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THE LITERACY COACH AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER: HOW THREE
LITERACY COACHES IN RURAL GEORGIA IMPROVE TEACHER PRACTICES

by

CARLETHA DOYLE

Under the Direction of Sharon Brooks

ABSTRACT

The bar has been raised on student achievement in the United States and on teaching quality as well. Compelling evidence confirms that a teacher's mastery of the academic content of what he or she teaches is critical to engaging students and inspiring them to academic excellence (Addey, 2000; Wilkinson, 2002). In order to truly impact instructional effectiveness, transformations must occur on the frontlines as teachers put research based theories into practice. A major obstacle facing literacy coaches and leadership teams is identifying an effective implementation model and practice that promote and support high quality literacy instruction through direct, school-based work with teachers in a district. To understand the support of various models, the researcher will examine the experiences of exemplary literacy coaches as evidenced by test scores and coaches who have been named as Coach of the Year by the school district. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the effective practices of exemplary literacy coaches as instructional leaders and the models and strategies being implemented that support teacher development.

INDEX WORDS: Instructional Effectiveness, Literacy Coach, Student Achievement, Teacher Development, Leadership, Teaching Quality, Research Based Practices

THE LITERACY COACH AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER: How Three Exemplary
Literacy Coaches in Rural Georgia Improve Teacher Practices

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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2009

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LITERACY COACHES IN RURAL GEORGIA IMPROVE TEACHER PRACTICES

by

CARLETHA DOYLE

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DEDICATION

To my husband Keith and my son Kyle, cheers to the both of you! This work is dedicated to you. Thank you for your love, patience, and support throughout this journey.

“You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them.”

-Desmond Tutu

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

President Bush's educational reform agenda mandated that every child become a reader by the end of 3rd grade. This legislation has profoundly impacted how reading is taught by providing support and training for teachers to implement scientifically based reading strategies. One such support is the emergence of reading specialists as literacy coaches in hopes of leaving no child behind. The underlying purpose of coaching is to improve student achievement through changes in teacher learning and classroom practice. In response to a nationwide call for creating highly-qualified teachers, states, districts, and schools have turned to alternative professional development models in an effort to impact teacher knowledge and improve classroom instruction. Instructional coaching, a professional development model that involves placing reading specialist within schools to provide ongoing support for teachers on issues of knowledge and practice, is experiencing explosive growth in popularity in response to the challenge of producing highly qualified teachers. The implementation of instructional coaching programs has outpaced research.

On-site literacy coaches serving as instructional leaders have become a vital component for working with teachers on implementing change. In many situations, the literacy coach working as an instructional leader facilitates professional learning communities focused on issues of learning and practice. If students fall behind, they risk both school and workplace failure. Therefore, even basic literacy levels are no longer sufficient. The Rand Report, *Reading for Understanding* (2002), noted the demand for literacy skills is steadily increasing. The U. S. economy today demands a universally

higher level of literacy achievement than at any other time in history, and it is reasonable to believe that the demand for a literate populace will increase in the future (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). To ensure sufficient support to develop the knowledge and skills of classroom teachers, the identification of appropriate implementation models of coaching is a necessity in order to change the trajectory of student achievement in primary grades. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify effective practices used by exemplary literacy coaches.

Background of the Study

Leadership is a critical component of all school improvement efforts (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Effective leadership builds and sustains an organizational culture that focuses on continual improvement of educational programs, teachers' capabilities and skills, and student learning (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001). Traditional school leadership places this authority and influence in the hands of the principal or a small team of administrators at the main office. This type of centralized control continues to be the norm (Day & Harris, 2003). However, the challenges facing schools today to improve student achievement raise serious questions to the traditional approach to school leadership with the principal as the primary instructional leader. As a result, educators are proposing the dispersal of leadership authority within a school and that teachers assume significantly greater roles in school improvement efforts (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Lambert, 1998; 1999; Sergiovanni, 2001).

The call for highly qualified teachers who can improve student literacy performance has led to increased attention to job-embedded approaches to professional learning (DuFour, 2004). Such approaches call for intensive, on-going efforts that include

coaching and feedback in order to help teachers learn to better meet students' needs (National Staff Development Council, 2001; American Educational Research Association, 2005). One model of teacher leadership prevalent in elementary schools is the literacy coach. Joyce and Showers (2002) described coaching as a strategy for implementing a professional support system for teachers that includes research, demonstration, practice, and feedback. The potential of the coaching process as part of this component of the change trajectory is clear, considering that classroom implementation is the stopping point of change for many well-intended professional development attempts. Literacy coaches are master teachers who provide essential leadership for the school's overall literacy program (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; International Reading Association, 2006). They have been hired to join the leadership coalition and spearhead reform efforts on the front lines by implementing professional development and providing job-embedded support to schools as the five essential components of reading are manifested in classrooms. The National Early Literacy Panel's (n.d.) descriptions of these components are listed below:

1. Phonics- the relationship between letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language.
2. Phonemic Awareness- the ability to notice, process, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words.
3. Vocabulary- the words we must know to comprehend and communicate effectively.
4. Fluency- the ability to read text accurately and quickly.

5. Comprehension- the ability to read words, the ability to comprehend language, and the ability to access background knowledge (p.5).

Many schools districts are beginning to use literacy coaches to aid in the implementation of programs designed to improve adolescent literacy. The International Reading Association (IRA) recently presented a statement on the role and qualifications of reading coaches (IRA, 2006). These guidelines make clear that the primary activity for coaches should be collaborative work with teachers focused on instruction. Common activities that appear on the IRA's compendia include the following:

- Providing professional development
- Modeling lessons in the classroom
- Observing teachers
- Providing instructional materials
- Sharing current research results
- Assisting with planning (p.17)

However, literacy coaching is a new and evolving phenomenon. Legislators and schools recognize that effective, continuous, and supportive staff development for teachers, administrators, and key district-level personnel is critical to success (Allington, 2001).

Roles of the Literacy Coach

According to Toll (2005), literacy coaches assisted teachers to recognize their skill knowledge and identify their instructional strengths and weaknesses using scientifically based research practices that reinforce the teachers' abilities to make more effective classroom decisions. There is a broad array of coaching models and an even wider variety of ways in which coaches have enacted these models. This section will

present various scholars' interpretations of literacy coaches' roles, the most prominent models of coaching found in the literature along with the challenges and benefits of utilizing literacy coaches. Dole (2004) equated literacy coaches as mentors. In Dole's (2004) examination of the evolving role of reading specialists, she focused on literacy coaches as mentors for teachers, and stated, "Among the most important kinds of reading coaches' activities are teaching demonstrations and modeling of lessons. The reading coach may also have observed in classrooms and provided them with feedback about their lessons" (p. 4- 5). In essence, she felt that literacy coaches were like mentors because they modeled for teachers. The findings of Guskey (2000), and Simmons and Harn (2003) were consistent with literacy coaching responsibilities inclusive of modeling for teachers. They reported that literacy coaches often worked as a consultant being available to provide teachers with advice or expertise to improve instructional practice.

Contrarily, Anderson and Shannon (1995) reported coaches as mentors mean monitoring teachers' progress, providing expert assistance, and guiding an ongoing reflective process. Their studies suggested a one-way flow of knowledge where knowledgeable mentors provide expertise and assistance in the learning process of less-knowledgeable teachers. Likewise Anders (2002) is in support of the literacy coach acting as a mentor. His findings described the coach's prime responsibility as providing support and advice to content area teachers throughout the implementation of the overall school-based literacy initiative through monitoring. All of the preceding studies suggested that that the work of literacy coaches consisted mainly of assisting teachers to interpret new information and apply it in the classroom in order to bridge the gap between information learned outside the classroom and how to implement new strategies

with students. On the other hand, Brown (2000) and Kovic (1996) questioned the effectiveness of a literacy coach functioning as a mentor. These researchers questioned the effectiveness of mentoring in the social context of schools because few published research studies have provided documentation of the impact of coaching on teacher development.

Another interpretation of a literacy coach is as a curriculum coordinator. Sturtevant (2003) felt that literacy coaches were curriculum coordinators whose job entailed school-wide curriculum implementation. He defined literacy coaches as “master teachers who provided essential leadership for the school’s entire literacy program. This leadership entailed creating and supervising a long-term staff development process that supported both the development and implementation of the literacy program over months and years” (p. 11). In the same way, Kamil (2006) argued that successful literacy coaches were skilled planners who led and developed the school’s overall literacy strategy. Walpole and McKenna (2004) also placed importance on this coaching as a curriculum coordinator because they identified that a crucial part of the coach’s job to be a school-level planner. This point of view is further supported by Bean and Zigmond (2006) as they placed significance on the literacy coach being responsible for providing essential continuous staff development for teachers and school leaders. Acting as a school-level planner, these researchers described the literacy coach as an important link between the school and the overall district and state literacy efforts. On the other hand, Sweeney (2003) used the term instructional coach to describe the support person who modeled new strategies in classrooms and provided feedback. She further stated that “Instructional coaches customize professional development to match each teacher’s needs and interests

while they help the school establish a common understanding across all teachers” (p. 50). Research also indicates that teachers who are supported by instructional coaches were more likely to implement newly learned instructional strategies (Walpole & McKenna, 2008). Likewise, Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) contended that the instructional coaching model provided support to enhance teacher quality; with meaningful professional development tied to standards, curriculum, research, and best practices; follow-up support to effectively implement new learning, and scaffolding that encourages reflective practices and instruction. These researchers further described the literacy coach as someone who planned and implemented programs designed to help students improve their reading and writing skills across grade levels.

Meanwhile, several researchers provided definitions of coaching that include both school-wide planning and mentoring responsibilities (Borko & Putnam, 1998; Knight, 2004). The coaching process, defined using this dual-purpose definition of coaching, involved the literacy coach addressing the professional development of teachers as a whole-school literacy advocate and teacher mentor in order to improve literacy instruction within a classroom setting (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). The studies of Ellison and Hayes (2006) and Knight (2004) examined actual reading specialists working in schools. They found that the reading specialist’s role often included both teaching and coaching components. Costa and Garmston (2002) were in agreement with the foregoing researchers. After an analysis that focused on the actual work of literacy coaches, they found that the duties of a reading specialist included both teaching and coaching where the literacy coach taught for a portion of the day and coached the remainder of the day. In a like manner Kise (2006) found that effective professional development must be

multidimensional to include research and theory based demonstrations and modeling of skills and strategies. Oftentimes, contextual environments determined the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches.

Studies by Shellard, (2001), Allington and Walmsey (1995), Ivey (2001), and Lyons and Chabra (2004) evidenced that literacy coaches should serve as facilitators of teacher training for expertise in their subject area, because struggling readers needed teachers who were skilled in implementing quality reading instruction. Accordingly, Roller (2006) described the literacy coach as the specialist responsible for extending reading specific training by providing on-site support and guidance through collaboration with teachers. Kaplan and Owings' (2002) findings concurred with the preceding scholars, "Better teaching is the key to higher student achievement. Improving the quality of both teachers and their teaching is one of the more important challenges facing departments of education and schools throughout the nation," (p. 3). Puig and Froelich (2007) further concluded "...that enhanced reading proficiency rests largely on the capacity of classroom teachers to provide expert, exemplary reading instruction..." (p. 74). Likewise Symonds (2003) contended that it is important to focus on increasing teacher knowledge in the instruction of reading by utilizing coaches who model lessons, observe instruction, and coach teachers. All felt that the literacy coach working as a curriculum coordinator was the best means of accomplishing this task. The National Institute for Literacy agreed that appropriate and intensive training must take place for teachers in reading in order to facilitate an understanding of the reading process and obstacles as well (2004).

Models of Coaching

Current research that supports teaching excellence acknowledges that there is no “one size fits all approach”. Existing research on coaching incorporates a range of possible coaching models, many of which overlap and are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature. While at one end of this range is the model of coaching as facilitating team planning with minimal observation and evaluation (Joyce & Showers, 2002), and at the other end of the range is the model of the coach as supervising and evaluating teachers (Richardson & Placier 2001; Glickman, 2002), many studies seem to focus on models of coaching existing somewhere between these two extremes. Peer coaching, collaboration and mentoring, and cognitive coaching represent a middle-ground of coaching conceptualizations. Underlying this variety of coaching models are the common goals of affecting teacher learning and changing classroom practice. Regardless of the methodology, Richard (2003) described this on-site job-embedded professional development as “...the best way to sharpen teaching skills and raise student achievement in contrast to more familiar forms of staff development which are delivered to teachers who gather for lectures or workshops” (p.2).

A prominent coaching model in research is that of the peer coach, where the coach works in an environment conceptualized as a self-help community which fosters the transfer of new skills, companionship, peer feedback, and self-reflection (Anders, 2002; Joyce & Showers, 2002). In this capacity, the coach works as a peer in cooperation with classroom teachers; one person is usually assigned to serve as coach for a school year, but in some cases teachers switch places, taking turns being the coach. Joyce and Showers (2002) reported this coaching model as having the potential to allow for smooth

transitions between professional development activities and work inside the classroom, as teacher and coach may likely be considered as peers. Walpole and McKenna (2008) added that peer coaching allows teachers to act as coaches of one another as instructional goals are discussed and specific lesson plans are developed. Finally the two peers observe each other implementing these lessons. As this model is utilized, it builds a bridge between formal professional development and classroom implementation (Murphey, 2004). Moreover, Joyce and Showers (1996) asserted that the “coach” is the teacher teaching the lesson; the observer is being coached by observing. Equally important, Slater and Simmons (2001) evidenced that peers may also find it easier to create forums for sharing and learning from teaching experiences. This possibility is suggested by the positive response to, and claimed benefit of, coaching work and planning among teachers across a number of studies where the sense of teacher isolation was reduced, and where teamwork resulting from the peer coaching approach was found to have a positive effect on knowledge acquisition and teaching practice (Kohler, Crilley, & Shearer, 1997; Adams, 1990; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Kohler, Crilley, Shearer, and Good (1997) also examined that teachers instituted and sustained more change when they worked with a peer coach.

Furthermore after conducting over 70 observations in 27 schools, Greene (2004) reported peer coaching as an effective coaching model. This researcher observed teachers subsequently modifying their practices after collaborating with the coach as demonstration lessons for the classroom were planned. One weakness of the peer coaching model is that it does not address how learning beyond the immediate classroom

would be affected or how peer collaboration work might address the whole-school literacy plan.

Another coaching model emphasizes collaboration and mentoring, where groups of teachers are assisted in team planning and problem solving. The coach as collaborator provides opportunities for continuous learning with the support of colleagues (Lieberman, 1996), the formation of discourse communities (Putnam & Borko, 2000), and to the creation of a nurturing a school-wide culture of inquiry (Szabo, 1996). In the same way, Showers (1985) described the purpose of coaching as building communities of teachers who engage in the study of their craft, developing the shared language and common understandings needed for new knowledge and skills. Showers (1985) further supported providing follow-up support after teacher training. Realizing that collaborative relationships are essential to the professional learning community, Harris and Lambert (2003) proposed collaboration that is characterized by teachers accepting joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work. McCardle et al. (2008) further examined that effective professional development involves reflection, discussion, support, collaboration, and continuous reference to the classroom and student work. In addition, Mangin and Stoelinga (2008) suggested that the prime responsibility of an instructional coach is to promote the development of teachers' instructional capacity through the collective processes of monitoring practice through observation, providing constructive feedback, encouraging self-reflection, modeling within the classroom setting, and providing professional development. Similarly, Costa and Garmston (2002) described instructional coaches as engaging educators in collaborative work designed to contribute to the intellectual capacity in schools. These researchers further contended that coaching

helped educators make informed decisions about instruction and school organization that will help teachers to teach in different ways that help students to gain a deep knowledge of subject matter. Related to this concept of accountability within the professional learning community, teacher-researchers have proposed that monitoring and evaluating student achievement and teaching behaviors are essential components of school leadership (Cobb, 2005).

In studies by Kohler et al (1997) and Slater and Simmons (2001), the collaborative aspect of coaching was examined. In this capacity, coaches worked with teachers in their classrooms on goals established by coach and teacher together. Coaches and teachers in these cases possessed similar levels of knowledge, and teacher learning appeared to have been positively affected. Frost and Durrant (2003) concurred with these findings. After conducting a six year study using peer coaching, these researchers found that teachers were more willing to work with people they already knew, and that if they were on-site, they were more willing to take risks if they knew assistance was nearby. Fibkins (2002) also evidenced that coaches shared their knowledge and expertise with teachers through collaborating, problem solving, demonstrating, and supporting the implementation of scientifically based reading research instructional practices. Similarly, in Quatroche's (2001) review of research, she explained the role of the reading specialist as someone who worked directly with teachers as a mentor. Working in this capacity was evidenced to support teachers in their everyday work as lessons were planned and modeled while providing on-going staff development simultaneously.

Cognitive coaching is yet another model of coaching that addresses the intellectual "hows" of coaching. This coaching model involves a coaching cycle that

entails a planning conference, monitoring, observation, and reflection. According to Riddle-Buly (2004), cognitive coaching addressed the thinking that guides a teacher's work. The goal of cognitive coaching is to facilitate the self-directed learning of teachers by focusing on the thought processes, values, and beliefs that motivate, guide, influence, and give rise to observable behaviors that enhance classroom performance (Cobb, 2005). Franklin (2001) based cognitive coaching on the following four major assumptions:

- Thought and perception produce all behavior.
- Teaching is constant decision-making.
- To learn something new requires engagement and alteration in thought.
- Humans continue to grow cognitively (p.6).

Research conducted by Costa and Garmston (2002), evidenced that teachers trained through the cognitive coaching methodology demonstrated a higher conceptual level and were more adaptive and flexible in their teaching style. These teachers varied their use of instructional strategies, gave more corrective feedback, and produced higher achieving students. Unique to this coaching model are what Costa and Garmston called five states of mind: efficacy, flexibility, consciousness, craftsmanship and interdependence. These are internal resources the coach seeks to enhance and develop in the teacher through self-directed learning strategies. Furthermore, Ellison and Hayes (2006) described cognitive coaching as a way of thinking and working that encourages others to shape and reshape their thinking and problem solving capacities. In their studies, these researchers reported significant growth in second, third, and fourth year

teachers over a seven month period. After training teachers utilizing cognitive coaching, survey data indicated an increase in the teacher's awareness of teaching practices.

