Discussion Paper on Learning Coaches—Support for the Inclusive Classroom

The Alberta Teachers' Association

I. Preamble

In July 2008 the Honourable David Hancock, Minister of Education, appointed a Steering Committee to examine special education in Alberta. Between November 2008 and March 2009, an extensive consultation process was undertaken and more than 6,000 Albertans contributed input and feedback related to vision, principles, policy, funding and accountability for students with special education needs. The report of the Steering Committee (Alberta Education 2009) stated that "the single inclusive system approach to education should be embraced in **all** Alberta schools" (p 5). The overarching recommendation of the framework was "the development of policy, accountability and funding mechanisms that are supported through comprehensive legislation that will enable one inclusive education system through curriculum, capacity and collaboration" (p 8). The remaining 10 recommendations were clustered within the three priority areas of curriculum, capacity and collaboration. Recommendation 5 within the priority area of capacity was to "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" (p 9) and one of the actions identified to meet the recommendation was to "explore provincial role descriptions and standards for school-based learning coaches" (p 9).

The recommendation to ensure school-based expertise to support teachers was of much interest to the Special Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association. The use of school-based learning coaches to provide support to teachers with students with special education needs became the focus of investigation and discussion. The goal of studying the topic was to further understand how teachers, responsible for the success of students with special education needs, can best be supported through the provision of learning coaches. Three distinct aspects of the model were discussed: (1) the efficacy of learning coaches in effecting change in teaching practice; (2) the characteristics and attributes required by individuals carrying out the role of learning coach; and (3) the role, responsibilities and preparation of teachers assuming the role of learning coach in Alberta schools.

This discussion paper documents the results of the literature review and subsequent discussion of the literature by the executive of the Special Education Council, as well as comments that were made as part of a panel discussion at the annual Special Education Council Conference held in October 2010. The content within the paper reflects current research, as well as the personal perspectives of experienced teachers working in special education. It is important to note that there was no common definition of *learning coach* in the literature; therefore, for the purposes of this paper the term *learning coach* describes a teacher who supports colleagues seeking to enhance their expertise in supporting all students, some of whom may have diverse and exceptional learning needs. A learning coach provides direct support to teacher colleagues. The coaching is collaborative in nature and intended to enhance the knowledge and skills of the teacher receiving coaching. The learning coach does not evaluate the teacher or specific practices but rather assists the teacher in identifying student needs within the classroom and the instructional response required to meet these learning needs.

This paper also reflects the input of teachers from across the province. In February 2011, a curriculum circle was convened to review the document, which included approximately 30 participants representing a variety of roles in the education system. The group provided feedback on the potential benefits and challenges surrounding learning coaches.

Alberta Education has been engaged in a process to revamp special education in Alberta. The process began with the Setting the Direction consultation and has evolved into Action on Inclusion. A primary element of Action on Inclusion is the introduction of learning coaches to facilitate inclusion in schools. According to Alberta Education, "Learning coaches work to improve student achievement by providing local support to teachers to strengthen inclusive practices."

The Association, in partnership with the Special Education Council, has published this discussion paper which was initiated by the council and involved an extensive review of the literature, as well as feedback from teachers across the province.

Alberta Education is requesting feedback on the concept and the role of learning coaches for inclusion. The deadline to provide feedback is **April 7, 2011**.

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II. Introduction

The diversity of students in Alberta classrooms and the evolving expectations to teach and support all students within inclusive classrooms challenge teachers to reflect upon their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Schools welcome students who vary in educational backgrounds, learning styles, cultures and languages. In the 2003 report, *Every Child Learns. Every Child Succeeds*, Alberta's Commission on Learning noted that 78 per cent of Alberta classrooms had children with special needs" (p 70). Learners in many classrooms can represent several grade levels of concept and skill development. Students who previously may have been educated in separate special education learning environments are now included in their local community schools.

Many experienced, successful teachers find the challenges of meeting diverse learning needs to be outside their areas of expertise. There is an expectation that all teachers will create inclusive learning environments and are able to instructionally plan and respond to individual needs of students. Professional development (PD) is required to help teachers respond to the diverse needs of students.

Although there are many ways to prepare and support teachers, a promising model is the provision of coaches who work directly with teaching staff in their classrooms. Recent literature related to peer coaching supports this method of providing guidance to colleagues within classroom practice (Zwart et al 2007; Borman and Feger 2006), especially to improve practices of teachers in the area of literacy (Denton and Hasbrouck 2009).

