



The Potential of Learning Coaches

CASS/Alberta Education Learning Symposium
March 2011

Today's discussion

- ▶ Review of the research and work completed to date
- ▶ Promising practices from the field
- ▶ Opportunity for feedback and discussion

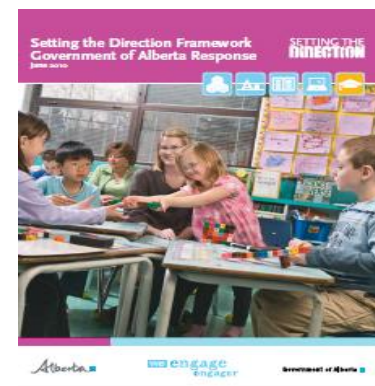
Updates from:

- ▶ Alberta Education
- ▶ Peace Wapiti School Division – Heather and Betty
- ▶ InPraxis Learning – Doug Ramsay
- ▶ Calgary Learning Centre – Anne Price
- ▶ Discussion of Draft Role Description

Setting the Direction Framework Government of Alberta Response, June 2010

▶ Strategic Direction 5:

Implement a province-wide expectation that school-based expertise will be in place to support teachers in meeting the needs of students with disabilities and diverse needs within learning environments.



Supporting the Vision

- ▶ Provide evidence-based guidelines so that:
 - there is a common provincial understanding and expectations of the learning coach role
 - school authorities can implement/sustain school-based support
 - implementation models can vary according to local needs.

Research to support Coaching Models

- ▶ A literature search was undertaken in the fall of 2009 to explore the potential of instituting learning coaches in Alberta schools

Highlights from the research include:

- ▶ A growing body of literature recommends a team or collaborative model.
- ▶ Reports of significant changes in instructional practices of teachers who were regularly coached one-on-one;
 - students were more engaged and enthusiastic about learning;
 - class attendance increased dramatically.

Highlights of the research

- ▶ Characteristics of successful coaching teams include:
 - teachers voluntarily determine knowledge/skills they would like to improve
 - professional relationships based on respect and trust
 - clearly defined classroom roles and responsibilities
 - support from administration
 - ongoing professional learning activities
- ▶ School-based coaches have the potential to support inclusive education when the right conditions are in place

Learning Coaches defined

- ▶ There is a need to develop a common language and understanding of the term **‘Learning Coaches’**
- ▶ There are many variations of this role across the province
- ▶ The emphasis is not on the name but on the role of this position
- ▶ *Focus of this position is to build the capacity of teachers to be better able to meet the diverse needs of students*

What are Learning Coaches?

Learning coaches are educators who are knowledgeable about inclusion, the Alberta Program of Studies, and are skilled at:

- ▶ facilitating teacher collaboration
- ▶ sharing of promising practices



What is **not** part of a Learning Coach's role?

- ▶ Evaluating or supervising teachers
- ▶ Resource Room teacher
- ▶ Paperwork: completing all IPPs, referral forms, coordinating meetings, administering Level A/B assessments



What skills do they need?

Learning coaches need a strong understanding and commitment to:

- ▶ Inclusive education
- ▶ meeting diverse student needs
- ▶ Using curriculum (Programs of Study, Learning and Teaching Resources, Balanced Assessment) as a starting point for instruction for all students
- ▶ Differentiated Instruction
- ▶ Positive Behaviour Supports
- ▶ how adults learn

What does a learning coach do?

- ▶ Learning coaches spend the majority of their time working collaboratively with teachers in solution-focused, one-on-one or small group learning contexts.



What might this look like?

Learning coaches collaborate with teachers to:

- ▶ identify instructional needs of students
- ▶ promote reflection
- ▶ problem-solve
- ▶ observe
- ▶ co-plan
- ▶ demonstrate instructional strategies through co-teaching

What work has been completed so far?

- ▶ Posted on Education's website:
 - *Executive summary* of literature review
 - Discussion paper *Exploring School-Based Learning Coaches in Alberta*
 - Draft role description and feedback form
- ▶ Working with the Calgary Learning Centre to develop online content to support learning coaches
- ▶ Review how school districts are currently meeting the needs of diverse learners

What work has been completed so far?

