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"I Want to Learn from Them as Much as I Want Them to Learn from Me": Finding a Balance of Coaching and Consulting Through the Analysis of a Literacy Coach's Conversations

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READING HORIZONS

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──────── **Abstract** ────────

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the ways in which one specialized literacy professional (SLP) navigated and reflected on coaching conversations with teachers. The participants for this study were one elementary school SLP and two classroom teachers at the same school. Coaching conversations the SLP held with teachers, the debriefing sessions that occurred after each conversation, and interviews with all participants were analyzed. Several themes emerged, including: the blended use of coaching and consulting, the ways in which the SLP built rapport with teachers, and the SLP's manifestation of herself as a learner. SLPs who are just beginning to coach and instructors who teach university graduate courses that include coaching practices might benefit from reading about the work of this coach.

Keywords: literacy coaching, coaching conversations, case study

Cassidy, Garrett, Maxfield, and Patchett (2009) defined a literacy coach as "a professional educator who collaborates with classroom teachers to provide individualized staff development…and aims to improve the reading and writing skills of students" (p. 15). For this article, the terms *specialized literacy professional (SLP)* and *literacy coach* will be used interchangeably, as our case study focuses on a literacy professional who held the title of reading specialist and was responsible for coaching teachers and providing intervention to students. The importance of an effective literacy coach on schoolwide achievement cannot be overlooked. Not only has literacy coaching demonstrated its potential for improving teaching practices (Bean et al., 2008), several studies (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, & Zigmond, 2010; Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2006; Sailors & Price, 2010) have found increases in student achievement in classrooms in which a literacy coach spent an ample amount of time supporting the teacher.

The strength of literacy coaching lies in that it is a highly effective form of professional development. One-on-one coaching conversations between SLPs and classroom teachers provide job-embedded, ongoing, and learner-specific opportunities for growth. Although typical one-day staff development sessions are usually hit-and-miss approaches, and may not meet the needs of individual teachers, SLPs strive to differentiate coaching techniques to accommodate for the diverse needs of the teachers with whom they work (Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Shoniker, 2011). The work accomplished through literacy coaching, including one-on-one coaching conversations, modeled lessons, and timely feedback on lessons observed, has the potential to induce meaningful change in classrooms over time, thus making it a more valuable method of professional development than the large workshops employed by many schools today (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Stover, et al.).

Coaching conversations between an SLP and a classroom teacher can be "powerful vehicle[s] for improving instruction and thereby, student achievement" (Nuefeld & Roper, 2003, p. 26). One-on-one coaching conversations honor adult learners by giving them a voice in their own learning and providing ownership over instructional decisions (Stover et al., 2011; Wall & Palmer, 2015; Yopp et al., 2011). Through a coach's use of effective questioning, wait time, and paraphrasing, teachers reflect upon their own practices and create plans to deepen their understanding. Bean (2015) emphasized that coaching is not just for new teachers, but also for experienced teachers wanting to learn more in order to best teach all students.

Although literacy coaches can significantly affect teachers' classroom practices and the achievement of their students, many professionals serving in this role are unsure of effective coaching techniques and may even feel uncomfortable working with adults (Bean, 2015). In a recent national survey of SLPs (Bean et al., 2015), "over 90% of respondents in the role of instructional literacy coach and 65% of respondents identified as reading or literacy specialists stated they needed more coaching experiences during the first year in their positions" (p. 95). In a study of coaches' conversations with teachers, Heineke (2013) found coaches "were not taking advantage of language as a powerful tool in shaping learning" (p. 430). These and other studies point to the need for more research and professional development in the area of coaches' work with individual teachers.

There is little documentation as to what actually occurs during coaching conversations (Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, & Schock, 2009). The present study sought to determine how SLPs, working as literacy coaches, engaged teachers in one-to-one coaching conversations in order to build teacher capacity in classroom literacy instruction. The study also examined the ways in which SLPs reflected on coaching conversations through the use of video recordings of their coaching conversations, as well as the effect of receiving feedback on their conversational moves when talking with teachers.

The research questions that guided this study were: In what ways does one literacy coach scaffold her teachers' learning during formal one-to-one coaching conversations?

In what ways do the literacy coach's formal coaching conversations with teachers change across one school year? How does the literacy coach reflect on her coaching conversations and use these reflections to improve her coaching skills?

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of social constructivism was used to frame this study. According to this theory, learning follows social interactions between people, especially when one person serves as the "more knowledgeable other" and is able to share or clarify understandings through social interaction. This is often accomplished by locating the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Once the learner's ZPD is discovered, *scaffolding* (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), which provides learners with just the right amount of support at the right time, can be used to move learners through their ZPD into deeper understanding of a concept. It is important to note that the support provided through scaffolding is removed little by little as the learner gains knowledge and demonstrates independent mastery of a skill. Costa and Garmston (1994) suggested coaches might use both language and nonverbal expression to their advantage when working with teachers to entice this deeper thinking. Additionally, the idea of scaffolding led the researchers to examine how coaches lifted a teacher's learning by way of one-to-one conversations in which the coach served as the "more knowledgeable other."