The works of Little and Houston (2003) examined the impact of cognitive coaching on teacher perceptions of their thought processes in the areas of planning, teaching, analyzing, evaluating, and applying. These researchers found that teachers who participated in seven or more coaching conferences perceived that cognitive coaching had a high level of impact on their thought processes in the fore mentioned areas.

Challenges of Literacy Leaders

With increased accountability, American schools and those who work in them are being asked to do something new. Classroom teachers must engage in systematic, continuous improvement in the quality of the educational experiences of students. Oftentimes, with change come obstacles. As Richardson and Placier observed, "inevitably, whether a change is mandated or voluntarily endorsed, teachers have a considerable amount of discretion as to whether they implement scientifically based research practices in their classrooms. This discretion has contributed to proposed changes not being implemented in many professional development programs (2001, p. 909).

A major hurdle that many coaches face is the result of the teacher's lack of understanding instructional reform. Neufeld and Roper (2003) contended that there is a gap between the teacher's knowledge of instructional reform and its link to standards. These researchers found that teachers appear to be comfortable using practices that they have always used. They further contended that because some veteran teachers who do not utilize new approaches may be regarded as experts by their colleagues because of

increasing student achievement scores, implementing reform continues to be a challenge for coaches.

Gersten and Morvant (2006) conducted studies to evaluate the reasons for the lack of implementation of research based instructional practices. These researchers found the following barriers to curricular improvement:

- Lack of time;
- Large class sizes;
- High stakes assessments, and
- Teacher's and administrator's long-held instructional preferences (p.62).

This makes the creation and support for effective professional development through coaching a complex undertaking.

Although the theoretical foundations for developing teacher leaders are sound, implementing these changes in practice is quite difficult with many barriers to overcome (Barton & Sawyer, 2003; Russo, 2004; Little, Smylie, 1992). Evidence about coaching's impact on teachers behavior is mixed. Studies by Showers and Joyce (1996), Neufeld and Roper (2002), and Knight (2004) suggested that coaching can change teacher behavior. Russo (2004) recognized coaching as an effective professional development model that is ongoing and deeply embedded in teachers' classroom work with children. He further added that the effectiveness is due to coaching's specificity to grade levels or academic content, and its focus on research-based approaches while serving as a springboard to open classroom doors and create more collaboration and sense of community among teachers in a school. However, Manzo (2005) and Guskey (2000) noted changes in teacher behavior resulted from on-going specific follow-up.

Showers and Joyce (1996) found that teachers receiving coaching were more likely to use new strategies more appropriately than teachers trained using traditional professional development models. Neufeld and Roper (2003) reported that teachers whose professional development included coaching were more likely to try out the new strategies that they learned. Knight (2004) agreed with these findings. In a study in Topeka, Kansas, he found that within six weeks into the start of the school year, 85% of teachers who worked with a coach had already implemented at least one teaching practice that they had learned in a summer workshop, compared to only 10% by teachers who did not work with a coach.

Although Adey (2000) indicated growing acceptance for teacher leaders who assume roles as subject area specialists to focus attention on monitoring and evaluation activities, he further found that some do not want to get themselves into a position where they appear to be judging the work of a peer (Alger, 2003). These teacher leaders acknowledged that collegiality is an aspiration rather than a reality. They reported experiences of conflict between their need to monitor teacher performance and the desire to promote collegiality and trust among unit members (Wise, 2001).

Yet other studies raise questions about the effectiveness of coaching. In a study in the Netherlands, Veenman, and Dennesen (2001) found that teachers who had been coached expressed higher levels of confidence in their teaching, but, were not rated as more effective than teachers who had not received coaching. A study by Gutierrez, Crosland, and Berlin (2001) concluded that coaching experiences did not help teachers fundamentally change their work in the classroom. Their study utilized survey responses, interview data, and videotaped instruction. They found that coaching models that focused

on transmitting particular strategies often did not help teachers understand when or how to choose one instructional strategy over another.

Statement of the Problem

One method of improving reading achievement for students is contingent upon the effective use of literacy coaches. Literacy Coaches are contemporary teacher leaders who serve as an integral part of fostering the implementation of research based practices in regard to teaching and learning. Moreover, literacy coaches serve as an impetus for professional learning and instructional leadership.

With many options available to develop and fine-tune a coaching program, a major obstacle facing literacy coaches and leadership teams is identifying an effective implementation model and practice that promote and support high quality literacy instruction through direct, school-based work with teachers in a district. The literature outlines limited, yet varying options for literacy coaching. Some researchers favor the use of coaching models characterized by collaboration and mentoring. Other research supports the literacy coach from a consultant's aspect inclusive of extensive observations or that of the peer coach. Thus far there is inadequate research to support the impact that various models of coaching have on teacher development.

To understand the impact of various models, the researcher examined the experiences of literacy coaches as instructional leaders. The researcher seeks to understand the experiences of exemplary literacy coaches as models in supporting teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the effective practices of exemplary literacy coaches as instructional leaders and the models and strategies being implemented that support teacher development which leads to the following overarching

question: How do literacy coaches impact teacher development? Specifically, the following sub-questions will be used to answer the overarching question:

Sub-question 1: What are the practices of exemplary literacy coaches?

Sub-question 2: How do teachers and principals perceive the process of literacy coaching impacting teacher development?

Sub-question 3: How do literacy coaches perceive the process of literacy coaching impacting teacher development?

Sub-question 4: How do literacy coaches through teacher development impact student's reading behaviors?

Significance of the Study

As increased numbers of schools are employing reading coaches, the identification of sufficient delivery models beneficial to literacy leaders is needed to assist schools in the implementation process. This study is significant because it will provide insight into how literacy coaches can effectively implement research based practices in Title I classrooms while working within the parameters of Reading First guidelines.

This study will also clarify the impact that specific research-based strategies used by exemplary coaches have on teacher development. It will further provide a platform that benefits local school systems and building level principals as this study will highlight models of coaching that ensure high quality reading instruction while facilitating teacher empowerment.

Despite the increasing popularity of coaching and the great potential of professional development it presents, there is little research documenting what an

effective coaching model looks like. Lastly this study is significant because it will contribute to the literature by identifying the coaching model and practices that are successful as well as a range of factors that contribute to the success of literacy coaches.

Methods

A purposive qualitative collective case study format was used for this study. Qualitative methods tend to capture a more complete picture of individual front-line experiences instead of a narrow perspective of generalizations (Merriam, 1998). This research methodology further employs inductive data analysis to provide more understanding of the interaction of "mutually shaping influences" and to explicate the interacting realities and experiences of researcher and participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). It allows for emergent design "because it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise the design adequately" and because the diverse perspectives and values systems of researcher and participant "interact in unpredictable ways to influence the outcome" of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 41).

The case study is a common form of qualitative research, which provides special opportunities to understand an individual's reality (Freed, 2008.). A case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group (Merriam, 1998). Tellis (1997) stated, "a case study can be seen to satisfy the three tenets of qualitative research: describing, understanding, and explaining" (p.3). The use of multiple case sites (in this instance three schools) enabled the researcher to search for emerging trends within one location as well as across locations which is also a benefit of a case study. In essence, the case study format will

isolate one period in time at each school site to learn the unique interactions and interconnections between the literacy coach, the principal, and the teachers that changed the instructional culture to one that is grounded in research and data. In order for the researcher to gain an understanding of the common and unique practices across sites, practices of exemplary literacy coaches will be observed.

Selection of Sites

Three elementary schools were selected from the Brown County School District¹. These schools were chosen because these sites have coaches who were designated as Coach of the Year by the district at least once over a three year period. All three schools were Title I schools. In addition, the selected schools received the Georgia Reading First grant and utilized. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), a research-based screener that measures critical skills in reading, was used at each of these sites to target children for early reading intervention.

Participants

The participants were three literacy coaches, nine teachers, and three principals employed within Brown County School District elementary schools. The coaches were selected based upon their job description as a Reading First Literacy Coach and their designation as coach of the year because of academic improvement as determined by members from the Curriculum Department of the Brown County School District. Participants were further trained under the guidelines of Reading First. There were three school sites where coaches utilize various models of coaching and strategies.

¹ All names of places, districts, schools, and people are pseudonyms in order to protect the identities of the participants.

Instrumentation/Data Collection

Interview questions, observations, and documentation were utilized to collect data for the study. According to McMillan (2004) “semi-structured interview questions do not have predetermined structured choices. Rather the question is open-ended yet specific in intent allowing individual responses” (p.168). This technique allowed the researcher to utilize a baseline of questions. It further allowed the researcher the freedom to probe deeper to develop in depth insight into the practices of exemplary practices.

This study was qualitative in nature, relying on interviews as the primary data source. Data were collected through observations and document analysis, and the researcher’s written reflections.

Documentation was also a source of direct data collection. This type of data collection enabled the researcher to study artifacts. Lesson plans, data, letters of commendation, and student results from DIBELS and the CRCT were the observed artifacts.

Trustworthiness

The basic question regarding trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry is "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Criteria for trustworthiness include credibility, transferability and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended a variety of strategies for improving the likelihood that findings and interpretations produced through naturalistic inquiry methods will be credible. Two of these strategies were peer debriefing and member checking.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 308) define peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind." Member checking is a process through which respondents verify data and the interpretations thereof (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each participant received via postal mail, a copy of the interview transcripts for review, clarification, and suggestions. Suggested changes were made, and the transcripts were re-sent for verification. All data were verified through this process.

Transferability

The emergent theory of naturalistic inquiry is dependent on a specific context and interactive dynamics, necessarily lowering the possibility and desirability of a focus on external validity, as compared with positivistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, naturalistic inquiry depends on a presentation of "solid descriptive data," or "thick description" (Patton, 2002) to improve an analysis' transferability. In order to enable others wanting to apply the findings of this study to their own research to make an informed decision about whether to do so, thick description of the experiences and identity development of the participants, as well as the definitive exposition of the researcher was provided.

Reliability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), both reliability and confirmability can be determined through one "properly managed" audit. To establish dependability, the auditor examined the process of the various stages of the study, including analytic techniques. The auditor determined whether this process was applicable to the research undertaken

and whether it was applied consistently (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To illustrate confirmability, a record of the inquiry process, as well as copies of all taped interviews and discussions, notes from interviews and discussions, and hard copies of all transcriptions were maintained and available upon request from the researcher.

The researcher used triangulation of multiple sources of information to build validity. These sources included documents, multiple participants and interviews, observations, and member checking that involved sending transcribed materials to the participants for them to review for accuracy and to clarify the researcher's assumptions.

Limitations

- The results of the study are only applicable to elementary schools and the K-3 population.
- The culture and climates at each site are different. School and classroom climate have an impact on the attempts the coaches make to engage teachers in the coaching process.
- Scheduling at each site is also different. Some schools are allotted common planning time during the school day while others do not. This could impact successful work with teachers.
- All schools that participated in the study were also Title I schools with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students.
- Each coach embodies unique skills, experiences, and interests to her work. Prior experiences, background and knowledge of the coaches, as well as their personal preferences and dispositions, will influence the ways in which they approach their coaching roles while interacting with teachers.

- The school district has not clearly established guidelines for qualifications of a literacy coach. Other than a master's degree and the recommendation of a reading endorsement, there is no clear set of credentials. Therefore, the background experiences of the coaches are somewhat diverse. This aspect makes implementation to some extent subjective.

Delimitations

- The study is restricted to kindergarten through third grade classrooms in Brown County.
- The study will be qualitative in nature in order to help the researcher develop an understanding of how literacy coaches facilitate teacher development.

Definitions

The following definitions will be used for the context of this study:

Georgia Reading First is a competitive state grant awarded to schools for the purpose of increasing student reading levels. Grounded in research, the grant targets improvements in classroom reading instruction through the improvement of teaching practices, monitoring student progress, and consistent high-quality professional development for teachers (Allington & Walmsley, 1995).

Literacy Coaches are certified teacher with expertise in reading who primarily trains, instructs, coaches, and supports teachers in the full implementation of the literacy program (Kise, 2006).

Title I Schools aim to improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged. The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on

challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (American Educational Research Association, 2005).

Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) is designed to measure how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). The assessments yield information on academic achievement at the student, class, school, system, and state levels. This information is used to diagnose individual student strengths and weaknesses as related to the instruction of the GPS, and to gauge the quality of education throughout Georgia.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) measures are specifically designed to gauge phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, and fluency with connected text. The measures are linked to one another, both psychometrically and theoretically, and have been found to be predictive of later reading proficiency (Deno & Mirkin, 1977).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine beneficial models of coaching used by exemplary literacy coaches in elementary schools in Brown County. This study was qualitative in nature, relying on interviews as the primary data source. Data were collected through observations and document analysis, and the researcher's written reflections. All interviews were audio-recorded; interviews, field notes, and written reflections were transcribed and coded. Several levels of analysis were conducted, beginning with the clustering of coded data segments around common themes and the direct interpretation of data as filtered through the sets of codes.

In summary, it is evident through the research that transitions are needed to profoundly impact academic support and rigor in the classroom. However, in order to assure a strong accountability and results-based literacy coaching, further research needs to take place in order to outline effective practices of consummate coaches.

This study examined the research-based coaching models with proven track records of effectiveness by literacy coaches in Brown County elementary schools. Exemplary components of the coaching models that lead to student, teacher, and coach success by design will be presented in this investigation.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Plummeting student achievement has led to a seismic shift in the daily operations of teaching. To meet the demands of myriads of students who are not minimally achieving established benchmarks, the classroom instructional framework has become an evolving work in progress. As educators strive toward systematic educational reform to rectify the plight of public education in the United States, teacher leaders with the wherewithal to change the culture of education are emerging. Key players in spearheading this transformation are on-site reading coaches who provide support for classroom teachers by ensuring equity to rigorous academic standards across the board as reading research strategies are put into practice (American Federation of Teachers, 2007).

School districts around the nation are searching for ways to improve student achievement as they strive to meet the ambitious goals of No Child Left Behind and help all students reach high standards. Nowhere is this task more daunting than in elementary schools where a sound foundation for future learning is established. Unfortunately many students enter school disaffected and disengaged lacking the basic literacy skills that are necessary to learn. In addition, many teachers feel ill-equipped to assist students who have lost ground academically over the years. The literature review focuses on three major topics, including improving instructional effectiveness, the role of professional development in school reform, and the role of the instructional coach as a teacher leader.

Historical Perspective: Traditional Forms of Professional Development in Schools

Professional development literature over the past three decades provides clear distinctions about what works and what does not. This body of extensive research clearly substantiates the ineffectiveness of the all too common one-shot workshop (Fullan, 2001). As indicated in Moat's (1995) comprehensive examination of professional development practices, a lack of attention to follow-up activities is another factor that contributes to ineffectiveness. Additional barriers included:

1. Tendencies toward fads and/or quick-fix solutions
2. Overload or too many competing demands
3. Lack of attention to site-specific differences
4. Teacher turnover
5. Failure to allow sufficient time to plan for and learn new strategies
6. Attempts to manage by central office staff, rather than provisions to develop capacity and leadership at the school level (Wilkinson, 2001).

Research into effective professional development consistently examines implementation of new teaching strategies and behaviors. Joyce and Showers (1996) noted that "in the 1970s, evaluations of staff development that focused on teaching strategies and curriculum revealed that as few as 10 percent of the participants implemented what they had learned." In a 1987 synthesis of the research, Showers, Joyce, and Bennett examined the conditions necessary to change teachers' practice. They proposed a combination of theory, demonstration, practice, and feedback and found that sustained practice was a critical element. "For a complex model of teaching, we estimate that about 25 teaching episodes during which the new strategy is used are necessary

before all the conditions of transfer are achieved" (Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987).

More recently, a report by the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching noted, "It took 13-14 months to turn the teachers around" in a professional development effort that involved changing science teachers' instructional approach from one focused on science as definition, facts, and theories, to one that used an exploratory process to engage students in activities to develop understanding of science concepts (1999).

Research studies confirm the ineffectiveness of conventional staff development strategies for making substantive improvement in instruction and supports adoption of different ways to facilitate professional learning (Juel & Deffes, 2004). Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001) suggested that the "test of effective professional development is whether teachers and other educators come to know more about their subjects, their students, and their practice, and to make informed use of what they know." Obviously training by outside experts with educators as passive recipients is less effective than job-embedded professional development. Today, the call for establishing a link between a teacher's professional development experience and a change in the classroom that ultimately translates into improved student learning and performance is gaining strength. In order to impact teacher practices, an examination of the frameworks of instructional effectiveness and professional development are essential. This type of analysis ensures that practitioners are impacting student achievement through the development of professional learning communities to ensure academic rigor and sustained instructional practices.

The shortcomings of traditional professional development resulted in the absence of follow through for implementation in the classrooms. Professionals often presented

strategies once on site or at a conference; however, there was no accountability for implementation or any measure of the impact on student achievement and teacher development. There was no buy-in because no one followed up to see implementation. Additionally traditional professional development models frequently use the conference-attendance model where teachers (frequently the very best teachers) are pulled from their classroom duties and sent to either training or a conference in some distant location to receive training in a new approach or program. This model is upsetting from several perspectives. First, the very best teachers are pulled from teaching, and the resulting instruction provided by substitutes is in no way comparable to the instruction provided by the regular teacher. This arrangement is extremely upsetting to the teaching-learning process (Wise, 2001).

Couple this conference-attendance model or any traditional professional development model with the research that tells us that staff development has a 10% chance of being effectively implemented if it is taught in context and is research-based and the difficulties inherent in the traditional model become clear (Veenman & Denessen, 2001). Veenman and Denessen (2001) further concluded, that same research tells us that if the components of reflection and coaching are added to the professional development model, the chance of successful implementation goes to 90%. Reflection means that a growing member of a learning organization needs time with colleagues for sharing, clarifying, inquiring about, understanding the rationale and demonstrating the newly learned practices. The coaching model of professional development encompasses the real and significant growth that takes place for professional educators through the guidance of an on site support that ensures building level implementation.

