Learning facilitator

Designs, implements, and evaluates collective and individual, job-embedded, standards-based professional learning in a collaborative environment.

In this role, coaches plan and implement a wide range of learning opportunities for teachers in either *structured and planned* or *naturally occurring* learning designs to develop teachers' capacity for effective teaching. While coaches facilitate learning in every interaction with teachers, this role relates to the planned forms of professional learning in which the coach structures the learning experience for teachers. Some types of structured professional learning include action research, classroom walks, conference presentations, constructing portfolios, or examining student work samples, face-to-face courses, lesson studies, online courses, seminars, webinars, and workshops. Naturally occurring forms of professional learning include conversations and unscheduled drop-in visits.

Sometimes learning facilitators work with individual teachers, learning communities or other teams of teachers, or the whole school faculty to facilitate professional learning.

This chapter focuses on the role of learning facilitator in general. Chapter 15 Team Coaching provides more details on how a coach interacts with teams whether in learning or in other forms of teamwork.

As learning facilitators, coaches engage teachers in building their professional knowledge, skills, and practices. The definition of professional learning included in the Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015 and informed by Learning Forward (2015) describes professional learning experiences that

> (A) are an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators (including teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, paraprofessionals, and, as applicable, early childhood educators) with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to

meet the challenging State academic standards; and (B) are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused, and **may include [various]** activities. (para. 2–3)

Learning facilitators support teachers in several ways

In the role of learning facilitator, coaches have several key responsibilities:

- Serve as a trainer, presenter, or facilitator of professional learning for individuals, teams, or whole faculty;
- Support teachers to develop their capacity to become learning facilitators;
- Coordinate, communicate about, or support teachers in learning about school-, district-, or community-based professional learning related to the school improvement goal, school or district initiatives, or individual or team needs or goals;
- Support implementation of new learning in individual classrooms, team settings, or schoolwide initiatives;
- Contribute information to the district about the learning needs of teachers within the school;
- Contribute to the development, implementation, and evaluation of the school's professional learning plan.

Learning facilitators find that designing learning for teachers is an exciting and motivating way for coaches to engage with teachers. Often it is their "foot in the door" to future work with individual teachers on teams of teachers. In their work as learning facilitators, coaches thoughtfully apply the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) and particularly attend to the Learning Designs and

Implementation standards (see definitions of both standards in Chapter 1, p. 10).

Coaches serving as learning facilitators support teachers in implementing new learning and refining it until it becomes routine practice. Donna Micheaux (2016) notes that, "Job-embedded professional learning allows teachers to improve their practice in an authentic setting and promotes buy-in at a faster pace" (p. 48).

The professional learning standards and research by Joyce and Showers cited in Chapter 1 reminds coaches that implementation support is essential to help teachers transfer learning to practice. Providing a structure and opportunity for all teachers to receive implementation support as they learn new skills is essential to reaching a high level of implementation with any new learnings (see Tool 8.1).

To help teachers learn new instructional strategies, coaches may use blended learning or face-to-face instruction, facilitate whole school study groups, lead critical friends' groups, conduct learning walks across classrooms, coordinate action research teams, facilitate lesson study groups, or support professional learning teams in using text-analysis protocols. Because coaches facilitate different types of learning experiences, this role gives them a rich array of supports for teacher learning (see Tool 8.2). Coaches recognize the importance of knowing and using a variety of learning designs to address the factors that influence teacher success. Even more importantly perhaps, they align educator learning with school improvement goals, team goals for student learning, teachers' individual professional growth goals, learning preferences of teachers, teacher experience and background with the learning, and teacher motivation to learn.