Furthermore, this study was guided by Knowles' (1968) andragogy theory, which posits that adult learners differ from young learners in several critical ways. Knowles outlined six assumptions of adult learners: 1) self-concept, 2) experience, 3) how the readiness to learn depends on need, 4) problem-centered focus, 5) internal motivation, and 6) the need to know the reasons why they need to learn something. The largest difference between adult and younger learners is seen in the principle regarding the learners' self-concept, meaning adults have developed the need to be self-directing individuals, responsible for their own choices and educational experiences (Forrest & Peterson, 2006). According to Knowles, Swanson, and Holton (2005), adults may be opposed to new learning if they believe others' views and beliefs are being pressed upon them unwillingly. Thus, adult learning opportunities should demonstrate a feeling of mutual respect between facilitators and participants (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Similarly, the vast array of life experiences which adult learners possess should be valued and utilized during learning opportunities because these experiences often help to define a person's identity (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Rather than dismissing the

experiential knowledge one brings with them, which could be viewed as an attack on the learner's identity (Merriam & Bierema, 2013), learning is most effective when adults are encouraged to share and reflect upon their own personal experience through discussions. Knowles (1968) also suggested adult learners have a deep desire to understand why they need to know something and the benefits they will attain from new learning. Knowles et al. believed "adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations" (p. 67).

Knowles' (1968) six assumptions of adult learners have been linked to the philosophies which undergird coaching (Cox, 2006, 2015; Maddalena, 2015). Coaching seeks to help teachers reflect on their own classroom practices, thereby valuing the experiences a teacher has accumulated and respecting the teacher's identity. Additionally, coaching is often directed by the specific needs of the teacher, thus Cox (2015) viewed this as an opportunity to help build teachers' self-concept and confidence in making their own instructional choices. While methods of coaching vary widely (Yopp et al., 2011), the researchers sought to determine ways in which literacy coaches supported learners' self-concept and allowed them to control their own learning—two other pivotal differences between adult and young learners. Eisenberg (2016) and Toll (2016) suggested teachers will experience greater success when coaches begin with a topic of importance to the teacher that exists at the teacher's level of understanding and allows the teacher choices in solving their own problems.

Literature Review

Evolution of the Literacy Coach

Since the early 2000s, literacy coaching has become an antidote to alleviate some of the stress felt by classroom teachers in raising students' reading levels. As explained by Toll (2014), "Although reading specialists and others have engaged in coachlike duties for many years, it was the Reading First program, enacted as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, that placed literacy coaching in the national spotlight" (p. 14; see also Bean et al., 2015; Cassidy, Grote-Garcia, & Ortlieb, 2017; IRA, 2004; Ortleib & Loveless, 2017; Peterson et al., 2009).

Although the government afforded only campuses with the Reading First program the funds to hire a reading coach, other districts that were not part of this program followed suit. Calo, Sturtevant, and Kopfman (2015) reported that schools across North America created instructional coaching positions in response to a realization that professional development provided onsite has the potential to make a much larger impact on student learning than typical once-a-year programs brought in by experts (International Reading Association, 2004). In a recent survey, Cassidy, Ortlieb, and Grote-Garcia (2016) discovered that,

although the role of literacy coach is extremely important in schools, the position is not receiving the attention it deserves, presumably due to a lack of funding.

Definition of Literacy Coaching

A review of the literature revealed it is difficult to delineate a clear distinction between SLPs whose main responsibility is working with students in need of extra support and those whose main responsibility is the onsite professional development and coaching of teachers (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Bean et al., 2015; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). Different models and definitions of coaching reflect varying conceptions of the inherent power dynamics among the participants and the roles, responsibilities, and learning theories guiding these interactions (Crafton & Kaiser, 2011). According to Jones and Rainville (2014), "Literacy coaches are in the business of helping to create some kind of change—change in teaching practice, change in school policy, change in curriculum, or change in teachers and children themselves" (p. 270). According to Toll (2014), a literacy coach "is one who helps teachers to recognize what they know and can do, assists teachers as they strengthen their ability to make more effective use of what they know and do, and supports teachers as they learn more and do more" (p. 9).

Many educators who carry the label of "literacy coach" are thrust into leadership roles on their respective campuses (Rogers, 2014). Galloway and Lesaux (2014) surmised that 1) reading specialists fill multiple roles and report varying levels of comfort in enacting these roles; 2) different stakeholders have different views of the role of the SLP; and 3) contextual factors influence how the role is enacted (Galloway & Lesaux). Bean et al. (2015), via their national survey of literacy leaders, found "responsibilities of the specialized literacy professional varied, not only across role-groups, but also within the role-group itself" (p. 91). Calo et al. (2015) reported that 93% of the 270 literacy coaches in their study identified themselves as literacy leaders who supported teachers and supported the school as a whole. Only 10% served in a staff development role, while 94% of the participants reported that they supported teachers using mentoring and coaching strategies.

Literacy Coaching Requires More than the Possession of Content Knowledge

According to the participants in Ertmer et al.'s (2003) study, "…coaching is a collaborative process aimed to improve teaching" (p. 9). A coach cannot rely on content knowledge alone to engage a teacher in a collaborative coaching conversation. Rather, a coach must also have an understanding of adult learning principles (L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010); be able to work collaboratively with colleagues; and possess a variety of non-content-related skills, such as a positive attitude, effective time management, and proficient communication (Bates & Morgan, 2018). They also need personality traits like trust, flexibility, and adaptability (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Bean et al, 2015; Calo et al.; Ertmer et al.; Ippolito, 2010; Jones & Rainville, 2014; Lowenhaupt, McKinney, & Reeves,

2014). Although building relationships is a slow process, coaches gain trust when they engage with teachers collaboratively as fellow learners, readers, and writers (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Dozier, 2008).