In Alberta, the use of a coaching model to enhance teacher capacity is becoming more commonplace. The way in which coaching models are implemented, however, varies among schools, and the roles, responsibilities and job titles of those providing the coaching differ. Many districts have some combination of consulting services and school-based educators who have responsibilities to support teachers and students with exceptional needs. The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) has encouraged collaborative practices and professional learning communities of teachers who work to share and solve problems of mutual concern.

To meet the challenges of inclusive education, Alberta teachers are faced with several challenges. Teachers may have limited professional preparation in the area of working with students with diverse learning needs. Moreover, the demands of everyday planning, lesson preparation, instruction, meetings, parent interaction and fulfilling supervision responsibilities restrict opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills in this area. It is difficult to find time to learn about individual student programs, meet with consultants, develop and revise differentiated curriculum materials, and create assessment materials. There is limited time to attend in-services and workshops to gain new knowledge and skills needed for individual student programming, or to gain an understanding of a particular student's learning needs. Furthermore, school districts often mandate topics and speakers to reflect the goals of broader initiatives such as AISI projects, and these professional development opportunities may not meet the immediate needs of teachers with students for whom special programming is necessary.

The provision of school-based expertise supports the notion of dynamic and responsive professional development. It offers many of the characteristics of effective professional development such as job-embedded, school-based support and ongoing professional learning

that is context specific (Darling-Hammond and Richardson 2009; Desimone 2009; Guskey 2002; and Birman et al 2000). Professional support and resources are then focused on the needs of the teacher, which may be determined by the individual needs of the students in his/her classroom. Thus a coaching model attends to both the needs of the teacher and, indirectly, to the needs of the students. By having learning coaches available to every school in Alberta, the support to teachers is responsive to and respectful of the needs of the teacher and occurs through targeted and ongoing feedback. As a result, teachers increase their capacity to address diverse learning needs.

Research on coaching models commonly defines *coaches* as partners who work together to solve classroom problems and who engage in professional conversations, rather than dictated particular practices.

Potential benefits of school-based coaching include:

- Learning resources that are networked and easier to establish and maintain

- Coordinated access to consultants

- Expertise and research-based practices that can be brought closer to the classroom where they are contextually relevant

- Frequent and immediate feedback

- Implementation of strategies learned in formal professional development

- Improved information gathering and sharing/communication about individual students

- Improved practices through data collection, reflection and analysis over time

- Improved staff capacity to meet the needs of students with diverse needs

- Increased collaboration with colleagues

- Increased job satisfaction as a result of sharing and support

- Individualized support to address unique teacher needs

- Opportunities to build collegiality

- Provision of efficient, classroom-embedded support that reduces the need for added-on professional development

- Structured opportunities for reflection

- Support for building wraparound services

- Use of common language

As with any initiative there can be implementation challenges that lead to less efficacious results. The gap between theory and practice is dependent on several variables, including a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, adequate funding and resources, and the knowledge, skills and attributes of those teachers performing the learning coach role.

III. Learnings from Literature and Practice

Although coaching as a method of increasing skills and competencies has been common practice for many years in sports and in business, educational coaching is not familiar to all teachers. Research has shown, however, that job-embedded professional development or work done directly in classrooms may be more relevant and therefore sustainable (Borman and Feger 2006). Research has further shown that presentation of theory using an inservice model has a very low impact on classroom application, while coaching within the classroom setting has been found to be much more effective (Boyd 2008).

Coaches may be part of a professional development team, with differing individual roles to address identified needs of school staff. Some may work only with teachers on particular subjects or classroom management strategies. In Alberta, coaches and learning support staff are often involved in developing or assisting with professional development opportunities, or attending workshops and sharing the information with the school staff. As well, coaching may be based on a direct teaching format, from an experienced teacher to a novice teacher, or take a cognitive coaching approach to develop reflective practice and embrace change through revised teacher belief systems and application of knowledge (Borman and Feger 2006).

Of importance to teachers who work with students with special education needs is how knowledge and strategies for teaching children with identified needs can become part of daily, natural practice. One method is to provide information and direct professional development through a workshop or inservice format, and then to follow up through coaching in the classroom. Donegan, Ostrosky and Fowler (2010) described such a model for an early childhood program and further considered the value of making both expert and reciprocal coaches available to teachers. They found that peer coaching reduced isolation, promoted collaboration, encouraged collegiality, promoted strategies for students who required extra assistance and encouraged reflective practices. Elements of peer coaching in this review included joint planning, observation and feedback.

