

## Citation

---

Shaw, M. (2007). Preparing reading specialists to be literacy coaches: Principles, practices, possibilities. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* [Online], 3(1), 6-17.

---

## Preparing Reading Specialists to be Literacy Coaches: Principles, Practices, Possibilities

Michael L. Shaw  
St. Thomas Aquinas College  
[mshaw@stac.edu](mailto:mshaw@stac.edu)

My work as literacy specialist in supporting professional development within the district is multilayered. I work at the school level to provide professional development at monthly staff meetings to all teachers, creating a common understanding of best literacy practices. I facilitate teacher study groups so that teachers' individual professional development needs are met. In addition, I work with teachers and students in classrooms, supporting teachers as they implement new teaching strategies. (Allen, 2006, p.3)

Jennifer Allen (2006) gives voice to the multiple complex roles of the literacy specialist (sometimes called *reading specialist*) that often include both teaching students and being a literacy coach (sometimes called a *reading coach*) to teachers. Literacy coaching is a *very hot topic* in reading education according to a survey of 25 prominent literacy educators and researchers (Cassidy and Cassidy, 2007). While there are multiple definitions of literacy coaching, the International Reading Association (IRA), in its position statement on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Reading Coach (International Reading Association, 2004), supported the definition developed by Paglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz, (2003):

Coaching provides ongoing consistent support [to teachers] for the implementation and instruction components. It is nonthreatening and supportive – not evaluative. It gives a sense of how good professional development is. It also affords the opportunity to see it work with students (p. 42)

The impetus to expand the role of the literacy specialist into coaching has been spurred in large part by two opposite belief systems. On one hand, the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law No. 107-110) have created extraordinary pressures for schools to raise test scores. In order to achieve this goal, the Reading First Initiative provides grant money for states to fund literacy coaches to train teachers how to prepare students for tests. The result is that in many Reading First schools the major responsibility for coaches is to be the “test prep” enforcer. This has been especially true in urban schools facing the most pressure to raise scores. One teacher told me that in her school they call the literacy coach the “test-prep czar.”

I have also heard sad stories from literacy coaches who are totally disheartened because they have not been permitted to use their knowledge and expertise to improve literacy

instruction. One coach recently told me:

I feel like I can't use my expertise to really help teachers the way I want. The principal told me I have to focus on raising test scores. When I told him that the way to accomplish this is to improve the quality of instruction, he said that he was "under the gun" to get the kids ready for the test. I feel like I have one foot nailed to the floor. Even when I take a chance to demonstrate an approach that engages students, teachers look at me with great trepidation and say, "That was a fantastic lesson. My kids loved it. Do I have permission to do what you showed me?" I then show them how they can incorporate my strategies while still meeting school mandates. It feels like I'm kind of playing a game, but the result is that teachers are going beyond skill/drill test prep.

This literacy coach was an experienced successful classroom teacher and reading specialist with a strong record of increasing student motivation and raising achievement. She refused to give in to the testing pressures. She found ways to break down the barriers so that teachers could teach meaningful literacy "in the cracks." But, I fear that many of our best literacy coaches – and classroom teachers - will become so demoralized that they will eventually throw up their hands and quit. Katherine Bomer (2005) is one of those teachers and coaches. She is an extraordinary educator who served as a staff developer for Columbia Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project, is a national literacy consultant, and has published professional articles. She resigned her teaching position in Texas because she could no longer cope with mandates that required her to teach to the test and prevented her from opening up the worlds of reading and writing possibilities for her students. She writes:

When I decided to resign from my beloved profession of teaching, I told my principal that my bottom line had been crossed. I told her that a decade of fighting increased district, state, and Federal intrusion into my classroom, and decreased trust in my ability and expertise as a teacher, had left me feeling like a used tube of toothpaste, squeezed and rolled up to that last sad, thin smear on the toothbrush (Bomer, 2005, p. 168)

I understand Bomer's decision because even our strongest educators can reach the point where both external and internal pressures to narrow curriculum and use scripted instruction shatter the passion and destroy the spirit that is the heart of teaching.

