in the case of the first measure, teachers are reporting on themselves and in the case of the second, they are reporting on their colleagues as a group. Taken together, however, they do raise questions about whether on an individual level teachers at Riverside believe they can help students achieve the expectations of the larger school community. It may be the case that this gap between self-efficacy and expectations encourages teachers to work with Carol to improve their practices. Carol may be viewed as providing the support they need to achieve expectations. This is plausible particularly because Riverside is a school where commitment to the school is high and teachers are willing to take risks with new ideas to improve instruction.

Finally, the composite measure for *trust* at Riverside School at .70 standard deviations is relatively high. One would expect this given the similarly high score for professional community. Teacher-principal trust stands out as particularly strong.

### **Working relationship between coach and principal**

Carol says of the principal in the first year that, “He’s very supportive and I can’t think of anything that I have asked him for that he hasn’t tried to do for me.” Carol describes a principal who takes an interest in the variety of issues that concern her in her role: staff development, the book room, and money for supplies and materials. She mentions somewhat obliquely that “we talk about the three to five people, issues with that, where we are headed with that,” suggesting that she and the principal talk about staff who may not be participating in initiative and how to address this problem.

Carol’s composite score on *relational dynamics between principal and coach around advancing the Literacy Collaborative initiative* is the highest possible score at .65 (standard deviations). Carol says of the principal in the second year that, “He was instrumental in getting it in this building, so his support just continues to be steady.”

Carol notes one change in her relationship with the principal from the first to the second year. “I think he’s more respectful.” She explains that she was not his first choice for the position, rather a person with considerably more expertise in literacy education was. In the three years since selecting Carol, the principal came to appreciate her ability to work with the teachers. According to Carol, he told her that, in hindsight, she “was the right person for the job” because she “had the support of the people in the building.”

### **Relationship between coach and teachers**

In her first interview, Carol said that before the initiative she had “a good rapport with the staff” and indicated even at that point that the principal had singled her out because of her “social skills.” She was comfortable working with her colleagues – “I am a team player.”

Carol said that when she took on the role she had a “network of support.” Carol explains the quality of her relationship with the teacher in terms of strengths in the school context:

“I work in a very positive building. I love my building and the people in our building. We are very close-knit even though we sometimes have had different philosophies. I think ...[we] very much want the kids to be successful. So our building is a very warm building..”

Carol’s reference to teachers’ commitment to student learning implies a strong professional community. Her reference to the warmth in her building suggests strong personal regard among teachers, which is an aspect of trust. Carol indicates that she is a recipient of this personal regard in her role as coach. According to her, the teachers support her because they know she took on the role so the school could participate in Literacy Collaborative.

In explaining her good relations with teachers, Carol also said that “the teachers wanted Literacy Collaborative.... We wanted to be on the same page. We wanted to get better so that was a driving force too.” Carol describes teachers who engage positively in the work:

“They will come to me with questions. They are very willing in class to dig in and do the work. And they like having me come out and model for them and then taking it on. And they like having me then see how they are doing.”

Carol’s score on the measure of *school context support for Literacy Collaborative* indicates that she expected teachers to be willing to try new practices. However, she may have expected some resistance as well. In her second interview, she refers to “a few who kind of like to talk the talk, but I don’t think they walk the walk. I go in and they make it picture-perfect, but I know what as far as increasing the literacy independence and making change, it’s not coming along as quickly.”

Carol’s positive words about teachers in her school may in part reflect the culture of warmth she values. There are indications in her interviews that the work is difficult for her and for the teachers and that both she and they feel challenged by the initiative and at times overwhelmed. She hints, for example, that it is one thing to want change and another thing to actually change. In describing her work with individual teachers she talks of challenges that other coaches in our study experience, for example teachers’ expectations of students make them hesitant to try new practices and there is a reluctance to relinquish “tried and true” practices.

It is not, however, Carol’s description of her experience working with individual teachers that most distinguishes this case from other cases. Rather it is her experience as part of a community of teachers committed to improvement that sets the case apart. This experience seems to be the key to her engagement in the role and to account, at least in part, for the quantity of her coaching. The teachers’ engagement in the initiative may provide the other part of the explanation.

### **The Coach’s Perspective**

What is Carol’s understanding of the level of her coaching activity? She says, “The quantity is not there so therefore it really affects the quality of what I do in my coaching with them.” She points to school size as the reason for insufficient quantity:

“Well, I think that’s the biggest downfall...just from networking with some other literacy coordinators, some people have five people under them, some people have twenty. And I have too many people. I have too many people.... I just can’t get out to see them. There are so many of them.”

Figure 1 allows us to examine the 8 schools that are smaller than Carol’s where the number of teachers the coach is responsible for ranges from 4 to 9. We see only 3 schools where the coach achieves the expected level of intensity with some teachers. Of these, the modal pattern of coaching for each teacher reaches 16 times or more in 1 school. Although the data suggest that achieving an intense level of coaching is more likely in

smaller schools (generally, we do not observe this achievement in the schools with 12 teachers or more), they also suggest that more than school size is at work when coaching is intense. Organizational factors may be as important.

