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Teachers' and Principals' Perspectives of Literacy Coaching in an Elementary School

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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May 2011

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Keywords: literacy, literacy coach, reading coach

ABSTRACT

Teachers' and Principals' Perspectives of Literacy Coaching in an Elementary School

by

Barbara Jane Anderson Hull

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the literacy coach's tasks and qualities teachers valued the most and which qualities they valued the least. Knowing those precepts might help one to become a more efficient and valuable resource for both classroom teachers and principals. School visits, focus group interviews, individual interviews, interviews with each principal, and documents from the 3 southwest Virginia schools in 2 districts provided the data for analysis. Teachers' and principals' perspectives of literacy coaching explained both the desirable and undesirable practices and techniques.

The 3 schools had been swept into a change process when they received *Virginia Reading First* funding. They were required to use only scientifically based reading researched programs and strategies. Teachers were required to use new programs, change their instructional practices, use data to drive instruction, restructure their schedules, and rearrange their classrooms. They were required to participate in more staff development and training opportunities. They learned to look at student data and use them to drive their instruction to meet the specific needs of certain students. They learned to use data to assess their own professional strengths and weaknesses and then take action to improve it. The need for change and an effective change agent emerged as teachers needed to match their skills to the increased demands. Research data inspired the recommendations for becoming an effective literacy coach.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my loving family: To my wonderful husband Roy, thank you for patiently encouraging me every step of the way. To my precious sons Clint, Jared, and Aaron, my delightful daughters-in-law Joy, Sarah, and Megan, and my two beautiful granddaughters Reagan and Berkley, thanks for your unending support. I could not have accomplished this without you. I also want to express love and appreciation in memory of my exemplary mother and father who wisely instilled my deep desire to learn abundantly and taught me to value greater educational pursuits and to highly regard those individuals who are able to reach their goals.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School districts are pressured to produce higher scores on standardized tests. Consequently, a specific group of educators called literacy coaches have emerged as catalysts for change. Through action-planning, implementing best practices, and promoting ongoing staff development, this group of educators has made an effort to improve both student and teacher performance. Often school systems' staff development opportunities have provided mediocre to excellent programs for teachers. Motivational speakers and introductions to new methods have given new perspectives to old ideas, but at the ends of the sessions many teachers have returned to their classrooms with short-lived or no intentions for change.

Background of the Problem

Traditional staff development has not been adequate to create the types of improvements in teachers' practices needed to meet the requirements of our rapidly changing society (McCardle & Chabra, 2004). The ongoing introduction of new bits and pieces of information without any follow-up or continued training often has left teachers feeling overwhelmed. Knight (2007) spoke of educators who begin to retreat whenever they see a new wave of initiatives coming. The need has arisen for an instructional support or a coach for teachers.

Some educators began reflecting upon teaching practices when they considered the problem of illiteracy. Knight (2007) observed that some teachers feel challenged when they are faced with changes in their professional lives. New habits, new ideas, new schedules, new patterns of thinking, new routines, new strategies, and new foci push educators out of their comfort zones and propel them to a realm where they are compelled to reflect, engage in action research, and participate in informed decision-making. He discussed how literacy coaches can

promote reflection, facilitate decision-making, attend to adult learning, and lead to student achievement.

In Virginia, where this research took place, my job as a Reading First literacy coach was to help teachers use scientifically based reading research strategies, use data to plan instruction, plan intervention, and to generate action research. In the spring of 2009 Virginia Reading First ended. Some school divisions abandoned funding for the literacy coaches in their schools. However, some school systems believed the role was worth maintaining and provided funding for the continuation of literacy coaching.

The ultimate goal of literacy coaching was to raise students' reading proficiency by improving teachers' best practices. I began to wonder what literacy coaches can do that elicits positive responses from teachers. What do teachers value about a literacy coach? What do teachers find of no value pertaining to the literacy coaching role?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to identify, to describe, and to analyze the components of the literacy coaching role and to relate how it affected the teachers in an elementary school. The primary research aim is to discover the teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching in relation to the practice of teaching reading. How do teachers and principals perceive a literacy coach as a guide for helping improve the practice of reading instruction? The secondary questions addressed the following:

1. What reading coach qualities do teachers and principals believe are valuable and helpful? Why?
2. What reading coach qualities do teachers and principals believe are not valuable and helpful? Why?

3. What do literacy coaches do that make teachers and principals respond positively to change?
4. What do literacy coaches do that make teachers and principals respond negatively toward change?
5. In what ways do teachers and principals feel they have changed or are changing as a result of working with a literacy coach?

Significance of the Study

The skill of reading text requires learning through instruction unlike naturally learned speaking and listening skills (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004). In spite of the fact the United States spent more than \$140 billion annually for Title I intervention, McCardle and Chhabra (2004) report that 50%-66% of students have continued to read below proficiency in targeted areas. They explained that reading below proficiency means that a person cannot apply what has been read. For example, a person who reads below proficiency cannot read a schedule at a bus terminal to get to a destination, cannot read and synthesize information about a political candidate, or can not analyze information from text. McCardle and Chhabra observe that some educators have continued to embrace the idea that reading is an innate process.

McCardle and Chhabra (2004) strongly argued that compulsory education merited change because wrong instruction can harm a child. They argued that instead of asking what is wrong with a child who does not respond to a specific type of instruction, educators should ask themselves what is wrong with the instruction. This type of reasoning brings to light a need for improving classroom strategies, the expectation of meeting the differentiated needs of each student, and the effort of making sure that every child succeeds. Through the studies of McCardle and Chhabra, therefore, the need for a literacy coach becomes evident.

The change process begins with staff development and the transformation of classroom instruction to meet the diagnosed needs of the students. The literacy coach supports the ultimate goal of every child reading at a level of proficiency. Literacy coaches provide assistance and support to teachers experiencing isolation, work overload, and little time for creativity. Teachers' insufficient training narrowly defined teacher roles, and poor solutions limit success in the classroom (Bean, 2004).

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this grounded theory research project is to identify, describe, and analyze the components of the literacy coaching role and describe how literacy coaches are perceived by teachers in three southwest Virginia elementary schools. Merriam (1998) explained that theory developed in grounded research is not formal or grand. It is substantive theory that is relevant to everyday situations. For me, literacy coaching is an everyday situation because I have been an elementary literacy coach nearly 7 years.

Definition of Terms

Several terms were used during this study including:

Cognitive Functioning – relating to the process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition, or perception.

Decoding – the process of breaking down a word into its phonemes and then synthesizing it into a spoken or silently read word.

Explicit – expressing details in a clear and obvious way, leaving no doubt as to the intended meaning.

Fluent – reading with speed, accuracy, and expression.

Linguistic – relating to the systematic study of language.

Literacy – the condition of being able to read and understand text and to write understandably.

Onset – the beginning sound of a word.

Orthographic Processing – identifying the correct sequence of letters in a given writing system.

Phonemes – the smallest phonetic unit that represents a sound.

Phonemic Awareness – the ability to segment words into their individual speech sounds.

Phonics – the method of teaching reading in which people learn to associate letters with speech sounds and patterns.

Rhyme – the phonogram or ending portion of a word, for instance the -ed in bed.

Round-Robin Reading – a classroom instructional practice where children take turns reading orally.

Semantic Mapping – graphic organizers to place information in categories.

Systematic Instruction – carried out in a methodical and organized manner (Schumm, 2006).

Summary

Chapter 1 provided a brief overview of the proposal study. Chapter 2 is the literature review giving explanation of literacy, components of reading instruction, and literacy coaching practices. Chapter 3 describes and explains the research methodology used in this grounded theory study. Chapter 4 describes the data collection process and explains the methods of data analysis. Chapter 5 discusses the findings of this study

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The conceptual framework for this study is a product derived of my 7 years as a literacy coach in an elementary school. The review describes literacy, explains the components of reading instruction, and gives an overview of the qualities and practices needed for serving as an effective change agent in the literacy coaching role.

Literacy Elements

Tompkins (2006) stated that it was important for students to become literate so they could become informed, interactive, and productive members of society. Students try to make sense of what they read, and they may or may not grasp the author's meaning. They tend to negotiate or create meaning based on the words they have read and their own background knowledge. Harvey and Goudvis (2007) found that when classrooms were framed around active literacy or student engagement and practice, students were doing interesting work, delving into important issues and ideas, asking questions, searching answers, and doing investigations.

Bear, Invernezzi, Templeton, and Johnston (2004) compared literacy to creating a braid of interwoven threads. The braids begin with intertwining threads of oral language and stories. As children experiment by putting pictorial ideas on paper, writing threads begin to form (Bear et al., 2004). As children move into reading words, components of literacy begin to develop and intertwine. Orthography, the correct sequence of letters in a given writing system, strengthens the bonds of language and reading. During the primary years language acquisition is mainly aural as children develop a rich speaking vocabulary. As children become expressive they expand their

oral vocabulary and move into writing words, tending to write their own names or words such as *Mom, cat, dog, and I love you* (Bear et al., 2004).

Bear et al. (2004) explained that maturity and development brings students to a new stage of acquiring new vocabulary from unfamiliar written language. Purposeful reading, listening, speaking, and writing new words can be learned along the way. However, it is possible to learn even more words if students explicitly examine and study orthographic relationships among words such as sounds, spelling patterns, and meanings (Bear et al., 2004).

The alphabetic principle is critical to reading proficiency and literacy. As children observe their parents, their siblings, and other adults, they start to realize that written language can symbolize people and objects – a picture of mommy, a picture of toys – symbols on paper that represent people and objects in the environment (Bear et al., 2004). The English language is alphabetic and represented by sound-letter relationships. In other words, the approximate 42 sounds that make up the English language are represented textually by writing a letter or group of letters that represents each of those sounds and then combines them into words. Written English moves from left to right sequentially. Sousa (2005) explained that the alphabetic principle provides the understanding that spoken words are made up of phonemes and that the phonemes are represented in written text as letters. He argued that the system of using letters to represent phonemes is very efficient in that a small number of letters can be used to write a very large number of words. Matching just a few letters on a page to the sounds in speech enables the reader to recognize many printed words. An example of that concept would be arranging and rearranging a set of letters to make words such as slap, laps, pals, and alps.

Reading is a language function whereby the reader makes meaning out of text. While reading, readers use three intuitive, linguistic cueing systems: semantic, syntactic, and

graphophonic. Semantic cues are derived from the meaning of the text; syntactic cues are derived from the text's grammatical structure; and graphophonic cues are derived from sound-letter relationships and patterns. All three cueing systems are important because they were constantly in motion enabling readers to construct meaning. The reader actively uses the cueing systems in an effort to derive meaning from text. Those three systems help readers answer questions such as: Does this make sense? Does this sound right? Does this look right? (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

The process of reading serves multiple purposes in our daily lives. It can be used to share information and to learn from one another. Reading can be a tool for learning about ourselves or to engage in specific activities such as hobbies and job-related tasks. People use it to enrich their lives as well as for some enjoyment. Opitz and Rasinski (1998) said that reading is a cognitive process. Readers predict what they think the text is about and convey it by using sample words or letters within words and confirm their predictions by checking to see if meaning is maintained. Readers are in search for meaning, instinctively taking corrective action when meaning breaks down. Readers are strategic using a variety of tactics to ensure their own comprehension. Reading is also a social activity. People use pragmatics, the context of their reading location (e.g. school, bed, doctor office) and the type of book they are reading (e.g., textbook, novel, magazine) to help guide their reading. They choose to read one type of book while sitting in a comfortable chair or they may choose to read another type of book while sitting at a desk. The choice is related directly to the pragmatics of the situation.

Lubliner (2005) described enhanced comprehension through getting to know words and increasing vocabulary based on dimensions of knowledge. First, she defined procedural knowledge as knowing how to intentionally learn new words and their meanings during reading. Conditional knowledge guides readers to use strategies and regulate word meaning for the most

accurate expressions. Finally, declarative knowledge is learning the words the reader knows but does not use. Lubliner wrote that it was important for teachers to use the three dimensions instructionally by setting goals. The first goal should be that children learn to use effective clarifying strategies. That is a procedural dimension. The next goal follows whereby children learn to monitor word knowledge and use clarifying strategies intentionally during reading is based on the conditional dimension. The third goal based upon the declarative dimension is that children build an in-depth knowledge of important vocabulary words. Lubliner emphasized that specific methods of teaching should be administered to students daily while Opitz and Rasinski (1998) recommended consideration of the students' learning processes.

Sousa (2005) said the ultimate goal of reading is for people to become fluent enough to understand the written language they read. That understanding includes literal comprehension as well as sophisticated, reflective understandings. For instance a reader may question the purpose for reading a specific selection or may seek the point the author is trying to make. Reading comprehension is heavily dependent on the understanding and comprehension of the spoken language. As children master word identification skills, their reading comprehension dramatically improves. Reading comprehension is a complex process relying on several components to be successful. In order to develop reading comprehension skills, students needed to develop their vocabulary and linguistic knowledge, and they must thoughtfully interact with the text in order to derive meaning (Sousa, 2005).

