**COACHING CONVERSATIONS: THE NATURE OF TALK BETWEEN A LITERACY COACH AND THREE TEACHERS**

by

Elizabeth G. Belcastro

Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education, Fairmont State College, 1983

Master of Arts in Specific Learning Disabilities, West Virginia University, 1989

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This dissertation was presented

by

Elizabeth G. Belcastro

It was defended on

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and approved by

Dr. Naomi Zigmond, Professor, Department of Instruction and Learning

Dr. Rebecca Hamilton, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Instruction and Learning

Dr. Charlene Trovato, Associate Professor, Department of Administrative and Policy Studies

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Rita M. Bean, Emeritus Professor, Department of Instruction and

Learning

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**LITERACY COACH AND THREE TEACHERS**

Elizabeth G. Belcastro, Ed.D.

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This descriptive case study examined the nature of talk a literacy coach used during coaching conversations to guide collaborative inquiry to support teachers' needs. The study provided a rich description of the type of talk used in the coach's conversations with three kindergarten classroom teachers by analyzing the content of conversation, levels of support provided by the coach to scaffold teacher understanding about instructional practices, and the types of questions posed by the coach to prompt teacher thinking about instructional practices.

Analysis of data revealed that the literacy coach was intentional in the approaches she used to differentiate her conversations with teachers. Moreover, the coach exemplified the characteristics that enabled her to hold effective coaching conversations: content knowledge, effective listening abilities, and skillful questioning techniques. Specific factors that influenced the nature of the coaching conversations included the relationships between the coach and teachers, teachers' experiences and their knowledge of literacy instruction and assessment, and the teachers' willingness to be coached. Analysis showed that both the content and scaffolding support differed in the coaching conversations between the literacy coach and teachers. Furthermore, student data provided the basis for the job-embedded professional development or coaching. It served as the impetus for the conversations held between the coach and teachers.

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**PREFACE**

It is with a grateful heart that I acknowledge the following people who have provided me with an endless bounty of support and encouragement throughout my dissertation process. I thank each and every one of you for being part this incredible journey and helping me make a dream come true.

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## DEDICATION

       I dedicate my dissertation to my sons, Jordan and Jacob. You were my inspiration throughout the entire journey. I pray that you will always work hard to reach the goals you set in your lives.

# 1.0    INTRODUCTION

Coaching has become a popular model in schools across the country as a means of providing professional development for teachers (Poglinco & Bach, 2004). By working with classroom teachers at the individual school level, coaches help teachers learn more about reading and reading instruction and thus improve reading instruction and student achievement (International Reading Association, 2004). The rapid increase in the number of literacy coaches in schools is one of the responses to the goal to improve reading achievement in the United States. The Reading Excellence Act of 1998 and the Reading First provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have allotted substantial federal dollars for professional development targeting improved reading instruction. Furthermore, many state education agencies have chosen to fund literacy coaches as one component of their initiative in which coaches serve an important role in the professional development of teachers.

The impact and effectiveness of traditional professional development venues has been questioned increasingly by educators and researchers (Fullan, 1995; Hubermann, 1995; Wilson & Berne, 1999). The "one-shot" or "sit and get" (Hughes, Cash, Ahwee, & Klinger, 2002, p. 10) workshops in which teachers were given a large amount of information within a few days with no follow-up could not be used if real change was to happen and were not sufficient to sustain teacher change. However, change is difficult. It requires teachers to transform habits and create new routines. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1996), teachers face what is referred to as a

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"pressing immediacy." "There are always things to be done, decisions to be made, children's needs to be met, not just every day, but every minute, every second" (p. 65). If teachers are emotionally fatigued by the pressing immediacy of their professional life and overwhelmed by innovation overload, then it is no surprise when they fail to implement practices enforced during the traditional "sit and get" workshops. Yet, teachers need to learn and implement better instructional practices if schools are going to close student achievement gaps. Therefore, more effective means of producing lasting changes in teacher practice have to be used. Studies have shown that incorporating relevant theory, demonstrating new skills, and having multiple opportunities for teachers to practice and receive feedback around a new skill help sustain teacher change (Hughes, Cash, Ahwee, & Klinger, 2002).

Coaching appears to be a promising approach to professional development because it strives to blend what is known about professional development with school-based and school-specific needs regarding both content and climate. A good deal of the work done by literacy coaches requires face-to-face interactions with teachers, much of which is done in conversations with individuals.

Coaching conversations with teachers provide a platform to reflect and analyze teaching practices that are seen as effective and suggest alternatives to those considered ineffective. More importantly, decisions about instruction can be made in a supportive climate through a collaborative inquiry process between the teacher and literacy coach. By supporting and fostering collaborative conversations about teaching, the coach has the opportunity to provoke not only deep reflection but also action regarding teaching, which is not a practice of traditional professional development (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Toll, 2005).

Collaboration is the lifeblood of instructional coaching. Through collaborative inquiry, the coach makes it possible for teachers to engage in reflective dialogue about teaching (Knight, 2007). Coaches must have meaningful conversations with teachers about teaching and learning in order to improve instructional practices.

## 1.1    PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This investigation focused primarily on the *nature of talk* used during coaching conversations. The purpose of this study was to describe how a literacy coach uses collaborative inquiry during coaching conversations to scaffold teacher thinking about instructional practices.

## 1.2    THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This study is grounded in theory supported by Vygotsky's (1978) work in Social Constructivism. Vygotsky, one of the earliest and most famous theorists of the social learning perspective, developed a theory that children learn as a result of social interactions with others. Joint social activities provide a forum for participants to contribute to the solution of emergent problems and difficulties according to their current ability; at the same time, participants provide support and assistance for each other in the interests of achieving the goals of the activity as they emerge in the situation (Wells, 2000). Lave and Wenger (1991) insist that learning is not a separate and independent activity but an integral aspect of participation in any "community of practice."

An important concept underlying Vygotsky's Social Constructivism is the zone of proximal development. *The zone of proximal development* (ZPD) refers to the ideal level of task difficulty to facilitate learning—the level at which a child can be successful with appropriate support. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as *"the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development level as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"* (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86, author's italics).

One salient feature of ZPD pertinent to this study is the central role of language in the interpretation of joint activity. "Language provides a conventional means for construing and reflecting on present, past, and potential future actions, on the persons and artifacts involved, and on the relationships between them" (Wells, 2000, p. 57). It allows people to build knowledge together and provide the context for learning.

Another important concept essential to Vygotsky's Social Constructivism is scaffolding. *Scaffolding* refers to the assistance that adults and more competent peers provide during learning episodes. This support can take the form of "clues, reminders, encouragement, breaking down the problem into steps, providing an example, or anything else that allows the student to grow in independence as a learner" (Slavin, 1997, p. 48). Thus, one can learn during experiences within the ZPD as a result of others' scaffolding.

A related concept that is useful to understand scaffolding is the *gradual release of responsibility* model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). This model depicts situations in which an adult or more competent other takes the majority of a situation's responsibility for completing a task successfully; situations in which the learner assumes increasing responsibility for the task; and finally situations in which the learner takes all or nearly all the responsibility for the task. At

any given point, the more competent other should scaffold the learner enough so that he/she does not give up on the task, but not scaffold so much that there is not an opportunity for the learner to work actively on the problem independently.

Vygotsky's theory has several implications for adult learning and literacy coaching. It is especially helpful in providing guidance to coaches who want to know whether they are having an impact on instructional practices and teacher thinking (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). Additionally, it focuses on the power of language to support and extend thinking through dialogue, a form of collaborative meaning-making in which both individual and collective understandings are enhanced (Wells, 2000).

## 1.3    SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

An essential ingredient of effective coaching is the ability to have meaningful conversations with teachers that ultimately will impact instruction to better suit student learning. This study provided a rich description of the nature of talk that a literacy coach used in coaching conversations with multiple teachers by analyzing the levels of support provided by the coach to scaffold teacher learning and understanding about instructional practices, and examining the types of questions posed by the coach to prompt teacher thinking about instructional practices. Literacy coaches, reading specialists, and school administrators will find this study helpful in understanding the complexities of coaching conversations. As these complexities become better understood, the role of the literacy coach may become more evident.

## 1.4    RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following research questions:

1) What was the content of the coaching conversation? That is, what topics or goals seemed to be the primary foci of coaching?

2) In what ways did the literacy coach facilitate the co-construction of meaning during the coaching conversation?

   a. What scaffolding support did the literacy coach provide to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking?

   b. What types of questions were asked by the literacy coach to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking?

3) In what ways did the literacy coach alter engagement with the different teachers during the coaching conversations and what teacher characteristics affected her engagement?

4) What were the teachers' perceptions of each coaching conversation and its effect on their classroom practice?

5) What were the literacy coach's perceptions of each coaching conversation and its effect on teacher's classroom practices?

## 1.5    DELIMITATIONS

This study aimed to provide a rich description of the nature of talk between a literacy coach and three teachers during coaching conversations. It is not possible to generalize the results of this study because it is based on conversations of one literacy coach. This study did not attempt to examine the effects of teacher change or student achievement.

## 1.6    DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Coaching**

For this study, coaching is defined as a professional development model that provides on-site support and guidance from coaches who work collaboratively with teachers to set professional goals for developing, extending, and improving research-based instructional skills, strategies, and practices (Learning Point Associates, 2004).

**Co-construct meaning**

Co-constructing meaning is the process of collaboratively thinking through ideas by inviting one another into a dialogue in which the participants puzzle through the ideas together (Berne & Clark, 2006).

**Literacy Coach**

A literacy coach works with classroom teachers at the individual school level in order to learn more about reading and reading instruction and thus improve reading instruction and student achievement (International Reading Association, 2004).

**Pedagogical Practices**

Pedagogical practices are the acts of teaching that represent an understanding of subject matter deeply and flexibly in order to help students create useful cognitive maps, relate ideas to another, address misconceptions, and develop broader understandings of new information (Shulman, 1992).

**Professional Development**

Professional development consists of those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students (Guskey, 2000).

**Reading First**

This federal funded program mandated under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 provides assistance to states and districts to establish scientifically-based reading programs for students enrolled in kindergarten through grade three. Funds support increased professional development to ensure that all teachers have the skills they need to teach these programs effectively. The program also supports the use of screening and diagnostic tools and classroom-based instructional reading assessments to measure how well students are reading and to monitor their progress (Guide to U.S. Department of Education Programs, 2007).

**Reading First Coach**

A Reading First Coach helps teaches recognize their instructional knowledge and strengths, and supports them in their learning and application of new knowledge and instructional practices (Learning Point Associates, 2004).

**Scaffold**

A process that enables a learner or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal that would be beyond his/her unassisted efforts (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

**Social Constructivist Theory**

A theory of learning credited to Vygotsky (1978). According to this theory, knowledge is constructed through social interactions, especially with a more knowledgeable person. The learner and teacher both plan active roles in the transmission of new information. The knowledgeable other gradually releases responsibility for the desired action/strategy to the learner, as control over the behavior is gained.

**Teacher Thinking**

Research suggests that implementing new teaching strategies and curricula requires teachers to *think* about instructional issues in new ways (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Fullan (1982) further argues that a thorough understanding is necessary for both the proper use of new teaching skills and for long-term integration of new skills into one's active repertoire.

**Zone of Proximal Development**

The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development level as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

# 2.0    REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Research informs us that the nature of literacy coaching is complex and often undefined. However, current literature has documented studies and initiatives for which literacy coaching has been a positive change agent in the professional development of teachers (Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Toll, 2005; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). While coaching efforts have not demonstrated to be associated with student achievement, coaching does cause change in increasing the instructional capacity of schools and teachers; a known prerequisite for increasing learning (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). This review of the literature will assist in acknowledging and understanding the promises and practices of literacy coaching. In the following sections, several essential aspects of literacy coaching are addressed: 1) Why literacy coaching; 2) The role of a literacy coach; 3) Characteristics of effective literacy coaches; 4) The nature of coaching conversations; 5) Attitudes toward coaching; and 6) Coaching for change in teacher practices.

## 2.1    WHY LITERACY COACHING?

Literacy coaching currently is one of the responses to the need to improve reading achievement and reduce the achievement gap that exists in the United States. The Reading Excellence Act of 1998 and the Reading First provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have allotted large amounts of federal dollars for professional development targeting

reading instruction. Several state education agencies have chosen to fund reading coaches as one component of their initiative. Also, several states, such as Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Alabama, and South Carolina, have made large appropriations for reading improvement, including funding for literacy coaches. The basic assumption is the expertise of reading professionals available to work with classroom teachers at the individual school level would allow these teachers to learn more about reading and reading instruction, and thus improve reading instruction and student achievement (International Reading Association, 2004).

Literacy coaching is evident across the United States at all levels of schooling (Toll, 2005). For example, coaching has been an integral aspect of Reading First, a part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Reading First, which is "dedicated to helping states and local school districts establish high-quality, comprehensive reading instruction for all children in kindergarten through third grade" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 1), requires extensive professional development, with coaching as a major component, to prepare K–3 teachers to teach the essential components of reading instruction.

Reading First provides funding for professional development at the state, district, and school levels. According to *Guidance for the Reading First Program* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), "professional development must be an ongoing, continuous activity, and not consist of "one-shot" workshops or lectures. Delivery mechanisms should include the use of coaches and other teachers of reading who provide feedback as instructional strategies are put into practice" (p. 26). A Reading First coach can provide ongoing follow-up to other professional development, a safe environment for teachers to experiment with new techniques, and an opportunity for honest feedback and collaboration with peers.

Coaching also can be found at the secondary level of schooling. Although literacy coaching at this level is just starting to gain recognition, the need for such coaches is on the rise. The Alliance for Excellent Education (Sturtevant, 2003) estimates that, to meet the needs of the more than nine million fourth through twelfth graders who read at "below basic" levels, approximately 10,000 literacy coaches will be needed, assuming a ratio of one coach to every twenty classroom teachers. The Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI) is a distinctive high school reform focused on instructional coaching and mentoring developed to improve student achievement. Formed in 2005 as a partnership between The Annenberg Foundation and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, PAHSCI represents a $31 million, three-year investment in high school instructional coaching and mentoring (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

The rationale behind having a literacy coach is informed by and rooted in research on creating an effective professional development environment, one characterized by providing ongoing support to teachers and creating a community of practice with permanent structures focused on instruction and curriculum (Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, & Supovitz, 2003). Early research on literacy coaching reinforces the notion that coaching is a promising strategy for instructional improvement. For instance, Joyce and Showers (1996) found that teachers involved in a coaching relationship practiced new skills and strategies more frequently and applied them more appropriately than did teachers who worked alone. Teachers learned from one another. They gained insight into their own teaching by observing one another and by being observed (Miller, Harris, & Watanabe, 1991; Sparks, 1986).

Bay, Bryan, and O'Connor (1994) conducted a study on the implementation of a pre-referral model designed to assist general educators in their work with urban children. This pre-

referral model was comprised of three components: information sharing sessions, peer exchange sessions, and peer coaching teams. The overall goal of the model was to create a structure by which teachers could assist and support one another in making decisions about the dilemmas posed by at-risk students in their classes who were experiencing learning difficulties. The pre-referral model relied heavily on peer collaboration, which allowed teachers to rethink classroom problems, generate solutions, and evaluate effectiveness of those solutions.

The participants in the Bay et al. (1994) study included 10 teachers who were involved with the model and 10 teachers who did not participate but served as a comparison group. Overall, the study's findings were positive in several areas. Interview data revealed that the participating teachers indicated that the model helped them learn new strategies and techniques that better equipped them to work with at-risk children experiencing learning difficulties in their classrooms, resulting in a decrease of referral rates for special education services. The participants valued having a teacher partner, or peer coach, who gave them perspectives on their teaching. Finally, the pre-referral model created an environment of collegiality and support. This climate of mutual assistance gave teachers ample opportunities to share information about their successes and failures, and to engage in self-evaluative behavior with the support of colleagues.

Ross (1992) examined the mediating effects of teacher efficacy on the relationships between coaching and student outcomes in a small sample of seventh and eighth grade history teachers, hypothesizing that: (1) student achievement would be higher in classrooms of teachers who interacted more extensively with their coaches; (2) student achievement would be higher in the classrooms of teachers with higher teacher efficacy beliefs; and (3) coach and teacher efficacy would interact such that the high-efficacy teachers would benefit more from coaching than low-efficacy teachers.

The task of the teachers was to implement a new history curriculum. In addition to receiving the curriculum materials and workshops over the course of the academic year, teachers were provided coaching from "experts" in the history program. This model of coaching was designed to provide teachers feedback about their existing practice and assist in lesson planning.

Overall, Ross found that student achievement was higher in the classrooms of teachers who interacted more extensively with their coaches. Even though it may be possible to infer that coaching practices contributed to higher achievement, it also is possible to consider that teachers who were enjoying greater success in the classroom might have sought out their coaches or that coaches might have responded more enthusiastically to the teachers' success.

Another finding of this study was that student achievement was higher in the classrooms of teachers with high teacher efficacy beliefs. Personal teaching efficacy (the expectation that teachers will be able to bring about student achievement) rather than general teaching efficacy (the belief that teachers' abilities to bring about change is limited by factors beyond their control) was salient. It should be noted that this study is one of few attempting to examine the effect of teacher efficacy on student achievement, and the first to do so in social studies at the time it was conducted.

