Preface

Literacy Program Evaluation and Development Initiatives for P–12 Teaching addresses two educational aspects that are very important to educators. First, we know that support for classroom improvement requires on-site, real-time work with teachers and school leaders. Working with practitioners in the contexts where they work helps to support program implementation and facilitates ongoing self-assessment based on student outcomes. Second, to effectively implement literacy programs, we need contributions and support from all stakeholders because program development requires leadership in various forms. For instance, teacher leaders work directly with colleagues to offer mentorship, serve as role models, and guide the development of novice teachers. Although the characterization of teacher leadership takes different forms—mentor, coach, staff developer, critical friend, team leader—we know that the social learning evident during peer-to-peer interactions is critical for all learners (Vygotsky, 1978). Third, one leadership role teachers assume in schools that has shown potential for making long-term cultural and school-wide changes in practice is the coach. A plethora of research describes coaching interactions and how they are used to explore strategies that support students’ literacy development in urban classrooms. For example, the coach works with teachers across grades and content areas to support implementation of school-wide literacy initiatives. Under the umbrella of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) educators today seek to implement literacy standards across subject areas. Thus the coach as well as other teacher leaders can be integral for the implementation of these and other initiatives.

These issues are particularly important to the audience of this text, who are primarily reading and literacy teacher education programs, school-based professional learning communities, coaches, and school and district leaders. Effective implementation and development of literacy programs is beneficial when teachers improve their own practice; they achieve better student outcomes over the long term when they actively participate in the school improvement process (Schmoker, 1999). Therefore, when schools evaluate and develop literacy programs they must closely examine literacy instruction, assessment, professional development, and curriculum. In each of these areas, program initiatives can significantly impact student outcomes, teacher practice, leadership, and school culture.

We are working in a time of significant changes in education. We greatly appreciate your interest in our volume. In this preface we will

- Identify the goals of Literacy Program Evaluation and Development Initiatives.
- Provide some background on the relevancy and significance of Literacy Program Evaluation and Development Initiatives.
- Describe the processes used to select chapters for Literacy Program Evaluation and Development Initiatives.
GOALS

To reconceptualize Professional Development (PD) as an ongoing learning experience for practitioners rather than a stand-alone workshop, we need to design sustainable PD activities that yield improvements in teaching and learning (Zimmerman & May, 2003, p. 38). Barton (2006) suggested PD include systemic school improvement efforts that help develop programs through ongoing collaborative teacher inquiry and professional learning communities (PLCs), where teachers share ideas, receive support from colleagues, and reflect on practices (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2003). Using collaborative learning to involve teachers in the school improvement process leads to improved teacher quality, sustainable change in practice, and positive student outcomes (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2003; Schmoker, 1999; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Moreover, the availability of a wide array of professional learning opportunities help to foster a community of inquiry where stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, and school leaders work together to support program development.

Almost two decades into the era of high stakes testing and national curricula mandates in education, we are immersed in evaluating, accountability, and more mandates. Although this trend—accountability and data-driven decision-making—is not unique to education, we see that changing roles and increased responsibilities have redefined expectations for school and district personnel, namely literacy coaches. Some of the key ideas addressed in *Literacy Program Evaluation and Development Initiatives* are literacy instruction, literacy program development, program evaluation, literacy coaching, professional development, teacher leadership, and the professional learning community. In terms of these ideas, the literature shows teacher leadership can take many forms and roles in today’s schools and districts.

*Literacy Program Evaluation and Development Initiatives* focuses on two aspects of literacy coaching defined by the International Literacy Association: evaluation and professional development. These areas highlight the significance of coaches as teacher leaders. The chapters illustrate how coaches can conduct school- and district-wide evaluations and facilitate professional development experiences. *Literacy Program Evaluation and Development Initiatives* will introduce techniques for conducting self-study, specifically processes for collecting data and reviewing examples of evaluations conducted in urban and suburban P–12 schools. Readers will explore strategies for analyzing data and discuss how the methods introduced can be used to transform and improve practice; learn how to engage in inquiry through analysis of school-wide programs; and gain an understanding of how to analyze and interpret authentic data.

