YOUR LITERACY COACHING PLAYBOOK

What to Know, Say, and Do

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Chapter 1

What Is Your Role—**Really?**

Let's talk about titles. Maybe yours is *coach*. Or maybe it's *professional learning leader*, *instructional coach,* or *literacy specialist*. Regardless of what you are called, your role is to support the continuous development of teacher expertise with the goal of better teaching and better outcomes for students. In this book, we use the term *coach* to mean a leader of professional learning in a school or district, but the title is hardly the point. It's how you embody the role that really matters.

Effective coaches position themselves as thinking partners, colleagues, advocates, problem solvers, and active participants in working with teachers to support a strong culture of continuous professional learning in the school. Effective coaches are collaborators, bringing together people who share common goals, interests, or problems of practice and putting them in touch with each other and with other sources of professional knowledge, such as current research on teaching and learning as well as professional magazines, organizations, and books. Although they have broad expertise to share, effective coaches make it clear that they do not think of themselves as "experts," but as thought partners who facilitate the continuous professional learning of their colleagues. They position themselves as learners who draw understandings from their observations of and interactions with colleagues.

If all that sounds like a lot, take heart. The coaching role *is* multidimensional, but after a while, you will see that the individual components work together to produce a kind of synergy. And little by little, you will begin to learn that your role is not to take on a set of discrete responsibilities, but to weave them together in a coherent way. When that happens, you will notice a change taking root in your school as it becomes a vibrant learning community.

Meaningful change happens when teachers are inspired by a clear sense of purpose and a collective commitment to excellence, when they willingly help

one another solve problems and celebrate successes, and when they are offered compelling professional learning opportunities, including one-on-one coaching, that they trust will keep them working at the top of their game.

Meaningful improvement in teaching and learning doesn't happen overnight, however. It takes time, and it requires at least one person in the school to be an agent of positive change. If you are that person, the pages that follow will help you get a handle on your role.

The Multidimensional Role of Coach

The coaching role—and the amount of time allotted to it—varies greatly from school to school. Some schools are staffed with multiple coaches, each of whom concentrates on a different content area or a span of grade levels. In these cases, coaching tends to be a full-time role. In some districts, a single coach serves multiple schools. Others have school-embedded coaches who also teach students for a portion of the day. Some coaches have flexibility to provide coaching support across an entire school day, while others have only a few hours a day on a few days of the week. But the one thing all coaches have in common is the multidimensional aspect of their role.

Your impact as an instructional coach has the potential to reach deep into the heart of your school's community because of the multiple roles you play in supporting the various dimensions of professional learning within the school. Whether you are called *coach* or by another title, you know that you must juggle all the parts of your role, often within a single day.

Be Clear About Your Role

Be sure your job description doesn't imply that you are in any way an evaluator (unless you do have a role in evaluating teachers, in which case you need to be clear that you do). Use language that expresses your role as a thought partner and a collaborator in the school-wide pursuit of continuous professional learning.

Coaches typically fill multiple roles simultaneously. One of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of being a coach is balancing the range of responsibilities while serving different personalities, varying levels of experience, and diverse needs within a group of teachers. Though you have an official job description, and you might clearly communicate your role to your team, it is difficult to capture the element of coaching that we describe as "taking a coaching stance all day long." How do you capture the hundreds of brief, supportive interactions that you have with colleagues across a day, month, or year? The answer is you don't.

You are spontaneously supporting teacher learning all the time—when you have a conversation at lunch about a student's work, when you send a text about a book you know a class will love, when you write an email responding to a question, and when you have an impromptu conversation in the corridor about a problem of practice. For some coaches with limited time, these brief interactions comprise most of their coaching opportunities. Regardless of the amount of time you are given, you can make the most of even your briefest exchanges, so don't underestimate how small moments can have a big impact. When you make personal connections with teachers, take time to check in, and support them with small gestures, you make a difference in the way your colleagues perceive you as a member of the team. You inspire them, and they in turn inspire their students.