Ross's study found no interaction between coaching, teacher efficacy, and achievement. Even though there might have been an ordinal interaction, one could not be sure given the small sample size. While Ross acknowledged the limitations of his study, he recognized coaching as a powerful strategy for school improvement, and the need for further research in this domain.

## 2.2 THE ROLES OF A LITERACY COACH

The roles of coaches, the support they receive, and the rapport they are able to gain with teachers and administration varies dramatically. As the notion of literacy coaches has increased in popularity, school districts are hiring for a job that often has not existed before in a school. In the best of situations, a carefully considered job description has been conveyed, understood, and accepted by administrators, teachers, and coaches in a district. However, often this is not the case (Buly, Coskie, Robinson, & Egawa, 2006).

Unfortunately, those who are given the role of literacy coach often receive insufficient support or training to perform it adequately. Many coaches are expected to learn how to coach their colleagues even while they are performing this new and unfamiliar role. This challenging situation is complicated by the fact that very few administrators understand the demands of the role of the literacy coach (Poglinco & Bach, 2004). Therefore, the first responsibility of a literacy coach is to build a relationship with the school's principal (Casey, 2006).

For coaching to succeed as a vehicle for professional development, there is a strong need for principals to enter into a partnership with coaches in their schools. Literacy coaching is about improving literacy learning for all students, and the leadership of principals really matters in school improvement (Poglinco and Bach, 2004). Michael Fullan states, "I know of no improving school that doesn't have a principal who is good at leading improvement" (Fullan, 2000, p. 141).

Carroll (2007) conducted a study in an attempt to gain an understanding of the problems and possibilities of coaching in Pennsylvania's Reading First schools. She interviewed 30 Reading First coaches representing 12 school districts across Pennsylvania. The interview consisted of questions about their coaching responsibilities, successes they have achieved,

barriers they perceived as keeping them from doing their job effectively, and the culture in their schools.

As part of the interview process, coaches were asked to describe the work they conducted with the school principal and to rate the principal using a scale of 1–10 (with 10 being very supportive) on how supportive he/she was in assisting the coach carry out job responsibilities. Interestingly, 57% of the 30 respondents gave their principal a score of 10. But, 10% of the respondents rated their principal with a score of 5 or lower.

Carroll indicated that the majority of work coaches did with their principals revolved around a variety of meetings. Meetings between the coach and principal were used to discuss school-wide data, student achievement, Reading First mandates, planning, and discussions about what teachers were doing within their classrooms. There was variation among the coaches in the frequency of meetings with the principals. For example, one coach responded that she met with her principal two to three times a day. However, the majority of coaches had formal meeting times built into their schedules each week, with the flexibility to meet with the principals when the need arose.

Overall, a vast majority of coaches described their principals as being supportive of Reading First initiatives and the work of the coach. The principals valued the importance of professional development for coaches and assisted in finding the funds to buy materials teachers needed to successfully implement a research-based reading curriculum. "Open" was a term often used by coaches who gave their principals favorable ratings. This implied that principals were available to the coaches and took time to listen to their needs. One coach mentioned that her principal always had an open-door policy and was willing to discuss anything at any time.

Coaches who rated their principals with less favorable numbers appeared to have unpleasant experiences with their principals on one or two occasions; they knew that the relationship could be better. One coach remarked that that the principal could be more helpful in how they (the principal and coach) support teachers together. A few other coaches responded that their principals did not have a clear understanding of the coaching role and were difficult to work with on any terms.

As mentioned previously, the role of a coach is complex and the support he/she receives from administration varies dramatically. However, Casey (2006) argues that whether or not the principal is open to learning with and from the coach, it is the coach's responsibility to approach the work as if the principal will, over time, be influenced by the work. She further claims that building a relationship with the principal helps the coach understand, and perhaps influence, the school culture in which the teachers work.

Most of what is known about literacy coaches has come from informal literature and testimony from experts. A plethora of articles, books, and Internet sites have been dedicated to the topic. However, little information is found in peer-reviewed research publications to inform us about specific aspects of coaching (Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutler, 2003). For example, in an extensive review of the research on literacy coaching (between the years 1992–2008) conducted by Bean, Belcastro, Hathaway, Risko, Rosemary, and Roskos (2008), only 27 articles met the criteria set forth by the researchers as being high quality studies.

Because coaching has expanded so quickly, federal, state, and local policymakers must decide whether to use literacy coaches despite scant data and information about what coaches do and whether coaching has an impact on student learning. Obviously, there is a need for additional research in this area.

Evaluation reports on literacy coaching initiatives, however, are available and often assist in capturing a clearer picture of what coaches actually do once they are in a coaching position. A major report prepared by Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, and Autio (2007) for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) examined the role of literacy coaches from 203 Reading First schools in five Western states (Alaska, Arizona, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming). Surveys were administered to K–3 teachers and literacy coaches at all 203 schools. Between 75–88% of teachers and more than 90% of coaches responded. One of the research questions answered in this study addressed how the coaches performed their jobs.

Deussen et al. (2007) found that coaches on average spent only 26% of their workweek actually coaching K-3 teachers; that is observing, providing feedback, modeling lessons, or training groups of teachers. This amount of time fell significantly short of state guidelines that expected coaches to spend 60–80% of their time working directly with teachers. Data and assessment-related work consumed the same proportion (25%) of the workweek as direct coaching activities.

Planning for and attending meetings took up 14% of the coaches' time and was closely followed by dealing with paperwork tasks (11%). The remainder of the time was spent on planning or delivering interventions (10%).

This study demonstrated that coaches held multiple roles and a varied array of responsibilities. Moreover, it showed that coaches spent almost as much time on data-related activities as they did working with teachers. But a salient finding across the responses was the inconsistency of duties performed by the coaches collectively. For example, some coaches reported they spent no time on assessment-related work, while others spent as much as 50% on

assessment and data. Obviously, the variance in the data makes it difficult to generalize the duties typically performed by coaches.

To understand the duties of coaches beyond the number of hours per week they spent on various tasks, Deussen et al. (2007) conducted a cluster analysis to create five distinct categories of coaches. This qualitative approach to analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of the varied roles performed by the coaches. Each of the categories is discussed below.

1) *Data-oriented coaches.* This category included 15% of coaches in the study. These coaches focused on data and assessment tasks; 45% of their workweek was spent on such responsibilities, including administration and coordination of assessment, data management, and data interpretation.

2) *Student-oriented coaches.* This group comprised 24% of coaches. They spent 12% of their time providing interventions directly to students. Data showed that the focus of these coaches, even when in the classroom, was on the activities of students rather than teachers.

3) *Managerial coaches.* The managerial category comprised 29% of coaches. These coaches spent 35% of their time on paperwork and attending meetings. They viewed their role as organizational and saw themselves as a "resource" to teachers.

4) *Teacher-oriented coaches (group).* This category included 21% of coaches; they worked with teachers mainly in group settings. They devoted vast amounts of time interpreting and sharing assessment results with teachers to help them plan instruction. While they spent less time coaching individual teachers than groups, they spent 41% of their workweek in direct coaching activities.

5) *Teacher-oriented coaches (individual).* Only 11% of coaches were categorized as working mainly with individual teachers. However, these coaches spent nearly half (48%) of their workweek delivering one-on-one coaching to individual teachers.

This study demonstrated how coaches allocated their time across multiple tasks to fulfill the roles and expectations of their jobs. The study demonstrated that the expectations of coaching activities often are quite different from how coaches actually spend their time.

To illustrate this point further, the International Reading Association (2005) surveyed literacy coaches across the country to determine the duties and responsibilities required of their job. The survey was conducted on Zoomerang, using a list of literacy coaches and other reading professionals obtained from Market Data Retrieval. The survey went to 1,053 literacy coaches and 140 completed surveys were returned for a 13.2% return rate. Of the respondents, 86% reported working at the primary level, 41% at the intermediate level, and 17% at middle school level. Only 5% of coaches worked at preschool levels and 7% worked at high school levels.

One consistent finding of this study was that literacy coaches worked primarily with teachers: 67% said they focused solely on teachers; 25% worked with both teachers and students; 6% focused on implementing a core reading program; and fewer than 2% focused solely on students.

Coaches spent approximately five hours per week conducting assessment and instructional planning activities, and two to four hours per week planning and conducting professional development sessions. They also reported spending approximately one hour or less a week in developing curriculum, facilitating teacher study or inquiry groups, and conducting professional development for administrators.

When asked about working with individual teachers, survey respondents indicated that they spent two to four hours per week observing, demonstrating, and discussing lessons, and less than one hour per week planning lessons with teachers. They also indicated that they spent nearly two hours documenting activities around observation and lesson demonstrations and two to four hours talking to teachers about student assessment and achievement data.

As to evaluation activities, 78% reported spending no time or less than one hour per week evaluating teachers; more time was spent evaluating the reading program and the students. Coaches reported that they spent two to four hours a week administering assessments to students and less than one hour or no time teaching children as a whole class or in small groups.

The results of this International Reading Association (2005) study and the Deussen et al. (2007) study provide evidence supporting the notion that the expectations of the roles and duties of literacy coaches are not consistent among those serving in coaching positions. The data also suggest that coaching ranges from informal "low risk" activities such as conversing with colleagues to more formal "high risk" activities as holding team meetings, modeling lessons, and visiting classrooms. Bean (2004) distinguishes between these various levels of activities (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1  Coaching activities (Levels of intensity).**

| **Level 1 (informal; helps to develop relationships)** |
|---|
| o Conversations with colleagues (identifying issues or needs, setting goals, problem solving)<br>o Developing and providing materials for/with colleagues<br>o Developing curriculum with colleagues<br>o Participating in professional development activities with colleagues (conferences, workshops)<br>o Leading or participating in study groups<br>o Assisting with assessing students<br>o Instructing students about their strengths and needs |
| **Level 2 (more formal, somewhat more intense; begins to look at areas of need and focus)** |
| o Co-planning lessons<br>o Holding team meetings (grade level, reading teachers)<br>o Analyzing student work<br>o Interpreting assessment data (helping teachers use results for instructional decision making)<br>o Individual discussions with colleagues about teaching and learning<br>o Making professional development presentations for teachers |
| **Level 3 (formal, more intense; may create some anxiety on part of teacher or coach)** |
| o Modeling and discussing lessons<br>o Co-teaching lessons<br>o Visiting classrooms and providing feedback to teachers<br>o Analyzing videotape lessons of teachers<br>o Doing lesson study with teachers |

Although literacy coaches engage in a full range of activities, such as those described above, it is the in-class, one-on-one coaching that distinguishes the role of the reading coach (International Reading Association, 2004). At the classroom level, coaches help teachers transfer what they learn about new practices to their classroom. Teachers are encouraged to try the strategies they are learning in district-provided professional development sessions. The coach

serves as a safety net if the teacher encounters difficulties, by offering suggestions to improve implementation of the new approaches.

As literacy coaches move into the classroom, an important aspect of coaching is being able to separate coaching from supervising. At times, coaching duties appear similar to administrative duties. Coaches need to maintain teachers' trust while having good communication with the principal (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Toll, 2005). Coaches who slip into supervisory roles usually are making a big—often serious—mistake (Toll, 2005) because that trust may be jeopardized if the teacher believes the coach is a supervisor (Costa & Garmston, 2002). "The coaching relationship must be collegial and supportive, not evaluative" (Casey, 2006, p. 8). Teachers should view the coach as a resource, someone who has ideas as well as the time to reflect and to discuss those ideas with teachers.

Coaches can help teachers develop leadership skills with which they can support the work of their colleagues. For example, coaches in Boston, Massachusetts, use the Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) model to encourage teachers to become lab-site leaders. Lab sites provide opportunities for teachers to learn in collaboration with one another and with the coach. The CCL model includes a coaching cycle that begins with a pre-conference in which the coach reviews the focus of the demonstration teaching that is scheduled to take place in the lab site. The lab-site group moves to a host classroom where the coach or a teacher demonstrates an instructional strategy. At the lab site, not only the coach is responsible for demonstration lessons, but teachers also take on the role of demonstrating lessons in front of their colleagues. As teachers observe the coach and/or other teachers demonstrating strategies, they have to attend to what they see in light of the strategies learned from their own teaching and their professional reading.

After the demonstration, the teachers, the principal, and the coach discuss the lesson and debrief. Teachers meet in inquiry groups to discuss the professional literature linked to the cycle's course of study and demonstration. All teachers are expected to try the demonstrations in their own classrooms. The final piece of the cycle is the one-on-one coaching with teachers. The coach schedules time to support the teachers individually as they implement new strategies within their own classrooms.

When teachers take on the role of lab-site leader, they open their classrooms for observations by other teachers. These types of observations allow new teachers to observe someone with more experience, as well as helping the lab-site teacher gain feedback on practices s/he is trying to implement.


## 2.3    THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LITERACY COACHES


A reading coach supports teachers in their daily work. Because the primary role of literacy coaches is to provide support to classroom teachers for reading instruction, it is essential that they have a greater level of reading expertise than the teachers they are coaching (Dole, 2004). A position statement from the International Reading Association (May, 2004) indicates that one of the essential requirements for a literacy coach is that s/he have in-depth knowledge of reading processes, acquisitions, assessments, and instruction. Literacy coaches cannot be expected to help classroom teachers improve reading instruction and student achievement if they lack knowledge of the range of effective instructional methods, materials, and practices that can be employed at the levels they coach. Dole (2004) also emphasizes that effective coaches can identify critically important skills and strategies that students need to learn, and they know

different methods of instruction to teach those skills. Likewise, coaches must have the ability to observe what is going on in the classroom in such depth that they can share that knowledge with teachers and make useful suggestions (Bean, 2004).

It is essential that literacy coaches be excellent classroom teachers themselves (Dole, 2004; Bean, 2004; International Reading Association, 2004). Their teaching experiences should include work at the same grade levels of the teachers they coach. They need to be able to "walk the talk" in order to be credible and connect with teachers. In other words, they must have been successful with students themselves. Effective coaches have tried the strategies they recommend and are able to pinpoint the problems that might occur and the means to resolve them. Having this type of knowledge and expertise gives coaches credibility with teachers.

Effective literacy coaches are successful teachers and communicators with adults. The primary responsibility of coaches is to work with teachers in order to increase teachers' knowledge and understanding of reading; to help them learn more about and use evidence-based instructional practices, and to increase opportunities for teachers to talk with their peers as a means of sharing what they are doing (Bean, 2004).

Toll (2005) points out that much of the work done by literacy coaches is verbal, and accomplished through conversations. Effective literacy coaches develop the communication skills that minimize the chances that their words will be misunderstood or misinterpreted and that maximize trust and communication between themselves and those with whom they work. Moreover, listening is at the heart of all literacy coaching. Coaches need to be empathetic listeners. When coaches listen more and talk less, they let teachers know they value their thoughts and opinions. Relationships are built as people talk about their ideas and experiences, and realize that those listening understand "where they are coming from," which leads to mutual

trust and respect for one another. Bean and DeFord (2007) argue that listening allows the coach to explore the myriad of experiences, perspectives, and talents that each teacher brings to the community that the coach and teacher are building together.

Effective coaches are reflective coaches. Coaches must think continually about their interactions with teachers. As they conduct model lessons and demonstrations, they must be open and honest about what mistakes might have occurred and be willing to admit them. They think carefully about their lessons and pinpoint the good as well as the bad. In this way, coaches build trust and honesty with their teachers. Bean (2004) suggests that it would be beneficial for coaches to seek feedback from the teachers with whom they work. Even though this may appear threatening, the results may be surprising; positive or negative results help shape the direction in which the coach may want to go.

Coaches also need to be able to plan and organize "on the run." They must have flexibility in their thinking and must be able to assess a teaching and learning situation automatically and make suggestions quickly to keep pace with teachers' fast-paced days. No day is ordinary in the life of a coach. Each day presents a new set of challenges and problems; therefore, a coach needs to be prepared for the unexpected. Likewise, a coach must maintain a sense of humor. Dole (2004) notes that coaches with a sense of humor can accept things that inevitably go awry, appreciate and enjoy the teachers and students in their school, and marvel at the growth and progress made by everyone, including themselves.

## 2.4     THE NATURE OF COACHING CONVERSATIONS


Coaching conversations with teachers provide a platform to reflect and analyze teaching practices that are seen as effective and suggest alternatives to those considered ineffective. More importantly, these distinctions can be made in a supportive climate through a collaborative inquiry process between the teacher and literacy coach. By supporting and fostering collaborative conversations about teaching, the coach has the opportunity to provoke not only deep reflection but also action regarding teaching, not a practice of traditional professional development (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Toll, 2005).

Gibson (2006) investigated the practice of an expert literacy coach as she provided lesson observation and feedback to an experienced kindergarten teacher. Three cycles of data collection were conducted including observation and audio recording of coaching sessions. A qualitative verbal analysis of each of the coaching session transcripts was conducted to determine the nature of the conversations between the literacy coach and one kindergarten teacher, following observation of a guided reading lesson.

