

T3 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

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ROLE: School leader

PURPOSE: To work collaboratively with school's formal leadership to plan, implement, and assess school change initiatives to ensure alignment and focus on intended results.

BY JOELLEN KILLION AND CYNTHIA HARRISON

Fourth in an eight-part series about roles of the school-based coach

To influence the school in a systemic way, coaches assume a leadership role in the school. With a vision for the school's success and a moral commitment to the success of all students, the coach may serve in an informal or formal leadership role. “Leaders must act with the intention of making a positive difference,” asserts Michael Fullan, a leading expert on school change (2001, p. 3). The very premise of the role of a coach is to make a positive difference in their schools. They do this by serving on the school improvement team, meeting with other coaches or resource personnel within the school to coordinate services to teachers, leading a variety of school committees, serving as liaisons or key communicators to central office, and serving on district committees such as content-area curriculum committees.

T3 presents one role of the school-based coach each month.



Our goal: All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.

SCENARIO:

School leader at work

During June, Taletha Coleman agrees to help the administration and school improvement facilitator design and facilitate Everwood High School’s* new school improvement team meeting. The team is meeting for the first time to begin developing next year’s school improvement plan. The principal tells the planning team that it is essential that the meeting be motivating and focused, and move the team members to significant action. Coleman asks other team members to share their ideas related to the meeting. She charts the ideas as members share their vision. Coleman asks team members if they want to use the list she wrote as the criteria for a successful first meeting of the new school improvement team, and they agree.

Next, Coleman asks the team to generate a list of essential items for the meeting’s agenda. Coleman suggests examining student achievement data. She records their ideas and asks them to prioritize the list. When they agree to make data analysis the major portion of the meeting, Coleman suggests several ways staff can interact with the school’s data. She also recommends that the agenda include some activity to have the school improvement team members see themselves as leaders.

With the principal and school improvement team facilitator, Coleman co-designs several sections of the agenda to actively involve

members. She suggests a data analysis protocol. After a highly successful meeting, Coleman asks the planning team to assess the meeting using the criteria they established for success.

As a result of the first meeting of the school improvement team, Coleman volunteers to facilitate content-area, course- and grade-level groups to look at student achievement data in their areas. Coleman notices some teachers are not buying into the need for change when looking only at school-level data. She meets with individual teachers to help them with data analysis to understand student growth in their own classrooms. As she meets with individual teachers, Coleman asks them to think about what department, grade-level and individual actions might be needed to increase student achievement. This schoolwide data analysis process will help the school improvement team, course, grade-level, and content-area teams, and individual teachers establish goals and plans of action to increase student achievement.

Coleman encourages each teacher to examine his or her students’ achievement data and to set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Based, Time-Bound) goals for their individual classrooms. As Coleman meets with teachers individually, she helps them transfer what they did as a large group to their own individual data. She ensures that teachers, not she, are doing the hard work of analyzing the data and considering how they can alter their instruction based on the data.

** Fictitious person and school*

Another role of coaches as school leaders is to be another set of eyes for the principal, helping him or her think through the work of significant school change. Coaches can offer the teachers’ perspective, consider how initiatives relate or clash, maintain a focus on student learning, and be a critical friend to the principal. Among teachers, the coach is a champion for quality teaching and learning and a peer who can influence needed instructional changes in classrooms. Through

informal conversations, the coach assesses teachers’ perceived barriers to change, seeks out the resisters and listens to understand the causes of resistance, and provides information about how change initiatives will benefit both teachers and students. The coach is a teacher at heart and a leader of change.

Knowledge and skills

Coaches understand the change process and

9 roles of the school-based coach

- Catalyst for change
- Classroom supporter
- Curriculum specialist
- Data coach (T3, Oct. 2005)
- Instructional specialist
- Learning facilitator (T3, Sept. 2005)
- Mentor (T3, Nov. 2005)
- Resource provider
- **School leader**

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

how to bring about systemic change. Coaches also know at least one model for planning, designing, and implementing school improvement. Being able to discern between first- and second-order change (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) is a skill that helps coaches exercise appropriate leadership behaviors to advance any change effort. Coaches have a full range of leadership skills such as sharing a vision, engaging the unengaged, monitoring progress toward the goal, and reporting progress. The coach facilitates alignment among various school improvement strategies. Coaches use skills such as questioning, research, relationship, and communication in this role.

Challenges

One of the challenges of this role is providing differentiated services or resources to accommodate staff members' various stages of concern related to innovations. Some staff members are ready to delve into new behaviors, while others

struggle with understanding the reason for the change. When implementing a district-directed change, coaches are challenged with creating schoolwide and individual buy-in to the initiative.

Another challenge is walking the fine line between being an administrator who supports the change and a member of the teaching ranks. Coaches must straddle this line artfully so that teachers continue to trust coaches to influence their classroom behaviors and administrators trust that coaches are committed to moving school and district initiatives forward.

Protecting teachers from unnecessary work or distractions is another challenge to coaches in the role of school leader. In most schools, numerous interruptions, emerging problems, or new demands can easily sidetrack teachers' focus and energy. The coach must be a strong advocate for keeping the focus on student learning and the identified initiatives within the school's improvement plan. ♦

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