Regardless of the amount of time you are given, you can make the most of even your briefest exchanges, so **don't underestimate how small moments can have a big impact.**

Your Role Description

We trust you were provided with a general description of your role when you applied for the position. We recommend that you take the time to work with your supervisor (e.g., principal, district-level leader) to discuss and write a more detailed description that outlines clear expectations and the full scope of your responsibilities because the coaching role can vary quite a bit depending on the expectations of the school or district. It is helpful for you and your supervisor to have a common understanding of the details of this complex role.

This is important: without a written document that summarizes your role and responsibilities, you will have nothing to refer to if you are challenged by misunderstandings of how you are expected to support teacher learning in the school. Although urgent situations may arise that cause you to temporarily take time away from your role to do whatever needs to be done, in general, your job description should specify a high priority for working with teachers.

Take time at the beginning of every school year to clarify your role with your administrator even if you've been in that role for a long time. Reflect on what has worked well in the past and how you each see the role continuing in the future. Talk together about how much actual time you get to provide structured professional learning and coach teachers. The more work you put into clarifying your role for yourself and others, the more effective you will be in building trust and meaningful partnerships.

The more transparent you are about the many dimensions of your role with all members of the school community, the more successful you will be. When you revisit your role with your supervisor at the beginning of each new year, make any revisions you think are needed. Your goal in doing so is to maintain a current document that expresses, in clear language, the expectations of your role in supporting professional learning in your school. Figure 1–1 may be helpful in discussing the broad categories of your responsibilities. Some of these may apply in your school and others may not.

Your Attitude Toward Your Role

As an expression of your mindset and approach to working with others, your coaching stance conveys your attitudes about professional learning, collaboration, growth, problem-solving, self-reflection, and more. The way you see

THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL ROLE OF COACHES

Figure 1–1

yourself feeds directly into your stance, which is the way you form relationships with and present yourself to teachers, other coaches, students, and administrators. Your stance will also be reflected in the language you choose when you communicate with others.

As a coach, you help colleagues see where they are in their thinking, articulate where they want to be, and develop a plan to get there. When you consult with a teacher, your stance requires more listening than telling. It means bringing the individual into the interaction to make decisions and seek solutions. Each time individuals make a decision and analyze its impact, understanding expands—and that's what you want for the teachers you coach.

The coaching stance is not a rigid, single way of being. It is fluid, multifaceted, and responsive to each teacher's unique needs. In general, you can think of your coaching stance as a composite of multiple stances that you will move in and out of, often unconsciously, in response to what's called for in the moment.

Collaborative Stance

A collaborative coaching stance requires movement away from a top-down distribution of information and toward a collaborative learning relationship as shown in Figure 1–2. You thrive on being helpful and believe almost anything can be accomplished when you think and work together. Though the comparison is certainly not a rigid one, you can see how a collaborative stance honors co-constructing, co-planning, and valuing the voices of all professionals involved. Because your role as coach might appear to place you in a position of power, it is important to clarify from the beginning that teachers will be working *with* you, not for you. Of course, there will be times when a coach will model or demonstrate a lesson, focus on procedures, or provide information, but even those acts happen in a context that values collaborative thinking.

Coaching is about supporting your colleagues in being reflective. It is not about fixing people and behaviors, judging others, or telling teachers what to do. There is no right or wrong, just collaborative analysis of evidence that shows the impact. If the coach views coaching as fixing a situation, then the coaching becomes evaluative and judgmental. If teachers see the relationship in this way, they begin to ask the coach, "What am I doing wrong? Tell me whether I am doing this right." They put themselves in the position of individuals who need fixing instead of valuing their own experience and expertise, working collaboratively with the coach to reflect on the impact of their teaching,