Sousa (2005) contends that text comprehension can be improved with direct, explicit, systematic instruction that helps readers use specific strategies to make sense of a passage. Those strategies are purposeful steps allowing readers to reason strategically whenever they encounter barriers to understanding what they read. Comprehension strategies include self-monitoring,

graphic and semantic organizers, answering questions, generating questions, recognizing story structure, and summarizing (Sousa, 2005). Literacy acquisition gives every student a chance to live a productive life with lifelong learning and positive social compatibility with humanity.

Literacy Instruction

In 1997, Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to consult with the Secretary of Education and convene a national panel to assess the status of research-based knowledge including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read. The report presenting the panel's conclusion was called *Report of the National Reading Panel, Teaching Children to Read*. The National Reading Panel (NRP) conveyed an evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. The committee intensively studied alphabetic (phonemic awareness and phonics instruction), fluency, and comprehension that included vocabulary instruction, and text comprehension instruction. The committee also studied teacher preparation relating to comprehension strategies instruction, teacher education related to basic reading instruction, and computer technology related to reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000). Each of these elements is discussed in the following sections.

Phonemic Awareness

The National Reading Panel (2000) determined that phonemic awareness (PA) instruction assisted children in learning to read. Their meta-analysis showed that teaching children to manipulate the sounds in language helps them to learn to read. The panel also found the effects of PA training on reading lasted beyond the culmination of the training. The panel found that PA instruction helps all types of children including normally developing readers, at-risk students, disabled readers, preschoolers, kindergarteners, first graders, and children in second through

sixth grades, children from all economic sectors, and students who are learning to read English or other languages (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Phonological awareness is a child's ability to manipulate phonemes in the spoken language. The instruction and practice of phonological awareness includes the following: Phoneme isolation requires the recognition of individual sounds in words, for example, Asking a student to identify the first sound that is heard when paste is spoken. Phoneme identity requires the recognition of a common sound in different words, for example, asking beginning readers the sound that is the same in milk, moon, mouse, and man. The sound that m represents is the correct answer. Phoneme categorization requires the recognition of the word with the odd sound when a sequence of words are spoken, for example, asking students to identify the word with the beginning sound that is different from the others when saying salt, sad, and bug. Bug would be the correct answer. Phoneme synthesizing requires listening to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and combining them in order to form a word. For example, pronouncing the separated sounds in rug, r-u-g, and expecting the student say the word, rug. Phoneme segmentation requires the listener to break a word into its phonemes or sounds by tapping out or counting the sounds or by pronouncing the sounds in order. An example of that would be having a student tap or say the sounds heard in chip when it is pronounced such as ch-i-p. Phoneme deletion requires the student to recognize the word that remains when a specific phoneme is omitted, for example, leaving the s from stick would leave tick (National Reading Panel, 2000).

When compared to memory for sentences, vocabulary, father's occupational status, and parental reports of reading to children, the research showed that first semester kindergarteners' knowledge of phonemic awareness along with letter knowledge is the top predictor for how well they will read at the end of kindergarten and first grade. Phonemic awareness correlated 0.66

with reading achievement scores in kindergarten and .62 with scores in first grade (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Phonics

When it comes to teaching phonics, National Reading Panel (2000) found that several instructional approaches have been implemented. Those strategies included synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, embedded phonics, analogy phonics, onset-rime phonics, and phonics through spelling. All of the systematic approaches to phonics have used well planned introductions, but the applications have been different. For example, synthetic phonics programs have helped children with the conversion of letters to sounds by generalizing phonic representations. Analytic phonics teaches students to analyze letter-sound relationships once a word was identified. Embedded phonics teaches students to use context clues but additionally to use letter-sound relationships to decode words. Analogy phonics has helped students by teaching them to use the small recognizable parts they already knew to identify new words. For example, using the rime in rent to make words with shared rime and blending such as rent, bent, sent, etc. Phonics in context strategies has helped children to use sound-letter relationships in addition to context clues to identify unfamiliar words in text. Some phonics programs combined two or more of the instructional strategies. Systematic phonics programs have used sequential phonic elements to transfer strategies explicitly and systematically, such as using the letter-sound relationships to sequence the sounds for spelling and writing.

Phonics programs should include practice activities in order for children to gain opportunities to apply the knowledge during reading and writing activities. Those programs teach decoding strategies to sound out and synthesize letters and digraphs. Others provide students with decodable text using the sound-letter relationships that had been taught. The

National Reading Panel (2000) found the key feature of systematic phonics instruction that differs from nonsystematic phonics structures is the identification of letter-sound relationships.

Our understanding of the nature of reading continues to evolve. Harvey and Goudvis (2007) contended that reading encompasses both decoding and the making of meaning. In Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1999) reading is defined as "to receive or take in the sense of (as letters or symbols) esp. by sight or touch" However Harvey and Goudvis added that thinking must be included in the reading process. They explained that reading uses a two-pronged attack involving cracking the alphabetic code to determine the words and thinking about those words in order to derive and construct meaning.

National Reading Panel (2000) conducted studies of children at-risk for reading problems. Researchers began phonics instruction in kindergarten or first grade and continued for 2 or 3 years, the mean effect sizes were sizeable and their strength was maintained across the grades. The mean effect for kindergarteners at risk was 0.58, first graders at risk was 0.74. Phonics instruction also improved the reading performance of disabled readers or students with average IQs but low reading ability with an effect size of 0.32. The panel concluded from their findings that systematic phonics instruction is found to be significantly more effective than nonphonics instruction in helping prevent reading difficulties among at-risk students (National Reading Panel, 2000).

In reference to phonics instruction the National Reading Panel offered suggestions to be kept in mind while using a part of curriculum. The first recommendation was to recognize that a student must have phonemic awareness before learning phonics. The second recommendation was for teachers to receive sufficient in-service training in order to systematically teach phonics

programs effectively. Third, integration of phonics into complete and balanced literacy programs of reading instruction is critical (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to quickly and accurately read text with the proper expression (National Reading Panel, 2000). It is central to comprehension because it allows the reader freedom to attend to understanding of the text. Dysfluent reading indicates that a student's conscious mental resources are divided between word recognition and comprehension (Walpole & McKenna, 2007). The NRP found that guided oral reading procedures such as repeated reading has an effect on procedures that encourage students to read more. The NRP found that those procedures improve word recognition, fluency, and comprehension with most groups and lasts well beyond grade three or four. The National Reading Panel (2000) found that guided oral reading strategies and repeated readings improved fluency and reading achievement.

Sousa (2005) said that certain research reports show that good readers read the most and poor readers read the least. That suggests the more children read, the better their vocabulary, fluency and comprehension (Sousa, 2005). Monitored repeated oral reading improved fluency and overall reading achievement. When students practice passages by reading them over and over to a listener, that can be considered monitored repeated oral reading. This approach helped struggling readers at the higher elementary grade levels. On the contrary, round-robin reading, where students took turns reading orally, did not tend to increase fluency because children only read a small amount of text when it was their turn. Also, the students were most likely to pay attention only when it was their turn to read (Opitz and Rasinski, 1998).

Opitz and Rasinski (1998) reflected the following concerns about round-robin reading practice:

1. It provides students with misconceptions about reading because they are not prepared, are expected to read every word accurately, and additionally the listeners have copies of the text and are expected to listen and critique each mistake.
2. Round-robin reading causes faulty reading habits instead of effective strategies because the listener absorbs sketchy information due to mispronunciation, repetition, and slow decoding. The listener begins to associate frustration and nonsense with reading. Because the oral reader is the only student reading orally, the listeners use subvocalization as they read.
3. Oral reading is slower than silent reading, so the student is asked to follow along silently. This causes internalization of slow silent reading and slower silent reading rates. It also causes inattentive behaviors and leads to discipline problems.
4. It works against students' acquisition of development to their full potential because it is difficult to pay attention to meaning and self-correcting when less fluent readers were not given the opportunity to develop. They are usually corrected by others.
5. It consumes lengthy class time that can be used for more meaningful activities.
6. It is a source of anxiety and embarrassment for students and inhibits comprehension.
7. Because students are preoccupied with following lines of print, looking ahead, coping with boredom, or practicing their segment before it is their turn, they are distracted and do not listen well. It tended to reduce listening comprehension (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

Vocabulary

The National Reading Panel (2000) found that reading vocabulary is crucial to the comprehension processes of a skilled reader. The importance of vocabulary acquisition is recognized by many educators and occupies an important position in learning to read. For a student who is learning to read, reading vocabulary is mapped onto the oral vocabulary that the learner brings to the task. If a particular word is not in the student's oral vocabulary, it is not understood when it is encountered in print (National Reading Panel, 2000). The NRP also identified five main methods of teaching vocabulary: explicit instruction, implicit instruction, multimedia methods, capacity methods, and association methods. Explicit instruction is demonstrated where children are taught word attributes or definitions. Implicit instruction exposes children to words and gives them opportunities to do a great deal of reading. Multimedia Methods teach vocabulary by going beyond text to include other media such as graphic representations, hypertext, or American Sign Language. Capacity Methods encourage capacity through making reading automatic. Association methods help students connect what they know with unfamiliar words.

Hart and Risley (1995) and Walpole and McKenna (2007) showed that deeper instruction leads to larger vocabulary gains, especially in the case of struggling readers. Hart and Risley found that the most advantaged children also experience a language advantage because their parents engage in more extended language interaction that stretches and extends child language. They also realized and reported that the infusion of rich, early vocabulary leads to a language advantage.

Based on the studies of Walpole and McKenna (2007), between grades 3 and 5 children increase about three new word meanings to their vocabularies each day and their word leaning

progresses at a predictable rate. They also found that growth in root word knowledge is relatively developmental. Children tend to learn word roots in about the same order, even though the children have different types and amounts of access to words through reading and listening. A major concern is highlighted because it is a fact that students do not begin school on an equal vocabulary footing. While there is much to be learned about vocabulary instruction during the early grades, read-alouds are important and teachers should maximize conversation about new words in order to maximize vocabulary development (Walpole & McKenna, 2007).

Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) developed a perspective on the types of words that need instructional attention. They considered a reader's vocabulary to be organized into tiers. The first tier consists of the most basic words such as *clock*, *baby*, *happy*, *walk*, and so on. Those words rarely need attention in school. The third tier of words is a specific set of words, rarely used and generally used within the parameters of specific domains such as *isotope*, *lathe*, *peninsula*, and *refinery*. The second tier of words consists of high frequency words for the mature language users and by developing a rich knowledge of those words, the verbal development and written functioning of a language user could be highly increased. Examples of tier two words are coincidence, absurd, industrious, and fortunate. Those words can be organized into word families or groups of related words. Beck et al. found that learning approximately 400 of those words per year results in improvement in word knowledge and comprehension of text containing those words (Beck et al., 2002).

The term *derivational relations* is the type of word knowledge that more advanced readers and writers possess. Spelling and vocabulary knowledge for students at that stage develops through processes of derivation. In other words students can derive meaning by adding prefixes or suffixes to a root word. A number of related words are derived by using that method.

At that stage children begin to notice reciprocity. Effective word study extends it by engaging students in important and productive patterns in spelling and meaning that are selected by the instructor. Then students are taught how to apply their knowledge of those patterns in their independent exploration of words (Bear et al., 2004).

It is important for teachers to provide students with a variety of reading materials and opportunities to read. However, it is important to keep in mind that wide reading alone is not enough to expand students' vocabulary. Just as students do not always respond to a particular book, not all students respond to a particular vocabulary strategy. Thus, it is important for educators to know and implement many different strategies for teaching vocabulary (Cummins, 2006).

Comprehension

Comprehension is the goal of reading instruction. Students must comprehend what they read in order to learn. They must have made sense of the words in order to maintain interest and derive pleasure. The sense of interest and enjoyment promotes them to become lifelong readers and learners. In the classroom the goal of comprehension envelopes and entwines around everything the teacher does, from building prior knowledge to extending out to mini-lessons, guiding reading, and encouraging students to ask questions and continuing informational searches (Tompkins, 2006).

Tompkins (2006) relayed the active engagements of readers based on the National Reading Panel (2000) report as students read to comprehend the text they were reading. For example, children who actively engaged in reading exemplified the following characteristics and skills as they read:

1. They activate their own prior knowledge.
2. They examine the text to determine the length, structure, and important parts.
3. They enjoy making predictions before, during, and after reading a selection.
4. They determine the big ideas in the story or passage.
5. They make connection with their own life experiences.
6. They create mental images and lexicons.
7. They monitor their understanding as they read.
8. They generate summaries after reading.
9. They evaluate the text after reading.

These activities are reader and text factors (Tompkins, 2006).

Tompkins (2006) found that more capable readers exhibit the following skills and characteristics:

1. They view reading as a comprehending process.
2. They adjust their reading according to purpose.
3. They decode rapidly and read fluently.
4. They can relate what they are reading to background knowledge.
5. They have large vocabularies.
6. They use a variety of comprehension strategies.
7. They monitor their understanding as they read.

Capable writers exhibited the following skills and characteristics according to Tompkins (2006):

1. They vary how they write depending on the purpose and the audience.
2. They use the writing process flexibly.

3. They focus on developing ideas and communicating effectively.
4. They turn to classmates for feedback on how they are communicating.
5. They monitor how well they are communicating in the piece of writing.
6. They use correct formats and proper structures for stories, poems, letters, and other texts.
7. They apply comprehension strategies.
8. They postpone attention to mechanical correctness until the end of the writing process.