- ▶ Met with school authorities across the province to determine how they currently meet diverse learning needs of students
- ▶ Visited sites with a learning coach model in place
- ▶ Researched experts in the field to help guide the work: Jim Knight, Joellen Killion

Website:

<http://education.alberta.ca/departement/ipr/inclusion/capacity/learning.aspx>



EXPLORING SCHOOL-BASED LEARNING COACHES IN ALBERTA

FOR DISCUSSION

Learning coaches are educators who are knowledgeable about inclusion and are skilled at facilitating teacher collaboration and creating or promoting practices. School-based learning coaches should be part of the school's learning team, facilitating professional learning and ongoing professional development for school staff. A learning coach facilitates, supports, and supports improved instructional practices, with teachers, and other personnel, supervisors or administrators, through ongoing communication about school learning needs with school administrators, a learning coach is a change agent and collaborator, and contributes to an individual's school growth plan that supports achievement in areas, skills, and practice goals. A learning coach makes an ongoing commitment to continue to learn about pedagogical issues and trends, technologies, and new instructional trends.

Concepts of school-based coaching and effective education may impact student success and to verify effective that leads to cooperation, professional relationship, training and research (Alberta Support of the development and improvement of learning practices in inclusive classrooms and schools).

...when stakeholders work together in a collaborative and purposeful way, more is accomplished for students" (Jait, p. 10). The Framework establishes a foundation for building capacity that includes defining professional role descriptions and standards for school-based learning coaches, and supporting professional learning opportunities for teachers to develop instructional strategies for inclusion education in schools and school activities (Jait, p. 12). Establishing norms in school-based learning coaches are encouraged by the Learning Committee of the Learning Committee as one way to build capacity to ensure that Alberta's schools are equipped, measured and ready to support and respond to the needs of all students in an inclusive way.

...when stakeholders work together in a collaborative and purposeful way, more is accomplished for students."



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Within Alberta, the *Setting the Direction Framework* (Alberta Education, June 2009, p. 5) stresses that an inclusive education system is "a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice."

The Framework is based on a principle that states "when stakeholders work together in a collaborative and purposeful way, more is accomplished for students" (Jait, p. 10). The Framework establishes a foundation for building capacity that includes defining professional role descriptions and standards for school-based learning coaches, and supporting professional learning opportunities for teachers to develop instructional strategies for inclusion education in schools and school activities (Jait, p. 12). Establishing norms in school-based learning coaches are encouraged by the Learning Committee of the Learning Committee as one way to build capacity to ensure that Alberta's schools are equipped, measured and ready to support and respond to the needs of all students in an inclusive way.

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UNDERSTANDINGS AND CONCEPTS

Although the concept of school-based coaches is making increased attention in the world of school improvement and inclusion education initiatives, the link or relationship between inclusion education and school-based coaching is not always explicitly or clearly defined in the literature. For the purpose of this review, instructional or learning coaches are defined as a professional development strategy in which coaches apply their expertise in a direct way or coaching approaches to individual teachers or small groups, with the goal of expanding practice and ultimately increasing student achievement. A school-based learning coach focuses on inclusion, student achievement and on the culture and environment provided in schools/ classrooms.



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Next steps

- ▶ Research project to explore how five Alberta school jurisdictions are using learning coaches
- ▶ Research report will highlight:
 - indicators of success
 - promising practices
 - challenges
 - funding strategies
- ▶ Field review of Draft Role Description

Moving Forward



- ▶ Investigating possibilities for province-wide implementation for 2011 and beyond
- ▶ Identifying potential resources, professional learning and networking opportunities for teachers in this role
- ▶ Working toward a culture of building capacity and increased collaborative practices within schools
- ▶ Plans for upcoming professional learning opportunities for Coaches and Administrators as well as a learning coaches video to be posted on Education's website

Upcoming Professional Learning Opportunities

- ▶ **ERLC: Leading our Way Forward Conference, April 14–15, 2011, Edmonton, AB**

The purpose of Leading Our Way Forward 2011 is to increase capacity among district/school leadership teams (e.g. instructional leaders / coaches, *Learning Coaches) in creating a culture for learning for all students and staff.

What Instructional Coaches Need to Know about Assessment – upcoming webinars/webcast

ARPDC: Learning Coaches Summer Institute

—more information to follow

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Learning Coaches in Action

- ▶ What does an instructional coach do?