It doesn't have to be this way. There exists a more enlightened vision of literacy coaching. Bean, Swan, and Knaub (2003) examined the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches in schools that have won the International Reading Association Exemplary Reading Program award, Title I schools that had been identified as having exemplary reading programs, and schools that were identified as having "beaten the odds" based on student demographics. They found that coaches in these schools serve as change agents who make a school-wide impact by being a resource to teachers. They provide materials, make instructional suggestions, model strategy instruction, conduct professional development, mentor new teachers, coordinate the reading program, and oversee the school's assessment system. They also serve as a liaison to the community and work with parents to build strong school/home connections. These findings demonstrate that in our best schools the literacy coach is an educational leader who uses multiple approaches to effect change by building a professional learning community where all parties work together to increase effective literacy instruction.

The International Reading Association (IRA) has embraced this enlightened vision of coaching in its *Standards for Reading Professionals – Revised 2003* (International Reading Association, 2004). These standards identify criteria that graduate reading/literacy programs need to meet to gain IRA national recognition. For the first time the two positions of the reading

specialist and the literacy coach have been combined into a single role that is called “reading specialist/literacy coach.” As a result, graduate reading/literacy programs seeking IRA national recognition are now required to add coaching initiatives to course assignments so that graduate students get opportunities to assist and support classroom teachers in assessment, instructional grouping, choosing appropriate texts and materials, teaching reading and writing strategies, and conducting professional development. This is a major paradigm shift from previous standards that simply required graduate students to work with students.

I strongly support the new IRA standards. I believe that literacy coaches can be transformative change agents who make a school-wide impact. I further believe that graduate reading/literacy programs must be committed to making sure we mentor graduate students to gain the qualities needed to be an effective coach. It is IRA’s position (International Reading Association, 2004) that coaches should be excellent classroom teachers who have in-depth knowledge of reading processes and can provide demonstration lessons. In addition, they should be able to develop trusting relationships with teachers, have experience observing teachers and providing feedback, and be excellent presenters and group leaders.

The paradigm shift that adds coaching to the preparation of literacy specialists has not been easy to make for many graduate reading/literacy programs. As co-chair of IRA’s Professional Standards and Ethics Committee, I review program reports for institutions seeking IRA national recognition and have witnessed how difficult it has been to incorporate coaching experiences into the curriculum. This is because teacher educators are having a difficult time finding ways to address a number of important concerns. First, they believe that many graduate students lack the knowledge and experience to coach other teachers. Second, they question whether more senior teachers will accept coaching from neophyte educators. Third, they feel that graduate students are already overburdened by existing requirements and they fear adding more assessments. Finally, they are not sure what types of coaching experiences to include.

We had these same concerns when we began to revise our literacy coach/reading specialist program at St. Thomas Aquinas to address the 2003 IRA Standards. As a result, we first created a vision for our program that commits us to prepare “*master teachers and educational leaders* who enhance, enrich, and reform education” (St. Thomas Aquinas College, 2004). We believe that preparing master teachers will make a significant impact on student motivation and achievement. We further believe that preparing educational leaders will make an impact on school-wide literacy instruction. We then developed a set of principles and practices that we believe effectively prepare teachers to be both reading specialists and literacy coaches.

## PRINCIPLES

We developed our coaching initiatives based on IRA’s three levels of coaching (International Reading Association, 2004) identified in its position statement. The levels identify a continuum of coaching that begins with informal support and progresses to more direct assistance, including school-wide initiatives, as coaches gain greater knowledge and experience. Level One coaching includes conversations with colleagues, developing and providing curriculum materials, and participating in professional development activities. Level Two coaching includes co-planning lessons, helping teachers plan instruction, and making professional development presentations. Level three coaching includes modeling and discussing lessons, co-teaching lessons, observing classroom instruction and providing feedback, leading study groups, and analyzing literacy programs.