All of those characteristics are related to comprehension because the students know them and use them. They are more successful than the students who do not use them (Tompkins, 2006).

Less successful readers and writers often exemplify very few of the characteristics of the capable ones. They behave differently when they read and write. One of the most notable differences is that the more capable readers desire to comprehend and see reading as a process for that purpose. Less capable readers focus on decoding. In writing less capable writers made grammatical changes as they revised, while the more capable writers concentrated on communicating meaning. More capable readers and writers focus on comprehension of others' ideas and communicating their own ideas to others (Tompkins, 2006).

Of the 16 categories of instruction, seven of those categories have a firm scientific basis for concluding that they bring about improvement in normal readers. The seven categories are as follows: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic and semantic organizers including story maps, question answering, question generation, and summarization. Effective comprehension requires highly trained teachers who used good teaching strategies.

The National Reading Panel (2000) found that improvement occurs when teachers practice, explain, model, and interact with students by explicitly teaching them how to comprehend text. Walpole and McKenna (2007) contend that young children are able to learn key strategies if the conditions are right. They wrote that it is pointless and risky to put off teaching comprehension strategies until the upper elementary grades.

Opitz and Rasinski (1998) found that reading strategies not only help children develop comprehension, they help students develop other attributes associated with skillful readers such as skimming and phrasing to name two. There are effective oral reading strategies that can affect other reading skills and strategies. The skills are listed as follows: Think-aloud sessions, induced imagery, directed listening thinking activities, acknowledgement of punctuation signals, say-it-like-the-character activities, rapid retrieval of information, and reading for discovery of new information.

The following characteristics are the positive effects teachers observe when they use scientifically based reading research skills and explicit systematic strategies:

1. A positive attitude or interest while reading.
2. Reading comprehension increases..
3. Listening comprehension improves.
4. Vocabulary increases.
5. Vocabulary use is expanded.
6. Language cueing systems are practiced.
7. Readers use predicting, imagery, self-monitoring, inference, prosody, fluency, phrasing, and skimming for information. (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998)

In conclusion, the National Reading Panel Report (2000) determined that there was empirical evidence to support that teaching a variety of reading comprehension strategies leads to increased comprehension.

The Need for Change

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* placed a significantly increased number of demands on states and local school districts to produce improved reading and math scores for all students. In an effort to assist compliance, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the predecessor of the Institute of Education Sciences, quietly began to work on transformation of the federal role in educational research. As a result, in 2002 the decision was made to develop a What Works Clearinghouse sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The clearinghouse would be expected to report and provide evidence of the effectiveness of programs, products, and strategies meant to improve academic achievement and other educational goals (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004).

A very important part of improving educational research was providing the funds to support it. Congress agreed on a bipartisan basis to fund high quality research in education as an appropriate role for the federal government. A number of private sector organizations were supporting scientifically based reading research as well. The Council for Excellence in Government was founded in 1983. It was a nonpartisan, nonprofit, and nationally scoped organization comprised mainly of bipartisan leading policymakers and scholars from a broad range of policy areas. On November 18, 2002, it held a meeting entitled *Rigorous Evidence: The Key to Progress in Education? Lessons from Medicine, Welfare and Other Fields*. McCardle and Chhabra (2004) include the following considerations written by the coalition:

Over the past 30 years the United States has made almost no progress in raising the achievement of elementary and secondary school students according to the National

Assessment of Education Progress, despite a 90 percent increase in real public spending per student. Our nation's stark contrast to our remarkable progress in improving human health over the same time period-progress which, as discussed in this report is largely the result of evidence-based government policies.... Effective implementation of the scientifically-based research concept could have a major and enduring impact on the effectiveness of U.S. elementary and secondary education. (Bringing Evidence Driven Progress to Education. 2002, pp. 1-2; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004, p. 32)

McCardle and Chhabra (2004) continued by explaining that the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development considered that teaching and learning reflect educational and public health concerns. School failure has devastating consequences with respect to self-esteem, social development, and opportunities for meaningful employment or advanced education opportunities. They found that of the 10% to 15% of students who become dropouts, 75% have reading difficulties. Two percent of the students receiving help for reading difficulties are likely to continue their education and complete a 4-year college program. At least 50% of the adolescents and adults with criminal records also have reading difficulties. At least half of the children and adolescents, who have problems with substance abuse also have reading difficulties (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004).

Studies and surveys indicate that many teachers are not prepared to teach reading because they did not receive enough formal instruction in reading development and reading disorders. The average teacher has completed two reading courses (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004).

The National Reading Panel (2000) studies conclude that teachers can learn to teach strategies effectively and with greater proficiency. Their improved lesson delivery leads to improved performance on awareness and use of strategies, to improved performance on comprehension measures, and often higher scores on standardized reading tests (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Additionally, the National Reading Panel (2000) found that teaching comprehension strategies in the natural classroom setting involves a level of proficiency that requires substantial

and intensive teacher preparation. Fielding, Kerr, and Rosier (2007) point out that it was visionary to assure that each student read at or above grade level by third or fourth grade 10 years ago, but today it is the law. In 10 years, it might be a civil right (Fielding et al., 2007).

In southeastern Washington, the city of Kennewick set a goal to have 90% of its students reading at grade level by third grade. In preparation for the journey toward their goal, the creators of the Kennewick Model retraced prior changes. In the book *Annual Growth for All Students, Catch-Up Growth for Those Who Are Behind* (Fielding et al., 2007) the creators of the program realized America was in its third phase of educational reform in the last century. The first reform began in 1900 and lasted approximately 30 years. The school year increased from an average of 144 days to 174 days. The average number of school absences decreased by 19 days. Enrollment in grades 6-12 grew 15 times faster than elementary school enrollment. High school graduation rates rose from 6.3% to 28.8%. Four-year college degrees granted rose from 27,410 to 122,484. This education reform occurred amidst a noisy social and economic transformation at a time when the 19th Amendment added women to a voter pool that prior to that limited the voting rights to male, literate, property owners who were at least 21 years of age. Other changes during that era included a world war, major population shifts from rural to urban, and an economy that shifted from agricultural to industrial (Fielding et al., 2007).

The second educational reform era began when millions of service men and women returned from the Korean War and World War II. College enrollment skyrocketed from 2 million to 6.9 million students. Nearly every public school enjoyed accelerated growth and nearly every community college doubled enrollment. Federal legislation and funding sustained the new construction projects and enrollment (Fielding et al., 2007).

The third and most recent reform occurred amidst loud, bitter debates over social and economic changes as a result of moving from the Industrial Age and moving into the Information Age. Global markets initiated the need for reform in 1983. By the mid-1990s many entry-level jobs required higher level reading skills than previously. The focus was on getting the low performing students to acquire reading skills equivalent to those of the near-average student. In 1996 The National Education summit was held at IBM headquarters in Palisades, New York, hosted by the governor of Wisconsin. All 50 governors signed a *Commitment to Action* statement endorsing standards-based education. Fourteen states already had standards-based systems in place (Fielding et al., 2007).

Fielding et al. (2007) pointed out that educational policy moved into the hands of 500-1,000 legislators on state and federal committees. The business community would influence those legislators concerning the structure of education in the decades ahead. Fielding et al. explained the idea that if something cannot be measured, it cannot be changed. The legislators demanded reform and based their decisions on three major societal factors:

1. In relation to economics, society expected schools to produce employees with basic academic skills.
2. With regard for racial inclusion and social equality, statistics revealed that minorities were not well-prepared for higher paying jobs after graduation from K-12 educational programs.
3. In view of legislative power, legislators found a potent lever in pairing accountability with funding (Fielding et al., 2007).

As a result of those reform efforts, schools were thrust into action research focused on student assessment, data collection, data analysis, data reports, and data-driven instruction. Sousa

(2005) suggested that action research expanded the role of the teacher as an inquirer into teaching and learning through systematic research.

McCardle and Chhabra (2004) discussed how teachers dutifully gave tests to their students, but without a principal, an academic coach, or a team review, without generated data-based instructional planning, teachers would not have guidance crucial to organizing instructional groups or selecting instructional targets. They found that increased emphasis on many school improvement plans placed more emphasis upon instructional practices, literacy incentives, family literacy programs, outside reading programs, and an atmosphere where there is an expectation of improvement at all levels (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004).

Strickland and Snow (2002) prepared text for the New Brunswick Group. Their studies indicated that a mere 28% of teachers reported feeling well prepared to use student performance assessment techniques; 41% reported feeling well prepared to implement new methods of teaching; 36% reported feeling well prepared to implement the state or district curriculum and performance standards. Based on those percentages, they concluded that teachers wanted to be better prepared to use student performance assessment to implement new methods of teaching.

Strickland and Snow (2002) researched America's commitment and public support for teacher preparation. Eighty-nine percent of Americans said it was important to have a well-qualified teacher in every classroom. Eighty percent strongly agreed that fully qualified teachers should have been provided to all children, even if it meant spending more money. Seventy-seven percent said it was a high national priority to develop the professional skills and knowledge of teachers throughout their careers. Sixty percent identified investment in teachers as the most crucial strategy for improving student learning, topping other strategies such as setting academic standards and using testing programs.

The Literacy Coach, A Change Agent

Hall (2004) reported that due to demands for educational reform, literacy coaching has been gaining its place in the field of American education. They have been increasingly in demand in 21st Century schools. Educators on the west coast worked within the parameters known as the reading apprenticeship while East Coast referred to literacy coaches as advisors or mentors. He reiterated the reports that there have been no agreed upon definitions or standards for the roles. Hall explained that they design, monitor, and assess reading achievement progress, provide professional development, and have staff supervision and evaluation assignments.

Immediately, the need for a change agent emerged within the system. Literacy coaches worked with teachers in a variety of ways in order to bring about change. They found that teachers with appropriate instructional materials often needed feedback concerning instructional strategies. A coach's level of knowledge and experience directly affected teachers' willingness to accept intervention for improvement.

Coaches are supposed to create effective presentations. They observe classroom instruction, provide constructive feedback, and know the steps to take to improve students' instruction. The instructional coach understands the context in which they work, methods of leadership, and how to be a change agent (Cummins, 2006).

The literacy coach is a learner, grant writer, school-level planner, a curriculum expert, a researcher, and a teacher reported Walpole and McKenna (2004). The International Reading Association explains a coach is an excellent teacher, has an in-depth knowledge of the reading process and its acquisition, understands the use of assessment and data, is experienced in working with teachers, and is an excellent presenter (Bean, 2004). Rodgers and Rodgers (2007)

explain the most intense coaching activities include modeling, coteaching lessons, feedback for teachers, and analysis of teachers' lessons.

Toll (2005) emphasized that a coach must be trustworthy and understand that trust relationship can be broken easily. A coach understands that attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions interfere with learners' abilities to acquire new knowledge. They believe that they are not the expert and realize no one is an expert for all aspects of teaching at all levels.

Knight (2007) gave details of the emotional connection between instructional coaches and teachers. He explained how Instructional Coaches adopt a partnership approach with teachers. He said that partnership at its core is a deep belief and emphasizes we are no more important than those with whom we work. Coaches should do everything they can to respect that equality. That approach, he suggests, is built around the core principles of equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. He explained that literacy coaches should collaborate with teachers as equal partners and no one's view is more important than the other. Coaches and teachers make their decisions collaboratively and teachers have a great deal of choice in what and how they learn. Teachers should be free to express their opinions about the content of their lessons. Literacy coaches should give voice to different opinions. Knight also said that effective literacy coaches encourage dialogue and encourage others to speak their minds. They try to understand what is being said and try to think and learn with the teachers. They do not try to manipulate. Instructional coaches realize that reflection generates freedom to choose or to reject ideas. Through collaboration, teachers and coaches attend to the practice of ideas in the classroom. In a partnership there should be reciprocity because everyone benefits from the success and learning experiences of the others. Knight emphasized that when one person is rewarded, all who are involved are the beneficiaries.

Toll (2005) explained that literacy coaches should have true respect for their colleagues. A literacy coach should meet, listen, and learn about concerns, strengths, needs, and efforts. The coach should not pose questions with wording such as, why aren't you..., but should ask, what gets in the way to prevent you from...? The coach helps the teachers look at data, standards, academic and curricular goals, student qualities, teaching strengths, and teaching interests. The literacy coach helps teachers prioritize. The effective coach does not make the following statement: You need to do this differently. Toll encouraged literacy coaches to ask: What are your successes? What do you want to do differently? How can I help?

She contended that an effective literacy coach should help the teachers engage in action-planning and pose the following question: How will you know when your efforts have been successful? The literacy coach helps the teacher as she plans and schedules her classes. The literacy coach should ask: How can we find the time and resources you need, so you can reach your goals (Toll, 2005)?

Effective literacy coaches listen, facilitate, and communicate. Toll (2005) described listening in four stages. The listening coach uses senses and notes what someone else said. The coach should pay attention to what is heard, makes sense of it. Lastly, the coach provides feedback to affirm the speaker has been heard.