Instructional Effectiveness

The bar has been raised on student achievement in the United States and on teaching quality as well. Compelling evidence has confirmed that a teacher's mastery of the academic content of what he or she teaches is critical to engaging students and inspiring them to academic excellence (Alger, 2003; Wilkinson, 2002). In order to truly impact instructional effectiveness, transformations must occur on the frontlines as teachers put research based theories into practice.

Research conducted by Wilkinson (2002) suggested a correlation between the instructional effectiveness of the teacher and equity in education. He contended that the use of research-based instructional practices fostered access to productive skill sets that can be attained by a mosaic of students. According to Lyons and Pinnel (2001) improving instruction was a crucial link between setting high standards and boosting student achievement. Likewise, Manzo (2005) contended that with focused and sustained efforts to improve instruction, student achievement rises as well.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) conducted a quantitative study involving 456 teachers from 20 elementary schools in Kentucky. Strategies for teaching reading explored in this study were adapted from The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's (2000) meta-analysis of reading research that used experimental or quasi-experimental methodology or a multiple-baseline design. Through this meta-analysis, strategies were identified that had a statistically significant positive effect on reading comprehension across grade levels. Their findings supported improved instructional practice when research-based methods were implemented. In the same way,

Vacca and Mraz reported that student achievement and teacher development were reciprocally related (2002).

Extensive research suggests that teacher quality is the most significant factor affecting student achievement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). Effective teachers emphasize high expectations for student behavior and learning. They make abstract content more concrete and personal, encourage curiosity and suspense, provide clear directions, make learning in school relevant to larger life, stimulate appropriate cognitive conflict, tell students about a wide range of strategies for accomplishing academic tasks, and express confidence in students (Wilkinson, 2002). Brown (2000) found that even though some strategies produce a greater effect than others, the use of a variety of research based strategies will encompass students from a wide range of achievement levels. Shanahan (2006) added another key factor to effective teaching is the teachers' ability to monitor learning. Successful teaching depends on not only the use of research-proven instructional techniques, but also on the teacher's awareness of how well the children are doing. Effective teachers pay attention to their children's progress and adjust their efforts accordingly (Shanahan, 2006).

With the significance of reading in mind, it is imperative that classroom teachers become experts in teaching reading to their students (Bush, 2000). According to Marzano (2003), an effective teacher using research based strategies has the biggest impact on student achievement. The coaching process entails helping teachers improve their implementation of scientifically based reading research through a collaborative model of ongoing professional development (Harris & Lambert, 2003). Coaches and teachers work together to analyze data, plan lessons, and deliver effective lessons. Joyce and Showers

(2002) contended that reading coaches “support the continuous study and improvement of teaching” to help improve student outcomes (p. 89). Regarding the process of teacher learning, Darling-Hammond observed, “Like students, teachers learn by doing, reading, and reflecting; collaborating with other teachers; looking closely at students and their work; and sharing what they see. This kind of learning enabled teachers to make the leap from theory to accomplished practice” (1996, p. 196).

Teacher learning is situated within the larger concept of teacher change, which is described as learning, development, socialization, growth, improvement, implementation, cognitive and affective change, and self-study. Effective schools research emphasizes the impact of teacher content knowledge, best practice methodology and the powerful role teacher expectations play in student achievement (Marzano, 2003). Change efforts in education traditionally moved in discrete steps from research to change agents to practitioners (Richardson & Placier, 2001). An alternative to this type of change process, identified as empirical-rational, is that of a normative-reeducative change process, which emphasizes the social nature of intelligence and the need for individuals to participate in their own re-education (Glaser & Straus, 1967). Change strategies adhering to this process share a number of components, including focusing on the needs of the client (individual or group), collaboration between change agent and client to problem-solve, and the selective use of resources in addressing these problems. Professional development efforts grounded in this approach to change emphasize changes in beliefs as well as practice, the development of a change orientation, and the growth of dialogue and community as important elements of teacher change. Teaching is considered a complex endeavor situated in a variety of contexts.

The situated learning perspective asserts that the contexts within which activities occur are integral to the learning that takes place within them (Putnam & Borko, 2000). From this perspective, teachers must be provided with opportunities to enhance knowledge and change beliefs as they learn new instructional approaches. These opportunities might include inquiry, reflection, examination of prior knowledge, and formation of professional discourse communities (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993). Wenger (1998) similarly identified networks and formal and informal groups in school settings as communities of practice, where teachers are engaged in networks and group interactions beyond the relative isolation of the classroom (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Learning is tied to social participation, an “encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities” (Wenger, 1998). Professional development programs, seen from the situated learning perspective, would need to be: embedded in context; collaborative and interactional; sustained and intensive; and would need to be ongoing in nature to sustain growth in teacher learning and create change in instructional practice (Darling-Hammond 1996; Stanovich & Stanovich 2003).

Instructional coaching, a relatively new and increasingly popular form of professional development (Dole 2004; Toll, 2007), would seem to promote a number of the traits identified by both the situated-learning perspective and the normative-reeducative change process. Conceptually, instructional coaching would involve having a knowledgeable individual work with teachers at the school or classroom level, over time, on issues of teacher learning and classroom practice (Toll, 2007). Even though this initiative is relatively new, it has been identified by researchers as a promising

professional development strategy because it embeds professional learning in the daily work that teachers do in their classrooms and with their colleagues. Coaches assist with the selection of appropriate instructional strategies, and then custom tailor the strategies to the specific needs of that classroom. Although there is not yet conclusive research linking coaching to increased student achievement, a number of studies indicate that coaching helps teachers better understand instructional practices and more widely adopt and use new skills and strategies (Vacca & Mraz, 2002).

Professional Development

In response to a nationwide call for creating highly-qualified teachers, states, districts, and schools have turned to alternative professional development models in an effort to impact teacher knowledge and improve classroom instruction. According to Dole (2004) high-quality instruction is a first requirement for all schools with large numbers of at-risk students. In a like manner, Russo (2004) reported that high-quality instruction only comes as a result of intensive professional development for teachers.

Professional development is a powerful way to address teacher learning and classroom practice (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). Although traditional approaches to professional development are largely considered inadequate in meeting teachers' learning needs in relation to new achievement standards for students (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Ellison & Hayes, 2006), a number of new and innovative approaches have grown in popularity in recent years. Common elements among these approaches include teacher collaboration, sustained and ongoing change efforts, teacher reflection and inquiry, and connections between professional development goals and teachers' work with students (Darling-Hammond, 1996). According to Harris and Lambert (2003) collaboration with

peers was at the heart of the professional organization and teacher leaders can play an important role in encouraging and sustaining these interactions among colleagues.

Frequent and meaningful exchanges between teachers build a climate of cohesiveness in which effective working relationships are established. For that reason, Riddle-Buly (2004), suggested that schools become learning organizations where professional development and change become the norm of continuous improvement. Professional development would, ideally, provide teachers with learning opportunities over time and in context, increasing the chances of affecting teacher learning and classroom practice.

Improving instruction is considered a crucial link between setting high standards and boosting student achievement (Richard, 2003). Wise (2001) reported one of the most compelling rationales for school-based coaching is that many of the more conventional forms of professional development—such as conferences, lectures, and mass teacher-institute days—are unpopular with educators because they are often led by outside experts who tell teachers what to do, then are never heard from again. Likewise, Sweeney (2003) contended to be effective professional development must be ongoing, deeply embedded in teachers' classroom work with children, specific to grade levels or academic content, and focused on research based approaches. In the same way, Sergiovanni (2001) found that effective professional development must help to open classroom doors and create more collaboration and sense of community among teachers in a school. Professional development would, ideally, provide teachers with learning opportunities over time and in context, increasing the chances of affecting teacher learning and classroom practice.

Additionally, the Georgia Department of Education recently scripted *School Keys*, a set of rigorous school performance standards (May, 2007). These descriptors of high impact practices for schools have served as the framework for a comprehensive and data-driven system of school improvement and support. Not only are students expected to demonstrate proficiency in numerous academic areas, but schools are also expected to demonstrate high impact practices which improve student achievement. Professional learning has been identified as one of the critical "keys" to school improvement. Using data from a variety of sources, coaches work with teachers to identify patterns of achievement and participate in planning academic interventions to address underachievement (Wise, 2001). Furthermore, Walpole and McKenna (2004) added, coaches and teachers assess the learning climate of the school and promote practices which enhance the learning of all students.

Ultimately there has been continued emphasis on the importance of professional development in the school improvement process. Former President Bush and the nation's governors cited professional development for teachers as one of the original six education goals adopted in 1989 (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory [NWREL], 1994). Goal Four states that, "By the year 2000, the nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continuous improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century"(p.12). To further delineate actions in support of this goal, the U.S. Department of Education's Professional Development Team identified 10 principles of high-quality professional development to serve as guidelines to both professional development providers and recipients. These principles reflect and embody what research

has identified as best practice for professional development opportunities (Office of Educational Research and Improvement [OERI], 1997). High-quality professional development:

1. Focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community
2. Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement
3. Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community
4. Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership
5. Enables teachers to develop further experience in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards
6. Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools
7. Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development
8. Requires substantial time and other resources
9. Is driven by a coherent long-term plan
10. Is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts (p. 21).

Many educational leaders recognize the old form of professional development, built around traditional in-service sessions for teachers, simply doesn't affect student achievement (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Guskey 2000; Robb, 2000; Lyons & Pinnell 2001). According to Sweeney (2003), professional development can no longer be viewed as an event that occurs on a particular day of the school year; rather, it must become part of the daily work life of educators. Likewise, Glickman (2002) proposed that teachers be provided a commensurate level of support in order to develop, master, and reflect on new approaches to working with children. Similarly, Costa and Garmston (2002), reported that fewer than 10% of teachers actually implement instructional innovations following workshops or in service experiences. Showers and Joyce (1996) found, however, that when coaching was included as a follow-up, most teachers incorporated the innovations into their instruction. In the same way Gay (1996) concluded that coaches were the vital link regarding supporting instructional changes through the modeling of strategies and providing specific feedback on-site.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) identified five models of professional development which provide a beginning point for coaches. The five models include:

1. The individually guided model where teachers are involved in designing and implementing their own program.
2. Observation and feedback where teachers receive data about their own practice which could be used for their own improvement.

3. The curriculum/development model where a specific issue or problem is identified and teachers work together through curriculum design and implementation to solve the problem.
4. The training model where a goal is identified and support/training are provided to reach the goal.
5. The inquiry model where teachers choose an area of interest and then design a model to investigate it (p. 33).

Walpole and McKenna (2004) suggested that literacy coaches working with adult learners will need to use all five models in designing an effective professional development program. “A comprehensive system will include mechanisms for individual support, informed by observation and feedback, all designed to develop curriculum and to train teachers to implement it, in a context of inquiry about the effects of the total program on teachers and children” (p. 187). Vacca and Mraz (2002) supported this idea of a comprehensive system and added that professional development should be conducted at the building level based on specific goals related directly to the teachers’ daily work in a collaborative atmosphere. In addition, Bean and Cassidy (2002) identified three structural features that set the context for professional development; form, duration, and participation.

Pardo (2004) examined that effective professional development provided for direct application to the classroom. The National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (1999) has further outlined the essential features of teacher professional development that correlate with the fundamentals of coaching:

1. It must be grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that are participant-driven.
2. It must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers.
3. It must be sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modeling, coaching, and the collective solving of specific problems of practice.
4. It must be connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students.
5. It must engage teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and feedback (p. 17).

In fact, Bender (2004) contended that teachers need time to learn the background information on methodology and the research behind the methodology. Moreover, Stanovich and Stanovich (2003) supported professional development that included in-class observations of teachers implementing new approaches and time to discuss strengths and next steps. In the same way, Slater and Simmons (2001) reported that in-class observations of teachers and feedback are important components of professional development that cannot be overlooked. Accessing the services of a literacy coach can help teachers renew and refine their practice, and support the integration of up-to-date, evidence-based practices into their teaching repertoire (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001).

However, professional development oftentimes for teachers is characterized as infrequent and disconnected one-shot workshops with little relevance to the classroom (Russo, 2004). The Learning First Alliance explained a critical aspect of effective professional development requires extended time for initial training that includes

discussions of research on how children learn to read as well as specific instructional strategies which includes extensive follow-up (2004).

Lambert (1998) echoed the connection between new expectations for teachers and the element of time: "The changes teachers must make to meet the goals of reform entail much more than learning new techniques. They go to the core of what it means to teach. Because these changes are so momentous, most teachers will require considerable time to achieve them" (p. 2). Nevertheless the time needed to acquire those skills was not given to teachers. Research into effective professional development consistently examines implementation of new teaching strategies and behaviors. Joyce and Showers (1996) noted that "in the 1970s, evaluations of staff development that focused on teaching strategies and curriculum revealed that as few as 10 percent of the participants implemented what they had learned."

Mentoring

Currently, coaches appear to have been assigned two major responsibilities: teacher mentoring and literacy program advocacy. These two responsibilities are reflected in the IRA standards for middle and secondary literacy coaches, with the four standards evenly split between them. Standard 1, "Skillful Collaborators," and standard 3, "Skillful Evaluators of Literacy Needs," emphasize literacy-program advocacy and collaboration. Standard 2, "Skillful Job-Embedded Coaches," and standard 4, "Skillful Instructional Strategists," stress the importance of working with teachers to provide mentoring and assistance in learning and implementing literacy-related instructional strategies (IRA, 2006).

In the mentoring capacity, the coach is often viewed as a peer coach. Peer coaching and mentoring "are professional development strategies that provide one-on-one learning opportunities for teachers focused on improving teacher practice" (Leiberman, 1996). The coaching relationship can be fostered through classroom observations, planning instruction, developing materials, or discussing students. Joyce and Showers (1996) reported that contrary to what many believe verbal feedback is not a critical part of coaching activities as classrooms are observed. Instead, the simple act of observing another teacher in action is a professional development experience. Likewise, Vacca and Mraz (2002) examined that coaching is most often a peer relationship and mentoring typically involves a more experienced teacher paired with a novice. In the same way, Kamil (2006) suggested that both coaching and mentoring are activities that focus on strengthening teachers' practice in the classroom. Kamil further described the coaching process being analogous to management. Just as site-based management puts decision-making responsibilities in the hands of those most affected by the decisions, coaching and mentoring place professional development at the critical level of the classroom, where it has the potential for a significant impact on students' learning (2006).

Coaching

As the demand for a literate populace rises, more emphasis is being placed on identifying teacher leaders to serve on the frontlines to spearhead sustained educational reform. In the movement to improve reading instruction, many states and districts are building an army of specialists to help teachers apply research to practice. A growing cadre of literacy coaches is helping new and veteran teachers alike refine their teaching

craft. On-site instructional coaches working directly with teachers have become a vital aspect of this leadership coalition. Fullan (2001) outlined some characteristics of leaders:

1. They have a moral purpose and work to make a difference with other leaders in a school.
2. They are knowledgeable about the change process and realize that change will create resistance, but they have the tools at hand to help others address concerns and commit to it.
3. They establish and improve relationships with teachers who support changes, as well as those teachers who resist it. Leaders recognize that teachers who share information through the social process of engaged discourse achieve personal and professional growth.
4. They provide stability through coherence. Efforts of improvement are targeted, specific, and focused on student learning (p.125).

Intuitively and in the general literature, coaching is unique from other forms of professional development in that it promises to provide reflective learning opportunities, over time, within real-world school contexts. Coaches would collaborate with teachers over an extended period of time, addressing issues of teacher learning and classroom practice identified by the teacher, coach, or administrator. The increasing popularity of coaching may be attributed, in part, to its promise of ongoing, relevant, context-aware support of teacher learning and changing classroom practice.

Unlike more traditional professional development approaches, coaching has the potential to deeply impact teachers' subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge as it is potentially situated both inside and outside the classroom. In keeping with Ricks

(2007) coaches working with teachers had opportunities to facilitate the learning of new subject matter; coaches observing teachers witnessed the transformation of subject matter knowledge into pedagogical content knowledge, and helped teachers reflect on this process. Correspondingly, Slater and Simmons (2001) acknowledged that coaching fosters a community of learners working together toward the improvement of student outcomes in reading as professional development is extended into the classroom. The American Federation of Teachers (2007) added that coaching has potential, over time, to affect teacher learning, to deepen levels of subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge, and to influence classroom practice.

Findings outlined by the National Staff Development Council (2001) illustrated school-based coaching meets many of the standards set forth by the nation's largest professional association dedicated to improving teacher professional development. The council recommended the following:

1. The organization of educators into "learning communities" that have clear goals consistent with school and district goals;
2. Effective leadership to support "continuous instructional improvement";
3. The application of research to school and classroom strategies and decision-making;
4. Support for teacher collaboration and
5. The development of educators' skills at increasing parent involvement (p.30).

Research studies present a promising view of the effectiveness of coaching as a venue for improving instructional quality (Gutierrez, Crosland, & Berlin, 2001; Veenman & Denessen, 2001). Instructional coaching, a professional development model that

involves placing an educator within schools to provide ongoing support for teachers on issues of knowledge and practice, is experiencing explosive growth in popularity in response to the challenge of producing highly qualified teachers.

Joyce and Showers (1996) outlined a model of professional development that provided support and assistance to teachers. This model clearly supported the importance of reading coaches in professional development (Bennett, 1987; Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987). The Joyce and Showers model identified theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and in-class coaching as the five potential kinds of support for teachers.

1. *Theory*—discussions, readings, and lectures where teachers learn the rationale or underlying reasoning behind particular teaching strategies or techniques. This knowledge provides teachers with an answer to the question “Why am I doing these activities?”
2. *Demonstration*—opportunities for teachers to directly see the activities taught to students either through modeling of lessons or videotaping. This knowledge provides teachers with an answer to the question “What do these activities look like in a classroom?”
3. *Practice*—opportunities in the session and in the workplace to practice the newly learned skills in front of other teachers or small groups of students. These opportunities provide teachers with an answer to the question “When I try these activities, what happens?”
4. *Feedback*—assistance and support about teachers’ practice from peers or more knowledgeable others. This assistance provides teachers with answers to questions like “What worked well in these activities?” “What could

I have done differently?”

