CHAPTER ONE

The Role of Literacy Professionals in Schools, Classrooms, and Communities

KEY QUESTIONS

- Why and how has the role of the literacy specialist evolved in recent years? In what ways has it remained the same? What policies and practices influenced this change?
- What are the multiple roles and responsibilities of literacy specialists in today's schools and how are they enacted?
- Why has there been a shift from the term *reading specialist* to *literacy specialist*?
- What contextual factors are currently affecting the role of the literacy specialist?

Much has been learned about how to teach literacy to all students, yet the evidence is clear: There continue to be students in schools at all levels (PreK–12) who are not learning to read or write effectively or who are reading or writing below grade-level expectations. Indeed, the results of the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (Nation's Report Card, 2019) revealed that only 35% of fourth graders and 34% of eighth graders were proficient in reading, indicating that we must continue our efforts to improve student literacy learning. Across the United States, legislators and policymakers, those in the business community, parents, and educators alike have searched for ways to address this dilemma. The federal government has invested in large-scale programs such as Head Start, Reading

First (a professional development initiative of No Child Left Behind [U.S. Department of Education, 2002]), Race to the Top (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; U.S. Department of Education, 2015), and other school improvement programs to support literacy instruction. These federal initiatives as well as others developed by states or local districts require that teachers have an in-depth understanding of how to teach literacy.

In order to reach the goals of these various initiatives, schools required literacy specialists to have dual roles: to teach students who have difficulty with literacy and to provide mentoring support to classroom teachers so that all students are successful. The instructional role of the literacy specialist is an important one given it increases the opportunity for students to receive appropriate and differentiated instruction. The leadership role in which literacy specialists work with classroom teachers has been evolving, especially since the early 2000s, with many schools hiring literacy or reading coaches to partner with teachers as a means of improving classroom instruction and enhancing student learning.

Yet the dual role of the literacy specialist is not a new one. As cited in Hall (2004), "the concept of literacy coaching dates back to the 1920's—but they are increasingly in demand in 21st century schools" (p. 11). In 1981, Bean and Wilson, in their book *Effecting Change in School Reading Programs: The Resource Role,* wrote about the need for reading specialists to work as partners with teachers, parents, and administrators, and that "this partnership must be based on mutual trust and respect" (p. 7). In 1998, Snow, Burns, and Griffin reinforced this stance, stating, "every school should have access to specialists . . . reading specialists who have specialized training related to addressing reading difficulties and who can give guidance to classroom teachers" (p. 333). Moreover, the position statement of the International Reading Association (IRA, 2000; now the International Literacy Association [ILA]) on the role of the reading specialist called for such a dual role. It is this dual role that is addressed in this book. This role requires literacy specialists to have expertise with literacy assessment and instruction and to possess the leadership skills that enable them to work with other adults, such as classroom teachers, other professionals (e.g., speech and language teachers, special educators), and the community (e.g., parents, volunteers, universities, community agencies).

Throughout this book, we use the case example of Pam during her first year as a literacy specialist to explore the challenges and opportunities for literacy teaching. In this chapter, we start with her job interview.

Pam was excited about her upcoming interview with a curriculum director at a local school. She was applying for a position as a literacy

specialist in one of the elementary schools in the district. Pam looked again at the written description of the position: reading specialist certification required; able to administer literacy assessment tests and analyze results with teachers; plan and implement instruction for students identified as needing Tier 2 instruction; serve as a resource for teachers and support their instruction. Well, she had successfully completed her reading specialist certification program and she had a good understanding of how to assess and then to work with students needing supplemental literacy instruction. She had just finished a course on being a literacy leader, but she was still hesitant about this aspect of the position. With only 3 years of teaching experience, she wasn't sure how she would work with more experienced teachers. She was friendly and had a good sense of humor! Would that be enough?

In this case example, Pam, as a new literacy specialist, recognizes that she will need more than a knowledge and understanding of literacy instruction to be effective in her role. She will need the leadership skills that enable her to work collaboratively with and support her colleagues in their efforts to provide excellent literacy instruction for all students. As you read this book, you will learn more about what skills, knowledge, and dispositions Pam needs to be successful in her role as a literacy specialist. As indicated in the preface, we have three goals for this book:

1. To provide information and ideas that inform prospective and current literacy professionals about leadership and its importance to their success in schools.
2. To provide insights into the leadership role and responsibilities, from teaching students to working with teachers, to addressing larger systemic issues, such as designing curriculum or developing a community partnership program.
3. To provide practical ideas and resources that help literacy professionals effectively perform their role at the student, teacher, and system levels.

What makes the position of literacy specialist an exciting, complex, and challenging one are the opportunities to work with multiple stakeholders who have different needs and perspectives about literacy instruction, assessment, and about the role of the literacy specialist itself. We begin our leadership journey by taking a look at the evolution of this role of reading (literacy) specialist. Although in later chapters, we use the term literacy specialist, in this chapter, we use the terms interchangeably, using the term reading specialist when discussing the history of the role or describing research in which researchers used the term reading specialist.

WHERE WE WERE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROLE

> Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it.
> —EDMUND BURKE, 18th-century Irish statesman and philosopher

We believe that an understanding of how the role has evolved can be useful to those now seeking to serve as literacy specialists. Educators have learned a great deal about what works—and what doesn't work—for literacy instruction and for the various roles of literacy educators. As you read this section, think about what you see in schools today. What similarities are there in how literacy specialists function in today's schools and how they served in the past?

The presence of specialists in schools dates back to the 1930s when they functioned as supervisors who worked with teachers to improve the reading program. In 1940, Dolch called for schools to employ remedial reading specialists to work with students experiencing reading difficulties, but it was after World War II, in response to criticism of the schools and their inability to teach children to read, that remedial reading teachers became fixtures in many schools, public and private, elementary through secondary. The primary responsibility of the specialist was to work with individuals or small groups of children who were experiencing difficulty in learning to read. Briggs and Coulter (1977) stated, "Like Topsy, these remedial reading services just 'growed,' aided and abetted by government at all levels and by private foundations quick to provide grants of funding for such programs" (p. 216). IRA (1968), in its *Guidelines for Reading Specialists,* strongly supported the remedial role: Five of the six functions described for the "special teacher of reading" related directly to instructional responsibilities. However, there were those educators who began to see the difficulty of reading specialists serving only an instructional capacity. Stauffer (1967) described the remedial role as one of working in a "bottomless pit" and supported the notion of reading specialists serving as consultants.