Many books are available on program evaluation and research methods. However many of these texts focus on the topic in general terms so readers develop an understanding of the methodology. There are also several books emerging in the field that describe the literacy coach’s role. *Literacy Program Evaluation and Development Initiatives* is unique because it provides literacy researchers, teacher educators, literacy coaches, teacher candidates in reading methods courses, and other school-based personnel with a lens to examine real examples of literacy initiatives in P–12 contexts, specifically in terms of professional development and program evaluation. Readers will see how the coaching model can be used to improve literacy-based practice at the classroom, school, and district level. *Literacy Program Evaluation and Development Initiatives* also stands apart because it introduces the field to a discussion about the intersections between program evaluation, professional development, and the stakeholders who implement school-wide literacy program initiatives.
BACKGROUND, RELEVANCY, AND SIGNIFICANCE

The International Literacy Association (ILA) believes reading specialists and coaches are leaders in schools. The ILA (2010) asserts that preparation of reading professionals needs to focus on their professional roles as teacher leaders by working with and supporting classroom teachers. According to the ILA (2010), literacy leadership includes the ability to act as change agents by disseminating research and materials to parents, teachers, and administrators, providing professional development, advocating for students and families, evaluating literacy programs, and developing curricula.

Researchers have used teacher-led inquiry in various contexts to examine school-wide programs. The processes and resources shared in this book have helped to change teachers’ perceptions of their role in school-wide initiatives and empowered teachers and educators to collaborate in data-driven decision-making. Teachers who have participated in school-wide evaluation have demonstrated leadership, and committed to life-long learning and ongoing professional development. The teachers were able to draw upon data to identify recommendations for school improvement. Teachers and school administrators collaborated in data-driven decision-making to determine the best way to support diverse learners.

Different models can be used to foster professional learning: for example, lesson study, peer coaching, and study groups are coaching models used throughout the country for teacher learning. Additionally, job-embedded professional development (e.g., in-class coaching and professional learning communities) provides a model for ongoing professional development that improves practice. Literacy coaches are an integral part of teachers’ ongoing professional development. Coaches demonstrate leadership by modeling best practice, observing peers, and providing feedback to colleagues. Through a close look at the experiences of literacy coaches, we can identify effective models for changing classroom practice. This type of inquiry can be framed by questions such as:

1. What are the elements of the coaching model that appear to foster changes in practice?
2. How do we know this is effective? In other words how do we know what works?

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PAPERS

The papers in this volume were selected based on their alignment to the goals of the text. A Call for Book Chapters was disseminated to various national and local organizations such as American Educational Research Association, Northeastern Educational Association, New York State Reading Association, and National Council of Teachers of English and their local affiliates. After authors submitted a proposal, they were invited to prepare a chapter for peer review. Members of the Editorial Advisory Board and other proposed authors reviewed the proposed chapters, and each chapter received two or three reviews. For the review process, we used a rubric that evaluated such areas as the significance of the topic, appropriateness for the book, adequacy of the literature review, analysis of issues, and organization. Chapters recommended for publication were accepted.

The chapters in this volume revolve around three themes: literacy program evaluation, collaborative and professional learning in program development, and teacher leadership. There is some overlap across these themes. It is evident in each chapter that the nature of literacy programs and development is not a seamless process but one that requires cyclical and interconnected parts and collaboration among various constituencies.
Three chapters explore strategies for evaluating literacy programs. In “Mapping a Way to Design, Implement, and Evaluate Literacy Instruction in School Settings: A Flexible Action-Oriented Data Analytic Framework,” Mokhtari and Consalvo present a tool that school-based teams can use to evaluate literacy instruction. They argue the tool can promote professional learning, collaborative inquiry, and school-wide improvements in literacy instruction through systematic analysis of data that can lead to data-based decisions.

Similarly Lawrence and English document ways in which various educators can be incorporated into the program evaluation process. In their chapter, “Methods and Processes for District-Wide Literacy Evaluation,” the authors argue for the use of mixed methods for program evaluation. They explain the benefits of using both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive and cross-context view of school-wide and district-wide literacy programs.

Readers of this volume can obtain further guidance on methods for evaluating literacy programs, from Lekwa, Shernoff, and Reddy. Their chapter, “Advancing Instructional Coaching with Teacher Formative Assessment and Input,” shows that instructional coaching is essential for supporting teacher development. In this chapter they provide a structured model for instructional coaching and how it aids in supporting program development—specifically curriculum implementation via instructional planning.

Any discussion of collaborative and professional learning in program development includes the ways in which teachers, coaches, school leaders, and teacher candidates work in various contexts to facilitate implementation and evaluation of literacy programs. The chapters in this section of the book examine how educators can use a wide array of data sources and perspectives to improve practice. Additionally, the authors in most of the chapters highlight professional learning as an essential practice that can facilitate program development and improvement. Different forms of professional learning are described. For example, in “Reinventing PLCs: Teachers Coaching Teachers at the Onset of Change,” DiMarco and Parenti take a close look at the benefits of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). As they explore this professional development method they examine how coaching can help to improve classroom practice for in-service teachers. In the chapter they provide evidence of best practices from what they consider “high functioning PLCs,” strategies from these processes that can be replicated in other contexts.