Thus, at St. Thomas Aquinas, we created Level One coaching assignments at the beginning of our program because they align with foundational course work. We created Level Two coaching assignments in the middle of our program because we believe that our candidates are now prepared to do more hands-on assistance. And we created Level Three coaching assignments in our capstone course, *Organizing and Supervising the Literacy Program*, because we believe that candidates upon reaching this point have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to take on the more direct roles of a coach.

At the same time, we needed to address the issue of placing young teachers in situations where they would be coaching more senior teachers who might not be receptive or supportive. We solved this problem by creating coaching assignments that graduate students could complete with supportive colleagues, including other teachers on their grade level or teachers who were friends. We also made a strong commitment to teach graduate students how to build trust and create open communication with teachers (Lyons & Pinnell, 2003; Vogt & Shearer, 2007). We have found that the steps we took enable our graduate students to learn how to be effective coaches without putting them in high-risk situations.

In addition, we recognized that some coaching assignments might not be able to be completed by middle school and high school teachers because of the very different organizational structure of these schools. At the same time, we are committed to preparing literacy coaches for all levels of schooling, K – 12. We strongly support the International Reading Association’s “Standards for Middle and High School Coaches” (2006), created in collaboration with the National Council of Teachers of English, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Science Teachers Association, and National Council for the Social Studies. This document identifies the critical need to increase literacy achievement for our nation’s adolescents and notes that even though there is no systematic body of research to directly link literacy coaching to student learning, there are many examples where teaching content-area teachers how to infuse literacy instruction across the curriculum has had a very positive effect on student learning. The document concludes, “Literacy coaching – a form of highly targeted professional development – is a particularly potent vehicle for improving reading skills” (p. 3).

## PRACTICES

Once we had developed the principles to guide our coaching initiatives, we began planning appropriate assignments. We made the important decision that we would not add any new assignments to develop the Level One and Level Two coaching skills. Rather, we would embed coaching components into existing field-based assignments that involved teaching students. We also decided to provide class time for teachers to work together in grade-appropriate groups to plan coaching. We believe that encouraging teacher collaboration promotes coaching because teachers are working together. We further believe that providing time in class reduces the stress level associated with completing assignments.

I begin this section with examples of a Level One and Level Two coaching initiative, but I focus mostly on Level Three coaching initiatives because these assignments most closely reflect roles and responsibilities of the reading specialist/literacy coach in the *real* world (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). I also include graduate student reflections for Level Three assignments because their voices open a window into the impact of the assignments as they envision becoming

coaches. Further, I identify the grade level where the coaching was completed and very briefly identify the school's demographics.

It is also important to note that since we are asking graduate students to support and assist classroom teachers, we need to reach out to principals and department chairpersons to inform them of the coaching requirements in the 2003 IRA Standards and to ask permission for our students to be allowed to complete their assignments. We also want to promote the belief that coaching can make a positive impact on literacy instruction. We accomplish this goal by sending a letter to principals and chairpersons for every coaching assignment that explains the goals of the assignment and identifies the process. In the three years we have included coaching assignments, there has not been a single instance when a principal and/or chairperson prevented a graduate student from completing a coaching assignment. In fact, I have received numerous communications of support. These building leaders recognize that we all share the same goal to improve school-wide literacy instruction.

### **Level One Literacy Coaching Initiative: Creating a Handbook of Exemplary Literacy Instruction**

This initiative occurs early in the program in the course entitled Language Development: Foundation for Literacy. Teachers work together in grade-alike groups to create a *teacher-friendly* handbook of best practices that is intended to serve as a valuable resource. The handbooks support and assist teachers by including information about implementing a balanced literacy program, creating an exemplary classroom environment, teaching reading strategies, and developing parent-involvement programs. They also include an annotated bibliography of literature that motivates students to read and can be used to model strategy instruction along with a list of websites that teachers can use as professional resources (e.g. [www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org)).

Feedback from schools has been overwhelmingly positive. One principal emailed me to say, "This handbook supports everything we are trying to do in our school. The bibliography of children's books and web sites is fabulous. I have asked Rita [graduate student] to present this handbook at our next faculty conference."