Support for reading specialists serving in multiple roles continued throughout the next several decades. As previously mentioned, Bean and Wilson (1981) emphasized the importance of interpersonal, leadership, and communication skills for those in reading specialist positions. Their book in many ways was a call for professionals who might serve as literacy coaches, although they did not use that term (Hall, 2004). In 1998, Snow, Burns, and Griffin reinforced the stance of a dual role, stating, "every school should have access to specialists . . . reading specialists who have specialized training related to addressing reading difficulties and who can give guidance to classroom teachers" (p. 333). Moreover, the position statement of the IRA (2000) on the role of the reading specialist called for such

a dual role. This role requires reading specialists to have expertise with reading assessment and instruction and to possess the leadership skills that enable them to work with other adults, such as classroom teachers, other professionals, and the community. Below we address several factors that have been responsible for defining the role of reading specialists, including the source of funding that provided support for these specialized professionals and research that contributed to new ideas about literacy assessment, instruction, and the roles of reading specialists.

Policy and Its Influence on the Role of Reading/Literacy Specialists

In 1965, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Public Law No. 89-10) provided large-scale funding to provide supplemental support to students identified as economically deprived. In the initial conceptualization of this program, policies and procedures were developed to ensure that only eligible students were receiving support provided by this funding stream. Moreover, they were to be taught by reading specialists who had the necessary credentials to work with them. Materials and other resources purchased with Title 1 funds were to be used by these eligible students only. Such policies led to what is commonly referred to as "pullout" programs; that is, large, separate, and distinct programs for designated students. By separating the Title I program and its resources from the general school program, it was easier for school personnel to maintain fiscal compliance. However, these pullout programs generated many problems. Often, there was little congruence or alignment between the classroom program and the supplemental program, so students with reading difficulties who could least handle this lack of alignment, received two different programs, with no "bridges" to connect them. Some reading specialists were not knowledgeable about the instruction that students were receiving in their classrooms (Allington, 1986; Slavin, 1987), nor did they share what they were doing with the classroom teachers! Moreover, when students who received Title I services returned to their classrooms, they were frequently asked to learn from materials that were too difficult for them or to use strategies or skills different from those they were learning in their pullout program. Another problem was that, too often, students in these supplemental programs spent their time doing workbook-type, skill-related activities. There was little opportunity to read nor was there much direct instruction (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989; Bean, Cooley, Eichelberger, Lazar, & Zigmond, 1991). And some classroom teachers seemed to think that the reading specialists had sole responsibility for teaching these students to read, even though the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) identified the instruction provided by the specialists as *supplemental*.

At the same time, teachers resented the "swinging-door" dimension of pullout programs; their instruction was interrupted by students coming into and going out of their classrooms. This feeling is illustrated in an article from a newsletter published by a teachers' organization:

> Over the past few months I've been noticing that my class has been quietly disappearing. They leave one by one, or in small groups. They come late due to dentist appointments and leave early for eye exams. They are being remediated, enriched, guided, weighed, and measured. They are leaving me to learn to speak English, pass the TELLS test, increase sight vocabulary, develop meaningful relationships, and to be PEP'd or BEEP'd.
>
> They slip in and out with such frequency that I rarely have my whole class together for any length of time on any given day. I don't know when to schedule a test anymore. I've considered administering them during lunch when I'm on cafeteria duty—but then again the "packers" aren't sitting with the "buyers"—so we are still not all together.
>
> One day I accidentally had the whole class in my room. As soon as I discovered it, I quickly gave them their language pretest and posttest! If it ever happens again, they're getting their final exam.
>
> When the office calls for one of my students, I try to be fair about it. My policy is—if they can find them, they can have them. I find you can get one small advantage from all this coming and going, if you work it right. You seat your talkative kids in between the frequent remedials and half the time they'll be next to empty desks.
>
> I am learning to deal with the disappearances. I teach in bits and pieces to parts of the whole. But you can help me out, if you will. If you ever run into any of my meandering students, say "hi" for me—and take them over their timetables please. (Shaler Area Education Association, 1986, p. 3)

Another problem was the stigma associated with leaving the classroom; students were viewed by their peers as being dumb or different, creating a lack of self-esteem in these students. Also, Allington (1986) and others were concerned that pullout programs that provided minimal reading instruction (i.e., 35–40 minutes, several times a week) did not address the serious needs of students.

The results of large-scale evaluations of Chapter 1 or Title I were not always positive, although Borman and D'Agostine (2001), in their meta-analysis of Title I program effects, indicated that "there has been a positive trend for the educational effectiveness of Title I across the years of its operation" (p. 49). They contended that, without these services, students would have fallen further behind academically. The evaluation of Title I has been difficult because it is essentially a funding program, not one that requires specific instructional foci, and there are many variations in the ways that it has been implemented in districts across this nation. At the same time, the great expectation for Title I—that it closes the achievement gap between at-risk, poor students and their more advantaged peers—has not been met.

In 1988, new federal legislation (e.g., Hawkins–Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Act) and research literature recommended many changes. These changes included recommendations for additional collaboration with classroom teachers and special educators and more emphasis on programs in which reading specialists worked in the classrooms with teachers. Further, schools with large numbers of Title 1 students were also eligible to receive schoolwide funding, which meant that reading specialists could work with all students in that school, rather than only with those who were targeted for Title 1 services. These policy changes influenced the role of reading specialists, making it essential that they be able to work well with their teaching colleagues. Although this movement generated more interaction between teachers and reading specialists, it was not always a "marriage made in heaven"; both partners had to learn to work collaboratively in new and different ways (we address this issue further in Chapter 2).