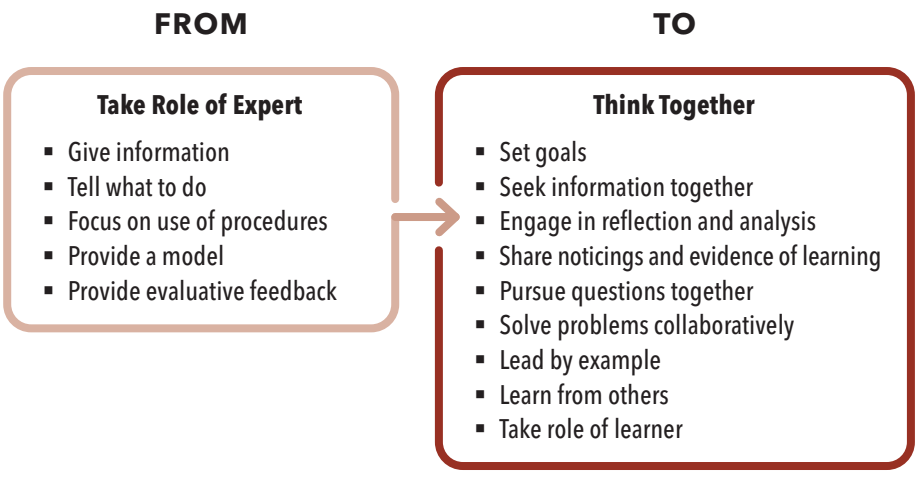

Figure 1–2

and finding solutions to what they see as problems. A collegial coaching stance conveys the view that teachers are lifelong learners who are capable of expanding their expertise with a little guidance and support.

It may be helpful to think of your coaching stance as an umbrella over all you do as a coach and leader of professional learning. Your stance reflects a spirit of genuine collaboration.

A collegial coaching stance conveys the view that **teachers are lifelong learners** who are capable of expanding their expertise with a little guidance and support.

Reflective Stance

A reflective stance conveys a focus on genuine inquiry and exploration that leads to new understandings. Conclusions are tentative and subject to testing. You show genuine curiosity and engage in wondering to learn more. This means your statements are not absolute and are adjusted continually as you discover new evidence. You are critical while reading research. Is it sound or based mostly on opinion? Such a stance can serve as a model for teachers as they observe children engaged in new learning and form tentative hypotheses that are tested by the actual behaviors of the students. When you enter a coaching experience or observe children without a preconceived idea of what will happen and how you will respond, you are more open to being surprised by the learner. As a coach with a reflective stance, you collect data and information that influences your response instead of forcing the data to fit into an established, rigid view of the situation. This stance allows you to be flexible, tentative, and responsive to your colleagues.

Your reflective stance extends to the way you read professional resources and learn new information. Keep an open and wondering approach so that you can critically evaluate the information and decide whether or how it applies to your situation.

Inclusive Stance

When you take an inclusive stance, you show that you value teachers and students for their unique identities inclusive of their cultural backgrounds, languages, diverse experiences, and perspectives. This stance also means you actively coach teachers to embrace culturally responsive practices that provide access to high-quality education for *all* children. Aguilar (2020, 6) explains that "educational equity means that

Coaching for Equity and Inclusion

Canaday (2023, 192) describes inclusive coaching by saying, "The coaching relationship provides a perfect platform for two people with diverse backgrounds to connect on a meaningful level and invest the time to understand their different or even opposing viewpoints." She goes on to explain that "developing an ongoing relationship with someone whose background and life experiences look nothing like yours can expand your worldview . . . and may also allow you to uncover any unconscious areas of bias and begin working to eliminate those."

every child is seen for who they truly are, and their unique interests and gifts are surfaced and cultivated." Apply this asset-based mindset to your work with both teachers and students. An inclusive stance encourages teachers to reflect on their own biases and beliefs and to work collaboratively to identify and interrupt policies and practices within the school that contribute (even unintentionally) to inequities for particular groups of students.

When you draw on an inclusive stance, you show that you understand that social and emotional learning are essential in providing educational equity. When you coach with this stance, you help everyone in the school community approach teaching and learning with empathy and a focus on relationship building. You get to know and value the teachers in all their uniqueness, the teachers build strong bonds with students and their families, and the students develop meaningful and respectful relationships with one another.

Responsive Stance

A responsive stance reflects your desire to meet teachers where they are and support them by building on their unique experiences, expertise, and knowledge. With a responsive stance, you continually adjust your feedback to fit the responses you observe. When you take the stance that all teachers can learn, your responses show a belief in their professional capacity. This stance builds trust because you listen and respond genuinely to the teachers you coach. It also shows your interest in getting to know the people you coach. You value who they are inside and outside the classroom and respond to them as individuals with their own unique identities.