As experts on professional learning, coaches use professional learning to leverage growth in teacher practice and student

Figure 8.1: Backmapping Model for Planning Results-Based Professional Learning
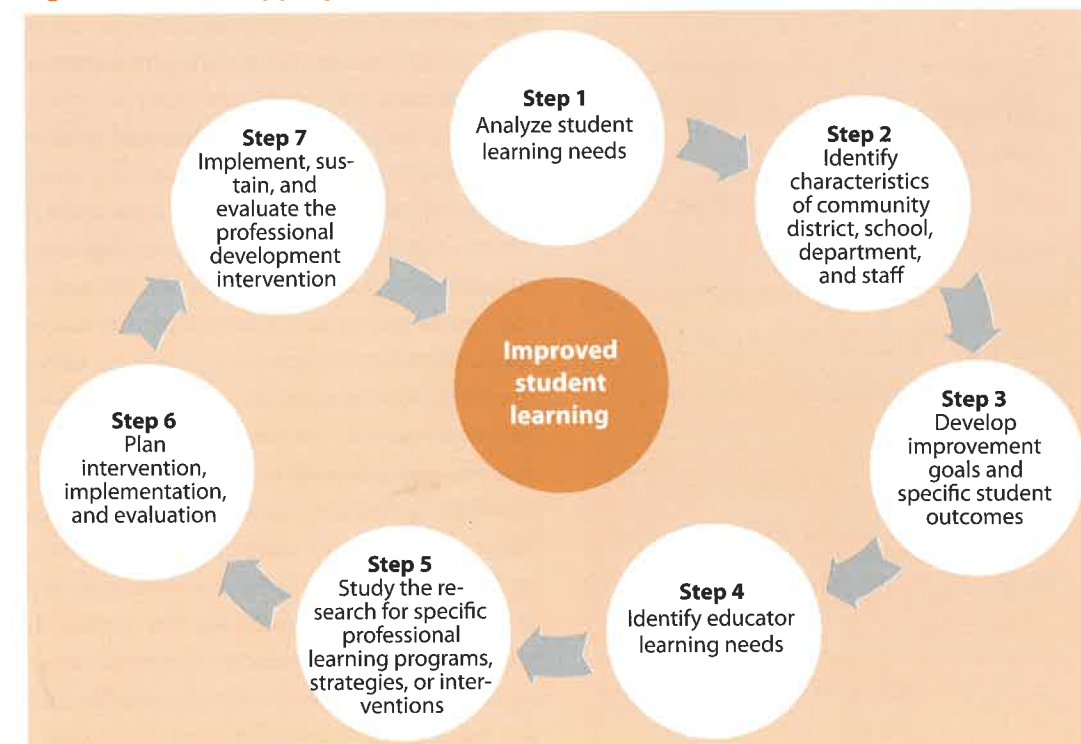
Source: Adapted from *Becoming a Learning School* by J. Killion and P. Roy. NSDC, 2009.

learning. Coaches partner with the principal, school improvement team, school leadership team, and grade-level or department teams to co-design effective ways to structure professional learning so that they can use team and whole-school learning time effectively. This partnership is a pivotal part of the professional learning coaches facilitate to move the school forward. Collaborative work among teachers is essential to reduce variance in the quality of teaching and promotes whole-school growth. When whole teams or the entire faculty join together with the coach to implement new initiatives or instructional practices, there is a higher level of implementation and more opportunity for student success.

Coaches apply the Backmapping Model (Killion & Roy, 2009) to plan, implement, and

evaluate professional learning (see Figure 8.1). The model outlines a process that the coach may use when designing professional learning. Or, the coach may teach the process to others, such as the school leadership team, to use when they develop the school's improvement plan.

Many coaches coordinate professional learning experiences for teachers in their schools on topics related to curriculum, assessment, and instruction. When professional learning is needed, the coach organizes it in such a way that teachers are active participants in experiences related directly to their specific professional learning needs, the content, and the students they teach. Coaches also act on the belief that teachers learn best with and from one another and organize frequent opportunities for teachers to do so. For example,

"I found that the information we reviewed about powerful designs was truly beneficial in arming me with some very powerful tools to support our teachers as we all move forward in our school change model. Part of my Plan of Action is to include a number of the design models as I develop and implement professional development for our school. I am excited to have such powerful tools at my disposal to develop more successful and meaningful learning opportunities for our staff."