Literacy Coaching Practices: Coaching and Consulting

Effective literacy coaching takes on many forms and varies widely from one setting to another (Yopp et al., 2011). Equally significant is the difference between coaching and consulting, as SLPs often walk this fine line during their work with teachers. Both practices focus on moving teachers forward in their understanding and implementation of effective literacy instruction. Coaching, however, is suggestive of a collaborative relationship in which the SLP and the teacher share responsibilities in decision making (Eisenberg, 2016; Toll, 2014; Yopp et al., 2011), while consulting is more directive, with the SLP typically having most of the power. Often, when using consulting techniques, SLPs position themselves as the expert holding the knowledge, and thus directly provide the teacher with resources, research, and answers to problems. Although content knowledge is fundamental to all instructional specialist positions (Calo et al., 2015; Heineke, 2013; IRA, 2004; L'Allier et al., 2010), multiple studies explain that the coaching role also includes building teacher capacity. Stover et al. (2011) suggested coaching involves asking questions and providing feedback in order to build self-efficacy within the teacher. Others (Toll, 2014; Wall & Palmer, 2015) agreed that utilizing questioning strategies guides teachers toward self-reflection and ownership over problem-solving issues that arise within their classrooms.

Both coaching and consulting have their place in a coaching conversation. Heineke (2013) found that the model of coaching employed by an SLP varied depending on the teacher and the situation in which the SLP was working. Regardless of the techniques utilized during a coaching conversation, the ultimate goal of a coaching conversation is to "deepen the teacher's understanding of how students learn" (Peterson et al., 2009, p. 501), yet many SLPs are unsure of when and how to use various coaching moves in order to meet this goal (Heineke, 2003).

Methods

Role of the Researchers

The first author has served in a variety of SLP roles, and serving in these roles affected the ways in which she viewed and discussed the conversations with the participating coach. The second author is the focus of the presented case study in this article; however, her case study was conducted by the first author. The third author is a doctoral student at the same university as the first author.

Participants and Setting

Although the research presented was part of a larger study of five literacy coaches, we lifted Alida's case study to present here due to the ways in which it successfully highlighted

various coaching and consulting techniques. Alida was an SLP employed at an elementary school located in Towson Independent School District (for the purposes of this manuscript, all names of locations are pseudonyms), in the northern suburbs of a large city. We chose to conduct our research here because this school district has an impressive history of promoting research-based literacy instruction in the schools and each school has a full-time reading specialist/interventionist on its campus. The first author purposefully chose Alida for the study based on her willingness to participate and because she engaged in the regular coaching of teachers in addition to her daily responsibilities as a reading interventionist. Alida was given the freedom to choose any two teachers with whom to work during the study.

Alida's school and teachers. Alida served as an elementary self-contained classroom teacher for seven years prior to taking on the role of reading specialist in her present school, Dawson Elementary, where she had been for two years at the time of this study. Alida's daily activities included providing reading intervention for students in grades kindergarten through four, dyslexia intervention, and meeting with grade level teams for weekly planning. Her school district had recently encouraged all elementary school reading specialists to engage in formal coaching activities. This initiative excited Alida and she began her new duties earlier than most in her district. She also explained this new dimension of her role to teachers and worked with administration team to keep them informed of her activities. Alida's school was a Title I campus that served 599 students in grades kindergarten through four. The school's student demographics at the time of this study were as follows: 55% male, 45% female; and 60% white, 32% Hispanic, 2% African American, 1% Native American, 1% Asian, and 4% two or more races.

Alida challenged herself by choosing two very different teachers with whom to focus her coaching work during this particular school year. Liz was in her fourth year as a first-grade teacher and had just begun her master's degree in reading. Alida described her as "eager to learn" and said she often read professional texts related to literacy instruction on her own; however, Liz admitted that she sometimes had difficulty implementing the ideas she learned. Maria was a kindergarten teacher at the time of this study and had previously taught third grade for three years. Alida indicated that this drastic change in grade levels was probably Maria's greatest area of development. She did say Maria was "really open to ideas and having me come in and watch her [teach]." Alida admitted at the beginning of the study that, out of the two teachers, she and Liz had a strong relationship, as they worked together frequently to hash out teaching ideas and had even presented at conferences and written manuscripts for publication together. (See Table 1 for participant demographics.)

Table 1. Participants (teacher names are pseudonyms)

SLP	Title	Years in Current Position	Ethnicity	Gender
Alida	Reading Specialist	2	White	F
Liz	First Grade Teacher	4	White	F
Kristen	Kindergarten Teacher	1	Hispanic	F

All but one of the observed coaching conversations occurred in the teachers' classrooms, with the other one occurring in the coach's classroom. The average duration of each conversation was 17 minutes, 35 seconds, with the shortest being the first one with Liz in the fall at 11 minutes, 50 seconds and the longest at 21 minutes, 5 seconds with Maria in the spring. Each conversation focused on one facet of literacy instruction, such as guided reading or writing conferences.