Findings gleaned from Gibson's study included the recognition that literacy coaches must be able to implement coaching sessions with high amounts of teacher engagement if they are to be effective. She found that effective coaching sessions included specific statements from both the coach and the teacher that replayed both the teacher's actions and her students' responses and resulted in an analysis and evaluation of teaching moves. Gibson concluded that coaches valued the formal coaching sessions for the opportunities they provided to engage in explicit conversations with individual teachers regarding teaching behavior.

Strong and Baron (2004) explored how mentor teachers make pedagogical suggestions to beginning teachers during mentoring conversations and how beginning teachers respond. They

analyzed 64 conversations between 16 veteran teacher mentors and novice teachers. Data sources included audiotaped conversations that occurred before and after a novice teacher's lesson that the mentor observed formally. The conversations were analyzed for all instances of direct or indirect pedagogical suggestions offered by the mentors, and how the novice teachers responded.

The findings of Strong and Baron's (2004) study indicated that of 206 identified suggestions, only 5% were considered direct and the rest indirect. Also, 38% of the indirect suggestions were embedded within an expression of possibility or conditionality (i.e., perhaps, maybe, might, wonder, etc.). For example, one mentor commented to the novice teacher, "What I was thinking was maybe if you had the vocabulary words up there it would help" (Strong & Baron, 2004, p. 51). Of the mentors' suggestions, 33% were posed in the form of a question, while 15% were suggestions presented as a recommended idea that had been seen elsewhere, read, or heard about.

The researchers found that novice teachers accepted their mentors' suggestions four times more often than they rejected them; however, one-third of the time the novices' responses, whether accepting or rejecting a direct or indirect suggestion, included elaborations and expansions of their own alternative ideas. Overall, it was found that the mentors generally avoided giving direct suggestions to the novice teachers, doing so only 5% of the time. This prompted the researchers to search for an explanation as to why so few direct suggestions were given by the mentor teachers.

One possibility may be the nature of the conversation itself. Certain contextual factors may have influenced the discussion between the mentors and novice teachers. The mentors were following a protocol of topics to be covered that were related to the state standards and philosophy of the program of which both mentor and teacher were a part. The mentors

determined the format and topics of the conversation, and usually when it began and ended. Also, the notion that conversations were being audiotaped might have inhibited conversational ease. However, as the researchers clearly pointed out, this does not explain why the mentors apparently avoided making direct suggestions to the protégés.

Another possible explanation could be the training the mentors received to work with novice teachers. The training relied heavily on Cognitive Coaching (Costa & Garmston, 1993). This approach to mentoring emphasizes the development of trust between mentor and teacher, the engagement of the teachers' higher cognitive functions, and the development of teachers' cognitive autonomy. The mentors are trained to ask non-judgmental questions to promote teachers' thinking about pedagogy. This might have discouraged mentors from making statements that might cause defensiveness, and the elimination of evaluative comments that may have been received as negative judgments.

The researchers concluded that further study with mentors and novice teachers from other mentoring programs is called for in order to determine whether these patterns of indirect suggestions are typical, and whether alternate approaches result in similar or different levels of elaborated responses from beginning teachers.

## 2.5    ATTITUDES TOWARD COACHING

Literature suggests that coaching holds promise to sustained instructional improvement within a school-wide reform. As more studies are examining the effects of coaching on teacher practices, it is imperative to scrutinize teachers' attitudes toward the coaching process. Without capturing the value of coaching, as perceived by those who are coached, it is difficult to equip

coaches with the appropriate professional development or consider what impact their work has on teacher practice (Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

Gersten, Morvant, and Brengelman (1995) conducted a study that explored the use of coaching as a vehicle to bring research-based teaching practices into general education classrooms to improve the quality of reading instruction for students with learning disabilities. Two expert coaches with extensive experience in classroom consultation and special education instruction coached 12 classroom teachers using a coaching model based on intense and ongoing feedback, including informal discussions of how instructional principles relate to observed teaching and learning situations.

One goal of this study was to help teachers clearly see the link between their instructional behaviors and student learning. Seeing observable changes in student performance and behavior during lessons often is a dynamic motivator in teachers' attitudes toward coaching or other innovative practices (Gersten, Carnine, Zoref, & Cronin, 1986; Guskey, 1986).

The expert coach usually began the coaching process by conducting classroom observations, focusing on several defined aspects of the students' learning environment, their successes during the lesson, and the quality and quantity of feedback provided by the teacher during instruction. Soon after the observation was completed, the coach and teacher participated in a debriefing conference that allowed the coach to share perceptions and offer suggestions that led to developing a plan of action. After the teacher began implementing new techniques and strategies within the classroom, the coach continued to provide assistance to support the teacher's needs.

Results from this study demonstrated that regardless of the level of teacher experience, a recurrent issue was that the change process proceeded in a decidedly irregular manner.

Sometimes instructional suggestions made by the coach were implemented consistently; at other times, they were ignored completely. The researchers realized that this fluctuation was typical of most types of learning, and reflected how difficult it is to alter ingrained patterns of behavior.

Also stemming from this study was the acknowledgement that even though the focus of coaching was on student performance rather than teacher competence, the participating teachers often felt they were being evaluated and felt anxious during coach observations. These anxieties were most apparent with the more inexperienced teachers, but even some veteran teachers admitted that having their lessons observed caused some anxiety. Interestingly, about half of the participating teachers indicated that the discomfort usually was offset by perceived benefits to their students and themselves.

Within this study, the coaches used a variety of student data to supplement the discussions they had with teachers about their instruction. Over time, the teachers shifted from a global, more personal assessment of how well the lesson went to increasingly specific discussion of individual student involvement. They even began to articulate linkages between specific suggested instructional techniques and changes in student performance. This verification supports the notion that observed improvement in the performance of students who previously were floundering can be an important motivator for teachers to acknowledge and implement new techniques in their instructional practices.

A study conducted by Licklider (1995) examined the role of peer coaching. Peer coaching, evolving from the work of Joyce and Showers (1980), conceptualizes coaching as a process in which teacher pairs observe each other in the classroom and provide each other with helpful information, feedback, and support. The major functions of peer coaching include provisions for companionship, providing technical feedback, analysis of application, adaptation

to students, and personal facilitation (Joyce & Showers, 1982). Licklider's exploratory study investigated the effects of a peer coaching in-service model on teachers' use of a complex teaching technique. The study also examined teacher perceptions or attitudes about the effectiveness of the model for promoting teacher efficacy, professional development, and collegial relations.

The voluntary participants consisted of 11 teachers and two principals in two secondary schools in a Midwestern state. To enhance the importance of the in-service workshop, the two principals received training and participated in the same workshop activities they would deliver to their teachers. The training was developed and delivered by the study's researcher who felt that principal involvement would enhance the importance of the training in the eyes of the teachers.

Principals led the workshops for teachers in their respective buildings, demonstrating and modeling effective questioning techniques. Teachers had the opportunity to practice these techniques with feedback from principals and colleagues. Principals next described the components of the peer coaching model and how peer observation and feedback enhances transfer of skills and knowledge. Teacher pairs worked together to practice peer coaching by watching a videotape of the lesson and then identifying and rating the teacher questions by using the elements of effective questioning. The workshop concluded with each teacher conducting a mock post-observation conference with a peer coaching partner.

In order to gather baseline data about the effectiveness of teacher questioning, the teachers audiotaped a classroom session once a week for each of the three weeks preceding the effective questioning workshop. After the workshop, teacher pairs implemented the peer coaching cycle that included classroom observation and post-observation conferences for four

weeks. Each lesson was audiotaped for analysis. After each peer coaching cycle, teachers reported perceptions of their involvement in the peer coaching activities.

The results of this study indicated that the peer coaching in-service model was effective. Teachers improved in every element of effective questioning, such as wait time, probing, and reflective questioning. Teachers reported their improvement was most influenced by three aspects of the peer coaching model: (1) practice the use of elements of effective questioning in the classroom; (2) observing a colleague using the elements and providing feedback; and (3) receiving feedback about the use of the elements from a colleague. Most teachers indicated that time was well spent and that they would be involved in peer coaching again if afforded the opportunity. They were very positive about the development of collegial relations and professional growth that stemmed from the activities of this model.

### 2.6 COACHING FOR CHANGE IN TEACHER PRACTICE

A salient feature of effective teacher professional development consistent with research literature is recognizing that it must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers. Coaching, at its best, adheres to this principle; it is grounded in inquiry—collaborative, sustained, connected to, and derived from teachers' work with their students—and is tied explicitly to changing and improving teacher practice (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). As coaching increases in popularity, its effect on teacher practices has become the focus of several studies.

A three-year action research study was conducted by Bintz and Dillard (2007) exploring the implementation of a new integrated literacy and social studies curriculum in a fourth grade

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classroom. The classroom teacher and the school-based literacy coach, the second author of the study, were the principal participants in this study. The study, based on the model of teacher as researcher and reflective practitioner, asked two inquiry questions: 1) What can be learned about teaching by taking a reflective practitioner perspective? 2) What can be learned about curriculum and development by implementing an integrated literacy and social studies curriculum collaboratively in a fourth grade classroom?

Three data sources for this study included: 1) recorded ongoing classroom observations; 2) teacher and coach conducting reflective conversations in debriefing conferences; and 3) a journal comprising notes the coach recorded and shared with the teacher during debriefing conferences. Data analysis was grounded in principles of naturalistic inquiry and driven by the methodology of grounded theory. Three vignettes detailing curricular changes and instructional practices enforced collaboratively by the teacher and coach were built from the data.

Results from this study spanned five areas representing changes the teacher, in collaboration with the coach, made in her teaching practices and beliefs about curriculum and curriculum development. The following briefly discusses each area.

1) Curriculum control was changed from external to internal. During the course of the study, the teacher and coach created the curriculum collaboratively more from within the classroom rather than being guided by the constraints of a published curriculum guide. By the end of the third year, students also participated in this collaboration by reading and discussing various reading materials that led to inquiry topics to be studied.

2) Curriculum sources moved from themes selected solely by the teacher and coach to student-selected themes based on interest and inquiry. The "one size fits all" theme

was not congruent with student learning and appeal, and did not meet the needs of individual students. The study reflected the change in curriculum source from teacher choice to inquiry topics constructed jointly by teachers and students.

3) Curriculum choice was based on the question: Who decides how learning is conducted? At the beginning of the three-year study, the teacher was influenced by the district curriculum guide on teaching the processes of literary research. Collaboration with the coach led the teacher to make curricular changes focused on student decision making. This choice gradually allowed students to control the process by self-selecting materials of interest and using an inquisitive approach to their personal research. In the end, curriculum choice changed from the teacher following the curriculum mandates to inviting students to offer curricular choices.

4) Curriculum content was modified throughout the course of the study from the stance of individually produced products to socially constructed explorations. This implied that the curriculum content changed from the teacher predetermining the research questions to supporting students in question-asking and adjusting their instructional practices to enhance the process. This change in curricular invitation enabled the students to select the choice of topic and develop their own form of sharing knowledge with their peers.

5) Curriculum evaluation was based on acknowledging the question: How is learning evaluated and assessed? At the beginning of this three-year study, the teacher utilized the district guide's predetermined criteria for assessing student work. Eventually, the teacher and coach established other criteria more suitable for evaluating and critiquing student performance (e.g., authentic writing, peer conferences, portfolios).

Overall, the curriculum evaluation changed focus from individual final product to a series of social experiences.

We can learn two things from this study. First, curricular change is a complex process that can take place when teachers are reflective practitioners. This study represents the nature of an observant, thoughtful, and reflective collaboration between a teacher and a coach striving to enhance the learning of their students, as well as promoting their own growth as educators. Secondly, if classrooms are to become communities of learners, then teachers must see themselves and their students as creators of curriculum, reflective practitioners, and collaborative inquirers. This study demonstrated clearly the changes made in curriculum based on a teacher's collaborative work with a coach to refine classroom practices more suitable for student learning and academic growth.

A groundbreaking study by Hendrickson, Gardner, Kaiser, and Riley (1993) examined the direct and indirect effects of a structured coaching procedure on the teaching behaviors of three day care providers. At the time of this study, very few studies on coaching had been conducted with teachers working with preschool children. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether a coaching strategy, previously used with the training of teachers of school-aged children, could be adapted for day care in-service training to facilitate social interactions among young children with and without disabilities.

Three day care providers serving as target teachers were asked to participate in the coaching program. Each participating teacher was linked to a specific day care child who demonstrated deficits in social interactions. A multiple baseline experimental design across subjects was used to evaluate the effects of the coaching intervention over a several month time span.

Two of the study's authors trained the participating teachers in the procedures of peer coaching using a multi-step coaching sequence. Teacher 1 observed and participated in the coaching of Teacher 2, and Teacher 2 observed and participated in the coaching of Teacher 3. Teacher 3 did not have an opportunity to collect data or coach formally. An average of two or three observation sessions were scheduled weekly consisting of 10 minutes with a five-second momentary time sample recording procedure. Thus, a total of 60 teacher and 60 child behavior counts were possible each observation.

In the Hendrickson et al. study, coaching consisting of peer teacher observation, feedback, and discussion of instructional practice appeared to result in beneficial changes in teachers' support of child-child interaction. For every targeted child, intervals of social interactions increased and appeared to be maintained after the coaching was diminished. The results suggested that adaptation of the coaching model used with teachers of school-aged students was promising to address social interaction training needs of day care providers. However, further research is warranted to explore the effects of coaching on teacher classroom practices and its effects on student performance.

## 2.7    SUMMARY

This review of the literature addressed several relevant features of coaching. It began with examining reasons why literacy coaching has become one of the many responses that school districts are using to improve reading instruction and student achievement across the country. Secondly, the various roles and responsibilities assumed by the literacy coach were examined. Quite often, the expectations of the roles and duties of literacy coaches are not consistent among

those serving in coaching positions. Coaching can consist of a wide range of activities that encompass informal "low risk" activities to more formal "high risk" ones. Furthermore, the characteristics of effective literacy coaches were examined. Establishing a trustworthy relationship between teachers and coaches, built on mutual respect, is the key needed for coaches to work effectively with teachers. Having knowledge of such characteristics can guide school districts to consider carefully the necessary qualifications of the literacy coaches they hire. Likewise, possessing knowledge of these characteristics benefits those who are considering taking on the role of literacy coach. This literature review offered a close lens on the significance of coaching conversations. Coaching conversation is the impetus that provides teachers a platform in a supportive climate to reflect and analyze teaching practices through a collaborative inquiry process. Finally, various studies that have analyzed teachers' attitudes toward coaching and its effect on their instructional practices were described. This information is significant for those utilizing coaching as part of a school-wide professional development reform. As coaching increases in popularity and is implemented in more schools, it is imperative that ongoing and future research continue.

After reviewing the current literature on coaching, it was found that a plethora of published information detailing the various roles and daily work of a literacy coach comprises most of the coaching literature. With the growing popularity of coaching, an increase in research on the topic is evolving. However, at this time, there is a significant lack of available research examining the nature of talk a literacy coach uses with teachers in coaching conferences. An essential ingredient of effective coaching is presumed to be the ability to have meaningful conversations with teachers, which ultimately will impact instruction to better suit student learning.

This study will contribute to the current body of research by providing a rich description of the complex nature of talk that a literacy coach uses in coaching conversations to scaffold teacher learning about instructional practices. Literacy coaches, reading specialists, and school administrators will find this study helpful in understanding the complexities of coaching conversations. As these complexities become better understood, the role of the literacy coach may become more evident.

# 3.0    METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study focused primarily on the *nature of talk* used during coaching conversations. More specifically, it examined how a literacy coach used conversations to guide collaborative inquiry to support teachers in their efforts to provide effective instruction.

This descriptive case study was designed to examine the coaching process in context and within school culture. In qualitative research, the researcher strives to describe the meaning of the findings from the perspective of the research participants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Moreover, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the interpretations of reality that change at a particular point in time and in a particular context. Learning how individuals interact with their social world, and the meaning it has for them, is considered a qualitative approach (Merriam, 1998).

In this study, I examined the conversations between a literacy coach and three kindergarten teachers during coaching conferences. The purpose of these conferences was to analyze student data, provide information relevant to teacher instruction, discuss next steps, and formulate a plan for upcoming work together. The questions guiding this study included:

1)  What was the content of the coaching conversation? That is, what topics or goals seemed to be the primary foci of coaching?

2)  In what ways did the literacy coach facilitate the co-construction of meaning during the coaching conversation?

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a. What scaffolding support did the literacy coach provide to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking?

b. What types of questions were asked by the literacy coach to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking?

3) In what ways did the literacy coach alter engagement with the different teachers during the coaching conversations and what teacher characteristics affected her engagement?

4) What were the teachers' perceptions of the coaching conversation and its effect on their classroom practice?

5) What were the literacy coach's perceptions of each coaching conversation and its effect on teacher's classroom practices?

