

## What is Peer Coaching?

**Broad Definition of Coaching:** a cooperative, ideally collaborative relationship, with both parties mutually engaged in efforts to provide better services to students.  
(Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005)

Peer coaching is a confidential process through which professional colleagues work together to:

- Reflect on current practices
- Expand, refine and build new skills
- Share ideas
- Teach one another
- Conduct classroom research
- Solve problems in the workplace

(Robbins, 1991)

Peer coaching is a time for teachers to take risks, to try out new ideas and approaches, and to discuss results with trusted colleagues. Peer coaching is NOT supervision or evaluation of teachers, nor should peer coaches be expected to improve the overall performance of ineffective teachers.

The difference between supervision and peer coaching is easier to understand if you consider the purpose of each (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005):

- Supervision: purpose is to provide information so a supervisor can make evaluative judgments: is the teacher performing in a professionally competent manner or not?
- Coaching: purpose is to help teachers provide students the best possible instruction; should never be about making evaluative decisions.

## What is the Role of a Keys to Literacy Coach?

A major goal of Keys to Literacy professional development is to gradually release responsibility for the provision of long-term support of teachers to a school or district. The best way to do this is to train individuals to become building-based coaches. A KTL coach applies the role of peer coach as described above specifically to support for one or more KTL programs. The role of the KTL coach is to provide support to their peer teachers as they develop lesson plans and use our programs in their classrooms. The KTL coach is there to encourage teachers to try all of the components of *The Key Comprehension* or *Key Vocabulary* routines and refine their KTL instruction.

## The Coach's Role in Follow Up Professional Development

The coach is also there to facilitate the sharing of ideas among teachers about effective instruction for the routines. Keys to Literacy trainers typically conduct the first several follow up sessions, such as guided practice and small-group sharing meetings. It is important for coaches to attend these sessions in order to learn to conduct these kinds of follow up. Eventually, building coaches coordinate and facilitate follow up support for teachers without a Keys to Literacy trainer.

It is important to note that a building coach should not be expected to provide initial training to teachers. This should be delivered by a Keys to Literacy trainer who knows the program well enough to answer questions that might arise and who has the experience to meet the individual needs of participants.

Ideally, administrators should provide ongoing support to coaches and communicate with them on a regular basis about how they are assisting teachers with the program.

## Who should be a coach?

First, it is essential for coaches to believe in and use the Keys to Literacy program so they will champion it with their peers. Additional suggestions:

- Coaches do not have to be reading specialists or English teachers! Successful building coaches can be classroom teachers, librarians, curriculum coordinators, reading coaches or teachers, department chairs, team leaders, or master teachers. Math, science and history teachers often make good coaches, because they can relate to the kind of reading used by other teachers in their subject area.
- The most effective coaches are well-respected by their peers and possess the following skills: organization and planning, group facilitation, and effective interpersonal communication.
- If possible, schools should consider providing a stipend, extra planning period, or reduced responsibilities to compensate coaches.
- There should be at least two coaches for every 35 teachers trained. It is ideal to have one coach at each grade level or in each major subject area.
- Coaches are typically at the building level. However, if use of the Keys to Literacy program is district-wide, then district-based coaches can also be helpful.

## References

Hasbrouck, J. and Denton, C. (2005). *The reading coach: A how-to manual for success*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Robbins, P. (1991). *How to plan and implement a peer coaching program*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.