5. *In-class coaching*—collaboration with more knowledgeable others and peers on newly learned activities and strategies taught and practiced in classrooms to solve problems and seek solutions to problems that arise during implementation. This collaboration provides teachers with answers to questions like “What do I do next?” and “Where do I go from here?”(p.5).

Successful schools in the United States provide support for teachers on a day-to-day basis and focus on improving learning for all students (Vacca & Mraz, 2002). The determining factor; however, that separates successful schools from unsuccessful schools is how educators define and utilize leadership (Glickman, 2002). Teacher leaders have become pivotal to reversing the intolerable achievement gap that exists for minority students in urban schools. Today, the view of leadership is transformed to focus on scientific understandings of teaching and learning, data driven decision-making and a broader view of professional development. Dufour (2004) preferred the term learning leader versus instructional leader. The educational lens is now focused on leading learning communities The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001), embraced six important roles of leadership:

1. Establishing high expectations for students
2. Connecting content and instruction to standards
3. Using multiple sources of data for assessment of learning
4. Placing a high priority on learning for students and adults
5. Providing ongoing professional development in a culture of learning
6. Embracing the community’s support in the success of the school (p. 26).

Conclusions

At present, evidence in the literature regarding how effective coaches impact teacher development is nonexistent. Schools that are at-risk require the on-site training with follow-up opportunities for reflection that coaching can offer. Improving education for all children has become a priority across the nation. In light of this, effective professional development models are beginning to take shape to serve as a safety net for teachers and further ensure that research-based practices come to fruition in classrooms (Hickok, 2002). Programs and materials do not bring about change, people do. To stay current in best practice, teachers must be lifelong learners. Seeking professional development by attending conferences and workshops has proven to be an ineffective means of sustained instructional improvement.

Aimed at improving the instructional capacity of schools and teachers, coaching, a professional development model, offers support, feedback, and intensive, individualized professional learning. As school and district leaders recognize that a critical factor in students' reading achievement is the knowledge and skill of their teachers, many stakeholders have become more interested in the kind of intensive, continuous instructional support coaches can offer.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a purposive qualitative collective case study format. This design was selected in order to gain an understanding of the impact of literacy coaches in teacher development across sites. The chapter details the methods design, selection of sites, the sample population, a description of the participants, sources of data, instrumentation, data collection, procedures, and data analysis. In order to develop insight and gain in depth understanding, the overarching question was: How do literacy coaches impact teacher development? Specifically, the following sub-questions were used to answer the overarching question:

Sub-question 1: What are the practices of exemplary literacy coaches?

Sub-question 2: How do teachers and principals perceive the process of literacy coaching impacting teacher development?

Sub-question 3: How do literacy coaches perceive the process of literacy coaching impacting teacher development?

Sub-question 4: How do literacy coaches through teacher development impact student's reading behaviors?

Methods Design

A purposive qualitative collective case study method was used to collect data that described the practices of three exemplary literacy coaches employed in the Brown County, Georgia school district. Qualitative research as defined by Stake (1995):

Is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher

builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Equally important was the purposive sampling of the participants. McMillan (2004) asserted that qualitative research includes extensive narrative data used to gain insights into phenomena that would not be possible when using other types of research. Merriam (1998) stated a “case study can be seen to satisfy the three tenets of qualitative research: describing, understanding, and explaining” (p. 3). Collective case studies are one of the common forms of qualitative research which provide special opportunities to understand an individual’s reality across locations (Freed, 2008.). Collective case studies examine commonality and distinction and phenomenon across programs, events, persons, processes, institutions, or social groups (McMillian, 2004).

According to Glesne (2004), purposive sampling is a sampling method in which elements are chosen based on the purpose of the study. This type of sampling may involve studying the entire population of some limited group or a subset of a population. Purposive sampling targets a particular group of people; therefore, this method was used to identify elementary school personnel who have a proven track record for improving the instructional capacity of others.

Therefore a qualitative methodology was chosen because it enabled the researcher to ascertain an in depth understanding of the various ways that literacy coaches create a culture that supports children’s learning and teacher development in their environment and to ascertain how teachers perceived the work of the literacy coach’s role and the impact of the literacy coach on teacher development.

Selection of sites

The researcher conducted empirical case studies on three schools from the, Georgia school district. These schools were selected because each of them employs a literacy coach who has earned the designation of Coach of the Year. The student performance data at each of the selected sites has also continued on a constant rise. The Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) from the Georgia CRCT is listed in Table 3.1. Each school, as a whole, and each student group meeting the minimum group size must meet or exceed the State's AMO regarding the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on state assessments in Reading/English Language Arts. Utilizing this type of unified accountability system made the resulting rewards and consequences identical in Title I and non Title I schools throughout Georgia. The Georgia AMO was set at 73.3%. First grade students at Site 1 surpassed the AMO for three consecutive school terms. The second and third grade populations from Site 1 exceeded the AMO for two out of three school terms. The first and second grade populations at Site 2 exceeded the state AMO for the past three school years. The third graders at Site 2, on the other hand, did not reach the AMO for the past three school terms. The first through third grade populations at Site 3 surpassed the state AMO for three consecutive school years. This table details the performance of students in first through third grades at each site. Table 3.2 summarizes the DIBELS scores for the K-3 student population over a three-year period. Students who are labeled intensive are reading below grade level. These students require extensive interventions to meet grade level reading achievement. Emerging students demonstrate some risk in the skill measured to meet reading achievement. These students require additional practice in order to achieve reading success. Benchmark

students read at or above indicated benchmarks and can read fluently and comprehend text.

Table 3.1-Reading CRCT Scores for Grades 1-3; 2005-2008

State AMO: 73.3	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
2005-2006, 1 st Grade Reading	77%	75%	92%
2006-2007, 1 st Grade Reading	75%	80%	89%
2007-2008, 1 st Grade Reading	80%	84%	94%
2005-2006, 2 nd Grade Reading	77%	75%	91%
2006-2007, 2 nd Grade Reading	57%	93%	91%
2007-2008, 2 nd Grade Reading	88%	85%	97%
2005-2006, 3 rd Grade Reading	57%	53%	83%
2006-2007, 3 rd Grade Reading	75%	49%	86%
2007-2008, 3 rd Grade Reading	72%	65%	83%

Table 3.2 DIBELS Scores for K-3 Students; 2005-2008

	Site1			Site 2			Site3		
	05-06	06-07	07-08	05-06	06-07	07-08	05-06	06-07	07-08
Kindergarten Intensive	10%	5%	0%	22%	11%	12%	15%	5%	0%
Kindergarten Emerging	27%	18%	11%	22%	20%	18%	18%	5%	0%
Kindergarten Benchmark	63%	77%	89%	63%	69%	70%	67%	90%	98%
1 st Grade Intensive	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	0%	12%	11%	5%
1 st Grade Emerging	0%	5%	4%	5%	10%	0%	20%	15%	5%
1 st Grade Benchmark	100%	95%	96%	90%	85%	100%	68%	74%	90%
2 nd Grade Intensive	12%	5%	5%	15%	7%	0%	10%	5%	5%
2 nd Grade Emerging	12%	10%	5%	10%	5%	0%	22%	15%	5%
2 nd Grade Benchmark	76%	85%	90%	75%	88%	100%	68%	80%	90%
3 rd Grade Intensive	11%	12%	7%	15%	11%	5%	15%	5%	0%
3 rd Grade Emerging	19%	8%	8%	20%	15%	5%	22%	18%	15%
3 rd Grade Benchmark	70%	80%	85%	65%	74%	90%	63%	77%	85%

Sample Population

Site 1

There are 38 elementary schools in the Brown County school district; 24 of which received the Reading First Grant. Site 1 is a neighborhood school that serves the Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade population. The area around the school site is economically depressed. Twenty-four teachers serve 336 students and the student to teacher ratio is 1:13. The workforce also consists of 12 support staff. The average years of teaching experience for this staff is twelve years. This is a predominately African American school; however, 69% of the workforce is White and 31% is African American. The student demographic population consists of 68% African American, 24% White, 5% Hispanic and 2% multiracial. Ninety-one percent of the student population is eligible for either free or reduced lunch, while 15% of the student population has been identified as having a disability. This school has made Adequate Yearly Progress for two out of the past three years. CRCT data at Site 1 shows continual improvement across each of the grade levels. There is also a correlation between student achievements on the DIBELS assessment.

Site 2

Site 2 is also a neighborhood Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school. There are 21 teachers averaging 13 years of teaching experience who serve the 256 student population. Fifty-two percent of the teaching population is White while 48% of the workforce is African American. The demographics at this school are racially balanced, consisting of 48% White, 47% African American, 2% Hispanic, and 2% multiracial. 66% of the students at Site 2 are eligible for either free or reduced lunch. Twelve percent of

these students have a diagnosed disability. This school has made Adequate Yearly Progress for two out of the past three years. CRCT data has ranked over the 80th percentile over the past three years. DIBELS results also show 80% of the population maintaining benchmark performance.

Site 3

There are 291 students that attend Site 3, an urban elementary school in the Brown County School district. The area around the school is economically depressed. This school serves the pre-kindergarten through fifth grades. There are twenty-three teachers on staff with 17 average years of teaching experience. Eighty percent of the teaching force is African American while 20 % of the workforce is White. The workforce also consists of 8 support staff. Presently the majority-minority ratio is 16% White to 81%African American; 3% of the population is multiracial. Thirteen percent of the population at this predominately black school has a disability while 93% of the population is eligible for either free or reduced lunch. This school has consistently made Adequate Yearly Progress for the past three years. There is also a positive learning trajectory on both CRCT and DIBELS assessments for this site.

Participants

Participants were three literacy coaches, nine teachers, and three principals from three different elementary schools. The participants took part of this study in order to have a body of research to validate the benefits of additional instructional support as district and school level leaders seek to strategically place personnel in hopes of accelerating student achievement. The researcher interviewed each coach at least two times, the principals and the teachers once. The researcher adhered to the protocol as

outlined by Merriam (1998) eliciting understanding and meaning with the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of fieldwork, an inductive orientation to analysis, and findings that are richly descriptive(p.11).

According to McMillan (2004), key informant interviews provide the researcher with insight and understanding about phenomena. Key informants were building and district level personnel who provided insight and understanding of specific information about effective instructional practices that were put in place as the result of the coaches that could not be learned otherwise because these key informants played integral roles during the implementation process.

Literacy coaches employed at Title I elementary schools in Brown County, Georgia who have earned the coach of the year designation were selected to participate in this study. These selected coaches have a proven record of increasing instructional effectiveness. Coaches were asked to recommend teachers with whom they had worked extensively. The data from the teachers served to triangulate the data derived from the observations and interviews with the coaches. Teachers also provided data regarding the effectiveness of the literacy coach in promoting teacher development. Building level principals were also selected because they are employed at a school where a literacy coach has earned the Coach of the Year designation. Data from interviews with principals helped to portray the work and effectiveness of the literacy coaches.

Sources of Data

Semi-structured interview questions from individual participants, observations, and documentation were used to collect data. During site observations, hallways and

classrooms were observed. Lesson plans, grouping sheets, anecdotal notes, and professional learning agendas were the documents examined by the researcher.

A purpose of interviewing, one strategy for exploring others' perspectives, is obtaining "here and now constructions" and "reconstructions" of "persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities" (Merriam, 1995, p. 268). Semi-structured interview questions are flexible in nature and allow new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says (Glesne, 1998). The interview questions were used to get individuals' perception of practices that had an impact on student learning as well as practices implemented by the literacy coach that led to teacher development.

Observation is the selection and recording of behaviors of people in their environment. Observation is useful for generating in-depth descriptions of organizations or events, for obtaining information that is otherwise inaccessible, and for conducting research when other methods are inadequate. As a result, observations were used because behavior is best understood as it occurs without external constraints and control. McMillian (2004) defined observation as the process of taking field notes on the participants, the setting, the purpose, the social behavior, and the frequency and duration of phenomena. Observations may be made of non-verbal behavior, verbal behavior, and physical phenomena. Participants were observed three times over a nine-week period. As observations took place, the researcher noted how the participants assimilate information, the types of resources available, and the relationships between the coaches and the teachers and principal on the staff. The literacy coach was observed during the 135 minute reading block. The observations were guided by the following questions: What was the

coach doing and saying?; What was the teacher doing and saying?; and What are the students doing or saying? These interactions helped the researcher to gain insight into the daily operations of the literacy coaches as they interacted with teachers and students. These observations highlighted practices that impacted student achievement and teacher development (see Appendix A).

Instrumentation

An interview guide approach to naturalistic interviewing starts with a list of issues to be addressed by each participant, still allowing for other topics to emerge, specific to each participant (Glesne, 2004). In this approach, interview questions must be asked in an open-ended fashion in order to "minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data" (Patton, 2002, p. 295). The interview guide for the focus group interviews consisted of three issues to be addressed: 1) a discussion of the various models of coaching, 2) the development of an understanding of the experiences of literacy coaches, 3) an analysis of the benefits of using particular coaching models.

Semi-structured interview questions were created by the researcher based on documented effective practices found across the literature. A range of 10-20 questions were asked of all of the participants in order to ascertain perceptions of effective practices that have made a profound impact in the classroom. The questions for the principals asked information about their perception of noticeable improvements that were a result of having a literacy coach as well as the role that the literacy coach has played in maintaining student success and teacher development (see Appendix B). The semi-structured interviews for the teachers helped to gain information about how the

reading coach has helped the teacher to achieve reading success with their students. The questions were meant to give the researcher insight regarding the practices used to improve student achievement and differentiate instruction which ultimately resulted in teacher development. These questions also shed light on the teacher's perceptions of the benefits of having a literacy coach (see Appendix C).

The final set of questions was generated for the literacy coaches. These questions addressed the daily routine of the coach, leadership style, and methods used to assist teachers with struggling readers. These questions also addressed the literacy coach's professional development approach. Effective strategies were also a main component of the interviews (see Appendix D).

The researcher created the interview questions. However, in order to ensure validation, the instrument was submitted for review by a selected body of experts prior to implementation for face validity. The selected body of experts included a literacy coach, a principal, a curriculum specialist, and a reading consultant. After review, the panel of experts suggested that the context of the questions be more flexibly worded in order to allow a broader perspective and a uniqueness of answers from the participants. After a subsequent review, there were no additional suggestions in reference to modifying the instrument.

Confidentiality was ensured as pseudonyms were used. The participants were required to sign an informed consent letter specifying that their participation was on a voluntary basis. They were also informed that the interviews would be recorded, transcribed, and safeguarded by the researcher.

The researcher was the discussion facilitator. As researcher/moderator, the researcher facilitated the discussion and encouraged participation and expression of feelings and thoughts. The discussion was semi-structured using a checklist of issues constructed iteratively by the researcher. Prior to starting the focus group interviews, ground rules were established to ensure that rules of conversation are adhered to. As interviews progressed, the researcher posed and redirected questions as necessary.

All interviews were audio-recorded; interviews, field notes, and written reflections were transcribed and coded. Several levels of analysis were conducted, beginning with the clustering of coded data segments around common themes and the direct interpretation of data as filtered through the sets of codes.

Each site was observed by the researcher on separate occasions during the 135 minute reading block. At this time, documentation, field notes, and observations were the data collection instruments. The researcher interviewed each coach at least two times, the principals and the teachers once. Over a one month period of time, all participants were interviewed individually for approximately 45 minutes.

Procedures

At the outset, the researcher obtained IRB approval. Prior to implementation, the researcher elicited permission to conduct research and interview literacy coaches from the superintendent. The researcher provided a cover letter to elementary literacy coaches who have received coach of the year designation over the last five years to explain the purpose of the study. Once consent was given, interviews were conducted. In order to gain an understanding of effective practices used by successful literacy coaches, interviews were the primary method of data collection. Field notes, direct observations,

interview transcripts, and analyzing documents also served as data collection techniques.

Data Analysis

In this qualitative study, data were triangulated using the first two stages of constant comparison, as adapted from the grounded theory method, to locate overlying themes. Glaser and Strauss (cited in Guba, 1990, p. 339) described the constant comparison method as following four distinct stages:

1. comparing incidents applicable to each category,
2. integrating categories and their properties,
3. delimiting the theory, and
4. writing the theory (p. 127).

Since the literature has already identified the literacy coach as an instructional leader, this study only required utilization of the first two stages of the constant comparison method. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to show the process of how literacy coaches can establish themselves as the instructional leader to fill the gap in the literature.

In stage one, responses and observations from the literacy coaches were compared and contrasted in order to note commonalities and differences among exemplary coaches. The responses from the literacy coaches, principals, and teachers were integrated in stage two. This helped the researcher to detect similarities as patterns were identified that examined the correspondence between the participants. Throughout the third stage of data collection, documentation was analyzed in order to note commonalities. During the final stage of data analysis, emerging themes were identified and compared to the conceptual framework that was present in the literature.

Documentation was also a source of direct data collection. This type of data collection enabled the researcher to study artifacts. The following artifacts that examined were: lesson plans, coach's schedules, professional learning agendas, data, letters of commendation, documentation of informal teacher observations by the literacy coach, and student results from DIBELS and the CRCT. These documents helped the researcher to triangulate data and document reported outcomes regarding teacher development.

Glesne (1998) asserts that the use of documents makes findings trustworthy because they support the researcher's observations and interviews stating, "They enrich what you see and hear by supporting, expanding, and challenging your portrayals and perceptions. Your understanding of the question grows as you make use of the documents" (p. 59). Documents were also utilized to evaluate the impact of instructional practices on teacher development. The documents consisted of CRCT test results and DIBELS test scores.