Data Collection

We collected several kinds of information along a specific timeline across one school year to respond to our research questions. First, the first author interviewed Alida (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). It should be noted that this protocol was used as part of a larger study and not all of the information collected is reported in the findings section. Alida then video-recorded two coaching conversations (one in fall and one in spring) with each of the teachers. Alida and the first author viewed each coaching conversation video individually and took notes based on general observations (a detailed note-taking guide was not created at this point during the research study). Together, we created a list of what to look for while we viewed the videos, including where the teacher and coach were physically situated in relation to one another; topic(s) of the conversation; questions asked by the coach; and other general noticings that were of interest. The decision to have the coach and the first author view the conversations individually was made because we did not want one another's observations to interfere with or influence the other's. We were interested in seeing how our observations were similar and different and how these similarities and differences were addressed during the debriefing sessions.

Within one week of viewing each coaching conversation, the first author debriefed with Alida (see Appendix B for debriefing protocol). At the end of the school year, the first author interviewed Alida again. All interviews, coaching conversations, and debriefing sessions were video-recorded and transcribed. We also took notes as we viewed the coaching conversations and debriefing sessions. All interviews at the beginning of the study and all debriefing sessions were conducted virtually due to distance, time, and monetary restraints. The end-of-study interview was conducted in person. See Figure 1 for the procedures used to collect data.
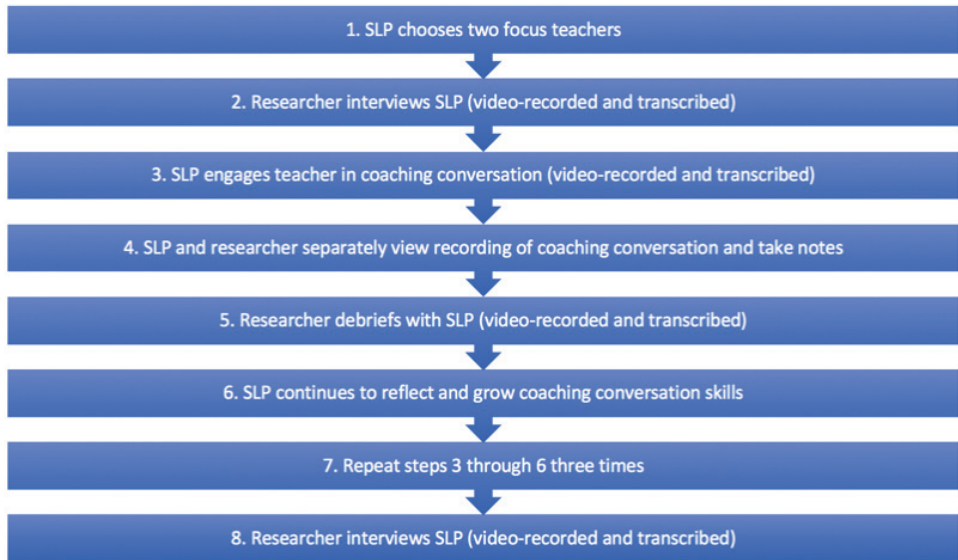
Figure 1. Data Collection Process

Data Analysis

For this case study analysis (Merriam, 1998), we first read through each coaching conversation transcript. We then coded each using *a priori* categories (Saldaña, 2013), as we searched for certain types of questions (e.g., open-ended, positive, plural, and tentative). These delineations were derived from the work of Costa and Garmston (1994). *Open-ended questions* elicit a more complex response than a simple dichotomous (yes or no) question. Questions that are presented in a *positive* manner let the teacher know that the coach assumes the practice in question is actually occurring. Questions phrased using *plurals* suggest there are many possibilities for the subject at hand, and *tentative* questions include words such as "might" or "maybe," sending the message to the interviewee that the information presented in the question is a suggestion (Costa & Garmston, 1994). Paraphrasing and ways of facilitating rapport with teachers were also considered and recorded during our note-taking. While coding for these, we noticed other aspects of the conversations as they emerged, such as nonverbal communication, feedback, and how Alida situated herself as a learner. We then used each of these items to create a note-taking guide (see Appendix C). We used the note-taking guide to engage in a *focused coding* of each coaching conversation transcript. We analyzed each debriefing session and interview transcript by coding for the themes already indicated. Themes were grouped into broad categories, which we named, and these categories allowed us to present the current case. The categories were: coaching and consulting, building rapport, and coach as learner (see Table 2 for examples of each). Much of what we gleaned from observations of the conversations and debriefing sessions was related to the literacy coach shifting, often

effortlessly, from a coaching role to a consulting role and back again. This aligns with what was referred to frequently in the literature on instructional and literacy coaching. From this set of analyzed data, we were able to gather and explain the findings as related to the research questions.

Table 2. Examples of Themes Collected from Coaching Conversation Transcripts, Debriefing Sessions, and Interviews

Theme	Description
Coaching and Consulting	The coach's inclination might be to support the teacher by providing advice (consulting), and there are times the coach finds that this is important. The coach also strategically asks carefully crafted questions and uses paraphrasing and wait time to allow space for the teacher to problem-find and problem-solve (coaching).
Building Rapport	The coach builds rapport with teachers during coaching conversations as evidenced by where the coach and teachers sit in relation to one another, body language, facial expression, and conversation turn-taking.
Coach as Learner	The coach situates herself as a learner at some points during the conversation by sharing her own challenges in teaching and discussing how she utilizes research in daily practice.