## 3.1    PARTICIPANTS

One literacy coach and three kindergarten teachers participated in this study. The selection of the coach participant was made purposefully, based on her experience as a literacy coach. According to Patton (2002):

Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned. Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study. (p. 230)

The coach participant for this study was selected from a group of nominated literacy coaches working in school districts in southwestern Pennsylvania. Reading First technical assistants, educators who support the implementation of the Reading First grant in schools, were asked by letter to nominate any coach who demonstrated the following characteristics: 1) possessed in-depth knowledge of the reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction; 2) had established a good working rapport with teachers; 3) spent a majority of time working directly with teachers in the classroom; and 4) conferred regularly with teachers following classroom observations (Appendix A). The principal of the schools where the nominated coaches worked had to agree with the technical assistants' nominations.

Once nominations were received from the technical assistants, I examined each nominee's coaching log, an artifact collected by the Pennsylvania's Reading First External Evaluation Team to confirm that the nominee reported spending a majority of time working and conferring with teachers on a regular basis, which is crucial to this study. Coaches completed logs for a three-week time period and submitted them three times a year. During this three-week period, coaches specified the time spent on various coaching activities conducted throughout the school day.

In addition to the coaching logs, an examination of past teacher satisfaction surveys guided me in selecting a coach. These surveys were submitted yearly by teachers; they rated the extent to which the Reading First coach was valuable in providing professional development. The survey also included teachers' responses to whether the coach was considered a resource for materials for intervention and was valuable in helping them solve instructional problems. Moreover, the survey measured the extent to which teachers were comfortable talking with the

coach about their instructional practices. The teacher satisfaction surveys and the previously mentioned coaches' logs provided pertinent information that assisted me in establishing a ranking order of the coach nominees who were contacted to participate in this study.

Once I selected a potential coach participant, I contacted her to describe the purpose of this study. I explained the expectations for the participating coach and teachers and how the study would contribute additional knowledge to the field of literacy coaching. I then invited the coach to participate in the study. At the end of the study, I gave the coach a small token of appreciation for time spent and willingness to participate.

In addition to the literacy coach, three classroom teachers participated in this study; they were selected based on the recommendation of the participating coach. I sought teachers with varied teaching experiences who were willing to participate in the study, interacted regularly with the coach through coaching support, allowed the coach and me to observe their reading instruction, and were willing to be audiotaped during coaching conversations. At the end of the study, I also gave the teachers a small token of appreciation for time spent and willingness to participate.

Upon the coach's and teachers' agreement to participate, I requested and was granted permission from the school district's superintendent and the school principal for approval to conduct the study. Furthermore, in order to conduct the study, I sought and was granted approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Pittsburgh.

Due to the nature of this study and the limited number of participants, it is crucial that anonymity exists to protect and safeguard the professional well-being of all involved. Therefore, pseudonyms have been used for the participants, students, principal, school district, and school in order to limit the possibility of identification.

### 3.1.1 COACH PARTICIPANT

The selected coach, Hannah, has a background in education atypical of most reading coaches. Hannah holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in speech pathology and audiology and a Master's Equivalency due to experience and in-service credits. She has spent the majority of her career providing speech services to children through various agencies. Prior to her work as a Reading First coach, she spent several years providing speech services to children in the Head Start program and at a hospital rehabilitation center. Later, she accepted a position offered by the local school district to serve as a speech therapist in the kindergarten unit and primary elementary schools.

Hannah continued in the role of a school speech therapist for nine years until the district offered her the position as a Reading First coach in the kindergarten unit. Hannah recognized that she was not a typical reading coach with a reading specialist degree and/or a background in teaching reading. Hannah stated:

> The role of a reading coach was very intimidating to me when I started. Honestly, sometimes the reading field jargon went over my head at first, but I was convinced that I could bridge the gap between the speech and reading field by equipping teachers with the ability to understand the processes and acquisition of speech and language so they can assist early readers.

For the past six years, Hannah has enjoyed her role as a reading coach. Soon after taking the job, she became certified in Orton Gillingham, a multisensory, language-based reading program. Hannah commented:

> My job as a reading coach is to help teachers with language-based lessons. I do classroom language lessons, phonemic awareness lessons, I teach the kids how to make the sounds,

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and I teach the teachers how to teach the kids to make the sounds. I like working with the kids, but I really like working with the teachers. This is what makes my job so interesting for me.

Hannah quickly credited Reading First for the professional development she has received over the past six years. She stated:

The training that Reading First has given the coaches is the best professional development. Reading First has brought in very knowledgeable people to the training sessions that have taught me about best research practices in reading. I felt that much of what Reading First wanted me to do as a coach I had learned from my Orton-Gillingham training. But, I also recognized that my background in speech therapy gives me a firm foundation for the work I do as a coach. Because my school district uses Success for All (SFA) as the core reading program, I strive to incorporate my trainings within the curriculum to assist the teachers with their instruction.

### 3.1.1.1 HANNAH'S COACHING DUTIES

Hannah spends much of her time during the week working directly with the fourteen teachers in the Garrett Kindergarten Unit. She tries to schedule two classroom visits a week per teacher to give them any assistance they may need. She regularly models lessons for the teachers in addition to providing small group instruction to students. She commented, "The teachers know that I am coming to their rooms. I like to plan a lesson to model for them, but I always let them decide where they need my help the most. The visits work well for everybody."

Hannah facilitates monthly group meetings with all of the teachers. This common planning meeting is used to discuss upcoming events, but primarily is focused on examining

student data. Each teacher is expected to bring to the meeting his/her assessment binder that Hannah created, which compiles all of their students' assessment data. Hannah tells, "I say to the teachers that I don't want you to tell me what you think about your students; I want you to look at their data and tell me what you see." During these monthly common planning meetings, Hannah focuses on teaching the teachers how to use the students' data to inform their instruction. She claims, "Teachers are really getting good at looking at the data and making instructional decisions and choices. We have come a long way in the past six years."

In addition to Hannah's coaching duties, she also is in charge of the Scholastic Book Fair and the Reading Is Fundamental programs at the school. Another sector of her time is consumed with managing the duties of the two hired tutors at the school. It is her responsibility to coordinate their services with the students needing the most help. This decision is made from teacher input and student data. Hannah commented:

> Instead of sending the tutors to the teachers for them to decide which students need the
> most help, I assist the teachers by assigning the tutors to specific students who are
> struggling. This prevents unneeded interruption during the teacher's classroom
> instruction. For the most part, the tutoring schedule runs pretty smoothly.

## 3.1.2 TEACHER PARTICIPANTS

Three classroom teachers participated in this study; their selection was based on the recommendation of the participating coach.

### 3.1.2.1 TEACHER 1: RICK

Rick has a Bachelor of Science degree in Education and has been teaching for five years. Four of those years have been spent teaching kindergarten at the school district's kindergarten unit. During the first year of his teaching career, he was a Reading First tutor at one of the elementary schools and then transferred to a full-time substitute teacher position at the Garrett Kindergarten Unit. This position led to a permanent classroom position, which he now holds. He serves actively on several school-wide committees and regularly submits articles for the school district newsletter. In the past few years of his tenure, he has attended the Leadership Conference and the Success for All Conference. He plans to earn his master's degree in the near future.

At the time of this research study, Rick had 21 students in his kindergarten classroom; 71% of these students were white, 24% were African American, and 5% other. There were 13 males and 8 females; 43% of the students were eligible for free or reduced cost lunch. None of the students were identified as receiving special education services, however, 4 (23%) of his students were identified as having a speech or language impairment and received speech services from the school speech therapist. Furthermore, 2 (10%) students in the class were English Language Learners and received language support services within the school.

### 3.1.2.2 TEACHER 2: DAWN

Dawn holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and has been teaching for nine years. She is currently in her first year of teaching kindergarten at the Garrett Kindergarten Unit. She was hired initially by the school district to fill the position of an in-school suspension teacher at the intermediate school. She remained in that role for four years before becoming an instructional aide at one of the district's intermediate schools. Her responsibilities as an instructional aide consisted of teaching various levels of reading

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instruction, using the core reading program Success for All. In addition to her teaching requirements, she served as a school-based tutor for students having academic difficulties. Dawn has served on several committees throughout the school district and is concluding her tenth year as the cheerleading coach for the high school.

During the time of this study, Dawn had 22 students in her kindergarten classroom. Of the 11 males and 11 females, 68% were white and 32% were African American. A large percentage (86%) of the students was eligible for free or reduced cost lunch. None of the students was identified as receiving special education services, and only 1 (5%) of her students was identified as having a speech or language impairment and received speech services from the school speech therapist.

### 3.1.2.3 TEACHER 3: SANDRA

Sandra is a 15-year veteran teacher who holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education. Prior to her employment at the Garrett Kindergarten Unit, she served as a substitute teacher in various elementary schools. During her tenure of 10-plus years at the Kindergarten Unit, Sandra has served on several committees and was selected to pilot a new spelling and math program for the school district. Sandra has experience presenting at several conferences, including the Reading First Conference and the National Reading Conference.

At the time of this research study, Sandra had 21 students in her kindergarten classroom; 52% of these students were white and 33% were African American. The remaining students were Hispanic (10%) and Asian (5%). There were 12 males and 9 females and 52% of the students were eligible for free or reduced cost lunch. None of the students was identified as receiving special education services; however, 3 (14%) of her students were identified as having a speech or language impairment and received speech services from the school speech therapist.

## 3.2    SETTING

The setting of this study was a kindergarten center located in a small, rural school district in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The school, Garrett Kindergarten Unit, is one of eight schools in the district and serves all of its 301 kindergarten students. The racial distribution of the school included 70% white students and 26% African Americans. The remaining students were either Hispanic (3%) or Asian (1%); 56% of the students were eligible for free or reduced cost lunch, reflecting the small town's poverty rate of 22.1%.

Garrett Kindergarten Unit would be described as a close-knit family-oriented school. There was a sense of neighborhood comradeship upon entering the doors of the school. The hallways exemplified the proud showmanship of student work, with colorful displays of their artwork throughout the building. The students, who wore the mandatory dress code colors of blue and gray, always were respectful of school rules while transitioning between classes to their scheduled activities. Teachers were eager to greet visitors and one another as they passed by on the way to their destinations. It was not uncommon to eavesdrop unexpectedly in the teachers' lounge on quick conversations between staff members arranging plans to socialize after a work day, since many of them are connected through long established friendships, are neighbors, or have common family ties.

The school principal, Ms. Glover, sets the tone for the school. She has long established family roots in the small town and has several relatives employed by the school district as educators. She knows each student by name and has made a concentrated effort to know their families. She values having a school in which parents feel comfortable entering its doors. Ms. Glover meets the needs of the students in ways that go beyond educating them. Because many of the students are economically underprivileged, Ms. Glover has become adept in utilizing

community resources to aid many students in the school. One teacher commented, "Ms. Glover is the most compassionate person, who cares about her school, kids, and teachers. She is what makes this building unique."

Ms. Glover takes her administrative duties seriously. She is knowledgeable about curricular issues and often visits classrooms or conducts a walk-through with district or state school personnel. She believes in teamwork among her faculty and is not hesitant to get a resistant teacher "on board." When I asked the reading coach how she deals with noncompliant teachers, she stated quickly, "I leave resistant teachers to Ms. Glover. She is the one in authority and the teachers respect her position. We seldom have teachers who are uncooperative in this school."

Garrett Kindergarten Unit houses fourteen kindergarten classrooms and one instructional support classroom. It provides services in speech and language and counseling, and has an early learning consultant in addition to the Reading First coach, who works with the teachers on a part-time basis. The school also has two Reading First tutors and an instructional aide who assist the teachers by working with academically struggling students beyond classroom instruction.

In 2002, Garrett Kindergarten Unit was a recipient of the first round Reading First grant. Reading First, an outgrowth of the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, focuses on putting proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. Through Reading First, states and districts receive support to apply scientifically-based reading research to ensure that all children learn to read by the end of third grade. The program provides formula grants on a competitive basis to states that submit an approved application. Only programs that are founded on scientifically-based research are eligible for funding through Reading First. Funds are allocated to states according to the proportion of children ages 5 to 17 who reside

within the state and who are from families with incomes below the poverty line. Funds support increased professional development, including the hiring of reading coaches, to ensure that all teachers have the skills they need to teach these programs effectively. The program also supports the use of screening and diagnostic tools and classroom-based instructional reading assessments to measure how well students are reading and to monitor their progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). At the time this study was conducted, Garrett Kindergarten Unit was in the final year of its Reading First grant funding.

### 3.2.1   SCHOOL-WIDE READING PROGRAM

Success for All (SFA) is the core reading program utilized by the Garrett Kindergarten Unit since 2002. SFA, developed in 1987, was founded on the principles of reading instruction that were showing or had been shown through scientific research to be effective in teaching children to read (Success for All, 2005). SFA grew out of a partnership between the Baltimore City Public Schools and the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle School (CREMS), formerly at The Johns Hopkins University. Baltimore's school board president and superintendent challenged the research team at CREMS to develop a program that would enable every child in an inner-city Baltimore elementary school to perform at grade level by the end of grade three. The program first was implemented during the 1987–88 school year in Baltimore (Success for All, 2005).

KinderCorner, a component of SFA, comprises the instructional reading program at the Garrett Kindergarten Unit. It is based on a thematic approach to learning and emphasizes language and literacy development during the daily 90-minute reading block. The curriculum is divided into timed segments of instruction consisting of domains like Greetings, Reading, &

Writings; Let's Get Together; and Rhyme Time. The Story Tree component involves interactive story experiences and shared storybook readings. The Learning Lab component of SFA allows the students to explore multiple opportunities to learn through engaging and discovery-based learning centers. Direct instruction of oral language skills is taught in the domains of Stepping Stones and KinderRoots. During this period of instruction, students gradually are taught the concepts of print, phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, and comprehension skills.

The components of SFA are aligned with the five essential components of Reading First (FCRR, 2002). Phonemic awareness activities are introduced at the kindergarten level through songs, games, and rhymes, and are developed further with blending, segmenting, and sound manipulation activities. A systematic phonics program, Fast Track Phonics, is used to teach beginning readers the basic letter and sound combinations. Decodable texts are used to allow the children an opportunity to practice their emerging decoding skills. Vocabulary is developed through thematic units, with listening comprehension integrated with the stories read in ReadingRoots. Fluency is strengthened through paired and repeated readings, and comprehension is pivotal as children are taught metacognitive comprehension strategies.

At the Garrett Kindergarten Unit, teachers administer quarterly assessments to determine the adequacy of their students' progress in reading. The quarterly assessments include the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Stepping Stones, the curriculum-based assessment. The information gleaned from these assessments is used to guide the reading coach and teachers in making important decisions about tutoring needs, suggested alternative teaching strategies, changes in differentiated groupings, etc.

SFA provides an extensive professional development program. Before implementation, the principal and the reading coach attended a week-long training session to become thoroughly

acquainted with the program. Additionally, a three-day on-site training session was given to all the teachers and SFA continues to provide follow-up consultation. The principal, coach, and several teachers at the Garrett Kindergarten Unit regularly attend the Leadership Academy sessions and the SFA conferences.

## 3.3    OVERVIEW OF STUDY PROCEDURES

As mentioned previously, a descriptive case study approach to qualitative research was used to examine the conversations between a literacy coach and three kindergarten teachers during coaching conferences.

Data from several sources were collected in this study over a 10-week span to capture a snapshot of how the literacy coach engaged three different teachers in conversations to prompt teachers' thinking about pedagogical practices. Audiotaped coaching conversations between the participating coach and teachers were transcribed later for analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the coach and teachers following each coaching conferences. These interviews also were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

Other data sources included an audiotaped semi-structured initial interview with the participating coach. Field notes were kept while observing a staff planning meeting and during a visit to each of the teacher participants' classroom instruction. Table 1 provides a timeline for data collection. Data sources are described in detail following the table.

**Table 1**

**Data Collection Timeline**

| Data Source | Collection Date |
|---|---|
| Semi-Structured Coach Initial Interview | November 17, 2008 |
| Common Planning Meeting Observation | December 8, 2008 |
| Audiotaped Coaching Conversation (Sandra) Post-Conference Teacher Interview Post-Conference Coach Interview | December 10, 2008 |
| Audiotaped Coaching Conference (Dawn) Post-Conference Teacher Interview Post-Conference Coach Interview | December 11, 2008 |
| Classroom Visit (Rick) | January 7, 2009 |
| Classroom Visit (Sandra) Classroom Visit (Dawn) | January 8, 2009 |
| Audiotaped Coaching Conference (Rick) Post-Conference Teacher Interview Post-Conference Coach Interview | January 27, 2009 |
| Audiotaped Coaching Conference (Dawn) Post-Conference Teacher Interview Post-Conference Coach Interview | January 29, 2009 |
| Audiotaped Coaching Conference (Sandra) Post-Conference Teacher Interview Post-Conference Coach Interview | January 30, 2009 |

## 3.3.1 DATA SOURCES

### 3.3.1.1 INTERVIEWS

#### 3.3.1.1.1 COACH INITIAL INTERVIEW

Kahn and Cannell (1957) describe interviewing as "a conversation with a purpose" (quoted in Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). A semi-structured interview combines both structured and unstructured approaches. There are some prepared questions for the interview, but the researcher has the right to inquire more deeply about a topic in order to discover the

participants' perspectives and what they have experienced (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

Prior to the beginning of this study, I conducted an initial semi-structured interview with the coach participant (Appendix B). One purpose of this interview was to establish a comfortable rapport and relationship with the coach as we embarked upon the study. A second purpose was to obtain specific information regarding the coach's experience (e.g., years of teaching, years of coaching, degrees/certification), training or professional development received to prepare for the role of a coach, coaching beliefs (i.e., rationale for the purpose of coaching and its importance), and her role as a coach in the school (e.g., coaching activities and duties conducted regularly).

