

No. 1 resource has a human face

Professional development requires resources. In NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, resources include time and human and fiscal resources to support professional learning.

When coaches serve on school improvement teams or school leadership teams, they have opportunities to influence decisions related to creating time for collaborative professional learning during the school day. In addition, they can recommend how financial resources are allocated to support professional development. On a day-to-day basis, however, coaches provide resources to teachers in every interaction they have. Coaches provide both instructional and professional resources to help teachers strengthen teaching and student learning.

Coaches are the resource and they also provide resources. Coaching as an investment, the type of resources coaches provide, how to help teachers find their own resources, and how to reduce teachers' dependence on coach-provided resources are the focus of this column.

Coaching as a resource

A school or district decision to invest in coaching and place a coach in a school is both a significant fiscal and human commitment to professional development. When districts invest in coaches, they demonstrate the strong belief that student learning increases through quality teaching. The investment a school or district makes in a coach is the cost of a full-time teacher. Since most coaches are experienced teachers, this figure is often near the upper end of the teacher salary schedule.

Coaching is an investment in teacher development and student learning. The investment in coaching is substantial and schools and districts expect a significant return on their investment in

terms of student-academic success. When coaches' work is focused on teaching and learning and when coaches are carefully selected, prepared, and placed, the return on the investment is realized. If any of these elements are missing, the return on the investment in coaching may be limited.

Coaches are a professional development resource whose work is centered on assisting teachers to refine their content knowledge, pedagogy, and assessment strategies. They help teachers use data to identify student-learning needs and to find appropriate interventions to address those needs. In their roles as resource provider, mentor, learning facilitator, classroom supporter, curriculum specialist, instructional specialist, data coach, school leader, catalyst for change, and learner, coaches provide a wide range of support to meet every teacher's needs.

Coaches as resource providers

Unlike a principal or central office staff, coaches do not provide monetary resources or time to teachers. However, they can help teachers access resources, identify the best resources to buy with limited school funds, and share vast resources from their personal professional or classroom libraries.

Teachers have endless access to resources on the web and through interlibrary loans. Yet, the challenge teachers have is finding what will be useful for their particular individual and classroom needs. Teachers just don't have time to



Joellen Killion is director of special projects for National Staff Development Council.



RESOURCES

Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration.

For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

spend searching the web for high-quality, standards-based, or age-appropriate materials for their classroom. Coaches can help teachers in several ways.

First, coaches can do some searching for teachers once they have specific needs identified. Getting the needs identified requires time to talk with the teacher to learn what standard they are addressing, what developmental needs to consider, and how the resources will be used, e.g., by the teacher for his or her own use or with students. Whether this search is a physical one (in the school library or professional resources, in the district professional resources, or in a local library) or whether the search is online using an online search engine or online virtual library, the search must be focused on specific needs. If teachers are uncertain about what they want, coaches can use clarifying questions to help teachers gain clarity. (See box at right.)

Frequently, a teacher is not able to be as specific as these questions might suggest. A coach will want to avoid searching for general resources that might not be helpful to the teacher. If the teacher is uncertain, the coach might suggest that the teacher do a preliminary search to identify the type of resources desired and the area of resources before the coach conducts his or her search.

The coach, too, can be the resource. By modeling instructional strategies, sharing books from his or her own professional library, offering feedback to a teacher after visiting his or her classroom. Coaches can co-teach a lesson, engage teachers in a book or lesson study, facilitate a tuning protocol, or offer many other services that can be resources to teachers.

Sometimes, rather than finding resources for teachers, the coach might teach teachers how to do their own searches for appropriate resources. This might include short and practical strategies for using web-based search engines; accessing library resources in the school, district, community, or interlibrary loan programs; and identifying and accessing community resources, such as speakers' bureaus, professionals who volunteer in schools, district resource staff, or college and university faculty.

When a coach empowers teachers by helping

them conduct their own resource searches, they provide them with limitless possibilities for enriching their teaching with practical and authentic instructional aids.

Coaches can model for teachers how to use these resources and then engage teachers in an authentic search and provide coaching and support to ensure teachers know how to conduct searches independently. Coaches might also want to share with teachers lists of web sites related to each of the disciplines. Many district-level technology coordinators have collections of appropriate web sites for teacher and student use and even have these sites aligned with the district's curriculum standards. Rather than compiling these sites, coaches can collect lists of appropriate sites and make sure teachers know about them.

When coaches help teachers strengthen their research skills, they decrease teachers' dependence on the coach to be a resource provider. Teachers, with increased competence, will search for their own resources. Armed with the knowledge of how to use research skills and tools, teachers will be more independent in their resource search. Working collaboratively with their colleagues, teachers may become more interdependent in their resource search processes.

Most teachers agree that their coaches are indispensable resources. Coaches work hard to demonstrate their integrity, trustworthiness, and credibility. As a resource for teachers, coaches make important decisions each day when they determine where to invest their expertise to improve teaching and student learning. ♦

Questions to help teachers describe resources they need from the coach

- What **standard(s)** will you be teaching when you use these resources? What specific **knowledge and skills** will you want students to learn when you use these resources?
- What **type of resources** do you want, e.g., print for classroom display, web-based for use by students, web-based or print to deepen my content knowledge?
- **Who** will use the resources, you or the students?
- **How** will the resources be used, e.g., for background information, to develop student instructional materials, to deepen my own knowledge about this concept, to consider ways to differentiate the concepts for students, by students in an inquiry lesson, by students for an enrichment activity, etc.?
- What **reading level** is most appropriate for the resources?
- **When** will you use these resources?

