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With the federal initiatives of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, many school districts are employing literacy coaching in their quest to improve reading test scores. This study seeks to understand teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching to answer this primary research question: "What meanings do teachers make of literacy coaching?" Additional questions of interest included how teachers described their literacy coaching experiences, how administrators influenced literacy coaching at their school, what teachers perceived as *effective* literacy coaching, and the participants' professional development needs related to literacy coaching.

Research has suggested that instructional coaching *can* provide the support that teachers need (Guskey, 2000; International Reading Association, 2006). However, to maximize the benefits of instructional literacy coaching for teachers, it is important to understand what actually makes coaching effective from the perspective of teachers receiving coaching. Unfortunately, there is currently very little research that actually explores the meanings that teachers make regarding literacy coaching. Therefore, this study sought to understand literacy coaching from teachers' perspectives.

Using a phenomenological approach, six teachers from three Title I elementary schools were interviewed three times each following Seidman's (2006) interview model. The data analysis process consisted of

decontextualization and recontextualization (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). During decontextualization, data were sorted by the teachers' responses according to each interview question and highlighting key words in order to compare and contrast the responses and also to help identify main categories. During the recontextualization phase, a second level of coding was used to merge significant words, phrases, or events that recurred across all interviews into themes. These themes were used to describe major ideas that emerged from the data to describe the participants' lived experiences of literacy coaching.

The findings of this study suggested that teachers welcome literacy coaching because they seek to become more effective teachers. A trusting and open relationship was found to be key in the coaching process, as was clear communication. The findings also indicated that school administrators can positively or negatively influence literacy coaching. In addition, teachers desired literacy coaches who took a hands-on approach to coaching by being actively involved in their own professional development and not just being a disseminator of information from the school or district administrators. The results of the study led to several implications for literacy coaches, school administrators, and district administrators. Ideas for future research were also provided.

LITERACY COACHING THROUGH TEACHERS' LENSES:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Committee Chair

To Allen, Ariel, and Alyson

Tough times don't last, but tough people do.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by STEPHANIE LEE DAVIS has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I started my teaching career over 20 years ago as a first grade teacher. During that time I did not have a literacy coach or curriculum coach/facilitator on-site to provide me with instructional support as a new classroom teacher. In my tenth year of education, I began working as a curriculum facilitator (CF), and my responsibilities included assisting administrators and teachers in understanding and implementing the curriculum, conducting assessments aligned to the curriculum, and reaching the instructional goals of the school by providing collaboration, consulting, and coaching services to those within the school. This position also included providing professional development (PD) to teachers through model lessons, workshops, professional learning community (PLC) meetings, and coaching sessions with the direct goal or outcome of increasing student achievement. I have served as a curriculum facilitator (CF) in three different schools. One school I served had an affluent population, and the other two were Title I schools that served high minority populations.

While serving as a CF, I made many classroom visits, also called “walk-throughs,” which were considered to be informal visits to assess the quality of the teacher’s instruction and to determine the level of student engagement in the learning process. School and district administrators also did the same.

Sometimes we did walk-throughs together, and at other times they were done separately. However, when district personnel were in the building, they typically visited classrooms with the principal. There were often discussions about the observations during the walk-throughs so that we could compare our findings. Typically, the end result was for me, the CF, to be given a list of teachers who needed support, and this list was typically categorized by level or type of need. This list also included recommendations or sometimes directives as to what needed to be done “to”, “with”, or “for” the teacher. For example, I may be told to do a model lesson in a teacher’s classroom without a discussion with the teacher about what type of help she needed or even if she thought a demonstration lesson was the type of help that she needed. In my seven years of being a CF, my main recollections were that literacy coaching seemed to be more a directive from an administrator than a collaborative conversation with the teacher about his or her needs.

Furthermore, teachers were typically told that I would be helping them and sometimes specifically how I would help. As the CF I was faced with the challenge of making this process a collaborative one while also following orders in the process. I often wondered, “What does the teacher feel like she needs? Where does she think that she needs the most help? How can I help her?” Many questions began to go through my head, but the fact remains that I want to maximize the effectiveness of literacy coaching.

Current and past research (Guskey, 2000; International Reading Association, 2006) has suggested that instructional coaching *can* provide the support that teachers need. In order to maximize the benefits of instructional literacy coaching for teachers, it is important to understand what actually makes coaching effective for teachers. While the premise of coaching is to provide support for teachers, the design of coaching models is often done in a “top down” manner where administrators or professional developers make the decisions regarding the kinds of coaching that teachers receive (Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996). In fact, as an educator with several years of experience as a professional developer and a literacy coach, I can attest to teachers having little to no say regarding the amount or the type of coaching that they receive. Because teacher participation is at the heart of any coaching model, I believe that teachers’ voices should be heard regarding the meanings they make about coaching, and specifically about literacy coaching. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to believe that teachers’ meanings of effective literacy coaching may be a contributing factor to the success of the coaching process. However, there is currently very little research that actually explores the meanings that teachers make regarding literacy coaching.

Historical Framework of Professional Development and Literacy Coaching

In thinking about the traits of an effective teacher, words like knowledgeable, insightful, creative, and innovative come to mind. Of course there are many factors that contribute to the effectiveness of teachers. One

characteristic stated in the research (Guiney, 2001; Guskey, 2003; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 1980; L’Allier, Elish-Piper, Bean, 2010) is teachers’ participation in ongoing professional development. Teachers’ continual growth in knowledge and skills seems to be a key factor in the process of improving student achievement. One of the avenues for professional growth for teachers is believed to occur through professional development (Levin, 2003).

Professional development for educators has continued to evolve along with education. In fact, the former National Council of Staff Development (NCSD), now called Learning Forward (see <http://learningforward.org/>), uses the term “professional learning” rather than professional development to capture the lifelong nature of teachers’ learning and improving their content and pedagogical knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, in this study, I will continue to use the term professional development (PD) to describe part of what literacy coaches do because this is the term I still hear most teachers and administrators using.

Professional development has long been a part of the education environment and can be defined as “a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement ” (Hirsh, 2009, p. 12). Other terms that are often used synonymously with professional development include staff development, in-service training, teacher training, and professional training, although the most current term is professional learning. In fact, Learning Forward, which publishes the Journal of Staff Development, has created new standards for professional

learning. The Standards Revisions Task Force and Standards Advisory made the decision to change the name from Standards of Professional Development to Standards of Professional Learning:

The decision to call these Standards for Professional Learning rather than Standards for Professional Development signals the importance of educators taking an active role in their continuous development and places emphasis on their learning. The professional learning that occurs when these standards are fully implemented enrolls educators as active partners in determining the content of their learning, how their learning occurs, and how they evaluate its effectiveness (“Standards for Professional Learning,” 2011).

Teachers’ participation in PD can be voluntary or mandatory. These “trainings” range from attending conferences, to one-day district-level trainings, to several mini-training sessions after school, to ongoing job-embedded training led by building-level teacher leaders, instructional coaches, or curriculum facilitators. Regardless of the type or length of the PD, it is typically required at some point for licensed teachers because of continuing education credits for licensure renewal or school or district mandates regarding the implementation of a new academic or instructional programs. While PD can occur in a variety of ways, instructional coaching has emerged as a new role in recent years, more specifically literacy coaching, because of the focus on PD for teachers in efforts to increase student achievement in reading (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2009; Haughey, Snart, Da Costa, 2001; Poglinco & Bach, 2004).

With this increase of literacy coaching, English language arts (ELA) teachers supposedly have more support in improving their instructional practices. However, I have found there is a dearth in the literature that actually examines teachers' perspectives on the literacy support that they receive. While the literature that explores the need for coaching (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2010; Hsieh, Memmeter; McCollum, Ostrosky, 2009; L'Allier, Elish-Piper, Bean, 2010; Neuman & Wright, 2010), various types of coaching support (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa, Byrk, & Dexter, 2010; Denton, Swanson, & Mathes, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Lapp, Fisher, & Flood, 2003; L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010; Steckel, 2009; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, Lamitina, 2010), and the impact of coaching (Al Otaiba et al., 2008; Bintz 2007; Kennedy & Shiel, 2013; Matsumura, Garnier, Correnti, Junker, & DiPrima Bickel, 2010; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013; Porche, Pallante, & Snow, 2012; Shaw, 2007; Steckel. 2009; Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Shoniker, 2011) are well represented, research that explores what teachers believe, want, and/or need from literacy coaching is lacking.

In the remainder of this chapter I will: (1) describe the political context that has impacted PD for teachers and the emergence of literacy coaching, (2) defend the need for literacy coaching, and (3) make an argument for why teachers' voices are needed so that we can learn what type of literacy coaching they need, and what they consider to be effective coaching support. Because teachers must be receptive to literacy coaching in order for there to be a positive

influence on their literacy practices (Gusky, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 1982), their voices should be heard in the coaching process.

The Connection of Professional Development and the No Child Left Behind Legislature

Because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation passed in 2001, PD progressed to the forefront in the educational world due to requirements for increased accountability (Hirsh, 2009; Huffman & Thomas, 2003). In order to understand increased demands for PD, one must understand the four pillars of the NCLB legislation because there are direct implications regarding PD in three of them (“Four Pillars of NCLB”, 2004).

One of the requirements of NCLB was “stronger accountability for results” based on disparities in achievement levels in various groups of students when considering state mandated test scores. Under the NCLB legislature, schools were required to make adequate yearly progress with all students being proficient in reading and math. Schools that did not make adequately yearly progress for five years were required to make drastic changes in the way they were run (“Four Pillars of NCLB”, 2004). Continuous and quality PD for teachers was believed to be a key link in overcoming the challenges in meeting these goals.

Another pillar of NCLB was “more freedom for states and communities”. This requirement simply meant that schools were given more control and flexibility regarding how they used their federal funding. School districts had the ability to use funds, for example, to hire more teachers, to increase salaries, and

to develop and/or increase PD. Therefore, under NCLB, schools had an opportunity to increase and improve the training for teachers and administrators (“Four Pillars of NCLB”, 2004).

The third pillar of NCLB included the use of “proven educational methods”. This pillar emphasized the use of instruction based on scientific research that had been proven effective (“Four Pillars of NCLB”, 2004; Department of Education, 2001). Federal funds were earmarked to support these kinds of programs. According to NCLB’s definition (Department of Education, 2001) of scientifically-based research, programs must:

- 1) employ systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment
- 2) involve rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions
- 3) rely on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers
- 4) be accepted by peer reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts.

In order to effectively implement new programs, quality PD was needed to properly train teachers and administrators in a quest to improve student achievement.

The fourth pillar of NCLB, “more choices for parents”, did not have the same direct implications regarding professional development as the other three (“Four Pillars of NCLB”, 2004). However, this pillar meant that students no longer had to stay at low performing schools, or in those that were continuously

dangerous, or where any student had been the victim of a violent crime. Parents of children in consistently low-performing schools had the option to transfer their children to a better performing public school within their district (“Four Pillars of NCLB”, 2004).

Considering these foundational principles of NCLB, one can see the intent to generate greater accountability. As a result, more emphasis was put on PD for teachers, and school administrators searched for appropriate strategies and programs to increase student achievement (Hirsh, 2009; Huffman & Thomas, 2003; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). Schools are looking to improve professional training in hopes of increasing teacher knowledge and skill with the intention of this translating to an increase in student learning that is evident in an increase in scores on state-mandated tests (Killion, 2003).

With this increased interest in PD for teachers, questions of how a district should go about meeting the requirements of NCLB (Benton & Benton, 2008; Guskey, 2003) and questions of what makes it effective have emerged. However, many researchers (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Bean & Isler, 2008; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Coggshall, Rasmussen, Colton, Milton, Jacques, 2012; Hunzicker, 2011) have found that sending teachers to one-day or short-term PD in which they are exposed to new programs and strategies and are expected to implement their new ideas was highly unlikely and ineffective. Providing training to “fix” teachers was generally unproductive because it did not allow any buy-in from the teachers, was typically done from a deficit view, and did not provide opportunities

for job-embedded professional learning to develop strong learning communities and professional cultures within schools (Baron, 2008). Additionally, researchers found that PD should be embedded in a teacher's daily work because of its link to student learning (Atteberry & Byrk, 2011; Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007; Stover et al., 2011). Therefore, because of the mandates of NCLB and the belief that effective PD for teachers was key to the improvement of student success, there has been an emergence of research regarding the need for effective PD.

The impact of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). When considering the high-stakes testing that is prevalent in schools today because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, more attention has been focused on student achievement, particularly in the core areas of literacy and mathematics (Orlich, 2004). In fact, NCLB (2001) mandated increased funding for professional development in hopes of increasing teacher content and pedagogical knowledge in literacy with the goal of increasing student reading achievement. However, the 2013 NAEP report (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013) stated that there have been no gains in the average reading score of American fourth graders since 2009. According to the 2013 NAEP report, still only 41 percent of America's fourth graders performed at or above the *basic* level in reading while only 34 percent performed at the *proficient* level which is not significantly different from the 2011 NAEP report. Those fourth-grade students who performed at the *basic* level should be able to locate relevant information, infer, and use the text to

support their interpretations and conclusions. Additionally, fourth graders performing at the proficient level should be able to integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations.

Furthermore, there was no significance improvement in the eighth grade reading scores. The 2013 NAEP report indicated that 38 percent of eighth graders were reading at the *basic* achievement level and only 27 percent of eighth graders performed at or above the *proficient* level (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). Once again, students who performed at the basic level were technically *less than* proficient, and that suggests that they really do not have the necessary skills to be prepared to compete in a global society. With little improvement in NAEP scores in recent years, educators are faced with the reality that much work is still left to be done.

To summarize, even though there is more emphasis on testing and PD since the NCLB act, there has been little to no gain in reading achievement for fourth and eighth grade students. Additionally, when considering fourth grade data, the achievement gaps between Caucasians and other minority groups remain constant because there were no significant changes in the average reading scores from 2007 to 2013 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). Even though there was a slight increase in the eighth grade reading scores, the Caucasian, Black, and Hispanic groups each had the same rate of

increase. Therefore, the achievement gap between Caucasian students and the Black and Hispanic minority groups was not significantly impacted.

The shift to Race to the Top (RttT) Initiative. More recently under the Obama administration, a new educational initiative was implemented. The Race to the Top Program (RttT) has continued to promote a high level of accountability but from a different perspective. RttT is an incentive-based program and was designed to reward school districts, administrators, and teachers for the academic achievement of their students. The 4.35 billion dollar RttT fund was the largest amount designated for education from the federal government in American history (Department of Education, 2009). States had to compete for the money by going through a rigorous application process. There were several criteria that state education systems had to meet in order to receive RttT funding.

One criterion in particular had direct implications for PD, more specifically for instructional coaching for teachers and principals. The RttT scoring rubric directly stated that the expectation was for education systems to “develop teachers and principals, including providing relevant coaching, induction support, and/or professional development” (Department of Education, 2009, p. 9). Similar to the NCLB legislation, the main purpose of the RttT program was to increase student achievement, specifically in reading and mathematics. The RttT program provided federal funds to education systems to support them in their training efforts by developing and supporting teachers who could effectively teach our students.

Because reading achievement continued to be predominantly defined by standardized test scores, teachers were under even more pressure for their students to perform well on mandated tests. With governmental funding given to school districts to increase overall student achievement, there was increased pressure on teachers to teach effectively. However, with more than 8,000,000 adolescents who have not mastered the necessary reading skills to meet secondary school requirements or to compete for meaningful jobs in the workplace, the reality is that many students are still failing and are not prepared to compete in the global economy (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). Because of these results, and because of NCLB legislation and the RtT program, more emphasis had to be put on the PD of teachers.

Professional Development Formats

With so much emphasis being placed on PD for teachers and literacy achievement for students, it is important to examine the different formats of PD that are available for teachers. A common form of PD is the “one-shot” workshop or seminar in which the presenter leads the session by sharing his/her experience or the required information in a lecture or “sit and get” style. Typically there are handouts given and some type of visual presentation, such as a PowerPoint. Sessions at conferences are under tight time restraints so there may not be much time for sharing or talking with the other participants in the session. One-day workshops may offer a little more engagement because there is a little

more time, but my experience has been that they are usually presented lecture style.

One benefit of the above types of PD is that they usually occur in a short time period, and teachers are able to receive a lot of information in a short amount of time. Depending on the length of the session or the number of days of the conference, teachers could possibly participate in a variety of sessions that address many of their professional needs. Conference-style PD usually gives teachers many choices in sessions to attend, so they are able to select a session that is of interest to them. Another benefit is that one-day workshop or conference sessions is that they are generally focused on a single topic, which means teachers may leave feeling like they have information that they can readily use in their classrooms. However, in reality there is no accountability for what is learned and no follow-up support related to these one-shot PD formats.

Another form of PD is college courses. These classes can be taken online or face-to-face on campus. Teachers typically take college classes to earn a higher degree or certification in a specialty area. Teachers who take college courses do so individually and in isolation. In other words, college courses typically are not part of a school-wide or district-wide professional development plan. Because there are a variety of topics that are taught in the classes, they may or may not relate to the teacher's current teaching practices, areas of weaknesses, or concerns (Neuman & Wright, 2010).

However, a benefit of participating in this kind of PD is that it is sustained over one or more semesters, and teachers are engaged in the learning process through classwork. An added benefit could be financial compensation for the earning of a higher-level degree or certification. However, like workshops and seminars, because there is no follow up or support given at the school level, implementation may be more difficult. In fact, college coursework has been found to be less effective when no coaching support is given (Neuman & Wright, 2010).

Additionally, PD is also offered through professional learning communities (PLCs) which are defined as “collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek, 2004, p. 3). The element that makes education PLCs different than just a grade level or team meeting is that the focus is on student learning. Teachers who are a part of an effective PLC have shifted the emphasis away from what they are teaching to how they are teaching in order to help students to learn (DuFour et al., 2004). During this time, teachers collaborate as they work together to respond to the three main questions: (1) What do we want our students to learn? (2) How will we know when they have learned it? (3) How will we respond when they don't?

Properly functioning PLCs are referred to as a viable method of PD because teachers are able to collaborate and share experiences, ideas, and strategies that are focused on teacher improvement in a quest to promote or increase student learning (DuFour et al, 2004). Not only do teachers receive

tangible support through sharing (instructional strategies, materials, books, handouts, etc.), but they may also receive emotional or classroom support because the teachers have an avenue to share their struggles or challenges in reaching their students.

Another popular format of PD that is offered for teachers is job-embedded training sessions that can be offered in a series of sessions over time within the course of a few months or throughout the school year. This type of PD is done in small intervals, such as a few hours after school or a few hours on a workday. Usually job-embedded PD is offered in smaller segments as part of a bigger PD plan or PD framework. Further, it is more likely to be based on the needs, vision, or goals of the school (Fisher & Frey 2007; Huffman & Thomas, 2003; Kinnucan-Welsch, et al. 2006).

One additional PD format is instructional coaching, which is the focus of this dissertation. More administrators and educational policy makers have come to realize that the problem that teachers encounter after receiving PD is not having follow-up support after receiving PD training (Deussen et al., 2007; Matsumura et. al., 2010; Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996). Literacy coaching is designed to provide this kind of support, to help or guide classroom teachers so they can improve their teaching practices in literacy. While many teachers may attend PD sessions with great intentions of not only receiving new information but also being able to implement the newly learned knowledge into their classroom or their teaching practices, this is often difficult to do when they have no one to

support them in their efforts or no level of accountability to make changes in teaching practices (Deussen et al., 2007; Matsumura et al., 2010; Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996;). Because of these reasons, and the current reading deficits of many American elementary and middle school students, literacy coaching has become more prevalent. Its purpose is to support or guide teachers in response to their professional needs and to ultimately increase student achievement in literacy skills (IRA, 2004; Poglinco & Bach, 2004).

Coaching is a unique form of PD because it occurs in response to other modes of PD. Coaching after PD sessions should assist teachers in the application or implementation of what was learned from the training (IRA, 2004). For example, in instances when teachers receive information from attending workshops on how to improve their teaching practices in reading instruction, a coach could meet with the teachers to discuss areas of concern, to answer questions, or to offer suggestions regarding implementation or use of the information gained. On the other hand, literacy coaching can also occur in response to the knowledge level and instructional practices that a teacher is currently demonstrating.

In addition, sometimes teachers may not have attended a specific training, but may need specific support on how to improve their instructional practices. For example, a literacy coach may see that a teacher has difficulty with using student data to plan the instruction of her guided reading groups. While a teacher may not have received specific training on how to plan lessons based on student data,

the coach would have to assess the teacher's knowledge level through reviewing the student data, looking at the teacher's lesson plans, observing lessons, and having reflective conversations (Lynch & Ferguson 2010). Then the coach would need to make a plan for how to support the teacher based on his/her needs.

Therefore, literacy coaching is not a stand-alone type of PD; it is part of a system of PD experiences that teachers need to improve their practices (Deussen et al. 2007; Matsumura et al. 2010; Peterson, Taylor, Burham, & Schock, 2009; Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996; Poglinco & Bach, 2004;).

The Need for Literacy Coaching

As stated earlier, a common problem that teachers have with attending PD is the challenge of implementing new knowledge learned without any guidance or support upon returning to the classroom (McQueen, 2001). Research (Deussen et al., 2007; Dole, 2004; International Reading Association, 2006) has suggested that literacy coaching can provide the support that teachers need to successfully implement new practices because teachers need someone who: (1) is knowledgeable about the content, (2) can help them be reflective on their practice, (3) model best practices, and (4) provide on-going support in the classroom on how to implement instructional strategies. Literacy coaches are believed to provide these services to classroom teachers (Dole, 2004; Haughey, et al., 2001; IRA, 2006).

Most recently, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (see <http://www.corestandards.org/resources>) has increased the need for literacy coaching. The purpose of the CCSS is to:

provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, n.p.).

Currently more than 40 out of 50 states have adopted the CCSS. Over the course of the last few years many school districts have implemented these standards, although the timeline for implementation varied by each state (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). More specifically, the implementation for school districts seemed to be dictated by the state department of instruction or state board of education. For example, in New York teachers were expected to implement at least one Common Core (CC) unit in the 2011-2012 school year. Then in the 2012-2013 school year, teachers were expected to implement all ELA and math CC Standards in third through eighth grade (“Engage NY Common Core Implementation Guideline”, 2014). However, in North Carolina, teachers were expected to implement all the CC standards in the 2012-2013 school year (“North Carolina Common Core Explained”, 2014). In my own personal experience, local district personnel provided teachers minimal training

the summer prior to implementation. Because the standards were new and forced teachers into a different way of thinking about literacy instruction, and because the standards were implemented in a short amount of time, in my experience, teachers needed more support teaching Common Core English Language Arts (ELA) standards. Thus, the need for literacy coaches increased.

One of the major benefits of literacy coaching is that teachers can receive the support they need in their efforts to improve their instructional practices (Deussen et al., 2004; Matsumura et al., 2010; Walpole et al., 2010). Coaches are expected to provide coaching according to the needs of the teachers that they serve. This support can be through observations, co-teaching, modeling lessons, and/or providing resources (Stover et al., 2011).

A second benefit of literacy coaching is that it helps teachers to be reflective of their practices (Stover et al., 2011). Coaches often observe teachers and provide them with feedback, which can aid the teachers in their reflections of their own teaching practices. Because coaches are not evaluators, they can provide teachers with constructive feedback in a non-threatening manner, which can assist the teachers as they analyze their instructional practices and plan for the changes they need to make.

Third, coaches often assist or lead teams in analyzing student data and also provide resources for the teachers so that they have what the need for their lessons (IRA, 2004; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). At the building level, administrators can determine the level of effectiveness of literacy coaching by

examining the organizational change that can occur due to coaching, by looking for evidence of the participants' learning and improvement in a particular skill, and by analyzing student data to see the strengths and weakness of the instructional program (Deussene et al., 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Stover et al., 2011).

In addition, because coaching is becoming more prevalent, more research is being done to determine its effectiveness (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Blamey Meyer, & Walpole, 2008; Buly, Coskie, Robinson, & Egwa, 2004; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Shanklin, 2006;). However, while some research examines the effectiveness based on a change in teacher self-efficacy or a change in teacher practices (Haughey et al., 2001; Hayes, 2007; Steckel 2009), there is little research that substantiates that literacy coaching increases student achievement, (Elish-Piper & L'Allier 2010; Huffman & Thomas, 2003; Walpole et al., 2010) even though this is a common belief. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of all coaching models is predicated upon the teacher's willingness to receive coaching support from the literacy coach. Therefore, it seems as if teacher perceptions of literacy coaching contribute to its effectiveness, then research should be conducted to explore these perceptions. In order to learn more about the phenomenon, explicit research on how teachers perceive the value of literacy coaching should be done.

Statement of the Problem

The current literature on instructional coaching could be categorized in a number of ways, but the fact remains that there is a gap in the literature on the meanings that teachers make of effective literacy coaching. My experiences and the research on literacy instruction have caused me to make some basic assumptions about the current issues surrounding effective literacy coaching. Based on my review of the literature about the increased need for PD in response to recent mandates made through NCLB and RttT, and the fact that we still have not reached the student achievement goals set forth in these mandates, I believe it is important for teachers' voices to be heard because they are absent from the research literature about literacy coaching. In a quest to improve coaching practices and literacy instruction, teachers' voices should be heard to provide a greater insight in the coaching that they receive.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of literacy coaching from the perspective of teachers who work in Title I and high minority schools. One goal is to reveal their lived experiences and the affordances and constraints that they face with literacy coaching. With this understanding, district administrators, school administrators, professional developers, and literacy coaches may be better equipped with broader perspectives and more insight about what is necessary to improve the literacy coaching experience for the teachers. My hope is that literacy coaching that meets the expressed needs of

teachers may be improved based on the findings of this study. Ultimately, applying what is learned from the teachers in this study to the practices of literacy coaches might help teachers improve their instructional practices. As a result their students would be beneficiaries of increased reading proficiency.

Considering the emphasis that is placed on school districts to increase overall student achievement, effective coaching models are an integral part of teacher growth and development, which in turn is believed to impact student success.

Therefore, I believe that teachers' voices should be heard as part of the process of improving coaching models so that literacy coaching is more effective for them.

Research Questions

In this study, I am seeking to understand teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching to answer this primary research question: "What meanings do teachers make of effective literacy coaching?" In order to answer this question I will explore the following subquestions:

- How do teachers perceive and describe their experiences of literacy coaching?
- What are the teachers' perceptions of the influence of school-based administrators on literacy coaching?
- What are the teacher's perceptions of *effective* literacy coaching?
- What are teachers' needs for coaching as they relate to their individual professional development?

Summary

In this chapter I provided a brief historical perspective of the political influences on PD for teachers and the emergence of literacy coaching as one model of PD. Because of the lack of student reading achievement and the implementation of CCSS, teachers have a greater need for support in improving their instructional practices with the hopes of increasing student achievement. I also argued for the need to hear teachers' voices regarding their perceptions of literacy coaching so that coaching can be more effective for them. In the next chapter, I will review the literature on literacy coaching to explore various coaching models, and the effects that literacy coaching has on teacher self-efficacy, school reform, and student achievement. I will also articulate the theory used to inform this study. In Chapter 3, I will explain my selection of phenomenology as the preferred research methodology for this study and describe the data collection and data analysis procedures used in this study. In Chapter 4, I will present my findings from the data collection. And finally, in Chapter 5 I will draw conclusions based on the data and offer suggestions and implications for future research based on my findings.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to share teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching with the goal of making literacy coaching more effective. Toward this end, this chapter explores the available research related to literacy coaching. I begin this chapter by describing what is known about the characteristics of high-quality professional development (PD) because literacy coaching is one type of high-quality PD. Using current and past research, I also explore the definitions of literacy coaching and how literacy coaching fits into the broader framework of effective PD. Next I describe Vygotsky's perspective of learning and development and how Vygotsky's principles are connected to literacy coaching. Because of Vygotsky's belief that all learning is social and this social interaction on learning coincided with one's environment and one's history, I posit that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides a theoretical foundation for this research on literacy coaching because coaching is a sociocultural experience. I also describe the components of effective literacy coaching, describe various coaching models, discuss the roles and responsibilities of coaches in district or state mandated literacy projects and local school reforms, and explicate the benefits of literacy coaching. Lastly, I critically examine research that includes teachers' voices

regarding literacy coaching to make the case that there is limited research amplifies teachers' voices, which I argue are needed in order to make literacy coaching more effective. Listening to and learning from teachers about their experiences with literacy coaches is the focus of this research and will serve as one way to fill this gap in the research literature on literacy coaching.

Characteristics of High Quality Professional Development

Regardless of the type or length of professional development, it is typically required at some point for public school teachers because continuing education credits are needed for licensure renewal or because of school or district mandates regarding the implementation of new academic or instructional programs. Even though professional development can occur in many ways for educators, many believe there are specific characteristics that define high-quality, effective PD (Guiney, 2001; L'Allier, et al., 2010). While there is much research on what constitutes high-quality PD, I will only focus on those characteristics that directly relate to how instructional coaching is an approach to provide high-quality PD to teachers.

One characteristic of high-quality PD is that it should be instructionally focused to enhance content and pedagogical knowledge (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Guskey, 2003; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hunzicker, 2011). Content knowledge includes information taught in the PD session. For example, in literacy-focused PD, teachers may learn the structure of language, the components of literacy, comprehension strategies and tools, etc.

Content topics should deepen the teacher's knowledge of literacy, and a byproduct of this growth in content knowledge should be a better understanding of the necessary skills students need to be fluent, independent readers. Pedagogical knowledge involves understanding the process of teaching and learning with an emphasis on learning outcomes. It deals with the "how" of teaching, such as understanding what needs to be learned and how to best teach it for optimal learning to occur. Content and pedagogical knowledge are interconnected because one deals with the information taught and the other deals with how to teach this knowledge. As teachers gain a deeper understanding of their content areas AND as they improve their pedagogy (instruction) in the teaching of the content, students are more likely to be successful (Buly, et al., 2004; Hunzicker, 2011).

Another attribute of high-quality PD is that it should be sustained over time and contain an ample number of contact hours (Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Lydon & King, 2009; Polk, 2006,). According to Hunzicker (2011) PD that is ongoing affords teachers more opportunities to learn more about the content at hand, and more time to practice, collaborate, and reflect on their new learning. Therefore, the duration of PD is a contributing factor to the quality and effectiveness of the PD. According to Hunzicker (2011), the more teachers participate in PD, then the more likely they are to improve their instructional practices. Furthermore, research supports that PD is most effective when teachers have multiple opportunities to learn about a topic and to do so over time

with ample contact hours for the learning to occur (Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Lydon & King, 2009; Polk, 2006). In my opinion, quality PD does not necessarily happen simply because of quantity of time, but quality PD will not happen without ample quantity of time.

The duration of PD is not limited to the actual “instructional time” when teachers are sitting in a workshop-type setting. High-quality PD should also include follow-up sessions, reflective dialog with colleagues, and coaching support that teachers receive (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). In other words, high-quality PD should expand beyond the PD sessions so that teachers have opportunities to learn, study, apply, and reflect (Joyce & Showers, 1980, Neufeld & Roper, 2010; Polk, 2006). As teachers reflect, share, and receive collegial support, PD is more likely to be an effective change agent in the teachers’ professional practices and professional growth.

