Preface

Too many of our nation's students—32% of fourth graders and 24% of eighth graders—cannot read a text at a basic level (McFarland et al., 2019). This means they cannot identify the main idea, make simple inferences, and use the text to identify details that support their conclusions. They cannot read a story and identify the problem. They cannot gather information from various sections of informational text to support a conclusion. This happens in spite of the fact that, for example, identifying the main idea of a text is an expectation written into the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGACBP & CCSSO], 2010a) included at every grade level from kindergarten through 12th grade. Students as young as kindergarten are taught to look for "basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic" (NGACBP & CCSSO, 2010b) as a foundation to the 12th-grade standard that requires students to "integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem" (NGACBP & CCSSO, 2010c).

If standards require that students as young as 5 years old begin to learn these important literacy skills and if the standards repeat and expand as students move through the grade levels, then why are a quarter of our eighth-grade students still considered to be "struggling readers"? Some students have disabilities, but this accounts for only 14% of all public school students (Hussar et al., 2020), many of whom perform at or above basic levels on the national literacy assessment (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019). Other students are English learners, but this accounts for only 9.5% of all public school students. Many of these students are proficient readers as well. There must be another reason why so many of our nation's middle school students struggle with basic literacy skills.

Several researchers have systematically observed content-area classrooms across the nation (e.g., Ness, 2016; Swanson et al., 2016; Wanzek et al., 2017). Through these studies, we catch a glimpse of the frequency and type of literacy instruction that takes place within middle school content-area classrooms. A substantial finding of note is that little reading of connected text takes place within social studies (10.4% of observed time), science (2.2% of observed time), and English language arts (14.8% of observed time; Swanson et al., 2016; Wexler et al., 2017). Even worse, observers reported that comprehension supports are rarely provided, with less than 1% of observed time in science classrooms spent on reading comprehension supports like previewing, asking/answering questions, or identifying the main idea (Wexler et al., 2017). While there was more reading comprehension support observed in social studies and English language arts classrooms, the type of support was overwhelmingly comprehension monitoring by asking questions (Swanson et al., 2016).

Many middle school leaders across the country are beginning to recognize this trend and are answering the call to build schoolwide adolescent literacy models in an effort to impact student literacy outcomes. It was with this goal in mind that our team of literacy experts and teachers partnered with several middle schools to implement a schoolwide literacy initiative (Vaughn, Swanson, Wexler, & Roberts, 2015–2019). We proposed a twofold effort to intensify literacy instruction for all students, including struggling secondary readers and students with disabilities:

1. *Instruction:* For all students in the school, we proposed an evidence-based vocabulary and text-reading routine that teachers in all subject areas could implement with ease and little time commitment.
2. *Intervention:* For struggling secondary readers and students with disabilities, we proposed a highly focused and intensive set of evidence-based instructional practices focused on multisyllabic word reading, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension strategy use.

This effort was well received by district and school leaders. Leaders were dedicated to improving student literacy and shared our vision that this feasible set of instructional practices could improve middle school literacy if woven into every content area, combined with more intensive intervention designed for struggling secondary readers and students with disabilities. We left these leadership meetings filled with enthusiasm and optimism.

When we received carte blanche to work with middle school teachers, we faced a different atmosphere. We shared with them the vocabulary procedures that required choosing three essential words and spending 2 minutes per word engaged in a routine to encourage a deep understanding. Many in the room voiced concern. Some were worried about their ability to choose words and prepare materials. Others were concerned about maintaining student engagement. We were told many times, "I'm not a reading teacher!" We wondered whether teachers were unwilling to implement the new practice or if they felt underprepared to deliver the vocabulary routine effectively. To help identify the issue, we conducted an anonymous survey. Teachers agreed that the initial

professional development was of high quality. Every single teacher expressed his or her willingness to try the new routine. However, 85% of teachers were worried that they could not deliver the vocabulary routine in an effective, engaging way.