### **Level Two: Mid-Program Literacy Coaching Initiative: Conducting a Professional Development Workshop for Teachers**

This initiative takes place in the course Diagnosing and Teaching Students with Literacy Difficulties that is taken after all foundational courses have been completed. This is a Level Two coaching initiative because it focuses on conducting a professional workshop for grade-level colleagues. The workshop focuses on assessing and diagnosing literacy difficulties, choosing appropriate texts and materials to teach skills and strategies, and using a variety of groupings. Graduate students also create a handout packet that provides useful information and graphic organizers.

Before conducting the workshop, graduate students use personal experiences to create qualities of excellent workshops. We use those qualities to create an evaluation form that workshop attendees complete. A number of graduate students have been asked to present their workshop to the entire faculty because they were so successful on their grade level.

### **Level Three: End-of-Program Literacy Coaching Initiatives**

These initiatives take place in our capstone course Organizing and Supervising the Literacy Program. At this point, we believe that graduate students have developed the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to implement a variety of more direct coaching initiatives. What they now need to acquire is experience that will affirm their expertise and empower them. The coaching assignments included below serve as models on the IRA web site ([http://www.reading.org/resources/community/ncate\\_support.html](http://www.reading.org/resources/community/ncate_support.html)). Here, however, I have added student comments in order to illustrate the kind of impact these experiential assignments can provide for graduate students.

#### ***Level Three Literacy Coaching: Modeling a Reading Lesson and Observing a Colleague Teach a Reading Lesson***

This assignment is intended to emphasize the role of a literacy specialist as a coach who can demonstrate effective teaching and then give supportive feedback to a colleague after observing her lesson. The emphasis is to promote best practices based on a collaborative approach. Before the assignment is completed, in class we identify qualities for providing constructive, positive, respectful feedback that will be appreciated by teachers. Graduate students pair up with a teacher in their school who they know will welcome the opportunity to collaborate. Together, they co-plan a reading lesson that our graduate student will demonstrate with her own students while the colleague observes. After the lesson, the graduate student asks for feedback and they co-plan follow-up lessons. We believe that it is very important for coaches to first be able to *walk the walk* rather than just *talk the talk* in order for teachers to gain confidence that the coach is an exemplary teacher. They then reverse roles so that our graduate student observes the other teacher's lesson, provides feedback, and co-plans further lessons. After the assignment has been completed, graduate students write a reflection that identifies implications for professional growth as a reading specialist/literacy coach.

#### ***Graduate Student Reflections***

##### ***First grade teacher – suburban school with diverse student population.***

The experience of working as a literacy coach was eye-opening. It allowed me to apply the knowledge and skills I have acquired. I listened to the teachers' concerns, identified areas to work on, helped create a plan based on the identified needs and guided the teacher through the lesson...With my ability to evaluate and create plans to meet children's reading needs, I can see myself becoming very involved with guiding the school community on better reading and writing practices.

The graduate student concludes with a list of Essentials for Effective Coaching:

- ▶ Have an open mind.
- ▶ Discuss with the teachers you're working with the areas they want to work on and make suggestions when appropriate.
- ▶ Encourage teachers to observe you teaching in your class.

- ▶ Point out positives you observe in a teacher's class prior to and after the coaching lesson.
- ▶ Explain and provide research on the topic you are coaching.
- ▶ Select the appropriate materials.
- ▶ Develop a rapport with teachers.
- ▶ Follow up after lesson is over and provide support.

***Resource room teacher – middle income suburban middle school.***

I recognize that I must take small steps in modifying instructional practices being used within our classrooms and that many teachers might fear my role as an advocate for professional growth. I must be a listener before I am a speaker...In working with professionals who are less motivated to change, I plan on primarily observing their classroom and being a true consultant. What is it they want to change? What is not working well? What have they wanted to try, but have not yet tried? Making literacy coaching personal for the teachers I work with will allow the process to become more meaningful for all parties involved. We want our students to be surrounded by informed educators who aspire for better. I hope I can one day help many teachers reach that goal. As a result of this assignment, these teachers, like many of their peers, are learning that becoming a literacy coach is a process which requires strong interpersonal communication skills. They are also learning to model lessons, observe lessons, and provide supportive feedback.