Not only is the duration of the PD important, but also relevance and coherence to the overall goals that are set for increasing student learning are important (Dunne, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Lydon & King, 2009). PD that is relevant provides a link between standards that students must learn and the instructional strategies used to teach the standards. Relevant PD should be data driven PD (Dunne, 2002). Garet et al. (2001) assessed the coherence of teacher’s PD in three ways: 1) the extent to how the PD connects, supports, or extends what teachers previously learned; 2) the emphasis on how the content and pedagogy of the PD are aligned to national, state, and district

standards, program structures, and assessments (Dunne, 2002); and 3) the continuing professional dialog of the teachers with each other as they all seek to improve their teaching.

Professional development should build upon what has been previously taught or learned rather than being an isolated or “stand alone” learning session that does not connect with other PD opportunities that teachers have had (Dunne, 2002; Garet et al., 2001). Each PD session should be a part of a bigger PD plan, or a part of the overall vision of the district or school to increase student learning. There are two questions that teachers should be able to answer when participating in PD: 1) “*What am I going to learn*”, and 2) “*How am I going to use what I learn?*” Both of these questions speak to the relevance or significance of the PD and to the coherence or consistency of what they are learning. When teachers are provided with learning opportunities related to previous PD, or related to state standards and district and schools goals, then it may be easier for them to see the “big picture” of how their training relates to the overall goal(s) (Garet et al., 2001). Therefore, they may become more motivated and committed to receiving and implementing the newly learned PD.

Finally, high-quality PD should promote active learning for teachers. PD sessions should provide teachers with opportunities to see best teaching practices (Joyce and Showers, 1980; Polk, 2006); therefore, the “sit and get” formats should not be used in efforts to model best practices because teachers need to get a first-hand view of what quality instruction should look like (Garet et

al., 2001; Hunzicker, 2011; Lydon & King, 2009). Active learning could involve teachers observing the instructor or expert teacher. It could also involve being observed by the instructor, coach, or peer teachers. Teachers should also be afforded opportunities for collegial dialog as they plan to implement new knowledge presented during the PD (Dunne, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003). Whether they observe another professional or are observed by someone else, reflective dialog should take place as part of the active learning process.

More than 30 years ago, Joyce and Showers (1980) stated that effective PD must include demonstration, practice, and feedback. Current and past research supports the idea that teachers should be active in their overall professional development opportunities (Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003; Joyce & Showers, 1980; Lydon & King, 2009; Polk, 2006). Over a decade ago, Guskey (2003) stated that “educators value opportunities to work together, reflect on their practices, exchange ideas, and share strategies” (p. 749) when engaged in high-quality PD. Current research still posits the importance of teachers having opportunities to interact with the content and each other as they receive PD (Hunzicker, 2011). However, active learning is not comprised of only one mode of interaction. It can happen in a variety of ways, such as being observed by a coach or expert teacher and receiving feedback, observing an expert teacher, collaborating in a PLC, or working with grade level or content team to analyze student work. More recently, Hunzicker (2011) reported that PD should be job-embedded, supportive, collaborative, and ongoing. Job embedded PD or

professional learning refers to teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers instructional practices with the purpose of increasing student learning as part of a cycle of ongoing improvement (Coggshall et al., 2012; Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, Killion, 2010). Job-embedded also means that PD opportunities should happen during the school day.

While the research strongly supports the aforementioned attributes of high quality PD, Coggshall et al. (2012) described high-quality *job embedded* PD as learner centered, knowledge centered, community centered and assessment centered. Job embedded PD that is learner centered focuses on teachers' sustained efforts to improve their effectiveness after analyzing student data and reflecting on their practices. Job embedded PD that is knowledge centered means that teachers examine their students' data and seek to understand students' deficits or areas of misunderstandings. When this happens, teachers refine their own knowledge of the content. Additionally, when teachers have opportunities to dialog about student learning, share professional practices, and collaborate with other teachers in efforts to develop innovative ideas, they have a tendency to adopt professional practices that will improve student learning (Coggshall et al., 2012). Therefore, high-quality, job-embedded PD is often community centered because teacher learning occurs as a result of the iterative interaction with the members of the group. Lastly, high-quality, job-embedded PD is described as assessment centered, which means teachers use feedback and

revision to ensure that what is assessed is aligned to a teacher's learning goals (Coggshall et al., 2012). This feedback can be based on student data, the teacher's own observations and reflections, observations from a peer or coach, a videotaped lesson of the teacher presenting the lesson, or a discussion within a PLC.

High-quality, job embedded PD is not just focused on one of these areas, but each one is important as teachers work to improve their instruction (Coggshall et al., 2012; Hunzicker, 2011). Research says that teachers must use student data (formal and informal assessments, observations, student work samples, etc.) as measures of learning and to assess whether students' progress matches the learning goals that they set for their students (Denton et al., 2007; Hayes & Robnolt, 2007; L'Allier et al., 2010; Slack, 2003). Concurrently, teachers should also reflect on their instructional practices, and they need opportunities to observe, model, and practice new instructional strategies. Therefore, working with other colleagues in professional learning communities, which has the potential to be a form of high-quality PD, provides teachers with opportunities for sharing with and learning from each other. In sum, in order to improve in instructional practices, teachers must be willing to 1) reflect on their teaching, 2) analyze student data, 3) learn more content and instructional strategies, 4) listen to other educational professionals, and 5) try new ways of teaching to see whether or not they work (Dunne, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Polk, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 1980; Lydon & King, 2009).

High-quality, job-embedded PD affords teachers with opportunities to do all of these things.

While there are many characteristics that researchers include in their definitions of high-quality professional development, this section has focused on those characteristics that have direct implications to literacy coaching as it relates to professional development. These attributes, which include instructional focus, duration, relevance and coherence, and promotion of active learning, are not the only characteristics of high-quality PD but are also related to high-quality literacy coaching. Furthermore, literacy coaching is also job-embedded, supportive, collaborative and ongoing, all of which Hunzicker (2011) and others (Dunne, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003; Guskey & Yoon., 2009; Polk 2006; Joyce & Showers, 1980; Lydon & King, 2009) found to be attributes of high-quality PD. The next section will define literacy coaching in more detail and describe how the previously mentioned attributes of PD directly relate to literacy coaching.

Definitions of Literacy Coaching

As a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act and Race to the Top (RttT) Initiative, the proliferation of literacy coaching has been rapid; however, there has been a lack of definition of the roles that literacy coaches undertake (IRA, 2004; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008; Poglinco & Bach, 2004). Literacy coaching is described as being complex and multifaceted (Deussen, et al., 2007; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Gallucci, Devoot Van Lare, Yoon, Boatright, 2010), and its usage varies across schools and school districts. It is a term that is not easily defined

because coaching can involve several different jobs and tasks within various educational settings (Mraz et al., 2008).

Sturtevant (2003) described literacy coaches as “master teachers who provide essential leadership in the school’s overall literacy program” (p. 1). Other research (Buly et al., 2004; Gallucci et al., 2010; Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, & Supovitz, 2003) described literacy coaching as a means to: 1) support teachers in being more reflective about their instructional practices, 2) hone their teaching skills, 3) set goals that are driven by student data and observational feedback, and 4) share with other colleagues their instructional successes and failures (Buly et al. 2004). Furthermore, Bean and Isler (2008) added that literacy coaching is “a job-embedded approach to professional development” (pg. 1). This PD should be literacy focused, based on what the knowledge that teachers need to teach their students, and provide ongoing support for the teachers, which includes observations and constructive feedback (Gallucci et al., 2010). Literacy coaches are key players in the process of improving teaching practices in order to improve student success in literacy achievement (Sturtevant, 2003).

In 2000 the International Reading Association, IRA, issued a position statement indicating that literacy coaches had three major roles: 1) being an expert regarding literacy instruction, 2) providing guidance with assessment data, and 3) demonstrating leadership in the implementation of the school’s reading program. With the increasing use of literacy coaches, the varied roles that they

perform have continued to increase as well (Gallucci et al. 2010). Because of the ambiguity of the definition of literacy coaching, in 2004 the IRA issued another position statement that supported the definition of literacy coaching created by Paglinco et al., (2003):

Coaching provides ongoing consistent support [to teachers] for the implementation and instruction components. It is nonthreatening and supportive – not evaluative. It gives a sense of how good professional development is. It also affords the opportunity to see it work with students (p. 42).

Futhermore, this definition of literacy coaching endorsed by the IRA supported the belief that literacy coaching is job embedded and should support teachers in their daily work, which may include modeling lessons, team teaching, leading team meetings, giving feedback to teachers, and providing in-class coaching (Gallucci et al., 2010; Taylor, Moxley, Chanter, Boulware, 2006; Walpole et al., 2010).

The range of responsibilities related to literacy coaching has increased over time and may include a variety of tasks, such as conversations with colleagues or helping prepare materials for the classroom, and more formal tasks such as modeling lessons or co-teaching lessons (Gallucci et al. 2010; IRA, 2004). Coaches also can work as a liaison for teachers within the grade level, across grade levels, across departments, and to administration (Sturtevant, 2003). Therefore, just as teachers do much more than just teach, literacy

coaches are responsible for more tasks than just coaching (Bean & DeFord, 2008; IRA, 2004; Mraz et al., 2008; Shanklin, 2006; Smith, 2009; Sturtevant, 2003).

The IRA (2004) also noted the importance of building relationships in the coaching process. Because literacy coaching is non-evaluative and more supportive in nature, it is important for literacy coaches to build trust with the teachers with whom they work (Buly et al., 2004; Gallucci et al., 2010). Part of the coaching experience includes teachers and coaches engaging together in reflective dialog. The coaching experience should be highly collaborative (Sturtevant, 2003); therefore, teachers must feel that their reflective conversations with literacy coaches are safe and non-judgmental.

Because literacy coaching is a job-embedded approach to PD (Bean & Isler, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010), there are direct implications of the attributes of high-quality PD to literacy coaching. As previously mentioned, high-quality PD promotes active learning for teachers and should be instructionally focused, sustained over time, and relevant and coherent to goals for student learning. The same is true for literacy coaching. Within the coaching process, the coach and the teacher must be actively involved in collaborative and reflective dialogue, which can occur after observations, feedback, or receiving student data. Additionally, when considering the notion that high-quality PD is instructionally focused to enhance pedagogical and content knowledge (Garet et al., 2001;

Guskey, 2003; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hunzicker, 2011), literacy coaching is concentrated on improving the literacy instructional practices of teachers.

Literacy coaching also consists of guiding teachers in the process of analyzing students' learning and finding solutions to problems of practice (Coggshall et al., 2012; Denton, Swanson, & Mathes, 2007; L'Allier et al., 2010; Slack, 2003). For change to occur in instructional practices and for progress to be made, the literacy coaching process happens over time rather than being a one-time occurrence. Literacy coaching is a collaborative process that takes time and is not meant to be a "one shot" form of PD. Literacy coaching is designed to give teachers time to reflect, change, and practice for improvement in the teaching of literacy (Joyce & Showers, 1980, Neufeld & Roper, 2010; Polk, 2006). Lastly, as teachers dialogue with the literacy coach about their instructional practices, their conversations should be relevant to improving the instruction regarding the overall literacy program (Dunne, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Lydon & King, 2009). Literacy coaching should build cohesion to what the teachers have previously learned and connect to the literacy goals set for the teachers and their students. As in high-quality PD, coherence and relevance are an integral part of literacy coaching because the goal is improving the instructional practices of teachers (Dunne, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Lydon & King, 2009).

In summary, while the specifics of literacy coaching may vary in educational settings, the commonalities within the research on literacy coaching

indicate that it consists of providing on-going, job-embedded professional support in the area of reading in order to increase productivity, make instructional changes, use effective instructional strategies, and implement a literacy program or initiative (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Deussen et al., 2007; Gallucci et al., 2010; Mraz et al., 2008). While various benefits of literacy coaching may occur in the process, the thrust of its existence is to support teachers in their efforts to increase student reading achievement (IRA, 2004).

Vygotsky's Theoretical Perspective on Learning and Development

Lev Vygotsky is considered a leading theorist of cognition, learning, and human development. He was a Russian psychologist who made major contributions to the field of psychology, but also to the field of education because of connections between his interests and education. Vygotsky had specific beliefs on the perspective that has been termed as cultural historical theory. Vygotsky believed that we all have a "history" that situates the learning that we obtain, and more specifically, that learning is greatly influenced by one's environment (Vygotsky, 1978). By historical, "Vygotsky meant how humans have mastered and used the environment..." (Smidt, 2009 p. 21). The usage of language helps us as humans to generalize concepts that make up the sum of our human knowledge. Vygotsky's definition of the term *cultural* refers to society's organization or social structure of tasks that one encounters and the tools (both physical and mental) that one uses to master those tasks (Vygotsky 1978).

Because of Vygotsky's belief that all learning is social and this social interaction on learning coincided with one's environment and ultimately one's history, the term "historical" was later replaced by the Western culture with the term "social" or "socio" (Smidt, 2009). As such, sociocultural theory also implied that there is "an interdependence of individual and social processes in the co-construction of knowledge" (Mahn, 1999 p. 347). A major theme of Vygotsky's work was that social interaction has an effect on the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). When considering this theme, there are three aspects of Vygotsky's work that I would like to explore in more detail in order to identify the implications that they have on literacy coaching for classroom teachers today.

Connecting Vygotsky's principles to instructional coaching. These three basic tenets of the Vygotsky's beliefs regarding learning and development are implicated in what happens during literacy coaching:

- 1) The interaction of culture, society, and our history, which influence our individual learning and development and impact how instruction and learning take place.
- 2) Thought and language, which are tools through which learning new concepts are mediated.
- 3) The zone of proximal development (ZPD), which Vygotsky (1978) defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as

determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86).

Next, I will explore how each of these principles directly relates to and supports literacy coaching even though Vygotsky’s theories/beliefs were centered on the development of children with little to no mention of adults. In instances where teachers were mentioned (Vygotsky, 1986), it was in the context of how teachers’ actions could facilitate learning for their students and NOT how these principles related to the teacher’s individual development. However, I propose that the above three principles collectively provide the foundation for a theoretical framework of effective instructional coaching based on Vygotsky’s thoughts.

First, the act of providing instructional coaching is a process. In order to provide coaching, one must first identify key information about the teacher. There should be consideration of who teachers are, their history, their sociocultural background, what they “bring to the table”, how they have been taught, and their theory for the content they teach.

Dozier (2006) posited that responsive coaching relationships consist of caring and respectful instructional relationships. Having a better understanding regarding the teacher’s history and sociocultural experience provides the coach with ways to make such connections in order to bring about change (Dantonio, 1995). Dantonio (1995) stated that “collegial coaching is premised on the belief that the growth and development of teaching expertise depends on

connectedness, trust, and shared visions, values, and goals among individuals within a profession” (p. 3). She also identified five stages of professional development for teachers: 1) novice, 2) advance beginner, 3) competent, 4) proficient, and 5) expert. Therefore, the role of the coach includes identifying the stage in which the teacher is operating. This can be done by observing the teacher actually teaching a lesson coupled with meeting with the teacher individually for reflective dialogue on her teaching performance and abilities, including strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvements. Understanding the teacher’s sociocultural experience gives the coach essential qualitative data that can be helpful in not only understanding the teacher’s history but also as a basis for building relationships to help facilitate the coaching experience (Dantonio, 1995).

Second, I would argue that the development of thought and language is not only essential to children’s development but also teacher development. Dozier (2006) stated that language is used “to make sense of ourselves and our world” (p. 51), and it is also the means by which we produce knowledge by exploring, inquiring, and learning together. Consequently, dialogue must have a prominent role in the teacher’s learning. In addition, Vygotsky believed that as speech becomes internalized, thought is developed, which consequently allows for reflective thought (Vygotsky, 1986). Reflective thought is essential to coaching (Buly et. al, 2004; IRA, 2004). As teachers seek to improve their practice, reflective thought allows them to critique their practice and assess their

performance. The dialogue that occurs between teacher and coach must include reflective thoughts from both parties as the coach also seeks to reflect on the performance of the teacher and the effects on the students. Therefore, in order for optimal coaching experiences to occur, there must be open dialogue between the teacher and the coach.

Third, Vygotsky's concept of a zone of proximal development is also relevant to improving teacher practices through coaching. Just as a classroom teacher should structure learning opportunities according to each student's ZPD, so should the instructional coach plan for the teacher's ZPD as well. Providing support based on a teacher's ZPD can be based on the coach's observations of the teacher's classroom instruction. When providing support according to one's ZPD, the coaching partner (the more competent or capable one) must be more knowledgeable and skilled with regard to what needs to be developed in the teacher's ZPD. In the case of literacy coaching, the learner (the teacher who is being coached) can reach his/her potential level of development with the support of the more capable one (the literacy coach) (Eun, 2011). The discourse that occurs between the teacher and the coach can be powerful because of the teacher's voice, including her own internalized thoughts regarding her practice, which she shares with the coach. Theoretically, based on Vygotsky's notions, over time teachers appropriate and internalize the skills and practices learned from the literacy coach, the more capable other (Eun, 2011). Internalization occurs after prolonged interaction and support (Eun, 2011). In addition, if the

coach used the teacher's ZPD to gauge the teacher's needed development, then instructional coaching cannot be done as a "one size fit all" treatment. It is the coach's responsibility to provide differentiated support to the teacher as she changes her instructional practice in order to become a more effective teacher.

In sum, the basic premise of instructional coaching is providing support to teachers as they practice new knowledge or skills. Vygotsky's thoughts about learning as a social practice are important to the coaching process because they are focused on learning as it occurs in the context of work (Gallucci et al., 2010). Vygotsky's theory, then, would predict that there is a reciprocal relationship in the interaction with individual learning and coaching support.

I believe that instructional coaching that follows Vygotsky's sociocultural principles would give teachers the foundational support that they need to facilitate growth and teacher development. While each principle should be examined individually, they each connect, and the coaching process is optimized when each principle works as part of an iterative process. Even though Vygotsky (1986) stated there are intersecting lines of thought and language that have a continuous crossing or intertwining and then separating and reconnecting again and again, in order for these three Vygotskian principles to work effectively and for the *ideal* coaching experience, they should seldom stand alone, but connect to at least one other principle. Therefore, each component is essential to the coaching process and works in conjunction with the other principles to optimize the coaching experience for the teacher. In sum, in order to effectively coach

within a teacher's ZPD, the teacher's cultural-historical experience and reflective dialog are both necessary in the overall coaching process. A coach could make a plan based only on a teacher's ZPD, but in order for it to be the *optimal* experience, the other principle must be considered as well.

In the previous sections I defined literacy coaching in detail. I then posited that Vygotsky's principles for learning and development are directly linked to literacy coaching and that Vygotsky's principles are useful as the theoretical foundation for this study. The following sections will further explore the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaching in various settings and the components of coaching models through "Vygotskian" lenses.

Roles, Availability, and Responsibilities of Coaches with District or State Mandates

Before examining the different types of coaching models employed in schools, I will first provide a deeper look at what coaching positions actually look like in the various educational settings. Coaching positions range from fulltime building-level or on-site, very accessible support (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Denton et al. 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Kinnucan-Welsch et al., 2006; Scroggins & Powers, 2004) to district office or state personnel assigned to work with teachers in more than one school (Denton et al., 2007; Kinnucan-Welsch et al., 2006; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010; Walpole et al., 2010). More specifically, coaching that occurs from those who are outside the school is sometimes in response to

the implementation of a district or state literacy professional development initiatives.

For example, the literacy coaches who were assisting with the first phase of the South Carolina Reading Initiative (SCRI) (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010) were not at one school but were shared with eight to ten teachers at up to four schools. These coaches were expected to support teachers in implementing strategies that teachers were taught in the bimonthly study groups that the coaches facilitated. The coaches offered research-based strategies that promoted effective literacy instruction and also assisted the teachers in using authentic assessments that provided student data used to drive their instruction. While the coaches in this study were considered “master teachers”, they still had to juggle their time between several schools and teachers.

With the Georgia Reading First (GARF) Initiative (Walpole et al., 2010), schools were required to hire full-time coaches to provide professional development for kindergarten through third grade (K-3) teachers. The coaches in this study worked directly with teachers in applying reading concepts in their classroom instruction. Those coaches who worked with teachers in the GARF initiative (Walpole, et al. 2010) were not expected to teach children. Rather, their job was to help teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices so they could make appropriate changes that would positively affect students' outcomes. Their roles also included: 1) collaboration with grade level teams, 2) tailoring coaching

according to the teachers' needs (differentiation), and 3) gathering the support of the administration.

Still another model of coaching was used in the Literacy Specialist Project (LSP), which was a statewide PD initiative that focused on increasing the literacy knowledge of K-3 classroom teachers by sustaining high-quality PD within the school districts of Ohio (Kinnucan-Welsch, et. al., 2006). Professional development was provided to university faculty (especially those who were field faculty), literacy specialists, and classroom teachers. The field faculty met monthly with the literacy specialists who in turn met with small groups of teachers. The literacy specialists in this study also provided classroom coaching for the teachers in their literacy instruction. The training offered as a part of this initiative was continuous, ongoing, and job embedded. The LSP research results suggested that teachers benefited from this type of PD because they had continuous support after they received training and as they attempted to apply their new knowledge in the classroom (Kinnucan-Welsch et al., 2006).

Literacy coaches in each of the previous examples were stakeholders in the improvement of literacy instruction for their assigned schools. Each of these PD initiatives appeared to value the coaching role because they required coaching positions as a part of their PD models. Literacy coaches were expected to provide teachers with the support that they needed as they worked to implement instructional strategies that they had learned in PD sessions. As a result, teachers in these studies were able to participate in job-embedded PD, as

described by Coggshall et al. (2010), which was either learner centered, knowledge centered, community centered, or assessment centered. While the ultimate goal of the coaches in each of these state or district initiatives was to assist teachers in connecting what was learned in PD workshops to classroom application with the expectation that student achievement would increase, the coaches' roles in assisting with this task varied.

Roles, Availability, and Responsibilities of Coaches Within School Reform

Some literacy coaching positions described in the literature were not a part of a district or state initiative but were school-based and part of school reform (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Steckel, 2009). These studies (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Steckel, 2009) described how the coaches supervised student teachers, provided induction support to the new teachers, provided peer coaching for the experienced teachers, and conducted PD for the staff. The role of the coaches was found to be an integral part of the reformation process, just as they were in the previous section regarding the usage of coaches in state or district mandated initiatives.

One example of how literacy coaches were used as a part of school reform is in the Literacy Collaborative (LC) reform model (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010). Teachers were typically selected by the principal to become literacy coaches in order to help lead in the reform efforts. These teachers/coaches continued to teach students half- time after their training

period. They also took on the role of coaches who were focused on increasing literacy content knowledge and supporting teachers as they implemented literacy instructional strategies. These teachers/coaches received intense training on literacy theory and practice and how to provide site-based PD and coaching to the teachers. Because the Literacy Collaborative program was grounded in the belief that short-term or “one-shot” PD sessions could not provide teachers with guidance regarding implementation of the PD, the LC program was based on using on-going, job-embedded professional development as a means to improve student literacy learning.

In addition to differences in coaching roles across various projects reported in the literature, as noted earlier, there is ambiguity with the coaching role. In some schools reading specialists actually served as peer coaches in addition to working with students who were in need of individual tutoring or more intensive reading instruction (Lapp, Fisher, & Flood, 2003). Lapp et al. (2003) studied three urban California schools (an elementary, middle, and high school) and examined their reform efforts to increase literacy achievement. Coaching by literacy specialists was a part of the overall reform for these schools and was a contributing factor in increasing student reading achievement for each school. Just as literacy coaches in the LC model had dual roles (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010), the literacy specialists in these schools had dual roles as well. The specialists spent time tutoring students individually, having collegial conversations with teachers, modeling literacy or reading lessons, providing PD,

or facilitating professional book clubs focused on literacy development. In each of these schools, the literacy specialist was a contributing factor in the reading growth the schools experienced. While the specialists in these schools had a dual role in working with both students and staff, the coaches also assisted in fostering “a positive school climate building capacity and creating a community of learners” (Lapp et al., 2003 p. 36).

To summarize, coaches who were part of state or district literacy programs or initiatives did not have the dual roles of teaching and coaching (Denton et al., 2007; Kinnucan-Welsch et al., 2006; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010; Walpole et al., 2010;). Also, those coaches’ roles seemed to be focused specifically on supporting the teachers through classroom visits and observations, PD sessions, team teaching or modeling, and providing resources that will improve literacy instruction. However, coaches who were hired by school-based administration for the purpose of impacting literacy instruction and being a part of school-wide literacy reform, tended to have additional duties and roles outside of those specifically geared toward direct literacy instruction (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Lapp et al., 2003).

Even though the purpose of the literacy coach may be to assist in school reform as schools strive to improve student achievement in literacy, the specific roles of coaches vary due to: 1) mandates from state, district, or local school administration, 2) the literacy initiative or reading program being implemented, and 3) the usage of a particular coaching model where coaching occurs in a

certain structure. As previously stated, some coaches also served as a reading teacher and worked with students daily or weekly in addition to supporting classroom teachers in literacy instruction. Additional roles of school-based coaches included organizing literacy volunteers and parent literacy nights, creating or finding reading interventions, serving on school-wide leadership teams to monitor student achievement in literacy (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Lapp et al., 2003; Steckel, 2009). Components of different coaching models will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Components of Coaching Models

Several components are included in the design of most coaching models. These designs are influenced by the number of coaches available, the number of schools and teachers served, and the frequency of the coaching visits (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Hsieh et al., 2009; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). Additionally, consideration is given to the venue of coaching, which is typically provided on-site and face-to-face. The research also indicates that instructional coaching can be provided individually, in small groups, virtually through technology, or a combination of these (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010 et al., 2010; Denton et al., 2007; Hsieh et al. 2009; Neuman and Wright, 2010; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008; Putman, Smith, & Cassady, 2009). As I continue with my review of the literature, some of the aforementioned studies are discussed again, but this time with consideration to

the components of coaching employed with a particular study in order to provide a fuller picture of literacy coaching.

Individual coaching. Many coaching models include onsite, one-on-one coaching sessions that are conducted between the teacher and the literacy coach. These sessions are believed to give the teachers individualized attention with the hope in meeting their professional needs (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, Zigmond, 2011; Bintz, 2007; Stover et al., 2011). The coach is able to focus specifically on the individual teacher and therefore differentiates the coaching services that are provided. In each of the studies that was examined, teachers were coached one-one-one (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Hsieh et al., 2009; Neuman and Wright, 2010; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008).

In the study conducted by Hsieh et al. (2009), individualized coaching allowed the coach to provide feedback that was directly related to teachers' usage of pre-emergent literacy skills. This was also the case in the Mentor-Coach Initiative that was designed to provide training, support and guidance for teachers on research-based literacy practices (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). Through relationship building, the coaches, who were called mentors, developed an understanding of the teachers' needs and goals, which enhanced their willingness to change their instructional practices. In the LC model (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010), that was previously described as part of school reform, the researchers analyzed teacher's participation in literacy

coaching activities, which consisted of observing, modeling and facilitating teacher development toward improved practice with the goal of improving student achievement in reading writing and language (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010). Individualized coaching was also part of a mixed-methods study conducted by Neuman and Wright (2010) who examined the impact of two forms of PD on pre-Kindergarten teachers' early language and literacy practices.

Some studies indicated positive results regarding the impact of coaching such as an increase in the teachers' usage of literacy skills activities (Hsieh et al. 2009), a *significant* improvement in the structural features of the early language and literacy environments in the child care centers (Neuman & Wright 2010), and a collaborative and trusting environment due to having a fellow teacher serve as a mentor/coach (Onchwari and Keengwe, 2008). Conversely, research also indicated that while individualized coaching was helpful for some, it was not necessary for coaching success (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011). Neuman and Wright (2010) found that teachers who received coaching had significant improvement in the structural features of the early language and literacy environments in the child care centers, while those in the coursework group made no significant improvements.

Teachers attributed their success to having ongoing, job-embedded, individualized support; therefore, individualized coaching seemed to have a positive impact on the teacher's instructional performance (Hsieh et al., 2009).

Because the mentors (coaches) were fellow teachers in the study by Onchwari and Keengwe (2008), the mentors were able to have a better understanding of the daily challenges that the teachers encountered at work, which created a caring and supportive relationship that fostered an environment of trust among the teachers in the Head Start programs.

While Vygotsky's principles were not emphasized explicitly in these studies, there were still connections to the principles. As teachers had positive interactions with the coaches (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008), the coaches were able to learn more about the teachers and their needs. Thought and language, which are tools through which learning new concepts are mediated (Vygotsky, 1978), were essential to the coaches' and teachers' interactions. Additionally, individualized coaching seemed to be an avenue in which coaching was tailored to teacher's individual needs. Instructional support, which included sharing feedback from lesson observations, providing model lessons, co-teaching, and engaging in reflective dialogue, was given to the teachers (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Hsieh et. al., 2009). Therefore, I posit that individualized coaching is an ideal mechanism by which Vygotsky's zone of proximal development can be used for literacy coaching for teachers.

Individual and group coaching. While some coaching models only consisted of individual coaching for the teachers, there are other coaching models that use both individual and group coaching. In some instances, the coach met with the teachers in group settings and then followed up with teachers

one-on-one to provide differentiated coaching according to their individual needs. For example, in the Content Literacy Project (Cantrell et al., 2009), the teachers attended a five-day summer institute that was followed up with monthly onsite coaching. The literacy coach held group sessions followed by individual coaching according to the teachers' needs. Similarly, in the ExCell coaching project (Wasik, 2010), teachers attend monthly three-hour group training, which was followed by individual coaching sessions where the coach modeled the literacy strategies taught in the group session.

Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) conducted a qualitative study that explored the impact that literacy coaches had on teachers, and identified the changes that teachers made regarding their beliefs and instructional teaching practices in the areas of reading and writing. Individual and group coaching were provided by the literacy coaches who facilitated bimonthly study groups for teachers and spent four days each week in teachers' classrooms to support them in implementing the practices learned in the study groups. The findings of this study indicated that the study-group sessions were beneficial because they promoted teacher collaboration, provided ongoing support by not only the coach but also other colleagues, and increased the teachers' knowledge gained from research on literacy. In addition, the findings indicated that because of literacy coaching they received, the teachers were willing to try new strategies, used more authentic assessments, changed their beliefs and practices based on literature they read, and used more student-based curriculum.

Another professional development model that facilitated a change in teachers' attitudes and teaching practices was the Intentional Teaching Model (INTENT) (Putman et al., 2009). This program included four phases. "Active change" was phase three, which focused on the teachers' commitment to change as they began to try new concepts or skills aligned with their goals for improving their teaching practices. While the people in this model who were facilitating the change were called "change agents" rather than instructional or literacy coaches, they led the teachers in a series of steps toward implementing change in their teaching practices. The "change agents" worked with teachers individually and also in groups. As a part of INTENT, teachers received peer-coaching, demonstration lessons in literacy, and support with curriculum alignment and literacy resources. While more individual support was provided in the initial stages of INTENT, more grade level and full group meetings were held as the schools collectively moved toward positive change.

Coaching models that use both individual and group coaching may allow teachers to have "the best of both worlds". Group coaching may provide teachers with opportunities to build relationships with not only the literacy coach (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010) but also with their peers through sharing ideas and engaging in reflective dialogue, while one-on-one coaching provides them with opportunities to receive coaching tailored more specifically to their individual needs (Putman et al., 2009). Once again, Vygotsky's principles (interaction of cultural, society, and historical influence on our individual learning, thought and

language as mediation tools for learning, and zone of proximal development) (Vygotsky, 1978) work in conjunction with each other to provide optimal learning and growth for teachers. Coaching models that consist of both individual and group coaching may provide more opportunities for each of these principles to be used.