This finding helped us realize that our professional development should be both intensive (like our vocabulary workshop) and also sustained over time in order to influence teacher adoption of the practices in classrooms (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Our new goal became to integrate professional development into the daily work of teachers (Joyce & Showers, 2002) through instructional coaching. This type of work required that instructional coaches work with teachers closely and over extended periods of time. The problem then became that our budget allowed for two instructional coaches to address the needs of over 60 science, social studies, and English language arts teachers. The challenge was indeed steep! Every teacher needed help of some kind. We predicted that some would require careful and time-consuming instructional coaching, whereas others would require only check-ins and motivational votes of confidence in their skills. How would we identify teacher needs? Furthermore, how would we identify teachers most in need of instructional support who were also willing to join an instructional coach during the learning process? We needed a systematic, streamlined instructional coaching model so that we could facilitate the instructional coaching of large numbers of middle school teachers with a variety of backgrounds, job descriptions (i.e., science, social studies, English language arts), ability, and enthusiasm. It was from this challenge that Adaptive Intervention Model (AIM) Coaching was developed.

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Our goal for this book is to provide instructional coaches with a feasible format for implementing an intensive schoolwide adolescent literacy model that is focused on:

- Bolstering literacy instruction within every middle school content-area classroom to provide a platform of services that benefit all students, and
- Providing struggling secondary readers and students with disabilities with an intensive, evidence-based intervention that is based on their needs.

For the purpose of this book, we consider an instructional coach to be a literacy coach, some type of specialist (e.g., reading specialist or special education teacher), or even an assistant principal who is capable of providing professional development and ongoing instructional coaching support to teachers. The driving force behind the model is AIM Coaching that offers a structure for providing ongoing professional development and support to teachers across the entire school. Therefore, this book is designed for several audiences:

- For the school administrator or district leader who has a desire to adopt a schoolwide literacy model driven by AIM Coaching, it provides parameters for the

model, desired qualifications for instructional coaches, and materials that can be used campuswide to encourage buy-in.
- For the novice instructional coach, it provides a presentation of evidence-based adolescent literacy practices and instruction in using AIM Coaching to reach the needs of all teachers.
- For the experienced instructional coach who may be knowledgeable about evidence-based adolescent literacy practices, it provides AIM Coaching explanations and also materials that can be used tomorrow morning with teachers.

Whether you are a middle or high school principal tasked with improving literacy for all of your students or a high school reading specialist asked to coach content-area teachers on how to infuse evidence-based literacy practices into content-area classes, this book is for you. We will review the latest evidence on adolescent literacy practices, walk you through AIM Coaching, and give plenty of examples from our real-life experiences providing instructional leadership in middle schools across the nation. We'll also offer tools to help you organize the process of AIM Coaching as well as materials you can use to present the model to your colleagues. Indeed, adopting a new instructional coaching model to support a schoolwide adolescent literacy model is not easy. Implementing AIM Coaching will be a challenge, but one worth accepting.

We live in an increasingly information-oriented society where literacy is key to social and educational mobility. With the Internet, information is at our fingertips and we must read to access it. The other day, my (E.S.) 5-year-old wanted to know how far a man could jump. I said, "Let's look it up!" And then he asked me where prairie dogs live. We "looked that up," too. From a very young age, children learn that (1) information is readily available and (2) accessing the information requires reading. Young adults do a lot of daily online reading, too. In 2018, adults in the United States between age 18 and 24 received an average of 128 text messages per day (Burke, 2018) that were, on average, 20 words long (Alan, 2013). That's a daily reading load of 2,560 words—equivalent to 3.4 college textbook pages per day (*http://cte.rice.edu/blogarchive/2016/07/11/workload*).

Consider also post-high school reading demands. In our nation's highly competitive colleges and universities, 92% of students report taking at least one class that requires more than 40 pages of reading per week (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Most college professors agree that students should study outside of class for twice the number of hours spent in class. Under these conditions, for each class, students could read as few as 15 very difficult to understand pages (e.g., in biology) to 120 easier to understand pages (e.g., in history) of text per week (*http://cte.rice.edu/blogarchive/2016/07/11/workload*).

We looked up the five most common jobs in the United States. The top three jobs (retail salesperson, cashier, and food preparer) require little reading. However, the number 4 and 5 jobs—office clerks (with 2,808,100 people employed) and registered nurses (with 2,633,980 people employed)—require a great volume of daily reading (Thompson, 2013).

How can we best prepare our students to participate in this information-based society that demands literacy? According to Michael Pressley, "If we can infuse literacy practices into every content classroom, maybe there's hope" (2004, p. 426).