***Level Three Coaching: Analysis of School Wide Literacy Program and Action Plan for Improvement***

This assignment is intended for graduate students to do an ecological analysis of their school's literacy program based on IRA's ten standards for winning the Exemplary Reading Program award (available at [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org).) and creating an action plan to improve one aspect of the program. They evaluate their school's reading program, instructional materials, literacy environment, quality of instruction, and level of parent involvement. They also have discussions regarding the qualities and needs of the literacy program with the principal and/or department chair, experienced teachers, reading specialist and/or literacy coach, mentor teachers, and parent leaders to elicit perspectives from a variety of stakeholders. Then, graduate students use all the information they collected to develop a detailed action plan based on the need they identified. Finally, they are required to volunteer to take a leadership role in enacting their plan. If graduate students are not currently teaching, they pair up with a practicing teacher to complete the assignment.

As a result of this assignment, graduate students have developed action plans to increase parent involvement, implement more effective word study instruction in the primary grades, use curriculum mapping to plan grade-by-grade benchmarks, develop a school-wide assessment plan, and increase the effectiveness of balanced literacy instruction. This assignment has also resulted in two schools winning the IRA Exemplary Reading Program award.

***Graduate Student Reflections***

***Middle school – suburban school with diverse student population.***

When I shared my findings with my instructional supervisor and principal, they were enthusiastic not just about my plans for the coming school year, but because of the overall reflection involved in this analysis. Sometimes it helps to see the forest through the trees. In other words, as teachers and administrators struggle to provide students with the best possible instruction in language arts, sometimes we get bogged down in details... Sometimes we get so focused on what is not working, on the challenges or the gaps, that we don't see successes. I know that before I engaged in this project, I could only see what wasn't working. It was empowering to be able to enumerate all the parts of the plan that are moving forward and to be able to see that we are turning our program, slowly but surely, into a true balanced literacy program.

***K-5 elementary school – urban school with large population of African-American and Hispanic students.***

In the two years of working at P.S. XXX, I have been so focused on my readers and writers and the literacy instruction within my classroom that I never really devoted much attention to what was happening throughout the school... I found this analysis to be very effective because it allowed me to identify specific strengths and weaknesses in the literacy program. I was encouraged to take an active role and create an action plan for improvement of the program. By doing this, I feel that I am actually taking a step forward in my educational career and stepping out of the confines of my classroom. All educators in my school have the common goal of preparing students to become lifelong readers and writers by promoting student success in reading and writing. It is my responsibility as a literacy teacher and specialist to facilitate actions that will enhance the achievement of this goal.

As a result of this assignment these teachers, like many of their peers, are developing a vision of literacy teaching and learning beyond their classroom. They are learning to listen to multiple voices, and to use what they learn to develop school-wide initiatives that will make a positive impact.

***Level Three Coaching: Leading a Study Group***

This assignment is intended for graduate students to organize and facilitate a mini-study group of teachers based on a topic of interest. Most often, this is completed as a grade-level study group. Once teachers on the grade have collaboratively decided on a topic, the graduate student finds a *teacher-friendly* professional article, distributes copies well in advance of the study group, arranges a time for discussion (often during lunch, although some groups have met before or after school), arranges snacks (A MUST!), develops focus questions, and facilitates the discussion. The goal is to identify specific steps teachers can take to increase effectiveness. In class, we discuss ways to effectively facilitate a discussion.