Denton and Hasbrouck (2009) studied instructional coaching and its relationship to consultation and found that coaches could be categorized according to their approach and focus in working with school staff. Their research suggests that technical coaching, problem-solving coaching, reflective practice coaching, team-building coaching and reform coaching can be defined and described through the coaches' roles, purposes and procedures. Although this research related predominantly to literacy coaches, the consultants provided input for teaching students with special needs. Comparing strengths and challenges of consultant models with coaching models could be an interesting area of exploration.

In the literature reviewed there was a wide range of expectations and outcomes for coaches. For example, coaching appeared to be popular in the United Kingdom (Simkins et al 2006); in the United States, however, there were variations in preservice education, inclusive education practices and general educational expectations for teachers. It is therefore important that the model developed for use in Alberta reflects the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard, the Program of Studies and the Setting the Direction Framework (Action on Inclusion). A further consideration is that many school districts in Alberta currently have school-based educators who are responsible for assisting students with special learning needs and they are performing many of the roles typically assigned to learning coaches. While not called learning coaches,

learning support teachers, key contacts, learning facilitators and curriculum coordinators often assume these responsibilities. Although perhaps some roles are ambiguous, they often serve as a "mentor and facilitator to enhance the capacity to address diverse learning needs in all classrooms" (Alberta Education 2009, 15).

Neufeld and Roper (2003) reviewed coaching research and identified issues and challenges to be considered prior to establishing a coaching program. Note that the following list has been supplemented by information generated through discussions, meetings, and a review of the literature by the Special Education Council executive:

- Ensuring that cost to the schools does not detract from other needs

- Discriminating between coaches and consultants and ensuring that students who have high needs receive adequate support

- Ensuring administrative support, involvement and PD for administrators

- Ensuring that coaches have the skills and abilities to do the job well, give appropriate feedback and respect the role of teaching staff

- Ensuring that coaching is school based and has the potential to affect students over time, perhaps through work with established learning teams

- Ensuring that the role is supportive and instructive, rather than evaluative

- Finding coaches with the knowledge, skills and expertise to support teachers who have students with exceptional learning needs, particularly in remote areas

- Possibility of removal of skilled teachers from the classroom

- Ensuring ongoing professional development for coaches

- Providing adequate time to both teachers and the learning coach during the school day to ensure that collaboration is effective and respectful

- Providing time to plan the work of teacher assistants

- Respecting, preserving and integrating, where appropriate, effective models and initiatives that are in existence—for example, professional learning communities, consultative practices and learning teams

- Encouraging teacher agreement and participation—the question of choice

- Verifying the role is to build capacity and assist the teacher and not to assume direct responsibility for the student(s)

Kise (2006) developed a framework that could be helpful in developing a coaching model and be a support to coaches in their ongoing work with teachers. She suggests that recognizing specific learning styles of teachers and matching supports in ways that fit their personal needs, interests and teaching beliefs is necessary to providing effective assistance. This model of differentiated coaching is similar to an individualized approach to student teaching and learning.

Kise articulates six key elements necessary for effective staff development:

1. Encouraging teachers to engage in deep, reflective collaboration
2. Meeting the needs of each teacher
3. Understanding the teacher's strengths and beliefs about teaching and learning
4. Providing information and evidence that can influence beliefs
5. Relating or applying what is being learned to the problems teachers want to solve in their classrooms
6. Using a common framework for unbiased reflection on education.

In order to ensure positive outcomes, there are many prerequisites that must be satisfied prior to implementation of a professional development model using learning coaches:

- Administrative support for learning coaches (Bickmore 2010)

- Clear roles and responsibilities

- Development of protocols for reflection and assessment of the coaching program

- Guidelines related to participation in a coaching program

- Limits placed on class size and composition that are reasonable for teachers to manage as they learn new strategies

- Ongoing professional development for coaches

- Provision of in-school support on a regular basis and multiple coaches in larger schools

- Sufficient flexibility to meet specific teacher and/or district needs

- Sufficient time assigned to carry out the role effectively—the learning coach will not reduce the need for teacher assistants who support students

Implications and Necessary Conditions for Implementation

- Adequate time during the school day for teachers and learning coaches to meet is crucial. Administrator support for and understanding of the role of the coach is essential (Bickmore 2010).