Based on her research Toll (2005) defined goals that made instructional coaching powerful. Above all else the effective literacy coach develops a habit of listening and learning. Toll (2006) explained that the effective literacy coach develops and exhibits new strengths, strengthens teachers' capabilities, and helps teachers find and solve problems. The coach holds conversations with teachers individually, expands coaching conversations through book study, and extends inquiry demonstration lessons and coteaches lessons with teachers. Based on

coaching conversations, the literacy coach often plans demonstrative lessons. If literacy coaches are not helping teachers, they are not performing a coaching task. They realize that teachers are their true clients.

Coaches should be change agents. Knight (2007) emphasized that they learned how to lead school improvement while keeping in mind important facets of the coaching challenge.

Knight gave eight points of advice to instructional coaches.

1. Protect yourself by staying detached.
2. Be prepared by walking on solid ground.
3. Communicate by clarifying your message.
4. Meet teacher's needs by managing change effectively.
5. Face facts by confronting reality.
6. Make fundamental improvements by understanding school culture.
7. Lead by being ambitious and humble.
8. Stay energized by taking care of yourself. (Knight, 2007)

The Change Challenge

Knight (2007) described the experience of one literacy coach and her perspective relative to change. The coach felt that there were always challenges, some teachers were standoffish at first, they ducked their heads when she walked by. Cracking the hard ones, the resistant teachers, took time but her approach was to let them know she was a friend, partner, and support. She was there if they needed her (Knight, 2007).

Hoy and Tarter (2004) explained the challenges of leadership due to variety of disciplines and experiences have led to contrasting constructions of reality. They noted that knowing what and knowing how are very different as one faces putting theory into practice.

Bean (2004) pointed out that group dynamics is an integral force in the relationships and the planning of a successful literacy coach. The coach should establish rules for group behavior, attend to tasks, and maintain aspects of *esprit de corps*. A literacy coach learns to work with disruptive or difficult group members. Bean explained that the literacy coach relentlessly maintains a continuum of planning and reflection.

Bean (2004) noted that literacy coaches should stay current with the latest research. Professional development as provided by many schools and school systems has not been valuable in general. Teachers are randomly bombarded with new ideas or they are expected to implement new programs with very limited training. The implementation of new programs without support usually ends up being deleted from the teachers' repertoire of strategies and methods of instruction (Bean, 2004). Fullan (2004) has suggested that all successful schools experience implementation dips as they move forward. This dip is literally a dip in performance and confidence as participants in the organization begin something innovative that requires new understanding and mastery of new skills. When programs are worthwhile, teachers are asked to alter their beliefs, develop new skills, gain clarity, and find understanding. Fullan explains that it is classic change and people feel anxious, fearful, confused, overwhelmed, deskilled, cautious, and disturbed. He makes clear that effective literacy coaches and leaders need to have sensitivity to the problems of implementation.

Whitaker (2003) encouraged helping people feel comfortable during decision-making. Allen (2006) argued that while sensitivity to change is a necessary attribute for literacy coaches or instructional leaders, leaders and coaches tend to listen and partner with people who agree with them, rather than to risk listening to alternate views. In fact, instructional coaches and leaders might avoid or under-listen to resisters.

Wepner and Strickland (2008) contend that people are generally anxious to judge others but are fearful of being judged themselves. When a person has taken on the voice of a judge, intentionally or not, they assert their knowledge, power, and authority over others. But when the lens is turned on the judgmental person, they do their best to escape notice, strike back, resist, and even subvert. We live in a culture where mistakes have been a sign of weakness. Evaluation in our professional lives has not been different because all evaluations have been personal. Wepner and Strickland highlight the idea that facilitators should abstain from rushing into evaluative circumstances. They suggest that a literacy coach should initiate positive relationships based on trust and respect with the faculty members and school community before initiating change.

Another barrier that a literacy coach experiences is building the capacity for change to occur. There is tension in research literature between the top-down and bottom-up approaches. The top-down approach is based on federal, state, and local mandates. Bottom-up change efforts have capacity building qualities because of the teachers' time and resource investments and the resulting sense of ownership. Bottom-up efforts for change require time and patience because they are long-term processes (Wepner & Strickland, 2008). Literacy coaches needed to understand this in order to be effective leaders of change.

Literacy coaches facilitate change through effective and knowledgeable evaluation processes. They facilitate the creation of a rich description of what is and not what should be. Program descriptions serve as the mirrors reflecting the programs in place (Wepner & Strickland, 2008). Teachers need a view and a self-evaluation of their own practices as well. It has been important for the literacy coach to help teachers develop self-evaluation criteria. Whitaker (2003) stated that good teachers consistently strive to improve their own performance, but other teachers

wait for something else to change. Dozier (2006) observed that just as teachers try to help students learn to see themselves as effective participants in their own learning process, a literacy coach should help teachers see themselves as learners who are expressing and developing ideas in collaboration with each other. Schlechty (2002) wrote that by exercising control over curriculum content and ensuring that the schoolwork provided is engaging for students, the teacher will increase the probability that each student will learn what he or she needs to learn. Schlechty noted that without that type of control, systematic improvement would be impossible. According to Hall and Hord (2006) the leadership style of a change facilitator relates to the implementation success for organization participants.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 provided thorough discussion of the context of my study in three parts. The first part was a literature review of the elements of literacy and literacy instruction. The next section reviewed literature with perspectives concerning the need for changes in literacy instruction. The final portion of the chapter provided explanations of the role of the literacy coach.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this grounded theory research is to identify, describe, and analyze the components of effective literacy coaching and describe how literacy coaches are perceived by teachers and principals in three southwest Virginia elementary schools. The primary research question is how do teachers and principals perceive a literacy coach as a guide for helping improve reading instruction? The secondary questions asked the following:

1. What reading coach qualities do teachers and principals believe are valuable and helpful? Why?
2. What reading coach qualities do teachers and principals believe are not valuable and helpful? Why?
3. What do literacy coaches do that make teachers and principals respond positively toward change?
4. What do literacy coaches do that make teachers and principals respond negatively toward change?
5. In what ways do teachers feel they have changed or are changing as a result of working with a literacy coach?

Merriam (1998) explained that in grounded theory research, developed theory is not formal or grand, but it is substantive theory that is relevant to everyday-type situations instead of global concerns. Literacy coaching practice is an everyday-type situation found in the classrooms of many schools.

Data Collection

This multi-site study is based upon the qualitative methodology of grounded theory. I collected data from interviews and documents. Merriam (1998) presented a view of grounded theory research methodology developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1999). The investigator is the primary data collector and analyzer who assumes a stance to derive meaning from the grounded theory research. As he suggested, I collected data by using interviews and documents.

I conducted a grounded theory study at Highland View Elementary School, Meadowview Elementary School, and Rhea Valley Elementary School in southwestern Virginia. Teachers in each of those schools have had experience with literacy coaches. After acquiring Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I contacted the school principals by telephone, described my research project, and asked for permission to conduct research at the schools. Then, I composed a letter for each one of them describing my research questions. After gaining the principals' approval, I prepared a recruitment letter for teacher interviewees. Both letters were sent using e-mail and standard postal service.

The three schools have 74 classroom teachers and three principals. I began my research project by collaborating with the principals to develop schedules for teacher-interviews and document collection. After collecting letters from willing participants I chose a purposeful sample with the help of each principal. An explanation of purposeful sampling by Creswell (2007) explained that the researcher selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem. I asked each principal to consider experience, inexperience, male, and female in equal proportions. I chose to interview and collect data from classroom teachers and principals because they are the persons who have had direct

contact and firsthand experience with the literacy coaches. During my research 20 participants, 17 teachers and three principals, were interviewed at the three schools. Creswell suggested collecting data from 20 to 30 interviews to saturate the research.

The interview sessions were completed in focus groups and included one representative from each grade level, kindergarten through fifth grades, and each school's principal. I used four types of questions as Merriam (1998) described in relation to grounded theory research. Interpretive questions helped provide a check on what is thought to be understood and comprehended as well as provided opportunities for more extensive opinions and feelings to be revealed. Interpretive questions extended interpretation of what the interviewee said and asked for a reaction. Devil's advocate questions helped bring forth respondents' opinions and feelings because they asked for consideration of an opposing view. Ideal position questions brought forward opinions and information because they provided the respondent an opportunity to describe their view of the ideal situation. Hypothetical Questions with *what if* or *suppose* allowed the interviewee to speculate what might happen in a certain situation.

Merriam (1998) suggested that the key to getting data was to ask good questions and asking good questions takes practice. Both Merriam and Creswell (2007) suggested pilot interviews to try out the questions to be used in the interviews. I conducted pilot interviews at grade-level team meetings at one elementary school before I began conducting interviews at the three research sites.

Merriam (1998) suggested that using wording that makes sense to the interviewee would be crucial in gaining valuable and informative data. I attended to wording of the questions and then concentrated on the participants' understanding of the question.

I recorded the actual focus group interview sessions at the research sites and transcribed them later. My interview included a four- to five-page protocol that I created to record interviewee responses in addition to the recording. The protocol helped me maintain focus, stick to the questions, and remain a good listener. Before beginning the interview sessions, each interviewee was required to submit a signed consent form to be filed with my records. Creswell (2007) suggested the use of adequate audiotape devices, a four-to five-page interview protocol, sticking to the questions, being a good listener, and obtaining participant consent forms.

Merriam (1998) explained that a qualitative study of classroom instruction would lead to a selection of documents in the form of lesson plans, assignments, and records, archives, files, and other classroom items. I began collecting notes, summaries, and archival records from staff meetings and grade level team meetings.

Ethical Considerations

It is very important that research participants feel confident that their privacy and anonymity is being protected. I did not place them in situations that would cause them to feel embarrassed or compromised and have maintained confidentiality. Creswell (2007) warns researchers to be sensitive to the potential outcome or consequences of the research, to use nondiscriminatory language, to honor who holds the account, to avoid stereotyping, to maintain confidentiality, to avoid the conundrum of deception, to protect anonymity of the individuals, and to respect a participant's wish to withdraw from the study. I protected and honored the participants in my research project. Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations require that investigators attain consent from participants, follow policies and procedures, and protect the rights and welfare of human subjects while carrying out sound, ethical, research plans approved by IRB.

Data Analysis

In grounded theory research, there are three phases of coding, open coding, axial, and selective. I will use open coding as a means to develop categories of information. As the data pertaining to literacy coaching were collected, I placed them into categories. Later, I placed the categories into smaller categories that formed major themes in my study (Creswell, 2007). Axial coding followed open coding and identified one of the major themes as a central phenomena, I used additional data from the database to gain insight to the coding categories relating to and explaining the central phenomena in relation to strategies, consequences, actions, and context (Creswell, 2007). Interview sessions were recorded, transcribed, and coded during the open coding phase. The following section describes my intent and procedures for analyzing data from both transcribed interviews and collected documents. I organized the literacy coaching data, coded it, and condensed the codes into categories. I managed the data by creating and organizing data files on my personal computer and I maintained a hard copy file as well. While I read the interview transcripts and documents, I made notes in margins and labeled initial codes. Using open coding I described and identified categories. I selected one of the open coding categories for the central phenomenon of my study. During the next phase, axial coding, I classified causal relationships, intervening conditions, strategies, consequences, and the context of the central phenomena. As I interpreted the classifications, I began selective coding. During selective coding, I used the constant comparative method described later in this chapter to interrelate the categories and develop a storyline.

Glaser and Strauss (1999) developed the constant comparative method of analyzing data and establishing grounded theory. Creswell (2007) described open, axial, and selective coding and the development of the constant comparative method used in grounded theory and

representation. Merriam (1998) characterized the approach to grounded theory analysis as categories, properties, and hypotheses as concepts that linked categories and properties. Constant comparative method is an inductive way of analyzing data when substantive theory is not being sought.

Validity and Reliability

In evaluating my grounded theory research I wanted to be sure that my study is credible and that my findings are accurate. Triangulation, the use of multiple sources and types of data, involves corroborating evidence to enlighten a perspective. In qualitative research, member checking assures the researcher that the interpretation of the data accurately reflects the participants' views, opinions, and feelings. In my grounded theory qualitative research project I used triangulation and member checking. Additionally, I looked for criteria that included a general process and relationships between the concepts. I looked to other researchers to help me define more criteria to validate my study. Creswell's (2007) criteria for grounded theory study aligned with my project. I used his criteria as benchmarks to evaluate my investigation of literacy coaching. In grounded theory research Creswell looks for:

- The study of an action, process, or interaction that serves as the theory's key element
- A coding process that will move the data to a broader theoretical model
- A presentation of the theoretical model in a diagram or a figure
- A story line that connects categories and presents further questions to be answered
- Self-disclosure of the researcher's stance in the study

Limitations

There is no indication that the methodology used to obtain the results could be perfectly transferred to other research projects. The findings of this study are limited to the experiences of participants from three schools. The schools have defining characteristics that might not be present in some schools and might affect the transferability of the results of this study to other schools.

1. All three schools are high poverty elementary schools, and their issues may differ from the issues found in elementary schools that are not high poverty.
2. All three schools had literacy coaches for 6 years, while other schools may have no experience with a literacy coach.
3. The schools in southwest Virginia might be culturally different from schools in other localities.