Two other large-scale policy initiatives had a great influence on how reading specialists worked. First was the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and its programmatic arm, Reading First. Reading First emphasized the importance of increasing teacher knowledge and understanding of reading instruction. Given the focus on providing job-embedded support for teachers, districts employed reading coaches to work directly with teachers. Often reading specialists, who may not have been prepared to handle these coaching responsibilities, were assigned to function in this role, leading to great variation in how these newly assigned coaches functioned in schools. Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, and Autio (2007) found that on average coaches spent only 28% of their time working with teachers, although they had been asked to spend 60–80% of their time with them. During this time period, the major function of many reading specialists shifted from that of teaching to that of coaching.

The second major initiative was response to intervention (RTI), which was created through the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004); the goal of RTI was to reduce the numbers of students identified for special education by providing early identification of needs and immediate intervention. This initiative called for a multilevel model for differentiation (i.e., a tiered framework) and for additional, specialized instruction beyond that provided by classroom teachers. Teachers known as *interventionists* were to provide these services. Again, this legislation affected the role of reading specialists who were now being asked to develop and implement "Tier 2" instruction and often given a new title, that of interventionist.

In 2015, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 with passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The ESSA regulations provide states

with flexibility in how they structure their Title 1 programs. Each state submitted a plan describing both long-term and interim goals, with a requirement for indicators of the accountability system (e.g., proficiency on tests, English language proficiency, graduation rates). The ILA (2016a) published an overview toolkit featuring an analysis of ESSA's implications for literacy instruction, including changes impacting funding for schools, new requirements, and links to resources.

Changes in Literacy Assessment and Instruction

Although policy initiatives had a great effect on the role of reading specialists, changes in knowledge and beliefs about assessment and instruction also created shifts in the role. In the early days of Title I programs, reading specialists carefully documented the reading achievement and reading expectancy of students who might be eligible for compensatory services. School districts calculated reading expectancy or potential in various ways, from obtaining the intelligence quotients of students to administering listening comprehension tests, or sometimes using teacher judgments. Only those students who were identified as "discrepant"—that is, their literacy test performance revealed a gap between achievement and potential—were assigned to receive reading services. With growing recognition of (1) the limitations inherent in scores achieved on intelligence and standardized tests and (2) possible test bias in identifying students, regulations eliminated the use of a discrepancy formula, and students were identified based on their actual reading achievement.

The criticism of standardized testing also led to the identification of new indicators of success for students and Title I programs, with a primary emphasis on how well students performed on "authentic" measures and indicators of success in the classroom such as grades in subject areas. Schools, therefore, found themselves in the position of creating their own measures, identifying what they wanted students to know and be able to do at various grade levels. And, often, reading specialists found themselves in the position of working with classroom teachers to develop such instruments.

Likewise, changes in reading instruction influenced the work of reading specialists. As mentioned previously, Allington and McGill-Franzen (1989; Bean et al., 1991), who studied Chapter 1 programs, found that reading specialists often spent their time using "skill-and-drill" methods. Students completed worksheets or participated in specialized programs that emphasized skill instruction. Students spent little time reading! Yet research evidence and theorists in the field were advocating the teaching of more explicit reading strategies, authentic experiences that provided increased opportunities for students to engage actively in reading and writing tasks.

These changes as well as the results of Title I evaluations led to a period in the 1990s when school districts eliminated or downsized the number of reading specialists in their schools. One reading specialist summarized the situation as follows:

> Our grant from Title I is substantial; yet rather than use the expertise of reading specialists in the district's reading program, the number of specialists has dropped in the last several years from 14 to 4. Reading specialists have been assigned to classroom teaching positions or have not been replaced from attrition. Blame for dropping reading scores has been laid at the Title I door; reading specialists are an expensive liability. Reading specialists are being replaced with many, many inexpensive aides. (personal communication from an anonymous reading specialist to Rita Bean, May 1991)

Various programs and strategies were implemented to address the problems of students experiencing literacy difficulties: improving classroom teaching practices, reducing class size, using technology in the classrooms, adding after-school and summer programs, and employing volunteers and aides to work with students. None of these strategies, though they can be somewhat beneficial, seemed to produce the desired results.

Role of IRA in Evolution of the Specialist Role

In 1995, the IRA (now the ILA), recognizing that its members had concerns about these multiple interpretations of the role of reading specialists, established a commission to investigate the role and status of reading specialists in schools. The commission was given two tasks: (1) analyze the literature and research about the role of the specialist, and (2) conduct a survey of members to determine the actual responsibilities of reading specialists. That work was reported in two articles found in *The Reading Teacher* (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 2002; Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001). The work resulted in a position statement: *Teaching All Children to Read: The Roles of the Reading Specialist* (IRA, 2000). Because of the many changes in the role of reading specialists in the decade from 2002 to 2012, that national survey was replicated in 2015, although one difference in the 2015 survey was that we were able to differentiate responsibilities of various literacy professionals (reading specialists, interventionist/reading teachers, literacy coaches, and supervisors). Below, we summarize in more depth the findings of the 2015 study and compare it with the earlier study.

Comparison of the National Surveys of Reading Specialists

There is an old expression: "The more things change, the more they remain the same." However, in this instance, although there were some similarities

in the roles of reading specialists, there were also differences in responses to the two surveys. Survey results were similar in the following ways. First, in both surveys (Bean, Cassidy, et al., 2002; Bean, Kern, et al., 2015) respondents tended to be white and female; they were also experienced educators, with most having served as classroom teachers before accepting reading specialist positions. Second, respondents to both surveys indicated that they have dual roles: They instruct students and they also support teachers in providing instruction for students. Third, reading specialists continued to work in both classrooms and in pullout settings, with 40% in the 2015 study indicating that they taught exclusively in pullout settings. Fourth, reading specialists have an important role in administering and analyzing assessment results, and in assisting teachers in using those results for instructional decision making. Finally, the percentage of reading specialists overall serving at the secondary level was still small.