Alternative to face-to-face coaching. While onsite, face-to-face coaching was prominent in the literature, Denton et al. (2007) used the Student-Focus Coaching (SFC) model as the coaching structure to work with teachers. The SFC model included two more approaches to instructional coaching in addition to onsite coaching: (1) coaching on demand or by request only, which involved teachers initiating contact with their coaches via telephone, email or onsite visits; and (2) technology-based coaching using a technology application called “The Virtual Coach”. The SFC approach used an Internet interface and a compact disc (CD) which contained video clips of demonstration lessons, PowerPoints of PD sessions, and an interactive tool demonstrating the pronunciations of various phonic elements. The interactive web-based component allowed teachers and coaches to have “conversations” regarding student assessment and data. This “virtual coaching” increased the coaches’ ability to support teachers through the usage of the resources such as the CD and the Internet without physically being there. However, the purpose of this study (Denton et al., 2007) was not to examine the different forms of coaching in

the SFC model but to examine the use of student assessment data in the coaching process between the coach and teachers.

While there are advantages of engaging in “virtual coaching” through technology, some would argue that there is no true replacement for onsite or face-to-face coaching (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). One possible hindrance of virtual, technology-based coaching is the inability of the coaches to observe the teachers in real time and provide immediate feedback based on the observations. Another argument is that watching a video of a demonstration lesson taught by the coach does not have the same impact as actually seeing the lesson in person with students. In my experience as a literacy coach, some teachers who request demonstration lessons want the lesson done with their students, and some coaches prefer to use the teacher’s class to dispel the thought “this will not work with my class”. Teaching demonstration lessons with the teacher’s students did not occur in SFC technology-based coaching described by Denton et al. (2007). Even though virtual or technology-based coaching may not be a perfect model, it was effective for some teachers (Denton et al., 2007), and it offered another option for providing coaching when an onsite visit was not possible.

Frequency of coaching. Another key aspect of various coaching models found in the research literature was the frequency of coaching visits or sessions. Matsumura et al. (2010) conducted a study to evaluate effectiveness of a comprehensive literacy program called the Content Focus Coaching (CFC). The

frequency of the coaching sessions included weekly face-to-face grade level planning sessions with teachers and individual meetings once each month. In other research, Hsieh et al. (2009) conducted a study in which teachers received coaching two to three times each week. The length of the coaching sessions varied, depending on the lesson being taught or the literacy activity being done. The frequency of the coaching visits for this study was predicated upon the teachers' performance. In another study done by Neuman and Wright (2010), coaching sessions were three hours each week for ten weeks to ensure equal treatment. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of two forms of professional development – coursework and coaching. In the study by Denton, et al. (2007) the teachers in the onsite coaching group only met the coaches one time per month, but uniquely, the other sessions for the virtual and technology-based coaching were only by request.

Of the studies reviewed, the frequency of the coaching was reported as a contributing factor to the change in teacher practice in only one study (Matsumura et al., 2010). The researchers (Matsumura et al., 2010) examined the regularity of the coaching as one of the factors that determined the schools' implementation or usage of the CFC and found that there was a significant increase in teacher participation in coaching for both the experimental and the control group of teachers. Teachers in the CFC group reported that improvement in their instructional practice was attributed to their participation in the coaching activities. Thus, the frequency of coaching was a contributing factor to the

change in teacher practice even though there was no indication of how the frequency of the coaching sessions were determined.

Conversely, the results of the other studies reviewed did not substantiate the frequency of coaching as a contributing factor to change teachers' instructional practices. The results of the study by Hsieh, et al. focused mainly on the teachers' usage of literacy strategies during and after the intervention phase with no mention of the impact of the frequency of coaching on the change in teachers' literacy instruction. In the study conducted by Neuman and Wright (2010), coaching sessions were three hours each week for ten weeks to ensure equal treatment. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of two forms of professional development – coursework and coaching. Therefore, the frequency of the coaching received was only mentioned to show equity in treatment and was not considered in the results. It was not clear in the study by Neuman and Wright (2010) and Denton et al. (2007) if or how the frequency of coaching sessions impacted the coaching effectiveness. Considering the current research, it seems reasonable to investigate teachers' needs and perceptions regarding the number and regularity of the coaching sessions to further explore this issue, as this has not been addressed very well in the research literature to date.

Interaction of the Coach with the Teachers: Reflective Versus Directive Coaching

Another consideration in studying teachers' perceptions of and experiences with the coaching process is the approach that coaches use in working with teachers. Research indicates that the relationship that coaches have with teachers is an important factor in the coaching process (Deussen et al., 2007; Dozier, 2006; IRA, 2004; Stover et al., 2011). The approach that coaches use can be categorized in two specific ways: 1) reflective and 2) directive (Deussen et al., 2007).

Reflective coaching occurs when the coach allows the teacher to initiate the instructional conversation or when the coach begins the coaching session by asking the teacher to share his/her thoughts about the lesson (Deussen et al., 2007). Sometimes while teachers are sharing, coaches think of other questions for the teachers, which helps to facilitate more discussion and reflection. The goal is for teachers to be reflective about their practices so that they can take ownership of their performance and the changes that need to occur (Stover et al., 2011).

Various coaching models found in the research literature used reflective coaching as a process to literacy coaching. In the Mentoring Coaching Model (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008), teachers were reflective about their practices and shifted their initial focus on teaching to student learning. In the School Innovation Through Teacher Interaction (SITTI) coaching model (Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996),

the premise was that teachers should be active participants, as opposed to passive participants, in PD activities by participating in peer coaching. As Haughey, Snart, and da Costa (2001) assessed the factors that impact students' literacy achievement, teachers had group sessions to share ideas for instructional strategies and to reflect on their daily experiences.

These non-evaluative coaching models (Haughey et al., 2001; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008; Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996) facilitated collegial relationships among teachers and encouraged them to be reflective about their own instructional practices. Teachers demonstrated trust with the group members, were comfortable questioning their own practices, and sought advice from others. In each of these models, a sense of collegiality created a safe environment in which teachers were willing to take risks and share the results of those risks taken. As they began to share more of themselves, they were more apt to be reflective about their practice and receive suggestions or input from their colleagues.

While reflective coaching takes into account the teacher's perception of her own skill and performance, the studies that exemplify reflective coaching were not designed to actually examine teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching. Rather, reflective coaching was used specifically to help teachers process their performance and learn how to improve as a practitioner.

Directive coaching is described as the coach providing very specific and direct recommendations or instructions about how to teach in a particular way or

about a change that needs to be made (Deussen et al., 2007). In some instances teachers specifically asked for assistance because they were looking for directive coaching and wanted a specific answer. In other cases, help was not solicited, and the coach used the directive coaching approach to provide teachers with specific feedback because of an observed deficiency or because an administrator asked the coach to address a certain area (Deussen et al., 2007).

In my review of the literature, I found no studies that used only directive coaching; however, there were some studies in which the coaches used both the reflective and the directive approach (Gibson, 2005; Hsieh et al., 2009; Ippolito, 2010). For example, Ippolito (2010) described how coaches had to balance the use of both approaches. To balance reflective and directive coaching, the coaches used agendas, planning or discussion guides, and observation protocols. One study also described the conditions that may determine the type of coaching needed (Ippolito, 2010).

Both reflective and directive coaching were used in some studies. Hsieh et al. (2009), for example, reported that teachers were expected to increase their usage of literacy instructional practices. Directive coaching occurred until teachers reached the criterion of using 80 percent of the strategies. Reflective coaching occurred as teachers shared ideas about how they could have increased their usage of literacy instructional strategies. In the case study report by Gibson (2005), initially the coaches took a directive approach to coaching because their “agenda” in coaching superseded the teacher’s agenda in the

coaching experience. Over time, the coaches realized that in order for coaching to be effective in promoting change in instructional practices they needed to guide the teachers in thinking about how to improve their instruction by creating the kind of dialog that fostered reflective coaching. Coaching was found to be more effective when there was teacher buy-in (Gibson 2005).

In my role as a literacy coach, I have experienced being directed to coach specific teachers, and thus, in those cases I tended to take more of a directive approach to coaching. Even though I was not able to find a study that examines the directive coaching model, I know that directive coaching does occur. Therefore, in my study, I will not only investigate the teachers' general perceptions of literacy coaching, but also their perceptions and experiences toward directive and reflective coaching.

Benefits of Literacy Coaching

In previous sections I described literacy coaching and some purposes of literacy coaching. As the purposes are achieved, then the benefits of literacy coaching become more evident. Some of the benefits of literacy coaching previously mentioned include: collaborative support for teachers (Deussen et al., 2004; Matsumura et al., 2010; Steckel 2009; Walpole et al., 2010), job embedded PD (IRA, 2004, Kinnucan et al., 2006; Steckel, 2009), assisting teachers with analyzing student data, connection of theory (what is learned in a PD session) to practice (what is taught in the classroom) (Deussen et al., 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2007; IRA, 2004; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Stover et al., 2011), scaffolded

assistance according to the teachers' needs, and avenues for teachers to be reflective of their instructional practices (Joyce & Showers, 1980, Neuman & Roper, 2010; Polk, 2006; Stover et al., 2011). While the research supports all of these as benefits of literacy coaching, the ultimate benefit is for teachers to not only be reflective about their instructional practices, but also to change their practices so that their teaching has a positive effect on student achievement and students become fluent, independent readers (Peterson et al., 2009).

With demands being put on professional development as a result of NCLB and RttP, there is surprisingly little empirically-based research substantiating the goal for effective instructional coaching, as professional development, to increase student achievement (Haughey et al., 2001; Putman et al., 2009; Steckel, 2009). Instead, according to Huffman and Thomas (2003), the majority of the research on professional development investigated changes in teacher practices, content and pedagogical knowledge, beliefs, expectations, self-efficacy, and other variables that may indirectly affect student achievement.

Therefore, in order to better understand the findings of the few empirical studies of literacy coaching, the remaining research in this literature review is divided into two sections. The first section includes research that investigated how instructional or peer coaching affected teacher practices, teacher beliefs, self-efficacy and/or school culture, and the second section focuses on research that investigated how instructional or peer coaching impacted student achievement. It should be noted that while many of the studies in the following

sections have been described or highlighted in one of the previous sections describing the structure and function of various models of coaching, the focus here is on outcomes of literacy coaching.

The effect of literacy coaching on teacher reflection, instructional practices, and/or school climate. Standard V of the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards (North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process, 2009) states that “Teachers should reflect on their practice.” Teachers are expected to analyze student data and understand why learning happened and what needs to occur to increase achievement. Just as students are encouraged to reflect on their work and practice, so it is with teachers as well. Thoughtful teachers reflect on ways to continually develop and implement the curriculum in a way that all children can learn (Bintz, 2007; Haughey et al., 2001; Stover et al., 2011).

Effects of coaching on teacher reflection. Coaching teachers towards being reflective can be done individually (Bintz 2007; Stover et al., 2011), or in small group settings (Haughey et al., 2001). In the case study conducted by Bintz (2007) the coach and the teacher recorded ongoing classroom observations, had reflective conversations in debriefing sessions, and shared a journal that consisted of notes from their debriefing conversations focused on “What are we learning about ourselves as teachers?” (Bintz, 2007, p. 211). This study implied that while teachers may be able to be reflective on their own, having coaching

support in working through the teachers' thoughts and giving feedback can increase teachers' ability to improve in their teaching practices.

Additionally, coaching towards being a reflective practitioner can also be done in small groups. Haughey et al. (2001) reported that the PD program, which consisted of PD training and follow-up group reflective sessions, contributed to teachers increased knowledge of literacy-development strategies. Small group monthly reflective sessions were an avenue for teachers to be reflective about their own practices, and caused teachers to become more appreciative of the group members and increasingly comfortable with sharing and discussing their classroom experiences with those in the group. This study (Haughey et al., 2001) and other research (Kennedy & Shiel, 2010; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013; Stover et al., 2011) showed that as teachers increased their collaboration and trust with peers and/or with a literacy coach, they were more comfortable sharing and receiving new ideas. In addition, increased self-efficacy gave teachers the confidence to change and try new instructional practices (Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013; Steckel, 2009).

Effects of coaching on instructional practices. According to the research, literacy coaching has also facilitated change in teacher practices (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008; Pomerantz and Pierce, 2013; Steckel, 2009; Stover et al., 2011). Coaches promoted teacher change in literacy instruction through classroom observations and collaboration between coach and teachers (Steckel, 2009). Literacy coaches promoted improvements in instructional

practices by clarifying questions that teachers had in response to PD they received and by reviewing principles of effective literacy instruction (Pomerantz and Pierce, 2013). As a result, teachers demonstrated increased proficiency in using formative assessments, matching materials to meet the needs of individual students, teaching guided reading groups, conferencing with individual students to provide feedback, and providing direct instruction (Steckel, 2009). Coaches also made classroom observations that focused on key aspects of comprehension instruction, which also resulted in teachers improving in their literacy practices (Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013).

It is essential to note the importance of relationship-building between the coach and the teacher in the process of changing teacher practices (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008; Steckel, 2009; Stover et al., 2011). Onchwari and Keengwe (2008) found that as the mentors (coaches) were getting to know the teachers, they also were better equipped to understand the teachers' needs and therefore better able to support them in reaching their goals. Relationship building created an environment in which teachers were comfortable in reflecting about their practice, thus improving their practice. This whole cycle positively affected the teachers, the grade level, and eventually the overall culture and climate of the school.

Effects of coaching on school culture and climate. Other studies also reported that literacy coaching made a positive impact on school culture and climate (Al Otaiba et al., 2008; Kennedy & Shiel, 2013; Matsumura et al., 2010;

Porche et al., 2012; Shaw, 2007; Steckel, 2009). For example, Steckel (2009) stated that the stakeholders (coaches, teachers, and principals) “reported significant and observable changes in overall school culture” (p. 18). Teachers and coaches had continuous dialogue regarding instruction in an open and non-threatening manner. A culture of collaboration, problem solving, and inquiry became part of the norm (Steckel, 2009).

Kennedy and Shiel (2013) reported that their PD program was designed not only to increase the teachers’ expertise but also their confidence and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was described as one’s beliefs about their capabilities to accomplish desired tasks and how people think, feel, and encourage themselves to perform. According to Kennedy and Shiel (2013), as teachers increased their knowledge and confidence, they were willing to take make changes in their literacy instruction. With their improved skills, teachers in their study were better able to respond to daily challenges. Additionally, as their students’ achievement increased, teachers gained more confidence regarding their instructional practices.

The studies mentioned in this section highlight the value of coaching for assisting teachers to link what is learned in formal professional development trainings (the theory) to the actual implementation (the practice) in the classroom. Coaching also appears to empower teachers to take more ownership in the task of promoting student success (Kennedy & Shiel, 2013; Stover et al., 2011). In addition, teachers engaged in increased self-reflection, which aided them in

making changes in their teaching practices (Kennedy & Shiel, 2013; Stover et al., 2011). As their confidence increased in their teaching abilities, teachers were more comfortable in sharing their successes and failures in literacy instruction with their colleagues because they felt supported and that they were not alone (Kennedy & Shiel, 2013; Onchwari and Keengwe, 2008; Stover et al., 2011) All these factors increased teacher collaboration and cultivated a positive school climate, which was in turn instrumental in overall school reform (Kennedy & Shiel, 2013; Onchwari and Keengwe, 2008; Stover et al., 2011).

The effects of coaching on teacher practices resulting in increased student literacy achievement. While most research on coaching does not provide specific data on its effect on student achievement, there are a few studies that did indicate a positive gain. According to Slack (2003), the Reading Success Network (RSN) helped teachers with both the content of literacy and the process of teaching literacy. In this study, teacher coaches had to facilitate collegial discussions around teaching, learning, and assessment, to be reflective of teacher practice coupled with providing meaningful feedback, to assist teachers in analyzing their reading data, and to use that data to drive literacy instruction. As a result of properly using all components of the RSN program, there was a change in teacher practices and an increase in reading skills in various regions in the US that implemented RSN. Unfortunately, there was no empirical data that supported or explained the increase in student achievement,

no scores or data that indicated the increase in scores, and no mention of other possible factors that influenced the improvement in reading scores.

As a part of Elish-Piper and L'Allier's (2010) exploration of the relationship between literacy coaching and kindergarten and first grade reading achievement, they gathered data from weekly coaching logs that documented all coach/teacher interactions and other coaching activities. While the focus of this study was on examining how literacy coaching impacted student reading achievement, the data from the coaching logs indicated that the coaching role entails many other duties outside of the actual coaching process itself. Even though the findings in this study indicated that coaching might not have contributed to the *overall* student gain, it may, however, have contributed to the student gain of *some* teachers.

Hsieh et al. (2009) investigated the effect of coaching on preschoolers acquiring early literacy skills. The purpose of the study was to assess the effects that coaching had on the teaching practices of early childhood teachers using specific strategies linked to student success in reading. Children's literacy development before and after coaching interventions were compared, and the results of a paired t-test indicated that the children demonstrated *significantly* higher scores after the intervention with the teachers. The researchers acknowledged the lack of a control group and suggested that further study be done with an experimental and control group to truly see the effects of coaching.

Without a control group, it is difficult to determine the actual impact of coaching on student achievement.

Other research also supported the belief that literacy coaching increased student achievement. Bean et al. (2011) examined the relationship between coaching and student achievement and found that the teachers who received more coaching had the highest gains in student achievement. Biancarosa et al. (2010) conducted a four-year longitudinal study where not only did first and second grade students make significant gains but also the results were greater each year. Kennedy and Shiel (2013) also found an increase in literacy achievement in three areas: 1) standardized reading test, 2) standardized spelling test, and 3) non-standardized measure of writing. Data collected from student interviews indicated that there was also an increase in student engagement and motivation. Students grew in their strategic knowledge of reading and writing; they reportedly were more persistent which increased their levels of confidence.

Each of the studies that included student achievement data. Though few in number, they suggested that either there was an increase in student achievement as a result of instructional coaching for the teachers, or that coaching was a contributing factor linked to student success (Bean et al., 2010; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier's, 2010; Hsieh et al., 2009; Kennedy & Shiel, 2013; Slack, 2003). Nevertheless, all these researchers acknowledged that there are multiple factors that interact to contribute to the

increase in literacy achievement; however, one cannot overlook data that suggested increased literacy coaching had a positive impact on the increase in literacy achievement. The change in each school or educational setting began with dialogue between the coaches and teachers, and then implementation of what was learned came next. As the teachers became more empowered, they were more successful in using effective literacy instruction in the classroom. Consequently, the claim was that their students were more successful and there was an increase in the literacy achievement scores. However, there remains a dearth in the literature that specifically examines the impact of coaching on student achievement because each of the studies indicated that there were various other factors that may also contribute to student success - not just the literacy coaching alone.

Studies that Amplify Teachers' Voices in Literacy Coaching and Literacy Achievement

The previous sections described studies about the various benefits of instructional literacy coaching. Even though it is important to document how beneficial coaching can be for teachers and students, one vital question still remains, "What are teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching?" Currently there is a lack of literature that truly explores or amplifies teachers' voices regarding their perceptions and experiences of literacy coaching. In fact, I did not find any study that was specifically designed to collect data that focused only on teachers' voices regarding coaching. While there were a few studies that included

teachers' voices (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Mraz et al., 2008; Scott, Cortina & Carlisle, 2011), there seems to be very limited research that indicated what teachers think, feel, and need regarding literacy coaching.

While only a few studies have actually focused on amplifying teachers' voices regarding literacy coaching, there was a study conducted by Fisher and Frey (2007) that illustrated how teachers had a voice in school reform efforts to implement a school-wide literacy framework that improved the school's literacy achievement. First, a literacy task force, which included the principal, parents, and teachers, developed an instructional framework that guided teachers' instructional decisions and also allowed teachers to have a common language regarding literacy instruction. Second, there was teacher buy-in to the school's focused professional development plan because teachers had a hand in the design, the development, and the implementation of the plan. Their ability to create their own learning increased collaborative conversations that contributed to their implementation of what they learned in the professional development sessions. Consequently, teacher buy-in contributed to the fidelity of the framework. One teacher was quoted saying, "...We were trusted as professionals. We were treated as professionals. And we were expected to perform as such..." (Fisher & Frey, 2007, p. 41). Once again, this study exemplified that positive outcomes can occur when teachers' voices are heard in the process of improving literacy achievement.

Mraz et al. (2008) actually examined the perceptions and expectations of principals, literacy coaches, *and* teachers about the responsibilities of literacy coaching. This study compared views about various issues of literacy coaching from the perspective of each of the stakeholders. Data were gathered to answer the question: “What are the perceptions of principals, teachers, and literacy coaches relative to the roles and expectations of literacy coaching and to what extent they are similar across these different groups of professionals?” (p. 145). Data were collected through (1) a survey that contained specific behaviors of five roles for coaches, (2) semi-structured interviews of the principals, literacy coaches, and randomly selected teachers, and (3) samples of the literacy coaches’ weekly schedules.

Teachers’ voices were amplified in the Mraz et al. (2008) study because the researchers sought to hear their voices through a survey and interviews. The results of this study were useful, especially regarding the differences in each stakeholder’s views based on their role. This study echoed the need for focused research on teachers’ perceptions of literacy coaching because without it teachers’ voices become lost in top-down approaches when coaching is done “to teachers” rather than “for teachers”. The results were compared between each stakeholder (the principal the coach, and the teachers), and the results varied regarding how each one viewed the various roles of the literacy coach. To highlight the teachers’ perceptions, the data indicated that they wanted the coach to be more involved in implementing literacy programs beyond the district’s

requirements. Teachers wanted the coach to become more “hands-on” in the developing of literacy programs and practices. Simply attending grade level meetings and sharing resources was not enough; model lessons that incorporated strategies and/or resources would be more beneficial. Teachers also believed that the coaching role should include “observing teachers at work in their classrooms, mentoring, gathering materials for classroom use, and defining and addressing staff development needs” (p.147). Even though teachers wanted coaches involved with instruction, they expressed concern of the coaches operating in an evaluative capacity rather than a coaching one. While there were some similarities and differences in all the data when comparing it with each group of stakeholders, principals and teachers had more opposing views regarding the roles of the literacy coach.

Relatedly, Vanderberg and Stephens (2009) reiterated that the voices of teachers have not been prominent in the literature regarding their thoughts and experiences on literacy coaching even though they are the ones who are most directly impacted by literacy coaches. As a part of the South Carolina Reading Initiative (SCRI), the researchers analyzed interview data that was collected from 35 teachers who had worked with a coach for three years. The data were not collected specifically with the intent of studying teachers’ voices. However, the researchers used these data to examine teachers’ perceptions of literacy coaching. As a result of literacy coaching, they found that teachers were willing to 1) try more things, 2) use more authentic means for student assessments, 3)

differentiate instruction, and 4) make instructional decisions based on research and theory. Changes in teachers were attributed to the coaches creating ways for the teachers to collaborate by providing ongoing support, and teaching them how to use research-based practices.

More recently, Scott et al. (2011) conducted a study that focused on how coaches spend their time *and* how teachers perceived the coaches' work. Data sources included a survey for coaches, a teacher survey, and coaching logs completed by the coaches. These data indicated that teachers appreciated the coaches 1) organizing and facilitating grade level meetings, 2) providing feedback regarding their literacy instruction, 3) instructing them on how to use DIBELS data, and 4) providing opportunities for practice through literacy workshops. This study also reported that coaches who felt tension from the teachers were rated less favorably. Once again, this study reinforced that the effects of literacy coaching was dependent on the buy-in from all stakeholders (Scott et al., 2011).

While the studies highlighted above included an element of teachers' voices either in the data collection or the findings, none of these studies solely gathered and examined data for the purpose of learning about teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching. Even though literacy coaching has become more prevalent and has increased over time, especially since NCLB Act and RttT, it has been a few years since any study has privileged teachers' perceptions about literacy coaching. Since teachers are stakeholders in the

coaching process, it seems reasonable that their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions should be at the heart of every literacy coaches plan and process and at the heart of literature on the subject. Nevertheless, there is currently a dearth of literature that explores teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching.

Summary

In summary, I began this chapter by first describing the attributes of high quality PD and then defining literacy coaching and describing how the attributes of PD directly relate to literacy coaching. Next, I described Vygotsky's principles of learning and development as a theoretical framework to use for this study, and I explained how sociocultural principles are directly related to literacy coaching. Using specific examples from the research, I described the many roles and responsibilities that coaches have at the state, district, and school level. In this literature review, I also described various coaching models and explicated specific components of the coaching models. I also explained the benefits and impact that literacy coaching had on teachers, teachers' self-efficacy, school reform, and literacy achievement. Lastly, I closely examined the few studies that amplified teachers' voices regarding literacy coaching, although there seems to be a lack of research that explores teacher's perceptions on the topic.

In my review of the literature on teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching, the current literature on instructional coaching could be categorized in a number of ways. Others have looked at what makes literacy coaching effective by looking at student data, the change in school culture, and teacher self-efficacy. However,

few studies have explored the meaning that teachers make of literacy coaching and how this meaning can be used to design a coaching model that will be effective for teachers and also beneficial for students. The fact remains that there is a gap in the literature on the meanings that teachers make of effective literacy coaching. My experiences and the research on coaching and literacy instruction have caused me to make some basic assumptions about the current issues surrounding effective literacy coaching. In a quest to improve coaching practices, teachers' voices should be heard to provide a greater insight in the progression of the coaching field. Hence, further study is needed to receive clarity on the topic. The findings from this study may provide additional information that can be used to design a model of "coaching that matters" for all teachers of literacy.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

With the federal initiatives of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, many school districts are employing literacy coaching in their quest to improve reading test scores. In this study, I am seeking to understand teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching to answer this primary research question: "What meanings do teachers make of literacy coaching?" In order to answer this question I will explore the following subquestions:

- How do teachers perceive and describe their experiences of literacy coaching?
- What are the teachers' perceptions of the influence of school-based administrators on literacy coaching?
- What are the teacher's perceptions of *effective* literacy coaching?
- What are teachers' needs for coaching as they relate to their individual professional development?

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that investigates the meaning of a phenomenon or lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2003;

Gallagher 2012; Glendinning, 2007; Schram, 2006; Spinelli; 200; van Manen 2014). The term phenomenology is partly derived from the Greek *phainomenon* which literally means 'appearance' (Spinelli, 2005). This way of thinking is rooted in the philosophical perspective of Edmund Husserl (Gallagher, 2012; Schram, 2006) who focused on consciousness and the world as we experience it. Husserl also believed that phenomenology was a way of seeing rather than just a set of doctrines. Husserl stressed that the word 'phenomenon' relates to '*that which appears*' and not simply '*appearance*' (Gallagher, 2012).

Some philosophers, such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Schutz, to name a few, believed that phenomenology is also defined as a method as well as philosophical theory (Gallagher, 2012; Glendinning, 2007; Schram, 2007) Spinelli, 2005; van Manen, 2014). For Husserl, phenomenology was also a method that attempted to give a description of the way things appear in our conscious experience. His focus was not on reality but *how* we experienced things. The way that things appear in our consciousness may be different than how things are in reality (Gallagher, 2012). With this method, the researcher tries to describe the commonalities of all the individuals, and then seeks to reduce these descriptions and narrow the focus into the *essence* of these human experiences (Creswell, 2008).

Phenomenologists must approach the data without prejudice, bias and taken-for-granted assumptions, which is known as *epoché*. This refers to the ability to suspend, separate ourselves, or "bracket" our preconceptions regarding

our experiences and events in the everyday world (Schram 2007). The researcher's goal in a phenomenology study is to obtain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences, and this must be done through the meaning that the individuals make of their own experiences or events.

While data gathered in a phenomenological study may tell us what we already know, these data are still important because they provide the participants' truth, which is subjective and knowable only through the embodied perception (Starks, & Trinidad 2007). When using phenomenology as a method, assumptions are suspended until they are substantiated in the data. Also, researchers are focused on "conveying a meaning that is fundamental to the experience no matter which specific individual has had that experience" (Schram, 2007 p. 99).

One benefit of using phenomenology is that each participant is accepted as unique and has his/her own story or reality to share. In this study, the interview format encourages the participants to be truly open and fully share their experiences in response to literacy coaching. Each participant's perspective is valued and their uniqueness adds to the richness of the data. As a researcher I have to accept their responses as *their* reality because I am seeking to understand *their* meanings.

Another affordance of a phenomenological study is that even though it does not offer theory, it does offer plausible insights, and in this instance, insights regarding the teachers' experiences with literacy coaching. The details of their

experiences form a rich amount of data, and from these data, themes will emerge. These themes may: 1) confirm the taken for granted assumptions of the teachers experiences with literacy coaching, 2) offer new insights and possibilities regarding literacy coaching, or 3) do both of these things. As the details are analyzed, themes begin to emerge and those themes may be viewed as “practitioner friendly”, and consequently, teachers, coaches, or other school-based educators may more easily use the findings. The teacher’s voices are being privileged, but one cannot assume that what teachers say about coaching is all there is to say about coaching. There is more to learn, more to explore.

Rationale for Phenomenology

When considering the current usage of literacy coaching in American public schools, there seems to be many assumptions made about literacy coaching based on how decisions are made regarding the coaching process. This realization caused me to revisit qualitative research approaches. One thing that became very clear for me was my interest in the lived experiences of teachers, more so than creating or substantiating a theory that looked at this process, or focusing on an activity, event, process, or program of a specific case or cases. Therefore, I determined that using a phenomenology approach would be a better fit for the purpose of my study.

Starks and Trinidad (2007) stated, “Phenomenology contributes to deeper understanding of lived experiences by exposing taken-for-granted assumptions about these ways of knowing” (p. 1373). Ultimately, I want to understand the

lived experiences of teachers and determine what their perspectives are toward literacy coaching. To gain a greater understanding into the effectiveness of literacy instructional coaching from the perception of teachers, I wanted to explore the phenomenon of the literacy coaching experience. Schram (2006) stated, “Phenomenological studies investigate the meaning of the lived experience of a small group of people from the standpoint of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 98). My focus in this study is the phenomenon of literacy coaching and more specifically what meaning teachers make of literacy coaching. It is important to know what influences (the supports and constraints) teachers believed to be essential in literacy coaching. Through examining the meanings that teachers make of effective literacy coaching, I am “not focused on the intrinsic meaning of actions and words, but on what they are *made* to mean, particularly in terms of what they accomplish for those who engage in or use them” (Schram 2006, p. 13). Simply put, just because the teachers say what they think about literacy coaching does not mean that that is all that they have to say about literacy coaching. Understanding meaning is necessary in order to understand the teachers’ reality of literacy coaching, which can give researchers insight on what teachers believe that they need in order for coaching to be effective for them.

Some of the research that explores coaching effectiveness quantifies teachers’ voices through using surveys or observation protocols (Hsieh, et al 2009; Mraz et al. 2008; Neuman & Wright, 2010). While this research does add

value and knowledge to the field, qualitative data that provides a deeper look into effective coaching as defined by teachers is rare or non-existent. Therefore, through a phenomenological lens, I am privileging teachers' perspectives and will seek to understand how they view effective literacy coaching. In other words, from a phenomenological perspective, effective literacy coaching is not defined according to what policymakers, administrators, or coaches say, but is defined by what meanings the teachers make of it.