Limitations

While the first author would have preferred to debrief with Alida in person after each conversation, this was not possible due to time and financial restraints. The first author was able to conduct some face-to-face visits, which were helpful, especially to get to know Alida and her teachers. While the first author was not able to listen in on every coaching conversation Alida held, four conversations were recorded and analyzed, providing a manageable data set. Alida was fully invested in this study and devoted a great amount of time growing her skill-set as a literacy coach. This investment inevitably impacted what was noticed about her progression from fall to spring. Similarly, Alida chose teachers whom she knew would be open to coaching and would therefore be easy to work with. Certainly, this impacted the conversations that occurred between the coach and her teachers. Both teachers were also relatively new to the field of teaching, which created a possibly different dynamic than might occur in a conversation with more experienced teachers.

The use of the video recorder seems to have caused nervousness on the part of the coach and teachers at the beginnings of the first conversations; however, it seemed as though it was forgotten shortly thereafter by each pair. Finally, the information presented here was gathered as part of a larger study of five literacy coaches. As stated previously, we extracted Alida's case study due to the positive outcomes for her two teachers and the success Alida experienced as a literacy professional who was new to coaching. We are not using this information to generalize to all literacy coaches; however, it is offered as a guide

for what coaches might try during coaching conversations to both lift teachers' learning and improve or enhance their coaching skill-set.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

We took several measures in order to ensure the trustworthiness of our findings. Three kinds of information were collected over one school year, including interviews, observations of coaching conversations, and debriefing sessions, which allowed us to cross-reference our noticings. Thick descriptions (e.g., noting nonverbal communication) were used to add layers to observations. Also, Alida and her teachers engaged in member-checking of their interviews to ensure that this research report represented them as accurately as possible. Last, as a form of peer review, all authors viewed all coaching conversation and debriefing videos, reviewed others' notes and added notes of their own, and met frequently to discuss these notes. This research was approved by the participating school, as well as the university. We secured informed consent from all participants prior to the study.

Findings

The categories that emerged after viewing and analyzing coaching conversations, debriefing sessions, and interview sessions with Alida were: the balance of coaching and consulting; building rapport; the use of questioning, paraphrasing, and wait time; and the coach as learner. These categories served to answer the three research questions: In what ways does one literacy coach scaffold her teachers' learning during formal one-to-one coaching conversations? In what ways do the literacy coach's formal coaching conversations with teachers change across one school year? How does the literacy coach reflect on her coaching conversations and use these reflections to improve her coaching skills?

The findings are presented as a case study of Alida lifted from a larger study of five SLPs. The case study presented here serves to provide insight into effective coaching conversations that enhance teachers' learning.

Coaching and Consulting

In conversations with her two teachers, Alida worked flexibly between the dimensions of coaching and consulting, two of the dimensions of Costa and Garmston's (1994) four support functions. The piece she grappled with was knowing the right moment to give advice: "Sometimes I feel like I'm just really quick if they have a problem, [I'll say] 'here, use this' or 'do this' and I think that doesn't ultimately help them. They need to come to it themselves" (fall interview). After viewing and debriefing her conversations, however, Alida came to terms with how there are appropriate moments to consult. She said at the end of the study, "You have to know your teachers and how to meet them at their level" and that using the same techniques with one teacher as she did with the other teacher might have been inappropriate.

For example, during their initial conversation, Maria discussed only the negative parts of her lesson vaguely. Alida, sensing this would be counterproductive to Maria's development in this area of instruction, made an on-the-spot decision to share with her the specific parts of the lesson that went well and how they might work together on those that did not. Alida picked up on Maria's need for reassurance and understood that this teacher needed more guidance, thus she provided her with what she needed through consultation that provided "explicit and unwavering suggestions" (first author's research journal) in a nonthreatening manner.

Alida's consulting tactics with her teachers consisted mostly of providing examples and asking specific leading questions, with the occasional demonstrations of strategies. While these strategies were used intermittently, Alida sought to increase the amount of coaching that occurred while working with teachers. She made a goal of increasing coaching because she wanted "[teachers] to make discoveries for themselves and take ownership of the conversation" (fall interview). At the end of the study, she discussed her progress on this goal and how "powerful" the interactions were when she assisted teachers in "coming to their own realizations" instead of always leading them down a coach-determined path. She said she accomplished this by working with teachers in more of a "team" environment, rather than a supervisor-oriented approach. Alida shared that she also tried to stay focused on student learning behaviors, which allowed the two professionals to problem-solve together and make the conversation less threatening for the teacher.

Questioning

Alida typically began conversations with open-ended questions in order to provide space for teachers to share their ideas and concerns. Open-ended questions allow the coach to "foster reflection and build trust" (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010, p. 59) because the teacher is able to offer multiple answers, unlike with dichotomous questions. Some of the open-ended questions Alida used in the spring, however, after considering her fall conversations, were more direct, in order to elicit a focused response while still keeping possibilities open for the teacher (see Table 3). She mentioned that using questions such as these helped conversations stay on track and elicited more focused and purposeful discussions.

Table 3. Examples of Open-Ended Questions

Fall	Spring
• What do you notice?	• How's it been going?
• How do you think it went?	• Talk to me more about now you send the students off [after the guided reading lesson].
• What do you mean?	• So, moving forward, what do you want to focus on?
• Why do you fell that way?	