Summary

The design of this study was qualitative using a collective case study method. Interviews were the primary data source. Data were collected through observations and document analysis, and the researcher's written reflections. All interviews were audio-recorded. Field notes and written reflections were transcribed and coded. Several levels of analysis were conducted, beginning with the clustering of coded data segments around common themes and the direct interpretation of data as filtered through the sets of codes. Three literacy coaches, three principals, and nine teachers were the participants in the study in order to help the researcher determine effective practices of exemplary literacy coaches. Interviews with the literacy coaches, teachers, and principals, observations, and

field notes, were utilized to collect the data needed. Lesson plans, test data, hallway displays, and classroom displays were the artifacts that were also examined by the researcher at each of the three sites.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the various ways that literacy coaches created a culture that supports children's learning and teacher development in their environment, to understand how teachers perceived the work of the literacy coach's role, the impact of the literacy coaches on teacher development and student learning, and to analyze student behaviors towards reading. The research in this section highlights the findings from the participants' responses to the interview questions and observations.

This chapter is organized in terms of two sections. A summary of the three sites is provided in the first section. Descriptions of the school environment, a description of how the literacy coach has created the school culture, the perceptions of the teachers and principal, and student behaviors towards reading at each of the three respective sites is included in this section. The second section encompasses the procedures used for data analysis and the process of theory development.

Garner Elementary

School Environment

The researcher began with Garner Elementary. This school was situated in an economically depressed area. Upon entering the building, an atmosphere welcoming the love of reading was evident. The word READ in bold colors of red, yellow, and blue adorned the entry doors. Throughout the hallways, slogans were prevalent such as "Books Rock!", "Catch the Reading Bug!", and "We Love Reading!" The morning at Garner Elementary began with the announcements. From the outset, it became apparent that the principal was an instructional leader. Over the audio system the principal began

with the word of the day. After stating the word for the day, the principal reviewed the silent sounds that were in the selected word.

Each grade level was situated in respective hallways. The researcher observed a sense of collegiality as pendant banners were posted above each of the teachers' doorway's from their undergraduate alma mater. Beside each doorway was a translucent wall that allowed anyone in the hallways to monitor classroom activities. Banners representing the reading achievement over the years were also displayed throughout each of the hallways. Having 80-90% of the student population reading at or above grade level earned the school several silver medal and gold medal literacy banners. Bulletin boards in the hallways also showcased the students who participated in the 100 book club, students who achieved honor roll, and students who had met the reading benchmarks.

School Culture

Janet was a very organized literacy coach. Her schedule was posted outside of her door. She also had a miniature sized schedule that she took with her each day. A copy of the schedule was also provided for her principal. The researcher inquired about this practice and Janet stated that she gave her principal a copy of her schedule so that the principal could join her in making reading a priority at the school by helping to safeguard her time by not requesting anything of Janet during the times listed on her schedule.

According to Principal Davis:

It is commonplace to see Janet working with teachers in small groups and meeting with them one-on-one. She is constantly conferencing and always talking to teachers and always keeping abreast of new things that are going on in reading

research. I make sure that as a principal that I don't put any more on her or disturb her. I let her do her job. In other words, I respect her time.

This belief of Janet working in small groups with teachers is also supported by the teachers.

One teacher said, "I appreciate the individual attention that Janet provides us. Sometimes I don't want to show that I don't understand in the presence of my grade level."

Another teacher said, "I am a better teacher because of the work that Janet has done with my grade level. Even after she has worked with the whole grade level, she always makes it a point to follow-up with each of us individually."

The observations of the researcher further support that the literacy coach has spent extensive time working individually with teachers. In looking at the observation log that the literacy coach maintained, the researcher observed documentation of completed conferences with teachers. The form that the literacy coach used outlined the purpose of the meeting, the date, the time, suggestions, and a place for the teacher to initial at the close of the conference. The literacy coach also utilized a diagnostic observation tool as classroom visits were conducted. The three column instrument detailed the expectations of a standards based classroom in one column, best practices in reading in were outlined in the second column, and an additional column was available for the literacy coach to note the realities of the classroom. This tool was used as a springboard for discussion during pre and post-conferences with the literacy coach.

Each morning Janet began by conducting a school walk through. There was a friendly atmosphere throughout the school. According to Janet, the literacy coach:

Each morning I make it a point to individually greet each of the teachers. I see it as killing two birds with one stone. As I walk around I can make sure that the teachers begin the reading block on time while checking to see if the teachers have everything they need to meet the needs of their students for the day.

As the researcher and the literacy coach completed the morning walk through, it was observed that the teachers pleasantly greeted the literacy coach. For instance, one teacher reminded the literacy coach that she still needed the website for a comprehension activity that was mentioned during the last grade level meeting. The coach acknowledged the request and made a reminder note in her journal. After the walk through, Janet focused on the grade level that she had listed on her schedule.

The rituals and routines at Garner Elementary were obvious. The researcher entered each of the classrooms to find each seamlessly immaculate. Learning stations were clearly established. The teaching stations were uncluttered and organized with materials for the day's lesson available for the teacher. Data notebooks were located on each of the teachers' desks containing differentiated lesson plans, individual student assessments, grade level standards, anecdotal notes about individual students that helped the teacher to plan for the instruction of each student, professional learning agendas, and a visitor's log. Upon perusing the data notebooks, it was obvious that the literacy coach was a frequent visitor in the classrooms as many dates with comments and feedback were listed in the visitor's log. Adults throughout the building took responsibility for student learning. For example, in classrooms where there was a teaching assistant, it was hard to identify the teacher from the teaching assistant. The teachers, principal and literacy coach contribute much of the school's success to the collegial work environment.

Teacher 1 stated, “We have learned to work together as a team. We are more engaged in supporting each other to improve our instructional practices.”

Teacher 2 stated, “There is a concentrated effort to think about not only what is taught but how it is taught. The children are at the center of all that we do and our goal is to help the students and each other to reach full potential”.

As the lesson plans were analyzed, the researcher observed differentiated lesson plans that were crafted to meet the needs of the different learners in the classroom. For example, on the lesson plan form there were activities planned to target the needs of three separate groups of students. Students reading within a certain range were grouped together. Students in need of comprehension practice had specific activities while others requiring assistance in fluency had distinct lessons in order to provide additional support for the student. One of the goals in the School Improvement Plan was to meet the needs of the students by planning differentiated lessons in order to meet the students at their learning level.

The overall tone of the classrooms was calm and the staff recognized the importance of team work. According to the principal, “I listen to my coach immensely, we work together to try to suit people to where their strong points are.”

The literacy coach added, “We are all on board. From the paraprofessionals to the principal, we can all analyze data and plan accordingly. We are on the same page; we want to see the children excel.”

A teacher stated, “We work hard to hold up our end of the bargain. It’s the only way to make sure that our students are successful.”

During the observation of Janet, a data meeting with the third grade team was held. The meeting took place in the established data room. The researcher observed the meeting norms posted in the data room. According to the list, during professional learning everyone agreed to participate, cell phones would be silenced, collaborative interactions would be focused, and sidebar conversations would be minimized. According to the literacy coach, grade level teams had previously decided on the protocol for meetings by gaining consensus prior to listing a norm on the posted chart. The teachers recorded the oral reading fluency of the students on data sheets. This information was used as the team discussed grouping the students according to the data outcomes. Upon entering the room, the teachers were met with smells of freshly baked goods. The literacy coach explained that during her meetings with the teachers, she provided refreshments in order to ease the angst that many teachers feel when they are pulled from their classrooms. On each wall were color coded pocket charts organized by grade level. On each of the color coded sections of the pocket chart were coordinating cards with the teacher's name on the exposed side of the card and the student's first name and benchmark score on the other side. The red section was designated for students who were struggling and far below benchmark, the yellow section was designated for the students that were emerging towards benchmark and slightly below, and the green section was designated for on track students who were at or above benchmark. The literacy coach explained that after weekly progress monitorings, the teachers celebrated the successes of the students by moving for example a red card to the yellow section after a child met the benchmark. Her meeting began with Kudos to one of the third grade teachers. Ms. Jackson, a new teacher, was being recognized for having the highest number of students

to move from emerging to on track as indicated on the most recent benchmark. The teachers celebrated and Ms. Jackson shared that she attributed this influx to the scripted fluency lessons that Janet had delivered in their most recent professional development session.

The literacy coach and the principal agree that there is an interconnectedness that has helped to mold the culture at Garner Elementary. According to Principal Davis:

We support each other here. I have some really good teachers. However I don't mind being upfront and honest when I don't see people doing what is in the best interest of children. At this time my main goal is to see what kind of help I can provide for the teacher.

The literacy coach stated:

We all work together and are all dependant upon each other. A main thing that I have done is make sure that the expectations are clear. Our school vision is clear. All of the teachers know that word walls, read alouds, data notebooks and word king and queen are nonnegotiable.

During the site visit, the researcher also examined the results of a recent focus walk. The literacy coach used an observation form to quickly ascertain the presence of word walls, read alouds, data notebooks, and word king and queen in the classrooms. According to the documentation, there were noticeable increases in the percentages across grade levels as the school year progressed.

This position was also viewed as important by the teachers.

One teacher said, "My coach has helped us all sing on the same sheet of music!"

This team-based approach was also supported by another second grade teacher.

She stated, “We really help each other. We plan together, we discuss concerns together. We know that it’s okay to share concerns and that has made a difference. We have really capitalized on two heads being better than one.”

Another teacher added, “Because we work together and support each other so much, I feel like I can try different strategies without worrying that I will fail.”

Teachers and Principal’s Perceptions

The teachers and the principal at Garner Elementary agree that the literacy coach has had a strong and positive impact on the instructional practices throughout the building. There was a consensus from the teachers at Garner Elementary that the literacy coach has helped them to individually meet the needs of all of their students. Ms. Smith, a second grade teacher said:

Our coach helps to support our efforts by planning with us and serving as an additional set of eyes as we look at the data. She has also helped us to understand our School Improvement Plan. As we revisit our plan during our planning and data meetings, we are clear as to whether we are in reach of our goals as a school. This has helped my team to make sure that we are giving our kids what they need.

In a like manner, the views of Mrs. Wilkes, a kindergarten teacher further supported the literacy coach positively impacting instruction at the site. She added:

I really appreciate my coach, even when she has to correct me I don’t mind because she always finds something to celebrate first. My students have benefited because the strategies that she models in professional development have helped my students to progress.

Mrs. James, a second grade teacher, also supported the literacy coach as being

responsible for improving instruction through professional development. She said:

The quality of my instruction has improved greatly since the literacy coach came. The professional development sessions have helped me to grow as a teacher and as I learn more and do more, the achievement of my students rises as well. I also like that the professional learning activities are aligned with our School Improvement Plan.

According to Principal Davis, the literacy coach has been a tremendous support to the academic program. Ms. Davis credited the literacy coach with creating a risk-free atmosphere of learning. She stated:

Our coach has helped us to become a school driven by teaching and learning. She begins each of her professional development sessions with these ice breakers that put the teachers at ease. This has helped us all over the years to feel comfortable with each other. She has been our missing link by acting as the impetus to begin conversations about curriculum implementation. Because of her, my teachers aren't afraid to take risks. We begin by looking at the data and deciding on a learning path for individual students, and if at first we don't succeed, we reflect and start all over again. The barriers have been removed and teachers feel free to discuss strategies that may be helpful to colleagues. We no longer focus on what takes place within our four walls. We sink or swim together by planning collaboratively and providing feedback to enrich our initiatives and it is all because of the work of our coach.

Two teachers from Garner Elementary agreed with the principal. One teacher stated:

Now we focus more on learning. There is a continuous cycle of looking at data and in some cases changing teaching practices in order to support students' needs. The literacy coach has supported these practices by leading data meetings and making sure that the initiatives that we learn about in professional development sessions are what are best for our students.

Another teacher from this site stated, "Our common planning time is used to reflect on lessons that have been modeled or to support our teaching in other ways. We are constantly looking at the data and using the standards to drive what we do."

The observations of the researcher further supported a focus on student learning. During the site visit, the researcher observed teachers using progress monitoring results to formulate needs based groups. The team of teachers individually evaluated their class results. Students with like needs were color coded and grouped accordingly. After which the team of teachers suggested strategies to implement with each group.

In addition, the principal and teachers agree that collaboration has made a difference in their school. The principal said:

Janet and I are on the same page. When she came to us, the classroom teachers were overwhelmed by all the duties, responsibilities and mandates imposed upon them. Together we have worked together to create a collaborative culture that makes reading a priority. We set aside time during the school day to focus on the data and plan accordingly. Most importantly, we both have a genuine interest in our teachers. Their successes are our successes; we feel like a family.

Mr. Wright, a third grade teacher was in agreement with the principal. He stated, “We collaborate extensively and are oftentimes successful through trial and error.”

This view was also supported by Mrs. Pearson, a first grade teacher. She stated, “Our coach has provided the big game plan for the work to be done. She has nurtured a professional culture that welcomes ongoing learning and collaboration. Now it’s the norm.”

Student Behaviors

Reading materials were visible and accessible to the students. Classroom libraries were at the level of the students. In kindergarten classes, reading benches were used. Students could sit on the benches in the classroom to read. Underneath each bench were storage areas for books. The sides of the benches were color coded according to the type of genre. As the researcher observed a first grade teacher working with a fluency small group, the students seemed very eager to show their performance. One first grader stated to her teacher, “I got my focus pants on today to help me focus and read.”

Most of the classes worked in small groups. Oftentimes the students worked cooperatively while teachers and teacher assistants worked with small groups reinforcing specific skills. As students worked on tasks, they appeared energetic and focused on the task at hand. For example, in one small group of second graders, the researcher observed one student attempting to distract another. The assigned team leader redirected her counterpart and each of the students then began to complete the task at hand.

As students completed cooperative group activities, the researcher observed the students migrating to listening stations, selecting books to read from the classroom library, and practicing fluency with partners. Moreover, it was apparent that the students

were clear about their learning goals and objectives. During the observations, the researcher observed two third grade students discussing their reading goals and how many words they were away from reading the number of words needed to attend the end of the year benchmark party.

There was a lot of interaction between students as reading materials were selected and read. Independent reading was promoted by the designation of a library corner that was partitioned off from the rest of the classroom. Books were accessible and arranged in a neat and orderly manner. The book selections had eye-catching titles that were current. The students were drawn to the displays as books were showcased on an open-book shelf. There was also a felt board and story props were provided for the students to use. In this area were several colorful bean bags. The students appeared relaxed as books were read in pairs and independently. The library corner was also equipped with listening stations and stories on tape for the students.

Garner Elementary was a collaborative community that functioned well together. They appeared united in their commitment to student learning. Under the guidance of the literacy coach, there was a focus on targeted instruction, collaboration, and data driven decision making. The teachers learned collectively. As a result, the students thrived as learning conditions were optimized for the students through differentiated lesson planning. Ultimately, the teachers learned to make cognizant decisions about the learning paths of students and continued to raise the bar of student achievement.

Ridge Hill Elementary

School Environment

Ridge Hill Elementary is an urban school. The parking lot was in the rear of the school. Many neighborhood residents gathered along the sidewalk to the school and ushered their loved ones to school. Upon walking toward the front entrance to the school, graffiti was sprayed on the outside walls. However, upon entering the front door of the school, it seemed more like an oasis. There was a soothing fountain in the center of the building's foyer. To the right of the fountain was a wall-sized fish tank with an array of fish in various colors. Situated left of the fountain was a trophy case filled with medals and trophies for oratorical contests, spelling bees, and math competitions and commendations that had been received throughout the county over the years.

The principal, literacy coach, and teachers agree that having a nurturing environment has added to the success of the school. The principal commented:

For some of our students, this is their only solace. We have made learning a priority and the staff here doesn't mind going the extra mile. We know that much is required and as a whole we have all laced up our running shoes in order to make sure that we get the job done effectively.

This aspect was also supported by the literacy coach. According to the coach, "The parents know that we care about our students and they make sure that they are here and ready to go each day".

These views were also supported by the teachers.

One teacher said, "Sometimes, the smiles of care and concern that the students

receive at school are the only rays of hope that they will get all day. So here we make it a point to show that they are important to us.”

Another teacher added:

When I did my student teaching a seasoned teacher constantly reminded me that the students would not care how much I knew until they knew how much I cared.

As I have worked with students throughout the years, I have begun to live this out and I see the importance of a caring classroom.

The researcher signed in at the front office. There were pencils available for visitors with the school's name and a message attached saying, “Welcome! We're penciling you in today!” The importance of reading was evident as I walked toward the literacy coach's office. Evidence of reading was bountiful. As I passed the cafeteria, soothing instrumentals played in the background. Students read orally in pairs and triads. Entry doors to the classrooms were ornamented with book-themed wreaths. The teachers worked with their students to create a wreath about their favorite classroom book. For example, one wreath was titled Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot. This wreath entailed airplane embellishments and miniature snickers bars were glue-gunned to the door. A fifth grade teacher made a tribute to *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. The students then used note cards to discuss the characters, the setting, and story elements that were discussed regarding the story. In addition, there were dolphin cut-outs pasted on the door and the students wrote paragraphs persuading others to read *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.

On a bulletin board near the coach's office, information about the employee of the month was displayed. A picture was shown with biographical information that detailed the accomplishments and interests of the teacher.

One teacher believed that the relationships that have been built over time have had an impact on the success of the school. A third grade teacher shared:

Over the years, our principal and coach have built a school-wide connection that has seeped beyond the classroom. We have built a school family and we know that we are all a vital part of the overall success of our school.

The principal also supported school-wide collaboration to encourage the staff. Principal Johnson stated:

I am always trying to motivate the staff. As you may have noticed, throughout the building you will see motivational signs that I hope will keep the teachers encouraged. I also try to always celebrate my teachers by highlighting a star teacher each month.

Moreover, the researcher observed the vision of the school on the letterhead of the principal and the literacy coach. As correspondence was shared with the staff, they were reminded of the instructional focus of the school.

Reading was an important part of the instructional focus as Ridge Hill began with twenty minutes of sustained silent reading. As a school, this time was coined “D.E.A.R. Time {Drop Everything And Read}.” During this time, students read trade books, magazines, comic books, or newspapers. The researcher observed some students taking accelerated reader tests or listening to stories on line while others discussed books with the teacher.

