

## **Roles and Responsibilities of a Literacy Specialist**

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## **Historically Speaking**

As far back as the 1930s, there have been people who have been supervising teachers on how to conduct literacy instruction. Later, this position evolved to reflect that not all students needs were being met and there were children who were having difficulties reading. Therefore, this role of these specialists transformed into remedial work. However, “it was after World War 2, in response to criticism of the schools and their inability to teach children to read, that remedial reading teachers became fixtures in many schools, private and public, elementary through secondary,” (Bean and Goatley, 2021, p. 4) meaning that it wasn’t until the 1940s that these professionals had a concrete position and role in education. After cementing their place in the schools, they took on much more responsibility than merely advising teachers on how to effectively teach literacy. While this is still a key aspect of their role, it is a “dual role [that] 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” (Bean and Goatley, 2021, p. 5) . Therefore the role is quite complex because you have to possess the knowledge of literacy and be able to apply it and to lead others so that they can effectively carry out the instruction as well to try to help combat reading difficulties.

Aside from firmly securing their spot in the schools, there was still confusion about what it is exactly that they would do. Under the Title 1 Act (1965), which provided funds to lower socioeconomic areas, helped to ensure that students who were struggling had the support needed to help combat reading difficulties. As the policy stated, these reading specialists were to provide supplemental material, yet there was a lack of communication between these specialists and the classroom teacher. In order to be within the constraints of the policy, the specialists would pull the students out for the enrichment. However, this caused problems because “there was little congruence...between the classroom program and the supplemental program, so students...received two different programs, with no “bridges” to connect them,” (Bean and Goatley, 2021, p. 5) , which is only detrimental to the students because they were unable to

make these connections and missing key instruction because of the lack of correlation between the instruction and confusion as to whose role it was to teach actual reading.

From this point forward, there have been laws and policies that have worked to improve this system so that we can better serve students who struggle with reading and to improve collaboration between professionals. For example, in 1988, made collaboration between reading specialists, SPED teachers, and classroom teachers and helped broaden the population of students that the specialists can work with. Another important policy that helped strengthen the role of the specialists was the passing of No Child Left Behind and Reading First, that reading coaches were placed in schools as a way to help strengthen the skills of the teachers so that they feel prepared to teach literacy. Also, RTI became popular and allows for more differentiation to take place as a way to provide more personalized and directed instruction. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act was passed and changed the program again by setting goals and new requirements for funding.

Overall, one of the more important factors that has evolved was that we have moved away from solely using standardized testing and instead started using benchmarks for what should be expected and help students from there. Reading instruction also changed to more explicit and authentic lessons so that are having the opportunity to explore and learn hands-on.

### **Present Day**

Moving from being in a position of a “reading specialist” to “literacy specialist,” in order to reflect the relationship between all of the components of language arts. This is to show the relationship between reading, writing, spelling, speaking, etc., and how they all play an important part in literacy instruction and success. Throughout the years, we have ended here and the only thing that has remained the same is that the role of the reading specialist, like the teacher, is plenty. The new term that these professionals go by now is “specialized literacy professional,” in order to encompass all that they do in terms of helping students, other teachers, and the system as a whole by assessing, instructing, and leading. Between pulling students out for instruction, they also have to find the time to provide instruction to

teachers in order to make sure they are comfortable with the material, while also finding the time to ensure that the school is utilizing proper methods and keeping up research and policies. The job is never done. There is more information on these duties in the reflection below.

### **Reflection**

There are three main roles and facets of a reading specialist is helping students, other teachers, and the system as a whole by thinking of assessment, instruction, and leadership. In all aspects, assessment, instruction, and leadership, I would feel the most comfortable with students. I know that I have the confidence and skills to assess and analyze student data, instruct them in class and literacy as a whole, as well as demonstrate leadership by communicating clear expectations and with and among the class. Moving out of my comfort zone would be assessing, instructing, and leading teachers. While I feel comfortable collaborating with my colleagues, I do not feel that I would feel comfortable assessing them and pointing out their flaws. Also uncomfortable to me would be instructing teachers on how to do their job because I do not feel 100% comfortable in my abilities yet, therefore I do not feel that I can instruct other teachers, nor lead them to success. On the other hand, I know that I do have knowledge and different perspectives that I can serve as a resource, but not leading and instructing on them yet. On the other hand, I do think that I could see myself in a team leadership position at some point in my career. Finally, moving even more out of my comfort zone would be leadership. Again, I do not feel comfortable assessing teachers, so assessing multiple teachers across the whole school would be too much for me at this moment. Likewise, instructing and leading teachers (such as PD) would be uncomfortable because I do not yet have the confidence in myself to be able to feel confident in my knowledge to carry out this task. Also, having my little amount of experience, this just seems like a big task to tackle at the moment. I can see myself being more of a silent leader where I will make changes in my classroom and hopefully inspire others to do the same. Potentially in the future, I would take more of an active and vocal position, but right now, I feel that I am too timid and unsure of myself. I hope that this will change in the future as I become more confident and comfortable in my abilities.

**Resources**

Bean, R. M., & Goatley, V. J. (2021). *The literacy specialist: leadership and coaching for the classroom, school, and community*. The Guilford Press.