Site of Research

The participants for this study were selected from elementary Title I schools in a large urban district in the southeast region of the United States. Schools are considered Title I in this district when at least 70 percent of the students at the school qualify for free or reduced lunch. This also means that these schools receive Title I funds from the federal government. This district serves over 71,000 students and contains 124 schools: 67 elementary, 23 middle, 28 high, and 6 alternative. The district's student ethnic composition is as follows: American Indian - 0.2%, Asian - 6%, Black - 41%, Hispanic - 14%, Multi-Racial - 4%, Pacific Islander - 0.1%, and White - 35% (Financial and Business Services, 2015).

In the district used as a site for this study, all elementary schools had a curriculum facilitator and the district provides 50 percent funding for the position. In the 2013-14 school year, the district required that all curriculum facilitators assume the role of literacy coach for the "50 percent" that the district funds. Most

schools use other funds to pay for the other half of the position so that the curriculum facilitator is onsite fulltime. In a few instances the CF/literacy coach is shared between two schools so that the CF is at both schools part-time but employed fulltime with the District. Also in some cases the other half of the CF/coach position is paired with a reading specialist position there at the school, so the CF is part-time literacy coach and part-time reading teacher. Nevertheless, this school district is attempting to put more resources into the schools to help increase student learning in an effort to narrow the achievement gap in reading.

Participant Selection

Teachers were recruited from Title I elementary schools from the southeastern region of this school district. Participants had to be a regular education classroom teacher who taught any grade level kindergarten through fifth grade. My focus was the regular education classroom teachers because I am most interested in the thoughts of these teachers because of the pressure for these teachers to do well due to end of year reading assessments (kindergarten – 2nd grade) and end-of-grade standardized testing (3rd – 5th grade). Table 1 shows basic information for each participant. Detailed profiles for each of them is provided in Chapter IV.

Table 1

Participants' Profiles

Teacher's Name	School	Number of Years Teaching	Ethnicity	Grade Levels Taught	Pathway into Teaching
Sharon	School A	7	Caucasian	1 st , 2 nd , & reading for 3 rd – 5 th	Non-traditional path. Teaching was second career.
Shadae	School A	10	African-American	1 st & 2 nd	Non-traditional path. Teaching was second career.
Tina	School A	16	African-American	2 nd , 4 th , 6 th & 8 th math & science	Non-traditional path. Teaching was second career.
Kelly	School B	5	African-American	Kinder & 1 st	Non-traditional path. Was a teacher's assistant before becoming a teacher.
Diana	School B	16	Caucasian	2 nd , 3 rd , & 5 th	Traditional path: earned education degree in college
Jackie	School C	4	African-American	3 rd , 4 th & 5 th	Traditional path: earned education degree in college

The participants for this study were required to have experienced at least one year of literacy coaching from the CF/literacy coach. Also the teachers had to have at least three years teaching experience, which means that they were not

considered a “Beginning Teacher” according to the state’s evaluation process. The goal was to have between six and eight teachers participate in this study based on the recommendation that phenomenology studies typically have from one to ten participants (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Because the selection for the teacher interviews is purposeful (based on variation in years of teaching experience, grade level, and years of experience with literacy coaching), the goal was to maximize the differences within the grade levels so that there was sufficient variation of the different teachers (Maxwell, 2005). Ultimately, I interviewed six elementary teachers that fit my selection criteria.

Within this school district, schools were divided into regions: Northern, Western, Southeastern, and Central. I began my recruiting process by first determining which of the 17 elementary schools within the Southeast region were Title I. Next I contacted the CFs at three of the ten Title I schools to solicit participants for the study. The CFs gave me specific names of teachers who qualified for the study or those who they thought would be interested. I then followed up with the participants via email and then either talked with them on the phone or met with them in person. Teachers who were willing to participate were included on a first-come, first-served basis until I received enough volunteers. While interviews are the main source of data in phenomenological studies, methods of collecting data and data analysis are described next.

Methods of Data Collection

As an interpretivist, I realize that teachers develop meaning from their experiences, and that these meanings are varied, multiple, and subjective (Creswell, 2008). In my quest of understanding my subjects' perceptions, I realize that their perceptions and the meanings that they make of literacy coaching are shaped by their own social interaction with others and by historical and cultural settings of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2008; Creswell & Clark, 2011). Thus, my intent was to construct, interpret, or make sense of the perceptions that teachers have about their coaching experiences based on what they told me.

Data for phenomenological studies are typically gathered through interviews, and phenomenological studies tend to have long, in-depth interviews. Using Seidman's three-interview model (Seidman, 2006), I conducted three individual interviews with each participant. Each interview had a specific focus: interview one – life history including their professional history, interview two – the details of their experiences with regard to teaching and literacy coaching, and interview three – reflection on the meaning of the teacher's experiences with literacy coaching. Because the goal of phenomenology is to discover the essence of the participants' experiences, it was important to receive detailed, in-depth accounts of their experiences. My purpose in interviewing the teachers was to elicit the teachers' stories. I was basically seeking to know three things: 1) *what* the teacher experienced in regards to literacy coaching, 2) *how* they

experienced literacy coaching (Creswell, 2008), and 3) what meanings they make of what they experienced with literacy coaching.

In order to understand the meanings that teachers make of literacy coaching, it was necessary to hear the teachers' voices. Creswell (2003) posited that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (p. 9). The questions for the interview protocol were divided strategically into three sections that follow Seidman's model for interviewing as previously mentioned. (See Appendix 1 for Seidman's Interview Structure and Research Questions Matrix.)

For the interviews, I used a semi-structured format that contains preformulated questions to solicit open-ended responses. (*See Appendix 2 for Interview Protocol.*) I wanted to use this format because it provides flexibility and focus or directionality (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow for probing of additional questions in the event that I needed clarity or more information regarding the interviewees' responses. The order of the questions was designed to move from simple to more complex and from the concrete to more abstract (Schensul et al., 1999). Following an outline of the interview questions offered me a systemic way of collecting data while leaving room to probe into the teachers' responses when more information is needed. Also, data from semi-structured interviews were more easily comparable because specific answers were given to direct questions. Gaps in

the data can be more easily detected and closed (Patton, 2002) when using semi-structured interviews.

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or via telephone with each teacher. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain an in-depth look at the participants' meanings of instructional coaching. The interviews were done at the teacher's convenience and lasted on average about 30 – 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded on an audio recorder and then later transcribed by me, the interviewer.

Methods of Data Analysis

After collecting the data, I began the data analysis process by first transcribing the interviews. According to Maxwell (2005), the initial step in qualitative analysis is “reading the interview transcription, observational notes, or documents to be analyzed” (p. 96). As I read through the transcriptions, I began the analysis process by writing notes and memos to record thoughts that come to my mind as I recounted the interviews and as I began to develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships of the data collected (Maxwell, 2005). I read through all the data multiple times to obtain a general sense of the information gathered and to reflect on its meaning (Creswell, 2003). Reading through each participant's entire transcript gave me an overall picture of each teacher's literacy coaching experiences. This also gave me an opportunity to write down additional questions that came to mind from the actual interview that may have not been captured at that time.

When doing a phenomenology study, the data analysis process is iterative, occurs in layers, and consists of decontextualization and recontextualization (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). After multiple readings of each teacher's responses, all of the responses for each participant were color-coded. For example, one participant's answers were colored blue, one red, one orange, one green, etc. During decontextualization, I separated the data by sorting the teachers' responses according to each interview question so that I could easily see all their responses together to each question. This process helped me to be able to examine and more easily compare what each teacher said in response to each question, and to categorize these data. Additionally, key words were highlighted in order to compare and contrast the responses and also to help identify main categories. Responses that were related to each category were coded and then placed on an "Analysis and Coding Table". During the recontextualization phase, a second level of coding was used to merge significant words, phrases, or events that recurred across all interviews. New themes were then merged under the main categories that were originally identified. After the responses were grouped, I summarized the responses in paragraphs to capture the essence of what the teachers shared in response to each research question.

After coding and analyzing these data, I used the recurring or significant words and phrases to build descriptions and themes. Creswell (2008) says, "Describing and developing themes from data consist of answering the major

research question and forming an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon through description and thematic development” (p. 254). Thus, my themes were used to describe major ideas that emerged from the data to describe the participants’ lived experiences of literacy coaching.

Lastly, the final step of data analysis involved interpreting the data to capture the essence of what the teachers shared. At this point, I looked to gain additional insights about the meanings that teachers make of literacy coaching. While interpreting the data, I gained an in-depth understanding of teachers’ lived experiences regarding literacy coaching and how that information can be used to create more ideal coaching situations.

Validity

Validity can be defined as the extent to which a test or other measurement instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. Validation of the findings is actually established throughout the research process (Creswell 2003), which includes the purposive sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Participants for a phenomenological study on teachers’ perceptions on literacy coaching had to be teachers who had actually experienced literacy coaching. In this study there are specific parameters for purposive selection such as type of school, number of years of experience, and grade level of teachers, which I described earlier in this chapter. However, the first criterion was that each teacher had experienced literacy coaching for at least one academic year.

Secondly, validation is also gained through the rich data collected from three interviews per participant. According to Seidman (2006), each interview could last for up to 90 minutes each, keeping in mind that some may be shorter or longer than the anticipated time. My interviews sessions with the teachers lasted on average from 30 - 45 minutes each. These dense data provided more information regarding the participants' thoughts and feelings of literacy coaching. According to Seidman (2006), using the approach of interviews in a three-session series increases validity because, with the sessions done overtime (typically one to three weeks) it: 1) enhances the context for the participants' comments, 2) checks for internal consistency of their comments, and 3) accounts for the idiosyncrasies of the participants. The goal of this process was to gain a full and deeper understanding of the meanings that the participants made of their lived experiences of the phenomenon. Teachers in this study had the opportunity to share their thoughts on the questions in the interview, and then the second and third interviews began with a summary or recap of the previous session. Teachers were able to validate what was said and also add or correct anything that was previously shared. Also, at the end of the first and second interview, I gave the participants a preview of the next interview by telling them the purpose of the next session and things to be thinking about. One participant told me that knowing the focus of the next interview session gave her time to think about her experiences because sometimes it was difficult to think of some of those things "on the spot". Also, giving participants multiple days between the sessions

allowed them time to reflect on their experiences, and they were able to actually think of more things to share. With only one interview, it may have been more difficult for them to share in one interview all of details they shared over the course of three interviews, so this process increased the validity of this study.

Two validity threats to phenomenology as a research methodology include a small sample size and the fact that the data gained were self-reported. However, in a phenomenological study the researcher is not trying to find out all there is to know about a specific topic, but rather is trying to get detailed insight on a phenomenon according to the lived experiences of a small group of people. In this study, I focused on a targeted group of teachers' literacy coaching experiences and the their ideas of what is needed to make literacy coaching effective. While there was no true way of knowing whether of not the data gathered from each teacher were accurate, the prolonged intense data collection using interviews from multiple participants was one way to address both of these validity threats. The more complete the data, the clearer the picture or understanding of the teachers' views on literacy coaching. Consequently, validation was confirmed through the development of themes from the rich data that were collected.

Also, the participants engaged in "member checking", which was a process that allowed the participants to read the researcher's findings to determine whether or not they are accurate (Maxwell, 2005). Creswell (2007) described member checking as how the researcher solicits "participants' views of

the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (p. 208). I provided “member checking” in a number of ways. First of all, during the interviews, I summarized my interpretation of the participant’s responses to my questions and asked them to verify my understanding. Additionally, in the second and third interviews, I started the interview by reviewing the main parts of their previous responses for validation. This method helped to reduce the probability of misinterpreting the meaning of what the participants provided throughout the data collection process. I realized, as Maxwell (2005) stated, that the participants’ feedback regarding the data is no more valid than the interview responses; however, their responses were “simply used as evidence regarding the validity of [their] account” (p. 111). Next, I allowed the participants to read all of their transcripts to check for accuracy of what had been transcribed. Creswell (2007) said that the member checking approach consisted of “taking the data analysis, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account“ (p. 208). Therefore the last phase of member checking consisted of the participants reading their participant’s profile and my interpretation of their responses as they related to each interview question. (See Chapter 4.) Unfortunately, there was no true way of knowing that the data that I gathered from teachers actually got at the meaning that they make of literacy coaching, and each participant’s meanings may have varied from those of others. As a qualitative researcher, my job was to create a study that was trustworthy and credible and not one that was flawless (Schram, 2006).

Researcher bias in this phenomenology study was also a validity threat. It is difficult to prove whether or not researchers have bracketed their own experiences and assumptions in the data collection and analysis process. To counter this threat, there were steps that I, as the researcher, followed. First, I addressed the bias that I brought to the study upfront in a detailed explanation of my biases and beliefs about literacy coaching in the Positionality section of this chapter (see below). Secondly, I bracketed my thoughts and assumptions that I had regarding literacy coaching until they were substantiated by the data. Schram (2007) described this method as the researcher's ability to "suspend judgments about what is real until they are founded on a more certain description of how everyday life (or some aspect of it) is produced and experienced by its members" (p. 99). Therefore, my interpretations of the data are well supported through the responses that were given by the participants.

Positionality

Working as a literacy coach for the past four years, I have preconceived notions of what effective literacy coaching is because I too have a perspective of and bring meaning to the coaching experience. I also have specific beliefs about the elements that make coaching effective and these beliefs impact how I provide coaching on a day-to-day basis. To address this threat, I clarified the biases that I bring to the study upfront (Creswell 2003). However, as Maxwell (2005) stated:

Qualitative research is not primarily concerned with eliminating variance between researchers in the values and expectations they bring to the

study, but with understanding how a particular researcher's values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study"...(p. 108).

Therefore, because I am seeking to understand teachers' meanings of effective literacy coaching through an interpretivist lens, I had to tend to my interpretations of the data so that I could understand how my role as a coach affected my interpretation.

As a coach, I have two main underlining beliefs about literacy coaching. First is the belief that literacy coaching must be designed to meet the teacher's needs; it cannot be done in a canned, one size fits all fashion. Rather, it must be individualized to be effective. However, the question that arises is "Who defines the needs of the teachers?" In some instances, teachers are very reflective and recognize areas for improvements in their own instructional practices. In other instances, they see no need for help or improvement, while the administrators and/or I (as the literacy coach) see it quite differently. Second, while I believe that teachers should have some say in the type of coaching that they should receive, I also believe that administrators and the literacy coach should also have input in this process because teachers do not always see the need. It is important for coaches and teachers to have collegial conversations to discuss areas of concern. Understanding the teacher's point-of-view helps me as the coach to guide the conversation in such a way that it may broaden the teacher's perspective. If help is given to a teacher without buy-in from the teacher, then the

“help” may not be received as “help” and thus no progress will be made to improve literacy instruction.

My beliefs about coaching also include a coaching code of ethics in which the coach must establish a level of trust with the teacher and maintain that level of trust and confidentiality in order to provide teachers with a safe place for receiving help. Lack of trust is detrimental to the coaching relationship. In my experiences as a coach, teachers who trust the coach will share their feelings, thoughts, and challenges. As a result, I am able to have greater insight in the needs of the teacher and not just a surface-level understanding based on classroom observations when trust is present. When teachers are comfortable to have open dialog about their specific needs, it allows me as the coach to provide coaching based on the areas that need the most attention. If teachers believe that I am merely an informant to the administrators, then they may either 1) completely shut me out, or 2) simply do enough to remain compliant but do not completely open up to receive help that will impact their instructional practices. I believe that trust is essential to a healthy teacher/coach relationship. Without it, there is a hindrance in moving forward with progress in literacy instruction and teacher growth and development as it pertains to literacy coaching.

Ethics

Serving in the role of a fulltime literacy coach in a local elementary school provided me with the opportunity to be an active practitioner in the field of coaching. Working in a local school district allowed me access to many teachers

on the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. I also have developed collegial relationships with other coaches from the district level and from various schools. Through these relationships, I am also able to get deeper insights regarding the coaching experiences of teachers and coaches through the informal conversations that we have.

Therefore, issues of access were not a problem in this study. As described earlier, the schools in this district were divided into regions. The CFs have monthly PLC meetings according to the region in which our schools are placed. These PLC meetings have given me an opportunity to build relationships with many CFs across the school district. Thus, I gained access to many schools through the relationship that I had with the CF.

Even though I obtained access to the school based on my relationships with the CFs, one main ethical issue that I had to guard against was maintaining confidentiality of the participants. Therefore, a level of trust was established with each of the teachers so that they felt free to share their perspectives regarding literacy coaching, especially considering I have contact or professional relationships with the other literacy coaches in the district. Additionally, the interviews were not meant to be evaluative of the coaches, but simply to receive insight into literacy coaching as a phenomenon experienced by the teachers in this study. Therefore, I cannot and did not make judgments about my colleagues, including other CFs and literacy coaches, based on the information that I received from teachers at their schools. Also, no data were shared with coaches

or with the principals who supervise the teachers. It is imperative that the highest level of confidentiality is maintained to make this research ethical.

Also, in the final report of this study, I was careful to not situate my findings or to insinuate a negative tone regarding teachers and literacy coaches. While my findings could indicate that the meanings that teachers make of literacy coaching are negative, I tried to find a way to present the data so that neither the teacher nor the coach are presented in a negative light but in such a way that we can understand more about what teachers need to be successful. According to the research (IRA, 2004) trust is believed to be essential to an optimal coaching experience. I had to display the same character with the participants of this study.

Summary

In summary, in my own quest to improve literacy coaching practices, I believe that teachers' voices should be heard to provide greater insight to the literacy coaching field. The findings from this study may provide additional information that can be used to design a model of "coaching that matters" for all teachers of literacy. Because this study amplified teachers' voices, it could create an avenue for meaningful discussions between teachers, coaches, and administrators regarding the various needs of the teachers at their school. For example, the data suggested what is beneficial, what is not, or how coaching impacts the teachers' instructional practices. It also revealed details about the internal feelings, such as the teachers' beliefs regarding literacy instruction.

While generalizations cannot be made from the study, it will offer the teachers' perspectives for other educators to consider. Through meaningful discussions with teachers, coaches can make plans to improve the coaching experience for teachers. Therefore, literacy coaches or principals may be able to use the findings to assist them in making informed decisions about the literacy instruction at their school.

Finally, the data from these studies are not generalizable, which means that these findings are not necessarily representative of what all teachers perceive regarding literacy coaching. Therefore, district policies should not be made simply on the basis of these findings. While these data can provide more insight into the greater picture literacy coaching, they cannot and should not be the final authority regarding how literacy coaching should be conducted.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the data gathered from the participants will be shared. The chapter begins with participants' profiles that provide historical information regarding the teacher's professional history, desire for teaching, and a general and brief description of their teaching experiences. Next, the data is presented in categories according to the research questions. Also, the data is presented by the participants' responses so that each one of them has voice regarding each topic. Themes for each category are given in efforts to make meaning of the participants' experiences.

Profiles of the Participants

Sharon. Some people know early in life what career path they want to take. This was not the case for Sharon who initially received her first degree in biotechnology. She always liked biology in school and was "on the fence" on whether she wanted to be a teacher or nurse. Either way, she knew that she wanted to help someone. Her job consisted of DNA sampling, specifically analyzing bone marrow samples. There were times she worked twenty-four hour shifts when certain amounts of testing needed to be done. The motivation and reward of this job was helping someone find a match for bone marrow to save

someone's live. Sharon reflected on that exhilarating feeling and said, "Of course when you would find a match, I was just thrilled that I was a part of that."

Even though the job was emotionally rewarding, there were challenges that came with the job such as being stuck by dirty needles, the hiring of more and more employees who did not have proper training, and dealing with the company being bought out. Sharon said that the job became more of a production so she left the field and began working as a bank teller. After working there a short while, she was promoted to a teller service supervisor. She was good with numbers and can recount the times that she would be locked up in the vault counting a million dollars. She enjoyed the math part of the job and finding the discrepancies in the numbers, but still that was not what she really wanted to do. She wanted for her job to be fulfilling, and that needed to be done through helping people.

Sharon had two sons, and she was very involved at her sons' school and would help out as much as she could. "That's what was in my heart and where I always wanted to go. I loved being in the school", Sharon said. So she decided to go back to school to become a teacher. Sharon shared how her mom reminded her that when she was four-years-old, she said that she was going to be a teacher and have forty children in her room! "I don't know where I got that number from but she always reminded me of that. That's what I would always tell her..."

But becoming a teacher presented its challenges as well. This meant that she would need to go back to school to get certified, and she would still need to work during the process. She started by cleaning houses during the day so that she could go to school at night to become a teacher. She attended a local private college where she was required to double major. She majored in early elementary and psychology. Remarkably, Sharon was able to finish both degrees in two years.

After graduation, Sharon accepted a position in the local school district as a teacher's assistant because that was the only position the school had available at the time and she wanted to "get her foot in the door". Even though she was an assistant, she did the same thing as the reading teacher, which included writing her own lesson plans and teaching small groups of students. After the teacher left, she actually became the reading teacher and taught guided reading to third, fourth, and fifth grade students. She worked with students who were performing below grade level. Even though she enjoyed being the reading teacher and even though her principal was pleased with her work, the school district decided that all reading teachers had to have reading certification or at least 24 hours of higher education coursework in the area. Therefore, Sharon had to leave the position of reading teacher, and she was placed in the classroom as a second grade teacher.

Whether she had the students all day as a self-contained classroom teacher or was a guided reading teacher who pulled students all day and worked

with them in small groups, Sharon valued getting to know her students, watching them grow and learn, and motivating them to becoming successful readers. For example, after she became a classroom teacher, she still kept tabs on some of the students she had when she was a reading teacher. In fact, a memorable moment for her was when one of her former students passed the reading End-of-Grade (EOG) test. Sharon stated:

...one of those that I will always treasure is that she passed the EOGs and the second time around she came to me and she was so excited to tell me that she passed the EOG. And I said, "I know I've already checked to see". I told her that I knew what she did. She said, "Well I did it for you", and that meant a lot to me. I pushed her and pushed her, but my main thing was I let her know that she could do it.

Also, being in a Title I school, she realized that many of her students lacked resources such as books outside of school. Therefore, she really pushed reading by providing hundreds of books in her classroom for students to read not only in the classroom, but outside the classroom as well. She also knew that many of them lacked the motivation to read, so she provided incentives to motivate and encourage her students to read. The success of Sharon's students is a driving force for her as a teacher.

Tina. Perseverance and determination are two words that come to mind when it comes to the next participant, Tina, who had a different path in becoming a teacher. Tina became a single parent of two children at an early age. She worked in the corporate world and realized that that was not for her, so

consequently, she started working in a day care. While at this job, she decided to go to school to become a teacher so that she could have the summers off with her children. She packed up with her children and moved a few states away to pursue a bachelor's degree in education. After graduation she returned to her home state to begin her teaching career. She initially taught middle school in a neighboring county and then later taught elementary – second, third, and fourth grades.

Unfortunately, after her perseverance, hard work, and reaching her goal, Tina was very unhappy her first year teaching. In fact she described it as stressful, disappointing, and not rewarding. She felt as if she was unprepared for the many things that teachers face in education. She stated:

What you read in the books is not what you do in the actual classroom. ...That is one of the biggest disappointments in my early years of education is not knowing... 'cause in college they did not tell you how severe testing is. They did not tell you how children behave and how parents have an impact on you as far how they talk to you and their demeanor towards you and how they don't support their students like I thought they were going to. And it was just amazing when you get out in the real world with real people and real children and real life situations that they don't teach you in college. I think that there was a deficiency there that they don't prepare you really well for the real world of education.

Tina was at the point that she was going to leave teaching because she did not want to deal with the stress of the job. She felt like it was all for naught and that it was not worth staying. Her husband told her that if she had just touch one child's life, then she was doing her job. It just so happened at the end of that

year that one of her students reached out to her to let her know that the year was not as bad as she thought it was. Tina said, "I was ready to pack my bags and go back home." However, hearing this student's feelings about her, coupled with what Tina's husband had also told her, helped Tina to stay in education. Even though she stayed in the field, she did leave that county and move to the county where she currently teaches. Tina's first teaching assignment in this county was in a highly impacted, low socioeconomic middle school.

Tina enjoyed working with middle schoolers. Surprisingly, one day she was called into the principal's office and was told that she was being transferred to an elementary school within the district. In fact, several teachers from that school were transferred to other schools in the district. Tina expressed her displeasure in how the district handled the process. She did not have a choice in the matter and was told that if she did not go to the new school that she would be terminated from the school district. Wanting and needing a job, Tina decided to go the elementary school where she was placed even though she really wanted to teach at the middle school level.

Tina taught fourth grade for some years, and she fell in love with teaching elementary school to the extent she does not even want to go back to teaching middle school. More recently, she taught second grade, and one year she looped up with her students and taught third grade. At the time of her interview, she had just completed her second year in teaching third grade.

When asked what stands out about her journey thus far in education, Tina said that she realizes the seriousness of testing. One of the issues with the testing is that teachers are not really given ample time to teach to prepare students for summative testing that occurs at the end of the year. Tina described it as:

...In my early years of teaching, I thought as I went into the classroom I would really teach my students things about the content that they needed to learn to be successful, but then you have a pacing guide that takes you through the whole year. But then you see your students not grasping what you're teaching them and they're not passing your assessments or your test for your assignments. And you give them a grade and you keep moving and you got to go to the next objective or the next standard and keep it moving whether they got it or they didn't. The grade is the grade. And then you go to the next objective that you got to teach and you go through that pacing guide so quickly so fast, and the next thing you know is the end of the school year. And then they have to sit in front of a test and pass it. Then that test is a reflection of me as a teacher. [Even though] I really feel that if they give us the time that we need to sincerely teach what they need to learn, they can be successful.

Tina expressed the frustration of giving students test, such as the End-of-Grade tests, that you know that they are unprepared to take, especially when they had not grasped the concepts that had not been taught. Unfortunately, she felt pressured to keeping up with a pacing guide that is created by the district for her to follow. "I really feel like reteaching was important but you know the curriculum doesn't provide you with time to do all of that in the classroom. You got to just keep it moving."

Tina also expressed another facet of her job and that is the emotional and relational side of teaching.

And on top of teaching, you have to nurture them; you have to care for them. You've got to love them and help them. You got to do all of these many tasks. You have to accept the fact that you've done the best that you can.

Tina is a very conscientious teacher who has experienced the range of feelings that come with end-of-year tests – jubilation when students do well and extreme disappointment when they do not.

You know it's kinda disappointing when at the end of the year you want to kick yourself because you know that a child could have performed way better than they did on the end-of-year test, but you know it is what it is then. Because it is all in black and white and their scores are their scores, and their scores are a reflection of all of your teaching.

Nevertheless, Tina realizes that as a teacher she must keep moving.

You have to accept the fact that you've done the best that you can, you know throughout the year and the students' performance on these test will be what it is. You can't really let it rock your world because you know you did the best you could as an educator in the classroom...You got to just keep it moving. Keep doing what you have to do, you know following the guidelines in which you have to teach your students. Just got to keep it moving. Now I know that I just have to do the best that I can.

Jackie. Jackie's path into teaching was a more traditional one. She knew as a child that she wanted to teach and never really thought about doing anything else. She went to college right out of high school and majored in elementary

education. While in high school, Jackie actually was awarded a state sponsored four-year scholarship to attend one of the sixteen state public institutions to become a certified teacher. Coupled with this scholarship was the agreement that she would teach in the state for the four years after graduation. Applying for and accepting this scholarship confirmed Jackie's commitment and desire to be a teacher. After graduating she did not apply for a teaching job right away because she just did not feel like she was ready to teach so she worked in a child care center. She waited a year and a half before applying for a teaching job.

Her first teaching job was as a fifth grade teacher in a county neighboring where she lived and went to college. The class had had a substitute for half the year, and Jackie began working there the second semester. It was extremely challenging because students had been with a substitute teacher, so there were discipline, management, and instructional issues with this class. Jackie was able to finish the year and then she transferred to the county where she currently works. Jackie has worked at the same school for the last four years. Her first year she taught second grade, then third grade for two years, and last year fourth grade. This year she is back in third grade.

Jackie shared that her first full year of teaching was also challenging. The moral was low among the teachers because, according to Jackie, the school "was in hot water" because the test scores were not meeting the standards set by the state. Therefore, they were receiving pressure from district administrators to

improve in reading and math, which were the tested subject areas in third, fourth and fifth grades.

Also, the state in which she worked had specific requirements for school districts and schools to provide support for each beginning teacher (BT). This was a three-year program in which there was a tiered level of support for each of the first three years of teaching. One of the requirements was for each BT to have an assigned mentor who had at least four years of experience and who had completed the mentor training. Since Jackie was a BT, she was assigned a mentor, but unfortunately, her mentor was not a classroom teacher but a specialist who could not relate to what Jackie was dealing with as a first-year teacher.

Being a specialist who had never taught lower elementary grades, there wasn't a whole lot of resources she could share with me. Like I couldn't relate to her. She would try, but she really couldn't help me.

In Jackie's second year at the school, she had continuous change beginning with teaching third grade in addition to having a new principal and a new curriculum facilitator (CF). (This school was not large enough for an assistant principal.) The CF did not last and left in March. Because this position is so critical, the principal appointed a classroom teacher as the interim CF in addition to her continuing in her role as a fifth grade teacher. Since this interim CF was not working in the role fulltime and still had the same amount of

responsibilities for her class of students, she was not able to provide the instructional support for the classroom teachers.

Each year Jackie's school experienced massive turnover, so it was difficult to establish ongoing, cohesive, collegial relationships. During her third year, Jackie remained as a third grade teacher, but the other two teammates were new to the grade level. One was a veteran teacher but was moved from fifth, and the other was new to teaching and was lateral entry. At the beginning of the year, the principal appointed Jackie as grade level chair even though she only had two years of experience. The principal wanted to give other people in the building an opportunity to lead, people who had fresher ideas, and those who somewhat had a handle on the curriculum. Jackie believed that she met those requirements and that was why she was appointed as grade level chair even though she was still considered a BT.

One of Jackie's most memorable moments was being selected as "Teacher of the Year" during her fourth year as a teacher. As she reflected on her first four years, she realized how she had grown as an educator and how she had become a leader in her building. Being selected as Teacher of the Year was quite an honor, and it evoked both excitement and humility. She shared:

I felt like I hadn't been there long enough to be able to be teacher of the year. But it was kind of refreshing because it let me know that somebody was watching me, and that I was doing something right. And often times that's not the gratification that we get.

Jackie reflected on how her colleague went beyond what was required or even expected to support Jackie in so many ways. Currently, there are not a lot of veteran teachers left in her school, so she tries to help others with less experience as much as she can. She understands what it feels like to need support and not receive it.

Shadae. Shadae is a veteran teacher with over ten years of teaching experience in which she has taught kindergarten through second grade. She had to overcome many obstacles in becoming a teacher. During and after high school, Shadae's focus was on becoming a nurse. Sadly, her mother passed away during her senior year of high school, and Shadae went through many emotional changes in dealing with her mother's death. Even though she went to college and initially majored in nursing, she later decided that nursing was not for her so she changed her major to therapeutic recreation. The jobs were not as plentiful in the county where she lived, so she worked in the health field with the special needs population for a while. While working there, she decided to go back to school and get her teaching certification.

