

## **ROLE:** Learning facilitator

**PURPOSE:** To design collaborative, job-embedded, standards-based professional learning

From  
*9 Roles of the  
School-Based Coach*  
by Joellen Killion  
and Cynthia  
Harrison

BY JOELLEN KILLION AND CYNTHIA HARRISON

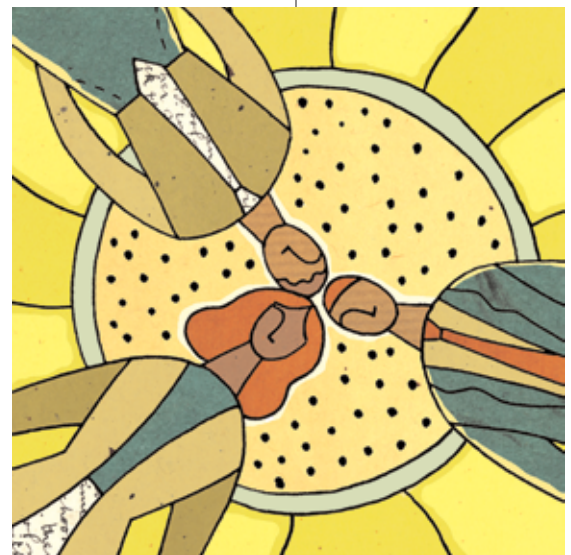
Coaches in the role of learning facilitator coordinate a wide range of learning opportunities for teachers to develop teachers' knowledge, attitude, skills, aspirations, and behaviors. Coaches may train teachers in new instructional strategies, facilitate whole school study groups, lead critical friends groups, facilitate action research teams, or organize professional learning teams. Because the types of learning experiences the coach facilitates vary, this role is diverse. Coaches recognize the importance of using a variety of learning processes, honoring the uniqueness of adult learners, and aligning the learning process with the content and the learning preferences of teachers.

In the role of learning facilitator, coaches influence the direction of the school's professional development plan. As experts on professional development, coaches use professional development to leverage improvement in teacher practice and student learning. Coaches assist the principal, school improvement team, and grade-level or department teams to design effective ways to structure their learning and use team and whole school learning time effectively.

Many coaches provide training for teachers in their schools on topics related to curriculum, assessment, and instruction. When training is needed, the coach organizes it in such a way that teachers are active participants in learning that relates directly to their identified needs. Learning

facilitators organize professional learning in multiple diverse ways in addition to training. They accept that teachers learn best with and from one another and organize opportunities for teachers to teach teachers. This form of learning often occurs within the school day in collaborative settings where teachers view their work as opportunities to refine their practice.

Frequently, the coach provides just-in-time or "at the elbow" training to teachers in small groups or individually. When a new teacher wants assistance with a behavior management strategy for a student who is often disruptive, the coach may teach the novice teacher a simple and effective behavior management strategy and help her implement consistently. If an experienced teacher has an autistic child in his classroom for the first time, the coach may provide ideas about how to make accommodations in assessment for this student. Sometimes, a teacher may want help with English as a Second Language students and the coach may help the teacher understand the stages of language acquisition. These forms of learning occur daily and are facilitated by coaches in conversations about teaching and learning.



For example, when a new teacher wants assistance with a behavior management strategy for a student who is often disruptive, the coach may teach the novice teacher a simple and effective behavior management strategy and help her implement consistently.

**SKILLS OF THE LEARNING FACILITATOR:**

- Facilitating dialogue and team work
- Assessing needs of teachers
- Designing learning and learning materials
- Differentiating for diverse learners
- Presenting skills
- Following up with learners
- Meeting management skills
- Communicating effectively

**References**

**Killion, J. & Kaylor, B. (1991, Winter).**

Follow-up: The key to training for transfer. *Journal of Staff Development*, 12(1), pp. 64-67.