Chapter Summary

In chapter 3 I discussed the methods that I used during my study. I have described data collection, interviews, data analysis, ethics, along with quality and verification of my grounded theory research project.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This is a multi-site study based upon the qualitative methodology of grounded theory. I collected data by interviewing teachers individually and in focus groups at three southwest Virginia elementary schools. All three schools had been Virginia Reading First Schools and had used literacy coaches to assist teachers in the effort to improve students' reading progress. I interviewed 17 teachers and 3 principals. The teachers' professional experience ranged from 3 to more than 20 years. At Meadowview Elementary and Rhea Valley Elementary Schools in Washington County, Virginia, I interviewed teachers in Kindergarten to Second Grade Focus Groups and Third Grade to Fifth Grade Focus Groups. At Highland View Elementary School in Bristol, Virginia, I conducted an individual interview with each teacher. I interviewed the principal at each school.

The purpose of my study emerged from my own pursuit to become a more effective literacy coach as I considered ways to improve. I realized that teachers' and principals' perceptions of the literacy coaching role impacted the level of my success. I wanted to know which of the literacy coach tasks and qualities that teachers valued the most and which qualities they valued the least. Furthermore, I wanted to know why they felt the way they did. I believe that knowing those precepts could help me to become a more efficient and valuable resource for both classroom teachers and principals.

In preparation for research, I obtained permission from the East Tennessee State Institutional Review Board to conduct interviews and use documents to find data that might answer my questions. I chose to do research at three Virginia Reading First Schools because each

school had experienced having a literacy coach during the grant. I sent letters to the principals in order to obtain permission to do research at their schools. I answered follow-up questions and spoke with each one of them in person. I sent letters to the superintendents of Bristol Virginia Public Schools and Washington County Virginia Schools to request permission to do research at the schools. Before the interviews I sent a copy of the participants' questions to the principals to distribute to the teachers who would be interviewed. On the day of the interview I requested that each teacher and principal participant sign the letter explaining the procedures and policies regarding the interview process as determined by the Institutional Review Board. I gave each teacher and principal a copy of the signed letter.

The documents I collected gave me information about the characteristics of the school, but they did not supply information that would help me discern teachers' or principals' perceptions of a literacy coach. So, while the documents provided abundant information about each school's history, accomplishments, academics, demographics, standards, and goals, it did not give me information about teacher perceptions. The data from the documents helped me to establish familiarity with the schools' cultures, accomplishments, and high levels of expectations extending to all members of the school community.

I recorded the interviews and transcribed them later. The interviews gave me great insight into teachers' and principals' attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about literacy coaching and student improvement in reading. I was able to use the data from the interviews to answer the questions pertaining to literacy coaching.

Rhea Valley Elementary School is a high poverty elementary school in rural southwest Virginia, with 454 students in grades prekindergarten through fifth grades and 63 teachers and support personnel. The interviews took place on a day during the last week of school when there

was an air of excitement about the field trips, picnics, the award day, and the fifth grade graduation events. The principal had prepared a conference area for the teachers' focus-group interviews in her office.

Highland View Elementary School is a high-poverty inner city school in southwest Virginia with 208 students in prekindergarten through fifth grades and 38 teachers and support staff. I conducted seven individual interviews with one teacher per grade level near the end of the school year during a week in May. There was a feeling of anticipation for the summer days ahead among the students and the teachers, and the teachers were feeling stressed about all of the end-of-year tasks they had to complete. The teachers' interviews took place in my office area in the school, and the principal's interview took place in her office.

Meadowview Elementary School is a school located in southwest Virginia. The school has 642 students in grades prekindergarten through fifth grades with 73 teachers, administrators, teacher aides, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, custodians, school nurse, and secretaries. On the day of the interview, students in the school had been dismissed for the summer and the teachers were having a workday. The workday is an extra mandatory day that teachers use to complete records, clear bulletin boards, and organize and store materials for the next school year. The principal had arranged for the focus-group interviews to take place in the school cafeteria. One focus group was composed of three teachers representing kindergarten, first, and second grades. The other focus group was composed of a third grade teacher, a fourth grade teacher, and a fifth grade teacher.

Research Questions

The primary question I answered was how do the teachers and principals perceive a literacy coach as a guide to improve reading instruction? Knowing their perceptions could allow

me to become a more efficient and effective literacy coach. I collected data that answered the following questions:

1. What reading coach qualities do teachers and principals believe are helpful?
Why?
2. What reading coach qualities do teachers and principals believe are not helpful?
Why?
3. What do literacy coaches do to cause teachers and principals to respond positively to change?
4. What do literacy coaches do to cause teachers and principals to respond negatively to change?
5. In what ways do teachers feel they have changed as a result of working with a literacy coach?

The Qualities Teachers and Principals Consider Helpful

Through the examination of the transcripts of the interviews, 14 categories emerged as positive coaching attributes. The following categories of positive coaching attributes emerged: 1) knowledge, 2) experience as a classroom teacher, 3) ability to listen, 4) respectfulness, 5) relationships, 6) leadership, 7) desire for involvement, 8) helpfulness, 9) motivational and positive interactions, 10) organization, 11) data usage, 12) ability to communicate knowledge and information, 13) instructional modeling, 14) knowledge of materials and resources.

Every teacher and principal I interviewed mentioned experience, expertise, or knowledge as prerequisites to positive coaching attributes. Teachers value leadership from individuals who have authentic understanding of classroom experiences and situations. They highly value literacy coaches who are reading specialists because they have the knowledge, insight, and understanding

to help them solve students' problems. One principal I interviewed said, "If they don't have the knowledge, they are not going to be able to achieve what they want to. And if they do have the knowledge and they do not have the rapport and the people skills, then they are not going to be able to achieve." During the interview sessions, teachers spoke candidly on their viewpoints of what a literacy coach does that is helpful to them. One teacher said, "The qualities that my reading coach has is her wealth of knowledge on the research that she has to back up what she is introducing to us. I get new strategies from her. She also helps me with scores and grouping my students. My coach has been able to give me wonderful ideas and strategies on what I can use."

Overwhelmingly, teachers stressed the importance of the literacy coach's knowledge, skills, and experience. During the interviews, interviewees used 124 references and descriptors concerning it. Some of the valued literacy coach descriptors were as follows: reading specialist, knowledge of reading, disaggregates data, reports, conducts in-service, determines intervention, shares ideas, knows where to find information, provides training opportunities, helps solve problems, knows how to improve, understands data, knows research and backs it up, uses good practices, experienced at all grade levels, stays current and on top of things, knows programs, stays realistic, has classroom experience, open to new strategies, differentiates with teachers, keeps up with trends, shares information from conferences, knows and reads books, is knowledgeable, knows resources, and helps determine intervention. One teacher stated, "It is not helpful when the coach has not been a teacher in an elementary classroom before...that makes it more difficult for the teachers to relate to the coach."

Another teacher said, "The weekly meetings give me time to sit and pick the brain of somebody who has had way more experience and done more research, who has the knowledge on the content I am using and needing. I am still learning, being a new teacher."

When asked to talk about literacy coach qualities that would not be helpful, one teacher responded, “You’ve got a lot of people who try to fake it and they don’t really understand or they are very limited with their background information...and those would be totally non-productive. So someone who doesn’t have the knowledge base or really understands the position.”

They felt that keeping up with professional development, trends, strategies, and scientifically based reading researched (SBRR) were extremely helpful to them. They enjoyed the fact that the literacy coach would share new ideas or new approaches to old ideas. They wanted the literacy coach to encourage them.

Listening is an important positive practice of a literacy coach according to teachers. They have reasons for what they are doing. When asked what the literacy coach should do to become valued by teachers one teacher put it as follows: “I think to work as a team with the teachers and make them feel comfortable with you and to work as a team with the principal, to be willing to listen and help and assist when needed, to help as a leader and role model, which our coach is.” Listening was specifically named five times during the interviews. Additionally, teachers highly valued the opportunities to communicate with the coach and during the interviews expressed their value of situations where they could engage in conversations with the coach 76 times.

Respectfulness might offset problems and disagreements; however, during times of change, there will be disagreements and so there must be times when the literacy coach is found working with individuals or groups who have different views. Teachers described the positive attributes of the literacy coach with 54 descriptors that signal respectful relationships as follows: nonjudgmental, , has excellent rapport with teachers, builds relationships, non-threatening, feel comfortable, works with faculty, respected by faculty, good rapport with community, earns respect, solves problems with follow-through, keeps promises, gains faculty buy-in, owns

leadership qualities, excellent rapport established, available to help teachers, daily help, helps with testing, people oriented, met with teachers, be a fair evaluator, asks teachers opinions for diplomacy, dependable, trustworthy, positive, encouraging, complimentary, motivates, realistic, role model, east to work with, respects teachers, has professionalism.

The leadership role of coaching entails inspiration of the teachers and the students. During interviews the teachers consistently said that good literacy coach leadership was helpful to them. One teacher said, “The literacy coach, coach is a good word, because a coach is directing as a basketball coach would, but also, the basketball coach provides the team with fundamentals, and that’s the framework that you’re talking about, the scaffolding you’re talking about to build your program. You can’t have a basketball team without fundamentals, and the coach provides those fundamentals, the same thing with the literacy coach.” The term, leadership, was specifically mentioned five times during the interviews. Leadership characteristics and qualities were also mentioned. Teachers named the following qualities of leadership as desirable for a literacy coach: Motivates in a direction, fair evaluator, respects teachers’ professionalism, gains faculty buy-in, earns respect, good rapport with the community, respected by faculty, works with faculty, builds relationships. While explaining her perspective on helpful reading coach qualities, one teacher said, “Leadership-definitely – to be able to not push people into things, but to encourage them to try new things. I think that is important.”

The teachers I interviewed wanted a literacy coach who could help them and participate in their classroom experiences and problems. During the interviews, teachers made 116 references to ways they wanted the literacy coach to become involved in their classrooms. They used the following descriptors to describe the ways that the literacy coach built capacity in their classroom and helped them in valuable ways: Assisted with the reading program, gave

individualized help to teachers, modeled lessons for teachers, was readily available, acknowledged successes, remained accessible, works with principal, works with administrators, helps with testing, stays positive with adults and children, knows students' needs, has energy, fosters student improvement, asks questions about particular students, loves kids, loves reading, appreciates others' talents, gives encouragement, and builds confidence. Building capacity is such an important part of literacy coaching.

Some of the references that teachers made toward motivational behaviors that literacy coaches should exhibit were: points out strengths, establishes trust, is supportive, is a team player, talks and shares, creates comfort zones, gives positive suggestions. In discussing the value of coaching qualities, one teacher said, "If they weren't motivated to help, my coach is always (saying) 'Can I help you with anything? Do you need any help with this?' If I had a coach that was really relaxed and not motivated to come and help, that wouldn't be very helpful. And if they weren't caught up on the newest research and they weren't knowledgeable on the content which they are sharing with me, I wouldn't take them very seriously and want to do what they were suggesting. When I do have the research, it motivates me to get on the stick to get on the ball and start implementing those strategies that I have been taught. So, if they aren't motivated and they are kind of hiding in a room somewhere, not wanting to come and help the kids...my coach will pull the kid and see exactly what I am talking about and find maybe another technique to use whether it be a new puzzle or a puppet or a new hands-on activity or another way to motivate the child. So that is the way my coach has really helped me, and I feel it is helpful because she is motivated and on top of everything. So, if they weren't motivated, and didn't take initiative to come down and just check, just to check on me, then that wouldn't be

very helpful.” The southwest Virginia teachers expressed their desire to be appreciated for the strengths they exhibited.

Teachers often considered organization as one of the major attributes of the literacy coaching role. Their literacy coaches scheduled conferences, work in the classrooms, and grade-level team meetings with them. One teacher said, “I think organization would be one, number two would be a strong leader, number three would be someone who wouldn’t take things personally.”

Teachers said organization was an important attribute of coaching. Organizational qualities were mentioned 14 times during the interviews. Teachers made reference to qualities as follows: Keeps organized, keeps an agenda, keeps a calendar, organizes programs, plans, organizes classrooms, keeps organization. One interviewee said, “Our reading coach – she was on top. She had everything color coded. She had everything laid out, and if you didn’t have someone that organized, I don’t think you would get the full benefit of what they had to offer. To organize data was very helpful. She would bring it to us, and I mean it was right there for you to read and use from it what you needed to do with it, whether it be grouping or particular strategies that needed to be focused on. That was very helpful.”

When responding to reading coach qualities that were not valuable, a teacher responded, “I think disorganization because you are juggling a lot of things, a lot of different personalities and teachers and children, and you really have to have your ducks in a row and do what you say and say what you do.”

The teachers who were interviewed discussed the impact and importance of the literacy coach’s work with student data. The literacy coaches helped teachers group their students and plan appropriate instruction and intervention for them based on the data reports. Teachers

reported that they valued interpretation of data. Teachers referred to data usage 14 times. One interviewee stated, “The data needs to be interpreted for the teachers, and it needs to be done in a way that is understandable. I think we did have a problem with that in the beginning of Reading First. I know that the teachers were intimidated by some things at the very beginning of the implementation of the grant. Then things began to get easier as time went on. Part of it was the newness of Reading First. And then part of it was having someone look specifically at the results of their instruction. That was very intimidating for some teachers.” I was encouraged that nearly every teacher came to highly value the use of data.