She had received her bachelor's degree from a local university. She went to another local university to earn her teaching certification which was a two-year program since she already had a bachelor's degree. She was one class short from completing the program, but she had gotten frustrated and did not take the last class that she needed. When she finally decided to go back to the program and finish her coursework, she found out that she had waited too long and

everything was null and void. Consequently, she had to start all over! Shadae, did just that. In order to graduate, she had to have a passing score on the Praxis. She missed passing the Praxis by one point, and she was not able to retake it in time to graduate, so once again, her work was null and void. With true determination and perseverance, Shadae continued to pursue her dream of earning her teaching certification. After talking to the chair of the education department, she was told that she could take the Master's route and receive a Master's degree as she completed coursework.

Shadae endured the heartache, disappointment, and frustration of having to work through many obstacles as she pursued her goal of becoming a teacher. When asked what made her change her mind from nursing to teaching she stated, "I kept talking myself out of it and there's no money in it and it just kept nagging and nagging at me, until I had to pursue it." Shadae agreed that the cost was great...time, money, and energy. She said:

Trust me. It wasn't easy, but I was determined that I was going to do it. Then when I went the second time around and they said some of the classes wouldn't be offered. And you know the tuition and expenses...but I said that I was going to do it. And with most individuals, with [earning a] Masters it takes two years. I was taking a full load, working full time, went to both sessions of summer school. But I was determined I was going to get out in less than two years. And that's what I did.

During this time, Shadae was working at her current school as a guided reading teacher even though she had not completed her teaching certification. She pulled third, fourth, and fifth grade students who were reading below grade

level and worked with them in small groups in her classroom. In some instances she “pushed in” to classrooms and provided some reading support to the students there. Since she was not a classroom teacher, she had some flexibility with her schedule. For one of her graduate school classes, she had to do observations at another school across the county. Fortunately, her principal was amenable to her doing what was necessary for her to meet the requirements to finish her coursework.

Shadae decided to leave the guided reading position and be a classroom teacher there at the same school. She felt like she could be more useful in the classroom working with the same group of students all day. Her only request was to not work in a tested grade; it did not matter if it was kindergarten, first, or second grade. In the last five years, Shadae has taught kindergarten two years, first grade two years, and second grade one year.

Shadae believed that perseverance and determination stand out for her in her journey in becoming a teacher. She described herself as a hard worker and someone who was willing to go the extra mile to get the job done. Her path to the teaching career was not a typical one, and neither was it an easy one. However, after completing two teacher education programs and taking the Praxis exam multiple times, she was rewarded with earning her teaching credentials and being a part of the teaching profession.

Kelly. Kelly also did not have a typical path into the teaching career. It was her lifelong dream to be a teacher; in fact she never wanted to be anything

else. Neither of her parents went to college, but her aunts, who were also teachers, inspired her. She majored in middle grades education at a local university. While in college she got pregnant and had to make a decision to either stay at that school or make other changes. She decided to take the semester off and work and then transferred to a school a little closer to home.

After finishing her course work in college but prior to being admitted into Teacher Education, she did not feel prepared to take the Praxis exam that was required to get a teaching license. Also, she had had a second child and had to make a decision on what to do – stay in school and finish or drop out. She decided to stay, but she changed her major to history, which was an area that she loved, so that she could graduate and not have to worry about taking the Praxis exam. Upon graduation, she became a teacher's assistant in a pre-kindergarten class in a local elementary school. Her plan was to get a teaching position through the lateral entry program, but that did not work out as planned.

While working as a TA, Kelly attended an area private college to earn teacher certification in secondary education. She was going to become a social studies teacher since she already had a history degree. Being in the educational studies program, she would have had to quit her TA position to be able to do her internships and student teaching. This was during the time when the economy was very unstable, so her advisor recommended for her to get certification in elementary education so that she would not have to quit her job. Kelly's plan never was to teach elementary school but she knew that she could not afford to

quit her job so she changed her area of certification. When asked how she felt about teaching elementary school, Kelly responded:

I'm glad I made that choice because now when I interact with older kids, I think, "I probably couldn't do that." ...I didn't want to go down to kindergarten because I was thinking they don't know anything and I'm starting at the very basics and now that I'm there, I absolutely love it.

As Kelly reflected on her journey into teaching, she was reminded of her focus on accomplishing her goals. First she told herself that she was not leaving college until she had a degree. Even though it did not include teaching certification, she met the goal of graduating with a degree. However, she was not satisfied because she had not accomplished her main goal of becoming a teacher. Her motivation was her children and working in a school every day and having a firsthand view of being a teacher. Kelly stated:

So I met that goal and then I still wasn't satisfied. I was like, I have that goal, but I still don't have what I want because I want to be a teacher. That gave me the drive that I needed and also for my kids. I just didn't want to stop at where I was. And then being in the school setting every day, it was a constant reminder you're not what you set out to be yet. So that gave me more of an ambition to get everything done that I set out to do prior to having kids...

Kelly wanted her hard work and accomplishment to serve as inspiration for her children of how she worked and went to school to reach her goals. She had one bit of advice:

So don't give up on your dreams. Whatever you set out to do, you do it. I don't care what people say or what it looks like. I have a lot of family members who had a whole lot to say. And I have a Master's degree now. I just didn't stop.

Diana. Diana is a 16-year veteran teacher who also tried another profession before starting her teaching career. Diana grew up in Ohio and went to a catholic school where she was inspired by her third grade teacher to be a teacher. She went to college in Ohio and was an elementary education major. In her freshman year, she had to go to an inner-city middle school to do some tutoring. That experience completely changed her mind regarding being a teacher so she left the university and went to a junior college and earned an Associate's degree in accounting. She actually worked in banking for a while but realized that that was not what she really wanted to do either, so she went back to school and earned her teaching degree. She told herself that she did not have to work in middle school in the inner city in a metropolitan city. Understanding this, she had the motivation to return and earned her degree. However, after graduation, Diana was not able to secure a job. She had a friend who was working in an urban school district in the south and she talked her into moving. Surprisingly, she accepted a job teaching fifth grade in a school that was very similar to the things that she said that she did not want.

Her first year teaching was very challenging. There were five teachers on her grade level and four of them were new, so it was difficult to get veteran support because so many of them were new. Being at this school was also a

culture shock for Diana. She had not had such experience with students who were so economically deprived which stemmed into other problems such as lack of preparation for school, not just physically prepared with materials and school supplies, but also lack of preparation cognitively with academic skills. She stated:

...People talk about schools whose scores are in 80s and 90s percent, and I say yeah, but until you come in and do what we do with these kids, because some of them come to school and don't even know their colors you know. But you have to start four times back. Or you're at the school where the kids are ready to learn. Lot of big differences there. So even as a fifth-grade teacher, half the time I was teaching third and fourth grade.

Additionally, discipline was a major problem at her school. She stated that she “spent 75 percent of her time disciplining and 25 percent of her time teaching”. It was a school where she felt like you worked your hardest, but your hard work just went unnoticed.

By the winter break of her first year, Diana wanted to leave and not return. The students, the workload, and the students' lack of progress were all getting to her and she wanted to quit.

I will be honest. My first year at Turnaround School [pseudonym], at Christmas time when I went home for the holidays, I was ready to pack my bags and not come back. For me it was such a culture shock, but I made the determination that they weren't going to get me.

She returned after the break to finish the year, and fortunately, she had a strong finish with 16 out of her 18 students passing the state's end-of-year tests. She realized that her role at that school was more than just teaching.

With me, it is more about where I was for those 14 years. And knowing what I had as a child and seeing what those children went home to at night. It wasn't so much about yea I was teaching them, but I felt like I was needed. Like I was their safe haven.

She remained at the same school for 14 years and witnessed turnover with administration, curriculum facilitator/literacy coach, and teachers. She was also there with the school was turned over to the state because of their low performance status. During this time she has taught second, third, and fifth grades. Diana is a unique participant because she has received coaching from all three levels: school, school district, and state. She was able to share her experiences with each of those levels of support.

At the time of the interviews, Diana had just finished her first year at a new school after being at the same school for 15 years. Even though she transferred to another school in the district that was a Title I school, she described being there as “a breath of fresh air”. She also stated, “It was good not to have somebody looking over your shoulder all the time.” With having state level of support, those coaches were in the building every day in addition to the school level support from the CF. The district level coaches were not present every day but did visit every week. Even though she did not have the same number of people providing support, she felt more supported because she quickly developed a great relationship with her CF and she saw the impact in the classroom with her students. Diana stated, “I mean, I'm using the same lessons that I used [at Turnaround School] and I'm using [them] here at my current school

and I'm getting great results." Even though the student population is very similar, Diana was grateful for a fresh start in a different school environment within the same district. Her confidence in teaching has been renewed, seeing that she has had success with her students in the last school year.

Research Question 1: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Literacy Coaching Experiences

The participants in this study are from three different elementary schools. Sharon, Shadae, and Tina worked at School A; Diana and Kelly at School B, and Jackie at School C. Each school had a fulltime onsite curriculum facilitator whose role included but was not limited to providing instructional support to teachers by 1) finding, organizing, and/or distributing resources to support standards and instructional needs, 2) helping teachers to interpret and understand the Common Core Standards, 3) modeling instructional strategies, 4) observing and providing feedback to teachers, and 5) interpreting the data and assisting teachers in finding interventions or instructional strategies that will support students' needs. Additionally, the school district funds one-half of the CF position, and the district mandated that the half that is funded should not only be used as a CF but also a literacy coach. Therefore, even though CFs are not called literacy coaches in this school district, they are supposed to operate in that capacity at least one half of the time.

Sharon. Sharon experienced literacy coaching from three different sources: the CF, a district instructional coach, and an outside consultant for a

district initiative. Sharon worked at School A and had two CFs. One CF, Mrs. Kirby, was assigned to work with kindergarten, first, and second (K-2) grade teachers, and the other CF, Mrs. Dowdy, worked with third, fourth, and fifth (3-5) grade teachers. Mrs. Kirby was helpful and provided support by doing walk-throughs and informally observing Sharon during literacy instruction. Sharon took comfort in knowing that if she needed help Mrs. Kirby would provide it. She said:

Mrs. Kirby would come in my room and model lessons or she would join in or just come in and sit down and watch. If I went to Mrs. Kirby and if I had questions then, she would help me. And during our PLC meetings, we lead those more, but she was in there...But it wasn't like a formal literacy training.

However, most of the support that Sharon received was from Mrs. Dowdy who was the 3-5 CF and also her mentor because Sharon was a BT. Sharon recalled, "When I first went into the classroom, I still had my mentor. Her name is Priscilla Dowdy. I loved her. She was there. She helped me if I had questions and I knew that I could go to her." Even though Sharon had professional respect for both CFs, she usually went to her mentor first because of the trusting and open relationship that she had with her. Even though she knew that Mrs. Kirby was able and willing to help if she needed her, she had a more personal relationship with Mrs. Dowdy because of the mentor/mentee relationship.

Secondly, Sharon received two types of district level support. Her school was part of a district initiative called Raising Achievement and select schools received additional support, funds, and performance incentives for exceeding

expected growth measures as defined by the state. As a part of being a Raising Achievement School, district coaches were assigned to schools to provide instructional support in literacy and math. Sharon did not find this support to be helpful. In fact, she felt like it was more of a negative experience than anything else. Sharon described her experience:

Another thing we had was a Title I lady that came to our school. She was very...very...she wasn't very much help. She would say things like, "Why do you say this word, and why do you say that word?". And when she was coming into my room, I would get so nervous because I knew I was going to be questioned and that she was going to look for everything wrong rather than look for things that were right...She was more negative than positive in the classroom. And that's for every teacher who had her. Mrs. Dowdy helped me if I had questions and I knew that I could go to her.

Additionally, many of the visits were unannounced, and Sharon would get very nervous when the coach would come to her classroom because Sharon felt like she would be so picky about every little thing that it made her second-guess herself in simple things, like her schedule and what she had taught the students.

[Her coaching] wasn't very helpful. ...And my team members, whenever they would see her leave, they would come because they knew that I would be upset. They would come because it was like she would downgrade you whenever she would come. She would talk down to you. So I went to [the principal] and I told her that I was quitting. That's how bad it was. She would say to me things like, "Why did you say this word" and I would say, "I didn't", and "Why did you do this?", and I would say "I didn't". And then she would look at my lessons...I just felt like...when she would walk in to my room, I would just get so nervous because I was afraid that I would say a wrong word. I couldn't even think because when I was teaching and when she would walk in, I would just go blank. I was so frightened, well not frightened, but I knew she was going to come back at

me about something. It was like she came in and looked for all the wrong. It wasn't supportive at all. It was more...it was...it was horrible.

Normally after a classroom visit, the district coach would set up a time to talk with Sharon. It was usually at the end of the day or sometimes a couple of days later. Nevertheless, there was typically a conversation, and one that Sharon would rather do without. Fortunately, things did get better, but it was after Sharon refused to talk to the coach during a coaching session after a classroom observation.

But I finally told her, because she asked me why I wasn't going to talk to her and I told her that I'm not going to say anything because I don't know what you want me to say so I'm just not going to talk. And then after that, she became a little nicer about her approach. There is a way of approaching someone with criticism, but you can do it in a nice way. Half the time, what she said to me was wrong, and I would point out that didn't happen or I did not say that. I just hope that she'll never come back to my room again; I'll put it that way

Sharon also received coaching from one of the district curriculum specialists. Three years ago, the district adopted a phonics program called Foundations by Wilson Language to use in kindergarten through third grade classrooms. With the implementation, some of the schools received additional support from the Foundations consultants in addition to the school district literacy specialists who were being trained to be Foundations coaches. The CF would provide some support for Foundations to the grade level during the PLC meetings and to individual teachers, but the CFs did not receive any additional training

outside of what the teachers received. However, they were expected to study more on their own so that they would be able to support the teachers. Also, during some CF meetings, the district curriculum specialists would designate small pockets of time to give the CFs more instructions and explanations on some of the units so that the CFs could take the information back to their individual schools and share with the teachers. The district curriculum specialists also offered Foundations grade level support sessions after school to provide additional PD that was targeted to specific grade levels.

Sharon really enjoyed teaching Foundations because she believed that it had really helped her to be a better teacher of phonics because her understanding of spelling patterns and rules had increased. Consequently, her students gained a better understanding as well. Sharon summed it up as:

I love Foundations. And due to a lot of repetition and they get to understand why the 'e' is silent in cake and they love doing the actions with it. Foundations has helped me to be a better teacher to teach my lower groups and you're explaining it to them and it's one step at a time. I love Foundations.

Even though Sharon has embraced this district-mandated program, the district level support has been less than desirable. Sharon understood that the district specialists were in training and learning the program, but the specialist who came to model a lesson in her classroom did not use the manual and left out parts of the lesson which provided the content of what should be taught in each lesson of the program. Apparently, the specialist visited multiple classrooms in

different grade levels, and this was challenging for this specialist, from Sharon's perspective. Sharon had very strong feelings about the visit.

She should have stayed with the same grade level, same class to learn Foundations first at least for a week or two and then go to another class or something. But from day to day from here to here to here, she didn't know what I had already taught. She didn't know the week before of what the students had or didn't have. I thought that that was a disadvantage to her because the lesson that she did in my classroom was a waste. It did not go very [well]. Actually I retaught it the next day. And she said that she agreed because she didn't know what I had taught and what I hadn't. It would've been too much for her to go back and study the last two weeks just to do that one day for me when she was doing other days in of the classroom for other teachers...And other teachers said the same thing. She struggled. I feel that was the reason, and I don't know if the other coaches did, but she struggled. And the other teacher said the same thing...they pretty much had to redo the lesson or [correct] her...You didn't want to stand up in front of the class and say anything.

While the district level coaching for Foundations was not beneficial, the support from the Foundations consultant was. The district coach did not give helpful feedback after her classroom visits, but the Foundations consultants did. "The only time I got feedback is when the actual Foundations lady was with her. The lady from Foundations would give me feedback." The consultant gave Sharon meaningful insight and pointers that she could use.

Sharon's experiences with literacy coaching were positive with the building level support from the CF, her mentor, and the Foundations consultant.

Unfortunately, her experiences with district support were not favorable, whether it was for general literacy instructional practices or for implementation of a district

initiative. Those experiences left negative impressions, and Sharon preferred to not have either of those coaches to come to her classroom again.

Tina. Tina worked at the same school as Sharon and her experiences were very similar with the Foundations and Raising Achievement coach. However, building level support was different in that Tina did not receive much literacy coaching from the CF. She understood that CFs were very busy, and she did not speak negatively of the fact that she received little support from them. She was at her school for nine years and had the same CF for eight years and then two different CFs the last school year. Tina did not depend on the CFs for help (even though she had two of them), but she reached out to her peers for instructional support.

Professional support would definitely depend on the hard-working dedicated teachers in the educational realm. Without them I don't know how I would have survived or how I would've made it. I had to buckle down and you know just asked for help. If they wouldn't have taken me under their wings and helped me, I really feel that I would have left the educational field just because they put you in a classroom and administration put you in a classroom and they don't give you everything you need to be successful especially my first year of teaching. I'm really reflecting on my early years of teaching because they were really challenging for me. I mean really, really challenging for me. I don't know if it was just because of that school system or what, but I was really questioning why did I become a teacher...A few teachers took me under their wing and they helped me. They guided me and they gave me ideas, and they helped me learn how to do the computer and they helped me learn how to do lesson plans and use the materials and the manipulatives and ideas and everything you need in a classroom.

When asked about other literacy coaching or support in regards to guided reading or any other data driven instruction, once again, Tina referenced other teachers within the building as her main source of guidance.

As far as other literacy coaching, we had a teacher with another grade level model to us how she teaches and uses Jan Richardson's template, and strategies like to use your fingers to teach details, details, details and helping the students to put them into their own words. So I think that was the main strategy that I pulled from her presentation that I implemented in my class. As far as having a lot of support there, you just got with who you could get and basically depend on your colleagues.

Tina may not have received much support from the CF because she was not a "beginning teacher" when she arrived at this elementary school. She was coming from a middle school with about seven years of teaching experience, but she was inexperienced with early literacy instruction because she had not taught elementary school. Sharon stated that her literacy support from the CF was primarily because she was her mentor. However, she received some coaching from the CF without asking. Similarly, Tina felt that the CF was there for support if she needed her. For example, everyone on her grade level was departmentalized, and she was the only one who was not and had the task of teaching all subjects. The CF stepped in and provided her with curriculum support (without being asked), particularly in math because she had not taught math in several years. In fact, Tina seldom asked for help from the CF and turned to her colleagues instead.

Also, similar to Sharon, Tina did not favorably describe her experiences with the Raising Achievement coach. She felt that the coach provided some level of support but not much. Her response was:

Yes, we had one person that would come in and she's a Raising Achievement coach. ...She didn't come and observe me too much, but in the past she would come and critique and tell me things that I could be doing so when I asked her to come and asked her to model for me or what have you, I wasn't bothered by her anymore, you know.

In other words, the coach provided some support, but after Tina asked for her to come and model a lesson, she left Tina alone and did not follow through with modeling. Tina felt like the coaching could have been deeper and more meaningful rather than simply sharing ideas that the coach found on Pinterest or a simple handout. When asked for her to describe the Raising Achievement coach she said, "Very critical. Teachers were in tears and disheartened. I did not let the coach get to me like that. I know Jesus...Ideas were given to us from Pinterest or on a sheet of paper." Tina's faith was a source of strength for her, so she leaned on it for support rather than succumbing to the negative feelings that she felt from the Raising Achievement coach.

Tina's main source of literacy support came from an unlikely source. Her school employed part-time tutors to support teachers with small group literacy instruction. Often times these tutors were retired elementary or reading teachers. In addition to colleagues who provided some levels of support, the tutor really gave Tina what she needed. She stated:

The person that helped me out the most was a tutor/mentor. She modeled, gave ideas, did presentations, stayed in the classrooms, and did small group instruction. She was a blessing in my life. Just totally an awesome retired teacher...giving back.

Tina also received support from the Foundations consultant with the implementation of the Foundations program. The district implemented Foundations for kindergarten, first, and second grades during the first year, and then added third grade the next year so that those third graders would have a Foundations foundation regarding phonics content and lesson procedures from the second grade curriculum. Not all schools received a Foundations consultant or district level support. However, Tina's school did receive consultant level support. Once again, she embraced the coaching experience.

Teaching phonics was such a learning curve for her because she was coming from a middle school background and then to fourth grade. She went from fourth grade to teaching second grade for a few years and then looped up with her students to teach third grade. She knew that she did not have a strong background with teaching phonics so she reached out to ask for help from one of her colleagues.

When we would have a rep from Foundations come to observe us, she would correct me and help me with saying some of the things correctly or she would fix some of the things I was doing incorrectly...which was only once or twice this past school year. That was the only support outside of the classroom I really had with Foundations. She loved my enthusiasm that I had with teaching Foundations, but it was that I had some of the sounds wrong. Well some of the concepts were not clearly taught to the students

and as accurately as possible. So I was just doing the best that I could during that time.

As far as for me when I was teaching my students, she would actually interrupt or asked me if she could interrupt and help me...she would ask me in the middle of my lesson if she could say something or if she could jump in and say some things. I didn't have a problem with that. So she would interrupt and jump in and start teaching some of the things she wanted to teach. I didn't take it personally because I knew that we were learning and she would just come and pretty much interrupt what you were doing rather than just coming in and sitting back and just critiquing. You know she said that that wasn't her job. Her job was to help us when we were not doing things right or what have you. I didn't take it personally. I gladly accepted her coming in and doing what she needed to do. And like I said, Foundations is very new to me and I was willing to learn especially if I wasn't doing it correctly.

Unlike Sharon and Shadae, Tina did not have any additional coaching from one of the district curriculum specialists regarding the implementation of the Foundations program. This could be attributed to the fact that the implementation of third grade Foundations was during the second year of the program. Therefore, less support was given to schools since the Foundations program was not new overall and considering there were teachers and CFs, for the most part, who could provide support to those third grade teachers.

Tina believes that teachers should reach out to receive help if they need it, and they should not wait on the CF or literacy coach to provide help. She stated:

...You can't just stay isolated in a classroom and just sit there and cry. You've got to go and seek assistance and seek help. And you will find the ones who will really be willing to help you and that really made it worthwhile being a teacher and depending on your colleagues.

Therefore, being a part of a team and having collegial relationships in which teachers work together and support one another is important for Tina. Peer coaching is the form of coaching that was very beneficial for her.

Shadae. Shadae also worked at School A with Tina and Sharon. While she did not mention any support that she received from the Raising Achievement coach, she did share her experience with the CF who was able to provide three specific types of literacy support – 1) through leading the grade level PLC meetings, 2) individual classroom visits with feedback, and 3) literacy coaching by teacher request.

Mrs. Kirby, the K-2 CF, often led the grade level PLC meetings. During the meetings she lead the teachers in previewing the upcoming literacy units and helped to unpack the standards that the teachers were to teach. Also, she would provide resources that they could use with the literacy units. She also shared ideas for lessons and interventions that the teachers needed to do with the students who were reading below grade level. Once, Mrs. Kirby visited all teachers on the grade level to observe and video them teaching guided reading. She shared the videos during the PLC meetings and guided the discussion on what they saw for each guided reading lesson.

[The discussion about the videos] was oral and we sort of talked about it openly as a group. There were some things that she brought out; it was an eye opener for us. There were some things that I wasn't doing, but now after I saw my team members, I could reflect. I was able to implement those into my guided reading lesson.

These PLC sessions were beneficial for Shadae because they caused her to be reflective of her own guided reading lessons since she was open to learning from her peers. Being reflective, she identified areas that needed improvement and gleaned new ideas for her to implement during her guided reading instruction.

...I guess whenever we got training for guided reading, everyone got train but by different individuals. And everyone may do something totally different than what I'm doing so I was like OK I didn't know this, so let me try this and see if it works.

Shadae had a very open and trustworthy relationship with Mrs. Kirby. Like the other participants, she felt very comfortable having Mrs. Kirby come into her room and give her feedback. Their relationship was one with mutual respect. Shadae did not feel inferior to Mrs. Kirby and appreciated any individual support or feedback that she provided. Shadae also felt comfortable going to her when she needed help, particularly in finding resources. For example, she spoke of specific occurrences in which Mrs. Kirby provided one-on-one coaching at her request.

Mrs. Kirby was kindergarten through second so [my interactions] were more with her but if there was something that she couldn't provide I would ask Ms. Dowdy...If there was something, as far as, since Common Core had just come into play and there was one of the units that I was trying to do a lesson plan for and I couldn't find any resources, Ms. Kirby would provide some additional resources. She may have had something in her room or she may have found something on the computer.

I think there was something; it was guided reading. I guess my guided reading plans were not flowing like I wanted to and she referred me to Jan Richardson's book and there are also some question stems that I wanted

to be able to use during guided reading so she provided me with the question stems for me to implement into my guided reading.

Additionally, Shadae gave other accounts of how Mrs. Kirby helped her with finding resources for literacy lessons. Mrs. Kirby would also follow up with Shadae to find out how the lesson went in instances when she was not there to observe her. Shadae appreciated the collegial relationship that they shared.

Shadae also received coaching support with Foundations. She did not have classroom visits from the outside consultant or a district coach like her other colleagues. Her support was from the reading teacher who observed Foundations and provided individual feedback.

...We had a teacher that just primarily work with the Foundations part and she will come in to observe me doing Foundations. She would take little notes and tell me what she saw, and would say “maybe try this way”. She's like a reading specialist or a guided reading specialist.

So if I was doing a lesson, she would make her notes and tell me little things, like maybe this time walk around and make sure they're doing everything they need to be doing. Or this is the way the alphabet should sound. You know just little pointers so you know that I could advance and do better the next time.

Shadae found the support of the reading specialist to be helpful. She stated, “She was someone who I have worked with so I didn't feel intimidated with going to ask her anything.” Once again, Shadae was open to receive the constructive criticism because she was comfortable sharing her needs and comfortable receiving constructive feedback.

The last school year was different for these teachers (Sharon, Tina, and Shadae) because Mrs. Kirby left to go back to school to pursue her Master's degree, and Mrs. Dowdy transferred to another school within the district. It was quite an adjustment for the teachers because they had had two CFs for several years, and then they only had one CF to serve all teachers. The CF who replaced the two of them was new to the school and was a first year CF, on top of the fact they also had a new principal with different expectations. While the CF was very knowledgeable and collegial, it took time to build trusting, coaching relationships. The new CF was only there for one semester, and she accepted a job in another county. The reading specialist was placed in the CF role and she too was new to the role. Assuming a new role mid year had its challenges, especially since she was coming from the classroom and into a new role. The teachers understood that she was new, was busy learning her role, and was required to attend many meetings. They did not seem to have high expectations for receiving coaching support from her.

Kelly. Kelly was a kindergarten teacher at another Title I school in the same district. She was at a small school, and there were only two kindergarten teachers. Kelly had worked at the school as a pre-kindergarten teacher's assistant before accepting the role of kindergarten teacher. The CF and other faculty members knew her. However, Kelly stated that she did not receive much support from the CF or her mentor when she first started teaching. She speculated that it was because they thought that she did not need any help

because she was coming with more experience than the average first year teacher because she had experience in the classroom and knew a lot about the school, the school culture, and their ways of doing things. Also, Kelly did not reach out for help from the CF or the mentor. When asked what type of support her mentor would provide, Kelly responded:

We would meet here and there just for the purpose of signing the paperwork but not really, no. As far as you know coming into teach and show me how to do it, the answer will be no. I never got that type of support.

Similar to Tina's experience, the main source of her help came from other colleagues rather than those who were designated to provide instructional support.

As far as the support that I have received at the school, I think that my experience in working in the school, people just assumed that I have been teaching longer than I have been and I didn't really reach out as far as my curriculum facilitator or the academic coach during my first year, [or] my BT coach, I think that's what they're called. I really didn't receive any support from them because I guess they felt like I was where I needed to be. I didn't reach out a lot, but I did have a couple of colleagues who really took me under their wings, and at this time, I taught first grade and they taught second grade. And they were helping me professionally...When I had questions they helped me and they showed me what I needed to know.

Kelly stated that she knew of instances where other teachers received literacy coaching from the CF, but she did not. Because she was not in dire need of support and because there were others with greater need, Kelly believes that

she was “left alone”. Even with the implementation of the Foundations program, Kelly went to the training that was required by the district, and the K-2 teachers received coaching support from one of the district curriculum and instruction specialists who was training to become a Foundations consultant’s. The district coach was not very helpful because she was still learning the program. Kelly said that the district coach taught her students the wrong key word for one of the letters and sounds and she did things that were not in the manual. This coach would do walk-throughs and then debrief with the grade level and encourage them to use the online resources. Even though she was not as knowledgeable as she needed to be, Kelly appreciated her pleasant attitude and positive tone that she used with the teachers. Unfortunately, the district coach that they have now seems to be quite different. Kelly stated:

Her approach is to embarrass the teacher. She went into a colleague's class during her lesson with the students and told her she was teaching Foundations wrong and asked her to sit down and observe her take over the lesson.

Kelly is disappointed that “embarrassment” is being used as a tactic to intimidate teachers to do their jobs well.

Also, Kelly received teacher support from the Raising Achievement specialist but in a different way. Kelly was selected as a Raising Achievement Teacher Leader so she received support from the coach on how to be a teacher leader. The specialist shared resources for Kelly to use in her classroom and

shared opportunities that she should consider for participation. As a teacher leader, Kelly had to attend monthly meetings after school and also attend a Raising Achievement Teacher Leader Retreat. Even though Kelly was a teacher leader, she was only observed by the coach a couple of times. The coach's focus with Kelly was teacher leadership and not specific instructional practices.

Jackie. Jackie's first year of teaching could be described as feeling isolated. Being the only first year teacher, Jackie had a hard time connecting with the staff because 1) she was the only BT at the school and, and 2) there was so much going at the school because the teachers were focused on trying to improve test scores to ultimately save their jobs. Because there was an emphasis on improving test scores, teachers who taught third, fourth, or fifth grade received more attention such as classroom visits/walk-throughs, instructional coaching, and instructional resources. Since second grade was not a "tested" grade, she did not receive any additional instructional support from the CF that she felt like she really needed.

Also, during Jackie's second year of teaching, the CF left and a classroom teacher was appointed to assume the CF role in the middle of the year. Because she still had fulltime teaching responsibilities, she was not able to provide instructional support to teachers such as classroom observations, model lessons, or team teaching. She was more of a liaison for school and the district's curriculum and instruction office. Fortunately, Jackie had another teacher on her grade level who "took her under her wing" and provided her with "mentor-like

support” that she so desperately needed and wanted. This is how Jackie described this teacher:

She was not assigned as my mentor but she was always very consistent. She was a very good teacher. She was a really good teacher. And all the kids respected her. Adults respected her. She is consistent; she is as consistent as consistency could be. She's always the same. She was very helpful with finding resources when it was time to plan. Like we would actually talk about it and having that dialogue really made a lot of difference for me. Whenever she was willing to do new things and try new things, ...she pushed me outside of my comfort zone. And I appreciate everything that she has done.

During Jackie’s third year of teaching, she taught third grade. The state had new legislation regarding third students who did not pass the end-of-grade reading test. This legislature required those third graders to attend summer camp and retest at the end of summer camp. Any of those who did not pass the test during summer camp would be considered as a “transition” fourth grader and be required to get additional daily literacy support. School administrators had the option of putting all of the transition students in one classroom or spreading them across the grade level. Jackie’s principal decided that all 14 of the transition students would be placed in one class and that Jackie would be their teacher. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but Jackie struggled with having a classroom full of the lowest students in the grade level.

