



As tutors, reading specialists help students one-on-one.

And as peer coaches, they help colleagues expand their understanding of teaching literacy.

From San Diego to Boston, more districts across the country are hiring school-based reading specialists to improve student literacy — and using literacy as the basis for school reform. With the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which requires that children read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade, the emphasis on reform through literacy has even higher stakes. Reading specialists may play an integral role in these efforts.

In three urban, high-poverty San Diego schools, reading specialists have helped improve achievement. For example, 41% of 2nd graders at Rosa Parks Elementary School read at grade level in 2002, compared with 18% in 1998. The elementary school has met the state's target for student achievement on standardized test scores each of the last four years. Hoover High School met its target two of the past three years, a feat not accomplished in

Dual role of the urban reading specialist

BY DIANE LAPP, DOUGLAS FISHER, JAMES FLOOD, AND NANCY FREY

the previous decade, and the average reading scores for 9th graders increased by two years during each of the past three school years. These achievements are due in part to the input of each school's reading specialist.

Reading specialists have the knowledge and experience to assist with students' literacy in general, and particularly to help struggling readers. Reading specialists support, supplement, and extend classroom teaching; are specialized in assessing reading levels and using that data to plan appropriate instruction; and provide leadership, acting as a resource for parents and colleagues (International Reading Association, 2000).

Some are classroom teachers who have extensive literacy training and expertise, some tutor struggling readers either in classrooms or in pull-out programs, and others support colleagues as staff developers. Over the past five years, the authors have worked in three public urban San Diego schools to design and implement a university/school partnership that involves reading specialists in two roles: tutoring and professional development through peer coaching. As tutors, reading specialists help students not reading at grade level through one-to-one reading instruction. And as peer coaches, they provide information and model instruc-

tional strategies to colleagues who are working to expand their own understanding of teaching literacy.

A MODEL OF DUALITY

The partnership schools are in an area where the average family income is below \$16,000. The schools serve 1,500 elementary, 1,500 middle school, and 2,200 high school students, and of these, 100% receive free or reduced-price lunch. The ethnic composition of the schools is very diverse. Despite factors that might put these students at risk of not achieving, literacy is improving. In each school, the reading specialist both works with students and coaches paraprofessionals and teacher colleagues.

WORKING WITH STUDENTS

The reading specialist spends about 40% of the workweek tutoring struggling readers the classroom teacher has identified through formal

and informal assessments. The children get this one-to-one reading instruction in the classroom during independent reading, small group guided reading, or center time. If the classroom teacher's instructional plan does not accommodate individualized instruction, or if the student isn't comfortable with being tutored in the class-

room, the reading specialist works in a pull-out program. Generally, students in grades K-4 work with the reading specialist in the regular classroom, but students in grades 5-12 prefer working outside the classroom because they are more aware of peer attitudes.

These three schools, like many urban schools, have far more students who need one-to-one help than can

be helped by reading specialists alone, so the principals reassigned Title 1-funded aides to the reading specialists. The specialists taught, supported, and monitored the aides, who provided one-to-one instruction for as many students as possible. By mentoring aides, the specialists' role expanded, yet they report that they still feel responsible for each student because they observe the student and tutor's interactions and debrief with the tutor about the student's performance and the next steps in their assessment and instruction. This type of tutoring is called a ride along because the specialist works with lay staff members to schedule their work times, provides them with information about reading instruction, and supervises their interactions with students.

Data from the partnership schools suggest that struggling readers who receive individual instruction for regular, short periods of time experience continual reading growth (Frey, 2003). These findings are consistent with others who compared the progress of 118 students, some of whom received one-to-one instruction while others received small group instruction (Vellutino & Scanlon, 2001). Their data suggest students who received one-to-one individualized reading instruction had greater gains. Lay tutors at our target schools also report that their confidence and knowledge levels increase as they participate in this layered learning experience.

Specialists' learning: For this layered instruction to be successful, read-

ing specialists must continue their own professional learning. During their graduate programs, most reading specialists work in a clinical setting with individual students and learn about assessment, diagnosis, and instruction. At the partner schools, university faculty and district language arts consultants build on this knowledge by conducting their own ride alongs with the school reading specialists as the specialists work with students and paraprofessionals. After observing the reading specialist during a ride along, the university faculty or district consultant meets with the reading specialist to talk about the specialist's supervision and instruction. Principals in the partner schools also meet with school reading specialists to discuss supervision and leadership issues. These management skills are new for many specialists because they have only recently come from the classroom and are not used to supervising others and dealing with the complexities of administration.

WITH TEACHERS AS COACHES

Tutoring at-risk students and using lay tutors are not enough to build a school's overall literacy capacity. Every teacher must provide quality literacy instruction to children. Working as peer literacy coaches in each classroom, reading specialists can help teachers improve their instruction.

Peer coaching is a multifaceted role that involves talking with teachers about specific instruction techniques

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Rosa Parks Elementary School

San Diego, CA

Grades: K-5

Enrollment: 1,500

Staff: 83 teachers

Racial/ethnic mix:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| White: | 2% |
| Black: | 6% |
| Hispanic: | 80% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander: | 11% |
| Native American: | 0% |
| Other: | 1% |

Limited English proficient: 73%

Languages spoken: 39, including Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali

Free/reduced lunch: 100%

Special education: 11%

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Monroe Clark Middle School

San Diego, CA

Grades: 6-8

Enrollment: 1,500

Staff: 88 teachers

Racial/ethnic mix:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| White: | 3% |
| Black: | 12% |
| Hispanic: | 68% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander: | 16% |
| Native American: | 0% |
| Other: | 1% |

Limited English proficient: 50%

Languages spoken: 39, including Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali

Free/reduced lunch: 100%

Special education: 12%

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Hoover High School

San Diego, CA

Grades: 9-12

Enrollment: 2,150

Staff: 120 teachers

Racial/ethnic mix:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| White: | 5% |
| Black: | 19% |
| Hispanic: | 61% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander: | 15% |
| Native American: | 0% |
| Other: | 0% |

Limited English proficient: 51%

Languages spoken: 30, including Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali

Free/reduced lunch: 100%

Special education: 11%

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for a particular child, providing resources and demonstrating lessons to expand the teacher's instructional knowledge base, and conducting book clubs to enhance teachers' professional development.

