



ASK

Tom Manning

How do we clarify coaches' roles and responsibilities?

Q Last year, we transitioned 20 teachers and central office staff into the role of instructional coaches. All of these coaches are subject-oriented, and they struggled with establishing rapport with principals and the teachers they worked with. Principal-coach relationships were a particular issue. How do we ensure that the roles and responsibilities of coaches and their working relationships with principals are clear to everyone districtwide?

Learning Forward receives more inquiries about support for instructional coaches than any other consulting service we provide. School-based instructional coaching has the power to influence teacher practice, student learning, and school culture, and coaches play an essential role in ensuring the continuous learning of everyone in a school.

In many systems, coaches are master teachers with substantial instructional and content expertise. These coaches, however, often lack deep expertise in professional learning.

We work with instructional coaches to develop their skills in building relationships, leading professional learning, and providing individual and team coaching.

Before we get to those skills, however, it's important to understand the unique roles that instructional coaches play in what we call "learning systems."

In their book, *Taking the Lead: New Roles for Teachers and School-Based Coaches* (NSDC, 2006), Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison outline the complex, multifaceted roles coaches play in a system. "When designing coaching programs, hiring coaches, developing and supporting coaches, and evaluating coaches and coaching

Each issue, we ask a learning professional to answer your professional learning questions. This month's response comes from Tom Manning (tom.manning@learningforward.org), Learning Forward associate director of consulting and networks.

programs, defining what coaches do each day is crucial," they write. In systems with effective coaching, teacher instructional practice is more focused, and student achievement increases. Without clearly defined roles, coaches can strive to be all things to all people, leading to a lack of direction and a far greater likelihood that coaching will not result in the support teachers need.

Killion and Harrison describe 10 roles for school-based coaches and the essential purpose of each of those roles.

Resource provider: Coaches help teachers expand their use of a variety of resources to improve instruction.

Data coach: Coaches help teachers or teams of teachers examine data, understand student needs based on data, and identify instructional strategies to address those needs.

Curriculum specialist: In this role, coaches ensure implementation of an adopted curriculum. They deepen teachers' content knowledge; support curriculum alignment; and identify curriculum standards, the knowledge and skills students need to achieve standards, and benchmarks to measure progress toward standards.

Instructional specialist: In this role, the coach ensures that teachers implement effective, research-based instructional strategies.

Classroom supporter: This can include modeling/demonstrating, co-teaching, or observing and giving feedback on instruction or management.

Mentor: In this role, coaches increase instructional skills of new teachers and support schoolwide induction activities.

Learning facilitator: Coaches design collaborative, job-embedded, standards-based professional learning.

School leader: Coaches may serve in formal or informal leadership roles, working with the school's leadership to design, implement, and assess school



change initiatives and ensure a focus on intended results.

Catalyst for change: In this role, a coach seeks to influence change by introducing new ideas, making observations, and challenging current practice when needed.

Learner: Coaches are leaders of learning in their schools, modeling continuous improvement.

Our work with instructional coaches focuses on building specific skills so they can serve their schools and systems in each of these 10 roles. Through our partnerships with schools, systems, regional service centers, and state departments of education, we help develop effective coaches that build capacity, influence individual teachers and teacher teams, and create cultures of inquiry in schools and systems. ■

Resources

Coaching Matters (Learning Forward, 2012): Each chapter in this book describes an element of what research and the authors' firsthand experiences know it takes to make coaching effective.

Taking the Lead: New Roles for Teachers and School-Based Coaches (NSDC, 2006) *Second edition coming later this year:* Explore the complex, multifaceted roles played by teacher leaders and school-based coaches.

Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011): The standards define the essential elements of and conditions for professional learning if improvements in educator effectiveness and student learning are to be realized.

Available at the Learning Forward Bookstore, www.learningforward.org/bookstore or 1-800-727-7288.

LEARNING PROFESSIONALS: WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The "Ask" column is a way to open a dialogue with learning leaders about the issues you face daily. No topic is too broad or narrow. Whether you are struggling to establish a principal pipeline in a rural county or wondering how to find a literacy coach for your school, we'd like to discuss your concerns.

Send your questions to ask@learningforward.org. Take as many words as you need to explain your question(s) — understanding that we may edit them for length or clarity.

We look forward to hearing from you.