*Graduate Student Reflections*

***Sixth grade – affluent suburban school district.***

In planning my study group I was very nervous. I was unsure as to what to expect....After conducting this study group with a group of my colleagues I feel that this is something we should do more often....I felt that my study group was extremely effective. My group was very receptive and loved the chapter I provided for the topic of discussion. At the end of our discussion we were already planning on additions and changes we can make in our guided reading groups....I learned many things about working with a group of colleagues. I learned that you must be flexible, it is important to choose a time slot that works for all interested parties, and to provide plenty of time for everyone to read the article. I also learned that as a group leader I need to keep us focused on topic. It is also important to find a relevant topic...In working with a group of colleagues it is important to set goals but also be flexible. In discussing a topic conversation can very easily turn in an appropriate yet different direction. You must be flexible and allow the conversation to flow. Lastly, I learned that it is important to listen to everyone's ideas. Everyone has something worthwhile to contribute; therefore, everyone must be heard.

***Middle school special education teacher – urban school with diverse population.***

At the end of our study group, it was obvious to me that we did reach our goals. We discussed how we currently integrate character education into our classroom and analyzed why we are not able to consistently do this. Also, we discussed the fact that literature could be used in content area subjects to promote character education...Overall, this was an extremely valuable experience for my future role as a literacy coach and reading specialist. First, carrying out this study group made me feel that I had a strong voice. It also made me feel good that my rationale was supported by fellow teachers. Secondly, it helped me understand that when you lead a study group you sometimes have to prompt teachers with questions in order to facilitate participation. At first, many of my colleagues were reluctant to speak about how they integrate character education into lessons. Therefore, I had to use my own experiences to facilitate the discussion. This taught me that providing others with examples puts them more at ease with their own ideas and encourages participation. Next, I learned that providing teachers with a highlighted portion of the text was useful in facilitating our conversation. Many of the teachers told me that they did not have time to read the entire text, but they were able to quickly scan and skim the highlighted portions to understand what we would be talking about...This experience taught me that when carrying out a study group, the literacy specialist must consider the areas that teachers feel would be most beneficial to discuss and focus on. Finally, I also learned that study groups must be carried out in a pleasant, non-defensive manner. Our group worked very well together and the discussion went very smoothly. However, this came about because we all respected one another's opinions and experiences. ..Overall, this was a valuable experience that made me feel that I can have a voice in curriculum and education in my school. Furthermore, it made me feel confident for my future as a literacy specialist.

As a result of this assignment these teachers, like many of their peers, are learning that leading a study group can make a positive effect on literacy instruction. Further, they are learning that a study group leader needs to create conditions that promote thoughtful discussion where all voices are welcomed. Finally, they are learning how to bring teachers together to increase instructional effectiveness.

In addition, many graduate students have reported that this study group assignment has led to continuing discussions of ways to improve instruction. They have also reported that teachers frequently express appreciation for the opportunity to share ideas.

### ***Level Three Coaching: Shadowing a Literacy Specialist***

While this assignment does not directly focus on coaching, it is intended to provide graduate students with experiences that will open a window into the multiple roles and responsibilities of the literacy specialist. Candidates use preparation periods or other non-teaching time to observe the work of the literacy specialist in a variety of interactions with students and teachers.

### ***Graduate Student Reflections***

#### ***K-5 elementary school – suburban school with a large population of English-Language Learners.***

From this experience I learned the importance of working as a team player. The reading specialist is not only a leader but a team player as well. She has the responsibility to lead her colleagues and guide them based on their questions by using her knowledge of literacy. She also has the responsibility to work as a team with each teacher who has students that she services in order to provide consistent instruction...I found it important to know what is going on in the classroom. If the class is learning poetry, the specialist can incorporate poetry into her instruction to teach strategies...I have learned that the role of the reading specialist plays an important part in the school. Her teaching skills and knowledge impact on many teachers, students, and families. When everyone works together it is a powerful tool for success for our struggling readers.

#### ***K-2 primary school – middle income suburban school.***

As I reflect on my time spent with Liz, I am confident about my decision to become a Literacy Specialist in the near future. I am eager to work closely not only with students, but also with the other teachers in my building. In doing so, I think it becomes important for a Literacy Specialist to focus on gaining the respect and gratitude of her colleagues...My meetings with Liz got me excited about providing staff development for a group of adults. I know that most teachers, like myself, are continual learners. We like to hear about effective teaching techniques or new programs that will better support our students' needs. If easily accessible, most teachers are willing to try new lessons almost immediately. For this reason, I have learned that a Literacy Specialist must not only provide new information to her staff, but also make this information something teachers can use immediately...Perhaps the most important understanding I have taken away from

these observations is that each teacher, whether new or old, has something to bring to the table. Everyone has a wealth of background knowledge and the Literacy Specialist must acknowledge this. This also ties into the belief that a successful school is one in which all professionals work together to meet the varying needs of the student population.