Whenever you interact with teachers in whatever context you find yourself, remember that your stance as a coach reflects the way you see yourself and how others see you. It is important that every interaction conveys "learning together" as you position yourself as a thought partner and draw individuals into the conversation. Later in this book, we describe and offer examples of language that can help you communicate your stance to others.

Up **Next**

You can't be successful in your role unless you have the right supports. In Chapter 2, you'll learn how to help individual educators in your school become a team, develop the team's vision for literacy teaching and learning, build a school-wide culture of collaboration, and form sustaining relationships with teachers, your principal, and other coaches.

Chapter 2

What You Need to **Succeed**

If you are a full-time coach and leader of professional learning, you probably spend upward of 1,000 hours in your school each year (not to mention the time spent preparing and problem-solving outside of school). Multiply that by the number of years you've been working with students and teachers, and you will quickly see that your job consumes a big chunk of your life. No doubt you want every one of those hours to count—to be satisfying to you and your colleagues because you are making a positive difference in the culture of the school and the expertise of its teachers.

This chapter will help you work productively in your role by laying a foundation for success. That means crafting the conditions for success: establishing a shared vision for literacy teaching and learning, building a culture of collaboration, and developing strong, affirming relationships with your principal, with teachers, and with other coaches.

Help the Group Become a Team

A group may form for reasons as random as having the same ZIP code or riding the same subway line to work each day. But a team? That's something different. When you join a team, you implicitly agree to support common values and beliefs, to help others thrive so the team will excel, and to do what is needed to achieve stated goals. On a team, everyone wants the same outcomes and everyone is pulling in the same direction. All schools consist of a group of educators working in the same building. Your job is to help that group become a team.

This important process will better enable educators to achieve coherence in curriculum goals and instructional practices so students and teachers can benefit from the collective efficacy that drives long-lasting change and transforms the school culture. When you foster teamwork, you begin to notice an important

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language shift by the teachers—away from "my" students and "my" scores to "our" students and "our" scores. Additionally, team members come to realize that they are smarter together. As members of a team, the teachers in your school not only make the commitment to their own professional growth but also value and enjoy contributing to the learning of their peers.

Develop the Team's Vision for Literacy Teaching and Learning

When you have a common vision to guide your decisions, then all the different ways you interact with teachers will have a greater sense of purpose and cohesion because everyone wants the same outcomes for the students and each other. We recommend that, early in the year, you and your school principal bring together the classroom teachers and specialists in the building to revisit and amend their shared vision for literacy teaching and learning. In the following text, we briefly describe a process we have used for creating a shared vision in schools across the country. We invite you to use it in your own school. To guide the process, download Resource Tool: Authentic Literacy Classroom (available as **OR 2.1** in the Online Resources).