### 3.3.1.1.2    COACH POST-INTERVIEWS

Brief semi-structured interviews were conducted with the coach after each conference to discuss the outcome of the conversation with the teacher (Appendix C). The goal of these interviews was to ascertain the degree to which the coach believes she was able to co-construct meaning with the teacher that led into a deeper conversation reflective of teaching practices.

### 3.3.1.1.3    TEACHER INTERVIEWS

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the classroom teachers following each coaching conference to ascertain their views or perspectives on its outcome and relevance to their instructional practices (Appendix D). The main goal of the post-interviews with the teachers was to determine if the conference was an impetus to co-constructing meaning that actually will make a difference in their teaching, and how.

### 3.3.1.2 OBSERVATIONS

Observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for the study. Observation is a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry and is used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

During this study, I acted in the role of a nonparticipant observer. I was not involved directly in the situations being observed. Observational data were collected consistently over a span of 10 weeks while I shadowed the coach participant in the context of coaching conferences, grade level meetings, and classroom visits. I documented observations through field notes. Field notes describe, as accurately as possible, all relevant aspects of the situation observed (Gay, Mills, & Airaisan, 2006). The classroom visits were conducted primarily to assist me in developing a comfortable rapport with participants and also to help me get a better understanding of what the coach and teacher were discussing during the conversations.

### 3.3.1.2.1 AUDIOTAPED COACHING CONVERSATIONS

Each coaching conversation between the coach and teacher participants was audiotaped during coaching conferences. The practice of audiotaping the conversations ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis (Merriam, 1998). The coach held two conversations with each of the three participating teachers, which totaled six conversations in all. These six audiotaped coaching conversations were transcribed later by the researcher and coded for analysis.

### 3.3.2 OVERVIEW OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data. According to Marshall and Rossman, "The process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data is messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating" (2006, p. 154). Undoubtedly, the analysis process for this study was the same, as I attempted to make sense of the collected data in order to answer the research questions. First, I used an etic approach (Patton, 2002) in developing a perspective to understand the phenomenon of interest. Even though there were indications of how the coach and teacher participants thought and felt about their experiences in the conversations that took place, the data analysis for this study was conducted primarily from the etic perspective, which allowed me to describe, compare, and contrast the conversations of each, as well as consider the trends and patterns across each case.

I focused primarily on the *nature of talk* used during coaching conversations by analyzing three domains: (1) the content or topics of the coaching conversation, (2) levels of support provided by the coach to scaffold teacher learning and understanding about instructional practices, and (3) the types of questions posed by the coach to prompt teacher thinking about their instructional practices.

The content or topics of the coaching conversation was analyzed by using a framework adapted from the Pennsylvania Reading First Observation Checklist and Rubric (Bean, Fulmer, & Zigmond, 2008). The observation instrument has been used to document and describe the nature of Reading First classrooms by recording information about the literacy focus, grouping practices, materials, classroom climate, and instructional management across the mandatory 90-minute reading block. This observation checklist was designed to rate lesson quality of various observed components that include guided reading, read aloud or shared reading, and other

instructional practices, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.

To analyze the scaffolding, I adapted the work of Emily Rodgers (2004), who examined the nature of scaffolding in a one-to-one literacy tutoring intervention (Clay, 1993) in terms of the teacher's and the student's participation in the scaffolding process. Rodgers characterized the nature of teacher help in the tutoring sessions as being situated on a continuum consisting of these kinds of help: telling the student the solution, demonstrating a helpful action, directing the student to something helpful, or questioning the student (p. 75). This framework was easy to adapt to the efforts of a literacy coach as she provides support to teachers. "One of the many nuances of effective coaching is not only knowing what to focus on and what kind of support to give (telling, demonstrating, directing, questioning), but also when and when not to provide help" (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007, p. 78).

Table 2 illustrates an adaptation of Rodgers' framework demonstrating the four levels of scaffolding actions (from most supportive to least) a coach can use to prompt teacher thinking about pedagogical practices.

**Table 2**

**Coach Scaffolding Actions**

| Category | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Telling | The coach tells or provides the teacher with information | "Several of your students had difficulty pronouncing the vocabulary words." |
| Demonstrating | The coach takes the teacher's role and demonstrates a problem solving action. | The coach demonstrates procedures for the KWL reading strategy to the teacher. |
| Directing | The coach directs the teacher toward an action that is helpful. | "You want to challenge the students by selecting words to promote deeper conceptual meaning." |
| Questioning | The coach asks the teacher a question. | "What went well with your lesson?" |

To explain further how the above framework can be adapted to describe the levels of scaffolding support a coach uses with teachers during coaching conversations, the following is an excerpt of a transcript provided by a graduate student serving in the role of a literacy coach. During this post-observation conversation, the coach is discussing with the teacher the outcome of her read-aloud lesson. I categorized and coded the kind of support the coach provided, using the four levels of scaffolding actions.

> **Coach:** I could tell from the beginning that this was a story the children loved a lot by the way they were engaged in their listening. (*Telling*)
>
> **Teacher:** We read this story yesterday and they really liked it.
>
> **Coach:** Did you choose it for a specific reason? (*Questioning*)

**Teacher:** We had been working on color words and this book seemed like a good way to practice them.

**Coach:** I agree. Now, I noticed that you had strips of paper under each color and animal word.(*Telling*) Can you tell me about that? *(Questioning)*

**Teacher:** Because I was focusing on color words, I wanted those words to stick out. That way, we could focus on them. The animal words were important because I wanted them to see how picture clues really can help you when you need to read.

**Coach:** I noticed that after everyone got started working that some children began cutting out the pictures first and then later they had trouble coloring them because they were so small. *(Telling)*

**Teacher:** I know. I should have made that more clear before I sent them back to their seats. I don't think it really affected the point of the lesson, though.

**Coach:** I don't, either. It's just one of those small details that if you would do it again, you would probably want to give them the directions in very clear and concise manner. *(Directing)*

This portrays an example of how I adapted Rodgers' (2004) framework to code the levels of support the coach provided teachers in coaching conferences. Although this framework served as a solid foundation for categorizing the four levels of scaffolding actions, I found it necessary to include coding at additional levels of scaffolding support discovered during data analysis.

I delved deeper into the analysis of coaching conversations by examining the *types of questions* posed by the coach to prompt teacher thinking about their instructional practices. Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) explain that "when using questions to think about teaching, the literacy coach needs to solicit conversation by making initial probes regarding teacher

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knowledge or understanding" (p. 99). The work of Morgan and Saxton (1994) has helped

teachers understand why questions are important to teaching and student learning. They argue

that good questions lead to better understanding, and we should be cognizant of different types of

questions and why we ask them. Morgan and Saxton offer a framework that classifies questions

into three broad categories: (1) *Questions eliciting information* are those that draw out what

already is known in terms of both information and experience and establish appropriate

procedures for the conduct of the work. (2) *Questions shaping understanding* are those that help

teachers and students fill in what lies between the facts and sort out, express, and elaborate how

they are thinking and feeling about the material. (3) *Questions pressing for reflection* are these

that demand intellectual and emotional commitment by challenging the individual to think

critically and creatively (p. 41). Morgan and Saxton break down each of the three broad

categories further by offering types of functions specific to the questions (Table 3).

**Table 3**

**Functions of Questions to Prompt Teacher Thinking**

| Category of Questions | Selected functions of the question |
|---|---|
| Questions eliciting information | o Focusing on facts<br>o Suggesting implications<br>o Revealing experience |
| Questions shaping understanding | o Focusing on connections<br>o Pressing for rethinking or restating<br>o Promoting point of view<br>o Demanding interpretations |
| Questions pressing for reflection | o Developing hypotheses<br>o Focusing on future action<br>o Developing critical assessment |

Even though Morgan and Saxton's framework is geared toward teacher and student interactions within the classroom context, these categories were applied easily to the type of questions posed by a literacy coach to teachers during post-observation conversations. The following excerpt is from the previous transcript (used to demonstrate how the researcher coded the levels of scaffolding support provided by the coach). Continuing dialogue from the same transcript demonstrates the coding of questions asked by the coach to prompt teachers' thinking about their instructional practices.

**Teacher**: Right, just like I would have used a smaller strip of paper instead of giving them a whole sheet to work with. Some of them just didn't get the idea of putting them in a straight line.

**Coach:** That was something I wrote about, too. If they had a smaller strip, then they would have a clearer picture of where to put the animal on the paper. So, what did you think about the rest of the lesson? *(Question pressing for reflection: developing a critical assessment)*

**Teacher:** I thought it went well. They were able to retell the story with me. Oh, but they did have a bit trouble at the end. It was different than the rest of the story.

**Coach:** Yeah, I noticed that when it got away from the predictable part of the text, they had some trouble. What do you think you could have done differently? *(Question pressing for reflection: developing a critical assessment)*

**Teacher:** Well, I could have reviewed that part of the story more so that they would remember it. I guess I could have written that part of the story on the board. That way they could follow along better.

**Coach:** How will you teach this lesson differently the next time? *(Question pressing for reflection: focusing on future action)*

Above is an example of how I used Morgan and Saxton's (1994) framework to code the categories and specific functions of questions asked by the coach to the teacher in coaching conversations. However, based on a small-scale pilot study (described in Appendix E), I added two new codes to the analysis framework: *Celebration–General Positive Feedback* and *Celebration–Explicit Positive Feedback.*

The five research questions and the sources of data collection that were used in this study are described in Table 4.

**Table 4**

**Research Questions and Correlating Data Collection Sources**

| Research Questions | Data Collection Sources |
| --- | --- |
| 1. What was the content of the coaching conversation? That is, what topics or goals seemed to be the primary foci of coaching? | o Audiotaped coaching conversation<br>o Observation field notes |
| 2. In what ways did the literacy coach facilitate the co-construction of meaning during the coaching conversation?<br><br>　　a. What scaffolding support did the literacy coach provide to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking?<br><br>　　b. What types of questions were asked by the literacy coach to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking? | o Audiotaped post-coaching conversation<br>o Post-conference coach interview |
| 3. In what ways did the literacy coach alter engagement with different teachers during the coaching conversations and what teacher characteristics affected her engagement? | o Audiotaped coaching conversation<br><br>o Post-conference coach interview |
| 4. What were the teachers' perceptions of the coaching conversation and its effect on their classroom practices? | o Post-conference teacher interview |
| 5. What were the coach's perceptions of each coaching conversation and its effect on teacher's classroom practices? | o Post-conference coach interview |

### 3.3.3  RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

As in any research, reliability and validity are of utmost importance and concern. Reliability in a research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results (Merriam, 1998; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). However, in qualitative research, researchers seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it. Since there are many interpretations of what is happening, there is no benchmark by which to take repeated measures and establish reliability is a traditional sense (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 288) suggest thinking about the "dependability" or "consistency" of the results obtained from the data. In other words, given the data collected, the results make sense.

Validity is the degree to which the qualitative data collected accurately gauge what the researcher was trying to measure and establishes trustworthiness and understanding (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). In order to establish trustworthiness, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the research questions must be clear and congruent with the features of the study's design. The proposed research questions for this study are conducive to the nature of a descriptive case study's design. Miles and Huberman (1994) also suggest that the researcher must define his/her role and status within the site. As mentioned previously, I acted in the role of a nonparticipant observer, one who observed and recorded behaviors but did not interact or participate in the life of the study being observed.

Triangulation is the process of using multiple methods, data collection strategies, and data sources to obtain a more complete picture of what is being studied and to cross-check information (Gay et al., 2006). According to Merriam (1998), triangulation contributes to the validity of a study. In this case study, I used multiple sources of data to confirm the emerging

findings. Data collected from coaches' logs, teacher satisfaction surveys, observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and audiotaped coaching conversations were triangulated to give me a better understanding of the phenomena being studied.

I conducted member checks continuously throughout the study. Tentative interpretations of data were given to the coach participant from whom they were derived to check for accuracy before written in final form. Also, coding checks and peer examination of the data analysis were established. I employed the assistance of knowledgeable others experienced in data analysis to increase the inter-reliability of the data coded during the analysis process.

## 3.4    ANALYSIS

Analysis was initiated by transcribing the audiotaped coaching conversations into a Microsoft Word document. Then an in-depth analysis of one transcript (one coaching conversation) was conducted. Two colleagues, both university assistant professors experienced in research, and I collectively read one transcript to determine what would be considered the *unit of analysis*. Through discussion, we defined the unit of analysis as any meaningful utterance of coach talk. For example, in one conversation the coach said to the teacher, "According to the data, Samantha is weak on initial sound fluency and letter naming. What more should we be doing to help her in these areas?" This illustrates talk considered as a meaningful utterance of coach talk and was coded accordingly. In contrast, the following is an example of non-meaningful coach talk that did not warrant coding and was not considered in the analysis: "Dawn, this is all of the time we have today to discuss your students. I am glad we had this opportunity to talk."

Merriam (1998) explains that a unit of analysis can be as small as a word a participant uses to describe a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident. In order to grasp a better understanding of the proposed unit of analysis, we coded the first transcript together while orally discussing differences in the coding. It is imperative to acknowledge that although in this study I focused only on coding and analyzing meaningful utterances of coach talk during coaching conversations, I consistently had to examine teacher talk in order to code the coach talk.

The first transcript was coded in three ways. First, meaningful utterances of coach talk were coded for content or topic of conversation using a set of a priori codes that were adapted from the Pennsylvania Reading First Observation Checklist and Rubric (Bean, Fulmer, & Zigmond, 2008). For example, in one segment the coach discussed an approach the teacher could use to reinforce phonemic awareness skills. This was coded PA (phonemic awareness). Anytime the coach discussed a topic, it was coded for content. In addition to the set of a priori codes, eight new codes were developed throughout the transcripts and added to the coding scheme for content (See Table 5).

Next, the kinds of support the coach provided the teacher during the coaching conversation were coded using Rodger's (2004) four levels of support: telling, demonstrating, directing, and questioning. For example, the coach mentioned to the teacher that it would be helpful to use phoneme boxes with the children in order for them to better segment sounds. This was coded as Di (Directing) because the coach directed the teacher toward something helpful to enhance his instruction on phonemic awareness. Another example coded for scaffolding support involved a segment where the coach provided the teacher with information about certain sounds a student could not yet make. This unit of analysis was coded T (telling) because the coach told

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or provided information about a problem.

Within one domain of scaffolding support, a deeper analysis was conducted on the types of questions the coach asked the teacher during the conversation. Each question the coach asked was coded for purpose using three subcategories: questions eliciting information, questions shaping understanding, and questions pressing for reflection. Morgan and Saxton (1994) argue that good questions lead to better understanding and we should be cognizant of different type of questions and why we ask them. Coding the different type of questions the coach asked the teacher during the conversation produced and quantified an important ingredient in effective collaborative inquiry. An illustration of this type of coding is represented as the coach asked the teacher to describe a student's classroom performance in comparison to her most recent reading assessment results. This question was coded as QRca, which meant it was a Question pressing for Reflection by developing Critical Assessment. In other words, the coach was asking the teacher to balance his/her opinion of the student's progress with intellectual analysis. It should be noted that the majority of coding differences discussed were aimed at distinguishing the various categories of questions.

Based on the analysis of the transcripts, one new code was added to the subcategory: *questions shaping understanding*. This new code, Question for understanding (QUu) was applied whenever the coach simply wanted to confirm or acknowledge that the teacher understood what he/she was discussing. There were numerous incidents when the coach would ask, "Does that make sense?" or "Do you know what I mean?" at the end of her comments. Most often, she never waited for an engaged answer from the teacher, but used the questions as a way to keep the momentum of the conversation going.

In addition to the above, we coded for instances of celebration in the coach's talk, given the results of the pilot study. Whenever the coach used positive feedback in the form of accolades, it was coded as either C-EPFB (explicit positive feedback), in which she explicitly provided the teacher with positive feedback in a direct and precise manner, or as C-GPFB (general positive feedback), meaning she offered feedback in a nonspecific form of accolade.

After my colleagues and I grasped a firm understanding of what would be considered a unit of analysis and the coding scheme, we independently coded 50 percent of a second transcript to establish interrater reliability. Overall, agreement between us was 68%, based on the calculated percent of agreement using the formula:


Number of agreements_____ x100

Total number of agreements and disagreements


In order to recognize the reasons resulting in the significant differences of agreements, we reread the transcript and thoroughly discussed the discrepancies that occurred. It was decided to further read and independently code the remaining pages of the second transcript.

After reading and coding the remaining pages of the second transcript, the overall agreement among the three of us was 89%, using the previous formula to calculate the percentage of agreement. When we encountered discrepancies, we resolved them through discussion and agreement. After coding 33% of the data, the final coding scheme included 33 codes clustered into three main categories: Content, Scaffolding, and Celebration (See Table 5). I then independently coded the remainder of the transcripts.