Additionally, Alida asked more questions containing *positive* presuppositions in the spring, as she appeared to begin to draw on the impact these types of questions have (see Table 4). She realized questions such as these sent implicit messages to the teachers that they were thoughtful when planning and reflecting on lessons. Costa and Garmston (1994) suggested "limiting presuppositions have the potential to detract from and reduce teachers' resourcefulness" (p. 113).

Notice the last question listed in the "Spring" column also has a *plural* dimension (i.e., *things*), which is a questioning strategy that allows the teacher and coach to keep options open for the many alternatives to approach a problem. While she used a variety of question types, Alida expressed in her end-of-study interview the desire to "learn the specific language" of coaching conversations and thought it would be beneficial to have question stems to reference in order to broaden her repertoire of coaching discourse.

Table 4. Examples of Positive Questions

Fall	Spring
• What have you tried? • What's something else you could do?	• How could you [teach them story writing] going forward?
	• So tell me how you go about planning for a guided reading lesson. How do you select the book?
	• How do you go about planning your teaching point? And picking your teaching points for your group?
	• So movng forward, what do you want to try and focus on in terms of comprehension?
	• What are some thing syou could have them do whenver they finish their book and you're still working with other students?

Being *tentative* is yet another way to alter the structure of questions. Using this tactic helps the teacher understand that the coach's suggestions are ones that can be changed as they are given further thought. Tentativeness places the issue under discussion into the teacher's realm, thus shifting the authority from coach to teacher. Here are examples of questions Alida purposefully altered to include tentative key words (in bold).

*Is there a checklist or something you **could** use?*

*So **maybe** have you tried to do quick writes with him?*

*What else **might** you have them do?*

Paraphrasing and Wait Time

At some point during each conversation, Alida practiced active listening by paraphrasing what the teacher said. For Maria, she did this to confirm that the teacher had engaged in a positive teaching practice, as Maria was feeling her lesson had not gone

well, saying, "You activated their background knowledge and gave them a purpose for reading." Alida also paraphrased in order to clarify what the teacher had said, as she did with Liz here: "You were saying that your lowest writers have trouble getting started and you find yourself conferencing with them the most on [this]." Alida noticed these coaching moves while she watched and reflected on her conversations and said in her end-of-study interview, "Restating what you hear them say shows them that you are actively listening and trying to make sure that you understand them correctly, so I think that's something I've improved upon."

Important to Alida, as revealed in her fall interview, was ensuring the natural flow of conversation. She demonstrated this concern during her coaching conversations by allowing plenty of wait time for teachers to process. She said she had to be "conscious" of wait time and that she grappled with when and how long to wait; however, after analyzing the numbers of the teachers' and the coach's spoken words, it seems that her silence paid off. Alida's few interruptions seemed like casual interjections, especially with Liz, as the two often finished one another's sentences. After reflecting on her recorded coaching conversations, Alida believed that creating a two-way conversation was an easier endeavor with teachers who have a "strong literacy background," as Liz did, and, therefore, might induce more focused dialogue.

Building Rapport

Alida sat in close proximity to her teachers at a table, creating a casual environment. There were, however, noticeable differences in the rapport between Alida and each teacher, as well as differences from fall to spring. At the beginning of Alida's first conversation with Liz, Alida sat with her arms and legs crossed. Then, as the conversation continued, she "relaxed and became more like myself" (fall debriefing interview). By the second recorded conversation, Alida's posture was relaxed from the start. It was obvious in both the coach's and teacher's smiles and laughter that they were comfortable with one another. The spring conversation between Alida and Liz was so natural that it seemed like the video camera was not there and that it was a recording of two friends chatting in an informal setting.

Alida's interactions with Maria were more formal. This formality aligns with the information presented earlier about the existence of more consulting during these conversations. During their first conversation, both the teacher and coach were somewhat restricted in their posture, although they became more physically comfortable as they started to focus on discussing the teacher's lesson. Both smiled throughout the conversation and maintained eye contact. Alida and Maria's spring conversation was different from the one in the fall, in that Maria's confidence was evidenced by her straight posture, positive tone of voice, honesty about her lesson, willingness to try new things, and the ease with which she shared ideas and asked questions.

Throughout all four conversations, Alida maintained eye contact with her teachers, nodded her head, and used her hands while talking. All of these actions might be translated into her passion for coaching teachers.

Coach as Learner

Alida made it clear that her focus for this year was learning about herself as a coach and learning how to work effectively with teachers. Her guiding statement was, "I want to learn from them as much as I want them to learn from me" (fall interview). This focus was demonstrated in two ways: her candidness about her own learning alongside her teachers and her reflections on the coaching conversation videos.

Conversations with the teachers revealed several instances in which Alida shared her journey working with children who need extra literacy support. For example, while discussing strategies for writing conferences with Liz, Alida mentioned that conferring was an area she was strengthening in her own practice, as well. Also, by sharing her personal reading goals for the summer as well as articles she had recently read, Alida set an example of professional practices for her teachers.

Additionally, Alida shared with teacher her former discomfort with being a literacy coach and how she was now starting to grow into the role. She valued the opportunities to view and debrief on her recorded coaching conversations, as they gave her "confidence" to continue to internalize the "questioning and language" skills she was learning (spring interview).