School Culture

At 7:45 a.m. Lisa’s day had already begun. She was busy gathering materials to fill her cart. She placed books, sticky notes, pens, and reflection sheets for grade-level

meetings into her rolling cart. Interpersonal relationships between the coach and the teachers seemed apparent. A teacher knocked and inquired about a take home reading packet. Lisa let her know she would get one to her this afternoon. The teacher seemed annoyed, and Lisa asked about her child who was sick over the weekend. Smiling, the teacher told Lisa about her daughter's recuperation and walked away. The last thing to go in the cart, and according to Lisa, sometimes the most important, was the snacks she purchased for the teachers. According to the literacy coach:

I try to begin with a to-do list and sometimes the things that are on there may or may not get done. If a crisis hits, forget it. I had to realize that in this job it is sometimes hard to complete things I had planned so I have learned to measure my job satisfaction from evaluating the progress over time of the school instead of the tasks that are completed. With that being said, most times I play it by ear. The only thing that I have set in stone is the days that I will work with each grade level and professional development days.

The researcher viewed the monthly calendar of the literacy coach. Every Thursday was set aside for professional learning activities. The literacy coach also included a research-based strategy focus on the calendar for the professional learning dates. The planning times and objectives for each grade level were also included on the calendar.

Teachers and Principal's Perceptions

Ridge Hill Elementary teachers expressed that their literacy coach was a positive influence and an asset to them. The teachers described Lisa as "rigorous, supportive and passionate about her work." One teacher commented:

She works us like a Hebrew slave! And many times I have resisted some of her efforts but in the end I have found that children are at the center of all that she does. In hindsight, I must admit that my instructional techniques have blossomed under her leadership.

The principal also regarded the literacy coach as having a strong work ethic. The principal added, “Our coach is creative and task oriented. She is fair and passionate about her work. Workaholic would describe her well. She’s constantly moving and making sure that the teachers are on top of their game.”

The literacy coach, on the other hand attributed the overall success of the school to understanding where the teachers are and accelerating their progress. As stated by the literacy coach:

With teachers, I have learned to jump in to support the teacher at the place where their teaching is right now. Each year I begin by administering a needs assessment survey. This helps me to gauge the instructional needs of the teachers. As I work to individualize my interactions with the teachers, I use this as a way to build a relationship with the teachers and learn about the teacher. Often I have found that teachers are far more in tune instructionally than they give themselves credit for.

They have reasons for doing what they do. Supporting them where they are seems to be the key to sparking conversations and later making transformations.

The teachers also felt that they were needed and were a critical part of the instructional success of the school. As said by one teacher:

I know that we are all in this together. As a school we are more instructionally focused. We target the areas of weakness that are evident in the data. I know that I

am their first line of defense and if my students are to be successful, it begins with me.

The researcher observed targeted instruction as the data notebook was examined. Grouping sheets in the data notebook categorized students with similar needs. These students were provided small group instruction to remediate their deficit areas.

Another teacher shared, “I appreciate the collaboration. It has strengthened my practices and broadened my perspectives. I can draw from others to help benefit my students.” The importance of collaboration was also viewed as important to the principal. The principal added:

As a school, I have joined forces with my coach to lead the staff and systematically examine our professional practices and the impact that these practices have on student achievement. The results of such reflective analysis has transformed our school and made us more accountable for the quality of education that our students receive. As we reflect, we make changes in order to make sure that we are giving the students what they need to be successful in reading. Overall, as we have become a school that allows data to lead our instructional course, we have come from a destructive and unedifying mess to a constructive and transformative force in education.

Student Behaviors

The researcher observed that during the sustained silent reading, the students seemed engaged and eager to read. At the close of announcements, the students gathered reading materials and began to read. It was apparent that this was a ritual and routine of the school culture. It also seemed to heighten the interest of the children since they knew

the expectation. All of the students had a reading journal where they recorded what was read and summarized their understanding of the text. The students seemed to enjoy journaling about their readings. Many entries were inclusive of colorful depictions of text highlights. Each classroom was stocked with a plethora of reading material that was organized according to genre. Color-coded bins denoted books that were fact, fiction, nonfiction, girl appeal, boy appeal and science fiction.

The classroom contexts promoted engaged reading throughout the school. This seemed to be accomplished by the teachers and the school-wide emphasis that promoted free reading. The teachers ensured engagement as prominent knowledge goals and real-world connections to reading were provided. In a first grade classroom, the teacher helped to build the comprehension of her students by questioning the students. She asked a student, “If you were the little red hen and no one would help you, what would you do?” The students were able to relate the story to their own experiences and demonstrate a more sophisticated level of understanding.

One student responded, “I would try to make it a contest so they would think something was in it for them.” This shows the student was using higher level thinking skills.

The researcher observed posted goals for reading in the classrooms. During the sustained silent reading, many students had conferences with teachers and reconfigured previous reading goals. The students further assumed responsibility for the learning as many expressed to the teacher their reasons for selecting a particular book. One student expressed, “I am going to read *Socks* by Beverly Cleary because I have read other books written by her and her adventures are always exciting.” In turn, the teacher further

engaged the student's reading experience by suggesting that the student pause periodically throughout the text and record predictions in their reading journal. The researcher further observed students utilizing narrative cards to increase comprehension during the sustained reading time. The cards were color coded. Yellow cards contained questions to be answered before reading. Green cards contained questions to be answered during reading, and red cards contained questions to be read after reading.

Students made meaningful choices about what, when, and how to read. Posters were displayed that outlined questions to guide the reader when narrative and expository text were encountered. Some students also used miniature question cards that appeared to facilitate the comprehension of the text that was being read. As a whole, all of the students seemed actively engaged and responded quickly as questions about stories were asked. In turn, the teacher and the students responded positively to the comments made by students as text was read which seemed to promote positive attitudes towards reading.

The teachers at Ridge Hill Elementary continuously worked to refine their craft. After professional development initiatives were completed by the literacy coach, the teachers enhanced their effectiveness by putting the research into practice. The literacy coach facilitated reflective dialogue about teaching and learning. This dialogue resulted in the development of relationships where thoughtful discourse about instruction was commonplace.

Sandy Springs Elementary

School Environment

Sandy Springs Elementary is a neighborhood school. The environment seemed welcoming and a partnership between parents and the school was obvious. In the

commons area, several quartets of wicker chairs surrounded small coffee tables. As parents waited to see either teachers or administrators, they were situated in a very cozy and comfortable setting. Some perused the parenting magazines and brochures that showcased ways to help students at home and school. These documents were made available on top of the coffee tables. Above the doorway to the office hang a banner that said, “Welcome to the Lion’s Den!”

The staff members pleasantly stood in the doorways to welcome students and parents. The teachers seemed energetic and as the students were greeted, it seemed like the teachers wanted to be there. Wall-sized graphs hang outside of each teacher’s door. The red, yellow, and green colored blocks denoted the weekly reading performance of the students. The researcher arrived at the tail end of announcements to hear the principal tell everyone to have a super fantastic day.

There was a sense of community as grade level SMART goals were posted along the hallways. In the teacher’s lounge was a brag board and place where bright ideas were shared across grade levels. The board was divided into separate subject areas. Teachers posted ideas that worked well in their classrooms for others to utilize.

School Culture

From the outset of the observation, it was apparent that Sandy Springs Elementary School’s teachers were focused on instruction and time management. As the announcements came to a close, the researcher observed the literacy coach as she quickly grabbed a clipboard with neon post-its and a checklist attached. In an effort to assist the teachers to become more task oriented, the literacy coach created a checklist. The checklist had each teacher’s name listed and columns labeled “Read Aloud, Vocabulary

Development, Fluency Booster, and On Schedule”. On task behaviors of the school community were observed by the researcher as the hallways resonated with the sounds of the fluency booster began after the morning announcements. One minute later, an alarming sound came through and the students, like worker bees began to count the number of words read per minute. The students in first through third grade tracked their reading rate at the outset of the reading block each day. The day began for the literacy coach with a quick walk through of each of the three hallways. As the coach walked down the hallways, check marks and red dots were placed in each of the columns. A check mark indicated that the activity listed occurred and a red dot meant that the activity did not take place. Over the course of the day, the researcher observed a meeting between a second grade teacher and the literacy coach. The meeting was held because the teacher had acquired three consecutive red dots in a category. The literacy coach suggested ways to support the teacher in order to ensure that the read aloud began on time each day.

After the coach perused the kindergarten through third grade classrooms, she revisited the third grade classrooms. The coach explained that these classes needed some additional support with consistently pulling vocabulary words during the daily read aloud. The researcher observed the literacy coach utilizing an observation tool that detailed the presence of best practices in reading instruction. As the teacher proceeded with the lesson, the literacy coach noted her observations. These findings were shared with the teacher during the post conference. In Ms. Brown’s class, two students were acting out the definitions of words as others determined the mystery word. The literacy coach seemed to be pleased. She took out two of the neon post-its. On one of the post-its,

she wrote, great engaging activity, the students seemed to truly understand the definition of startled. She ended by saying I appreciate your hard work and a smiley face was drawn on the sticky note. This note was placed on the teacher's desk. On the other post-it she wrote see room 118—excellent vocabulary activity. This post-it was placed on the principal's desk. This gesture made the principal aware of classrooms that either needed a visit to celebrate or to monitor.

Communication between the coach and the principal seemed to help to keep the teachers instructionally focused.

According to Principal Johnson, “When I see lime green post-it note, I know that they are from the literacy coach. The information that is on the post-it note takes priority.”

The coach explained:

Usually the morning part of my day is spent coaching. I'm observing, modeling, and demonstrating lessons during the reading block. Most of the time, I am demonstrating or modeling a strategy that has been discussed during professional learning. In the afternoon, I am usually reading and researching. There is time set aside where I meet with my principal at least 2-3 times a week and more if needed. Throughout the afternoon, my teachers know that if they need to see me and I am in the office my door is open. I also meet with grade levels during their planning time, usually 2 grades a day.

As the researcher analyzed the reflection notebook of the literacy coach, evidence of classroom visits were prevalent. Dates and times were evident that supported extensive modeling and classroom demonstrations. The coach reflected at the close of each school

day. Details were listed regarding the classes that were worked with during the day and the focus of classroom visits. After each journal entry, the coach had a starred column that detailed next steps for the teacher. These next steps listed the ways that the coach would support the teacher instructionally.

Teachers and Principal's Perceptions

The principal and coach have worked together to create a custom of performance, support, and collaboration. According to the principal:

I feel that we have a culture of high expectations. To keep us all focused; I am visible throughout the building. When our coach conducts professional learning activities, I make it a priority to be an active participant. My aim in doing so is to send the message that my coach and I are on the same page.

This position was supported by the literacy coach. The literacy coach added:

I have the support of my principal. She works with me to make sure that the time is available to complete the professional development that is needed. My principal understands reading and has embraced my efforts. She is focused on the data and the teachers know that as well. They know that she has set high expectations for not only the reading achievement but for our school as a whole and she continues to raise the bar so there is an atmosphere of high achievement and performance. This makes it easy for me because as I implement different initiatives, everyone is onboard.

The teachers and the principal at Sandy Springs attribute much of the improvement in student reading achievement to having a literacy coach. The principal stated:

The literacy coach has helped to improve the reading achievement across the board. She became in a sense everyone's saving grace at a time when the teachers were unmotivated as a result of an unclear direction as well as exclusion from decision-making about programs, curricula, and instruction that impacted student learning. She has served as a breath of fresh air through delegation, empowerment, and paying special attention to each individual's needs, abilities and aspirations.

This aspect of the literacy coach being responsible for the overall improvement of the students and teachers is also a common belief among the teachers. Mrs. Hamilton, a second grade teacher added:

Across the board our literacy coach, through observation and co-learning has helped us to see beyond what is in the classroom to what we can do to improve. Our knowledge base has expanded and we are all ongoing learners because of our coach.

Mrs. Smith, a third grade teacher stated:

The literacy coach has helped us to be more engaged as a whole. High performance teams have been developed and they thrive as our school has transformed into a learning organization characteristic of an environment of collegial support, risk-taking, innovation, and an acceptance of change.”

Another teacher attributed her success to having a knowledgeable coach. According to Mrs. Barnes, a kindergarten teacher, “Our coach knows her stuff! That fact coupled with the on site professional development and support has contributed to the improvements in our instructional program.”

The teachers believe that the literacy coach has positively impacted their instruction. A kindergarten teacher stated:

I am more open to try new things because I know that she will be there just in case. If I'm not successful at an initial or successive attempt, our coach provides scaffolds and support; we then work together to discuss what happened and make adjustments to try it again.

The third grade teacher added:

She is like a wall fixture. She is always coming in and out working with me to show me how the teaching and learning strategies work. Sometimes we co-teach and sometimes she whisper coaches if she notices something that I need to correct. This is my favorite because I want to make sure that my students are getting the right information. She has made me become the kind of teacher that seeks to improve, I am always thinking about my teaching and how what I do affects the students.

A teacher further supported the view of the coach positively impacting instruction by exposing the teachers to current research. Mr. Jameson, a second grade teacher stated, "She provides us with up to date strategies. We have extensive professional development that has helped me to grow as a teacher and become an instructional leader."

The teachers, literacy coach, and the principal also concur that a benefit to having the literacy coach has resulted in the staff becoming reflective practitioners.

One teacher stated, "She has also made me think about what I do before and after working with my students. I have really learned to work smarter." Another teacher said:

My coach keeps me abreast. I am always learning and improving my craft because of my work with our coach. This is beneficial to my students because I am always trying to perfect my teaching to make them more successful students. In addition, a first grade teacher explained, “Overall my instruction is more targeted to the needs of the students. I now see the method behind all of the madness!”

Moreover, the coach discussed being reflective as the biggest contribution to the reading program over the past few years. According to the coach:

As a whole we have become reflective practitioners. We are constantly thinking about the impact that we can make in the classroom. Through collaboration, we inspire and motivate each other. As a result, our instructional program has accelerated.

The literacy coach also stated, “I believe that I help them to be more informed about their teaching and student learning by consistently sharing and discussing data and providing constructive feedback.”

The principal was in agreement with the coach being responsible for generating reflective thinking throughout the building. She stated, “Our coach makes us all think. She helps the teachers to use the data to inform their instruction and make adjustments along the way according to what the data dictates.”

In addition, the researcher observed the school’s evidence of a comprehensive approach to data driven decision making. As the researcher examined grade level reflection boards, she noted that these boards contained benchmark data over three periods of time. The results from preceding benchmarks were posted. Goals for the

upcoming benchmarks were also charted. There was a poster sized document entitled *The 5 Whys*. The first block on *The 5 Whys* document listed an academic problem statement. Subsequent boxes included responses from the teachers regarding why the problem existed. At the close of the document, the root cause for students not meeting the previous benchmark was pinpointed.

The principal and teachers further agree that the literacy coach has helped the teachers become more in tune to the students at Sandy Springs. As said by the principal:

We really try to meet the needs of our students. We see where they are. I'll give you an example, I have a kindergarten student who although she is in kindergarten, she is taking reading in first grade. I encourage my teachers when they see students in their classes who are excelling to go ahead and move them up. We leave them in the correct grade level class that they are supposed to be in but we don't stifle their education.

A teacher agreed with gaining a better understanding of her students through analyzing data. A teacher stated, "We know the data inside and out and when we see a weakness somehow we work together to give the child what they need."

Interviews with the principal, the literacy coach and the teachers revealed a family oriented sense of community. The principal stated:

Under the guidance of the literacy coach, the teachers actively take part as a team in molding their instructional development. Our coach has facilitated a supportive school context. As a result, the students are receiving a quality education because we have become that needed village that it takes to raise a child.

The literacy coach agreed with this aspect of a collaborative team approach to learning.

In conjunction, the literacy coach said, “We are in this together. When one is successful, we all are successful. In a sense we are only as strong as our weakest link so we try to keep everyone afloat. We are our brother’s keepers.”

The teachers agree that the literacy coach has helped to foster a positive environment. According to one teacher, “She is a supporter not a reporter. My interactions with her are confidential and we know that we can trust her and that she cares.”

Another teacher described:

She has helped to create a positive atmosphere. She leads by example and will not ask anything of us that she isn’t willing to show us how to do. Our culture began to change when we saw her dedication and commitment and it somehow has spilled over and we are all as a whole and finally on the same sheet of music.”

In addition, a second grade teacher added:

She has set high expectations and continues to prod us in the right direction and constantly reiterates that we are a valuable piece to the puzzle. We know that we are a needed part of the team if we are to be a successful school family.

Student Behaviors

It was observed that the student behaviors toward reading at Sandy Springs seemed positive. The children appeared to be intrinsically motivated to read. They freely shared books with peers and participated responsibly in a community of learners. Goals for reading were established and the students were socially interactive as they read. For example, two students discussed a chapter book and decided how many pages needed to be read each day in order to complete the book in one week. Motivators that read “Yes

YOU Can!” and “Read to Succeed!” were posted near most of the classroom libraries. The students seemed to believe in their capabilities as readers. As texts were selected, the students seemed to persist in reading difficult texts and integrate the text with prior knowledge. For instance, the researcher observed some students as they selected books that were worth more Accelerated Reader points. Even though they realized the text was more difficult, they believed that they could successfully read it. As students read in pairs, they appeared to be confident and employed work attack skills as difficult words were encountered.

The teachers also encouraged engagement teaching reading strategies. In a first grade class, pairs of students were noticed taking a picture walk through a book. Prior to reading the text, the pair discussed the pictures page by page. Along the way, inferences and predictions were made regarding possible story outcomes. In a second grade class, the students assumed the responsibility for learning. As two students read together, one student questioned the other. The student asked, “How do you think Rex felt when they left him?” This encouraged the other student to elaborate on the story hence facilitating engagement.

Twenty-five book graphs were posted near the classroom library. As students completed conferencing with the teacher, they eagerly approached the graph to color in an additional square to denote the completion on another book. As students completed teacher directed activities and began to read independently, there was no arguing and the students looked like they wanted to read.

At Sandy Springs Elementary, there was an undeviating focus on professional development and student learning. The teachers welcomed feedback and continued to

work toward improvement. The school environment seemed to value and support hard work and a commitment to academia. As a result, the students excelled.