- Earmarked funding for professional development programs to enable the acquisition of knowledge and skills required by teachers and coaches to work in inclusive classrooms is critical.

- Substantial, ongoing funding and professional development are critical to developing the expertise required to prepare teachers as coaches prior to the expectation that there will be full implementation of the coaching model.

- The development of a detailed yet flexible implementation plan is essential, which includes ongoing assessment and evaluation of the coaching program.

IV. Characteristics and Qualities of a Learning Coach

Ideally, a learning coach providing support to teachers is an educator who has strong knowledge, skills and experience in teaching a range of students with diverse learning needs, as well as the personal characteristics necessary to build relationships and maintain positive interactions with teachers. The literature review suggests a range of personal attributes related to coaching. For example, a content area coach would require expertise, education and experience teaching the subject matter required. A coach supporting teachers in their work with students with diverse special education needs may require an even wider range of experiences and knowledge, including specific experience and knowledge related to inclusion.

The need to carefully consider the role of learning coaches and to develop clear job descriptions is considered essential to the success of the learning coach model. Obviously, the role will dictate to some extent the required skills, knowledge and beliefs. It will be important for everyone involved with the school to have common understandings of what coaches can and cannot be expected to do. Delineation of clear role expectations, primary responsibilities, and expected outcomes can result in less role ambiguity and conflict. It should be noted that the role of learning coach may be different at different grade levels (Buly et al 2006) and that these differences should be captured by clearly written position descriptions.

Developing a learning coach program for supporting inclusive education is an ambitious undertaking and should involve Alberta universities. Effective coaches require knowledge of a range of curriculum and instructional responses and must also be current in educational thought and research. It will be necessary for them to network with other coaches and receive ongoing professional development. The International Reading Association (IRA) (2004) coach requirements suggest that reading coaches must be excellent and experienced teachers; have in-depth knowledge of reading, experience working with teachers and well-honed presentation skills; and be able to make observations, provide feedback and model instruction. Learning coaches require similar skills, but also expertise and experience in working with students with special education needs. Some requirements of teachers working with such students may also involve liaising with parents and other professionals, working with educational assistants and networking with services outside the school. Learning coaches require the knowledge and skills to engage and work with teachers who may not be comfortable teaching students with severe needs. A wide range of knowledge, skills and attributes are required in order to be an effective learning coach, as evidenced by the following list which reflects findings from the literature, as well as information generated through discussions, meetings and a panel session by the Special Education Council executive:

Professional Expertise

- Expertise in assessment for, of and as learning
- Curriculum and content areas
- Individualized program plans

- Experience relating to and facilitating work with other teachers

- Experience teaching students with special education needs

- Graduate education level and/or expertise in inclusive education

- Knowledge of provincial and local policies and regulations

- Observation and data collection procedures

- Positive behaviour supports and data analysis

- Provision of specific, accurate and timely feedback in a positive manner

- Technology, including assistive technologies

- Universal design for learning and differentiated instruction

- Working with parents, wraparound services, community agencies

Personal Abilities/Attributes

- Adhering to high professional and ethical standards

- Building trust

- Collaborating with others

- Commitment to participating in and supporting ongoing professional development

- Communicating effectively orally and in writing

- Creating teams

- Nurturing positive working relationships

- Practical problem solving

In summary, there appears to be at least four categories of attributes for a learning coach. The first category requires experience and expertise in inclusive education. A second category reflects expertise in pedagogies and effective teaching strategies. Third, expertise in coaching processes is important. The fourth category is that of professional qualities, such as the ability to engage, communicate and positively interact with one's colleagues.

Additional Conditions

- Positive relationships and trust are necessary before effective coaching can occur. Individuals will also need to possess or be able to obtain the required professional development and support necessary to coach teachers who have students with special needs in their classrooms (Killian 2010).

- Ongoing access to a range of professional learning opportunities will be important in order for the learning coach to continue to develop his or her expertise.

Learning coaches are concerned with improving learning outcomes for all students regardless of their educational needs. Special education categories speak only to some individual differences

and do not encompass the diversity found in most classrooms or the challenges of responding instructionally to these differences. Learning coaches must be able to support teachers with all their students, including those with identified special education needs.

The professional expertise and personal characteristics of coaches may prepare them to carry out this role. The work of coaches, however, is multifaceted and differs according to the needs within schools and school jurisdictions.