Discussion

Alida recognized the benefit of engaging her teachers in one-on-one coaching conversations; however, with the multiple duties she had as a reading specialist, these conversations had not previously occurred as frequently as she would have preferred. Galloway and Lesaux (2014) cautioned SLPs about the risks of taking on too many roles and encouraged them to engage in thoughtful reflection in order to maximize their effectiveness. The reflection and debriefing cycle in which Alida engaged made evident her growth as a coach throughout the year.

Coaching and Consulting Strategies (Coach as Learner)

Through thoughtful reflection on her coaching practices, Alida began to find a balance of coaching and consulting during conversations with teachers over the course of the study. She felt that reflecting upon her recorded coaching conversations was powerful and helped her develop as a coach. She drew many of the same noticings from her coaching conversation videos as the others who also viewed them did, things which may have gone unnoticed without video preservation. Stover et. al (2011) similarly discovered that inviting coaches to use video recordings fostered reflection and inquiry.

Alida paid close attention to the needs of the teachers with whom she was working by observing them in their classrooms, as well as by building rapport and actively listening during coaching conversations, as evidenced by her use of paraphrasing and wait time. This attention to the teachers allowed her to meet them where they were and support them precisely at these points of need, a coaching practice often recommended to promote teacher learning (Eisenberg, 2016; Toll, 2016). As seen in her fall conversation with Maria, rather than taking what might be the easier route and piling advice onto the teacher, Alida worked with Maria to co-construct next steps in teaching and learning, thereby building teacher capacity. She was putting into practice Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory, which she had previously used when teaching children. Alida tended to exercise *consulting* strategies when working with newer teachers like Maria, and *coaching* strategies when meeting with more experienced teachers and teachers like Liz, with whom she had worked extensively prior to the onset of this study. This difference in strategies mirrors the findings of Calo et al. (2015), who noticed that coaches used the term "coaching" when discussing their work with experienced teachers and "mentoring" when discussing their work with new teachers. Costa and Garmston (2002) identified the distinction between *coaching* and *consulting* in writings about the four support functions used when working with teachers. In addition to collaborating and evaluation, cognitive coaching is used to draw reflections from the teacher and has the "greatest potential for learning" (Ellison & Hayes, 2009, p. 82); and consulting is useful when the coach gives explicit advice. Coaching and consulting work hand-in-hand, as each is beneficial, as long as "those who are supporting others [are] clear about the purpose of their interactions and apply functions to their work based on need rather than some prescribed process" (Ellison & Hayes, p. 82).

During the study interviews, debriefings, and coaching conversations with teachers, Alida frequently positioned herself as a learner by sharing her learning with teachers, rather than an expert holding all the knowledge. This coaching move helped to establish trust between her and the teacher and cultivated a collaborative partnership in which they worked together to find problems and solutions (Stover et al., 2011). Calo et al. (2015) emphasized the coach's role as a learner and how it shapes their effectiveness as a literacy leader on the school campus. Alida shared that, since assuming the role of an SLP, she had several opportunities to participate in professional development related to literacy teaching and learning, but not as many opportunities related to coaching, which is similar to the findings of Bean et al. (2015) and Calo et al.

Building Rapport

Toll (2014) stated, "coaching is all about relationships" (p. 35). When collaborative nonjudgmental partnerships are formed between the SLP and the teacher, there is the potential for true learning to occur for all: teacher, coach, and students (Calo et al., 2015). Solid working relationships between Alida and her teachers was evident in this study

through the use of eye contact, head nodding, and friendly laughter, as well as sitting in close proximity with one another. Lowenhaupt et al. (2014) wrote about how "symbolic gestures [and] selecting locations for interactions" were important to coaches they interviewed (p. 750).

The coach–teacher relationship was also strengthened through the coaching techniques used throughout Alida's conversations with the teacher participants. Specifically, her use of wait time demonstrated that she valued the teachers' voices and viewed herself as an equal partner in the coaching conversation. She discussed wanting her coaching conversations with teachers to be as "natural" as possible and strived to create a healthy balance of coach-to-teacher talk, thereby enabling each teacher to engage as a full participant in the conversation in order to facilitate her growth. Coaching conversations in which teachers express their thoughts and share the responsibility for developing solutions have the highest potential for impacting classroom practice (Heineke, 2013; Stover et al., 2011; Yopp et. al, 2011).

Implications

This study has implications for the ways in which schools and districts professionally develop their literacy coaches, as well as for how universities prepare classroom teachers and reading specialists/interventionists to move into coaching roles (Shaw, 2009). Many SLPs receive little instruction in working with adult learners prior to engaging in literacy coaching activities. Adults learn differently than do younger students (Knowles et al., 2005), and SLPs should be aware of and consider these unique needs. SLPs might benefit from professional development that not only deepens their understanding of the principles related to adult learning, but also strengthens their leadership skills (Bean et al., 2015; Calo et al., 2015). Gibson (2011) suggested several methods for providing continuous support to SLPs, including reflecting upon videotaped coaching conversations and using self-assessment rubrics.

Often, coaches feel as if they must solve problems for teachers and assume sole responsibility for strengthening teachers' literacy practices. Although SLPs are generally hired for the wealth of knowledge they possess, Wall and Palmer (2015) warn that coaches "must learn to share their knowledge in a way that empowers teachers to critically problem-solve their own classroom circumstances," rather than just tell teachers what to do and provide the reasons why they should do it (p. 634). The discourse a literacy coach employs while meeting with a teacher is critical, as it can either promote or hinder self-reflection and deep thinking of one's own practice. Heineke (2013) found that sustained learning was less likely to occur when teachers did not have the opportunity to talk through their own thinking during a coaching conversation. Thus, coaches are most effective when they lend an experienced ear to the classroom teacher, rather than attempting to dictate what the teacher does in the classroom (Eisenberg, 2016). This listening takes time, practice,

and thoughtful reflection on one's coaching moves. It would be advantageous for schools and districts to create a space for SLPs to reflect upon the conversations they have with teachers, both in isolation and with peers serving in the same role.