**Table 5**

**Code Descriptions**

| Code | Activity | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **Content** | | |
| PA | Phonemic Awareness | The awareness of the sounds (phonemes) that make up spoken words. |
| PH | Phonics | A way of teaching reading and spelling that stresses symbol-sound relationships. |
| CP | Concepts of Print | Concepts related to the visual characteristics, features, and properties of written language. |
| VD | Vocabulary Development | The teaching-learning principles and practices that lead to a person's stock of known words and meanings. |
| FL | Fluency | The clear, easy, written or spoken expression of ideas. |
| C | Comprehension | The reconstruction of the intended meaning of a communication; accurately understanding what is written or said. |
| W | Writing | The process or result of recording language graphically by hand. |
| GR | Grouping | The division of students into classes for instruction. |
| ClMan | Classroom Management | Refers to all of the things teachers do to organize students, space, time, and materials to maximize effective teaching and student learning. |
| ClEnv | Classroom Environment | Refers to the physical environment of the classroom (e.g., student work display, learning centers, classroom library, word wall, etc.) |
| TU | Tutoring | A support service provided by hired personnel who tutor students beyond classroom instruction. |
| AS | Assessment | Refers to the types of diagnostic assessments administered to students. |

(Table 5 Continued)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| SD | Student Data | Results from diagnostic assessments used to guide teacher instruction. |
| NAF | Nonacademic Factors | Other factors affecting student academic performance (absenteeism, health issues, family life, etc.) |
| SP | Speech/language | Issues regarding the development and acquisition of speech and language in young children. |
| ELL | English Language Learnr | Refers to the instruction provided to students learning English as a second language. |
| SpEd | Special Education | Topics related to the field of special education (dyslexia, autism, etc.) |
| SFA | Success for All | Topics related to the Success for All program (curriculum, materials, resources, training, etc.) |
| **Scaffolding** | | |
| Q | Questioning | The coach asks the teacher a question. |
| *Questions eliciting information* | | |
| QIf | Focusing on facts | To share facts in order to establish a firm foundation for further work. |
| QIi | Suggesting implications | To prepare teachers to deal with a possible challenge or to focus on the parameters of response. |
| QIe | Revealing experience | To discover what personal experiences teachers are bringing with them to the content of the lesson. |
| *Questions shaping understanding* | | |
| QUc | Focusing on connections | To require teachers to use what they already know and apply it to the material at hand. |
| QUrr | Pressing for rethinking or restating | To press for intellectual clarity when the meaning is veiled. "What do you mean by …?" |

(Table 5 Continued)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| QUpv | Promoting point of view | To present opportunities for seeing material from a variety of viewpoints and to respect the attitudes and points of view of others. |
| Qui | Demanding interpretations | To require teachers to consider, justify, and/or explain instructional statements, situations, or conclusions. |
| QUu | Confirmation of understanding | To confirm or acknowledge an understanding of what has been said. |
| *Questions pressing for reflection* | | |
| QRh | Developing hypotheses | To provide teachers with opportunities to think creatively about the facts. |
| QRfa | Focusing on future action | To require teachers to consider the next steps or actions based upon "what it". |
| QRca | Developing critical assessment | Finding ways of justification or balancing feelings with intellectual analysis of the situation. |
| Di | Directing | The coach directs the teacher to something helpful. |
| De | Demonstrating | The coach takes the teacher's role and demonstrates a problem solving action. |
| T | Telling | The coach tells or provides the teacher with information. |
| **Celebration** | | |
| *Specific* | | |
| C-EPFB | Explicit Positive Feedback | The coach provides the teacher with positive feedback in a direct and precise manner. |
| *General* | | |
| C-GPFB | General Positive Feedback | Ranges from describing general instructional practices that have gone well to offering personal accolades to enhance teacher performance. |

To assist with the management of data, all transcripts were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and imported as source documents into NVivo 8, a computer software program built for the purpose of classifying, sorting, and arranging data that allows the researcher to discover patterns and themes and develop meaningful conclusions (QSR International, 2008).

Once the sources were imported, I began creating tree nodes designed to organize nodes into a hierarchical structure, moving from a general category at the top (the parent node) to more specific categories (child nodes). In total, there were 8 parent nodes with 30 children nodes rolled underneath.

After the coding structure was in place, NVivo 8 provided a sophisticated workspace that allowed for easy query of relationships among data. This useful tool also helped me build connections between the qualitative and quantitative pieces of the data analysis.

### 3.5    SUMMARY

A descriptive case study design was employed to describe how a literacy coach used coaching conversations to guide collaborative inquiry to support teachers' needs. The main participant was a Reading First literacy coach; three kindergarten classroom teachers served as secondary participants. Data were collected through audiotaped coaching conversations, audiotaped interviews with the literacy coach and participating teachers, and field notes kept during observations. All audiotaped data sources were transcribed and entered into a code and retrieval software, NVivo 8. Data were compared throughout the analysis to construct categories that capture recurring patterns. Salient themes emerging from the data were written to provide a

detailed description of how a literacy coach used collaborative inquiry in coaching conversations to assist teachers with pedagogical thinking.

# 4.0    RESULTS

This study focused primarily on the *nature of talk* used during coaching conversations by examining how a literacy coach used these conversations to guide collaborative inquiry to support teachers' needs. This study provides a rich description of the type of talk the literacy coach used in her coaching conversations with three kindergarten classroom teachers by analyzing the content of conversation, levels of support provided by the coach to scaffold teacher understanding about instructional practices, and the types of questions posed by the coach to prompt teacher thinking about instructional practices.

The following tells a story of the coaching conversations Hannah had with each of the three kindergarten teachers: Rick, Dawn, and Sandra. Within this story, I utilized a similar format for each conversation that addressed two of my research questions:

1.  *What was the content of each conversation that seemed to be the primary foci of coaching?*

2.  *In what ways did the coach facilitate the co-construction of meaning during the conversation?*

    a)  *What scaffolding support did the coach provide to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking?*

    b)  *What types of questions were asked by the coach to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking?*

## 4.1    HANNAH AND RICK: CONVERSATION 1

### 4.1.1   CONTENT

Hannah greeted Rick pleasantly as he walked into a room that Hannah established as her little nook in the building. This room housed her desk, computer, files, books, and other resources that she uses daily. In the back of the room, several stacks of papers and materials were organized on a table ready to be delivered to classrooms. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee from a coffee pot in the corner of the room filled the air. When Rick arrived, Hannah invited him to a cup of coffee while he joined us at one of the tables she used to conduct conferences and meetings.

Hannah explained to Rick that I would observe and audiotape their conversation that morning. I had met previously with Rick to discuss the purpose of the study and the role of his participation. He was eager and willing to assist in this project. After a bit of informal discussion, Hannah initiated the coaching conversation with Rick by establishing her purpose for the conference:

> Rick, I went over the most recent SFA assessments that you gave and I want to compare them to the latest DIBELS to make sure we are on track with all of the kids. I think if we compare both sets of data, we can make a better judgment about their progress. Also, I want to discuss those students who are receiving tutoring services and how well they are doing. So, let's begin with the first student on your list.

Hannah clearly established the goals for her conversation with Rick: assessment, student data, and tutoring services. The dialogue between the two of them flowed from these set goals. In

terms of analysis, the transcript first was coded based on content. In all, 66 total references were

coded at 10 specific nodes for content in Hannah's conversation with Rick (see Table 6).

**Table 6**

**Content: Conversation 1**

| Content | Number of Coded Content References | Percentage of Coded Content References |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 5 | 8 |
| English Language Learner | 1 | 2 |
| Grouping | 7 | 10 |
| Phonemic Awareness | 3 | 5 |
| Phonics | 1 | 2 |
| Nonacademic Factors | 8 | 12 |
| Student Data | 10 | 15 |
| Speech/Language | 7 | 11 |
| Special Education | 6 | 9 |
| Tutoring Services | 18 | 27 |
| Total | 66 | 100 |

Consistent with her goals for the conversation, Hannah most frequently discussed

tutoring services that were provided or should be provided to Rick's students. A part of Hannah's

coaching duties was to align two employed tutors with students who need their services. Hannah

discussed one student, Alicia, with Rick to seek his opinion as to whether the student needed to

continue receiving tutoring assistance:

> H: So, where do you see Alicia as far as needing instructional tutoring?

> R: Actually, Alicia is improving.

> H: Do you think she should continue being tutored?

R: I do. I think the tutoring really helps her. She did not go to preschool, so this is

her first school setting. She is getting use to the routine and needs consistency. I think we

should keep her on the list for tutoring.

H: Okay, I agree. I think the tutoring is a benefit for her, too. We will go ahead

and make sure she continues to receive the service.

The above interaction described the nature of the talk between Hannah and Rick during the conversation as they discussed each student in his classroom. There was a brief discussion about each student's progress as they devised a list of those requiring tutoring services.

A second topic frequently discussed during the conversation was student data. Because Hannah and Rick were conversing about assessments, interpreting student data to guide teacher instruction was a major focus. It is important to differentiate between units that were coded as *assessment* and those coded as *student data*. Whenever the topic was relevant to the *types* of diagnostic assessments administered to students, it was coded as assessment. However, when the talk pertained to students' performance on the given assessments, the unit was coded as student data. For example, Hannah explained to Rick the purpose of administering the STEPPING STONES assessment (SFA curriculum-based assessment) and the various skills it assessed: auditory blending, auditory segmenting, reading sounds, and writing sounds. This was coded as *assessment* because it specifically discussed aspects of an assessment used for diagnostic purposes. To further illustrate the distinction between the two codes, below is an example of how Hannah conversed with Rick about a student's performance on the assessments:

H: Nathan scored strategic on the DIBELS and it shows that he has not mastered initial

sound fluency. When a student has not grasped initial sound fluency, it makes me

worried. But, looking at his results on STEPPING STONES, he did very well. This is why it is so important that     we not only look at one assessment to make decisions.

Based on Hannah's talk about the assessment results for this particular student, the unit above was coded as *student data*. References coded as student data throughout this conversation ranged from specific talk about target scores – "Jill got 16 out of 30 on STEPPING STONES and her phonemic awareness is still weak" – to more general comments – "Let's talk about Jordan. He is a bright boy and scored at strategic. Where does he really need help?"

A new code, *nonacademic factors,* was added to the Content category because there were several instances when Hannah would ask or comment about a student's progress in general terms. Factors relating to this type of talk were those that might inhibit a student from succeeding academically in the classroom, such as absenteeism, health issues, family problems, etc. Consequently, 12% of the total references coded pertained to nonacademic factors. One particular discussion concerned the size and health of a student and how it affected his/her learning. Hannah and Rick talked about different seating arrangements that might accommodate this student in a more comfortable manner.

### 4.1.2   SCAFFOLDING

"It would be easy to scaffold learning if it only involved offering everyone the same kind of help at the same time, disregarding each person's present abilities and understandings of his or her response to the support" (Rodgers & Rodgers, pp. 73–74). Hannah varied the level of scaffolding support she offered to Rick throughout this coaching conversation. The four kinds of scaffolding support that Hannah provided Rick during the coaching conversation were coded as telling, demonstrating, directing, and questioning. Table 7 illustrates a breakdown of the data

into the number and percentage of references coded at each scaffolding level, in addition to the number of words spoken by the coach that were coded for each level. Recognizing the word count provided an interesting lens on the coach's talk by comparing the number of words she used within each level to support the teacher. Within the category of questioning, a deeper analysis detailing the types of questions posed by the coach also is discussed.

**Table 7**

**Scaffolding: Conversation 1**

| Scaffolding Levels | Number of Coded Scaffolding References | Percentage of Coded Scaffolding References | Words per Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| Telling | 31 | 37 | 792 |
| Demonstrating | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Directing | 10 | 12 | 250 |
| Questioning | 42 | 51 | 438 |
| Total | 83 | 100 | 1480 |

Analysis showed that 37% of the scaffolding support offered by Hannah was telling. It also was found that she used more words (792 word count) when she was directly telling or providing Rick with information during the conversation. A distinct pattern of Hannah's talk appeared to alternate between telling Rick information and then following up with a question. This could be due to the format of the conversation in which she presented him information about student data and then asked a question to prompt his thinking about the student's progress or about his teaching practices. This approach is illustrated in the following:

H: Let's look at Elizabeth's progress. Looking at the data, Elizabeth scored at the intensive level. She got 16 out of 30 and her phonemic awareness is very weak. I have

observed her in your class and noticed that she continues to struggle with many of the beginning sounds. What I have shown you in the past about teaching simultaneous oral spelling could help (telling). How do you think we can provide more help for her? (questioning)

By alternating the telling of information, most often reciting student data, and then posing a follow-up question, this varied level of support gave the teacher substance to consider and then respond. Again, this appeared to be the pattern throughout the conversation. However, the scaffolding support of *telling* should not be confused with the support level of *directing*. A clear distinction exists between these two codes. As mentioned previously, references were coded as telling whenever the coach told or provided the teacher with information. References were coded as directing whenever the coach directed the teacher to something helpful, such as new strategies and resource materials. Directing also encompassed suggestions that required the teacher to take action. This included scheduling a meeting with a parent, discussing a student's progress with the tutor, discussing a situation with the guidance counselor, etc. Analysis showed that 12% of Hannah's scaffolding was coded as directing, and most of her directing was aimed at suggestions requiring Rick to take action. No references were coded at the demonstrating level of scaffolding support.

The majority (51%) of scaffolding support offered by Hannah was coded at the questioning level. The coded questions were categorized into three broad categories: questions that elicit information, questions that shaped understanding, and questions that pressed for reflection.

Table 8 provides further information about the questions Hannah asked Rick during the conversation to prompt his thinking about instructional practices.

**Table 8**

**Distribution of Questions: Conversation 1**

| Category of Question | Specific Function of the Question | Number of Coded References | Percentage of Total Questions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Questions eliciting information | Focusing on facts | 9 | 21 |
| | Suggesting implications | 2 | 5 |
| Questions shaping understanding | Focusing on connections | 2 | 5 |
| | Pressing for rethinking or restating | 7 | 17 |
| | Promoting point of view | 9 | 21 |
| | Confirmation of understanding | 1 | 2 |
| Questions pressing for reflection | Developing hypotheses | 1 | 2 |
| | Developing critical assessment | 11 | 26 |

About one-quarter (26%) of her questions required Rick to develop a critical assessment in his responses. Developing critical assessment requires one to find ways of balancing one's feelings with intellectual analysis (Morgan & Saxton, 1994). This was not a surprise because Hannah clearly established that her main goal for the conversation was to assist Rick in making instructional decisions (e.g., tutoring, grouping, etc.) based on student data.

The following provides a snippet of the conversation regarding such questions:

H: Let's talk about Tony. Looking at the DIBELS results, he scored at intensive. What are your thoughts about how you think he is doing in class? How can we give him more help?

R: Tony is a concern, but he is also a tricky one. He is so quiet that it is sometimes difficult for me to assess him during instruction and really knowing what he is capable of

doing. He is really not behind and gets his work done in class. He also works well in his group. He is making a lot of progress. I often feel he is on the brink of reaching level performance. If I ask him questions, he is quiet but he always answers them. He is coming along. He needs to stick to a routine, so I think he definitely should continue getting tutoring help.

The question Hannah asked Rick forced him to critically reflect and discuss how Tony was performing in class based on his own observations and student data. It often is this type of reflection that leads to the hypotheses that guide instructional decisions (Morgan & Saxton, 1994).

Both promoting point of view and focusing on facts accounted for 21% of the questions that Hannah asked Rick in this coaching conversation. Questions that focused on facts pertained to general questions she had about the students in his class, such as: "Is Tonya moving?" or "Has Samuel missed any school this week?" The responses generated from Rick were basic yes or no answers or ones that did not need elaboration.

However, questions that Hannah asked promoting Rick's point of view were opportunities to engage him in the conversation by valuing his opinion to shape understanding. Rodgers & Rodgers argue, "The literacy coach may prompt teachers to provide their point of view or demand an interpretation. This can be extremely helpful in better understanding the teacher's interpretive lens and, therefore, planning subsequent professional development sessions (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007, p. 103). For example, Hannah sought Rick's point of view when asking him whether he was going to keep a student within a certain intervention group or request tutoring services instead. The question was nonjudgmental, but yielded helpful information for both the coach and teacher.

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Finally, 17% of Hannah's questions pressed Rick to restate or rethink by being more accurate and specific with his comments. Hannah sought clarification to establish further dialogue with Rick by asking questions such as, "What do you mean by that?" or "I am not sure I understand. Can you restate the comment?"

To illustrate this point further, Rick was comparing the progress of two English Language Learner (ELL) students:

R: You see, with Giavanni, I can observe clear improvements with her grasping the language. She is beginning to really excel at what she is doing in class. On the other hand, Eduardo is so far behind processing the information that he is just not getting it like Giavanni does. She gets it bit by bit. Eduardo is coming along, but so much slower.