Conversations. Peer coaches spend about 20% of their time in reflective conversations with teachers. Coaches are teacher-partners. They plan and reflect on a lesson's effectiveness, model instructional strategies, and provide feedback in a nonthreatening way (Gottesman, 1994). Classroom teachers often are willing to have conversations with the peer coach that they would not feel comfortable having with their site administrator, district consultants, or university faculty.

Specialists' learning: The professional development needed to be an effective peer coach differs from the professional development needed to provide one-to-one instruction. In addition to understanding the reading process and how to assess, diagnose, and plan individualized instruction, the peer coach needs to develop the skills to open reflective conversations, actively listen, and establish trusting, congenial relationships with the classroom teacher. The district language

arts consultant, a university faculty member, or a lead reading specialist can support the reading specialist in developing this capacity to coach.

Demonstration lessons. The reading specialists in San Diego were chosen because of their ability to plan and carry out literacy lessons. At the partner schools, reading specialists spend about 10% of their time demonstrating lessons in teachers' classrooms. The district hires substitute teachers to cover classes so several teachers can watch the lesson demonstration and then talk with the reading specialist. The reading specialist provides a rationale for the curriculum and instruction and talks with the observing teachers about instructional decisions. Classroom teachers often invite the specialists to model lessons in their classrooms, picking a topic based on their own needs.

Specialists' learning: Reading specialists rarely need additional professional development to be able to model lessons because most have experienced being observed, but they may need help at first in how to facilitate a conversation while making sure each observer feels comfortable talking about the lesson.

Staff development sessions.

The reading specialists also coordinate regular professional learning sessions. The reading specialists invite teachers to the school to share and model successful instruction. For teachers to grow professionally, they should have the opportunity for professional learning sessions at least once every two weeks on targeted issues. The specialists spend about 20% of their time in the critical aspects of planning and preparing for these sessions. Much of this time is spent helping teachers prepare to present in front of their peers.

Professional book clubs. The reading specialists organize a book club focused on literacy development (see the list below of recent selections), acting either as a facilitator or as a club member. The reading specialist may be a member of several book clubs based on grade level emphases or teachers' interests. In book clubs, teachers meet, talk,

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reflect, and begin to use new approaches to literacy instruction.

Specialists' learning: Most reading specialists need professional development in two areas to successfully complete this part of their job. First, they need support to explore and understand adult learning theories. And although they are teachers, they may not have differentiated between teaching students and presenting to adults. The San Diego partnership reading specialists learn presentation skills such as how to engage an audience, effectively add audiovisual materials, prepare useful handouts, and handle difficult audience members.

CONCLUSIONS

The International Reading Association called several years ago for every school to have a reading specialist on staff to address the wide range

Most urban educators view the reading specialist as a necessary team member, and they see the specialists' role as including instruction, assessment, collaboration, consultancy, leadership, and student advocacy. That expanded role adds to a positive school climate, building capacity and creating a community of learners.

of literacy levels that exist in each classroom. Unfortunately, many reading programs across the U.S. operate without reading specialists (Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001). More unfortunately, fewer reading specialists may be assigned to individual schools as diminishing funding causes schools to reassign specialists' responsibilities to paraprofessionals (Long, 1995).

Yet most urban educators view the reading specialist as a necessary team member, and they see the specialists' role as including instruction, assessment, collaboration, consultancy, leadership, and student advocacy. That expanded role adds to a positive school climate, building capacity and creating a community of learners among students, colleagues, and lay tutors.

Recent book club titles

- **Bear, D.R., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. (2000).** *Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- **Buss, K. & Karnowski, L. (2000).** *Reading and writing literary genres.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- **Flood, J., Lapp, D., Squire, J., & Jensen, J. (Eds.). (2003).** *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- **Herrell, A.L. (2000).** *Fifty strategies for teaching English language learners.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- **Jago, C. (2002).** *Cohesive writing: Why concept is not enough.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- **Kozol, J. (1996).** *Amazing Grace: The lives of children and the conscience of a nation.* New York: Harper Perennial.
- **McDonald, N. & Fisher, D. (2002).** *Developing arts-loving readers: Top 10 questions teachers are asking about integrated arts education.* Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.
- **Mooney, J. & Cole, D. (2000).** *Learning outside the lines.* New York: Simon & Schuster.
- **Moss, B. (2003).** *25 Strategies for guiding readers through informational texts.* San Diego: Academic Professional Development.
- **Salus, P. & Flood, J. (2002).** *Language: A user's guide.* San Diego: Academic Professional Development.
- **Wong, H.K. & Wong, R.T. (2001).** *First days of school: How to be an effective teacher.* Mountain Glen: Wong Productions.
- **Worthy, J., Broaddus, K., & Ivey, G. (2001).** *Pathways to independence: Reading, writing, and learning in grades 3-8.* New York: Guilford.

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Long, R. (1995, August/

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Vellutino, R.F. & Scanlon, D.M. (2001). Emergent literacy skills, early instruction, and individual differences as determinants of difficulties in learning to read: The case for early intervention. In S.B. Neuman & D.K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 295-321). New York: Guilford. ■