Modeling instruction emerged as one of the leading positive attributes of the literacy coaching role. Two teachers spoke about their positive response to having the literacy coach come into their classroom.

Teacher 1: I think just the aspect of that person willing to come in and demonstrate, our reading coach, she came in and did demonstrations with the students. She worked with them and just let the teacher observe to make them feel more like a peer rather than a subordinate. I think that was very helpful.

Teacher 2: You know I have to agree... I loved watching our coach working with students. And I was making little mental notes and thinking maybe I could do that, too. It made me want to be a better reading teacher because I felt the things she did or worded something made me want to strive to be better.”

Teachers highly valued the coach’s willingness to share knowledge and information. Two teachers in one focus group shared their perspective, “...being able to work closely with teachers and exposing the teachers to all of the wide variety of strategies and ideas...not pushing it on us, but you know, here’s something you can try, or maybe if that doesn’t work and you

don't like that idea you can try this. The coach that we had definitely was a good leader and did well with leadership as well as just a wealth of strategies and ideas that she was giving us. And I think that was a very good role for her to have."

The other teacher responded, "In addition to that, keeping up with current trends, our reading coach was very eager to attend conferences and to learn new things herself. She would bring them back here and she did a very good job of bringing them back... she would meet with us and always present it to us as it was presented to her."

The teachers highly valued the presence of the literacy coach in the classroom as an observer and they mentioned classroom observations as a positive coaching attribute. One teacher expressed it by saying, "And I like it when the literacy coach would suggest something and also come in and model it. If it is something new that you really haven't seen put into action before, it makes it really helpful."

Her colleague responded, "I think, too, that some of the training that we received, not all of it, was very beneficial. As you probably understand a lot of stuff we sit and hear over and over. But sometimes, when it was something new and something they wanted us to implement or they wanted us to try, our literacy coaches were really good about trying to get some form of training in here. Sometimes it was a crash course, but nonetheless, it was something that we could take back to our room."

The teachers I interviewed looked to the literacy coach to help them choose materials that were best suited for their needs. They said the literacy coach had exposure to the research that would help them make the best choices for their needs based on scientifically-based reading research. Interviewees referred to knowledge of programs, materials, and resources 22 times. They discussed depending on the coach to be "on top" of new trends, new materials, and new

programs. As far as choosing materials, one teacher said, “Definitely, particularly the one we had, she worked very well or seemed to work very well with all of the teachers, and could always depend on her for the wide variety of things that we might need from help with strategies to resources. And she was very willing, if we needed something, to look down the way to help us find it, if there was a read-aloud text or something that we wanted to use in the classroom.”

The Qualities Perceived as Not Helpful

Twelve negative attributes associated with literacy coaching emerged from the data I collected. I asked the teachers the following questions: What reading coach qualities do teachers and principals believe are not helpful? Why?

The characteristics were as follows: bossy and demanding, uninvolved, negative, know-it-all, poor attitude, forceful, unrealistic, lack of knowledge, untrustworthy, disorganized, poor communicator, and lack of experience. These findings of these characteristics are discussed in the following text.

A bossy and demanding literacy coach was mentioned 24 times as an undesirable quality. Teachers want to feel like they have control over what goes on in their classrooms. They need time to learn and make changes. Literacy coaches who are so demanding may not be listening to the teachers talk about their needs or reasons for their actions. Teachers mentioned bossy and demanding qualities in the negative sense 26 times. One teacher said, “I think if they came in and were very authoritative or demanding, I think that would make someone more resistant to what they had, the strategies or what they had that they were offering. If you come in and you let somebody know that you are there to help them, I think they respond better than if you come in and say, ‘You have to do it this way.’”

Another interviewee stated, “I would say somebody who would be overzealous, demanding, dictating, I think that would probably turn faculty off. It’s not the way you are going to get somebody to really buy in to what you would like them to do... People want to feel it is their idea, so again, that goes into the buy in.”

A literacy coach who is not involved in the classroom cannot form good relationships with the teachers nor can she get to know the students that are in need of help. Teachers mentioned a coach that was not involved 43 times. If the coach is not familiar with the instruction taking place then the dialogue and instructional conversations cannot be as rich with information. One teacher said it would make her “ask why the literacy coach was there.” They used the following descriptors: disregards my needs, disregards students’ needs, forgets each class is different, lacks awareness, is distant, disregards academic progress, initiates many changes at one time, not approachable, no help with modeling lessons, looks only at data, gives no feedback, independent, nonexemplary, poor interpersonal skills. One teacher said, “There were times the reading coach would be distant and wouldn’t be helpful at that time in the classroom, and that would make it stressful.”

One interviewee said, “If there is no vested interest from the literacy coach other than their job, I mean if there is not a vested interest in our individual students and individual students and individual learning styles, then it’s the same thing with a teacher that doesn’t have a vested interest in her students and is very laid back....if they come across as not being approachable, I don’t feel I can trust that person as far as having my class’s best interest.”

Teachers and students who continually receive negative feedback lose motivation to learn or improve. Teachers need to stay upbeat to address the challenges in the classroom and to help the students achieve. Teachers referred to negative feedback 20 times during the interviews. One

teacher described a negative response when she said, “Oh goodness, I guess maybe forcefully suggesting that you do something that maybe you haven’t tried or maybe done before...was especially critical because maybe you haven’t organized something in a way that they like, which wasn’t a problem for me, but I know that it has been for others.”

Her colleague responded, “I think that just being critical sometimes, about lots of things- that if it was your idea, it was something you wanted to do, and you had put time and effort into it...then being told that you can’t do that and you know that, well, you know that has happened here.”

Teachers described the “know-it-all” literacy coach as making them feel badly about what they were doing. They mentioned that quality of a literacy coach 33 times during the interviews. That type of attitude and behavior made them feel as though what they were doing was wrong when they may have worked very hard on something. One of the teachers explained, “When it’s the attitude that ‘I know everything and you are going to do everything the way we tell you to do it.’...You know that’s not very encouraging.” This research found that with the guidance of a literacy coach, teachers seem more inclined to embrace and implement new programs or strategies.

A literacy coach who makes teachers feel wrong causes them to be resistant to new ideas or change according to the teachers and principals. Teachers mentioned negativity six times. A teacher explained, “If a reading coach comes in just ready to pick out all of the things you’re doing wrong and want you to suddenly change everything, it just makes you feel bad and then you don’t want to respond in a positive way.”

Teachers do not like to feel pressured into making changes without rationale. Teachers spoke of literacy coaches who were inconsiderate when they disregarded students’ and teachers’

needs and introduced too many changes at one time. They want to understand the changes and want consideration for the things that they need to do in order to change. They want to keep their ideas that work for them and they voiced that when they feel pressured they also try to resist. When I asked what the coach did that caused her to respond negatively to change, she said, “Making a lot of changes all at the same time...instead of just one or two at a time. While I am getting used to those changes and then going on to something else...changing everything at the same time.”

Too much expectation at one time causes teachers to feel overwhelmed. One teacher described the inconsistencies as new ideas come to the forefront. She described her own experience of making many changes only to be told she needed to totally change once again. This was very frustrating to her and she resisted and resented the inconsistency and inconsiderate nature of that change process. A teacher explained, “There is consistency. I think consistency as well, because it was like we would get used to doing it a certain way and then the very next year it would be something different. And then the very next year it would be something different...and different venues, you know. We did it this way for 1 year, now we are going to do it a different way. And consistency, I think sometimes needs to be followed for a certain time in order to tell whether or not it helped, so that is what I would like to add.”

Some teachers had bad experiences with a literacy coach who they said lacked the knowledge to help them solve problems effectively. They said that the literacy coach needed to know more details of the way students learn to read as well as the reading acquisition process. A teacher explained, “...if they don't have the knowledge they are not going to be able to achieve what they want to. And if they do not have the knowledge, and they do not have the rapport and

the people skills, then they are not going to be able to achieve. So, I think those two go hand in hand and are really necessary in order to have a productive program.”

When teachers felt they could not trust the coach, they did not have good rapport or respect for the professional. One teacher spoke, “I feel they (coaches) need to know what we are dealing with in the classroom and just look at scores and say, ‘Oh, so-and-so hasn’t gone up any’ ...or anything like that. You know what I mean? So that is basically all I can think of right off the top of my head. You know, because a lot of people can be intimidated with people coming in to watch them and, I know that I was at first. But then, it was just because I didn’t know what I was doing. But once you understand that they are looking for ways to improve what you’re doing, like I said, you are just a resource...”

Her colleague spoke, “An overwhelming feeling ...would make me pretty nervous and very anxious and cause some anxiety toward teaching. So, I definitely appreciate a positive encouraging coach that I don’t feel like a failure...somebody that’s not going to make you feel like a failure...somebody that’s not going to make you feel like an idiot...”

Teachers said that a literacy coach who was disorganized would not be helpful to them. Dates, appointments, and schedules could be forgotten or lost. One teacher responded, “... you are juggling a lot of things, a lot of different personalities and teachers and children, and you really have to have your ducks in a row and do what you say and say what you do.”

Teachers did not like lack of communication or the failure of the literacy coach to listen. They said they needed to communicate their needs and rationale for their actions. One interviewee spoke about reading coach qualities that are not helpful when she said, “I don’t think it is helpful when an individual who is so impressed with themselves that they can’t be open-minded to hear other suggestions or to be able to understand where someone else is coming

from.” Teachers listed poor communication characteristics six times as follows: Doesn’t listen, feels threatened with disagreement, no follow through, an over-the-shoulder attitude.

Teachers said that the literacy coach who lacked experience in the classroom would not truly understand their situations, problems, or plights. They mentioned the negative effects of lack of knowledge and experience 10 times. They saw limited knowledge, limited professional development, and intimidation as signs of inexperience. In reference to ways that the literacy coach was not helpful, one teacher discussed, “I valued that we had a coach that would come in and work with the students and worked very well with the students. And even sometimes, I felt like seeing her work with the students kind of helped me. You know, she was kind of modeling things that I was willing to use in my classroom and take back and use myself. So, I think not being helpful and not being in there and not giving ideas or reminding that ...we are able to...one particular coach that I am thinking of that came to our school several times, Gretchen, who came in and just was always, you know, wow, always wowed us with what she had to show us. So I think someone who didn’t go that far to provide you with exposure to different strategies and styles.”

One teacher said, “I think probably being able to work with different personalities and appreciate that people have different techniques for doing things and as well as being encouraging. When someone is having trouble with something in particular, then you could be willing to suggest more than one option when you try to work with a particular child and also be complimentary. Tell what people are doing that is good so that you can fully appreciate what they are doing in the classroom. As a literacy coach I think you would have to differentiate with your teachers.” Her colleague responded affirmatively.

What Literacy Coaches Do to Create Positive Response to Change

Desirable literacy coaching attributes emerged with clarity and definition as I studied teachers' and principals' perceptions about the role. What do literacy coaches do to cause teachers and principals to respond positively toward change? The open coded data from their answers and comments fell into six desirable literacy coach phenomenon, situational conditions, intervening conditions, or consequences alongside four undesirable literacy coach phenomenon, situational conditions, intervening conditions, or consequences. As I organized the data, the desirable phenomenon of the study emerged as follows: (1) methods and practices of literacy coaching, (2) valuable literacy coaching tools, (3) practices that foster positive reactions, (4) the ways that teachers changed, (5) recommendations for literacy coach practices. While the undesirable phenomenon included: (1) practices of literacy coaches that are not valuable, (2) practices of literacy coaches that are not helpful, (3) literacy coach responses that cause a negative response, (4) literacy coach practices that cause resistance to change.

During the interviews I gathered teachers' perceptions of the desirable methods and practices of the literacy coach. Some of the ways that teachers described the literacy coaching methods included gathering data, choosing resources, creating data reports, providing professional development, scheduling meetings, finding alternative avenues for helping students, sharing information, conducting book studies, observing in classroom, organizing classrooms, and keeping track of students with reading difficulties.

During the interviews, teachers revealed the coaching tools that they perceived to be the literacy coaches' most valuable for helping them achieve their goals. Teachers valued the literacy coach's ideas and suggestions, follow-up, communication, availability, consideration, acknowledgement of teachers' professionalism, positive relationships, involvement, presence in

the classroom, help with testing, dependability, meetings and conferences, trust, encouragement, knowledge, leadership, student interest, good judgment, and organization. The helpfulness of the literacy coach was deemed an important factor in helping teachers feel positive about change. Some of the literacy coach practices that helped teachers feel positive about change were with both teachers and students. Teachers described ways that the literacy coach could help students. Remaining positive, interested, and showing interest in the students fostered positive feelings. They specifically mentioned finding ways to help struggling students.

Teachers wanted a leader, an encourager, a good listener, a fair evaluator, and a professional development trainer and planner. They wanted a reading specialist, a person to help them keep up with trends, and someone who could help them keep up with effective strategies and ideas.