I believe that my principal was under the impression that because there were so many and because there were three teachers that it would be best to just make one class. There were so many other fires that needed to be put out, you know. I mean if I could just be truthful. With a lot of

teacher turnover throughout the year, and other grade levels having many more difficulties than I had, I just think that my principal thought it was best to put those students with a strong teacher, which I guess was me. I was the only one on my team who have taught younger grades, and with the exception of one, she had taught kindergarten, but then they moved her to fourth grade. But thinking that I'm a stronger teacher when it comes to low performing students.

Jackie was able to receive support from within her building and from the district office. The CF (who was not the same one she had her first year teaching) and the reading specialist were able to provide some assistance. The CF shared some resources that would assist with literacy instruction. The reading impact teacher was also a big help with the resources, and Jackie also enjoyed being able to bounce ideas back-and-forth between the two of them. The support from these two sources was short lived. Because of two unexpected vacancies in third grade, the reading specialist was put back in the classroom so she was not able to provide Jackie with any more instructional support. Also, the help that the CF provided was very limited because as Jackie described it, "...There were so many other fires in the building", and Jackie believed that her need for help was not seen as critical as the other areas.

However, in spite of all that was going on within the building, Jackie received significant help from district level support – the Raising Achievement specialist. Even though Jackie was considered a "strong teacher" and her principal trusted her with the lowest performing students in fourth grade, Jackie was struggling with meeting their needs and really did not have anyone within the

building to lean on because everyone was “under fire” at the time. The district coach was a lifesaver for Jackie.

She helped me in every area that she could. If I needed ideas with literacy, and she was actually able to pull a group herself and was able to come in and she did a little book study with some of the fourth-graders at that time. She did a little book study with them and had them on Ed Moto and the session was great. It was great to see the kids with her. So she provided support in all areas.

The specialist also helped her to find additional resources that would be beneficial for her students.

Some of the most beneficial and specific literacy support came from an outside consultant from a company, Accelerated Reading Company (ARC) (pseudonym). This company was contracted by the school to coach teachers in teaching guided reading.

When we were with the ARC consultant, they came in and really showed me my first year how to execute a guided reading lesson. She came in and did a model lesson and then she came in and watched me and she gave me feedback. She followed up with me during my specials. Like our literacy block was before specials. So we debriefed then during specials.

The debriefing sessions were done one-on-one so Jackie could receive the individualized attention that she needed. When asked what was most helpful about her coaching sessions with the ARC consultant, Jackie replied:

Well she took very thorough notes and she always gave me something positive and then gave me something to go back and try. It was a very private and informal conversation but the point of the conversation was

always made. So she would give me something else to try and she would even make observations on some of my students to kind of see if I had seen the same things. Then if I had a question about a student that she had seen, I would ask her for tips or strategies that I could use with that student.

Jackie also said that the model lessons were helpful because she needed to actually see the lesson being taught and rather than simply being told what to do and how to do it with critical feedback. The team of consultants worked with all the teachers in the school. Jackie had multiple sessions with the consultant that consisted of 1) being observed, 2) debriefing about the lesson, 3) having a lesson modeled by the consultant, 4) debriefing about the modeled lesson and given a strategy to try, 5) being observed implementing the new strategy, and 6) having a final debriefing. Jackie said that this type of coaching was beneficial because it caused her to be very confident with teaching guided reading. Literacy coaching from the ARC consultants occurred during her first year of teaching. With principal turnover and three different CFs in a four year time frame, Jackie loss part of that confidence because she felt like she was starting over because her principal's ideas and expectations were different than what the previous principal wanted and expected.

[The principal's] idea was a lot different. But now that I look back, it is really not all that different, but at that time I felt like it was different. She was coming from a middle school and pretty much been in the middle school her entire career. So coming down to elementary, it was just a little bit different. It was a different experience; so a lot of times, a lot of things just got lost in translation for me.

However, as Jackie grew as a teacher, she realized that the two guided reading models were not that different. She figured out how to use what she had learned about guided reading and still do what was best for her students through using best practices coupled with meeting her principal's expectations.

Diana. Having worked at a school that had state and district level support due to the school's placement into "school improvement status", Diana experienced literacy support on three different levels. First of all, she had CF support. She had been in one school for 14 years and only spent one year in her new school prior to her participation in this study. She connected well to the CF at the new school, and Diana spoke well of the CF's helpfulness.

In this previous year, my CF was a great help. I think that's what made my position so easy because I could go to her with my ideas or I could go to her and say, "Hey I saw that. What do you think?" She would sit down and talk with me about it and say let's try it in the classroom. And we would do those kinds of things which was a great support to me to help me and to make that transition.

[CF support] was mostly done through PLCs but there were only two of us on the grade level so it was kind of hard to me because it was only two of us just me and her. And this year it will be me and him. He's teaching the math and I'm teaching the reading, so it's really no one to really bounce ideas off of. So I spent a lot of time in [the CF's] office after school talking about what do you think about this and what do you think about that. I think that that's why we connected because she had an open door policy. With too few people [on a grade level] you don't have anyone to bounce things off of.

With being in “school improvement status” Diana’s previous school received coaching support from the district’s curriculum specialists. However, the support that they gave was not as helpful for Diana as what her CF provided.

We had the turnaround services, from the county and I'm using quotation marks right now. They would come in to the building which were literacy coaches from downtown. They would sit in on our PLCs and sometimes they'd throw stuff out there and sometimes they wouldn't. I wouldn't get a lot from them. I would get more from my CF. I've had some really good CFs in my time. What I like best about the CF I have now is that she has not separated herself from being a classroom teacher. She has not forgotten where she came from, which I think that's why I connect to her so well. She'll say, “This is what I did when I was in the classroom” or she won't be like “this is the way it's going to be” or give me a run around about how she knows how hard it is to implement something because she was there. And she didn't forget that she was there. I've had some CFs who [were] moving up the ladder and they're just trying to get somewhere. And I don't feel like [we] get the support we need. While the ones who haven't disconnected themselves from the classroom are usually the best ones that I've had who will help you and actually come in to model lessons in reading. And they'll come in and say, “Hey, I had this resource when I was in the classroom” and they're just a great help.

While at Turnaround School, the district coaches who supported the school included a reading and math specialist from the curriculum and instruction department and a Raising Achievement coach. Diana did not find the support of the literacy specialist (coach) to be helpful as the math specialist (coach).

The math coach, when I was in the third grade and I did teach math, she was really good. She's now a principal, and she would actually come in and do model lessons too. And when it got down to actually prepping for the EOG she would...well we would do a blitz; she would be a blitz person and so she came right in the classroom. The reading one not so much. She came in one day and was helping me during guided reading and a kid said, “I have to go to the restroom”. I thought she was going to freak out

because she asked her to walk across the hall. So she didn't give a lot of feedback and she didn't give a lot of support. And literally in the classroom, she would walk in the door and stand at the door. But the math one was spectacular; she would bring things in all the time.

Diana had mixed feelings about the instructional support coaches from the state department.

In my previous school we had a full state team in there for a good part of the whole year for every day. There was a part of them who were in the building every single day. Most of the time they would just come sit in your room and watch you teach and maybe give you feedback. To me it was about your personality with them. There were a couple of them that I clicked with and they were great, and then there were a couple of them I didn't click with and they didn't like anything that I did. No matter what I did it was wrong. It was a couple of them they could come in and see the exact same lesson the next day and it was great. So to me, it depended on whose side you were on. But they were there every day.

In efforts to improve guided reading instruction, the district literacy coach, with the assistance of one of the state coaches, provided a sit-down, presentation style PD session to train the teachers on using the Jan Richardson's guided reading model (Richardson, 2009). The teachers were expected to implement the structure for guided reading, and then the literacy coaches would do walk throughs and provide feedback.

Well we were asked to implement it in our classroom. I'm not sure how much that was followed through, but like I say I'm not much with professional development. I will take it to my classroom and try and I'll be the first one to let you know if it doesn't work. But I absolutely loved [Jan Richardson's model of guided reading]. And when someone from the state and from the county came to do walk-throughs, and were very happy with what I had done and how I took it and ran with it. They were giving me

feedback. I didn't get follow-up training, but I did get feedback on what I was doing in my classroom with it. As far as everybody else, I don't know.

Diana also shared that within the literacy block, the teachers were expected to use the Daily Five structure (Boushey & Moser, 2006) for the literacy stations during the guided reading block. No formal PD was provided but each teacher was given a copy of the book and told to read it and implement the structure. At the previous school, Diana said that they talked about “The Daily Five” (Boushey & Moser, 2006) in the PLC but that was the extent of the support given. At her recent school, she was never told to use that structure, but she said that it was a natural fit for her and her teammate. Similarly, the district mandated the implementation of phonics and word study as described in *Words Their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston 2015). All fourth and fifth grade teachers were trained during the summer and then they were expected to provide word study instruction every day for thirty minutes. Once again, there was no structured follow-up support provided.

Themes for Research Question 1 about the Coaching Experience

This section describes the themes for research question 1 which explores the meanings that teachers make of their literacy coaching experiences. One criterion for participating in this study was that the teachers must have had at least one year of receiving literacy coaching. Therefore, all of the teachers in this study experienced literacy coaching, and the data indicated that coaching came from various sources within the school and from outside the school as well.

Teachers as initiators of receiving coaching support. Each of the participants in this study reached out to either a colleague or a literacy coach (whether it was building level, district level, or outside consultant) to receive coaching support. Tina, Sharon, and Shadae all worked at the same school and were accustomed to having two CFs prior to last school year. Even with two people supporting the classroom teachers, they still realized how busy they were and limited their requests for help. However, they did reach out for help when they felt it was necessary.

Kelly, like Sharon, had worked in her school in another role before receiving a full-time teaching position. Kelly speculated that the CF and principal did not think that she needed the same level of support since she was not new to the school. However, in her later years, Kelly reached out to her CF and when she needed additional help, she reached out to her to other colleagues who gave her the help that she needed. She stated:

I reached out to the CF; I go to her for everything. Everything. And then I see what she says before I go to the principal. ...Well I really trust [the CF] and I feel like she's going to be honest and real and give me the support that I need and just be genuine about it. Anytime I have an issue, whether it is related to curriculum or whatever, I go to the curriculum facilitator.

With such a focus on supporting teachers in the tested grades, teachers who teach kindergarten, first, or second grade may feel like that they are not priority in receiving coaching support so they may not reach out to the CF or expect to receive help. Sharon stated:

A lot of the tension is put on third through fifth because of testing. When we go to [the CF] for PLC meetings, it was mostly... it was some help. She gave us Foundations help. When the Foundations lady was there was, she really didn't [help], but the Foundations lady did. Let me think. Half the time our PLC meetings were canceled for the fact of trainings or TRC's or [the new CF] was having to go to meetings. I feel like a lot of times first grade was left out.

Shadae communicated “Even though you completed your degree and received your teaching certification, you still need support and guidance in your first years of teaching”. She recalled asking her CF for help when her guided reading lesson was not flowing as smoothly as she wanted. She also asked for specific help such as a lesson on text features.

Even though Shadae was comfortable asking for help from the CF, she recognized that it is sometimes difficult for rookie teachers to ask for help because of fear or feelings of inferiority.

If you only have a first-year teacher who's coming into the school district or the school system that he or she, you know...you go to school for four years, but you don't learn everything in the classroom. So you know you have your team members right there but then sometimes people feel inferior and they don't want to have to go to, and then they are just sitting here and he or she might be stuck in a bind. ...If they don't come to you openly or ask you, or the curriculum facilitator, so they're lost; they're out.

Additionally, Diana regularly went to her CF for assistance, guidance, and resources. In sum, while some teachers received some support that was not requested when their needs were not being met, all of the teachers in this study sought help from within the building from the CF, a mentor, or other colleagues.

Teachers' dependency on peers for support. In instances where teachers did not feel comfortable reaching out to the CF or district coach, they often leaned on their peers for support. Tina actually received meaningful support from a retired teacher who was working at the school as a tutor. When asked what was the main source of her support for teaching literacy, she stated:

Definitely [I] refer to a peer teacher because I had other options for help. We went through two CFs last year and they keep our CFs so so so busy and they don't have time to assist us in that capacity.

Tina believed that teachers should not be afraid to ask for help from the CF or other colleagues. For example, Foundations was new for Tina. Even though the district provided some coaching support by contracting the Foundations consultants, those visits were not sufficient for Tina, so she sought help from a teammate.

I heavily depended on an experienced teacher who taught it a year before I did. She helped me out a whole lot. I don't know how I would've made it without her. Just from the training that we received from the summer, when I taught summer school. I did have that little experience, but you know I wasn't as comfortable with it just because I didn't know if I was saying the sounds correctly. You know there was a website to go to and then there was a lot of stuff to teach on your own. You have to make the effort of going to the website and teaching yourself how to do it. I had to depend on another teacher who was really nice and was on my team that was comfortable with it and had more experience. She really helped me and another teacher out a lot with getting adjusted to doing Foundations.

Jackie experienced three different CFs in four years. She too needed help but sought support from another peer teacher because of the turnover with the

CF position. Jackie recognized that she needed help and she leaned on another veteran teacher for direction and support. Sharon reached out to Mrs. Dowdy as her mentor and not as the CF to get the support that she needed. In fact, all of the teachers in the study received literacy support from their peers.

In sum, the teachers in this study believed that not only should teachers reach out to CFs or other district level support, but they should also feel comfortable receiving help from their peers, which may or may not be teachers on their grade level. Also, these teachers were not boxed into the idea that instructional literacy support could only come from someone in the teacher support role, but could come from other teammates or colleagues as well.

Research Question 2: Teachers' Perceptions of the Influence of School-based Administrators on Literacy Coaching

In this study, three different schools were represented, and therefore, three different principals were discussed as well. Three teachers were at School A, two teachers at School B, and one teacher at School C. Even though the teachers' literacy coaching experiences were different, there were commonalities in their beliefs of the administrators' influence on literacy coaching.

Sharon. Tina, Sharon, and Shadae all worked at School A. There was a new principal, Mrs. Jonas, the year before this study took place who had been an elementary teacher, a reading specialist, and curriculum facilitator prior to becoming a principal. According to Sharon, she and some of her colleagues expressed to Mrs. Jonas their need for more low leveled text to use for guided

reading. Sharon believed that the principal was open to hearing from them and understood their concerns. In fact she appreciated her principal's knowledge of early literacy skills.

I think with Mrs. Jonas coming in, you know she's new, she sees the need we have like I was talking about the books. The low level books and just not guided reading books. This summer she is ordering new books for us and we got some of them in the middle of this year and she ordered some more for us. So she's trying, I believe to get books for us for guided reading. She bought some tutoring help for us, two ladies that helped.

Sharon believed that the principal recognized their need for more literacy support, and she was providing that support through resources, such as more low leveled text to reach the struggling readers, and by hiring tutors to provide more hands-on support within the classroom. Sharon believed that the principal had genuine concern with not just what the teachers were doing within the classroom but also a concern with how they could contribute to students' access to books outside of the school day.

[The principal] came into a our PLC meetings but that was like the first of the year and we were TRC testing and in the middle of the year we pretty much had PLC meetings on our own which we were trying to discuss what we were doing....Mrs. Jonas, I do believe she is trying to help with that. Well I know countywide, the TRC results were not what we wanted, but she met with each individual teacher and discussed the results with you and why do you think this one didn't go up and why this one didn't go up. She met with each teacher and was trying to get behind it and we had a whole meeting after school on [the data], and she said that even though we did show growth that we're still down on our proficiency [level]. A lot of our children are Hispanic and you see they don't have the help at home, because their parents don't even speak English. Half of our population is Hispanic. And our kids don't have books at home half of them. She

actually got them all books at Christmas and then a church group came to give them all a book twice this year. Things like that I think are really good to have.

Support for increasing early literacy skills was evident through the principal's actions. However, there was no recollection from these teachers that Mrs. Jonas shared any expectations of what coaching support should be provided by the CF or any plans for training and/or coaching support for the teachers.

Shadae. Shadae shared that Mrs. Jonas, the new principal, expected for everyone to use the Jan Richardson's model in guided reading, as described in her book *The Next Step in Guided Reading* (Richardson, 2009). All teachers were given a book and were expected to read it and then use the lesson plan templates for their guided reading lessons. The book and the lesson plan templates had been introduced the previous year with the veteran K-2 CF but they were not required to use it. However, Mrs. Jonas made it a requirement. Shadae stated that there was no formal training that she could recall, but everyone was given the book. She said, "I think because it was basically self-explanatory to me." Also, she had used the model during summer school, so she was quite comfortable with it.

Shadae believed that the principal's requirement of everyone using the same format and lesson plan template for guided reading coupled with the district mandate of Foundations being the phonics program taught in all K-3 classrooms

sent the message that they were collectively attacking the reading deficits that their students had.

Because I feel as a teacher, if students can't read then they can't do anything. And literacy is like a big push because everything they do, they have to read. Like coming up with new things; things that can work to get them where they need to be. You know like trying out these new programs. And I guess because of viewing the test scores, the literacy is going to have to be. The gap has got to close, so I feel like as a teacher what we've been doing, we can't do anymore. We're going to do something new and that something is going to be interactive. ...I believe it needs to start in kindergarten and what were using in kindergarten and needs to be across the board.

While the principal's expectations regarding lesson plans, the guided reading structure to use, and the need for more text for students to access were quite clear, her expectations for literacy coaching had not been clearly communicated. Nevertheless, Shadae believed that one of the principal's expectations for the CF was "for them to provide extra support to the teachers. And if there was something that we may have difficulty with, they would need to come in and do what we needed."

Shadae also stated that time was a major constraint for literacy coaching from her CF. "The time she often has to go to meetings. And you know I know from time to time we will get sick. But I know the majority of the times getting pulled for meetings." Shadae believed that the CF was not able to provide ample support because she was not present enough to be able to do so effectively.

Interestingly, Shadae shared her view on the difference in the role of CF and literacy coach. She did not view the CF as a coach, and therefore, her expectations of the roles were very different.

So you know it's like we had had two [CFs] each year, and this year we had one. I guess with me, it's new to me when you say literacy coach because I'm so used to saying curriculum facilitator. I guess when I look at it as curriculum facilitator, I think they're in their room and they're getting resources together and they're preparing us for the PLC. And then you know they're busy because of getting everything ready for testing. Because in October they have tests, and then the end of the school year they have tests. So it is basically they're being busy doing other things other than being a literacy coach. I guess when I say literacy coach I'm talking about somebody who will come in maybe twice a week. And then like "Ms. [So and So], is there a lesson you want me to teach?" And I would say, "yes" and then I'll give it to you, and then I'm going to come in and do that and you sit back and take notes on it. So that's what I would say. Literacy coach to me and curriculum facilitator are totally different. They are two separate entities.

Tina. Tina's responses were consistent with Sharon's when considering the support that was given to teachers to improve literacy achievement. Tina recalled that all three principals that she had there at School A focused on how to improve guided reading and provide more support for teachers during this time. Two of the three principals hired tutors as a means to provide hands-on support for classroom teachers and for direct instruction for the students.

Tina also believed that the duties that are assigned to the CF, such as being the testing coordinator, also constrained literacy coaching from occurring like it should.

But just to be honest, and with the transition of having a literacy facilitator half of the year, she was very good, but the majority of them I will say is very minimal because they're pulled for testing training and when they were new to the position, they were pulled a lot. And they weren't there for us, but basically knew when we had the test and what we had to do for testing. Now we were prepared very very well with the CF that we had this past school year, knowing what we had for testing and knowing how we had tests and things like that. But as far as getting the support from a literacy coach, that was very minimal just because they had to do a lot of training. Then at the first, or the beginning of the year, she had left and then the guided reading teacher became the CF, and she had to go through training, so the help was very minimal once again. She would send us emails and then things that we had to discuss during our PLC's. And we would take notes and then send the information back to them just to show evidence that we did do our PLC [meeting]. But as far as getting hands on learning or coaching from them it was very minimal.

Kelly. When asked if the administration supported literacy coaching, Kelly agreed that her principal was supportive. Her thoughts were:

As far as literacy coaching, when we look at the literacy specialist, she's highly respected by our principal. And pretty much whatever she thinks is what we need to do then that is what trickles down to us as teachers... Most of the direction that comes to us regarding curriculum comes from the curriculum facilitator. So I just assumed that it is the same vision as that the principal has.

Kelly's thoughts implied that there is high level of trust not only between the CF and Kelly (because Kelly had previously stated that she goes to the CF "for everything"), but also between the CF and the principal since there seems to be one message being sent to the teachers regarding the expectations with literacy instruction, specifically with guided reading.

Kelly, like Tina and Shadae, also feels that a constraint for literacy coaching is the multiple things that the CF is required to do.

I know this personally because our curriculum facilitator has been given a lot to do since we don't have an assistant principal. There are a lot of other hats that she wears as well and that would be a constraint because of the amount of time she has to do other things like coaching. Like she does coaching for those that need it as far as I know, but she wears a lot of hats, so whatever is needed by the principal at the time, is what she does.

Jackie. Jackie believed that the climate of her school constrained literacy coaching. She openly explained how the events such as high turnover within the last few years has affected the morale and school culture to the extent that coaching was not viewed as something that impacted student learning.

To be truthful [wait time] the turnover rate at our school, is you know...is significant...the teachers...Just with how things have gone the last couple of years, I've seen the morale, how it's has gone down and everyone is pretty much struggling to swim, struggling to keep their head above the water. Whenever there's turnover something gets dropped and something needs to be picked up by someone else. A lot of times that's what happens. And with all of that working together, there's no time to be coached...so to speak. And I think that's the difficult part because we could really benefit from the coaching but if you're doing 17,000 other things that's not related to our classroom instruction because someone else dropped the ball or because someone left their position, it's really a disadvantage to our students as well as our staff.

When asked to describe the school climate, Jackie responded:

It's not always very pleasant. There is a lot of competition created that is not necessary. Between teachers, between grade levels, between PLCs, between you know... It's always, "These people are doing this, why aren't you doing it?" There hasn't been opportunity to collaborate with anybody

outside of my teammates pretty much. And just the demand with expectations, like you can't expect a first-year teacher, a lateral entry elementary ed major who's only been in or has done work in the high school, you can't expect for them to come into an elementary classroom and know exactly what to do. So I feel like times when there could've been coaching, there was criticism and it causes people to shut down and they don't feel comfortable asking you questions because they never know what type of response will come or whether or not you're going to embarrass them in a meeting. Because I remember sitting in a PLC and we did ask one of the CFs, not the current one because she quit midyear, and asked her to give us an example of what it was she was looking for. And it turned into a full blown out argument because she felt like she shouldn't have to tell us that. But you're saying what we're doing is not enough, and we ask you to show us what you're looking for to meet the expectation. And you don't, then there's a problem.

Furthermore, Jackie felt like the competitive culture was created by the previous administration and CF, and that culture simply continued with the current administration. Because of the lack of trust and appreciation, Jackie said that teachers are not willing to ask for coaching or open to receive coaching.

Consequently, some teachers sought help only from each other.

With the current administration and the previous year...Because the middle school is a different world and they're departmentalize so it is different and everybody specializes in what they teach. And it is a completely different world. And just that mentality changed from middle school to elementary, thinking that if I say this, then that will make them work much harder but people are staying at school until eight or nine o'clock at night every day. And it never was enough. I can remember countless meetings just end up being just people storming out in tears and saying nobody cares about the kids or nobody is doing their job, or... but it's been kind of crazy. The culture of the school, the climate of the school the atmosphere is not conducive for coaching because I never know if you're coming from a place that you want to help me or if you're coming from a place in which you're out to get me.

Both the previous and current principal came from middle schools, and Jackie believes that that may be a contributing factor to why the principals viewed things very differently.

She was coming from a middle school and pretty much been in the middle school her entire career. So coming down to elementary it was just a little bit different. It was a different experience, so a lot of times a lot of things just got lost in translation for me.

Just as the other participants said, Jackie felt that the CF was given too many things to do, some required by the district and some things dictated by the principal. Therefore, the CF was not able to focus on what was most important. While it seemed like the CF had good intentions of providing support, with so many things to do, providing coaching support seemed to fall by the wayside. Jackie recounted:

There will be a sign-up sheet to sign up for help with something but then there's no follow through. [The principal] has, you know, one person doing 17,000 other things rather than what they're supposed to be doing. But I won't get on my soapbox about that.

Diana. Diana is a unique participant because she had experienced being at a school that was in “school improvement” which meant that an instructional team from the state department was deployed to work in her school daily. Diana had just completed her first year at another school in the district when she was interviewed for this study. When thinking about how the administration supported or constrained literacy coaching, she shared her experiences from both schools.

While at Turnaround School, Diana felt that the principal was very supportive. She described the overall school climate as a family, one in which people worked together and there was mutual trust to share your feelings regarding successes and failures.

I had a conversation with my [current] administrator and [told her that] at my old school that no matter what our test scores looked like or who was beating us down at the door, be it the state, the county, and whoever was in our room and whoever was in a room on a regular basis, we were a family. You can walk into anybody's room [and] you could lay your life out there, and nobody held it against you. Everybody was working together for the common good.

Diana confirmed her belief that the staff bonded together because of the state of the school with so many visitors there every day to critique all of the things that they were doing.

Diana even mentioned that the principal at her current school often attended the PLCs and actively participated through sharing ideas or instructional strategies. Contrary to Kelly's belief, Diana shared that the CF and principal are not always "on the same page". However, they both have the same intent to provide support to the help them be better.

From what I can gather, [the principal] sits in our PLCs and asking the questions about literacy and everything we're talking about in our PLC. I think sometimes she ends up literacy coaching too. Because she's like, "Why don't you try this?" and she's right at her side. Sometimes [the CF and the principal] don't agree with what's coming out of each other's mouth but they both have their own ideas, but they're constantly doing those walk-throughs and telling us what we were doing and what we could do better.

Even though the principal was highly visible and seemed to support literacy coaching by actively participating in PLCs, Diana felt that the school climate was quite the opposite at her current school than what she experienced at Turnaround School. There were two constraints that she described that hindered the literacy coach. First Diana said that the teachers were not willing to receive constructive criticism. She shared:

I feel like there's people there that can't take the constructive criticism...I own it. I'm not the best teacher out there, you know. We all would like to think that we are, but I know that I'm not. It doesn't matter that I've been there for 16 years. I still need help from someone from the outside. I think that's what constrains some of it, that there are some people who are not going to take your advice no matter who you are and no matter what you have to say. They just don't want it and they just don't take it. We're all there for one purpose and that's to serve the kids and when you get people like that that don't want to take the help, who is it hurting? Is it hurting that literacy coach or the person that you're not taking the information from? Because she's doing her job because she's giving it to you. She can't force you to do it, but she's doing it by giving it to you. You're only hurting the kids when you're not trying to make yourself better. I think that's a lot of the constraints.

Yea...I mean I think it constrains that person from doing their job. It doesn't constrain me from doing my job because I take criticism and I run with it. I welcome it. So it really doesn't really constrain me. It may constrain her from doing her job in the whole building. I think what it constrains is us as a whole unit. It constrains us all in the end because eventually I'm going to get those kids...the ones when you didn't want to take the criticism for to help you to be a better teacher so they could be better students. Eventually it is going to trickle to me because I'm the fifth grade teacher.

Another constraint that she described was the lack of trust and unity with her colleagues. She shared:

I don't really feel that way at my new school. I've bonded with a lot of people, but there are a lot of people I feel like I have to watch my back. To me I think that that's what is hindering the school. We could be doing so much more in that building, and that kind of makes me feel like that's what is hindering it. And my old school, even though we were a family, we had a lot more, and I've seen a lot more that hindered us and this school doesn't have half of what I saw over there. So I know if this group was just a good ole' family, and we all were together for the common good and bounce ideas off each other, I can't imagine what could happen in that building.

Diana had a very positive perspective regarding the role of coaches at any level (school, district, or state) and the role of other administrators who observe in classrooms. However, from Diana's viewpoint, if there is not a level of trust and camaraderie, or a sense of family, then it is difficult for one to accept the constructive criticism. Consequently, it is much more difficult to move forward and grow professionally. Diana reiterated the role of administrators and coaches.

Just like when you have people that walk in your room and glare at you and it doesn't matter if it's me, my CF, principal, they do it to everybody. Why? They are not here to catch you doing something wrong, they are here to catch you doing something right. And if it's not quite right, they are here to help you be better. So why give them that look every time they walk in the door? It's their job. That's what they're here to do.

It should be noted, however, that Diana did not always have this viewpoint. She grew to this out of her experiences with being at the school who was under low performance sanctions. She knew what it was like having someone in her room five out of the seven hours of the school day and three days a week. Now she is able to embrace the criticism as "help", and she is able to be reflective and see how she can use it to become a better teacher.

Themes for Research Question 2 about Teachers' Perceptions of the Influence of School-based Administrators on Literacy Coaching

There were three major themes found for research question 2. The participants shared their thoughts on whether or not the principals influenced literacy coaching at their perspective schools. The data suggested that principals had direct and indirect influence on literacy coaching. Furthermore, two of the themes indicated that there are other factors that can support or constrain the occurrence of literacy coaching in the schools.

Principals' support of literacy coaching. Each of the participants, felt that their principals supported literacy coaching. Shadae, Tina, and Sharon worked at the same school and Kelly and Diana worked at the same school. They all had favorable comments regarding their principal's support regarding literacy coaching. Sharon, Shadae, and Tina's comments suggested that the principal demonstrated support of literacy coaching based on the resources she provided, such as guided reading books and hiring tutors to support teachers in the classroom. Shadae felt that in order to increase student's reading scores that they could not continue doing what they had done in the past. Thus, having everyone follow the Jan Richardson's model for guided reading (Richardson, 2009) and having consistency across the grade levels (kindergarten through third grade) with teaching Foundations were two steps toward closing the achievement gaps in literacy, according to Shadae's beliefs.

Tina took comfort in the fact that the principal even worked with small groups of students as they prepared for the state end-of-grade tests. She stated:

I thought that was great to have a principal who pulled small groups of children and have relationship with her. They were so excited to go be with her while she could teach them the things that she was showing them how to do in the classroom. You know, maybe with her and also with literacy coach and just being a great support system to teachers. You know encouraging them, motivating them, and saying some positive things that will make you feel appreciated versus making you always feel unappreciated.

The principal's interactions with the students and teachers sent a strong message of support to Tina. While teachers may sometimes not feel appreciated with so much pressure with testing, this principal, Mrs. Jonas, sent the message that she was sharing the load with the teachers in helping students to be successful.

Kelly and Diana felt that their principal supported literacy but for different reasons. Kelly felt that the principal highly respected the CF and consequently, the principal trusted her instructional leadership abilities. Kelly believed that the principal and CF had the same vision, and because of this unity, Kelly's perception was that the principal strongly supported the CF and her role as literacy coaching. Diana had a different view about the CF and principal. She witnessed a couple of occurrences where the two did not agree on instructional issues during the PLC. Even though they did not always agree on specific instructional strategies, the principal had a very hands-on approach with

supporting teachers. Diana felt that the principal actually provided some coaching herself. She actively participated in the PLC and offered instructional strategies, just as a coach would do.

School climate's impact on literacy coaching. Jackie and Diana explained how the school climate hindered coaching from taking place. Jackie described the climate at her school as being negative and highly competitive. According to Jackie, teachers did not feel appreciated even though they were working hard and putting in countless hours trying to do their jobs well. However, they often received very negative feedback from the principal to the extent it caused such a spirit of competition that teachers were against their peers and grade levels are against grade levels. Jackie said that the environment was not conducive for coaching because it was difficult for teachers to be open to receive help because they did not know if the help was really help or if it was a way for administrative to come against them. At Jackie's school, the principal and the CF controlled the school climate, and coaching would continue to be hindered unless the climate made a positive turn.