ONLINE RESOURCE 2.1

RESOURCE TOOL

AUTHENTIC LITERACY CLASSROOM

WHAT DO YOU SEE AND HEAR THE CHILDREN DOING?	WHAT MATERIALS ARE NEEDED IN THE CLASSROOM?	WHAT WILL TEACHERS NEED TO TEACH THIS WAY?
▪ listening to books and poems the teacher is reading aloud ▪ sitting in comfortable places to enjoy their independent reading ▪ reading and talking about books in a small group with the teacher ▪ recommending books to each other ▪ choosing books from a classroom library ▪ talking with each other about their books and their unique perspectives (in pairs, in small groups, and as a whole group) ▪ sharing their thinking about texts through drawing, writing, performance ▪ keeping a record of books they have read and a list of books they want to read in their reader's notebook ▪ participating in explicit, systematic, and structured phonics/word study lessons using a variety of manipulatives ▪ applying phonics/word study principles in reading and writing ▪ playing games with letters, sounds, and word parts ▪ listening to books individually at a listening center ▪ reading enlarged-print books, poems, and songs with the support of the teacher ▪ reading print and digital texts ▪ writing for a variety of real purposes and audiences ▪ writing in a variety of genres or forms ▪ writing in a reader's notebook to express their thinking about books ▪ collecting their writing ideas in writer's notebooks ▪ making sketches in their writer's notebooks ▪ creating multimodal presentations ▪ using printed and digital research tools to learn about a topic	▪ beautiful picture books for reading aloud ▪ multiple copies of books for book clubs ▪ multiple copies of leveled books for small-group reading ▪ some decodable books for skills practice as needed ▪ enlarged-print versions of books, poems, and songs for shared reading ▪ hundreds of books in the classroom for the children to choose from, arranged by titles, genres, authors, and topics ▪ baskets or tubs for a classroom library ▪ high-quality books and other media that represent a variety of people ▪ personal book boxes for each student ▪ devices for collaboration, research, reading, writing, creating, and presenting ▪ a reader's notebook and a writer's notebook for each child ▪ two easels; unlined chart paper ▪ pocket charts ▪ individual whiteboards and dry-erase markers for each child ▪ pocket folders to organize and store word study activities ▪ letters in a variety of textures, styles, and sizes ▪ variety of manipulatives for phonics learning ▪ sticky notes ▪ long, thin pointers for shared reading ▪ magnetic letters and word cards ▪ various writing tools ▪ variety of paper for writing ▪ pocket folders to collect and organize pieces of writing ▪ markers, pens, art paper ▪ bookmaking materials ▪ rug for meeting area ▪ comfortable seating for meeting area ▪ tables that can be arranged flexibly ▪ movable seating (e.g., chairs on wheels)	▪ a written document that clearly articulates the literacy competencies that children need to be successful (curriculum goals) ▪ a strong understanding of the research on language and literacy development (including phonological awareness) and its implications for instruction ▪ a clearly articulated vision of every student's literacy learning opportunities ▪ a collaborative culture that supports risk-taking and continuous improvement ▪ professional books and resources ▪ many professional learning opportunities: workshops, institutes, seminars ▪ opportunities to observe each other teach and reflect with each other ▪ opportunities to work with a literacy coach or teacher leader ▪ time to plan and reflect together ▪ assessments that measure students' authentic reading and writing ▪ collegial partnerships with school leaders ▪ expertise for making instructional decisions that are responsive to students' needs ▪ tools for reflecting on teaching ▪ time to collaborate

Online Resource 2.1 | Resource Tool: Authentic Literacy Classroom **Version 01**

Figure 2–1

Process for Developing a Shared Vision

The questions below correspond to the three columns in Figure 2–1. Create a three-column chart that everyone can see, so on chart paper, an interactive whiteboard, or a computer. Title your chart *Ideal Literacy Classroom*. As the team begins to call out answers for each category, enter each one in the appropriate column. Wait to move on to the next column until you have finished filling out the column you are working in.

- **Column 1:** *In an ideal classroom, what would children be doing during literacy time? What would this look and sound like?*
  - List concrete, observable evidence of what team members most want to see and hear children doing in an ideal literacy classroom. Ask the team what they notice about the descriptors. Are there any that feel at odds with the team's collective vision?
- **Column 2:** *What books, resources, and materials would teachers need to make this vision a reality in their classrooms?*
  - Ask the team to imagine the school has an unlimited budget to purchase all the materials needed for this ideal classroom. What materials are needed for systematic phonics and word study? What resources will help students build their knowledge of the world? What books are needed for whole-group, small-group, and individual reading instruction? What writing supplies and tools are essential? What furniture and technology are needed?
- **Column 3:** *What professional learning will teachers need to teach this way?*
  - At this point in the process, change the name of the chart from *Ideal Literacy Classroom* to *Authentic Literacy Classroom* as you have likely described students engaged in real reading, real writing, and real learning.
  - Ask the team to imagine stepping into the authentic literacy classroom and picture what they will need from their professional learning experiences to be able to teach this way and for students to engage in authentic learning and achieve excellent outcomes.

Our experience indicates that this exercise will help you and your colleagues gain insight into what you truly value as a team. This shared vision will serve as a foundation for your discussions related to common values, beliefs, and goals for your team. To move from this shared vision to an articulated set of set of core values that guide your work, we encourage you to take the next step in your leadership and refer you to a detailed protocol for developing core values with your team (see sidebar).