Recall that Carol's total number of coaching sessions is the second highest in the study. This total reflects that she is in a relatively large school in which the supports within the school's context to engage in coaching are strong. In the quote above, Carol is correct in the following way: given the amount of coaching she herself does, individual teachers would receive more attention if she were responsible for fewer teachers. If she had just had to coach 8 instead of 13 teachers in 2006-07, each teacher would have been coached on average of 16 times instead of 10 times.

This case raises the question of how much coaching is possible given the other responsibilities of a literacy coordinator. Carol describes her day:

“I'm team teaching in a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class.... So there's 2 ½-3 hours a day while I'm doing literacy block in that classroom. And that's pretty set. And then the other piece of my day is trying to get out and coach at least once, some days twice, and that would include morning time where I will be able to pre-conference with the teacher, very briefly. And then I would have my coaching session, and then I try to get in, to get back to them that day during their planning time or my planning time or their recess time or my recess time. And that's basically my day because it takes all my day.”

Carol would need to aim to coach twice a day to reach each teacher 16 times or more. Within this study, we do have a case of a large school in which the coach is doing more coaching overall, and also on a per teacher basis, than Carol (See School 12 in Figure 1). An in-depth analysis of this other case will perhaps allow us to understand differences between the two coaches. An initial examination suggests that one possible difference is a sense of priorities reflecting self-interest. Indications are that Carol chooses to dedicate herself to her students. Referring to her multiple responsibilities in her first interview, Carol describes her “first job” as “teaching language arts to second graders and making them the best I can make them.” She follows this up by saying, “I'm teaching my teachers on the side.” In her second interview over a year later, she indicates that she chooses to spend the majority of her planning time on her second graders who are at-risk.

## **Conclusion**

A critical question that remains here is what Carol actually did in her coaching sessions. Did her role conceptions around influencing teachers combined with her modest expertise influence the quality of the coaching she accomplished? We know from Carol's interviews that she spent a lot of time in the first two years in her role modeling practices for teachers. Why is this significant? Literacy Collaborative encourages literacy coordinators to quickly move beyond the stage of demonstrating practices. The core of coaching is to work with teachers to help them reflect on the purposes of their instruction and how their instructional actions support productive learning behaviors on the part of

students. Modeling can feel safe and be a way of avoiding conversations with teachers about their practices.

Thus the concern we have about this case is whether sufficient expertise was being brought to bear in the coaching situation. The coach logs being kept as part of this study contain information about the amount of time spent modeling versus in conversation with teachers. This will be one way to gauge whether Carol was really coaching or mostly demonstrating.

We have focused on explaining Carol's modal pattern of coaching. Yet there is variation in the amount of her coaching, from 7 to 12 sessions per teacher. As part of our work, we will attempt to understand this variation by analyzing the individual characteristics of teachers. For example, Carol coached one teacher over 16 times. This teacher's score on *background literacy training* was 1.13 standard deviations below the mean for all teachers in the study. It seems likely this teacher was singled out, by Carol or the principal or both, for more intense work. An examination of social networks might also provide insight into variations in coaching activity. The school context survey and Carol's interviews may mask informal social networks within the school that are leading to differential engagement in the work of instructional change.

## Discussion

These two cases represent the achievement of quite different levels of coaching activity. It is clear in comparing them that the coaches, although they differed in terms of expertise, were similar in terms of their low interest in taking on the role and their lack of confidence in their ability to do the role. Carol's self-interest was a bit stronger than Laura's perhaps because she was in a supportive school context. Both coaches, however, had reservations about the role. Laura's reservations were in part a response to her perceptions of the lack of willingness by teachers in her school to support the Literacy Collaborative model. Carol's reservations seemed more directly related to her concerns about her own expertise.

An even stronger similarity in these cases is that both coaches felt that they could successfully work with their principals around the Literacy Collaborative initiative and both felt fully supported by their principals. Indeed this support may explain why, given their reservations, they initially took on the role.

The most apparent difference in the cases is the social organization in the schools. The data suggest that Riverside School has a well-developed professional community. Trident just started on the path to develop such a community and was contending with a variety of normative obstacles typical of loose-coupled organizations. Whereas the teacher community enables coaching activity at Riverside, it inhibits it at Trident.

Both cases raise questions about the coach and how to prepare her for the role. Might there be ways for the coach at Trident to respond to what indeed sounds to be hostile behavior on the part of some teachers without losing her confidence in her abilities? At

Riverside the obstacles to coaching seem to be much more manageable and the opportunity to improve practice through coaching much stronger than at Trident. The risk is that the coaching simply is not expert enough to advance the improvement of practice. How should a coach willing to do the job, but of modest expertise, be supported?

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