**Marzano, R., Pickering, D., & Pollock, J. (2001).**

*Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

**Scenario: Learning facilitator at work**

One of the goals for the Benton Middle School staff is increasing instructional effectiveness. In their school plan, teachers agreed to learn the nine strategies for effective instruction identified by Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock in *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (ASCD, 2001). Each month of the school year, teachers will learn and practice a new strategy in their classrooms. It is the beginning of the third month of school, and Wageh Saad\* is preparing for his 90-minute presentation on the third strategy, summarizing and note-taking. He talks with several teachers and learns that they are struggling with the second strategy, similarities and differences, and not satisfied with the work their students are producing. He decides to ask a few more experienced and confident teachers in several grade levels to bring samples of student work that represents their application of similarities and differences to the afternoon meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, Saad checks in with the whole staff to verify that what he has heard from a few is true for the majority. He doesn't want to assume that if a few teachers are struggling that all are. He comes to the meeting prepared to differentiate the learning experiences for teachers if that seems appropriate and has already enlisted the support of the principal to take the group of teachers who may want to spend more time on similarities and differences while he moves ahead with others to the new strategy.

Just as he heard, the majority of teachers express their frustration with similarities and differences. Even those who report being confident agree that it will be helpful for them to review the strategy. Saad asks the whole faculty if they want to use their time together to examine some student work and to do some joint problem solving about the similarities and differences strategy. He also asks for their commitment to meet again in two weeks to learn about the third strategy, summarizing and note-taking, which they will forego today. Saad quickly changes plans and organizes teachers into small,

mixed grade-level groups to conduct a Collaborative Assessment Conference using the student work several teachers brought. Teachers find it very helpful to look at student work and discover what students know and don't know about similarities and differences.

After a 45-minute Collaborative Assessment Conference, Saad organizes teachers into grade-level Help Groups (Killion & Kaylor, 1991) to talk about their problems with the similarities and differences strategy. Teachers use the information from the Collaborative Assessment Conference groups to focus their questions about the next steps for improving students' work with similarities and differences. Teachers leave the meeting feeling more confident and eager to try their new ideas. Saad realizes that not every strategy will be easy for teachers to apply. He appreciates teachers' openness to asking for more help with a strategy and is confident that this risk-free environment will help them all become more successful implementing these research-based instructional strategies.

\* Fictitious name and school

Occasionally, the coach organizes training by outside consultants because the expertise does not exist within the school or coordinates teachers' participation in training outside the school or district.

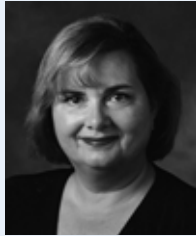
standards for high-quality staff development, research on change, powerful designs for professional learning, adult learning, and resources to support learning within the school, district, and beyond. The skills a coach uses in this role include facilitating dialogue and team work,

**Knowledge and skills**

Coaches have a deep understanding of the

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AUTHORS



**Joellen Killion** is director of special projects for the National Staff Development Council. In this role, she manages the NSDC Academy and also the new NSDC School-Based Staff Developers Learning Community. She can be reached at 10931 W. 71st Place, Arvada, CO 80004-1337, (303) 432-0958, fax (303) 432-0959, or e-mail: joellen.killion@nsdc.org.

**Cynthia Harrison** is the former director of staff development in Adams 12, Five Star Schools in Thornton, Colo., and a member and past president of NSDC. She can be reached at 306 W. Sixth, Broomfield, CO 80020, (303) 465-1845, e-mail: crh@instructimprove.org.



Coaches often fill multiple roles simultaneously.

## 9 roles of the school-based coach

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when providing services to individuals or teams of teachers. This allows coaches to reflect on their work and assess the balance of roles and the effectiveness of each role.

It is essential to keep in mind that coaches often fill multiple roles simultaneously. Depending on their job descriptions and their

agreements with principals, district supervisors, and teachers whom they serve, coaches may fill some or all of the roles in a typical day. The complexity and challenge of determining what roles to fill, and when and where to fill them, are the most difficult aspects of coaches' work.

We will explore one of these roles in each issue of this newsletter. We begin on p. 3 with the role of the Learning Facilitator. ♦

### Role: Learning facilitator

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assessing needs of teachers, designing learning and learning materials, differentiating for diverse learners, presenting skills, following up with learners, meeting management skills, and communicating effectively.

#### Challenges

Coaches face several challenges in this role. One challenge is ensuring that learning opportunities align with both learners' needs and the school's goals. Another challenge is resorting to whole group, one-size-fits-all training because it

is easier to organize than other designs for professional learning. While training is efficient and a relatively easy way to deliver information to the whole staff, training may be the least effective if the goal is change in practice. The coach knows that the power of shared learning is a factor that influences change in teacher practice. Another challenge is differentiating learning for teachers who may be at different points in their careers or who may have different levels of understanding or need to know. When coaches work with smaller groups of teachers, this problem is often mitigated. ♦