However, there were several differences in responses to the two surveys. First, the word *coaching* was never mentioned in the 2002 survey. In the 2002 study, about 84% of respondents indicated that they served as a resource to teachers (e.g., providing materials and ideas for instruction). In the 2015 study, 89% of the reading specialists supported teachers, but that support included more than providing ideas and materials. Rather these specialists were involved in initiatives such as RTI and they were more involved in helping teachers use data to inform classroom instruction. There were also differences between reading specialists and coaches in how they described their roles. The primary foci of coaches were planning and conferring with teachers, observing, conducting workshops, and modeling lessons. Specialists on the other hand, were involved in leadership activities such as serving on RTI teams, planning and conferring with teachers, and co-teaching, but not as frequently as coaches.

Second, there was also more of a focus on collaborative work, not only with teachers but with other reading specialists and with other specialized professionals (e.g., special educators, librarians, counselors, psychologists). In fact, two key findings in the 2015 study were that (1) there tended to be more than one reading specialist in the school, and they generally worked collaboratively with each other, and (2) they were not the sole reading instructor for the students with whom they worked. These two findings strongly suggest that reading specialists must understand how to effectively collaborate with not only teachers, but other allied professionals, and administrators.

Third, although the percentage of respondents in both surveys who worked at the secondary level was similar, a larger percentage of respondents in the 2015 survey who served in secondary schools self-identified as coaches rather than reading specialists. These professionals were responsible for supporting teachers' instructional efforts.

Fourth, most respondents in the 2015 study indicated they had multiple roles; that is, they taught students, supported teachers, led professional learning efforts, and so on. It was clear, also, that their positions were subject to change depending on funding, district initiative, changes in leadership or school demographics, and so forth. Such a finding requires literacy professionals to be nimble and able to adapt quickly and thoughtfully to meet the demands of their new roles and responsibilities. And again, reading specialists must possess the communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills that enable them to work with others to respond to changing environments, culture, and student needs.

Finally, respondents across all groups indicated they would be better prepared if they had more educational experiences enabling them to assume leadership responsibilities in the school. Such leadership included the ability to work effectively with adults, both individually and in groups, and to facilitate and lead the development of the literacy program. These findings from the 2015 survey have implications for the content in this book that focuses on the leadership role of reading specialists—not only with teachers and other specialized personnel in the schools but with administrators, families, community leaders, and agencies.

One of the disturbing findings of both the 2002 and the 2015 surveys was the virtual absence of men and people of color among the reading specialist population, a problematic finding given the importance of role models for the diverse students in schools today. The increased numbers of literacy coaches at the secondary level seems to reflect the growing emphasis on disciplinary literacy as reflected in standards being developed by the states and also as exemplified in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSO], 2010).

The Value of Reading Specialists in Schools

To accomplish their charges, the commission established by the IRA chose to investigate whether the role of reading specialist was valued in the school and whether these professionals were making a difference in instructional practices and student literacy learning. Bean, Swan, and Knaub (2003) sent surveys to principals in schools identified as exemplary. The principals in these schools were extremely positive about the importance of the reading specialists to the success of their reading programs, with 97% indicating that specialists were "extremely" or "very important" to its success. In a more recent study, principals who were asked to identify the value or influence of specialized literacy professionals in their schools, also indicated that these professionals had an impact on the school's literacy program; specifically, they helped to improve instructional practice, raise student

achievement, and create a culture of collaboration (Bean, Swan Dagen, Ippolito, & Kern, 2018).

Bean et al. (2003) in their study of reading specialists in exemplary schools found them to be experienced teachers; all but one of them worked directly with students, all also served in a leadership role, and all saw the leadership role as an essential part of their work. These specialists identified the following characteristics of the ideal reading specialist:

- Teaching ability
- Knowledge of reading instruction
- Sensitivity to children with reading difficulties
- Knowledge of assessments
- Ability and willingness to fill an advocacy role
- Ability to work with adults
- Knowledge of reading research
- Lifelong learners
- Ability to provide professional development
- Ability to articulate reading philosophy
- Energy

THINK ABOUT THIS

The descriptors mentioned above reflect comments about reading specialists, but with the current emphasis on the role of the literacy specialist, what other characteristics might need to be considered? Which of the above characteristics do you think are most important?

FROM READING SPECIALIST TO LITERACY SPECIALIST

Previous editions of this book were titled *The Reading Specialist: Leadership and Coaching for the Classroom, School, and Community.* This change in title from reading to literacy specialist reflects the shift in how literacy is taught in schools today, that is, schools now recognize that they must move beyond a narrow focus on reading only, to emphasizing the relationships among all the language arts. This move has been the result of research findings and state standards that call for an integrated model of literacy for teaching students.

In 2018, the ILA published its new set of *Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017* (ILA, 2018a); this document also emphasized the importance of preparing literacy educators who understood that they had responsibilities for teaching the many dimensions of literacy instruction (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing) (ILA, 2018a). And so, the shift from "reading" to

"literacy." Although ILA uses the term *reading/literacy specialist* in their 2017 standards document and many states continue to award reading specialist certification, we have chosen to use the term literacy specialist in this book. We recognize, however, that educators use many different titles in the field (e.g., reading/literacy specialist, reading interventionist, literacy coach, instructional coach) to identify these skilled professionals who most frequently teach students and/or have responsibilities to support classroom instruction. Also, although many candidates for these positions are enrolled in programs identified as reading specialist certification programs, many programs use the ILA Standards as the foundation for their programs and include content that reflects current research and scholarship about literacy instruction. Many certification programs require candidates to take courses about oral language development and writing, as well as those that emphasize reading instruction.

When we reflect on the past, we see pendulum swings in terms of where instruction occurs (e.g., pullout, in class, both), how students are assessed, and what and how specialists teach their students. What has not changed is that literacy specialists have always had to serve in a dual role that required them to teach students and support teachers. They have had to be able to communicate effectively with their colleagues to be successful in teaching students.

THINK ABOUT THIS

After reading the previous section, you might want to reflect on what you see in schools today: What are the duties and responsibilities of literacy specialists in the schools with which you are familiar? What have we learned from the past?