There are certain actions that seem to cause teachers to want to respond positively toward change. Based on data from the interviews, the following descriptors were used by the interviewees to explain what could cause them to react in a positively. Teachers were inspired positively when the literacy coach came to check on them, helped them, kept their promises, liked teachers' work, used diplomacy, suggested sensible ideas, modeled instruction in the classroom, worked with students, gently coached and corrected, gave compliments, motivated in a specific direction, used research to back decisions, listened, organized meetings, remained nonthreatening, and acted as a positive role model.

Teachers knew specific ways that they would want to advise literacy coaches to use in their day to day practice. They said it was important for literacy coaches to talk to teachers, be available, give ideas and suggestions, answer questions, go over data with teachers, target students for intervention, visit classrooms, keep up with trends, model lessons, share

information, act as a peer, be willing to help, conduct book studies, provide research, work as a team member, assist when needed, be a leader, listen, hold meetings, remain positive, build rapport, establish buy-in, and receive training.

What Literacy Coaches Do to Create Negative Response to Change

There are literacy coaching practices that cause teachers to develop a negative attitude. Teachers did not like it if the coach made them feel wrong, caused pressure, was not motivating, caused anxiety toward teaching, made them feel like a failure, would not listen, was not trustworthy, was not approachable, did not have the best interest of the students, had a laid back attitude, was judgmental, expected teachers to already know things, was not a good resource, was uninvolved, did not give exposure to new ideas or teaching styles, was disorganized, was too independent, or did not connect with them.

Teachers described characteristics of literacy coaches who were not helpful. They said that a literacy coach was of no assistance to them when they were impressed with self, did not listen to them, had limited knowledge of reading, did not understand, faked the amount of knowledge, was intimidating, was dictatorial, did not recognize teachers' strengths, felt threatened and judged, did not make teachers feel safe, offered criticism, gave forceful suggestions, was critical of hard work, had a know-it-all attitude, expected teachers to make many changes at one time, and was inconsistent. Teachers indicated that it was not helpful when a literacy coach was overbearing or dictating. They also said that literacy coaches who are overzealous or overbearing do not inspire a desire to change. One teacher described the coach's actions when she said, "...someone who comes in and tries to say this is the way it needs to be done, now do it, instead of coaching you through and helping you figure out exactly what it is

you need to do, and also, someone who doesn't acknowledge I have strengths as well, and that we all have areas that we can grow.”

As a change agent, it is important for literacy coaches to know what they do to work against their endeavors. During the interviews the interviewees named several ways that literacy coaches evoked a resistance to change. Teachers said they felt a resistance when their coach was placed in three additional schools and they only had access to her once a week. Limited access to the coach made them feel differently about changing. Teachers said, additionally, any negativity tended to bring them down, make them feel angry, doubt themselves, feel hostile, feel defensive, and prove the literacy coach wrong. Talking and not showing caused resistance to change according to the interviewees. Based the teachers comments, intimidation and loss of trust works against the literacy coach.

Changes

Teachers talked about the ways they felt they had changed because of their opportunity to work with the literacy coach. They said they now looked at data, judged curriculum, used small group instruction, were more assessment driven, used more intervention practices, were more open to the opinions of others, were more open to new ideas and new strategies, learned their own weaknesses, and had become a better reading teacher.

When asked how they had changed as a result of having a literacy coach, 11 teachers said that they were open to learning new ways to teach reading. Two teachers said that change no longer overwhelms them like it once did. One teacher stated the following: “I felt like...I was a better reading teacher. And from resources to different strategies and styles of teaching to working with small groups, incorporating work stations, and focusing more on the small group time, I felt like overall I have grown.”

In response to discussing ways they had changed as a result of having a literacy six teachers said they were using new strategies they had learned from the literacy coach. Five teachers said they felt like they were stronger and better reading teachers. Five teachers said they had an increased desire to grow professionally. Five teachers said they had incorporated more small-group instruction into their schedules. Four teachers said they had changed the way they teach reading. Three teachers said their knowledge of the reading process had increased due to working with a literacy coach. Three teachers said that after having experiences with a literacy coach they implemented more opportunities for students to independently practice their newly learned skills in literacy learning stations set up in various areas around their classrooms. One teacher said, “I realize there is more to teaching reading than just following a basal book. You know, it’s just got me really interested in learning about the new strategies, the different strategies, the small groups, and things like that.”

Teachers discussed ways they had changed using data and materials. Three teachers said they had started using data to drive their instruction. One teacher related that she had learned how to assess the students. The following changes were mentioned once during the discussion of how teachers felt they had changed: know how to solve problems, increased confidence, love weekly meetings, learned new strategies, use inclusion, use intervention, the way curriculum is judged, stretched boundaries, have more enthusiasm, students can make better scores than before. As one teacher stated, I have changed a whole lot of the ways I teach. I have somebody I can depend on, that I can go to and she can show me a different way to do things. If what I am doing is not working, she can show me how to try to fix it. And, I think the scores of the children come up and the enthusiasm the children have for reading. It makes a big difference.”

Another interviewee expressed, “When I came along here (the school) was a failing school. We did nothing but look at the curriculum, looked at the data, and start doing small groups. The first year we learned our kids. We know where they were, what they were doing. We started giving STAR three times a year. We started looking at STAR. We started looking at what they were reading. We started looking at PALS. We looked at doing some little benchmarks that we could keep up and document. We started saying okay, this kid’s struggling. What have we got to do with him? Do we have uninterrupted 90 minutes (of reading). It had never been done here. And then Reading First comes along and says yes. It was a way of saying look, this is why. And it has made a difference. We are being able to incorporate inclusion into the classroom when that had not been looked at before.”

Another teacher described her change experience when she stated, “Well, I know I have gained knowledge on how to assess reading abilities. That has been one of the keys that I have learned in working with the literacy coach. And also how to plan instruction based on those assessments to meet the needs of all students, and also, how to teach the test-taking strategies which has been a key to successful SOL’s (Standards of Learning).”

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 4, I have explained the data that were collected and the findings. I have explained how the data merged into major themes pertaining to the literacy coaching role. The major themes explained effective literacy coaching. They clarified and identified both the qualities of coaching that teachers appreciated the most and those qualities that they appreciated the least. In chapter 5, I discuss the findings of this study as they relate to prior research and present recommendations to school districts related to their implementation of literacy coaching.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the findings presented in Chapter 4. Both teachers and principals were interviewed at three elementary schools in southwest Virginia to find out their perspectives on the literacy coach as a guide for teaching reading. During an earlier 6-year period, all three schools had been designated as Virginia Reading First Schools. Ninety-one individual schools located in Virginia districts qualified and received federal funds designated solely for each specific Reading First school with low-performing and low-socioeconomic status. Part of the funding mandated the inclusion of a literacy coach.

Why Literacy Coaches

One might question the reasoning behind the mandated requirement for a literacy coach. Traditional staff development has been inadequate to meet the needs of the educational system. Due to ongoing mandates and higher expectations, teachers have felt overwhelmed with only the traditional bits and pieces of information they have received in regard to teaching reading. Teachers and educational leaders have realized a need for reform in professional development.

Literacy is the encompassing skill that is crucial for learning academics or maneuvering through daily tasks. In order to effectively teach all students, a teacher needs knowledge of the orthography of the language in addition to knowledge of the semantic, the graphophonic, and the syntactic cueing systems in language. Teachers need to learn how to guide their students to become proficient readers for enjoyment, life skills, and academic acquisition. Students do not comprehend material for a variety of reasons, but their comprehension can be improved if

teachers use scientifically based reading researched (SBRR) strategies. Many times students fail to overcome reading deficits because their teachers have not learned and are unfamiliar with the SBRR strategies that would bring success. The need for changes in traditional literacy instruction has emerged and the need for literacy coaching soon followed.

Qualities that Help Coaches Support Improved Teaching

Every teacher and principal I interviewed said that the literacy coach's training along with a wide and rich knowledge of literacy development and reading instruction was crucial to being effective for them. Teachers approach literacy coaches with a wide variety of problems and expectations. It is crucial that the literacy coach have the experience, expertise, training, and knowledge in order to make sound decisions that benefit the student and the classroom situation. One principal stated, "A reading specialist qualification would be number one because of being able to identify the quality of the strategies that could be used."

Teachers and principals in this study said that it was helpful when the literacy coach listened and communicated with them. Teachers desire help and collaboration when it comes to solving problems in their classroom. The literacy coach can be there to act as a resource and support to help solve a variety of problems that arise in their classrooms. The literacy coach can help teachers with students who are having difficulties in reading, find alternate strategies for teaching an unsuccessful lesson, or go into the classroom and model lessons for instructional routines. Toll (2006) suggests that literacy coaches can ask questions to open up the conversation, to learn more about a problem or situation, to explore solutions, to plan for action, or to forward the action.

My findings suggest that a respectful relationship with the literacy coach seems to be very important to both the teachers and the principals. Coaches are often placed in positions that

lend the occasion to evaluate teachers. Wepner and Strickland (2008) advise coaches to consider that people are often anxious to judge others, but they are often fearful of being judged themselves. If a person, intentionally or unintentionally, takes on the voice of a judge, he or she asserts knowledge and power over others. It is human nature to try to escape notice, strike back, resist, or subvert because we live in a culture that looks at mistakes as a sign of weakness. Wepner and Strickland found that developing positive relationships is an asset when trying to initiate change. Additionally, literacy coaches can facilitate change through effective leadership and knowledgeable evaluation processes. They discuss a variety of ways a literacy coach worked with them to create respectful relationships.

The teachers I interviewed wanted their coach to be approachable and trustworthy. They said that when a literacy coach is trustworthy, the teachers know they can trust what she says and they can find ways to address any problems or weaknesses. They also stated they needed a coach who could act as a resource and guide without fear of being judged and seemed to support Wepner and Strickland's (2008) view. Casey (2006) discusses the leadership and inspirations by pointing out that the students look to the adults for an education, so we must keep our eye on the goal of education all students. As one interviewee stated, "They (literacy coaches) have to have good rapport with the individuals they are working with in a non-threatening manner." Toll (2006) speaks of the joys of agreement, but during the course of change, there will be disagreement, as well. She suggests that there is no value in working with others if we all think alike. So, we must learn to respect disagreement, and the divergent views of others. When a person is in disagreement, it causes discomfort to the remainder of the people who are in agreement. According to Toll, we should not pretend it doesn't exist, we should continue to collaborate even when we agree to disagree, and we should not attempt to erase disagreement.

However, Toll recommends addressing attempts to undermine a group's efforts. Ultimately, it is the hope that a coach will respectfully help teachers move beyond disagreement with dialogic conversation and reasoning.

These findings suggest that during the coaching process, the literacy coach should continually remain aware that relationships are important. Knight (2009) discusses the fact that teachers often see the profession as part of their own identity. If coaches offend teachers, then they can damage relationships to the point that they will not be heard. He says that coaches must win trust. Another factor evident in the literacy coach – teacher relationship is that teachers will have more open conversations with a literacy coach if they do not view the role as an administrative one. Literacy coaches can help guide teachers in a variety of ways. They design, monitor, and assess reading achievement and progress, provide professional development and are given supervisory and evaluative responsibilities. They have an emotional connection to teachers because they can work one on one with each teacher to solve problems. This aspect of teachers' perspectives seemed contradictory to some research as Knight (2007) suggests that coaches remain detached. He lists the following eight points of advice to instructional coaches:

1. Protect yourself by staying detached.
2. Be prepared by walking on solid ground.
3. Communicate by clarifying your message.
4. Meet teacher's needs by managing change effectively.
5. Face facts by confronting reality.
6. Make fundamental improvements by understanding school culture.
7. Lead by being ambitious and humble.
8. Stay energized by taking care of yourself.

Teachers in this study said they greatly appreciate a coach who helps in the classroom. When the coach comes into the classroom, he or she gains more insight into the classroom instructional practices and finds ways to help the teachers and the students. This seems contradictory to Knight's (2007) suggestion to stay detached. Dozier (2006) discusses the collaborative nature of teaching together as partners and how it enhances learning of all who are involved including the literacy coach, the teacher, and the students. Dozier describes it as inquiring together, focusing on ideas that extend the learning of all who are involved through team teaching, and examining student work.

My findings suggest that the literacy coach should strive to motivate and lend confidence and positive feelings to teachers. When grade level meetings are held, the literacy coach's familiarity with the teachers, students, and the classroom operations makes dialogue and planning meaningful. Teachers in this study said that they want the coach to come into the classroom to work with them, model lessons, and work with students. Dozier (2006) reflects that in her experience working with teachers, she came to know them very well so that she knows when to encourage them or when to calm them down so they could process new information, become confident with it, and develop a comfort zone. She wanted teachers to be deliberate in their instructional approaches with their students. The southwest Virginia teachers participating in this study expressed their desire to be appreciated for the strengths they exhibited.

Those teachers also said they need help with data and depend on literacy coaches to guide them. One teacher spoke of how she focused on data and how they would drive her teaching. Toll (2006) lays out the responsibilities of coaching and even provides black-line masters for scheduling individual conferences, group conferences, action charts, teacher instruction charts, small group interaction charts, data charts, demonstration lesson planning charts, literacy

coaching evaluation planning, and others. It is crucial for the well-organized, effective literacy coach to consistently remain involved and to participate in classrooms with the best interests of students and teachers.