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coaches might organize opportunities such as brown-bag lunches, book studies, mini-presentations, teacher-led workshops, Pecha Kucha, TED Talks, or other forms of interactive, dynamic learning in which teachers share their best practices with one another. Coaches might also coordinate peer visits among teachers so they can learn from one another about effective teaching practices or observe how students respond to specific types of learning tasks. Coaches might facilitate various forms of learning walks with teams of teachers gathering data about practices related to a specific problem of practice that teachers have identified. Such forms of collaborative learning often occur within the school day in settings where teachers view their work as opportunities to

refine their practice (see Tool 8.3). Occasionally, the coach organizes professional learning by outside consultants because the expertise does not exist within the school.

Frequently, the coach provides just-in-time or at-the-elbow training to teachers in small groups or individually. When a new teacher wants assistance with a behavior management strategy for a student who is often disruptive, the coach may use a mini-lesson format to teach the novice teacher a simple and effective behavior management strategy and help her implement it consistently. If experienced teachers are teaching new standards such as the Next Generation Science Standards for the first time, the coach may meet with teachers to help them understand the standards and the content-specific pedagogy the standards require. If a teacher wants to expand her strategies for meeting the needs of students with limited English, the coach may teach the stages of language acquisition and describe how to use them in instruction. Once the teacher is familiar with the stages, the coach may shift to the role of classroom supporter. Using some of the instructional strategies, the coach co-teaches so the teacher becomes comfortable using them.

Ensuring that teachers have opportunities as well as skills for leadership in professional learning is another important focus on the coach's attention in this role. Often, the skills for a given strategy lie within the staff; the coach can help identify who possesses those skills and can help that teacher the confidence, opportunity, and support to work with other teachers.

A significant responsibility of coaches as learning facilitators is guiding learning teams to use a variety of forms of professional learning to support their own learning goals. Teachers may meet in small teams to examine student work, observe one another teaching a

lesson, engage in lesson study, shadow students, write in their journals, compile and share professional portfolios, or engage in other forms of professional learning (see Tool 8.4). Often facilitating learning within teams is a more efficient and effective way of supporting professionals as they learn and implement new practices (see Tool 8.5). Ellie Drago-Severson describes the value of collaborating in teams: "Teaming has great value for the school as a whole, supporting the goal of making it a richer learning and growth-enhancing context" (p. 75). Dion Burns and Linda Darling-Hammond (2014) report that teacher collaboration

> [a]ppeared as an important element of learning, influence on practice, and influence on job satisfaction and self-efficacy, which in turn related to teacher retention and effectiveness. … Actions that support collaborative learning among teachers appear to hold promise for improving the quality of teaching. (p. v)

Learning facilitators need certain knowledge, skills, and practices

Coaches use a large body of knowledge and skills to plan, coordinate, implement, and evaluate high-quality professional learning. Coaches offer professional learning so that teachers not only acquire new knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions, but also support members of a learning community to implement the learning in their classroom.

Coaches have a deep understanding of the standards for high-quality professional learning, research on change, powerful designs for professional learning, learning theories and models, and resources to support professional learning within the school, district, and beyond. In this role, coaches need to

"I learned that effective adult learning and teaching is:

1. **Political.** That is, it has to do with power and distribution of power both in the process and in the content selected.
2. **Problem-posing.** That is, it is a dialogue around adult themes using adult materials evoking affective, psychomotor, and cognitive responses.
3. **Part of a whole.** That is, it must have follow-up and continuity and not be a single event raising and then dashing hopes. In quantum terms, this celebrated the context of learning.
4. **Participative.** That is, everyone involved will have time to speak, to listen, and to be actively engaged in the learning.
5. **Person-centered.** That is, its purpose is the development of all the people involved, not merely the covering of content.
6. **Prepared.** That is, from the initial needs assessment through the use of Eight Steps of Planning through the design of materials, the learning is designed for this particular group of learners and time is used lavishly to make it ready."