WHERE WE ARE TODAY: THE MULTIFACETED ROLE OF LITERACY SPECIALISTS

The results of the Bean, Kern, et al. (2015) study of over 2,500 literacy professionals, as described earlier in this chapter, provided a framework for the 2017 ILA Standards (ILA, 2018a). Many colleges and universities use these ILA Standards as a basis for the development of their literacy specialist programs. The 2017 ILA Standards reflect two important outcomes of the 2015 study: (1) the development of a new term, *specialized literacy professionals,* as an umbrella or overarching term to describe the three positions of reading/literacy specialist, literacy coach, and literacy coordinator; and (2) definitions and standards for each position that are distinct, yet include opportunities for productive overlap. Figure 1.1 describes the level of emphases for three roles; there are no distinct lines between any of

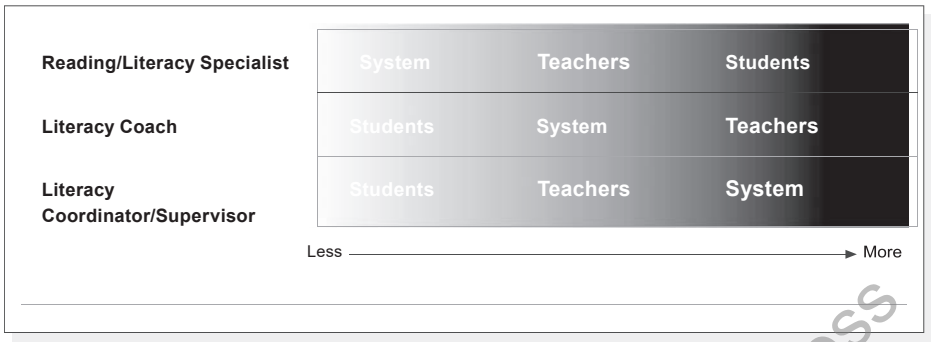

FIGURE 1.1. Levels of emphases. Reprinted with permission from Bean and Kern (2018).

these levels (i.e., student, teacher, system). However, the figure represents an understanding that most often literacy specialists spend most of their time with instruction, and less time working with teachers or the system. Coaches on the other hand, spend more time with teachers, while coordinators tend to focus on responsibilities at the system level. We realize that this may not always be the case, especially when districts are not able to employ more than one specialized literacy professional. These individuals may have both instructional and coaching responsibilities. Also, funding streams may affect how literacy specialists focus their time and work; for example, if a school receives a grant that requires teachers to learn new instructional approaches, literacy specialists may find themselves working more frequently with teachers than with students.

In Figure 1.2, we present a more detailed framework describing the many different tasks of specialized literacy professionals (Bean, 2020). This framework identifies tasks that literacy specialists, coaches, and coordinators may be required to perform. The framework divides responsibilities into three specific areas of focus: student, teacher, and system. Note that there are dotted lines between each of these areas, indicating that literacy specialists will often have roles that require them to have responsibilities beyond their instructional ones, that is, to work to some degree with teachers or to handle systemic issues. Likewise, coaches may find themselves having student-focused responsibilities! In each of the chapters, we describe ways by which literacy specialists and coaches can address these various tasks (e.g., in what ways can you advocate for students, serve as a resource to teachers?).

So, has the world of the reading/literacy specialist changed? We suggest it has. Although the various roles may vary—from instructional through coaching and leadership—all those in literacy specialist roles need leadership, interpersonal, and communication skills that enable them to work

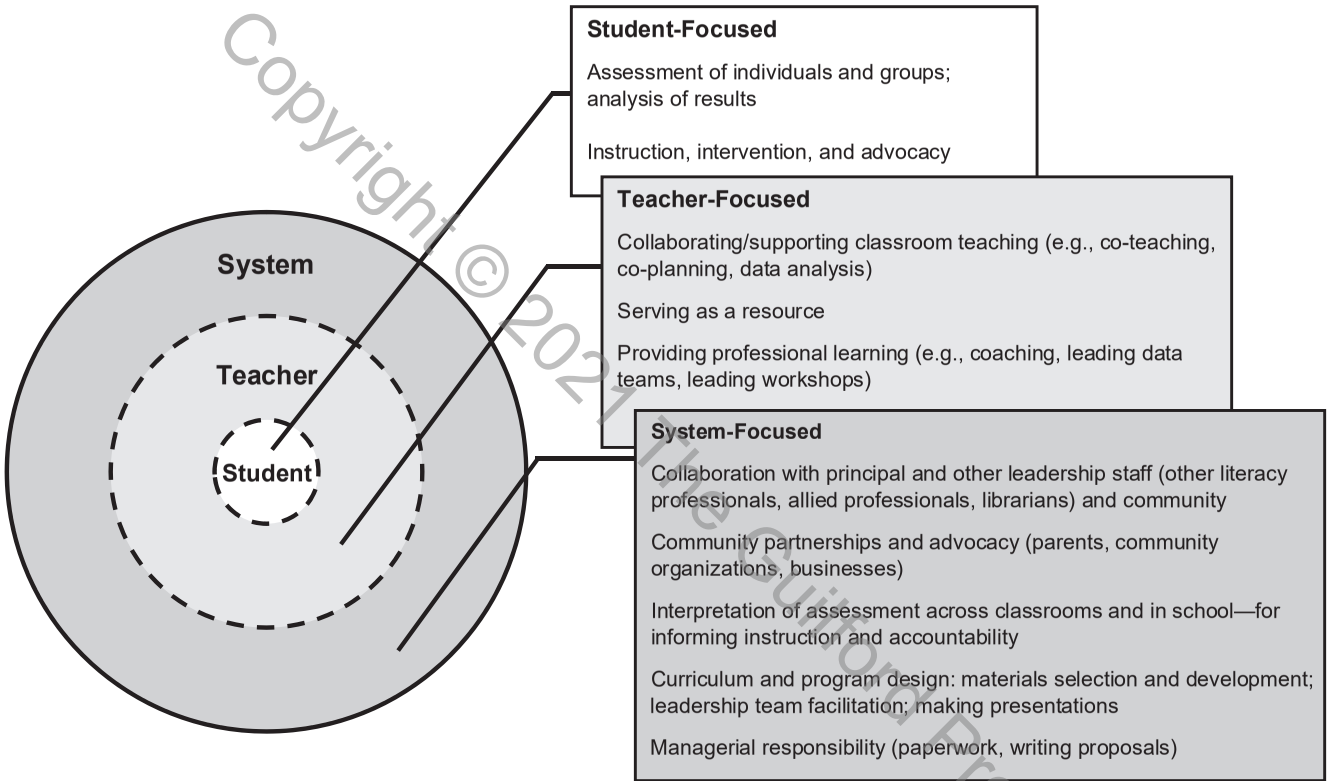

FIGURE 1.2. Framework for specialized literacy professionals as literacy leaders: areas of focus. Reprinted with permission from Bean (2020).