Getting from Your Team's Vision to a Set of Common Values

Using the brainstormed ideas generated for the authentic literacy classroom as a foundation, engage your team in a process of articulating the few essential values and beliefs they hold for the students and for themselves as members of a team of educators. The set of common values will guide decision-making around instruction, materials, assessment, and professional learning. We offer you a step-by-step protocol to create the set of core values in *Leading for Literacy* (Fountas and Pinnell 2022, 30). The time you spend working collaboratively for coherence and excellence will have a long-term impact on the outcomes in your school.

Build a Culture of Collaboration

In a positive school culture, educators believe in themselves, their team, and every student. They not only value and promote the identities and perspectives of all the children they serve but also of one another. Diverse voices are welcomed, actively invited, and sought out. When all members in a community feel valued and trusted, everyone is all in, and people are more willing to put in the hard work of problem-solving together and raising expectations for continued school improvement.

Teacher learning is facilitated when the school in which they work is a "learning place" (Fullan and St. Germain 2006). By that, we mean a school where students,

teachers, coaches, and administrators are learning all the time, every day. If you want your school to be a learning place, or just a better version of the learning place it already is, be advised that radical transformation in your school culture or even small improvements in collaborative learning can take time. But the payoff is well worth the effort, because in learning places, the following statements are true:

- People are willing to share with trusted colleagues their successes as well as their difficulties.
- Conversations about everyday topics and professional topics flow through the day.
- People expect to and take delight in learning something new.
- Learning is shared across the school.
- The school community sets goals for their professional learning every year and actively seeks the resources needed to boost their expertise.
- Nobody is afraid to identify a problem and work with colleagues to solve it.
- Everyone welcomes coaching (including the coach!) and the opportunity to have another person's eyes on their teaching.
- Everyone seeks out opportunities to expand their expertise through a variety of professional learning opportunities.
- Individuals take responsibility for their own learning and for helping others.

As a coach, you can promote this positive school culture by setting up situations in which colleagues have opportunities to learn alongside and from one another. Though you might be the only person in the school with the title of coach, you'll also want to encourage capable colleagues to take on leadership roles. For example, you might ask a colleague to lead a professional book club or work with you to design a professional learning session. Because when everyone believes that each person has something to offer, and people believe they have more to learn, collaboration is inevitable. Educators are then more willing to open their doors and share with one another. If everyone is invited to share expertise and everyone also invites feedback (again, including the coach), the playing field is leveled, and trust develops genuinely. Singh (2024) writes, "A culture which reflects that everyone deserves a coach because everyone deserves to grow, transform, and support the positive impact of student achievement is an imperative message that must be made loud and clear in order to help make shifts in teacher practice."

Strengthen or Build Relationships

Even if the culture in your school is highly collaborative, you'll still need to nurture relationships that can influence your thinking about teaching and learning and strengthen the learning outcomes of the adult learners in the building.

Don't Take Trust for Granted

Galinsky and Schweitzer (2015, 197) warn that trust should not be taken for granted. "In an age where it's all too easy to get lured into a sense of false intimacy created through social media and email, real trust can be a rare commodity." The pair go on to point out that people who inspire the most trust possess two important traits–warmth and competence.

We offer these principles for building trust:

- Always keep your word.
- Follow through on your promises, but don't over-promise.
- Don't share confidential information.
- Always be respectful.
- Assume positive intentions.
- Have difficult conversations in person, not by email or on the phone.

Coach-Teacher Relationships

Fostering a culture of collaboration built on trust begins with the way you interact and talk with your colleagues. If you communicate and work as a true partner, you can be another set of eyes and ears in the classroom and someone who promotes confidence, risk-taking, agency, and the pursuit of continuous learning. To make this partnership work, it is essential that you develop trusting relationships with your colleagues. Singh (2024) also writes, "When coaching is utilized in its truest form, the coach works to develop a plan with the teacher based on student and teacher needs and engages in a cycle of goal setting, inquiry, and improvement which is grounded in partnership and trust. Teachers will resist when coaching is done 'to them' versus it being done 'for them.'" Teachers need to see coaches as nonevaluative and as a support in reaching their own professional goals.