V. Roles and Responsibilities

A review of the coaching literature, as well as consideration of support personnel already in place in Alberta schools, indicates a significant number of expectations and responsibilities assigned to instructional or learning coaches. Many school districts in Alberta, for example, have identified teachers in each school to facilitate and be responsible for programming for students with special educational needs. While roles differ, these educators typically have assigned time and responsibility to coordinate supports, materials and processes necessary for identified students. Many other schools have created positions for coaches related to specific content or district initiatives. Although titles vary across districts, there are cases in which various responsibilities have been amalgamated into one position—for example, an educator who has some responsibilities for administration and coordination, in-class supports, direct work with individual students, and consulting or inservice responsibilities. Titles may include

- AISI coach,
- blended coach,
- classroom management coach,
- classroom support teacher,
- cognitive coach,
- content coach,
- curriculum coordinator,
- instructional coach,
- instructional facilitator,
- key contact,
- learning assistance teacher,
- learning support facilitator,
- literacy coach,
- peer coach or
- special education coordinator.

In Alberta Education's *Setting the Direction Framework* (2009), the term *learning coach* was used, although the term *instructional coach* was more commonly found in the literature. According to *Setting the Direction,* there is an identified need in Alberta to increase support to teachers teaching students who have diverse learning challenges. The provision of learning coaches could be an important aspect of collaboration in schools, another essential component of the *Setting the Direction* mandate.

A coaching role related to enhancing the practices of teachers who are working with diverse groups of students may vary significantly from the roles of subject or content coaches on which much of the research on coaching has been based. Knight (2004a) gave an example in which

the coaches were coaching teachers on behaviour support materials; however, they did not necessarily provide support to teachers for their students who had severe fetal alcohol syndrome or sensory impairments, even in areas such as classroom management or literacy programming.

The review of the literature revealed that the term *coaching* described a wide range of actual teaching-related activities. There were, however, some common expectations of a school-based educator who supported teachers to provide programming for students with exceptional educational needs. Specific to inclusion, Kovic (1996) studied peer coaching with a regular Grade 2 teacher in whose classroom two children with Down Syndrome were being integrated. Kovic found that through peer coaching there were fewer philosophical conflicts regarding appropriate curriculum, assessment models were reduced, risk taking and experimentation were increased, and a more collaborative spirit was fostered. She further identified seven skills that were critical to the ongoing success of the peer-coaching project—collaboration, flexibility, creativity, effective communication, leadership and initiative, positive self-concept, and shared vision. It is more common, however, to find general roles and responsibilities of coaches that may need to be modified to match the needs of teachers working with students who have exceptional learning needs (Borman and Feger 2006; Zwart et al 2007).

The primary role and responsibility of learning coaches should be that of coaching. Examples of coaching activities may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Assist in the identification and design of curriculum materials to support diverse learner needs

- Assist teachers in assessing student needs (diagnostic, formative, summative, etc)

- Collaborate to adapt, revise and modify curriculum materials

- Collaborate in locating appropriate resources, including assistive technology

- Model and/or demonstrate instructional strategies

- Observe lessons and provide constructive and timely feedback

- Provide ongoing support for individual program planning

- Support approaches such as universal design for learning and differentiated instruction

The way in which the role and responsibilities of learning coaches are conceptualized may differ from school to school and from school district to school district. It is imperative, however, that the primary functions of the role relate to direct work with the teacher that results in enhanced professional capacity to teach in an inclusive learning environment. The learning coach does not work directly with students unless it is through demonstrating lessons or modelling strategies.

Further, the role of learning coach must be in addition to, and not replace, existing supports and resources in schools and districts. In determining the role and responsibilities of a learning coach, it is essential to ensure that there is no role ambiguity or conflict with other roles in the school, that the role is not evaluative in nature, and that there is sufficient funding and resources to be able to implement the role with integrity.

Implications

- There is no agreed-upon description of the role and responsibilities of a learning coach in the literature reviewed, nor in practical application within school districts. It will be important to define the parameters and primary responsibilities as well as the expected outcomes of the role in order to establish an accountability structure.

- There are many possible roles for coaches. It is important, therefore, in order to preserve the integrity of the coaching work and hold the position accountable for predetermined outcomes, that there are common understandings within each school as to the primary functions of a learning coach.