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our-team/dr.-jane-vella

know and understand the tenets of and practices for collaborative learning since most teacher professional learning within schools occurs in teacher learning communities. Ellie Drago-Severson (2008) notes four practices that "support transformational learning or growth: teaming, providing others with leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring [or coaching]" (p. 62). Although Drago-Severson describes principal practices, they are applicable, as well, to coaches who serve as learning facilitators. Several main tenets of this work are important to understand. Jane Vella (2007), a leading authority on adult learning and particularly in dialogic education, recommends that learning facilitators honor the following principles in their work with adults: immediacy, respect, relevance, safety, engagement, and inclusion. Application of various learning theories asks learning facilitators to understand the background experiences that learners bring to learning and the contexts in which their learning will be used.

When facilitating formal, structured learning experiences such as those occurring in workshops, training, courses, conference sessions, or mini-lessons, the coach uses presentation skills. Presentation skills include planning, instruction, and assessment skills, in addition to building relationships with learners and motivating them to acquire and implement new practices. When working with teachers within team learning settings, a coach uses many of those same skills, but draws more on structuring and facilitating dialogue and team work, assessing needs of teachers and teams, maintaining safety for active engagement, following up with learners, meeting management skills, and communicating effectively. Because much of the learning that occurs in learning communities is informal and occurs during contract hours, coaches

use what they know about teacher practice to tap into the expertise and experiences of other teachers within the school and district. They also are knowledgeable about other resource personnel within and outside the school who may contribute to teachers' professional learning. For example, they may ask other coaches to recommend a classroom where their teachers can observe how other teachers are effectively integrating new practices or who may have been using the practices longer than they. They also blend the role of resource provider with learning facilitator to access web-based resources to support teacher learning. Coaches may find opportunities to use flipped learning, blended learning, and other innovative, interactive learning tools to support teacher professional learning.

The coach employs a variety of tools such as protocols to make teacher learning meaningful and focused on implementation of learning. This means that coaches link their role of learning facilitator with the role of classroom supporter to provide the coaching, extended learning, and problem solving needed to help teachers integrate new learning into their teaching practice. Coaches manage the transition from the role of learning facilitator to the role of classroom supporter as they create bite-size, real-time opportunities to give teachers information that will help them effectively implement new practices. Paul Bambrick-Santoyo (2013–2014) writes,

> Real-time feedback is the only way we can show new teachers how great teaching feels in action. When we model teaching techniques, we're merely showing them how it looks. When we get them to role-play those techniques, they discover how it feels, but only from the safety of the office or the conference room. … [I]t closes

the gap between rehearsal and reality. (p. 72)

Coaches as learning facilitators help teachers prioritize and sequence their learning to maximize the implementation of schoolwide and team-based strategies to achieve school improvement goals. This means that coaches engage teachers in identifying the focus for their work together as a team and individually with the coach. Ideally, teachers align this focus with school improvement goals, team goals, their individual professional growth goals, and their own level of knowledge and skills. Coaches guide professional learning communities (PLCs) to maintain a focus on their own learning so they can make an impact on student learning.

Essentially, when a coach steps into the role of learning facilitator whether it is with one colleague, a learning team, or the entire staff, he plans the learning outcomes both for educator practices and student learning. In doing so, he considers how to structure the experience to ensure that learning is successful, data-informed, and standards-driven. The coach as a learning facilitator considers teachers' diverse learning needs, learning styles, career stages, and background experiences in his planning. He may opt for examples to provide a variety of choices for ways to learn that might appeal to novice teachers and more experienced teachers. Using a planning template helps the coach to meet the intended outcomes based on the learners' needs, evidence of success, the type of learner engagement, and the sequence of the learning.

Another skill area for coaches is the effective use of technology as part of the learning. The actual learning of new information should be offered in a variety of formats including online self-paced options, face-to-face interactions, observation of other teachers, or

small-group learning together. Being adept at creating or using such learning designs means paying attention to Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning and being creative and innovative with online resources and other ways teachers can gain knowledge. It also means supporting teachers who are still afraid of the technology throughout the process of learning. Setting up web pages or blogs is an example of supporting teachers with a means of continuous dialogue as they implement.