TEACHER TRAINING IN LITERACY-BASED PRACTICES

Once teachers are in the field, the most common type of teacher training is the one-shot professional development session (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Hill, 2007). It serves an important role in teacher development. Evidence points to the fact that professional development sessions are effective in improving teacher knowledge of content and instructional techniques (Barlow, Frick, Barker, & Phelps, 2014; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). However, additional ongoing efforts are necessary if teachers are to operationalize knowledge into classroom practice (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). One way to involve teachers in ongoing professional development is to engage instructional coaches and teachers in a professional dialogue focused on skill development (Lofthouse, Leat, Towler, Hallet, & Cummings, 2010).

Within the past 7–10 years, the number of studies investigating the efficacy of instructional coaching has flourished. Take, for example, Yoon and colleagues' review of professional development literature published in 2007. In this review, only 9 studies qualified for inclusion. A mere 11 years later, Kraft and colleagues (2018) located 60 studies of coaching that allowed for effects to be calculated. This awakening in the literature provides us with evidence that instructional coaching largely works across all subject areas and impacts not only teachers' practices but also student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018).

THE CHALLENGES OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

The potential effectiveness of instructional coaching should not overshadow the challenges inherent in professional development models that require close communication and collaboration among professionals. After all, challenges exist related to the instructional coach, the teachers, and the students.

Instructional Coach–Based Challenges

Instructional coaches at the secondary level must possess a variety of skills. First, it is essential that instructional coaches have the ability and knowledge to analyze student data to identify areas of need, select evidence-based practices that fit student need, and then communicate the need and solution to not only administrators but also teachers. Next, instructional coaches must provide professional development that aligns with best practices in adult learning. Once evidence-based practices are in place within the classroom, instructional coaches must understand the critical role of fidelity to the intended practice and how to use formal and informal methods to determine fidelity. Instructional coaching methods that will encourage teachers to implement new practices with fidelity represent another essential area of knowledge. Finally, interpersonal relationship building is a skill critical to the success of teacher–coach relationships. With this long list of necessary knowledge and skills, it is no wonder that instructional

coaching ability varies greatly from one instructional coach to the next (Blazar & Kraft, 2015). The sheer volume and variety of skills necessary for a successful instructional coaching experience are daunting.

Teacher-Based Challenges

When you, as an instructional coach, propose infusing middle school classrooms with literacy practices to benefit all learners, consider carefully not only what you are asking of teachers but also their possible responses. At the most basic level, you are asking them to shift their practices—to change what they do in some way. Change is exceedingly difficult for most human beings. Consider dieters. Even highly motivated people intent on losing weight or improving their health are able to maintain a diet different from their norm for an average of only a few weeks (Pelletier, Dion, Slovinec-D'Angelo, & Reid, 2004). Dieters are far more successful when the change to their diet is slight; and when there is built-in accountability and ongoing support in making changes to eating habits and exercise. It is no different among teachers. Among a group of middle and high school teachers who were asked to adopt new instructional practices, 82% reported discomfort and anxiety (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2008). In order to change, teachers must understand the benefits of infusing their classrooms with literacy practices, be given highly feasible instructional practices that can be implemented with relative ease, and receive ongoing support as they try the new practices and receive feedback for improvement.

Instructional coaches should also be aware of secondary classroom culture (Lee & Spratley, 2010). Within the structure of middle and high school, there are content-area subcultures that value different forms of knowledge and ways of teaching. For example, in social studies classes, teachers most often lecture, provide students with definitions, and administer formal tests of isolated content knowledge (Swanson et al., 2017). In English language arts, more text reading takes place, but instruction largely remains teacher-centered (Swanson et al, 2017). In science, the focus is on content delivery independent of text reading (Wexler et al., 2017).

As the instructional coach begins to train content-area teachers in more student-focused evidence-based literacy practices (e.g., explicit vocabulary instruction or text-based discourse), expect some hesitation. After all, many content-area teachers not only believe reading instruction is someone else's duty (i.e., "I'm not a reading teacher!"), they also question their skills and ability to deliver meaningful literacy instruction (Lester, 2000). When we approached a group of 8th- and 11th-grade U.S. history teachers and asked them to increase text reading, many said, "My students can't read well enough," or "I need to cover so much content. Reading slows my students down." In response, we showed them research evidence that pointed to student improvements when they engaged in text reading. We provided supports by way of on-grade-level text sources with discussion questions. We paired this with extensive training in ways to guide student text reading in the classroom setting. Over the course of 10 weeks, we taught teachers to read aloud with their students and engage them in rich discourse. We taught them how to structure partner reading with paired student discussions. We also taught them to use short stints of silent reading followed by text-supported discourse