- There are many initiatives converging in schools such as those involving wraparound services and success-in-school plans for children and youth in care. If the learning coach were to be involved in the administrative aspects of these initiatives, it is possible that the time actually available for coaching would be minimal.

- It will be critical to have the time for coaching and debriefing during the school day, and not as an add-on at the end of the day.

- Since the term *instructional coach* has been used by AISI and other initiatives, it will be important to distinguish between specific roles within schools if there is more than one coach. It would not be possible to simply shift an AISI instructional coach into a learning coach position without a great deal of professional development, materials and support, as well as revising the role description.

- The coach's role is one of *coaching* and must not be evaluative. In cases where there may be a possible conflict of interest, it would be imperative that the role/responsibilities of any teaching staff be in accordance with the Alberta Teachers' Association Code of Professional Conduct.

VI. Concluding Remarks:
Toward Thoughtful Implementation

1. Inclusive Education and Professional Development

"Teachers have come to expect differences among their students with respect to such factors as culture, language, intellectual capacity, gender, and socioeconomic status. The challenge for the classroom teacher is knowing how to respond, instructionally, to these differences" (ATA 2009, 8). There is little argument that welcoming all students into the classroom adds to the richness of classroom composition but also adds to the complexity of teaching and learning. In order to ensure success for all students it is necessary for teachers to have the knowledge, skills and expertise to meet the diverse needs of the students within their classrooms, some of whom may have special education needs. Access to high-quality professional development is critical for teachers, coaches and school administrators. The provision of school-based learning coaches may be one effective professional development approach to support teachers in further enhancing their practice. With the focus on school-based learning coaches, however, there is the risk that other essential aspects of inclusive education will be overlooked. Professional development is but one dimension of supporting teachers in inclusive classrooms. It is essential to recognize that class size, uninterrupted instructional time, collaborative planning time with other teachers, access to well-trained teacher assistants, access to material resources and assistive technology, and support from school-based administration also influence life in the inclusive classroom. There are a number of factors, extraneous to the teacher's knowledge, skills and experience, that may determine the quality of teaching and learning in a classroom, and these factors must also be taken into account in a systemic approach to building capacity for inclusive education.

2. Coaching Is an Exercise in Self-Examination

Teachers require a certain degree of courage to engage in self-examination of teaching practices and in particular to engage a colleague in the process. Cochran-Smith (2003) described the highly qualified teacher as someone who "knows subject matter (what to teach) and pedagogy (how to teach), but also knows how to learn and how to make decisions informed by theory and research from many bodies of knowledge, and also as informed by feedback from school and classroom evidence in particular contexts" (p 96). Coaching could be one of those contexts. Coaching is a strategy that enables a teacher to engage in inquiry, collaboration, shared decision making and responsibility for student learning, and experiment with innovative practices with support and encouragement. It is a partnership, not an evaluative relationship. Coaching involves ongoing conversations between teachers and coaches within the context of professional and collaborative relationships. Teachers are supported in developing assessment tools and using data-based evidence to identify needs and provide programs for students with diverse needs. By working in a collegial and coaching relationship, teachers engage in inquiry and problem solving and enhance their instructional capacity to teach all learners.

3. The Need for a Common Vision

The roles and responsibilities of learning coaches must be collectively and clearly defined, and common understandings by all stakeholders must be established. The act of coaching

should be central to the role, with the primary purpose being to support the learning of the teacher and the subsequent success of students with diverse learning needs. Administrative and coordinating functions should be secondary to the role of coaching. The nature of the coaching relationship is collegial and professional and must not involve an evaluative function.

4. Traits of a Learning Coach

The success of any coaching initiative is highly dependent upon the skills of the coach. As described earlier, there appear to be at least four categories of attributes for a learning coach. The first category requires experience and expertise in inclusive education. A second category reflects expertise in pedagogies and effective teaching strategies. Third, expertise in coaching processes is important. The fourth category is that of professional qualities such as the ability to engage, communicate and positively interact with one's colleagues. It is of the utmost importance that those performing the role of coach possess the necessary pedagogical knowledge and expertise, as well as the skills to engage and motivate others in a positive way.

5. Program Assessment

It will be important to develop an ongoing strategy to assess the effectiveness of a coaching program. Links between coaching, teacher learning and student learning should be logical outcomes if the primary goal of coaching is for teacher learning to be realized in instructional practice and, ultimately, in student success. The success of a coaching program will depend on a long-term commitment of both funding and resources.

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