Diana felt that the literacy coaching at her school was hindered by the teachers' attitudes toward receiving constructive feedback. In her experience, the teachers were not open to the walk-throughs from the principal, the CFs, or district personnel. Diana felt that they should embrace the constructive criticism because it is meant to make them better teachers, and consequently student

learning will increase. Teachers should look at the feedback at not just what they are doing wrong but also a confirmation of things they are doing right.

Secondly, Diana believed that the school climate did not have unity and togetherness. There was no “sense of family” as she felt in her previous school. This implied that there was also a lack of trust. While Diana had only been there at the school for one year, she had made friends and established some collegial relationships. However, she also said that “There are those I can tell that I have to watch my back”. If there were a lack of trust then it would be more difficult to receive constructive criticism. Diana believed that if the teachers became closer together and worked as a family embraced the both positive and negative feedback, the climate would be more conducive to receiving literacy coaching. Diana expressed her concern with the principal about the lack of the sense of family. Since she had only been there for one year, she was not sure what had attributed to the staff’s lack of trust.

Contrary to Diana and Jackie, the three participants who were from the same school felt that their principal and school climate supported literacy coaching. This was first substantiated by having two CFs to support teachers, until this past school year when the budget reductions dictated the cutting of one CF position. The previous CFs were actively involved with the PLC meetings and often visited classrooms. However, the current CF was not as actively involved because she had to assume the role of two people, coupled with the fact that she was new to the role and had much to learn.

Many roles of the CF. The role of the CF varies from school to school, but one thing commonly heard from the participants was that the CFs had so many things to do that literacy coaching could not be a priority. Five of the participants specifically referenced how busy the CFs were, how they had too many things to do, “wore so many hats”, often had meetings, were busy with testing, etc. Literacy coaching, which entails ongoing teacher visits, support, and follow up visits, was not made a priority. While the participants expressed that their CFs were resourceful and were there to provide support when they could, teachers had limited expectations on how much the CFs were really able to support them. In one case, the teacher suggested that the principal had the CF doing many other tasks than what she should have been doing. Therefore, when literacy coaching is constrained by limited time because the CF is called to do much more than just coaching, that made it less effective for teachers.

In response to Research Question 2, there were three themes found in the data. Because the administrators provided the teachers with resources they needed in working with students and because they were actively involved with the teachers during the PLC meetings, the teachers believed that these actions demonstrated that their principals supported literacy coaching. The data also implicated that literacy coaching was impacted by the school climate and the CF’s inability to focus on coaching due to the many responsibilities that they were given.

Research Question 3: Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Literacy Coaching

There were many different perceptions of effective literacy coaching by the teachers in this study, but some commonalities as well. However, collectively these six teachers described their thoughts on the most important attributes of effective literacy coaching.

Sharon. Sharon believed that one of the roles of the literacy coach is to help her to effectively teach her students who are working below grade level. She also thought that the literacy coach should help teachers to understand the skills that students should be able to do at each grade level, particularly when they are new to a grade level. For example, Sharon taught second grade before teaching first grade. She had unrealistic expectations of the first graders because her knowledge base of them was what second graders could do at the beginning of the year. She believed that with proper literacy coaching she would have understood that she had unrealistic expectations and would have used more developmentally appropriate pacing and instructional strategies.

You know when I came to first grade I was shocked because by second grade they are reading chapter books. When I got to first grade and I was waiting for them to get the [chapter] books, the first grade teachers laughed and said you need to slow down because this is where we are... But if I had had more coaching and someone tell me how to reach these kids, that's what I would like.

Sharon also thought the literacy coach should be knowledgeable and able to find resources that would help teachers to be more productive. She said, "If this kid is

struggling, then what do I need? Help me find resources.” Sharon also desired collaboration with her colleagues. She expressed that CFs should be able to lead those kinds of discussions. In instances where the teachers find resources, Sharon said that collaborative discussion would be helpful as they examined resources together to determine their usefulness.

Shadae. Shadae’s definition of an effective literacy coach was “someone that would come into the class and execute a guided reading lesson plan or someone if I need additional resources, then that person can provide me with the resources that I need.” Shadae shared that with all the changes in education that occur from year to year, literacy coaches should model lessons so that she will know how the lesson should be carried out and so that she will be able to follow the same format.

I guess when I say literacy coach I'm talking about somebody who will come in maybe twice a week. And then like “Ms. [So and So], is there a lesson you want me to teach?”, and I would say “yes”. And then I'll give it to you, and then I'm going to come in and do that and you sit back and take notes on it. So that's what I would say.

Modeling makes it clear for Shadae on what the expectations are regarding guided reading instructions. However, as stated previously, she viewed the CF and literacy coach differently. Unlike other participants, Shadae believed that the CF would be responsible for gathering resources and preparing to lead the PLC rather than the literacy coach whose responsibilities involved more hands-on experiences within the classroom with the teacher.

Tina. Effective literacy coaching for Tina boiled down to two main things:

1) providing resources such as instructional strategies and books that would help students to be successful, and 2) modeling literacy lessons using strategies that worked and those that they expect to see the teachers using in the classroom with students. Tina said:

I would define effective literacy coaching as being someone that would be able to present their expectations or ideas and strategies that are effective that would really help our students improve in reading. They can present ideas and strategies that would help effectively improve our students. A literacy coach would give you and model for you different things they would want to be going, or would want to see in teaching literacy, and strategies that will work and modeling how to implement strategies that they think would be successful. To recommend stories or books they think would be help with different types of skills like focusing on main idea or details, and recommend books that we could use on our grade level for our students.

Tina also gave an example of how her CF did a very good job with finding books near the end of the school year that helped them with teaching specific skills the students needed to know for the end-of-year tests. The CF had a solid knowledge base about the skills the students needed and appropriate texts to use to teach those specific strategies. From Tina's perspective, teachers should be able to lean on the CF to provide support with resources to help teach specific literacy skills.

Jackie. Jackie also believed that literacy coaching should take a hands-on approach to helping teachers to become more effective in doing their jobs. She too believed that coaches must be able to demonstrate to teachers what effective

instruction looks like. Jackie described a literacy coach as “Someone teaching you or showing you how to execute and be effective. How to execute a teacher directed lesson or how to execute a guided reading time to be effective. To increase effectiveness and to execute accurately.”

As she reflected on her experiences, the outside consultant was Jackie’s only experience with what she called “true literacy coaching”. Jackie recalled, “When we were with the ARC consultant, they came in and really showed me my first year how to execute a guided reading lesson.” The consultant modeled the lesson, then gave Jackie time to try the instructional strategies on her own, observed her, and then followed up with additional feedback. Jackie was confident that this level of coaching propelled her to effectively teaching guided reading with her students.

Kelly. Kelly’s definition of literacy coaching had a slightly different focus than the other participants who believed that modeling was at the heart of literacy coaching. Kelly simply defined literacy coaching as “somebody assisting you with teaching or planning activities with literacy in the classroom”. For example, the principal and CF had concerns with the literacy stations that were being used in the kindergarten classrooms. The CF provided some coaching regarding the stations that they did. That was a focus of a PLC meeting, and the teachers had to bring guided reading stations and explain why they used them and how they used them, and what they wanted the kids to learn from them. The CF and teachers were able to collaboratively discuss the center/station ideas that were

shared. Following the meeting, the CF assisted the teachers with making guided reading stations, if they needed her to.

From Kelly's perspective, the CF also provided assistance as teachers expressed their need for help or as problems were identified from walk-throughs done by the CF, principal, or district office personnel. Kelly described how her CF assisted her with the problem of her kindergartners not being independent while rotating and working in the literacy stations during the guided reading block.

Our literacy coach also helped us because one of my challenges was they wanted our students to be more independent doing the stations. But seeing that I have kindergarten students, they kind of needed some help at first. So you need to set up a schedule or a plan for them without them interrupting you from teaching. So my curriculum facilitator helped me set up a chart so the students would know where they needed to be so that there will be minimal interruptions while you were teaching a group of students and while your students were in the guided reading stations.

Lastly, Kelly also described how literacy coaches can provide assistance as teachers are implementing either school or district required initiatives or programs. From her perspective, assistance provided by literacy coaching can serve different purposes. It could be to help enforce the implementation of the program or initiative. At Kelly's school, one teacher was not teaching Foundations when it needed to be done, so the CF provided support to make sure that it was taught every single day since the program was a district mandate. Secondly, assistance by a literacy coach can also be for encouragement. Sometimes teachers need support that simply affirms that they are doing well or making

adequate progress. The determination of whether the coaching is for enforcement or encouragement “will come from the individual needs of the teacher”.

Diana. Similar to Kelly, Diana’s perceptions regarding literacy coaching excluded modeling, but included the coach observing and giving constructive criticism in efforts to help the teachers to be better teachers. Diana stated:

From what I believe I would define [a literacy coach] as someone that has more knowledge than me in literacy and could come in and watch what I'm doing and give me constructive criticism. [They are] meant to help me to be a better ELA teacher. And say, “I saw you doing this, but maybe you want to do that”. You know giving me things that I can use to be a better teacher for the children.

According to Diana’s description of a literacy coach, one would need to be both knowledgeable (so that they can provide accurate constructive criticism) and resourceful (so that they can give them a variety of instructional strategies to use to teach their students). Diana also believed that teachers should be able to go to the coach and share their instructional challenges and the coach should be able to offer some suggestions as a solution. Diana felt that her current CF exemplified the definition that she had of a literacy coach:

Yea I mean I really think that she meets my definition to a “tee”. Because I will go to her or she'll walk through and say something and I will ask her “what would you do?” And she would tell me and then I will go try it. And it worked. ...I'll go to her and say, “I have this problem. What can I do about it?” And she gives me ideas to help the kids to get it. She helps me not be frustrated.

Just as Kelly stated, the CF can be a comforter or an encourager which is what teachers often need.

Themes for Research Question 3 about Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Literacy Coaching

Even though the teachers shared their experiences with literacy coaching, what they experienced was not necessarily what they considered as effective literacy coaching. This research question explored the teachers' ideas about what *effective* literacy coaching entailed. Two of the themes indicated that teachers have specific expectations of the characteristics or qualities that literacy coaches should have in order to be effective, while the third theme focused on what the teachers needed from the interaction with the literacy coach.

Resourcefulness of literacy coaches. A common theme throughout the interviews was that the teachers expected the literacy coach to be able to provide help with resources with teaching literacy. Teachers repeatedly shared instances in which they went to their CF needing help or resources for their instruction. A popular need was appropriate text for struggling readers or for books that could be used for specific literacy skills such as inferencing, main idea, supporting details, text features, etc. CFs were expected to find appropriate resources for the teachers to use in teaching guided reading lessons. For example, Shadae looked to the CF as an expert in literacy. In instances where the CF did not readily have an answer to Shadae's problem, she believed that the CF should be inventive in finding an answer. She shared:

I feel like they are more...they are the experts in the reading area. And if I ask them something they have time to go and research, because ideally, they are not in a classroom like I am with the students all day long. So if they don't have the resources, then they are able to go to some of the colleagues and find resources for the teacher.

Knowledgeable literacy coaches. A prerequisite skill for being resourceful and providing model lessons is being knowledgeable. Like Shadae, Diana expected the coach to know more than she did about literacy instruction. Sharon expected the same and also desired for a coach to lead collaborative team discussions when vetting resources, books, or literacy stations that could be used. Sharon shared that she expected the literacy coach to have a higher level of expertise, and she describe an experience when the district specialist fell short of this expectation. Sharon stated:

I felt like I was teaching her. Because she didn't know and she was skipping a lot of stuff and I had to get up and say, "What does this word mean?", and you should know how to introduce a word and use it in a sentence... The main thing is that the coach knows what she's doing. As a coach, you should've experienced it and done it yourself and not just try to come in and tell someone else.

In other examples, Kelly depended on her coach to be able to provide curriculum support when it came to the management of her literacy stations, and Tina depended on the coach to provide appropriate materials to help prepare students for end-of-year testing. In sum, the perception of these teachers was that literacy coaches must have a wide range and depth of knowledge in many areas of

literacy in order to meet the needs of a diverse group of teachers and a diverse group of learners.

Just as classroom teachers have a diverse group of learners, literacy coaches are required to support teachers who have a wide range of knowledge, skill, and ability. Literacy coaches not only must have knowledge about effective strategies, but also must have knowledge about the different types of learners as they find resources for the teachers to use for all types of learners such as ESL populations, children with special needs, and students reading below grade level. Sharon expressed her need for assistance in reaching those students:

Like with the struggling students the ones who are [non readers], or with the non-English-speaking students, as well as the gifted students. How to push them more. I just feel that we are just kind of left on our own to find what to use, the different things to use in the classroom. Here I am going out and buying this from buying that, but if I don't know that it's not working then I'm wasting a lot of money.

Therefore, these teachers depended on literacy coaches to share their knowledge with teachers as they work to become more effective in teaching and reaching all students to become independent readers.

Showing teachers effective instruction rather than simply telling them. Several teachers expressed the need for the literacy coach to come into their classrooms and do model lessons with literacy instruction. Teachers really wanted to know the effective way to teach and they would prefer to be shown and not simply told. Teachers expressed desire to do what the CF and

administration expected of them, but they also stated that they wanted to know what the expectations were and what they looked like. So that there was no doubt, they preferred to be shown what effective instruction was supposed to be. As an example of this theme, Jackie shared that the modeling by the literacy consultant, coupled with having the opportunity to teach on her own, followed by coaching feedback was an effective way to help her to progress with her literacy instruction.

For these teachers, effective literacy coaching began with the qualities of the literacy coach. While there are several characteristics that are needed for a coach to be effective, the two characteristics that were common in the data were being knowledgeable and resourceful. Effective literacy coaching also included the coaches having “know how” and being able to provide model lessons in efforts to demonstrate what quality instruction looked like rather than simply telling the teachers what to do. The teachers wanted the CFs to have an interactive and hands-on approach to literacy coaching.

Research Question 4: Teachers’ Needs for Literacy Coaching as It Relates to Their Individual Professional Development

Each teacher had their own definition of literacy coaching and what it meant to them. As discussed in chapter 2, literacy coaching can occur in a variety of ways. As they reflected upon their own needs, they shared their need for literacy coaching as it related to their individual preference. In this next

section, teachers explain the type of coaching that is most effective for them and the impact that coaching has had on their instructional practices.

Sharon. Sharon stated that her need for professional development starts in the PLC meetings with her colleagues and the literacy coach. She preferred for the coach to share videos as model examples for literacy instruction and then have collegial discussions about the videos that are watched. Sharon felt that short videos would be an effective way for teachers to see effective instructional practices modeled and to process what was seen through professional discussions. These conversations will allow teachers time to discuss what they learned, the good and/or bad about the instruction, the ideas they have for implementation of the strategies, and the questions they have about what they saw and the application of the content in the classroom.

I think what would be most helpful is more examples or maybe videos because you can see light short videos compared to reading. You can talk about it real quick. You can see it; we can all have a discussion on what was going on, you know, what worked and what didn't work. Things like that. I think that would be better than giving me a book and having me to read it. It would be faster because if you're reading, you know you got to go home, you got to read it, and then remember what you've read before you can discuss it, and then finding the time to read it. Discussing [the videos] as a group and talking about what we saw, that's the type of coaching that I would like to see.

I like the group because you can discuss it. You can talk about something that I see or that was what someone else saw. Or maybe I didn't understand or I took it one way and maybe someone else took it a different way. I think you're able to discuss it and say this is what I got from this but this is what I thought. It's better for you to be able to share.

Furthermore, Sharon would like to watch professional videos like those that are on the CD in Jan Richardson's book (Richardson, 2009) or those on the Wilson Language website for Foundations rather than watching those of herself or colleagues. In an effort to improve guided reading for her grade level, her previous CF videoed each teacher teaching a guided reading lesson. The videos were shared during the PLC and they each critiqued the videos. While Sharon appreciated the format of the PD (watching videos and then critiquing them together), she preferred to use videos from other settings and not videos of herself or her colleagues. She explained how personally she did not do her best teaching because she was very nervous when being videotaped. Furthermore, she believed that she could not be as honest as she wanted to be when watching her colleagues' videos.

The professional [videos] would show more and different things. If you are doing more like the literacy coach at your school, come in and video, to me, I am...well I feel like I am on the spot and I'm nervous. So I'm not gonna really do it the best that I could. And then I don't want people to take defense because someone might say...like it was my team member on there, and I was watching, I'm not going to feel that I can say something like I didn't agree with what she said there or I don't like the way she did that because if it's something personal that I know. And just like Ms. Webb, she's across from me. They videoed her and we're all sitting there together to discuss it, but I'm not going to say anything negative to her.

Upon Sharon's reflection of literacy coaching, she talked about how she did not receive much coaching the last school year because of the changes with the CF. Her most recent memory of the impact of literacy coaching was the

support that she received from the Foundations consultant. The consultant modeled a lesson and then debriefed with the grade level about the lesson, which Sharon liked. As a result, Sharon was able to see how she needed to improve on the pacing of her lessons. Reading the manual and being told to improve the pacing was not enough.

Her demonstrating for us. I was able to see the way she moves fast from one thing to another. And the pace of it because of Foundations you have to be so fast. She was able to show and I was able to learn from watching her move in the classroom. Even though she didn't know my students, she knew how to pull it out of them and keep it moving. I learned from that.

Shadae. Shadae taught at the same school as Sharon, but preferred a different type of PD. First of all, she desired one-on-one coaching because she would like the opportunity to have individual conversations with the CF rather than looking at videos within the PLC, which is what Sharon preferred. Shadae believed that meeting in a grade level would be more distracting while she wants to know specifically what she needs to do to improve. Next, Shadae would like the opportunity to independently try what was talked about in the coaching session. She desired for her first attempt to be in her classroom alone with her students so that she can have time to make mistakes free of other colleagues being there to critique. The coach would then follow up with a conversation with Shadae to reflect on the lesson including what went well, what did not, and responses to questions that Shadae may have. The coach could then follow up with a model lesson if necessary.

I think I prefer the one-on-one that way it can be strictly just me and you. I can ask and answer questions because I feel like if it's a small group things can start to get sidetracked and we can get off track so for me one-on-one. Then I also prefer that you let me try some things on my own and then we can have a conversation after I implemented those things. Then you can come in and demonstrate a lesson and I can see the things that you did but I didn't do and then I can try again after that...Let me make my mistakes. If I make my mistakes, then I can learn from my mistakes.

Shadae also indicated that she needs for the expectations to be very clear of what she needs to do, and she wants the feedback from the CF to be clear regarding whether or not she's meeting those expectations.

I would rather do the implementation first and let me see if I have any questions and if I'm meeting those expectations and if I'm not meeting those expectations then we can get together and meet then and see what else we can do.

Shadae said that literacy coaching has had a positive impact on her instruction. She stated, "It's pushing me to continue to grow and to do more research and stay with the latest trends when it comes to literacy". Regarding guided reading instruction, Shadae recognized her need for support:

I'm seeing a difference in the way that I used to do guided reading and using the Jan Richardson's model. So I feel like...I guess I would say I don't know everything so maybe if there is something that I don't know, I am going to reach out to you and then maybe you can provide the answers to what I need.

Tina. When asked to discuss her need for professional development through literacy coaching, Tina reiterated in the third interview that it begins with

clear expectations of strategies and materials she should use. More specifically, she stated:

The coaching that is most helpful for me is knowing what the expectations are and being given insight on specifics on what needs to be completed as far as what kind of materials we need to be using, and what needs to be presented like if things are suggested that you need to use, like TRC questions, different kind of strategies, fluency strategies, that we need to use. Anything that will help improve literacy overall, comprehension strategies that we can use and help us to be successful. And then we can tweak it by bringing in our own type of literature that will focus either on nonfiction or fiction stories that we need to practice, and use with our children so that they can improve in their reading as well as test taking strategies which are most important and in high regards based on EOGs which are at the end of the school year.

Tina was very explicit in her description of the three levels of coaching that may be needed for her.

As far as personally with the coach, basically when they are presenting the expectations, that's basically in a small group within a PLC, a grade level PLC. And if there is something that all teachers are expected to do, then it's during staff development. Then of course if it's personal or something that I need to personally work on, then one-on-one. I would prefer that to be one-on-one. It depends on what the situation is. I would say all three depending on the situation. Either one-on-one, if it is personal. If it's just grade level, then PLC, or if it's for the whole school, then staff development.

Tina added that having a trusting collegial relationship is key for effective coaching to occur between the CF and the teacher. She believed that teachers should feel comfortable in sharing personal concerns with the coach.

When thinking about the impact of literacy coaching on her teaching practices, Tina shared the same experience that Shadae and Sharon shared which was being videoed by the CF and then discussing it in the PLC with their peers. Like Sharon, Tina noted that it was uncomfortable being critiqued by her colleagues. Based on her comments about the experience, she described this type of support as *somewhat* helpful.

Our literacy coach or CF came and videotaped us. She videotaped us while we were teaching and doing guided reading. So we had our PLC and we would critique one another and say suggestions on what they saw. And you know the other teachers critiqued what I was doing and we would critique what they were doing. And you know you're not comfortable with that, but we had to do it, so we did. It ended up being a little rewarding in a way because you got to see what you look like when you're teaching and you got to hear comments about how others felt while you were teaching. And we came up with suggestions that we could do to show improvement overall. That was one specific time that I can recall that I thought was kind of helpful.

Tina said that since she is her own worse critic, it was nice hearing positive things about her teaching from her colleagues.

Jackie. Jackie's preference for literacy coaching would consist of being observed teaching a lesson and giving her immediate feedback, similar to Shadae and Tina. She stated, "You know, almost instant feedback and not let it be weeks down the road." She preferred this method of one-on-one attention because she wants to know specifically what she needs to do. Jackie appreciated the coach's ability to be positive yet provide constructive criticism and highlight areas of improvement for her to address in her literacy instruction.

Jackie's best coaching experience was with the outside consultant company. As stated earlier, those coaching sessions were explicit and tailored to her individual needs. The impact on Jackie's literacy instruction was that it built confidence in her guided reading instruction during her first year of teaching. It had a lasting effect after her first year of teaching. She summed it up as:

I pretty much just got better at doing guided reading. And I know in the following year my [literacy] stations got better. Guided reading instruction itself was better. You know maybe a year or so later when I moved to third grade with that teammate, she really helped me pull the rest of it together. So for me, it is really kind of gave me a solid foundation as to what guided reading is and what I should expect for my students.

Kelly. Feedback was the key word when considering Kelly's need for professional development. She wanted expectations explicitly given to her. During the PLC meetings, she felt like issues from the principal or CF were expressed to the grade level, but it was not clear if the concerns were grade level concerns or specifically for one of the members on the team. Kelly felt like it was "guess work" on which critiques applied to her. While she wants to effectively do her job, receiving feedback is essential to her professional growth. Kelly indicated:

The coaching that is most helpful for me is explicit coaching...like tell me exactly what it is that I need. Sometimes we will get a broad description of what we need in the PLC but not stated towards the person directly who needs it. So I guess when it is explicitly stated and also shown examples like, whatever I'm told that I need to work on...I want some type of feedback even if it's not an observation...Something based on a takeaway that I was given or something that I need to do to make sure that I am on

the right page. But if I could have an observation that would be great too, but I want some type of feedback.

Kelly also mentioned that in some instances she may need to be shown what she needs to work on coupled with detailed feedback that explains how she needs to improve. Based on Kelly's comments, she is the type of teacher who attempts to do what she is told and to live up to the expectations that the administration has.

Pretty much everything that we've received or any feedback that I get, I implement it, and if it doesn't really work for me, but then I do try to take it and use it. If we are given any type of activities to do, I might not like all of them but I do incorporate a lot of them into what I am doing in my teaching. Like we got an activity sheet and one of the assessments on there were like four corners. I had never done that so I just started doing that with my students to do the AR tests and they loved it because they got to get up and move around. So I will incorporate some of those activities into my teaching [and] in my classroom what I received from my CF or my PLC.

In reflecting on the impact of literacy coaching on her teaching practices, Kelly stated, "It has impacted my professional learning because it makes me more...handle it in a more professional manner." She shared that during their meetings she would share her materials with her teammate. She had a heightened sense of what she was doing. Kelly described it as, "I didn't wanted to look crazy, but it made me stay on top of my game according to what I was supposed to be doing."

Diana. Diana's need for professional development was centered on one-on-one coaching sessions that included collegial dialog with the coach, similar to

several of the other teachers. She described herself as “a talker”, and one who needs dialog as a means of processing the feedback that she receives from a coach. She shared:

For me it's a sit down and talk about it. Whether it comes from them or rather it comes from me to them, to sit down and really have someone to listen to me and hash it out with me, let me run my ideas and let me get feedback from them. You know, a one-on-one discussion helps me the most.

Diana described the frequency of these coaching sessions as “ they happen all the time”. More specifically, she stated:

With my new literacy coach, it happens almost all the time. Like a lot of times after school I will stop and the discussion will be about what I'm about to do or what I have done. That coaching with her is going on all the time because her door is always open. Oh and sometimes it could be, “you know I walked through your room today and this is what I saw”. And sometimes you know she really didn't intend, but it was just a walk-through and it wasn't intended to be a sit down, but you know with her and me, you know I feel like it is always happening.

Diana believed that the CF had an “open door policy”. This made it easy for her to have candid and impromptu conversations with the CF. Like Kelly, Diana was willing to try strategies that she received from the CF or ideas that she received from PD trainings. She said:

I would usually go to professional development or anything else someone wanted me to do and I will go to my room and I'll try it. But I also will be the first to tell you that it didn't work or it's not working for me.

Diana reiterated that she needed time for processing and then time to try things on her own in the classroom.

I'm not one of those "show me and I'll do it" but I'm "tell me" and I'll do it. Tell me what you're thinking and let me process it in my head and then let me go try it. You know I'm not one to sit in professional development and you just bring stuff to me... I don't want the science behind the stuff because apparently you've already tried it and it worked. Now give it to me; tell me how you used it. And that's normally what my literacy coach does. She gives me things that she used in the past, you know if I'm struggling, or she'll walk me through it because I've tried it and I can't seem to do it. That just works with me once I talk it out.

The impact of literacy coaching on Diana professionalism and her instructional practices is that it has caused her to be more reflective of her teaching practices. She went to the coach for ideas regarding the areas in which she struggled. Consequently, she used the ideas from the coach in her classroom and this helped her to grow as a teacher. This in turn helped the children grow and learn. Diana also indicated that literacy coaching has impacted her lesson planning and lesson delivery.

You know they are times I will be like, "that did not go the way that I have planned". And they'd [say], "Let's look at your lesson plans", rather than just asking me what did I do. And then I would say, "you know... what about doing this", or she would say, "why don't you do this and put this spin on it?" So doing all those things makes me a better person and it helps me to see where my different pieces are missing...

Themes for Research Question 4 about Teachers' Needs for Literacy Coaching Related to Their Individual Professional Development

While research question 3 focused on how the teachers described effective literacy coaching, research question 4 went deeper into the teachers' thoughts and focused specifically on what the teachers individually needed regarding literacy coaching. As they considered their own professional development, they shared their ideas on the coaching format that would be most effective for them. Additionally, they described what they needed from the literacy coach during the coaching process.

Teachers' needs for clear expectations and direct feedback. All of the teachers wanted to be effective, and therefore, they each had a strong need for clear expectations or direct feedback to be part of their professional development. Three of them preferred direct feedback from the coach and the other three wanted expectations to be made clear from the beginning. Sharon preferred for the expectations to be given in a group setting, while Kelly and Tina said that it could vary depending on the situation. Diana wanted continual dialog with her coach in which she was able to process any new content learned and any feedback from the coach. Jackie welcomed feedback that had a positive tone yet was critical in which it gave her things to work on for improvement. Kelly said, "I need to know exactly what I'm doing so that I will know that you're talking to me so I can address the issue." These teachers all had a heart to do well, and they understood that student learning was contingent on their teaching well. Diana

commented, “Well you know it goes hand-in-hand. The more I learn, the more I change the way I teach.” According to these teachers, clear communication of expectations and prompt and constructive feedback from the literacy coach are necessary for their own professional growth and development.

Teachers’ needs for individual and group coaching. The CFs for each of the schools in this study typically led grade level PLC meetings. During this time, the CFs would share literacy strategies, provide grade level feedback, or share concerns regarding literacy instruction. Each of the teachers indicated that they either preferred coaching done individually, within the PLC meeting, or both. Sharon specifically indicated that she wanted coaching in PLCs with her colleagues so that they could have collegial conversations. On the other hand, Shadae, Jackie, and Diana wanted individual coaching as it pertained to their own individual professional development. Tina and Kelly preferred the PLC setting when the feedback pertained to everyone in the group. They both clearly stated that coaching needed to be one-on-one if there were specific concerns that the CF needed to share with a specific teacher. While coaching can occur in a number of ways, one-on-one and within a PLC setting are the two that were most desired by these participants.

Allowing room for growth. These teachers indicated that they wanted to have opportunities to implement newly learned strategies, including things that the CF may have shared. Teachers wanted time to process the information and for there to be room for growth in the implementation process. Shadae stated

that she wanted opportunities to make mistakes on her own and time to learn from those mistakes. Diana indicated that she needed the coach to help her process instructional strategies, ideas, and suggestions. Then she wanted opportunities to try things on her own. Jackie shared that she too wanted time for implementation and then feedback based on her teaching practice. She accepted that the ARC consultants always gave her something to work on based on their observations of her instruction. Kelly also indicated that she wanted direct feedback on her instructional practices. She also wanted the opportunity to work on areas that need improvement. While these teachers all had a desire to be effective and a heart for student success, they each wanted and needed time to implement information gained in PD sessions or the ideas, strategies, or suggestions given by administration, the CF, or literacy coaches from any level.

In sum, this section provided more specific details on the teachers' needs for coaching as it related to their individual professional development. They each wanted clear expectations for literacy instruction which could be shared individually, in a group setting, or a combination of both. The teachers all had a desire to be a more effective teacher, and they expressed their need for time to grow and develop as they work toward meeting the expectations of the CF, administrators, and district leaders.

Summary

This chapter began with participants' profiles and then explored the data gained from the interviews of the participants. Teachers' experiences of literacy

coaching were described, followed by their feelings toward the influence of administration, which included their principals, CFs and literacy coaches, on literacy coaching. Their beliefs regarding constraints on literacy coaching were also described. Additionally, the participants' definitions of effective literacy coaching were also revealed, followed by what these teachers needed for PD as it pertains to their individual needs for literacy coaching. There were many similarities in the data gathered, and thus themes were described based on the information shared by the teachers. Further interpretation on the meanings of these data and the themes described in this chapter and how they relate to the body of literature on literacy coaching will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the lived experiences of six elementary teachers who experienced the phenomenon of literacy coaching while teaching in Title I schools. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings and implications of the study. I begin by summarizing the themes presented in chapter 4 as they relate to each research question. I also discuss the findings as they relate to the existing literature and the propositions of the theoretical framework. Next, I provide implications of the findings for teachers, literacy coaches, school administrators, and district level administrators and coaches. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of the research and discuss possibilities for future research stemming from this study.