Coaches believe that all teachers are capable of learning and changing instructional practices. Not giving up when they feel frustration with individual teachers or teams is important. Coaches would not let teachers give up on students; likewise, coaches refuse to give up on teachers' capacities to learn and change (see Table 8.1 on pages 86–87 to examine distinction of coaches' and teacher leaders' fixed and growth-oriented mindsets). Trying different strategies to effect adult learning is a critical skill for coaches, and perseverance is a characteristic of effective coaches.

Coaches as learning facilitators face challenges

Coaches face several challenges in this role. One challenge is keeping abreast of the wealth of new knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions teachers use to succeed in their profession. To be credible teachers of their peers, coaches who lead learning for their colleagues not only develop deep understanding of the content, but also have some experience with application.

Another challenge is aligning learning opportunities with both individual learner needs and school goals. Teachers without a strong sense of collective responsibility for student

success may be more concerned with their own interests and goals than with those of the whole school or team. Related to this, coaches may find that teachers prefer to pursue their own learning goals and learn alone rather than collaboratively. Coaches use two strategies to overcome these challenges. They find connections among individual, team, and school goals to enroll teachers in aligning their own learning needs with those of their colleagues and the school. They also design professional learning that includes opportunities for team members to contribute to one other's learning and support one another's implementation.

Coaches may occasionally be challenged to default to whole group, one-size-fits-all learning designs because they are easier to organize and manage than other designs. Training alone, which is a common, whole-group learning design, may be an ineffective method for learning if the goal is to change practice. Differentiating learning for teachers who may be at different stages in their careers, have different levels of understanding, or learn differently is challenging and time-consuming for coaches. Nevertheless, they respect all learners as individuals who want to succeed. Coaches often blend the role of learning facilitator with that of classroom supporter to support implementation in ways that change and refine teacher practice. Coaches may engage peers as partners in providing such support, although building their credibility and competence may require that partners undertake additional learning.

Assessing learning also challenges many coaches. Coaches often puzzle about knowing how to measure their colleagues' learning to determine when they are sufficiently ready to implement new learning successfully. Success

Table 8.1: Fixed and Growth Mindsets (based on Carol Dweck's work)

Coach's/Teacher Leader's Mindset TOWARD TEACHERS			
Mindset	A coach/teacher leader might believe:	A coach/teacher leader might:	A coach/teacher leader might:
Fixed	Not all teachers have the capacity to become highly effective. There is a limit to their teaching ability.	Hear a teacher make a negative statement about students and fail to respond because she believes this teacher will not change.	• Avoid adapting her leadership practices. • Avoid trying to help the teacher succeed. • Perceive comments about her leadership as personal attacks. • Make negative comments about other leaders who are successful leaders.
Growth	Every teacher has the capacity to become highly effective. There is no limit to his teaching ability.	Hear a colleague make a negative comment about a student and inquire without judgment. She might say, "I am curious to learn what you mean when you say …" or "I wonder what you want for your students."	• Engage all teachers in formal or informal professional learning. • Help all teachers to learn and grow. • Seek opportunities to engage in the feedback process. • Seek opportunities to observe and learn from successful leaders.

Coach's/Teacher Leader's Mindset TOWARD SELF			
Mindset	A coach/teacher leader might believe:	A coach/teacher leader might:	A coach/teacher leader might:
Fixed	She is not capable of learning how to lead adult learning better than she currently does. There is a limit to her leadership abilities.	Say to a colleague, after experiencing a conflict at a recent training, "I'll never be a successful leader because I can't handle conflict."	• Shut down when problems arise. • Fail to confront problems. • Avoid engaging in the feedback process. • Avoid investing into the team. • Feel intimidated by others who are more successful.
Growth	Is capable of learning how to facilitate adult learning more effectively and efficiently. There is no limit to her leadership ability.	Say to a colleague, after experiencing a conflict at a recent training, "I welcome an opportunity to learn how to address conflict more effectively." And at a subsequent meeting might say, "I realize that the conflict at our last session presented us from reaching our desired outcomes. Share your thoughts about what I can do as a trainer to improve how we approach a similar situation if it occurs."	• Perceive mistakes as opportunities to learn. • Reflect on practice. • Seek to engage in the feedback process. • Seek advice, guidance, and support from more experienced and effective trainers.