Qualities that Interfere with Literacy Coach Effectiveness

The teachers interviewed perceived certain coaching qualities that do not assist them in helping students learn to read. All of the teachers said that a coach who was uninterested or uninvolved with the students was of no use. They said a literacy coach who stayed in the office working on data was not helpful because it created a distance between her, the students, the teachers, and the classrooms. Similarly, Toll (2006) has explained that modeling lessons helps teachers to extend their goals to achieve greater student success because it is in response to their needs. The lessons are a result of coaching conversations and generally extend beyond the lesson through conversations after the lesson.

Several teachers said that a coach with a disproportionately elevated self-opinion was often too critical of others. The teachers were very put off by literacy coaches who may come into a classroom and tell them they were doing things that were wrong. One teacher said that if a literacy coach did that, she would tend to rebel against that type of approach. Another teacher described how she had put time and effort into lessons for her students and then was discouraged when she was told she could not use the lessons. She said the literacy coach was displaying a know-it-all and bossy attitude.

Visits in the classroom can foster relationships as described by Dozier (2006) when she describes a visit to a teacher's classroom after her mother's death. The two teachers connected over memories of their mothers and the fact each one wore her mother's ring, and then immediately began to chat about their mini-lesson and their prior lessons in preparation. They

were working together to perfect a lesson for the children. Dozier explains their instructional professional relationship was a result of invested time, trust, respect, and shared challenges and understandings.

The teachers discussed the literacy coach's approach to change. They said that if a coach introduced something and expected them to immediately change that it was not helpful. They wanted time to learn the new information and integrate it into their classrooms. They said an expectation to immediately change was not helpful to them. When I asked interviewees what literacy coaches did that made teachers feel negative about change, the teachers and principals expressed ways literacy coaches might inspire negativism toward it. Teachers, as a rule, indicated that literacy coaches who are authoritative, dictatorial, or demanding create feelings that make teachers turn away from new ideas, methods, or strategies. They also said that literacy coaches who are overzealous or overbearing do not inspire a desire to change.

In this study, the act of remaining uninvolved with the students was named 42 times as something that a literacy coach would do that could make teachers respond negatively toward change. Teachers said it was important for coaches to stay mindful of what is happening in the classroom, because when they did not, then coaches began to believe they were doing it all themselves.

Comments that teachers made indicated that self-proclaimed experts are seen as actually being limited in knowledge and in the words of one particular teacher, "faking it." They suggested that teachers who have elevated self-opinions tend to be more critical of others and are very judgmental. Coaches who promote negative feelings don't listen, feel threatened when there are alternate opinions presented, have a negative attitude, are highly critical, and do not follow through.

Teachers said that if literacy coaches used intimidation as a control or power tactic that it would invoke negative feelings. They said that literacy coaches who promoted negativity often lacked experience in teaching reading, were not reading specialists, and lacked experience managing a classroom. When literacy coaches tried to assume an administrative role, they were not seen as a positive force in the classroom culture. Many times teachers said that coaches assumed they were “doing it all” and displayed such an attitude. Teachers in this study were overwhelmingly negative about that type of attitude and behavior from a literacy coach.

Finally, teachers talked about coaches who expected sudden change. The teachers involved in this research project indicated that coaches needed to guide them through change. One teacher talked about change when she said, “Slowly growing and not trying to revamp and becoming overwhelmed all at once, but knowing that things change and that the needs of the children change each year. And being willing to go and look for extra things and go that extra mile for the kids, not trying to turn it upside down, but just to grow and look for anything that will work this year. And maybe next year those won’t, and you’ll have to go back and look for something different or look for a new idea, always growing.” That statement seemed to sum up the attitudes of most of the teachers in this study. They recognize that their work is complex, requiring continuous change, and they value coaches who guide them through change instead of forcing them into change.

Teachers and principals perceived some literacy coach behaviors to be undesirable because they impacted teachers negatively. The literacy coach who wants to make a positive impact on reading instruction should avoid the following behaviors:

1. Being a bossy and demanding type of person
2. Remaining uninvolved and somewhat distant

3. Offering negative feedback
4. Showing an all-knowing attitude
5. Exhibiting a negative attitude and countenance
6. Making forceful, definitive suggestions
7. Suggesting or setting unrealistic expectations
8. Accepting a lack of own knowledge
9. Being untrustworthy
10. Being disorganized
11. Using poor or lack of communication and listening skills
12. Owning a lack of own classroom experience
13. Being overzealous

Coaches Are Change Agents

Effective literacy coaches are change agents. In Rodgers and Rodgers' (2007) discourse on the fundamental challenge to change in education, they gave three reasons for its extreme difficulty. The first reason is cultural factors embedded in the school's operation that do not encourage or support teacher reflection and planning. For example, teachers do not use data to plan instruction or do not collaborate on a regular basis to plan intervention for student in need of help. Rogers and Rogers' second reason is professional development that does not initiate self-examination or methods to change. Traditionally, there is limited accountability and follow-up for staff development opportunities. The third reason posed by Rogers and Rogers is the fact there are very few opportunities provided for a professional team to collaborate and find ways to change. Many schools do not hold grade level team meetings or leadership team meetings to look at data and plan the appropriate instruction based on the needs of the students.

Knowledge of those major factors inspired my investigation for finding ways to help teachers who needed to change. When teachers are asked to change aspects of their teaching, the change is often difficult. It is more difficult for some teachers than others. I wanted to know what a coach did that helped teachers stay positive during the change process. Consistently, teachers involved in my research project said that it was important for the coach to form respectful relationships with them. They wanted the coach to be approachable. They wanted to feel like they could take their problems to the coach. They wanted the coach to become involved in their classroom instruction and find ways to get teachers on-board and participating.

One of the most inspirational discoveries in this study was how teachers and principals said they had made positive changes as a result of having a literacy coach on their team. All teachers said they had made positive changes as a result of having a literacy coach. They said they had become stronger and better reading teachers. The teachers included in this study appeared to be more open to new ideas, modalities of learning, and strategies for teaching students how to read. They said that after having experiences with a literacy coach they practiced new strategies and implemented new scientifically- based reading research in their classrooms more readily. Teachers said that their desire to learn increased. They shared with me that after having a literacy coach, they were able to use data more effectively to plan reading instruction. They said that they were using small groups and differentiating reading instruction based on students diagnosed needs. They stated that they are more open to change than they have ever been, and are more enthusiastic about teaching reading. Teachers said they had made the following changes by having a literacy coach:

1. They had become stronger and better reading teachers.
2. They owned an increased openness to new ideas.

3. They had gained knowledge of modalities for learning.
4. They had learned new strategies for teaching students how to read.
5. They practiced new strategies and implemented scientifically based reading research in their classrooms more readily.
6. Their desire to learn had increased.
7. Data was more meaningful and they were able to use it more effectively to plan instruction.
8. They differentiated reading instruction based on students diagnosed needs.
9. They had become more open to change than they had ever been.
10. They felt more enthusiastic about teaching reading.

In this research I found that with the assistance and guidance of a literacy coach, teachers seem more inclined to embrace and implement new programs or strategies. Bean (2004) has advised literacy coaches to stay current with the latest research because the professional development that is provided by many schools and school systems has not been valuable. She emphasized that teachers are often bombarded with ideas and are expected to embrace and implement new programs with very little training. As a result, teachers seldom adopt the new methods of instruction or improved strategies.

Recommendations for Districts

The findings in this study support the value of school district use of literacy coaches as change agents who can inspire and guide changes that need to be made. I found four positive attributes of literacy coaching that may positively support desired changes in instructional practices that may guide school districts in selection and training of literacy coaches: 1)

knowledge and experience, 2) communication and listening ability, 3) ability to form respectful relationships, 4) classroom involvement and participation.

The literacy coach's knowledge and experience is perceived as paramount to opening the door to change. Teachers and principals have voiced they have more respect and regard for a professional who is a reading specialist acting as a literacy coach. The teachers want someone to help them find effective well-researched teaching strategies to help solve students' reading problems.

Teachers said they have more respect for the literacy coach who has substantial experience as a classroom teacher. It only stands to reason that a literacy coach who has been in the classroom will have a deeper understanding of classroom experiences, higher regard for the issues and challenges that teachers face day to day, and better knowledge of classroom scheduling, organization, management, and maintenance.

Teachers interviewed during this research said they want their literacy coach to do more than sit in an office keeping data. They want the coach to share data, interpret it, and use it to increase student learning. They want the coach to help find interventions and best practices in teaching.

The findings in this research project, confirmed by the literature, suggest that a literacy coach should be a listening and communicating colleague. Literacy coaches should keep in mind that teachers have reasons for doing what they are doing. When teachers are having problems or experiencing challenging situations, they need to be comforted by the listening ears of someone who can step in to help out as a resource, a leader, and a role model.

The literacy coach should place respect at the fulcrum of the position, maintaining the perfect balance as the peer-leader. During times of change disagreements will occur. It is

important to maintain a nonthreatening, comfortable, helpful, fair, and nonjudgmental approach with the teachers.

Teachers want the literacy coach to become involved in the classroom. The literacy coach can effectively do this in several ways. She can get to know the students, help with testing, ask questions about particular students, appreciate the talents of the teachers, model lessons, help with the reading program, and remain accessible.

Recommendations for Literacy Coaching Practice

Although no generalization can be made from this qualitative study, a school district may find the following successful literacy coaching practices as valuable references during decision making while selecting literacy coaches:

1. Have a reading specialist's certification.
2. Have considerable experience as a successful classroom teacher.
3. Continue to learn and professionally develop.
4. Have a desire to share materials and knowledge.
5. Organize team meetings.
6. Plan individual meetings with teachers and principals.
7. Respect teacher opinions and search for the true source of any problems.
8. Remain focused on students' goals.
9. Stay focused on teachers' goals. Be nonjudgmental.
10. Remain willing to help in the classroom.
11. Provide encouragement.
12. Maintain a positive attitude.
13. Keep focused on both students' and teachers' goals.

14. Get to know the students.
15. Ask questions about particular students.
16. Acknowledge and appreciate teachers' strengths and talents.
17. Model lessons for the teachers.
18. Remain accessible to help teachers as needed.
19. Stay organized.
20. Always maintain follow-through with action plans.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study emerged from my desire to become a more effective literacy coach. During my tenure as a literacy coach I realized teachers' and principals' perceptions of the literacy coaching role impacted the level of my success. I wanted to know which coaching qualities they valued the most and which qualities they valued the least. I wanted to know why they felt the way they did. I felt that knowing this would enable me to become a more valuable resource for the classroom teachers and principals.

Additional research on literacy coaching in a variety of locations and situations would provide greater guidance for school districts in adopting literacy coaching as an improvement strategy and in implementing successful coaching. The schools where the research was conducted were Reading First Schools in southwest Virginia. Further research could be conducted in schools that are not Reading First Schools in order to see how the teachers perceived the coaching role and which qualities they perceived as helpful. Another aspect of research could be in school systems that are presently employing the Response to Intervention Instructional Model. One of the suggested aspects of that model is to use academic coaching. Some school systems are using the academic coach, while others are not due to lack of financial

support. It could be very helpful to study the attitudes and perceptions of the classroom teachers who have access to academic coaching and compare the findings to the attitudes and perceptions of those teachers who do not have access to coaching.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Letter to Prospective Participants

Teachers' and Principals' Perspectives of Literacy Coaching in an Elementary School

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide if you would participate in the study of literacy coaching. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at anytime.

The purpose of the research project is to study the components of literacy coaching and relate how it affects the teachers in your school. The primary research aim is to discover teachers' perceptions of literacy coaching in relation to the practice of teaching reading.

The data for the study will be collected at a scheduled audio-taped interview session. Participants will maintain anonymity and no identity will be disclosed at any point during the study. Your name will not be associated with research findings in any way.

There are no known risks associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information about literacy coaching that can enhance reading instruction and the opportunity to participate in qualitative research. If submitted for publication, a byline will indicate the general participation of teachers at Rhea Valley Elementary, Meadowview Elementary, and Highland View Elementary Schools in southwest Virginia.

With the full knowledge of the purpose and intent of this study, please sign the consent. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep.

Signature of Participant

Date

Barbara J. Hull, ETSU Graduate School, Principal Investigator

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

Teachers' and Principals' Perspectives of Literacy Coaching in an Elementary School

Date:

Time:

Place:

Interviewee:

Role:

Interviewer:

Questions:

1. How do you work with the literacy coach?
2. How often do you work with the literacy coach?
3. What reading coach qualities do you believe are valuable?
4. Why?
5. What reading coach qualities do you believe are helpful?
6. Why?
7. What reading coach qualities are not valuable?
8. Why?
9. What reading coach qualities do you believe are not helpful?
10. Why?
11. What does the literacy coach do that causes you respond positively to changes?
12. What does the literacy coach do that makes you respond negatively to changes?
13. How do you believe you have changed or are changing as a result of working with a literacy coach?
14. Suppose you are the literacy coach. What things should you do to become valued by teachers and principal?

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