effectively in schools as they exist today. Today's schools rely on shared leadership and teacher engagement in developing a common vision, developing expectations for students, and making instructional decisions. These changes in notions about leadership have made schools places of learning for both adults and students. Often, the literacy specialist or coach serves as one of the informal leaders in schools (Bean, 2020; Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014).

CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE ROLE OF SPECIALIZED LITERACY PROFESSIONALS

In this final section of this chapter, we describe briefly some of the many contextual factors that influence the work of literacy specialists. We encourage readers to think about other factors that, given space, we do not discuss below.

Implementation of Rigorous Standards for English Language Arts and for Literacy in the Various Academic Disciplines

Almost all states have adopted student standards that require rigorous, high-level thinking to prepare students for college and career. Many states have adopted the CCSS developed by the NGA and CCSSO (2010) and others have adapted those standards or developed similar ones. But now the hard work begins: What instructional changes are necessary if these standards are to be used in developing and implementing literacy instruction? The current standards require a new way of teaching that emphasizes the integration of reading with the other language arts, especially writing, and highlight the need for shared responsibility of all teachers in developing literacy skills. Teachers in the content areas, especially at the secondary level, are expected to develop an understanding of how to help their students comprehend the informational texts of their discipline and to support students' ability to produce clear and coherent writing. Literacy specialists and coaches who work in schools implementing these standards will need skills that enable them to work effectively, not just as teachers of students who are experiencing difficulties, but to support and guide content-area teachers who are being asked to incorporate reading, writing, and discussion strategies into their instruction as a means of developing student learning of academic content. The CCSS have been accompanied by an emphasis on literacy instruction for the adolescent learner, given current results on both state and national assessment measures, and the recognition that there is much that can be done to improve instruction at the middle and secondary levels.

Assessment as a Basis for Instructional Decision Making

The use of data to make instructional decisions has influenced what specialists do in schools. Specialists often help teachers administer and analyze test data throughout the year, and most importantly, they are responsible for helping teachers think about how to use these test results to differentiate instruction using different materials, approaches, and/or small-group instruction. However, at times, the emphasis on accountability has led to "teaching to the test," and literacy specialists, as well as classroom teachers, find themselves in the position of providing narrow, focused instruction only. In a more positive vein, the focus on accountability has made it critical that literacy specialists understand how to assess reading growth, interpret results of various assessment measures, and communicate results to others.

The RTI legislation (IDEA, 2004) encouraged schools to use an approach different from the traditional discrepancy approach for identifying students with learning difficulties. RTI also supports early intervention to reduce the number of students qualifying for special education by promoting differentiated instruction as a means of improving success of all students. Currently, RTI and its companion, multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS) describe academic and behavioral concerns simultaneously. These initiatives require collaboration among classroom teachers, literacy specialists, and special educators with each professional bringing to the table ideas for how to make instructional and behavioral adjustments. Classroom teachers can receive instructional support from specialists; for example, the literacy specialist may be asked to provide supplemental comprehension instruction to a small group of students. The specialist may provide explicit instruction on how to summarize or how to predict to students who seem to have difficulty even after the classroom teacher has presented these lessons to the entire class. Or the specialist may be assigned to deliver specialized or targeted instruction to a small group of readers who seem to be making little or no progress in the classroom, even after modifications have been made by the classroom teacher. Thus, the instructional role of the specialist will continue to be important, but it may require different responsibilities from those expected of them in the past.

Early Childhood Instruction

The research supporting literacy and language activities at the early childhood level as a means of reducing or eliminating future literacy and learning problems has generated a great deal of focus on the instruction that goes on in preschool and day care settings. The federal government has provided funding to assist states in building, developing, and expanding

voluntary, high-quality preschool programs in high-need communities. Such programs require early childhood teachers to be well prepared and for better transition programs bridging preschool and kindergarten. Thus, the need for well-prepared literacy specialists and literacy coaches who can work cooperatively with preschool educators to ensure there is a better understanding of what students need to know and do when they arrive in kindergarten—and so that kindergarten teachers have a better sense of what students are learning in preschool settings (see ILA, 2018b, for information on PreK literacy instruction). This movement also calls for more partnering among all individuals and agencies involved in the education of young children: families, teachers, preschools, libraries, and community agencies.

Professional Learning for Teachers

All the initiatives described above have led to an increasing focus on providing effective professional learning experiences for teachers who are being asked by various stakeholders to change the ways they teach. And research evidence about effective professional learning activities suggests that such professional learning be job embedded, ongoing, content-based, and provide for active engagement. Research on professional learning has led to an increased emphasis on coaching in schools, and often a change in the role of many literacy specialists across this country, with some who originally worked only with students now working as partners with teachers to support student learning. This role of coaching requires individuals to have not only an in-depth knowledge of literacy instruction and assessment, but in addition, knowledge of adult learning and excellent interpersonal, communication, and leadership skills. This movement has generated consternation for some literacy specialists whose "first love" is working with students experiencing literacy difficulties, or who feel unqualified to serve as a coach.

The Economic Climate in the United States

Given the economic climate in the United States, educational funding has been reduced not only by the federal government but by states and local districts. Some schools have found it necessary to eliminate coaching positions (Bean, Dole, Nelson, Belecastro, & Zigmond, 2015). As mentioned by Steinbacher-Reed and Powers (2011/2012), often administrators assigned reading specialists to these coaching tasks. They analyzed data with teachers, modeled, and co-taught; their role required them to work with both students and teachers. Again, reading specialists found themselves having multiple responsibilities, ones for which they may not have been prepared, especially in the area of coaching.