Source: Adapted from *The Skillful Team Leader: A Resource for Overcoming Hurdles to Professional Learning for Student Achievement* by Elisa MacDonald. Copyright 2013 Corwin.

in early implementation is a significant motivator for continued use of new practices. Coaches want to be sure that teachers have sufficient understanding of, skillfulness with, and confidence with new learning to be comfortable implementing the new learning.

Because coaches strive to build competence in others, they may face another challenge, namely relinquishing responsibility for structuring, organizing, and designing learning for others, encouraging others to take on the role of learning facilitators, and inspiring teams to be fully responsible for designing and implementing their own learning. Serving as a learning facilitator gives coaches a sense of contribution and success because it is a visible way to support the professional growth of their colleagues. Transferring responsibility for learning to others or teams is a difficult decision that coaches make, especially when the need and desire for learning is substantial such as in low-performing schools.

Conclusion

Coaches who work daily as learning facilitators with teachers have an advantage over others who provide professional learning: They have intimate understanding about the varied needs of teachers, can use that information to connect learning experiences directly to teachers' content and students, can provide personalized support for applying learning as a classroom supporter, and can see visible evidence of application of learning in classrooms and its effects on students. They also have the opportunity to scaffold learning over time rather than provide the occasional learning that occurs on few scheduled professional learning days. They can personalize learning designs and the types of implementation support for individuals and teams.

SNAPSHOT

A coach as a learning facilitator

Central High School* is in an affluent suburban area with 2100 students and 150 teachers. Most students perform at high levels on the state and national assessments. Students win a variety of awards including recognition as National Merit scholars. Most teachers feel a sense of accomplishment and do not have a great need to change their practice.

Carol Perez, a long-time physics teacher, is the new instructional coach at Central. She understands the school context and is increasingly aware of students who do not succeed. The percentage of low-performing students is low and most are high poverty and minority. In a recent survey, students stated they are bored and not challenged. Students cited teacher-centered classrooms as a common problem. Most students arrived at the high school from district middle schools where they enjoyed active learning strategies in student-centered classrooms.

In her close examination of local and national assessment data, she found that many students were not making significant growth in their learning. Perez anticipated that the lack of growth year-to-year would be a point that might stimulate conversation among teachers.

She brings together a group of teacher leaders to share her findings and invites them to work with her on the active learning initiative. The teacher leaders work with Perez to assess teachers' needs related to implementation of the initiative and to describe the necessary professional learning. The teacher leaders serve as ambassadors to roll out the professional learning plan and they agree to be the participants to give the plan a high level credibility. The teacher leaders also commit to working with Perez to problem solve and revise the plan as they move forward and to provide peer-to-peer support for implementation.

The central idea of the active learning initiative, one of the school's improvement goals, is to integrate technology into the classroom for instructional purposes and to promote student engagement. Not many teachers at Central are currently using technology and most don't have the knowledge and skill to begin. To start the process of teacher professional learning, Perez designs an array of learning experiences for teachers because she wants teachers to have multiple ways to access professional learning on active learning using technology. She designs an online, self-paced course. Teacher leaders agree to partner with anyone who wants to participate in the course. Perez offers to work with teachers individually or in teams to support completion of the self-paced course. One day a week during every class period, she or one of the teacher leader staff a drop-in center for teachers to come in with questions or other assistance. Perez provides a series of 90-minute workshops for teachers who prefer this form of learning. She sets up four demonstration classrooms in which teachers agree to have their peers visit to observe how they are implementing technology. Perez also offers to conduct demonstration lessons and co-teach with teachers. She conducts a lesson study with two departments that are ready to begin planning for implementation. The principal joins in the learning process by sharing a clear expectation for all staff to participate in some learning experience and to implement technology to engage students actively in learning. The principal sets a date for teachers to provide evidence of their use of strategies and offers several options for sharing evidence such as in a classroom observation, with student performance tasks, work samples, or products, peer observations, or another means.