Data Analysis

Since the process of data analysis is eclectic (Tesch, 1990), the researcher used constant comparison analysis to build the theoretical process for literacy coaches as instructional leaders. Three iterations were used to develop this theory. The first iteration categorized data by actions utilized by the coach. The second iteration grouped the actions by their impact on school policy in relation to literacy. In this iteration, categories were combined from the first iteration based upon their impact on school culture. The third iteration established the administrative role that the literacy coach must attain in order to be perceived as the instructional leader in the organization. Data in this section will be presented as they are grouped in iterations leading to a particular theory of process. Combined categories as they relate to each other are outlined in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Code Mapping: Three Iterations of Analysis (to be read from the bottom up)

(THIRD ITERATION: APPLICATION TO DATA SET)

THE PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING LITERACY COACHES AS
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS
(Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4)

RQ #1: The Literacy Coach as Managers of the Professional Development

RQ # 2: The Literacy Coach as Managers of Curriculum Implementation

RQ # 3: The Literacy Coach as Partners with Teachers and Administrators

RQ # 4: The Literacy Coach as Managers of the Learning Environment

(SECOND ITERATION: CHANGE AGENTS)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Catalyst for Transforming School Décor and Furnishings | 2. Catalyst for Professional Development |
| 3. Catalyst for Change in Student Performance | 4. Catalyst for Building Trust and Risk-Taking |

(FIRST ITERATION: INITIAL CODES/SURFACE CONTENT ANALYSIS)

Hallway Observations	Coaching Duties	Instructional Practices
1.1 Welcoming reading	2.1 Constructive feedback	3.1 Differentiated lessons
1.2 READ on doors	2.2 Coach posted schedule	3.2 Student assessments
1.3 Literacy banners	2.3 Teacher conferences	3.3 Anecdotal notes
1.4 Word walls	2.4 School walk-through	3.4 Grouping sheets
1.5 Word king/queen	2.5 Monthly calendar	3.5 Teacher needs assessment
1.6 Morning reading time	2.6 Teacher groups	3.6 Targeted instruction
1.7 Book themed doors	(small groups with coach)	3.7 Cooperative planning
1.8 Commendations	2.7 Student groups	3.8 Data driven decision making
1.9 SMART goals	(small groups with coach)	3.9 Diagnostic observation tool
1.10 Reading progress graphs posted	2.8 Needs based groups	
Accountability Evidence	Classroom Observations	Relationships
4.1 Observation logs	5.1 Organized classes	6.1 Teachers take risks
4.2 Professional learning agendas	5.2 Designated learning stations	6.2 Motivated teachers
4.3 School Improvement Plan	5.3 Organized class library	6.3 Caring
4.4 Focus walk results	5.4 Uncluttered materials	6.4 Nurturing
4.5 Neon post-its	5.5 Accessibility	6.5 Friendly teachers
4.6 Data meetings	5.6 Energetic students	6.6 Collegiality
4.7 Cooperative groups	5.7 Focused students	6.7 Trusting coach
4.8 Accountability	5.8 Posted reading goals	6.8 Common planning time
School Culture	Leadership Responsibilities	
7.1 Coach provided	8.1 Coach lead data meetings	
7.2 Coach celebrates Teacher' successes	8.2 Coach organizes grade level teams	
7.3 Employee of the Month	8.3 Co-teach	
7.4 Encouraging slogans	8.4 Conducts observations	
7.5 High visibility	8.5 Formulates needs-based groups	
7.6 High expectations	8.6 Modeling in classrooms	
7.7 Active participation	8.7 Facilitates time management	
	8.8 Delivers professional learning	
	8.9 Support teachers	
	8.10 Whisper coaching	

First Iteration

During the first iteration, eight categories were derived from the data based upon the coaches' actions. The first category was "Hallway Observations." Initial indications of the literacy coaches' actions were evident upon entering the buildings. The researcher observed READ written on the entry doors, literacy banners were posted, there was an established reading time, word king and queen contests took place, county level commendations were displayed, reading progress graphs were posted in the hallway, doors were decorated using themes from books, and grade levels posted SMART goals.

As the researcher walked through the buildings with the literacy coaches, the daily routine of the literacy coaches was discussed. The duties of the literacy coaches entailed providing constructive feedback, conducting teacher conferences, completing school walk throughs, working with teachers in small groups, and working with students in small groups. Other duties of the literacy coach involved assisting the teachers with the formulation of needs based groups, and posting their daily schedule. As a result of the literacy coaches impacting instructional practices, these actions were categorized as "Coaching Duties."

While data meetings were observed, the researcher witnessed the literacy coaches interacting with the teachers. The literacy coaches were responsible for supervising differentiated lesson plans. Under the leadership of the literacy coaches, the teachers also analyzed student assessments, used grouping sheets to formulate needs based groups, and the teachers were assisted as anecdotal notes were created in order to meet the needs of the students. The literacy coaches facilitated cooperative planning, shared feedback as a diagnostic observation tool was used, and had teachers to complete a teacher needs

assessment in order to ensure that their time with the teachers was individualized. Due to the literacy coaches' impact upon instruction, this group was entitled "Instructional Practices."

Artifacts were also observed by the researcher. Observation logs were used to document classroom visits. The professional learning agendas, focus walk results, and the School Improvement Plan were maintained in the literacy coaches' data notebooks. Classroom progress was also posted in the data room where data meetings were held. As the teachers worked in cooperative groups, an atmosphere of accountability was present as the teachers worked together and category four, "Accountability Evidence" was derived.

On each of the site visits, the researcher observed classrooms. The classrooms were organized well. Learning stations were clearly designated and classroom libraries were present in each of the classrooms. The materials used during instruction were uncluttered and the students could easily access instructional supplies. As students participated in classroom activities, they appeared energetic and focused as many students posted reading goals. Frequent classroom visits from the literacy coach have resulted in the preceding outcomes in classrooms; hence the development of category five, "Classroom Observations."

Throughout the building, as classroom visits took place and during data meetings with the teachers, interconnectedness was obvious. The teachers seemed motivated to implement new strategies. There was a sense of community as the teachers worked together and with the literacy coaches. As teachers were observed with students, there was a sense of care as the teachers nurtured the students at the start of the school day.

Teams of teachers worked cooperatively to plan instruction as well as offer suggestions regarding best practices suitable for various situations. Upon observing the coalition that the literacy coaches worked to formulate, category six, “Relationships,” was formed.

The teachers across each of the sites actively participated in the learning initiatives at the schools. Encouraging slogans were posted in the hallways that reinforced the vision of the school. There was also a bulletin board that displayed the achievements of the featured employee of the month. Each of the coaches also celebrated the successes of the students and refreshments were provided during data meetings. The literacy coaches’ actions attributed to the formulation of an environment characterized by high performance, thus creating category seven, “School Culture.”

The literacy coaches across sites were responsible for leading data meetings, organizing grade level teams, co-teaching, and conducting observations. Much of the literacy coaches’ time was consumed modeling in classrooms, delivering professional learning, and supporting teachers through whisper coaching. The coaches also assisted in maximizing instructional time and assisting teachers as needs based groups were formulated. Because of the literacy coaches’ influence on the overall implementation of the curriculum, category eight, “Leadership Responsibilities,” was formed.

Iterations Two and Three

The coaches’ actions became a catalyst for change in the school buildings. Iteration two exemplifies the literacy coaches as a change agent. Iteration three, the theoretical process for instructional leaders, outlines the process of becoming an instructional leader.

In the second iteration the researcher examined data from the first iteration. There were eight categories identified in the initial iteration. These categories were collapsed into four distinct categories. The four categories revealed the literacy coach as a change agent in that the actions of the literacy coaches resulted in transformations in the school environment and student performance. In addition, as a result of the work of the literacy coaches, the teachers participated in professional development initiatives which resulted in an establishment of trust between the literacy coaches and the teachers.

For the third iteration, the broad themes describing the literacy coach as a change agent were re-examined. The re-casting of the raw data from the second iteration revealed the process for establishing literacy coaches as instructional leaders. At the outset, this study found that in order to become an instructional leader, however, the literacy coaches must form partnerships with the principals so as to ensure buy-in. After which, it is a necessity for the literacy coaches to establish themselves as managers of curriculum implementation, managers of the learning environment, and managers of professional development.

Theory of Process

Throughout the literature the literacy coach has been established as the instructional leader; however, there is a gap in the literature regarding the process needed to be recognized and respected as an instructional leader. This research project addresses this gap. The researcher found during the study that in order for a literacy coach to be recognized as an instructional leader, the literacy coaches must first establish themselves as “Partners with Teachers and Administrators.” Seeking the support of the principal ensures compliance and overall buy-in. After this coalition has been formed, the literacy

coaches can successfully become “Managers of Professional Development,” “Managers of Curriculum Implementation,” and “Managers of the Learning Environment.”

Summary

This chapter highlighted the findings from the participants’ responses to the interview questions and the researcher’s observations and document analysis.

Specifically, the findings identified the literacy coach as the instructional leader and the person responsible for spearheading increased student achievement across sites. This was attributed to having an on-site support person and extensive job-embedded professional development. The coach assisted in formulating collaborative teams as well as facilitating the understanding of data driven decision making. In addition, the coach and principal were designated as being integral in molding a school wide culture that maximized high performance. A collegial connection was evident across the three sites. This study provides support for instructional coaching as an effective means of improving a teacher’s understanding and learning through sustained, on-going, and intensive support. A key factor found in this study is the necessity of the literacy coach formulating a partnership with the principal. This partnership allowed the literacy coaches to become the established instructional leader by commanding professional learning, managing the learning environment, and managing curriculum implementation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides a synopsis of the research study on the literacy coach as an instructional leader. Also included is an analysis of the major findings of the study and their implications for future research. The process of literacy coaching is also summarized and the dissemination follows.

Discussion

In response to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; 2002) and its emphasis on school accountability, current trends in school leadership have broadened the leadership base to include literacy coaches as on-site teacher leaders. In the capacity of on-site teacher leader, the literacy coach is responsible for the facilitation of ongoing professional development where teachers unite as a team to help one another to improve student learning. A growing body of literature has begun to espouse the central role of the literacy coach's impact on instruction and teacher development (Brown, 2000; Cobb, 2005; Dole, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Guiney, 2001; Kise, 2006).

According to the research, a cornerstone necessary to cultivate and develop the instructional repertoires of teachers is instructional coaching, a professional learning design (Bean & Zigmond, 2006). This professional development model entails placing an educator within schools to provide ongoing support for teachers as prior knowledge and practices are refined, enhanced, and developed. The coaching phenomenon has been embraced largely due to its success in having a more far reaching impact as teachers seek to transcend research into practice.

The literature states that a successful coaching model must entail collaboration, mentoring, theory, demonstration, practice, and feedback in its conceptual framework. Even though these components are stated in the literature, evidence of its effectiveness and the components of an effective model are extremely limited. The result of this research provides evidence of both its effectiveness and displays what the various components entails in reality in successful programs. Through documentation, field notes, and participants' voices, how principals and teachers at three schools perceived the literacy coaches' roles and their impact upon their professional development and students' growth is addressed. Research question 4: How do literacy coaches through teacher development impact student's reading behaviors is discussed. However, this research question will be integrated into questions 1, 2, and 3 as it provides support for these questions through the observations of the researcher. The discussion will be followed by the conclusions, implications for further research, the process of literacy coaching, and data dissemination. Specifically, the research questions were:

1. How do literacy coaches impact teacher development?

Research by Elmore and Rothman (2000) found that setting high standards by promoting an overall positive atmosphere through collaboration and mentoring resulted in a boost in student achievement. The results of this study supported the findings of Elmore and Rothman. A team based support system was established where grade level teams shared concerns and planned for improvement. The teachers and literacy coaches in this study set high standards through teamwork. As benchmarks were met, the literacy coach continuously elevated expectations by helping the teachers to increase the rigor in the content being taught. As students achieved success, the teachers were assisted in

increasing the depth of their knowledge of the students. The literacy coach achieved this by planning and collaborating with the teachers to ensure that higher levels of cognition occurred in the classroom.

After professional learning activities, a common practice of the literacy coach was to visit classrooms and provide support for the teachers through mentoring. At this time, the coaches often utilized whisper coaching to support the classroom practices of the teacher. Whisper coaching is a technique in which as the literacy coach observes the teacher, the coach will whisper pointers to help to guide the teacher towards proper strategy implementation. The literacy coaches in this study found this practice to be more beneficial for the teachers and students as well, rather than waiting until later because on the spot correction ensured that teachers implemented strategies properly. Reciprocally, this aspect increased the likelihood of student success. This practice of providing on the spot assistance from authority figures made correction procedures more natural and less intimidating. As a result, teacher growth became a natural part of each school's culture.

In addition to collaboration and mentoring, this study adds to the instructional framework for literacy coaches. Findings support that data targets, goal setting, consistency and fellowship were necessary components that in turn strengthened the base of the literacy coaches' instructional framework. As a whole, the literacy coach kept a continued focus on the data. Data were used as a vehicle for setting high expectations. The literacy coach facilitated continuous increases in teacher learning and student achievement by revisiting the data and setting goals according to data outcomes. After assessments were administered the teachers completed data sheets profiling student outcomes. As data were shared, the teams collaborated and shared strategies for

improvement. The literacy coaches disaggregated the data and results were charted in the school's data room during team meetings. The teachers relied upon the data as their roadmap for instruction. As the data were analyzed, modifications and adjustments were made in order to tailor instruction to the immediate needs of the students. The students were even involved in goal setting and these benchmarks were shared with parents as well at all of the schools. This was accomplished by constantly focusing on the data and keeping everyone informed through parent workshops, newsletters, and class web pages. As a result of this active participation, the students tended to have positive attitudes toward reading because they assumed an active role as goals were established. As students met instructional targets, they were recognized over the morning announcements. This practice helped to establish the literacy coach's position as the expert.

Additionally, established rituals and routines indirectly validated the coach's position as expert as it impacted the success of collaboration and mentoring across the sites. The literacy coaches across sites began to establish a culture of accelerated performance by establishing clear rituals and routines that were customary for the literacy coaches and teachers at each of the perspective schools. Each week the literacy coaches posted a schedule outlining the weekly routine. These schedules were posted outside of the literacy coaches' door and a copy was available in the front office of the school. Posting the schedule sent the message that the work of the literacy coach was important and the work of the literacy coach was validated. Team meetings and professional development activities were held with the literacy coach consistently on the same day every week. By the close of each week the teachers monitored the reading progress of

their students through oral reading assessments. It was a routine for the teachers to bring these completed data sheets with them to the data meetings as they were discussed with the literacy coach. Another routine was data entry. The teachers entered student data into the computer and in the data room. After the data were posted, it was a ritual across the sites to celebrate the achievements of each teacher. Another ritual that seemed to pave the way for successful initiatives with the literacy coaches was providing refreshments. The teachers seemed to appreciate using food to fellowship with colleagues. At one of the sites, the literacy coach provided the refreshments. At the other two sites there was a schedule that designated individuals to bring refreshments.

Other commonalities with the literature were that the literacy coaches across sites built a climate of cohesiveness by maintaining clear expectations and fostering team work as the main technique for creating a culture that supported children's learning and teacher development. The literacy coaches in this study made sure that the vision and mission of their schools were clear and focused. Prior to professional learning initiatives, the vision and mission were further included for review in the presentations prepared by the literacy coaches. In addition, the literacy coaches articulated nonnegotiable principles that the teachers had to adhere to. For example, an organized library was a nonnegotiable. All of the classrooms had to contain a plethora of reading materials suitable from the accelerated to the struggling reader. Having reading materials available to meet the needs of all readers seemed to contribute to the students having positive attitudes towards learning. The importance of reading was evident. The reading materials at each of the sites were easily accessible to the students and were organized in a student friendly manner. The various genres were color-coded and at the eye level of the students.

Classroom libraries across the three sites were equipped with listening stations, fluency activities, and a wide range of reading materials that appealed to the students. Student's work demonstrated an enthusiasm for reading as the doors were elaborately ornate with the students' favorite books. In learning stations, the students worked on print rich activities that facilitated comprehension and an understanding of story elements. There was a school wide culture that promoted free reading and each day began with sustained reading time prior to or during the instructional day. This aspect of building reading into the school's culture contributed to the students having a positive attitude towards reading.

Another important nonnegotiable was that each teacher had to provide intensive small group instruction each day. The teachers and the literacy coaches in this study recognized that focused instruction in a small group setting allowed the teachers to be more in tune to the needs of their students. The students also excelled because they seemed to be at ease and less intimidated in a smaller setting with students with similar abilities. Clear expectations were created that supported student learning and teacher development by having an established plan for improvement. The School Improvement Plans were not only a central part of professional learning initiatives, but they were continually revisited and compared to data. Subsequent review of the School Improvement Plan helped to create a shared belief system between the literacy coaches, the teachers, and the principals that all had to adhere to as part of the school's culture. As a result, the belief system was established which ensured buy-in from all of the stakeholders. Consequently, there was a school wide collective dedication to transcending student achievement.

Furthermore, this study adds to the literature as the literacy coaches in this study created a supportive culture for the teachers by forming relationships as a staff. The literacy coaches and the principals at each of the sites encouraged collegiality both in and out of school. In school, teachers were spotlighted and celebrated based on their accomplishments. Outside of the school day, the staff voluntarily participated in activities, such as a birthday club that entailed gathering at a restaurant on the staff member's birthday. The principals and the literacy coaches also made attending extracurricular activities of the children of staff members a priority. The coaches and the principals oftentimes visited local churches and recreational sports events outside of the school day in order to see the performances of the students and children of staff members. The coaches and principals felt that activities such as these helped to build the camaraderie of the staff. As relationships were established through activities and involvement, barriers to success were minimized.

According to Wilkinson (2002), effective teachers emphasized high expectations for student behavior and learning by acknowledgement and praise. This study supported Wilkinson's findings; yet the findings from this study found that the overall atmosphere of the school emphasized excellence as well. Throughout the school building, inspiring quotes or murals were posted. Teachers and staff members at each of the three schools greeted students each morning to encourage a productive day. At the outset of the day, a heartening aura was established as the students at each of the sites recited the school's pledge where they affirmed a positive learning day.