H: I think I see what you mean. Tell me if I am wrong, but are you saying that you think the problem is that Eduardo's language barrier is much worse than Giavanni's and that is why he appears to struggle?

T: Oh yes, absolutely. When I asked him questions for the first nine weeks, I never was sure he understood what I was saying. It worried me a lot. Then I started asking different types of questions and I could eventually see he was trying to process the information, but often I would have to ask the same question many times before he would respond. It frustrates me, because I do not know what he knows compared to what he does not know as far as learning the English language. I don't seem to see the same difficulties with Giavanni.

By asking a question that pressed Rick for clarification, Hannah promoted an open discussion between the two of them. Without this understanding, it would have been difficult for Hannah to offer Rick suggestions to assist his ELL students.

## 4.2    HANNAH AND RICK: CONVERSATION 2

### 4.2.1  CONTENT

As Hannah walked quickly down the hallway armed with a red folder containing student data, she shared with me that she was going to assist Rick in using the data to form his intervention groups. Hannah explained:

> All of my teachers are really good at looking at student data to guide their teaching practices. Today, I am going to help Rick form new intervention groups based on the latest assessments. We have been doing this throughout the year, but now the teachers are forming teams of three in which they will combine their students into different intervention groups: benchmark, strategic, and intensive. This will allow each of them to focus their teaching on one group instead of three.

Hannah then provided a rationale for why this decision was made:

> Two of the teachers have been working together all year with combining their groups and it is really working well for them. I have watched them teach the intervention lessons and thought that this would be a great idea for all of the teachers to do. I consulted with Ms. Glover and she supported the idea if the teachers were willing to do this. So, in our common planning meeting, I approached the teachers with the plan of working together as teams and combining their students into the three groups. Everyone liked the idea. I am glad. I think it will be great for the teachers to work together and it makes sense to combine the groups. In the long run, I think the teachers will enjoy spending time preparing and teaching one group instead of three.

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Hannah laughed, "I am going to try this out on Rick. He is the first teacher I am going to help with putting together his new groups. I am a little nervous because it is something new and there is paperwork involved!"

As we entered Rick's classroom, he was sitting at a round table and asked us to join him. He apologized that we had to sit on the small child-size seats and jokingly commented that everything in a kindergarten room is small. Rapport was established easily and the conversation between Hannah and Rick began:

> Rick, this morning we are going to work on forming your new intervention groups. I have brought along the DIBELS results for your class to help guide us on making sure the kids are in the right groups. Once the other teachers on your team have done the same, then you all will have to decide who of you will take each group. I think this is going to be such a help for everyone. However, there are some forms that are required by Reading First to show them our intervention plan. The forms go hand-in-hand with what we are doing today. So, we will complete the forms together as we talk about your groups. Okay?

Hannah established her goal for the conversation and proceeded to talk with Rick. In terms of analysis, there were 62 references coded at six specific nodes for content. Table 9 illustrates the content discussed in this conversation.

**Table 9**

**Content: Conversation 2**

| Content | Number of Coded Content References | Percentage of Coded Content References |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 11 | 18 |
| Concepts of Print | 2 | 3 |
| Grouping | 16 | 26 |
| Phonemic Awareness | 8 | 13 |
| Phonics | 4 | 7 |
| Student Data | 21 | 34 |
| Total | 62 | 100 |

Consistent with Hannah's goals set for her conversation with Rick, 34% of the coded references were about student data. An example of this type of talk included:

H: Rick, if you look at Eli's results you will see that he did not do well in nonsense word fluency. However, Ben reached the goal by getting 16 out of the 13 he needed for nonsense word fluency, so I would concentrate more on segmentation because it is such a hard skill for him. Now, look at the results and you will see that David needs help with nonsense word fluency, too. What do you think Madison needs based on the results?

R: Madison needs help in initial sounds and letter naming.

H: Well, if you look at her letter naming, it is not so bad. I would consider her borderline in that area. But, look at phoneme segmentation, she needed to get 18 and she got 13. So, I think Madison is strategic because of her weak auditory skills for blending. Do you agree?

R: Yes, I definitely agree. So, I should list her as strategic needing help in phoneme segmentation on the form?

H: Yes, that is what I would do.

The second topic that coincided with student data was grouping, and 26% of the content was coded as grouping students for instruction, which was the objective of this conversation. There were 16 references coded that referred to Hannah's talk about grouping. The following piece from the transcript illustrates this discussion:

H: The results show that Bobby needs help in letter naming. Now, look and see which other students may be grouped into this intervention. Who would you select?

R: Based on this, I see that Evan and Denzel could both use help in letter naming.

H: I agree. What about Samantha?

R: She is borderline. I think she needs more help in initial sound fluency than letter naming. I would group her with Adrianna for initial sounds.

Hannah forced Rick to scrutinize the data closely as he attempted to make the best grouping decisions for his student; the conversation seldom veered to other topics. Sometimes, Hannah would explain the various DIBELS subtests to Rick, coded as assessment (18%), whenever an explanation was necessary. However, for the most part, Hannah remained task oriented as she continued to keep the conversation on track with her goal in mind.

## 4.2.2 SCAFFOLDING

The levels of scaffolding support that Hannah provided Rick varied. Table 10 illustrates that 42% of the scaffolding was coded as telling. Furthermore, more than 50% of Hannah's word count was at this level. As explained previously, telling was coded anytime Hannah provided the teacher with information. The majority of information that Hannah provided Rick concerned student data and grouping. For example, Hannah often would initiate discussion by citing each student's DIBELS scores and whether they were identified as benchmark, strategic, or intensive.

Sometimes, she would tell or provide information to help Rick understand the various DIBELS subtests. For instance, Hannah explained, "Initial sound fluency tests their phonological awareness. But, this is just hearing the first sound in the word instead of hearing all of them. As you can see, Eric has problems with initial sound fluency." Providing this type of information to Rick seemed to help him better understand the rationale and purpose of the assessment in conjunction with his students' performance.

**Table 10**

**Scaffolding: Conversation 2**

| Scaffolding Levels | Number of Coded Scaffolding References | Percentage of Coded Scaffolding References | Words per Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| Telling | 30 | 42 | 997 |
| Demonstrating | 1 | 1 | 20 |
| Directing | 20 | 28 | 689 |
| Questioning | 21 | 29 | 149 |
| Total | 72 | 100 | 1855 |

It was found that 28% of Hannah's scaffolding support used with Rick was coded as directing, and that she used 689 words to provide this type of support to Rick. This was the second highest word count she used, lower only than the words used for the level of telling.

The context of this conversation was not only about analyzing student data to formulate intervention groups; it also included the completion of the required Reading First intervention plan forms. Therefore, an integral purpose of Hannah's conversation with Rick was to give him direction on how to accomplish these tasks. The following is an example of this type of talk that Hannah used:

H: Okay, I would keep working with Mia on the Green Words (SFA curriculum) because reading the Green Words are like …

R: (interrupts) … are like reading the nonsense words?

H: Exactly. So, I would just keep Mia in the segmentation and nonsense words group or the Green Words group, if you want to call it that. If you put the kids in a group where you work with them on the Green Words, they will see a connection to the nonsense words that are given on the DIBELS. I think this will help Mia and the others in her group a lot.

This scenario represented Hannah directing Rick toward an action that would assist a student in becoming adept in nonsense words fluency. Hannah often used her expertise throughout the conversation to coach Rick toward actions that she hoped would prove to be beneficial.

Analysis also revealed that Hannah supported Rick by questioning; 29% of her scaffolding support was questioning. However, by examining the number of words used (149 words), the questions she asked were not lengthy. Table 11 delineates the types of questions Hannah asked Rick during this coaching conversation.

**Table 11**

**Distribution of Questions: Conversation 2**

| Category of Question | Specific Function of the Question | Number of Coded References | Percentage of Total Questions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Questions eliciting information | Focusing on facts | 10 | 48 |
| Questions shaping understanding | Promoting point of view | 1 | 5 |
| | Confirmation of understanding | 8 | 38 |
| Questions pressing for reflection | Focusing on future action | 1 | 5 |
| | Developing critical assessment | 1 | 5 |

Almost half (48%) of the questions Hannah asked Rick focused on facts. Basically, she asked Rick to look at the DIBELS results and identify data in response to her questions. An example of this included:

H: Rick, by looking at this print-out of the DIBELS results, can you tell me what area Megan scored the lowest?

R: (Looking at the results sheet) She scored the lowest in nonsense word fluency.

H: What was her score?

R: She scored 6.

H: What was the set goal for nonsense word fluency?

R: The goal was 13 letter sounds.

Even though this pattern of conversing appeared to be somewhat mundane and predictable, Hannah was setting the foundation for further work with Rick. First, she urged him to examine the student data closely in order to place the students in appropriate intervention

groups. Second, she helped him record the data onto the Reading First forms that documented his intervention grouping and instructional plan.

Finally, the findings reported that 38% of Hannah's questions were directed toward a confirmation of understanding. These eight coded references were questions she asked whenever she wanted to confirm or acknowledge that Rick understood what they were discussing. Questions such as: "Does that make sense?" and "Do you know what I mean?" were tactics to keep the momentum of the conversation flowing.

### 4.2.3   SUMMARY

In both conversations, Hannah had predetermined goals that guided her talk with Rick. In the first conversation, her focus was assisting Rick with analyzing student data to identify students needing supplemental instructional support from tutoring. Consistent with her goals, the majority of Hannah's talk was about the tutoring service and how it could benefit certain students. Because they were examining results from recent diagnostic assessments to make decisions about tutoring, her talk also encompassed the topic of student data. Hannah and Rick continually compared sets of data to inform them about how the students were achieving in his class. This type of discussion often led Hannah to talk about other issues (e.g., health, absenteeism, family, etc.) that may inhibit students from achieving academic success.

In the second conversation, Hannah focused on student data. Again, seldom veering from her goal, she talked to Rick about how to scrutinize student data to place students in the appropriate intervention groups. This talk also included information about the diagnostic assessment used to guide their decision about grouping placements. Hannah was successful in

keeping the topics consistent with her goals, but included the flexibility to discuss other issues initiated by Rick, as needed.

In terms of scaffolding, Hannah varied the support she provided to Rick in both conversations. In the first conversation, the majority of the scaffolding support offered was questioning. Within this level, she most often asked Rick questions that required him to develop a critical assessment in his responses. Most often, her questions led Rick to make responses that bridged student data with instructional decisions. Often, Hannah would seek Rick's point of view throughout the conversation. She seemed to respect his opinions as she often referred to his excellence in teaching and willingness to learn.

Hannah used telling to guide Rick in the second conversation. Because of the content of this conversation, she told Rick information that would assist him in using student data correctly in order to make grouping placements. Also, since the school recently had enacted a new teaching approach for the intervention groups, Hannah told Rick how to modify his groups to achieve this. Additionally, she provided information about how to complete the Reading First forms that outlined the new intervention groups and how they would be instructed. A pattern that appeared consistently during this conversation was Hannah's technique of telling Rick information followed by a question. She seemed to want Rick to consider the information she provided, but always forced him to respond to it.

## 4.3    HANNAH AND DAWN: CONVERSATION 1

### 4.3.1   CONTENT

While Dawn's students were participating in gym class, Hannah and I met with Dawn in her kindergarten classroom. Dawn cheerfully welcomed us to her classroom and proclaimed her excitement about participating in this study. Hannah explained that this was Dawn's first year of teaching kindergarten and she was proud of Dawn's ability to adapt to the new situation. Because of limited time, Hannah promptly commenced her coaching conversation with Dawn by establishing the purpose for their meeting:

> H: Dawn, I have brought my binder that holds your students' assessments. You should have your binder that contains the same information. I want us to look at the current DIBELS scores along with the STEPPING STONES results and compare them so we can see how well the kids are doing.

After Hannah laid out her plan for the conversation, she found that Dawn did not have her own binder compiled with the latest assessments results. Hannah immediately told her that it was not a big deal and it would not interfere with their meeting. Hannah shared her binder with Dawn as they discussed each student's progress.

When Hannah directed Dawn toward the STEPPING STONES results, an SFA quarterly assessment, she asked Dawn about the levels of SFA she taught at another school prior to coming to the Garrett Kindergarten Unit. Dawn reported that she never had experience in teaching the beginning levels of SFA and it has been an adjustment for her. However, she explained that because she had taught higher levels of the curriculum in the past, she was able to

recognize the necessary skills that must be acquired in order for her kindergarten students to be successful as they progress through the SFA program.

Hannah redirected the conversation to the topic of examining student data. During Hannah's conversation with Dawn, the dialogue covered a myriad of topics. In terms of analysis, 75 total references were coded at 10 specific nodes for content (see Table 12).

**Table 12**

**Content: Conversation 1**

| Content | Number of Coded Content References | Percentage of Coded Content References |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 3 | 4 |
| Concepts of Print | 1 | 1 |
| Grouping | 17 | 23 |
| Phonemic Awareness | 6 | 8 |
| Phonics | 1 | 1 |
| Nonacademic Factors | 16 | 21 |
| Student Data | 4 | 5 |
| Success for All | 7 | 9 |
| Speech/language | 11 | 15 |
| Tutoring | 9 | 12 |
| Total | 75 | 100 |

Of the total coded references, 23% pertained to grouping students for appropriate instruction. Hannah wanted to ascertain the academic progress of each student and the instruction they were receiving in their intervention groups. For example, she inquired about a specific student's group placement:

H: Dawn, where is Joe as far as your intervention groups go? Is he in the lower group?

D: No, he is not. I do not think he should be in the lowest group. I have him placed with Julie and Jason.

H: How is he doing?

D: He is sounding out words and can write whenever he feels like it. We write in our journals everyday and if he feels like doing it, he will. If he doesn't, it is just a scribble or a picture. He is not mean about it and does not get defensive. Do you know what I mean?

H: You have to keep pushing him and the rest of that group. He should be writing his own words by now. I know he can do it. Overall, it looks like your middle group is not doing too badly. Just keep an eye on them because you don't want any of them to slip.

Throughout the course of the conversation, Dawn often had difficulty answering Hannah's questions regarding students' specific academic strengths and weaknesses. Dawn often would direct her responses to circumstances the students were experiencing to justify their lack of performance in the classroom. The following is an example of this type of discussion:

H: Let's look at Mary. How is she doing?

D: Not well. She is in my low group.

H: Where is she having the most difficulty?

D: Well, I don't think that she can't do it. She does try. Sometimes she talks. She divulged a lot of information today and there appears to be some real problems at home. It is a bad situation. Her mother is dead and her brother is in jail. It is really bad.

This type of talk represented 21% of the content coded as nonacademic factors. By definition, this code referred to factors affecting family issues, absenteeism, health, etc. There were 16 references in Hannah and Dawn's conversation that pertained to issues other than academics that affected the student's achievement in the classroom.

Another topic discussed was speech and language, with 15% of the coded references about speech and language difficulties that Dawn thought her students were experiencing. It

appeared that Dawn often confused students' lack of phonemic awareness with speech delays. Hannah frequently explained that most of the difficulties were not speech problems but immature phonemic awareness abilities. She often demonstrated techniques or prompts that Dawn could use with these students to reinforce proper sound production.

In addition to the topics previously mentioned, 12% of the references pertained to Hannah's talk about tutoring services. As Hannah gathered information from Dawn about the students, she gauged which students needed tutoring beyond classroom instruction. This topic was not the premise for the conversation and was discussed only when relevant to other topics.

Even though Hannah's intention for the conversation was to discuss student data, there were only four incidents of this occurring. Hannah often had to redirect the conversation to her goal of discussing student data after Dawn would mention other issues. The conversation was very broad and seldom reached pockets of in-depth discussion.

### 4.3.2   SCAFFOLDING

Table 13 illustrates that 31% of the scaffolding support that Hannah provided Dawn during the coaching conversation were coded at the telling level. It also reveals that the majority of words (869 word count) that Hannah used were within this level of support. Given that Dawn was struggling with classroom management and instruction, Hannah may have decided that she had to tell or provide Dawn with information to help improve her teaching practices.

Some of the information that Hannah provided dealt with nonacademic factors affecting student performance. Dawn often would comment on students' home environment issues and Hannah would share information to enlighten the situation. At one time during the conversation, Dawn was concerned about a student who rarely attended school. Hannah shared that there were

several children in this child's family and there has been a lot of absenteeism in the past with her siblings. Most of the time, Hannah tried to offer Dawn the appropriate protocol in handling these situations by suggesting she discuss the matter further with the guidance counselor or Ms. Glover, the school principal.

**Table 13**

**Scaffolding: Conversation 1**

| Scaffolding Levels | Number of Coded Scaffolding References | Percentage of Coded Scaffolding References | Words per Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| Telling | 36 | 31 | 869 |
| Demonstrating | 2 | 2 | 101 |
| Directing | 22 | 19 | 492 |
| Questioning | 56 | 48 | 446 |
| Total | 116 | 100 | 1908 |

Another portion of telling support that Hannah provided Dawn dealt with her understanding of phonemic awareness in conjunction with speech development. For example, Dawn was concerned about a student who continued to have difficulty with certain initial sounds and thought she may need to be referred for speech therapy. After listening to her concerns, Hannah explained that it was not uncommon for children at this age to not have mastered all of the initial sounds, but encouraged her to continue teaching the sounds and diagnosing the student's progress.