WHERE WE ARE GOING: A CRYSTAL BALL?

Although all the issues mentioned above will most likely continue to influence the role of literacy specialists, there are several other current factors that we anticipate will continue to evolve and influence schooling in the coming years.

COVID-19: The Pandemic

In our lifetime, we have not seen anything that has the effect that this pandemic has had on all segments of society. It has created changes in how we socialize, how we do business, and how we educate students. Although many are working to develop contingency plans for addressing remote education (e.g., online, hybrid, or blended learning) what we do know is that there will be long-lasting effects that will influence the roles and responsibilities of school leaders, including coaches and literacy specialists. They will need to learn new ways of reaching and teaching students with learning needs, and creative ways of partnering with teachers and families to enhance student learning.

The Effect of ILA Standards

We suspect that the 2017 ILA Standards (ILA, 2018a) will influence the preparation programs for specialized literacy professionals and for teachers, given the current emphasis on providing high-quality teaching in classrooms across this country. Also, when designing professional learning initiatives, districts can use the ILA Standards in considering what classroom teachers and specialized literacy professionals need to know and be able to do to be effective in their roles. Specific sections in the ILA Standards elaborate on the roles of classroom teachers (i.e., primary, intermediate, and secondary) and those of specialized literacy professionals (i.e., reading/literacy specialists, literacy coaches, literacy coordinators); they provide specific guidance, not only for employing professionals, but for designing appropriate professional learning experiences. There is an emphasis in the standards on ongoing learning and teacher leadership, with peers supporting each other. The revised standards (ILA, 2018a) have the potential to help those preparing literacy professionals to better understand the multiple tasks of assessment, instruction, and leadership and how to work with each other to address individual student, classroom, and organizational challenges.

Technology

Technology has influenced our lives in many ways, from the ways we communicate with each other, to how we gather new information, and how

we learn. Nearly 89% of the adults in the United States report that they own or use smartphones, Internet, computers, social media, and tablets (Hitlan, 2018). Over 9 million students in the United States, often in low-income homes or rural communities, lack Internet access at home (USA-Facts, 2020), creating a technological equity issue, further revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet, most students in the United States have grown up with technology and are accustomed to using social media, texting, video, and music downloads. Schools then must support students as they learn in this "complex, globally connected, digital world that revolves around digital devices and tools, use of social media, and digital interactions" (ILA, 2018a, p. 16). Technology also has the potential to make literacy more accessible for students, especially those who might experience difficulties with reading and writing. Yet, educators need to be aware of its limitations, including how much time students should spend with their electronic tools, how young children can use digital resources in meaningful ways without diminishing the role of authentic play and communication experiences (ILA, 2019c).

Technology has changed the way in which we define literacy, which has been expanded to address "the multiple ways we read, write, communicate, and collaborate using print and digital technologies" (ILA, 2018a, p. 16). This expansion to digital literacies has had a large impact on the ways we teach and learn in schools. Teachers and specialized literacy professionals now must be knowledgeable about how to "incorporate digital texts, tools, and online resources into learning activities" (ILA, 2018a, p. 17). They must work with learners in ways that enable their students to use digital resources in safe, effective, and appropriate ways. Further, much is available on the Internet and educators must help learners, especially adolescent students, understand how to critically evaluate these various resources. Also, educators must understand how to use the capabilities of electronic texts, mobile applications, and search engines to help students become critical readers.

Moreover, technology will continue to influence the preparation of teachers and specialized literacy professionals and their ongoing professional learning (ILA, 2018a). Many university programs are hybrid in nature in that they provide both face-to-face and online experiences. In light of COVID-19, even more institutions are moving in that direction. Literacy specialists in the field, to improve their knowledge and understandings, may use the electronic resources of professional organizations, participate in blogs, or join webinars. Teachers, too, have become accustomed to gaining information via the Internet rather than attending face-to-face meetings. They regularly participate in conversations via blogs, twitter, and other forms of social media (Affinito, 2018). Specialists who coach may use various technological tools, from video to Zoom or Google Meet, to provide coaching experiences for teachers.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity

Another issue that will continue to affect the role of literacy specialists is that of the increasing diversity of students in classrooms across the country. There has been a steady increase in populations such as students of color, English learners (ELs), transgender students, and students qualifying for special services (e.g., physical and learning differences). By 2027, the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2019a) projects increases of students in the United States in designated categories of Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial. Many children in the United States live in poverty in both urban and rural areas, especially those in single-parent households and with parents who did not graduate from high school (see U.S. Department of Education, 2019b). These demographic factors greatly influence the preparation of all educators as well as how they teach in their schools. While there are many definitions and implications of social justice (Banks, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Comber, 2015; Edelsky, 2006), teacher preparation programs and school districts need to continue to increase efforts toward equal access and opportunities for all students.

A key demographic shift will be students whose primary language is not English. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) indicate that there has been an increase in ELs in schools, from 8.5% identified as ELs in 2000 to 9.5% in 2015. Further, the percentage of ELs has increased in all but eight states, with California, Texas, Nevada, and New Mexico all having more than 15% of their students identified as ELs. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, by 2025 approximately one of four students will be an EL (*www.ncela.ed.gov*). Further, scholars are raising concerns about policies on immigrant and migrant populations and the implications for the educational system (Patel, 2018; Salas, 2017, 2019). As a group, second-language learners are demonstrating significantly lower levels of academic achievement as compared with native English-speaking students in the United States. Classroom teachers, English language teachers, and literacy professionals need to be able to teach collaboratively in ways that enhance the language and literacy learning of students identifying as monolingual, bilingual, and translingual in learning English literacy skills.