Both the coach and the teacher need to work at developing the coaching relationship. When teachers and coaches work side by side, they are truly partners working to make positive changes for students. They aren't afraid to take risks together and learn from one another because it is a learning experience, not a test of whether the teacher is implementing the coach's ideas. Teachers should never feel like they have to put on a show for you. One coach we know tells her teachers, "Bring me your messiest; let's work through it together. I won't necessarily have answers, but two heads together will be better than one." It is in the "messy situations" that real collaboration and real change happen.

You and the teacher need to trust each other to be vulnerable to work on real issues together. To develop this trust, the teacher-coach partnership needs to be nurtured. Trust requires face-to-face discussions and demands that each party offers feedback on how the coaching experiences are going. Establish from the beginning that you want to hear feedback, and then provide opportunities for it. You can also nurture this partnership by proactively thinking of ways to support teachers outside of professional learning situations (Figure 2–2).

Ways to Nurture the Coach-Teacher Relationship

- Send encouraging emails and texts or leave short messages on sticky notes.
- Share a book or an article with an individual teacher who could benefit from reading about a topic that you know is of interest.
- Recognize small things that took a lot of work in the classroom by asking permission to share the work with colleagues. Take a quick photo on your phone and send it around by email or text.
- Invite teachers to attend a conference or workshop with you even if it can be only one teacher a year.
- Engage in conversation as you travel to workshops, eat meals together, attend social events, etc.

Figure 2–2

Coach-Principal Relationship

Your relationship with your principal is another collaborative partnership that supports effective coaching. A successful partnership is built on a clear foundation of each other's values, beliefs, and goals and on an understanding of your respective roles. In schools where coaching is effective, the coach and

principal work together to create a culture that supports enthusiasm for professional learning opportunities. Much of the preparation to create and support that culture will be done in one-on-one meetings (Figure 2–3). You and your principal should help each other understand school-wide conditions that affect teachers and address problems and progress. The administrator must set the tone by emphasizing that every professional has more to learn and that everyone in the school (including the principal and the coach) will be coached in some capacity. Coaches are then left to concentrate on supporting the teachers and are removed from setting expectations for teacher participation.

Following are some other things you can do to ensure that the relationship you have with your principal is positive and productive.

Invite the principal to watch you work. This one packs a one-two punch—first, by visibly showing that everyone in the school will be observed and coached, including you; second, by giving your principal the chance to better appreciate your skills and the impact of your work with teachers.

Invite the principal to attend professional learning sessions. Nothing says "everybody is a learner" better than the sight of the school's leader engaging in a learning opportunity along with everyone else.

Share the self-reflection tools from Chapter 26. Identify a section you are working on, and ask your principal to observe you and discuss their observations.

HOW TO HAVE PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS WITH YOUR PRINCIPAL

Try to schedule short, efficient meetings (thirty to forty minutes) every two weeks or at least monthly to establish continuous coach-principal communication and collaboration around your professional-learning goals. Here's how to make sure the meetings go well.

Prepare an agenda with teacher input.

Being organized for the important issues you'll discuss at these meetings promotes productive collaboration.

Discuss important issues such as:

- **updates on progress toward learning goals,**
- **plans for future professional learning,**
- **priorities the teachers are working on,**
- **trends in the data,**
- **resources needed, and**
- **policies that need revisiting.**

Send a summary containing specific action items.

Maintain confidentiality.

- **Provide updates on the kinds of work teachers are doing.**
- **Never name teachers without their express permission.**

Figure 2–3

Check in to discuss needs for coverage in classrooms during out-of-classroom learning sessions for teachers. Try to provide your principal with a long-range view of the plans you've made for professional learning experiences that will require classroom coverage. It would be great if your schedule could always be the same—but things do happen. If you find yourself needing to cancel a session and reschedule, make sure the principal is aware so you can get some help with adjusting schedules.

Don't be afraid to ask for resources. Your principal may have a budget line for professional resources—books, journals, online subscriptions, and the like—but you may not know that unless you ask. Advocate for even a small amount of funds to support the purchase of professional resources. A library of current professional books is always helpful. There may be one book each year that every teacher should read or discuss in a professional book club (see Chapter 17).