As a result of this assignment these teachers, like many of their peers, are gaining a clearer vision of the multiple roles and responsibilities of the literacy specialist. They are also learning to envision themselves serving in this role. At the same time, this assignment only begins to scratch the surface of gaining understanding of the complex day-to-day life of the literacy specialist. We are now beginning to discuss making our capstone course a one-semester internship that would enable graduate students to implement all coaching assignments under the direct supervision of a literacy specialist.

### POSSIBILITIES

Faculty members at our university strongly agree that introducing literacy coaching assignments has made a major impact on preparing reading specialist/literacy coaches. Graduate student reflections give voice to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they now realize they have developed to make a school-wide impact on literacy instruction. They understand that it is essential for a literacy coach to be an effective communicator who builds the trust needed for teachers to make changes. They further understand that coaching is collaboration, not evaluation; it is the principal's role to evaluate teacher performance. And they feel empowered to take a leadership role in their schools.

Program completer surveys based on 2003 IRA Standards for Reading Professionals have resulted in 100% of completers indicating that they would recommend our program. Many identify coaching initiatives as a very important part of their education. This gives the program confidence that we can continue to produce quality, thoughtful readings specialists/literacy coaches that can meet the high standards set forth by IRA.

I strongly believe in the possibility of literacy coaching to transform literacy instruction when coaches are permitted to be educational leaders who build professional learning communities through a wide range of coaching initiatives. I also strongly believe that we cannot allow literacy coaches to be reduced to "test-prep czars." This destroys the prospect for meaningful change. We must prepare reading specialists/literacy coaches to become *master teachers* and *educational leaders*. We need to provide not only the knowledge and skills to teach and coach, but we must also provide the vision needed to transform literacy instruction.

**Michael L. Shaw is a professor of literacy education at St. Thomas Aquinas College. He serves as Co-chair of the International Reading Association (IRA) Professional Standards and Ethics Committee and is a member of the National Council of Teacher of English Commission on Reading. He has made many presentations at the International Reading Association and College Reading Association annual conferences. He has authored professional articles on preparing teachers and literacy coaching. He was a reading specialist and literacy coach in New York City for 16 years.**

References

- Allen, J. (2006). *Becoming a literacy leader: Supporting leaning and change*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Bean, R.M, Swan, A.L, & Knaub, R. Reading specialists in schools with exemplary reading programs: Functional, versatile, prepared. *The Reading Teacher*, 56 (4), 446-455.
- Bomer, K. (2005). Missing the children: When politics and programs impede our Teaching. *Language Arts*, 82, (3), 168-176.
- Cassidy, J. & Cassidy, D. (2007). What's hot, what's not for 2007. *Reading Today*, 24 (4), 1, 10.
- International Reading Association (2004). *The role and qualifications of the reading coach in the United States: A position statement of the International Reading Association*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. Adopted May 2004.
- International Reading Association (2004). *Standards for reading professionals – revised 2003*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- International Reading Association (2006). *Standards for middle and high school coaches*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Lyons, C.A. & Pinnell, G.S. (2001). *Systems for change in literacy education: A guide to professional development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Paglinco, S. Bach, A., Hovde, K, Rosenblum, S., Saunders, M. & Supovitz, J. (2003). *The heart of the matter: The coaching model in America's Choice schools*. Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.
- St. Thomas Aquinas College (2004). *Graduate literacy program conceptual framework*. Sparkill, NY: St. Thomas Aquinas College.
- Vogt, M.E. & Shearer, B.A. (2007) (2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed.). *Reading specialists and literacy coaches in the real world*. Boston, MA: Pearson.