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

Research question 1: How do teachers perceive and describe their experiences of literacy coaching? One theme apparent from the data was that teachers should be the initiators of coaching support from the literacy coach. While some research (Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996) showed that there are instances in which coaching can occur from the top down, the teachers in this study actually reached out for help. They each shared their experiences with seeking the help of the curriculum facilitator (CF) in some capacity, some more than

others. The participants shared specific instances in which a coach was helpful because they reached out to the CF rather than the CF initiating the help. Also, the teachers consulted the CF with specific needs. Finally, support was not just sought by the teachers while they were a beginning teacher (BT), but also as veteran teachers because all participants continuously sought to improve their teaching practices.

While the teachers in this study did seek help from building-level coaches like their CF or a colleague, they did not seek help from the district or state level coaches. Both district and state coaches visited classrooms and gave feedback even though the teachers did not solicit their help. The participants did not state if there were conversations with the CF or school administrators discussing their need for support outside of the building. Even though some research (Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996) has suggested that literacy coaching is done from the top down, the data from this study suggested that the participants in this study tended to initiate help from the school-level coach but did not have say with coaches outside of the building.

The second theme that emerged from the data was closely related to the first. These teachers also depended upon peers for literacy support just as much as, and sometimes more than the literacy coach. They realized that the literacy coach was not the only person who was able to support them. Because of the relationships that the teachers had with their peers, they felt comfortable receiving their help. In some instances the teachers reached out to their

colleagues, and in other instances, their colleagues “took them under their wings” (Jackie and Kelly) and simply helped them.

A major theme of Vygotsky’s work was that social interaction has an effect on the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Dozier (2006) posited that responsive coaching relationships consist of caring and respectful instructional relationships. Dantonio (1995) stated that “collegial coaching is premised on the belief that the growth and development of teaching expertise depends on connectedness, trust, and shared visions, values, and goals among individuals within a profession” (p. 3). Because these teachers had very trusting relationships with their CFs and their colleagues, they felt very comfortable seeking help from either of them. However, for the most part they did not have favorable feelings toward the district-level literacy coaches. Thus, the teachers did not seek help from them. In fact this kind of literacy coaching from the top down was more of “enduring the experience” rather than “enjoying the experience”.

Some teachers did have positive interactions with coaches from private companies such as for Foundations and the private consultant firm (ARC). Those outside coaches only visited the teachers a few times each year and their visits consisted of observing them teaching and then giving them direct feedback based on their lesson. The Foundations consultant periodically would interject with on-the-spot coaching or impromptu co-teaching. The ARC consultant would only observe and then debrief with feedback. Her coaching sessions were more

intentional and preplanned. Jackie was able to observe a model lesson, participate in collegial dialog regarding how to teach an effective guided reading lesson, and then practice with coaching support on actually teaching a guided reading lesson. As described in Chapter 4, this was a cyclical process and Jackie received additional coaching support from the consultant to solidify her ability to teach her guided reading lessons.

In sum, the teachers in this study had varied experiences with literacy coaching but there were some similarities. The CF was a help to each of them but there were differences to the extent in which they leaned on the CF for support. They all received notable help from other teachers in instances when the CF was not available for support. Also all of these teachers experienced help from either a district coach or outside consultant/coach or both. These teachers experienced coaching support that was constructive and helpful but also critical and with a negative tone. With their diverse experiences, they all believed literacy coaching as job-embedded professional development that could provide on-going support for them to be better teachers.

Research question 2: What are the teachers' perceptions of the influence of school-based administrators on literacy coaching? One of the themes gathered from the data indicated that the participants felt their principals supported literacy coaching. Interestingly, the teachers' evidence of the principal supporting literacy coaching was due to the resources the principals put into literacy such as buying books and hiring part-time tutors to work in the

classrooms with the students. None of the teachers indicated that the principals ever clearly communicated their expectations for literacy coaching from the CF. Therefore, the teachers in this study each developed their own opinion about the administrator's feelings about literacy coaching based on how they *supported literacy instruction* rather than what they *said about literacy coaching*. In only two instances the teachers said that their principals had a hands-on approach to literacy coaching in that they offered instructional suggestions during a grade level PLC.

Also, the data indicated that literacy coaching was impacted by the school climate, and the school climate was influenced by the principal. For example, even though Jackie was open to receive literacy coaching and actually wanted help, she was skeptical of receiving help from the CF because she was not sure if the coach was "coming to help her or coming to get her". While it is well supported in the literature (Al Otaiba et al., 2008; Kennedy & Shiel, 2013; Lapp et al., 2003; Matsumura et al., 2010; Porche et al., 2012; Shaw, 2007; Steckel, 2009) that literacy coaching had a positive effect on school climate, Jackie did not feel that literacy coaching had a positive impact on the school climate because there were instances where they received criticism rather than coaching. Jackie also expressed her concern about the level of competition between teachers and grade levels. This competition was fueled by the principal and thus it bred a sense of distrust and opposition between colleagues.

Also, according to the literature (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Biancarosa et al., 2010; Hsieh et. al., 2009; Steckel, 2009), in schools that where there was a positive impact due to literacy coaching, the teachers and coaches had reflective dialogue regarding instruction in an open and non-threatening manner. A culture of collaboration, problem solving, and inquiry became part of the norm in those schools. However, this was not the case for all the participants in this study, For example, Jackie did not feel that her school had this kind of support from the principal or the CF, and Diana did not feel the sense of family with her current school. Even though her relationship with her CF was a very open and collegial one, she did not feel that the rest of the staff were open to receive constructive criticism.

In all of the schools represented, the CF was viewed as one who was extremely busy and wore many hats. Some of the responsibilities of the CFs were not related to literacy instruction or to teacher support. Interestingly, the teachers did not hold this against the CF but as a result, they sought help from others. Also, research (Dessuen et al. 2007; Mraz et al. 2008) supports the ideas that literacy coaches have a variety of roles in addition to coaching. Mraz et al. (2008) reported that teachers wanted the coach to do more than just attend grade level meetings and share resources. They also wanted model lessons that incorporated strategies and/or resources that would be more beneficial. Dessuen et al. (2007) found that even though coaches spent long hours working at school, they only spent about 28 percent of their time actually working with teachers.

Coaches are often responsible for tasks such as organizing a book room, assessing students, attending district meetings, just to name a few (Walpole, & Blamey 2008). Nevertheless, Jackie was the only one who clearly expressed her displeasure with the principal for giving the CF things many other things to do that did not support literacy instruction. The other teachers in this study seemed to believe that the many tasks of the CF were either mandated or heavily influenced by the local school district.

In summary, the teachers in this study believed that the principals set the tone for literacy coaching. Most of them viewed support for literacy coaching as providing support for literacy overall. Principals, in each of the three schools represented in this study, attended PLC meetings quite often. All of the principals attended PLC meetings, and two of them made positive contributions regarding instructional ideas, and one of them used the time to come down harshly on the teachers regarding data or what they were not doing rather than support them in improving.

Also, the teachers noted the relationship that the principals had with the CFs. Once again, in two of the schools it seemed as the CF and the principals had a collegial relationship and were on the same page. While in the other school, the teacher felt that CF was in a precarious situation because she wanted to develop trust and support teachers, while the principal wanted her to be an informant and more demanding with the teachers. Consequently, this made it difficult for the teachers to receive help from the coach. Ultimately, all the

participants looked to the principals for the overall vision for the school, but they looked to the CF for the hands-on instructional support. In instances where the principal was able to provide specific, instructional support, that indeed was a plus.

Research question 3: What are the teacher’s perceptions of *effective literacy coaching*? For each of the teachers in this study, effective literacy coaching began with the qualities of the literacy coach. For example, a theme in the data indicated that the participants believed that literacy coaches should be resourceful. The teachers repeatedly leaned on the CFs to help them find resources specifically for guided reading. They also expected the CFs to be able to provide resources for them to meet their individual needs for things such as lessons on inferencing, text features, main idea and supporting details. If the CF did not readily have the resources that the teacher needed, the teachers expected for them to be able to find what they needed, even if it meant consulting other colleagues.

Additionally, teachers believed that effective literacy coaching also consisted of having a coach who is knowledgeable. Shadae even stated that she looked at the literacy coach as being an expert in literacy. They expressed that it is important for the coach to be the “more knowledgeable other”. Knowledgeable CFs often led the PLC meetings by helping teachers vet instructional materials, unpack the standards, preview the literacy units, and discuss interventions to improve literacy skills.

In sum, the teachers in this study expected their literacy coach to know more than they did regarding literacy instruction. This expectation clearly matched the research (Deussen et al., 2007; Dole, 2004; International Reading Association, 2006) which has suggested that literacy coaches must be knowledgeable so that they can provide the support that teachers need to successfully implement new practices. Furthermore, when thinking about Vygotsky's principle of zone of proximal development (ZPD), which was part of the conceptual framework for this study, the literacy coach must be more knowledgeable and skilled with regard to what needs to be developed in the teacher's ZPD.

Lastly, not only do teachers need a literacy coach who is knowledgeable and resourceful, but also one who can model effective instruction rather than simply telling them what it looks like. According to the literature on the characteristics of high quality PD ,(Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003; Joyce & Showers, 1980; Lydon & King, 2009; Polk, 2006), active learning is a necessary component. Active learning may include teachers observing the instructor or expert teacher or being observed by the instructor, coach, or peer teachers, followed by collegial dialog as they plan to work on the area of need (Dunne, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003). The teachers who were a part of this current study expressed the need to actually observe the CF modeling the strategies that needed to be implemented. Additionally, many years ago Joyce and Showers (1980) stated that effective PD must include demonstration,

practice, and feedback. Having the literacy coach to provide demonstration lessons is part of the learning process for teachers and one they expressed that do not want to do without.

In summary, the participants in this study indicated that effective literacy coaching consisted of a knowledgeable and resourceful coach or colleague who is able to provide literacy support in the areas in which they express need, and in areas in which the literacy coach sees the need. The teachers also desired for the literacy coach to model best practices in literacy instruction rather than simply telling them about it. Their definitions of effective literacy coaching are supported in the literature (Gallucci et al., 2010; IRA, 2004; Sturtevant 2003; Taylor, Moxley, Chanter, Boulware, 2006; Walpole et al., 2010).

The effectiveness of literacy coaching was also dependent on the relationship between the teacher and the coach. The teachers desired someone whom they could trust and someone who understood the problems as a classroom teacher. For example, Diana stated that she liked her CF because she had not forgotten from where she had come (as a classroom teacher) and that she had not separated herself from being a teacher. Therefore, in order for literacy coaching to be effective, the coach not only had to be knowledgeable and skilled in literacy and instruction, but also skilled in being able to work collegially with adults.

Research question 4: What are teachers' needs for coaching as they relate to their individual professional development? All of the teachers in this

study expressed their need for clear expectations and direct feedback. They each had the mentality of “just tell me what you want and I will do it.” Regardless if the expectations came from the CF, principal, district coach, outside consultant/coach, district personnel, or state-level instructional support, the teachers wanted the expectations for their instruction to be clear. Additionally, they also wanted immediate feedback in instances where they were observed. Just as Coggshall et al. (2012) posited in their research, feedback was essential to the professional growth of these teachers.

Teachers, however, varied on how they wanted expectations and feedback shared with them. Some of the teachers preferred for expectations to be given during the PLC meetings, which allowed all team members to hear the same thing. However, if there were other concerns that pertained to specific teachers, then individual conversations with those teachers needed to be done. One teacher preferred to have continuous dialog so that she could receive constant and immediate feedback, not just on her teaching, but her ideas as well. Additionally, these teachers had preferences for either individual or group coaching, and some wanted both.

Regardless of which coaching model was used, effective coaching must have collegial dialog. According to Vygotsky’s theory of learning, there is a reciprocal relationship in the interaction with individual learning and coaching support. As coaches provide expectations or feedback, this cannot be a one-way conversation. When teachers have opportunities to dialog about student

learning, share professional practices, and collaborate with other teachers in efforts to develop innovative ideas, they have a tendency to adopt professional practices that will improve student learning. Teachers should also reflect on their instructional practices, and they need opportunities to observe, model, and practice new instructional strategies. Therefore, working with other colleagues in professional learning communities, which has the potential to be a form of high-quality PD, provides teachers with opportunities for sharing with and learning from each other.

The teachers in this study also indicated that PLC meetings were typically a good platform for them to learn and grow as professionals. Sharon, Tina, and Shadae all taught at the same school and experienced being videoed and then watching their videos with colleagues and receiving feedback on their lessons. While it was difficult to watch and also give constructive feedback to their peers, these teachers all appreciated this as a form of professional development.

Another important need that was gathered from the teachers' responses was that they need room for growth. While they all understood that they had areas in which to improve, they want coaches and administrators to allow them time to grow and develop in these areas. Learning is a process. If the coach used the teacher's ZPD to gauge the teacher's needed development, then instructional coaching cannot be done as a "one size fit all" treatment. The basic premise of instructional coaching is providing support to teachers as they practice new knowledge or skills. Vygotsky's thoughts about learning as a social practice are

important to the coaching process because they are focused on learning as it occurs in the context of work over time.

Implications

This study amplifies the voices of elementary classroom teachers who have had coaching experiences from varying levels. The results of this study have potential implications for different groups of educators, which I will address next.

Implications for school level literacy coaches. The teachers in this study all indicated how important the role of the literacy coach was to their individual professional development. But first, they expected to have a collegial relationship with their literacy coach as they sought to improve their teaching of literacy. This begins with the development of trust within the relationship. The literacy coach must be one with whom teachers feel comfortable with sharing their challenges and needs. While the data indicated that the teachers should be willing to ask for help, the coach should still work toward building the relationships to make it more conducive for teachers to ask for help. For example, Diana said that her coach had an open-door policy and was very accessible. She also stated that her CF had not forgotten how it was as a classroom teacher; she was relatable. Just as Dozier (2006) stated that responsive coaching relationships consist of caring, and respectful instructional relationships, literacy coaches should establish this culture in their daily work. Responsive coaching relationships not only include the constructive feedback but

also encouragement when teachers are doing things well or when they are attempting to apply or implement what has been learned or discussed.

Second, literacy coaches must find ways to prioritize providing help to those who want and need it. This is not to say that literacy coaches do not prioritize their time. With so many things that they may be required to do, they must keep the main thing the main thing, and that is providing support for teachers. In this study, four of the teachers noted times when they did not receive any coaching support because there were others who were supposedly in greater need. As the teachers reminisced about their beginning years, none of them indicated that they received much support as a beginning teacher. For each of them it was either a veteran teacher or an outside consultant who provided literacy support.

Third, teachers expect for literacy coaches to be experts in literacy by being knowledgeable and resourceful. Therefore, literacy coaches should seek PD opportunities to enhance their professional knowledge. They must stay up with the literature and ahead of the learning curve in order to coach others. Literacy coaches are looked upon as leaders in the building. As literacy coaches learn and grow professionally, they become better equipped to support teachers. While literacy coaching is a form of job-embedded PD, literacy coaches themselves must be resilient and not complacent in continuing their own professional growth.

Implications for building level administrators. While literacy coaches are not administrators and do not typically have “administrative powers”, they are influential leaders in a school building. One of the biggest concerns that the teachers in this study had with the CF was the many roles and responsibilities that they had. For this district in which this study took place, the elementary CFs were supposed to spend one half of their time serving as a literacy coach. Even though this was a district mandate, it was not clear to the teachers if there was any accountability regarding this requirement. In other words, the participants in this study felt that principals seemed to assign responsibilities to the CFs as they saw fit.

However, the data from these teachers indicated that they wanted their coach’s support. They wanted access to their expertise through the modeling, observations, and dialog (including dialog about expectations and feedback). Only one of the teachers expressed her dismay in that the literacy coach was given numerous other tasks that had nothing to do with supporting teachers or with literacy coaching. The other teachers seem to understand that there were many things for the CF to do and seemed to just accept that they were not available for help. This implies that principals must see the potential for the effects of literacy coaching on teachers’ professional growth and development, and hence the positive impact on student achievement, and reassign other duties that hinder CFs from actually coaching teachers.

In the study by Deussen et al. (2007), the researchers examined the amount of time that coaches actually spent coaching teachers. They found that literacy coaches only spent a little more than one-fourth of their time actually working with teachers. While this study did not examine how much time the CFs spent coaching, the data did show that there is a greater need for coaching support based on the participants' expectations.

The question for principals remains, "With continuous budget cuts and limited personnel, who can do these other tasks other than the CFs?" Understanding the impact that this position can have on student achievement, principals should make it a priority to find ways to enhance the CFs ability and opportunities to coach. This may mean a reorganization of the duties assigned to the assistant principal and support staff such as the guidance counselor, social worker, reading teacher, and administrative support.

Also, the data from this study indicated that school culture or climate impacted the effectiveness of literacy coaching, while the research that I read to prepare for this study described the impact that literacy coaching had on the school climate (Al Otaiba et al., 2008; Kennedy & Shiel, 2013; Matsumura et al., 2010; Porche et al., 2012; Shaw, 2007; Steckel, 2009). The teachers shared how the climate toward literacy coaching and literacy instruction in their schools was set by the principal. For example, Mrs. Jonas, principal of School A, set the tone with her staff by first talking with the grade levels and hearing their needs. She then acted on what she heard and put more funds into literacy instruction by

purchasing leveled books and hiring classroom tutors. She personally found time to work with small groups of students as they prepared for end-of-year tests. This was a positive experience for the students, according to Tina who shared how excited they were to work with the principal. This also sent a strong message to the staff that the principal was in there with them. In sum, this principal established a climate of unity that helped the teachers feel genuine support from the principal. In the other school, Kelly and Diana's principal was very hands-on and would provide coaching support by not just doing walk-throughs but also providing them with instructional ideas and suggestions in addition to feedback. And, even though Diana had witnessed the principal and CF having different views about an instructional issue, they were professional, and Diana appreciated their ability to disagree agreeably.

According to Jackie her administrator set a negative climate by breeding a culture of competition. While the principal's intent may have been for this to be "friendly competition" or for it to be a motivator for teachers to do well, Jackie felt that it did quite the opposite. Teachers were against each other and they also felt unappreciated for all of their hard work. They seldom heard encouragement and did not feel any real support with their efforts to improve.

In sum, principals must realize the influence that they have on the school climate. The things that they say set the tone for the teachers. Just as teachers are encouraged to have high expectations for their students and provide encouragement as they continue to work toward their goals, principals should be

held to the same standard. Principals not only set the tone by what they say or do not say, but also their actions influence the school's climate. The participants in this study felt that the principals supported literacy coaching based on what they *did* more so than what they said. Their actions to provide support for the teachers spoke volumes for the teachers and the students. As schools continue to move forward in the quest for improving literacy achievement and closing achievement gaps, principals must work to set positive climates for their schools, one that is built on trust and unity.

Implications for district personnel. Teachers' expectations for literacy coaches to be knowledgeable and resourceful were not limited to CFs or building level coaches but district literacy coaches as well. Teachers look to them to be the "more knowledgeable one" just as those school level coaches. For the most part, the teachers in this study did not have favorable experiences with the district-level coaches. Some of them felt like one district coach was not very knowledgeable because what she had to share was very shallow. One even said that the coach simply found resources on Pinterest. While she did not mind the sharing of resources, she felt that the coach did not show that she had any depth of knowledge.

Therefore, the data from this study implied that the district coaches must also continue to improve their professional skill and knowledge in the area of literacy. It could be argued that they should be expected to be even more resourceful than the building coach simply because they are working at "a higher

level”. One question that comes to mind is “What are the required qualifications for one to become a literacy coach in this district?” Based on my experience in the same district, in order to be a reading teacher, one must have a Master’s degree in reading, certification in reading, or at least 24 hours of coursework in reading. However, one can assume that the district level coach is required to have at least those requirements if not more in order to have a district coaching role, but I do not know if this is the case.

The district coaches also seemed to be lacking with the teachers in the study regarding the “relational” side of coaching. This may be attributed to the fact that they were not in the schools as often as the CFs, and therefore, it was more difficult to develop the collegial relationships. However, the outside consultants were only in the schools a few times during the year, and the teachers spoke favorably regarding their interactions with them. Teachers felt that the visits from the district coaches were more punitive than helpful. Sharon in particular felt as if the coach was out to get her. Tina felt like the district coach was power hungry and asserted her authority with the principal who ultimately came down hard on the teachers.

District coaches must understand that in order for the coaching experience to be helpful and beneficial for teachers, they must develop a collegial relationship. It seemed as if the teachers did not feel threatened by the outside consultants and this may be because those professionals were not connected with the district, meaning they did not report back to district administrators.

However, the district coaches had district-level administrators to whom they reported. In this day of extreme testing and accountability, the participants felt that negative reports could possibly trickle back to principals and lead to reprimands of teachers. District coaches must work to build the trust with teachers and show they are truly there for the good of the teachers and the students they serve. Teachers must be convinced that the coaches do not have a self-serving purpose when coaching them.

Also, district administrators must continue to put more resources in the schools so that each school can have someone devoted to the job of being a full-time literacy coach. With CFs having so many roles to fulfill, supporting teachers has not become the priority that it needs to be. District administrators should also provide the proper professional development for district and school coaches so that they can become better skilled in doing their jobs. Additionally, in instances where district initiatives for specific programs are adopted, district administrators should continue to provide outside coaching support to assist with the implementation of specific programs. The teachers appreciated the support from program consultants and were happy to see that they were not left to implement things on their own with no support. The expertise of the consultants were valued. The teachers appreciated that the consultants treated them as professionals.

Limitations

Every study has limitations no matter how well it is designed or conducted, and this study is no different. There are restrictions within the methodology and possibly the interpretation of the data. These limitations will be shared next, followed by suggestions for future research that might improve on the limitations of this qualitative study.

One limitation of this study is that the focus was only on the teachers, and the coaches' perspectives was not considered. Neither was principals' voices heard in this study. Also, the teacher's voices were privileged, but one cannot assume that what these teachers said about coaching is all there is to say about coaching. There is more to learn, more to explore. As a researcher I have to accept their responses as their reality because I am seeking to understand their meanings of their own lived experiences with literacy coaching.

Another limitation to this study is that it only included six elementary school teachers. Due to the long, in-depth interviews, phenomenological studies typically have a small number of participants (less than 10) but it really depends on the study being conducted (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, data from this study are not generalizable, which means, for example, that these findings are not necessarily what all teachers perceive regarding literacy coaching. Therefore, district policies should not be made or changed simply on the basis of these findings. However, where these findings match what has been found in other studies, there may be a growing consensus of what constitutes effective literacy

coaching from the perspective of those being coached – the teachers.

Nevertheless, while these data provide more insight into the greater picture of literacy coaching, they should not be the final authority regarding how literacy coaching can or should be conducted.

A third limitation of this study is the purposeful sampling method that was used to select participants. Maxwell (2005) stated that one goal of using this selection technique is to achieve “representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected” (p. 89). The participants for this study were purposefully limited to teachers in Title I schools in the southeastern region of a large urban school district in the southern region of the United States. These schools were selected because they had a fulltime CF and the teachers had experience literacy coaching for at least one year. Another goal of purposeful sampling is to have participants who represent heterogeneity in the population so that a range of variance is provided (Maxwell, 2005). The teachers in this study had a variety of teaching experiences kindergarten through fifth grade. However, even with this variance of teaching experiences, three teachers taught at School A, two other teachers taught at School B, and another at School C. Therefore, the diversity of their experiences is a limitation. The experiences of those at the same school may or may not explain the similarities that they shared, but the findings from this study cannot be construed in any way as representative of the diversity of teachers’ experiences with literacy coaching beyond these six teachers.

Future Research

This study sought to examine the phenomenon of literacy coaching and to amplify the teachers' voices who have experienced this phenomenon. This study was focused on the six teachers at three different Title I schools. More research needs to be done to hear the voices of more teachers who have experienced literacy coaching. While these teachers were all at Title I schools, research is needed to determine the similarities and differences of the experiences of teachers at Title I schools and non-Title I schools. Because Title I schools are more highly impacted, they receive additional funding and additional personnel, including district-level and other outside coaches, to provide more resources to help level the playing field. Since the non-Title I schools do not have the same sanctions when they fail to meet achievement standards, a future research question might ask if teachers in these school need or value literacy coaching the same as those who are under more scrutiny to perform well.

Additionally, more research is needed to examine the changes that have occurred for teachers as a result of literacy coaching. This study did not explore in depth the affect that literacy coaching had on the teachers self efficacy and their teaching practices, as just two examples of potential effects of coaching. During the interviews, the teachers gave some concrete examples of how the literacy coach helped, such as, "She helped me manage my literacy centers", or "She gave me ideas for teaching text features". While these examples are very

specific and concrete, the overall effect or impact of literacy coaching on teachers and their individual professional growth still needs more exploration.

One of the questions about literacy coaching is the impact that it has on student achievement. However, more research is needed on whether or not literacy coaching leads to improved student achievement. This is always the gold standard, and ultimately the reason for having literacy coaches. Even though it might be difficult to measure directly because there are so many other intervening factors, but a quantitative study could be done to look at student outcomes in schools with and without full and/or part-time literacy coaches, as long as other factors like socioeconomic status are controlled.

Lastly, this study highlighted the teachers' voices, and these teachers were from different schools and different grade levels. There is a need for studies that hear the voices of both the coaches and the teachers from the same schools to corroborate the stories which might provide an even clearer picture of the literacy coaching experience. By doing this, school and district administrators may be able to use the data in moving forward in supporting coaching models that would be more beneficial to more elementary teachers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to understand the meanings that teachers made of the literacy coaching experiences. The experiences of six elementary teachers from three different schools were shared. These teachers were all receptive of literacy coaching and felt that it should be done in a

collaborative atmosphere of respect and trust. They also valued collegial dialog and relationships with both their peers and literacy coaches. Teachers in this study believed that literacy coaching cannot be done in a 'one size fits all fashion' but should be tailored based on the needs of the teachers. Administrators help to create a culture in the schools that supports the need and success of literacy coaching. Understanding the role of literacy coaching and its impact on teachers' instruction can make a positive difference in their instructional decisions and instructional presentations. Thus, the students they teach could be the benefactors of better literacy instruction and consequently become better readers. However, this remains an empirical question, one in need of additional research by others interested in the benefits of literacy coaching.

What I Have Learned

As stated in the first chapter of this dissertation, I worked as a literacy coach within the district in which this study was conducted. My findings have caused me to be reflective of my role as a literacy coach. Some of the data truly resonated with me because there were things that the participants said in this study that were the same as what I had heard from teachers at my school.

For example, in a survey given at my school last year, teachers expressed that they wanted a more hands-on approach to professional development support. They expressed their increased need for modeling from me the curriculum facilitator or from other "more knowledgeable" peers. While the teachers who voiced this need were those who were young in the profession (two

to four years), I should not dismiss their need for support simply because they are no longer a first year teacher or because they seem “to be doing fine”.

I thought of a teacher who was in her fifth year teaching but new to second grade and on medical leave at the beginning of the year. Upon the teacher’s return in October, I spent many hours supporting her with the management and teaching of Foundations. I modeled lessons, helped with the organization of materials, assessed the students, analyzed the assessment data, and made an intervention schedule. However, in my reflection, I did not find out from the teacher the level of support that she needed, but I provided what *I thought that she needed*.

I see the need to find out from the teachers that I serve the kind of support that they desire, just as the data in this study implicated. Even though I do not believe in “one size fits all” service, I see that my support of teachers resembled it rather than differed from it. I must be more strategic in understanding the teachers’ needs and how they learn as I seek to support them. I believe that coaching really should occur within a teacher’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). Providing individualized coaching support could yield great gains in which literacy achievement can be improved for many students as they strive to become fluent, independent readers.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS MATRIX

Seidman's interview structure	My research questions	Interview questions
<p>Interview 1 – Life history and professional journey</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do teachers perceive and describe their experiences of literacy coaching? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please tell me about yourself as a teacher. 2. Describe your educational experiences as a student and your decision to be a teacher. 3. Describe your journey as a teacher thus far, your professional history. 4. Please tell me about a typical day with teaching literacy. 5. Describe a typical coaching session that you have had with your coach.
<p>Interview 2 – Experiences with literacy coaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the teachers' perceptions of the influence of school-based administrators on literacy coaching? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. How does the current structure or culture of your school support or constrain literacy coaching?
<p>Interview 3 – Reflections on the meanings of literacy coaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the teacher's perceptions of <i>effective</i> literacy coaching? • What are teachers' needs for coaching as they relate to their individual professional development? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. As you reflect on your experiences with literacy coaching, what have these experiences meant to you? 8. Please tell me of any changes that have occurred for <u>you</u> as a result of literacy coaching. 9. If you could design coaching that is most helpful for you, what would it look like?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

Script: *First of all, thank you for taking the time to talk with me. As an educator who is interested in the professional growth and development of teachers, I want to hear teachers' voices regarding their professional needs. In this day and time, literacy coaching has become more prevalent in public schools. In the interest of understanding instructional coaching that matters for teachers, I would like to hear teachers' voices regarding literacy coaching, in particular, and find out more about what teachers think about what makes it effective, or not. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?*

Interview I – Life history including professional history

The purpose of these questions is help the teacher to feel more relaxed and comfortable with sharing and to understand the teacher's journey or professional history and her general attitude towards teaching and literacy coaching.

1. Please tell me about yourself as a teacher.
Probing questions: What grade do you teach? How long you have been teaching? How long you've been at this school? What you enjoy most about your role as a teacher?
2. Describe your educational experiences as a student and your decision to be a teacher.
Probing questions: What stands out for you? Have these experiences influenced you as a teacher? If so, how?
3. Describe your journey as a teacher thus far, your professional history. Schools, school districts, grade levels, etc.
Probing question: What stands out about your journey? How long have you had coaching support? What does literacy coaching look like with your literacy coach? How often and how long do you meet?

Interview II – The details of their experiences in regards to teaching and literacy coaching

The purpose of this section is to understand the teachers' experiences with teaching and literacy coaching and to understand how the school culture influences literacy coaching. Please tell me about a typical day with teaching literacy.

Probing questions: What is the definition of literacy coaching? What does it entail? What is the purpose of literacy coaching at your school? Is

literacy coaching related to the implementation of school, district, or state literacy initiative? If so, the please describe the reading initiative and role that coaching plays?

4. Describe a typical coaching session that you have had with your coach.
Probing questions: Describe a typical coaching session that you have had with your coach. What type of interaction have you had with your coach?
5. How does the current structure or culture of your school support or constrain literacy coaching?
Probing questions: What support is given for literacy coaching? What are the principal's expectations regarding literacy coaching?

Interview III - Reflection on the meaning of the teacher's experiences with literacy coaching

The purpose of this section is to get a more in-depth understanding of the teachers' experiences regarding literacy coaching, particularly how it has influenced the teacher in their professional growth and development, as well as the impact on their instructional practices.

6. As you reflect on your experiences with literacy coaching, what have these experiences meant to you?
Probing questions: Because coaching can occur in a number of ways, what type of coaching is most helpful for you? Why is this type of coaching helpful? What do you think is effective about literacy coaching based on your experiences?
7. Please tell me of any changes that have occurred for you as a result of literacy coaching.
Probing questions: What impact has literacy coaching had on your professional learning? What impact has literacy coaching had on your teaching practices?
8. If you could design coaching that is most helpful for you, what would it look like?
Probing question: How would you define effective literacy coaching for you based on what you believe and not necessarily what you have experienced?

Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding your experience or thoughts regarding literacy coaching? Please feel free to share.