sessions. With these ongoing supports in place, we saw text reading increase from consuming only 10% of class time to 20% of class time (Swanson et al., 2016). We also detected student increases in not only knowledge of U.S. history but also broader reading comprehension (e.g., Vaughn, Swanson, et al., 2013; Vaughn et al., 2014). By the end, teachers said things like the following: "I was afraid I'd lose control of my students. Your modeling helped me understand how to engage in partner reading without losing control of the class," and "At first, I didn't like all of the noise involved in partner reading. But then I realized that every student had a chance to discuss the text and that is beneficial." Finally, "The students enjoyed reading primary historical documents. Ben Franklin's letters really brought his voice into my classroom."

Student-Based Challenges

Teachers are faced with ever-increasing student diversity in their classrooms. In many large urban or suburban school districts, as many as 147 different languages are spoken across students' homes (District of Columbia Public Schools [DCPS], 2017). Many middle school and high school newcomers to the United States sit in content-area classes with little to no second-language supports to help them understand instruction in English. Consider also students who struggle with reading. These students are almost always included in content-area classes. In fact, the majority of students with disabilities spend at least 80% of their school day in general education classes (Hussar et al., 2020). Struggling secondary readers and students with disabilities often require intensive reading instruction in order to make progress in the curriculum. Other students may not arrive at school with their basic needs met. Some didn't receive dinner at home the night before or any breakfast that morning. Approximately 1.3 million school-age children in the United States are considered homeless (USDOE, 2017). It is no wonder that teachers cite classroom diversity as a major consideration when adopting new instructional practices. They wonder, "Will it work for all of my students? What about my struggling readers?"

Students, too, are resistant to changes in instructional procedures and their teachers are keenly aware of this. In fact, 29% of teachers surveyed expressed skepticism of new practices if their students didn't like the instruction (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2008). During our partnership with a large urban school district in the mid-Atlantic United States, we surveyed students' perception of a new vocabulary routine at two points—once right after it was introduced and again after 6 weeks of instruction. Immediately after its introduction, students were more likely to rate the instruction as "not very" enjoyable and less helpful. However, just 6 weeks later, student perception improved, with almost all students expressing agreement that the vocabulary routine was enjoyable, helpful, and effective. A majority of students reported that they "think their teacher should keep using the vocabulary routine."

The Bottom Line

Expect a variety of responses to new instructional coaching efforts. Some teachers will be eager and willing to support new literacy initiatives. Others will not be so eager.

Understanding the challenges prior to engaging in instructional coaching will help instructional coaches better reach the resistant teachers in creative ways.

Here is a summary of key challenges in the instructional coaching of secondary teachers:

- Instructional coaches must possess a variety of skills, including identifying student needs, selecting evidence-based practices to meet student need, communication skills, presentation skills, and interpersonal skills.
- Change is difficult for all human beings, and it is no different among teachers who are asked to change their practices.
- Secondary classroom culture is subject-specific. Preferred instructional practices differ by subject area (Lee & Spratley, 2010).
- Teachers may be unwilling or perceive themselves as unable to infuse literacy practices into their subject area.
- Classrooms contain exceedingly diverse groups of students.
- Students are sometimes resistant to changes in classroom practice.

In this book, we will share the following practices to help you manage such challenges:

- Part I provides instructional coaches with a broad view of the state of adolescent literacy, commonly found secondary schoolwide service delivery models, and implications for instructional coaches.
- Part II focuses on the knowledge and skills that all instructional coaches should master. They include how to use data to make instructional decisions, how to choose text for students who receive intensive instruction, features of effective instruction, evidence-based literacy practices that can be implemented in all content-area classrooms, and an overview of the role of fidelity within a schoolwide literacy model.
- In Part III, we show instructional coaches how to use a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) instructional coaching model to improve intensive literacy instruction for all students. Chapter 13 contains a series of case studies designed to bring the MTSS instructional coaching model to life. These case studies can help instructional coaches consider the essential question "How can I use the instructional coaching model effectively in my school?"

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

In an effort to maintain gender balance throughout the book, we alternate between using masculine and feminine pronouns. For example, we may refer to an instructional coach as "she" in one chapter and "he" in the following chapter.