This study extends the literature in that it found that a major factor across each of the sites was the establishment of partnerships between the principal and the literacy

coach where the groundwork for high expectations was formed. The two entities worked together and the efforts of the literacy coach were supported by the principal. Hence, the principal conceded to entrusting the literacy coach as the school's instructional leader which enabled the coach to implement policy with the principal's consent. At the advisement of the literacy coach, the principal further accommodated time within the school day for peer observations in order to facilitate teamwork and to communicate the importance of each entity being accountable to the other.

2. How do literacy coaches perceive the process of literacy coaching impacting teacher development?

The works of Wenger (1998) found that it is necessary for teachers to be involved in networks that interact in communities of practice in order to reflect, inquire and examine current methodologies. This study accentuates the literature. In addition to teachers interacting in networks, the literacy coaches in this study attended monthly cohort meetings where they participated in an exchange of ideas with other literacy coaches across the district to build collegiality and ensure equity for all students. One literacy coach found that a good way to build camaraderie and initiate professional learning was through motivational storytelling. A motivational story was shared in order to recharge the teachers and encourage the teachers to continue to strive for success. Stories such as these seemed to help teachers to feel free to try various strategies and not feel threatened. The literacy coach also ensured that the teachers were aware that they were appreciated by often recognizing best practices in action during professional development activities. These activities led to the acceptance of learning as part of the school's culture.

Veenman and Denessen (2001) found that the inclusion of coaching and feedback resulted in professional development initiatives being successful 90% of the time. In a like manner, Showers and Joyce (1996) found, that on-site coaching and follow-up improved instructional practices. Gerrits and Kenter (2001) also found that the modeling of strategies and providing specific feedback on-site supported instructional change. Little (1989) added that the absence of follow-up often resulted in overall ineffectiveness. The literacy coaches in this study concurred with the preceding scholars. Another commonality among the coaches was being visible, collaborating with teachers, and providing constructive feedback to the teachers regarding instructional practices. Classroom observations and conferencing assumed 50% of the literacy coach's day. During this time, the coaches visited classrooms and often modeled or observed strategies in action. The literacy coaches also supported immediate changes in the classroom by modeling for teachers in order to ensure an in depth understanding of the research based practices. Conferences were held oftentimes before and after classroom observations.

This research extends the literature, because the coaches in this study found it an important factor to use a targeted observational tool to build teacher knowledge and expectations as feedback was provided. Each of the coaches utilized diagnostic checklists to note strengths and weaknesses as instruction took place. Afterwards, the aspects of concern from the checklist would be discussed. The coaches viewed the follow-up with feedback as a critical component of their successes because the conferences helped the teachers to remain informed about their instructional growth.

Slater and Simmons (2001) added that coaching tended to foster a community of learners in coalition to improve overall student achievement. These scholars expressed

the importance of integrating professional learning in the daily work that teachers do in their classrooms and with their colleagues. The findings in this study support the literature. It was found that student achievement improved as colleagues developed a common understanding as the literacy coach facilitated teamwork. In addition, the findings from this study show having an on-site expert helped the teachers to develop a thorough understanding of content knowledge. On the other hand, this study found that top down support was a vital factor needed to ensure compliance among the teachers. The literacy coach took the lead in establishing the culture focused on targeted instruction and peer collaboration. The principal provided release time during the instructional day to ensure an in depth understanding of research based practices. In addition, the principal also participated in the professional learning initiatives that the literacy coach orchestrated. This set the tone for overall buy-in and ensured compliance.

Shanahan (2006) reported that effective teachers were mindful of student progress and fine-tuned their practices accordingly. However, the literature did not explicitly state the protocol for focusing on student progress. The literacy coaches in this study had frequent meetings with teachers. There was a systematic approach for ascertaining the levels of readiness for students in place. Teachers administered pretests, after which, data meetings were held. During data meetings, as a team, and under the facilitation of the literacy coach, the teachers pinpointed the root causes of deficiencies and developed learning goals and an instructional plan geared to meet the needs of the students. The data meetings also provided time for the teachers to evaluate the data in order to determine their instructional effectiveness. After the data were revisited, adjustments were made as needed.

Likewise, The National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (1999) outlined reflection, collaboration, and a focus on teacher communities of practice as essential features of teacher professional development. These aspects correlated with the fundamentals of coaching that were evident across each of the sites included in this study. The coaches facilitated collaboration and teamwork. In addition, the literacy coaches across each of the sites provided extensive support through modeling and feedback.

Sweeney (2003) reported that effective professional development must be on-going and specific to the needs of teachers. Furthermore, Sergiovanni (2001) found that effective professional development was characterized by collaboration and sense of community among teachers in a school. Additionally, Steiner (2000) reported job-embedded on-going professional development resulted in sustained growth and change in instructional practices. These research findings support these aspects. The literacy coaches across sites met with the teachers on a consistent basis for professional learning activities. This study found however; that professional learning initiatives were beneficial to teachers when they were infused with active learning, rather than a traditional workshop model. Each of the coaches utilized needs assessment surveys and data in order to determine the professional learning needs at each of the sites. The professional learning occurred during the school day and release time was provided. The professional learning activities included collaboration, data analysis, planning and training on research based strategies. Data also seemed to play a significant role in the professional development initiatives across each of the sites. Having an emphasis on the data seemed

to help motivate teachers as they examined first hand to see practices that worked as well as those that did not work.

In essence, this study validates instructional coaching as an effective professional development strategy that creates a school's culture that promotes learning and growth. This section also fills the gap in the literature regarding specific tasks that literacy coaches need to implement in order to make professional learning a part of a school's culture.

3. How do teachers and principals perceive the process of literacy coaching impacting teacher development?

Brown (2000) recognized frequent and meaningful exchanges between teachers was necessary in order to build a climate of cohesiveness in which effective working relationships were established as a significant aspect to the success of the coaching initiative. The National Staff Development Council (2001) recognized the necessity of teachers being organized into learning communities with high expectations in order to improve teacher professional development and facilitate continuous instructional improvement. In addition, Harris (2003) acknowledged the benefit of teamwork and its role in building a climate of cohesiveness and effective working relationships.

Correspondingly, the findings in this research project supported the literature. The teachers felt that the literacy coaches established teamwork by making time for conversations that defined common understandings about teaching and learning. On the other hand, in addition to teamwork, one of the literacy coaches attributed creating a supportive and positive team-based environment, as the main way to support the students and teachers, was essential. A team based environment was created as the literacy

coaches formed cohorts of teachers who collaborated on lesson planning and were involved in thoughtful discourse about academia. It differed from the normal concept of teamwork because it required the participants to come to a consensus regarding norms for the school and norms for team meetings. Ultimately the collaborative team agreed upon the values that led to the elevation of student achievement.

This research adds to this body of literature, in that the work of the literacy coach seemed to build the leadership and instructional capacity of the teachers. As a result of the teacher's interactions with the literacy coach and principals at each of the sites, there was the outgrowth of shared beliefs and the collective ability to affect teacher practices and student achievement. As teachers participated in interactive professional development initiatives that were targeted to their needs, the teachers became empowered. After extensive work with the literacy coach, the teachers owned the strategy and as a result were able to make sound decisions about paths of learning for students. Although the three literacy coaches were at different schools in rural Georgia, the participants' perceptions of their role and how teacher instruction and student learning were impacted were similar across sites. The teachers and principals across all three sites acknowledged the literacy coach as the instructional leader at each of the sites. This designation can be attributed to the literacy coaches at each of the sites asserting themselves as the on-site literary expert. Each of these coaches planned the professional learning at their respective locations after a careful analysis of standardized test data, observations, and a teacher needs assessment survey. The teachers also seemed to appreciate active participation in professional development activities.

Showers (1985) found that follow-up support after teacher training facilitated teacher learning and alleviated misconceptions. Harris and Lambert (2003) supported collaboration where teachers and coaches accept joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work. Frost and Durant (2003) further suggested extensive support for teachers as professional development initiatives are implemented. These researchers recognized the need to collaborate throughout the process in order to continually evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies being used.

The findings from this research study further support the necessity of active engagement and follow-up. After professional learning initiatives, the literacy coaches across each of the sites frequently visited classrooms as the teachers put the research into practice. As the teachers were provided with assistance and support throughout the implementation process, they felt free to take risks. Collective participation of educators in the form of grade-level or a school-level team was cited as being necessary in order for change to be successful. The principal expressed the importance of teacher-coach collaboration as a means of sharing responsibility for student learning and working toward a common purpose. Grade level teams assumed the responsibility for spearheading instructional changes by participating in peer observations. After grade level teams observed a strategy in action, observations were discussed and constructive feedback was provided that detailed three aspects that worked well in the lesson and one consideration for improvement.

Fullan (2002) outlined characteristics of leaders. He explained that leaders facilitate efforts of improvement that were targeted, specific, and focused on student learning. This body of research supported this aspect. The literacy coach was responsible

for each of the sites having a unified perspective where the learning targets were clearly established. The work with the literacy coach clarified the instructional focus and ensured that the students received appropriate instruction. The research findings from this study identified the literacy coach as the instructional leader in each of the sites observed. The literacy coach served as the catalyst for increased student achievement across sites by facilitating team collaboration, reflection, and follow-up. Having an on-site support person and extensive job-embedded professional development seemed to boost the overall productivity of the teachers. Across sites, the coach assisted in formulating collaborative teams as well as facilitating the understanding of data driven decision making. Overall, the coach and principal were designated as being integral in molding a school wide culture that maximized high performance. This high performance culture supported students in their environment. The students observed in this study exemplified a positive attitude towards reading.

Kamil (2006) suggested that coaching and mentoring focused on strengthening teacher practices in the classroom. Stanovich and Stanovich (2003) further contended that professional development is inclusive of in-class observations of teachers implementing new strategies combined with reflection and the planning of next steps. The findings from this study demonstrate that the teachers and principals recognized the literacy coach as the instructional leader. Additionally, the findings revealed the literacy coach being responsible for facilitating the growth of their colleagues while acting as a mentor and curriculum specialist. Interactions between the teachers and the literacy coach both in and out of the classroom were recognized as having helped to improve pedagogical knowledge and skills. As a result, teacher practices were impacted as the literacy coach

monitored the implementation thus facilitating the transfer to classroom practice. In essence, the perceptions of the participants were that the literacy coach was an integral part of their professional growth and which resulted in an increase in student achievement.

The Process of Literacy Coaching

Based upon the findings in this study, a literacy coach must be a catalyst for change in four areas in order to establish themselves as legitimate instructional leaders. Successful literacy coaches must have the ability to manage the professional growth and development of teachers in order to ensure empowerment and sustainability of skills learned. The literacy coach must also have the ability to manage curriculum implementation in order to safeguard student growth towards state and local accountability measures. An additional factor necessary for successful literacy coaching entails managing the learning environment. This aspect creates a welcoming atmosphere and sets the stage for a productive learning environment. Lastly, and most importantly, the literacy coach must form alliances with teachers and administrators in order to promote trust and risk-taking. However, without the support of the principal, none of the above is possible. Therefore, from the outset, the literacy coach must lay the foundation for a strong coalition with the building level principal in order to ensure buy-in.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the purpose of this research was to understand the various ways that literacy coaches create a culture that supports children's learning and teacher development in their environment. According to the instructional framework found in the literature, successful literacy coaching entails collaboration, mentoring, theory,

demonstration, practice, and feedback. However, in addition, the findings from this study examined that data analysis, reflection, the application of research based practices and collegiality were critical features in a successful literacy coaching model. Moreover, this study brings to the fore a clear depiction of what the instructional framework for a literacy coach epitomizes. Acting as the instructional leader, the literacy coach spearheaded learning teams that focused on refining and enhancing instructional practices while creating a culture that established the overall camaraderie of the school community.

The findings of this study further conclude that the literacy coaches were the catalyst for improvement. All of the literacy coaches in this study were not only trained from the same coaching model, their training was ongoing and updated as coaches shared their experiences in the schools. They provided the teachers with learning opportunities over time and in context, in order to increase the chances of affecting teacher learning and classroom practice. The literacy coaches spearheaded active engagement in professional development activities while setting the stage for a supportive risk-free environment that promoted collegiality. In turn, the work of the literacy coaches was supported by the principal. This top-down support resulted in teacher effectiveness and student engagement was positively impacted because the teachers welcomed professional development initiatives.

Just as students need highly qualified teachers, it is important for teachers to receive high quality professional development through literacy coaches. Students and teachers share a reciprocal relationship. As teachers are better prepared, the students are better prepared as well. Literacy coaches are the key to ensuring a framework and foundation of instructional effectiveness by increasing the pedagogy of teachers. Through

collaboration, the literacy coach can facilitate teachers' teaching and learners' learning. As teachers and coaches work in tandem, students benefit because student learning is then placed within our sphere of influence and high levels of learning are created for all students.

The outcome of this study affirms literacy coaching as an effective professional development model that enhances teacher development and children's learning in their environment. Acting as instructional leaders, the literacy coaches used coaching as a vehicle to promote professional growth through job-embedded support, modeling, monitoring, and feedback. As a result student achievement was impacted positively and the teachers in the study were more cognizant of research-based practices and methodologies.

Implications for Future Research

The results of the research have been noted to include Title I schools in rural Georgia. The Reading First coaching model was very successful for these coaches; however, future studies are needed to determine the coaching model's adaptability and effectiveness with other students. In addition, further research is needed to discover the effectiveness of the coaches by tracking the performance of the coaches and students over extended periods of time or perhaps the performance of the students after exiting the elementary school setting allowing for more consistent and conclusive results.

In addition, it is noted that a collaborative community of learners where data drives instruction appeared to have an affect on student achievement. Future studies may be able to address the impact of relationships and professional learning communities on student achievement. Moreover, research designs that incorporate the perspectives of

other stakeholders, such as community members, students, and parents, should be performed in order to determine whether there is a link between school culture, school community relationships and student achievement.

Dissemination

The outcomes of this study will be shared with district and state level personnel as they seek resolution in the implementation of effective coaching models. At the local school level, this research will be utilized as a springboard for mentoring new literacy coaches. Ultimately, this scholarship will be published and shared in academic journals that promote educational leadership, supervision, and curriculum development. These findings will further be presented at various academic conferences.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Site Observation Data Collection Instrument/ Location: _____ Date: _____

What is the coach doing or saying?	What is the teacher doing or saying?	What are the students doing or saying?

Appendix B

Scheduled Interview Sheet for Principals

Date: _____ Name of Interviewer: _____

Participant Number: _____

1.	How would you describe the students, teachers and parents in this school? (Race, SES, education, etc)
2.	Approximately how many students attend this school? Out of this group approximately how many are struggling readers at the outset of the reading program? (About what percent of your student population does this entail?)
3.	Describe your k-3 reading program before and after the presence of a literacy coach.
4.	Have you utilized more research based strategies since having a literacy coach?
5.	Do you think a literacy coach is a benefit to the teachers, students and school? Why or Why not?
6.	How has your literacy coach helped teachers improve reading instruction?
7.	What role has the literacy coach played in helping your school maintain student success in reading?
8.	Explain how your reading coach has helped students achieve reading success.
9.	Describe the daily routine of your literacy coach.
10.	What do you think has been the biggest contribution to the improvements in your K-3 reading program in the past three years?
11.	What are teachers' biggest complaints about the current reading program? How are these complaints addressed?
12.	How are struggling and proficient readers identified?
13.	How does your school differentiate instruction to meet the needs of struggling and proficient readers?
14.	What practices have contributed to the improvement of student reading?
15.	What benefits do you think your teachers and students and teachers have gained since acquiring a literacy coach?

Appendix C

Scheduled Interview Sheet for Teachers

Date: _____ Name of Interviewer: _____ Participant No. _____

1.	What benefits do you think your teachers and students and teachers have gained since acquiring a literacy coach?
2.	What practices have contributed to the improvement of student reading?
3.	How does your school differentiate instruction to meet the needs of struggling and proficient readers?
4.	What do you think has been the biggest contribution to the improvements in your K-3 reading program in the past three years?
5.	What are teachers' biggest complaints about the current reading program? How are these complaints addressed?
6.	How are struggling and proficient readers identified?
7.	Do you think a literacy coach is beneficial to you as a teacher? Explain.
8.	As the result of having a literacy coach, have you made any changes in your reading instructional practices? Explain
9.	Have you utilized more research based strategies since having a literacy coach?
10.	In what ways has the literacy coach hindered your reading instruction?
11.	In what ways has the literacy coach positively impacted your reading instruction?
12.	How does your school differentiate instruction to meet the needs of struggling and proficient readers?
13.	What practices have contributed to the improvement of student reading?
14.	What benefits do you think your teachers and students and teachers have gained since acquiring a literacy coach?

Appendix D

Scheduled Interview Sheet for Literacy Coach

Date: _____ Name of Interviewer: _____ Participant No. _____

1.	Do you have specialized knowledge/training in reading? Explain.
2.	Describe your school's reading program for grades k-3.
3.	How would you describe the students, teachers and parents in this school?
4.	What are some of the challenges that you have faced since becoming the literacy coach?
5.	Do you work with both teachers and students? Explain.
6.	What obstacles have hindered your work as a literacy coach? How have you overcome these obstacles?
7.	What are some specific ways that you address professional development in reading with your teachers?
8.	In addition to, or in lieu of professional development, what have you done to help faculty & students to promote reading success?
9.	Describe the methods that you utilize to help teachers to assist struggling readers.
10.	How would you describe your leadership style?
11.	How would you describe your daily operations? Does your day consist of modeling, planning, observing or a combination of the three?
12.	Do you work with both teachers and students? Explain
13.	Why do you feel you have been an effective literacy coach?
14.	How does your school differentiate instruction to meet the needs of struggling and proficient readers?
15.	What practices have contributed to the improvement of student reading?
16.	What benefits do you think your teachers and students and teachers have gained since acquiring a literacy coach?