In addition, literacy coaches need to be provided with training in different *coaching* techniques, including when to use consulting tactics during a coaching conversation (Rainville & Jones, 2008). This training might include discussions about the difference between coaching, which is a partner working alongside the teacher, and *consulting*, which constitutes a professional giving advice, whether solicited or not, to the teacher. Each of these techniques has its place in coaching conversations. One goal of professional development for SLPs might be for coaches to understand how to determine when to use certain coaching methods in order to meet the varying needs of teachers with whom they work.

Since the preparation of literacy coaches should be included in university graduate reading programs, a course specifically addressing the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches is in order. Instructors might provide a variety of readings from books and journals on the topic of coaching, as well as engage students in observation and practicum experiences such as how to use coaching models to work with groups of teachers and individuals.

Directions for Future Research

A logical next step is to analyze coaching conversations with more "resistant" teachers in order to understand the verbal and nonverbal strategies coaches use to build rapport with these teachers, as well as the ways they use questions, paraphrases, and other coaching conversation strategies to best scaffold teachers' learning. As the coaching initiative spreads in Alida's district, we wonder how she might help others feel comfortable working with teachers in this role and developing their skills.

Examining each teacher's classroom practice following the coaching conversation would be informative. It may allow researchers to determine the ways in which the teachers apply what was discussed during the coaching conversations to their actual classrooms. While we read and noted teacher responses to questions during the coaching conversations, a dimension that might be added to a similar study is holding a debriefing session with the teacher immediately following the coaching conversation in order to gain the teachers' reflections of the conversations. Similarly, it would be worthwhile to survey the teachers' self-efficacy as teachers of literacy prior to beginning the coaching work with the SLP, as well as after several coaching conversations have occurred. This surveying would allow researchers to examine the growth in the teachers' identities as literacy instructors throughout the coaching process.

These inquiries may lead to further examination of how literacy coaching builds teacher capacity on a campus by perhaps questioning the teachers about how they share the knowledge they have learned through coaching with other teachers in their building. Additionally, further research could be done to examine the ways in which SLPs work to expand their reach through utilizing skilled teachers in the coaching process.

As Alida continues her journey as a literacy coach, she will expand her reach and build capacity in her school. Working closely with teachers through frequent coaching conversations will allow her to accomplish things she would not have been able to if she were serving only students. She will continue to set goals for herself and record and reflect on conversations with teachers, learning more about her teachers, herself, and literacy teaching along the way.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Prior to the Study

- How often do you currently meet for formal one-to-one coaching conversations with teachers on your campus?

- Where do these conversations typically occur?

- What are some recent topics you have discussed with teachers during these conversations?

- Does your schedule allow you enough time to meet with teachers for individual coaching conversations?

- So far this year, how many teachers have you had at least one coaching conversation with?

- How do you feel teachers respond to these conversations?

- What kinds of goals have you set for yourself regarding how often you would like to meet with teachers for individual coaching conversations?

- How do you feel about these individual coaching conversations?

- Who usually initiates these conversations—you or the teacher?

- Who usually does the most talking during these conversations?

- Do you take notes during these conversations?

At the Conclusion of the Study

- Since we began our study, how often have you met for formal one-to-one coaching conversations with teachers on your campus, including the ones we recorded?

- What are some recent topics you have discussed with teachers during these conversations?

- Has your schedule allowed you enough time to meet with teachers for individual coaching conversations since our study began?

- Since our study began, how many times have you had coaching conversations with teachers?

- How do you feel teachers have responded to these conversations since our study began?

- What kinds of goals have you set for yourself for next year regarding how often you would like to meet with teachers for individual coaching conversations?

Appendix A Continued

- In what ways has reviewing recordings of your coaching conversations helped you in moving teachers forward?

- In what ways has reviewing recordings of your coaching conversations improved classroom instruction?

- What about differentiation? How did you know where to start?

- What would be the outcome of the perfect coaching conversation?

Appendix B

Debriefing Protocol

- How do you feel the two teachers you have recorded are responding to these conversations?

- What noticings do you have about the individual coaching conversation you just recorded?

    - Here, the literacy coach will review her own notes from the coaching conversation.

    - What kinds of questions did you ask?

    - What kinds of statements did you make?

    - Paraphrasing?

    - Pausing?

Appendix C
Note-taking Guide

Open-ended questions	
Positive questions	
Plural questions	
Tentative questions	
Paraphrasing	
Consulting	
Coach as learner	
Wait time	
Feedback	
Verbal noticings (pitch, volume, inflection, pace, other markers such as "hmm," "uh-huh," etc.)	
Nonverbal noticings (posture, gesture, proximity, facial expressions, rapport) Where are the participants sitting? Body positions? What are they looking at?	
Amount of coach talk vs. teacher talk	
Other	
Location of coaching conversation	
Length of conversation	
Topic of conversation	
Other comments from debriefing	