Culture of Collaboration

As we learn more about school change and the need to work with others if we are to improve schooling for all, there is recognition of the importance of collaboration, not only in the school setting but also with external

partners (e.g., parents, community agencies, universities). Literacy specialists must have the necessary knowledge and skills to work collaboratively to build those partnerships. This focus on collaboration, and on what is a new wave of school reform (Swan Dagen & Bean, 2014, 2020), will also affect the ways in which literacy specialists work in schools.

Literacy Specialists in Middle and High Schools

Given the increased attention to adolescent literacy, several chapters in this book include a section devoted specifically to literacy specialists serving students and teachers in middle and high schools. In these sections, we provide information about issues especially relevant for those specialists. As mentioned previously, districts are hiring literacy or instructional coaches who have a primary responsibility for working with teachers at the middle and secondary levels. However, at times, these schools will have both a literacy specialist and coach, or they will have a literacy specialist serving dual roles (i.e., teaching students and supporting teachers). Mason and Ippolito (2009) provide an excellent description of four roles of reading specialists in middle and high schools. First, these professionals may administer and analyze assessment tools that they or other teachers can use for instructional decision making. Second, they may support teachers in the disciplines by providing professional learning related to literacy, including co-planning, modeling, or co-teaching with these teachers; in other words, they assume coaching responsibilities. Third, they may work with special educators to assist students with learning differences or difficulties. In other words, they may be involved in working with an RTI team about how best to address the learning needs of students. Finally, they may be involved in creating and evaluating the literacy program at the middle or secondary levels, helping to select or develop programs, materials, or instructional strategies. In other words, they serve multiple roles that differ, depending on the context in which they work, their job descriptions, availability of other personnel, and so on.

Ippolito and Lieberman (2012) describe coaching at the secondary level, highlighting key differences between elementary and secondary contexts. These differences include organizational and cultural differences (e.g., larger numbers of teachers, teacher specialization by discipline, lack of teacher knowledge about literacy) and differences in students' literacy abilities and needs. At the same time, they suggest that these differences between the levels may simply be "differences of degree" (p. 67). The bottom line is literacy professionals at the secondary level have an important role in improving the literacy learning of adolescents and, in order to fulfill that role, they must be able to work collaboratively with their colleagues.

THINK ABOUT THIS

Do you agree or disagree with the contextual factors that have been identified above relative to how literacy specialists might function in schools? Which of the factors have affected you personally? Are there factors that you think should be added?

SUMMARY

The role of the literacy specialist and coach has continued to evolve over the past decades. Currently, we are experiencing a greater emphasis on leadership responsibilities, regardless if the professional works with students or teachers. Some changes in roles have occurred in response to research findings about literacy instruction and assessment practices. Other changes have emerged on the heels of criticism about the results of large-scale compensatory programs that lacked congruence between classroom and supplemental instruction. Other changes have occurred because of influences such as the COVID-19 pandemic. An increased demand for quality teaching using evidence-based literacy instruction has created a need for literacy specialists to assume an increased leadership role. Literacy specialists and coaches, however, will continue to fill multiple roles that require them to have an in-depth knowledge of literacy instruction and assessment and the ability to work well with other adults. The increased emphasis on professional learning; improving literacy instruction for all students, PreK–12; and technological capabilities will generate the need for new skill sets and new roles. Moreover, literacy specialists will need to understand how the organization in which they work affects what they do and how they can collaborate with others to create changes that facilitate student learning.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Bean, R. M., Kern, D., Goatley, V., Ortlieb, E., Shettel, J., Calo, K., . . . Cassidy, J. (2015). Specialized literacy professionals as literacy leaders. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 54*(2), 83–114.—This article provides the results of a national survey of specialized literacy professionals; it suggests that these professionals have many leadership responsibilities in schools.

Galloway, E. P., & Lesaux, N. K. (2014). Leader, teacher, diagnostician, colleague, and change agent: A synthesis of the research on the role of the reading specialist in this era of RTI-based literacy reform. *The Reading Teacher, 67*(7), 517–526.—These authors synthesized current research about the work of today's reading specialists and found that these professionals served as both an instructor of students and in a supportive role for teachers.

Ippolito, J., & Lieberman, J. (2012). Reading specialists and literacy coaches in secondary schools. In R. M. Bean & A. Swan Dagen (Eds.), *Best practices of literacy leaders: Keys to school improvement* (pp. 63–85). New York: Guilford Press.—These authors describe ways that reading specialists and coaches at the secondary level can organize their time to work with teachers across multiple content areas and how they can work with their colleagues to create a plan for change in instructional practices.

• REFLECTIONS

1. What skills and abilities do you think are essential for working successfully as a literacy specialist with students? With teachers? With the system? (See Figure 1.2 for a description of various tasks and functions.)
2. With which role are *you* most comfortable (e.g., working with students, teachers, or the system)? What concerns do you have about the other roles?
3. What are the implications of the following issues for literacy specialists and their role: placement in the middle or secondary school; increased emphasis on working with preschool providers; teaching ELs; focus on rigorous, high-level standards; addressing diversity in the classroom and community; use of online or remote learning, digital resources, and tools?

• ACTIVITIES

1. Analyze your own knowledge and skills in relation to the three areas of focus required of literacy specialists: student, teacher, system. Write a summary of your thoughts, indicating your strengths and where you think you may need to gain additional experience or knowledge.
2. Interview a teacher to gain his or her perceptions about the role of the literacy specialist. You may also want to interview a principal (or another literacy specialist), using the same questions.
3. Interview a literacy specialist, asking questions about how he or she fulfills responsibilities in the following areas of focus: student, teacher, system. Possible questions follow:
   a. How do you make decisions about the goals and content of your instruction? (Try to determine *what*—and *who*—determines the instruction.)
   b. Which assessment instruments do you find to be particularly helpful in assessing students' needs?
   c. How do you use assessment results?
   d. In what ways do you serve as a resource to teachers? Do you have any other coaching responsibilities, and if so, what?
   e. If you were able to develop your own assessment program, what would you emphasize or change?

f. What are some of the major literacy difficulties experienced by students in your school?
g. In what ways do you facilitate family involvement or partnerships?
h. What are the major issues or challenges you face as a literacy specialist?
i. How well prepared were you for the position you now hold?

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