Encourage the principal to be on the lookout for professional opportunities for teachers. There may be district meetings a few teachers could attend or school-wide projects that would foster collaboration. There may be opportunities for teachers to observe in other schools or to make presentations at local, state, or national educational conferences. We don't want teachers to be out of the classroom for more than a few days a year, but occasional opportunities like those we've described here can help develop the leadership potential of your colleagues.

Clarify with the principal your understanding of confidentiality. As you partner with your principal, be sure to politely but firmly maintain your commitment to teacher confidentiality so your colleagues can trust that you will not discuss their teaching with others. Think about language that might make your point clear if you find yourself in a situation that calls for you to restate the importance of your trusting relationships with the colleagues you coach (Figure 2–4).

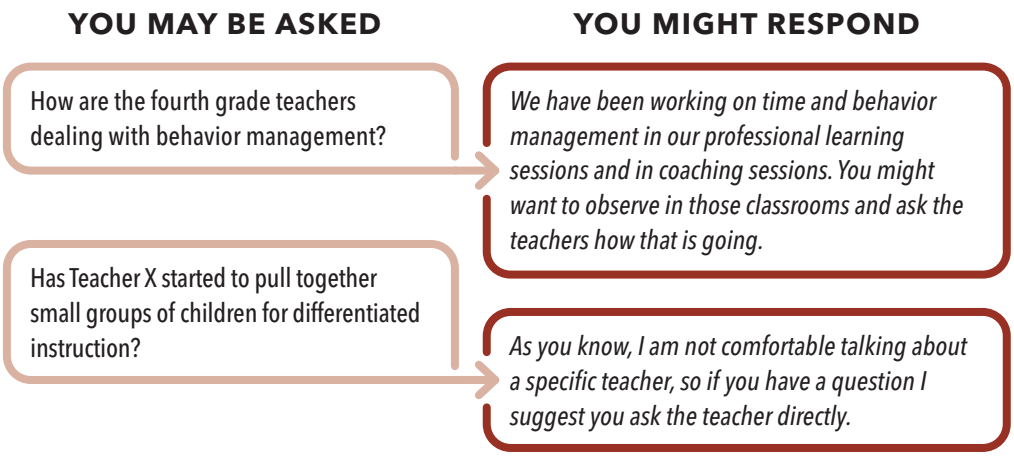

Figure 2–4

This value also applies to positive statements about a teacher. When you say Teacher X is doing really well in using a writers' workshop structure, you are talking about a teacher's performance and compromising confidentiality.

Stick to communicating the names of the teachers you are currently coaching and the content the team is working on. Your ability to communicate gracefully and clearly with your principal and teacher colleagues will provide a strong foundation for creating a positive learning culture resulting in long-term improvement in teacher expertise and student outcomes.

Coach–Coach Relationships

It takes time to build a network of other coaches with whom you can connect when you're feeling the need for support, but it is worth the effort. After all, who better to give expert advice, offer a different perspective, or celebrate your triumphs than another coach? Let's face it: coaching can be isolating. But if you take the time to build even a very small network of coaching colleagues within your school, district, or region, you will always have someone to call when you might benefit from another voice. Not only that, but a network of coaches can be a source of professional growth, effective instructional practices, shared resources, and friendship.

We urge you to find a partnership or a larger group that will nurture and sustain you as a coach. If there are no coaches to work with in your own school or district, seek other ways to connect with people who do what you do. Building a network of coaching colleagues is one of the best ways to keep growing as a coach.

Ways to Connect with Other Instructional Coaches

- Reach out to coaches in your district, even if they work in a different grade-level band.
- Look for virtual coaching networks. Many blogs and professional organizations host professional learning opportunities for coaches.
- If you are the only coach in your district, reach out to coaches in other local districts:
  - Offer to host monthly or quarterly meetings.
  - Read and discuss professional books and articles together.
  - Share ideas based on a topic or theme.
  - Share information from conferences or workshops you've each attended.
  - Try to attend conferences or professional learning sessions together.

Up **Next**

Chapter 3 provides essential information that will add to the knowledge base you already bring to your interactions with colleagues. We'll discuss the difference between professional development and professional learning; how adults learn best; coaching for equity; what every coach must know about curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and why it's important to celebrate success.