Central High School's active learning initiative through the integration of technology has a high level of implementation in classrooms. Teacher leader engagement and shared responsibility for the initiative's success increase the visibility and credibility of the initiative. Teachers appreciate having choices in their own learning process and knowing what is expected of them related to the initiative.

Fictitious name and school

Tools index for Chapter 8		
Tool	**Title**	**Purpose**
8.1	**Integrating Standards for Professional Learning**	Use this guide to integrate Standards for Professional Learning into the planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning.
8.2	**Choosing a learning design**	Use this tool to explore and select professional learning designs to achieve a goal.
8.3	**Learning lab: Peer observations**	Use this tool to coordinate peer observations in another teacher's classroom to focus on specific instructional strategies.
8.4	**Collaborative assessment conference**	Use this tool to facilitate an examination of student work to promote reflection on instruction and student learning.
8.5	**Results-based coaching Lesson study**	Use this protocol to guide teachers in working collaboratively to design and observe instruction to improve instruction and increase collegiality.

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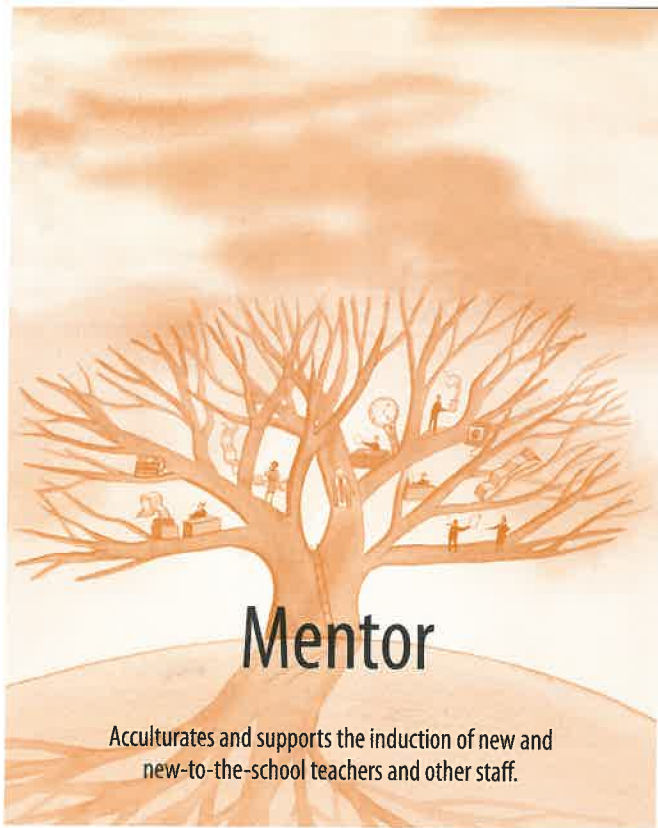
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Mentor

Acculturates and supports the induction of new and new-to-the-school teachers and other staff.

Coaches, in either a formal or informal role, mentor new teachers in their school. Depending on the number of new teachers in the school or district and expectations or requirements for support, this role can be a small or significant part of a coach's responsibilities.

The role of a mentor is a *both-and* role. As mentors, coaches provide the moral, emotional, and psychological support new professionals need so that they gain confidence and efficacy and a sense of belonging within a professional community. Coaches couple this role with other roles such as curriculum specialist, instructional specialist, learning facilitator, or classroom supporter to provide the professional support new or new-to-the-school teachers require. Because student success depends on teaching quality, it is especially important that new teachers develop the capacity to implement the school or district instructional framework and curricular program as quickly as possible so that their students' learning opportunities are not put on hold. Whether coaches serve directly as mentors to new teachers or new-to-the-school staff, or support other teachers who serve as mentors in the school, they contribute to the development of other professionals.

Mentors support teachers in several ways

Coaches may serve as mentors or coordinate and support others who serve as mentors within the school. Mentors ensure that new teachers and those new to the school or district are acclimated and acculturated into their new workplace. Acclimation, often referred to as orientation or on-boarding, is the process of helping a new employee understand the rules of the road, such as the schedule for the school day, where to find answers to questions about employment benefits, or procedures for performance reviews. This type of information is