Three chapters on coaching provide further evidence of the significant role coaches play in program development and implementation. Because teachers work at the forefront of program implementation, school-wide literacy initiatives appear to be more effective when teachers receive in-class coaching. Furthermore, the papers suggest that program development and improvement rely on collaborative learning, where teachers come together to engage in common planning, curriculum development, and examination of data that highlight the connection between teaching and learning. For instance, Parenti looks specifically at the literacy coach’s role and how literacy coaching can help to support pre-service teachers. In “Comprehensive Literacy Coaching: Content, Pedagogical, Political, and Professional Knowledge,” Parenti describes a framework for teacher preparation—Content, Pedagogical, Political, and Professional Knowledge—which can help to build pre-service teachers’ skills to work in P–12 contexts through case review, role-play, and authentic practice. Case studies of coaches described in “Coaches as Skillful Collaborators: How Coaches Influence Practice in Middle and High Schools” help to conceptualize how coaches navigate the school context to support program implementation. In this chapter, Lawrence, Jefferson, and Blaszkiewicz look at the various roles of literacy coaches and how they work with stakeholders to meet Standards for Literacy Coaches. Finally, in “The Literacy Coach’s Role in Supporting Teachers’ Implementation of the Common Core State Standards in Writing,” Philippakos
and Moore look specifically at how coaches help develop and implement literacy programs in writing. Given the nature of increased expectations for writing in the Common Core State Standards, their work is timely and informative.

The final section of the text focuses on teacher leadership. Some of the chapters in this section provide insights on teacher leadership and perceptions of literacy integration across subject areas. These chapters are timely given the context framed by the interdisciplinary expectations noted in the Common Core State Standards. As one of the strengths of this volume, this section of the book brings together diverse perspectives to discuss literacy program development and evaluation and role teachers play in the process.

Growing evidence suggests that more and more teachers are seeking out their own professional development through various online spaces, including Twitter, blogs, and websites, to name a few. While research suggests that online or self-directed professional development impacts teachers’ classroom practice, what’s missing in the research is if, and how, teachers are sharing their learning with colleagues, either informally or formally. In “Sharing Expertise Gained from Online Self-Directed Professional Development: One Teacher’s Journey from Classroom Teacher to Teacher Leader,” Kurstedt and Pizzi describe how technology is changing the role of literacy instruction and professional development for teachers. In this chapter we learn how one technology teacher became a teacher leader by facilitating implementation of a school-wide technology literacy initiative. The authors show how various digital tools enabled teachers to take ownership of their own professional development during program implementation. Through technology teachers were afforded the opportunity to build efficacy with technologies as they introduced the resources into their classrooms.

Similarly, Zimmerbaum chronicles her own journey as a teacher leader in “Not Just a Teacher: A Path to Teacher Leadership.” The author draws upon current research to present an overview of how teachers become leaders. Likewise, Lawrence, Kaplan, and Chernobilsy describe the challenges teachers face when engaging in school-based research. In “Perspectives on Teacher Research: Teachers Report Challenges in Examining Classroom Practice,” the authors presents a report of teachers’ perceptions of their role and their capacity to be change agents and researchers in today’s schools. Keith, Jennings, and Moran also explore how teachers display leadership at the school level. In “Coaching as a Grass Roots Effort for Building Leadership Capacity,” they present a coaching model for change that can be used to transform school culture through shared leadership and inclusion of all stakeholders.

Finally, discussion of in-service practice raises implications for teacher preparation. The book includes three chapters that raise considerations for preparing teachers to become teacher leaders. For example, in “Exploring Literacy Assessment through Teacher Leader Collaborative Inquiry,” Hong, Mongillo, and Moore take an inquiry-based stance on coaching by exploring how candidates in a graduate teacher education program engage in collaborative learning and literacy coaching for school-wide literacy initiatives. The authors’ focus on literacy assessment shows how teachers can use assessment data to make instructional decisions that lead to improvements in student outcomes. Mongillo also explores the work of teacher candidates by taking a look at teacher self-efficacy for integrating literacy in math and science. In “Supporting Literacy in Math and Science Classrooms: Building Teacher Self-Efficacy across Content Areas,” the author discusses the challenges of building teacher efficacy, and describes ways that teacher preparation programs and school leaders can support literacy growth and development through curriculum design and assessment. “Teacher Leadership: Teachers as Leaders,” Pepin uses illustrative examples of teacher leaders to characterize teacher leadership. The chapter places emphasis on the qualities of teacher leaders and the ways that teacher preparation programs can better prepare candidates for leadership opportunities.
REFERENCES