The least amount of scaffolding support Hannah provided Dawn was demonstrating. There were only two incidents in which Hannah took the teacher's role and demonstrated a problem-solving action. Both incidents pertained to showing Dawn how to use phoneme boxes to reinforce sound isolation in words. Hannah produced a graphic illustrating phoneme boxes and

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demonstrated how the students would use the boxes to orally manipulate the sounds. Dawn thought the strategy would be helpful to those students still experiencing difficulty with certain sounds and agreed to incorporate it into her reading instruction.

The findings revealed that there were 22 incidents in which Hannah directed Dawn to something helpful during their conversation. A majority of the directing was toward steering Dawn to the appropriate personnel who could assist her with those students experiencing difficulties outside of the classroom. For example, the following is a snippet from the conversation transcript in which Dawn was concerned about a student's habitual absenteeism and discussed it with Hannah:

H: How about Madison? How is she doing so far?

D: She only comes to school once a week, if that. I always tell her that she has to start coming to school. But she tells me that her mom does not wake up.

H: She is right. She does not get up and send the kids to school. It has been a problem for awhile and we have tried to stop the situation. So, how is she doing when she is here?

D: She has a lot of difficulty. She does not get along with the other kids. She lies and makes up stories all of the time.

H: What group is she in right now? The low group?

D: No, she is in the middle group. This is surprising since she never comes to school.

H: I suggest you talk with Ron (guidance counselor) about this as soon as possible. Maybe he can talk with Madison's mom and get her on board with us now before we need to take further action.

D: I agree. I will talk with Ron today.

In addition to directing Dawn toward the kinds of help as mentioned above, Hannah also assisted Dawn by directing her to implement practices to reinforce her instruction in reading. She discussed certain techniques she could use with her students to help them with letter/sound pronunciation. In order to help students make the correct sounds, Hannah directed Dawn to use prompts with her students. For example, she directed Dawn to point to her throat when helping students with the /k/ and /g/ sounds. She felt this reminded students that these sounds are produced in the back of the throat. Often, Hannah shared these kinds of techniques acquired from her many years as a speech therapist.

During Hannah's coaching conversation with Dawn, 48% of scaffolding was coded at the questioning level. A summary of the types of questions that Hannah asked is illustrated in Table 14. The majority of her questions were those eliciting information from Dawn. More specifically, these questions focused on asking facts that armed her with pertinent information needed to build a basis for the conversation. Examples of questions that Hannah asked included: "Which students are in your benchmark group?" or "How many days has Madison missed this year?" Most of Dawn's responses to these questions did not require in-depth thinking, but were basic facts that she could answer easily. However, Hannah was able to utilize Dawn's responses to engage her further in conversation. Below is an example of this type of engagement:

H: Dawn, do you wear the voice projection device when teaching?

D: Yes, sometimes.

H: You don't wear it all of the time?

D: No, sometimes I forget to put it on.

H: Does it work when you wear it?

D: Yes. It works fine when I remember to wear it.

H: I see. I think it would help Joel with his hearing problems. He is a mouth breather and may have fluid in his ears that is causing congestion which is probably why he does not always hear what you are saying. Try wearing the device more regularly and let's see if you notice a difference with Joel's attention and comprehension. Okay?

D: Yeah. I will be more conscientious of wearing it now.

**Table 14**

**Distribution of Questions: Conversation 1**

| Category of Questions | Specific Function of the Question | Number of Coded References | Percentage of Total Questions |
|---|---|:---:|:---:|
| Questions eliciting information | Focusing on facts | 24 | 43 |
| | Suggesting implications | 5 | 9 |
| | Revealing experience | 2 | 4 |
| Questions shaping understanding | Demanding interpretations | 1 | 2 |
| | Promoting point of view | 3 | 5 |
| | Pressing for rethinking or restating | 4 | 7 |
| Questions pressing for reflection | Developing hypotheses | 1 | 2 |
| | Developing critical assessment | 16 | 29 |

Analysis revealed that 29% of Hannah's questions required Dawn to develop critical assessment. Morgan and Saxton (1994) claim this type of question forces the responder to balance his or her feelings with intellectual analysis. There were 16 incidents in the conversation

in which Hannah asked these questions. Most of the incidents involved questions that required Dawn to assess her students' abilities and progress in the classroom. For example, the following demonstrates an incident in which Hannah asked Dawn to discuss how well a student was doing in the class:

> H: Dawn, let's take a look at Kevin. Data shows that he scored at the intensive level on the DIBELS. What do you think seems to be the problem? Do you see him making any progress at all?

> D: Yes. Kevin is making some progress. However, he has an attitude problem. If you even try to tell him to go back and let's try it again on something, he gets defensive. He will always ask me what he did wrong. I see that as being a problem with him.

> H: I see. But, is he learning all of the letters and sounds?

> D: Yes, but slowly.

Even though Hannah often would ask Dawn questions that required reflectivity, she appeared to lack in-depth reasoning in her responses. This is portrayed in the previous scenario as Hannah tried to engage Dawn in a discussion that would require her to analyze a student's progress. Dawn was not able to answer Hannah's question with substantial reasoning. She directed her response to his behavioral performance rather than academic. Again, Dawn's lack of experience teaching at the classroom level, especially kindergarten, and her lack of content pedagogy knowledge may have contributed to her difficulties discussing specific instructional topics.

## 4.4 HANNAH AND DAWN: CONVERSATION 2

### 4.4.1 CONTENT

Hannah greeted Dawn warmly as she arrived at the meeting that was planned for a Thursday morning. Coffee cup in hand, Dawn took a seat at the small conference table where Hannah and I were seated. The usual exchange of casual small talk between the parties created a relaxed atmosphere favorable to the beginning of the audiotaped coaching conversation.

Next to Hannah was a small stack of papers that included the most recent DIBELS results for Dawn's students and several Reading First data analysis forms. Hannah began the conversation by detailing her plans with Dawn in an explicit manner:

H: Dawn, what I am going to do this morning is go over these Reading First data analysis forms with you. I believe you will find that these forms will help you look at your kids' strengths and weaknesses and decide which intervention group will best serve them. So, let's start by looking at the DIBELS data and discuss the students who scored at the intensive level, then we will move on to the strategic and benchmark levels.

Table 15 illustrates that approximately 55% of the 67 coded content references pertained to assessment and student data. This finding appears to align with Hannah's goals for the conversation.

**Table 15**

**Content: Conversation 2**

| Content | Number of Coded Content References | Percentage of Coded Content References |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 20 | 30 |
| Concepts of Print | 7 | 10 |
| Grouping | 4 | 6 |
| Phonemic Awareness | 9 | 13 |
| Phonics | 7 | 10 |
| Student Data | 17 | 25 |
| Success for All | 3 | 5 |
| Total | 67 | 100 |

Because the analysis forms, required by Reading First, were new to Dawn and the other teachers, Hannah wanted to make sure that Dawn was able to complete the forms and use them to analyze the needs of her students. She wanted to show Dawn how she could look at each individual student and see his or her strengths and weaknesses in reading. Hannah told me:

Because Dawn is new to kindergarten, I need to take baby steps with her to show her step by step how to analyze the data. I think she knows more than she thinks she does because of her experiences with the higher levels of SFA. So, just showing her how to look at the data in-depth will help her think about her instruction with each of the intervention groups.

As Hannah and Dawn discussed assessment and student data, the conversation often would extend to other relevant topics; 23% of the content references were about phonemic awareness and phonics. Usually, these topics arose when Hannah explained what the DIBELS subtests measured. For example, she explicated that the nonsense words subtest measured the

students' ability to pronounce sounds in make-believe words. She further showed Dawn how to analyze a student's score on the nonsense word subtest:

H: Look at Jay's score on the nonsense word part of DIBELS. You can see that he got a 6 out of a goal of 13. But actually all he had to do was point to the make-believe words and read the sounds. He did not have to blend the words. So, if he was able to read 6 sounds then he is not doing too poorly because this is the first time he had to do this. It is like setting a benchmark for him now. Do you understand?

D: Yeah, it is measuring where he is on sound recognition and how I can build upon it.

H: Exactly. Very good.

Overall, there were 67 total references coded at seven different nodes for content. As previously mentioned, the majority of the conversation pertained to assessment and student data while Hannah and Dawn completed the Reading First analysis forms. However, Hannah also utilized the time to discuss other topics (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, concepts of print, etc.) that she deemed necessary to secure Dawn's understanding about how the data related to student needs and appropriate instruction.

## 4.4.2 SCAFFOLDING

The scaffolding support that Hannah provided Dawn most often during the conversation was telling (see Table 16). She used the greatest number of words (873) at this level of support. Given Hannah's plan for this conversation, it was not a surprise to find that she spent a lot of time telling Dawn what she needed to know in order to use the student data to formulate the intervention groups. Moreover, she gave Dawn new information that helped her complete the required Reading First analysis forms.

**Table 16**

**Scaffolding: Conversation 2**

| Scaffolding Levels | Number of Coded Scaffolding References | Percentage of Coded Scaffolding References | Words per Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| Telling | 31 | 40 | 873 |
| Demonstrating | 8 | 10 | 401 |
| Directing | 23 | 29 | 711 |
| Questioning | 16 | 21 | 110 |
| Total | 78 | 100 | 2095 |

Hannah divulged that her conversation with Dawn was mainly about giving her the information she needed to design her new intervention groups and complete the Reading First analysis forms. She said:

There was a lot of information that Dawn had to absorb this morning. She is still learning to analyze the student data to guide her instruction with the intervention groups. I was afraid that she was becoming a bit overwhelmed with what I planned for our coaching conversation. However, I think I gave her enough information about the analysis forms that she can finish them on her own. I think it was a good meeting.

Even though Hannah gave Dawn information that assisted her with completion of the Reading First forms, she also provided invaluable information about the DIBELS subtests and how to analyze the results. This is reflected in the following dialogue from their conversation:

D: I am looking at Taylor's scores on phoneme segmentation. Actually, he did fairly well on that part. Do you agree?

H: Yes, I do agree. I am glad that he appears to be improving.

D: Me, too. But look at the nonsense words subtest. He really bombed it. He did not get any right.

H: No, he did not read any sounds correctly. But do not base your opinion on just the nonsense words section of the test. You see, if he did well on the phoneme segmentation part then he apparently has good auditory skills and sound recognition. Sometimes, the nonsense word fluency can really throw the kids off because they are not real words. There could be a number of reasons why he did not do well. I would recommend checking these scores with their quarterly assessments and compare.

Although Hannah had set goals for this conversation, she seized opportunities to clarify or explain any concepts to Dawn that would increase her knowledge. Hannah commented that Dawn had several questions that needed to be answered. She said, "I was hoping to get more done with Dawn this morning, but she had a lot of questions. They were good questions that needed addressed before we could move on. She is beginning to see the connection with all of this … the assessments, the data, the groups … it is starting to click for her."

There were eight incidents in which Hannah demonstrated an activity for Dawn during the coaching conversation. In each incident, Hannah demonstrated an activity regarding the DIBELS assessment. For example, Dawn brought to Hannah's attention that there were words on the phoneme segmentation subtest with which some of her students had difficulty breaking apart the sounds. Hannah demonstrated a technique for Dawn that she thought might help:

D: You know some of the words on the phoneme segmentation part are too hard for a few of my kids. They really had a tough time breaking down the sounds.

H: Do you remember which words were difficult for them?

D: Yeah. I remember *stand* and *choose* were hard for them.

H: I agree that there is some discrepancy on what is tested. For example, when I tell the students to say the sounds in the word stop, they say /st/ /o/ /p/. I will ask them about /st/

and they will say /s/ and /t/ while counting the sounds separately on their fingers. (*Hannah demonstrated finger counting the sounds)* They need to learn how to count the sounds separately. I suggest you make them finger count the sounds in the words like I just showed you. I think it will help.

D: I agree. I can see how it would help. I will definitely do this.

Analysis indicated that 29% of the scaffolding support offered by Hannah was coded as directing. It was found that at this level, she used the second highest number of words (711 words). Because the Reading First analysis forms were a new requirement, Hannah spent much of her time directing Dawn toward completing them. She explicitly directed her to use the data to list the students needing additional support in letter naming, initial sound fluency, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency. Furthermore, she directed her to identify those students who were most at risk for not achieving benchmark, or who were deficit in the skill. Finally, the process evolved into the completion of a final form that delineated the new intervention groups. Given the lack of time, Hannah and Dawn were not able to complete all of the forms during their meeting. However, Hannah felt that Dawn would be able to finish them independently and would give her more assistance, if needed.

During Hannah's coaching conversation with Dawn, 21% of the scaffolding support she used was questioning. Table 17 shows the distribution of the type of questions she asked. It was found that 6 of her total 16 questions pertained to a confirmation of understanding. Questions such as, "Do you know what I mean?" and "Does that make sense?" appeared to be Hannah's method of keeping Dawn engaged in the dialogue. These questions were always asked at the end of Hannah's comments and mostly required simple yes or no responses.

There were three questions that pressed for rethinking or restating. By Hannah asking these questions, Dawn was forced to clarify or explain a statement she previously made. For example, Dawn commented to Hannah that she thought some of her students struggled with breaking down a few words on the phoneme segmentation subtest of the DIBELS. This is illustrated in the following:

D: As I said before, I think some of the words that the kids are to break down are really difficult for them. I think they get confused with how I teach them the sounds in class and what they are asked to do on the DIBELS.

H: I know we talked about this. Do you want to tell me more about what you think is confusing the kids?

D: I mean … take the word, *crowd*. Some of them have a hard time separating the /k/ and /r/ sounds. They want to keep them together. I really need to work on teaching them to separate certain sounds better.

The above scenario represents how Hannah needed Dawn to clarify her comment about the difficulties students were experiencing with phoneme segmentation. They had discussed this situation earlier in the conversation, but Dawn returned to the topic. Because it appeared to be of concern, Hannah wanted to make sure she understood Dawn's perception of the problem. Therefore, by asking Dawn to explain it further, Hannah would be in a better position to assist her.

**Table 17**

**Distribution of Questions: Conversation 2**

| Category of Question | Specific Function of the Question | Number of Coded References | Percentage of Total Questions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Questions eliciting information | Focusing on facts | 5 | 31 |
| | Revealing Experience | 2 | 13 |
| Questions shaping understanding | Pressing for rethinking or restating | 3 | 19 |
| | Confirmation of understanding | 6 | 38 |

Analysis indicated that 31% of Hannah's questions focused on facts. These questions were asked so that Dawn would share facts that would serve as a foundation for further discussion. Most of these questions were aimed toward information about the student data resulting from DIBELS. For example, Hannah would ask Dawn to discuss the assessment results with her. This required Dawn to examine the data closely in order to talk about the students' strengths and weaknesses. It often was found that her responses would jumpstart the conversation as they discussed the instructional needs of each student.

In addition to asking questions that elicited information, Hannah asked Dawn two questions about her past experiences, both of which pertained to the experience she had with SFA at another school. Hannah tried to build connections between Dawn's past experiences with SFA and her new ones at the kindergarten level. She commented, "Dawn comes with a wealth of knowledge about SFA from another school in the district. I need her to gain more confidence that she knows what she is doing with her kindergarten students. She has insight to what they will face later in SFA. I need to help her bridge that information with her current instruction."

### 4.4.3   SUMMARY

This study reported two coaching conversations that Hannah had with Dawn, a first year kindergarten teacher. An analysis was conducted to examine the content of each conversation that seemed to be the primary focus of coaching. In the first conversation, Hannah planned to assist Dawn in comparing two sets of student data to make judgments about the students' progress. It was found that there were a total of 75 references coded at 10 different nodes for content. Each node represented a different topic that was discussed during the coaching conversation. Even though Hannah planned to juxtapose student data with student performance, the conversation rarely delved into this area of in-depth talk.

Analysis indicated that the majority of the conversation was two-fold: grouping students for instruction and nonacademic factors. Hannah wanted to ascertain the academic progress of the students and the instruction they were receiving in their intervention groups. She spent time discussing each student with Dawn. It was found that Dawn often struggled to respond to Hannah's questions that dealt with the specific academic needs of her students. Analysis revealed that Dawn usually would direct her responses to circumstances the students were experiencing beyond academic achievement, such as health issues, absenteeism, family matters, etc. These topics, coded as nonacademic factors, often led the conversation astray from the primary goal Hannah had set.

In the second coaching conversation, the content appeared to be more consistent with the goals Hannah had planned. She aimed to help Dawn scrutinize the DIBELS results to aid in creating new intervention groups. Also, she wanted to assist her with the completion of the Reading First analysis forms that would delineate the instructional plan for each group.

Approximately 55% of the total references coded for content dealt with assessment and student data. Hannah spent much time providing Dawn with information about each subtest of the DIBELS assessment. She also helped her analyze the data in regard to placing students in the most appropriate intervention groups. Analysis indicated that throughout the conversation, several topics discussed were germane to the goals Hannah had planned.

Both coaching conversations were analyzed in terms of scaffolding support that Hannah provided Dawn. In the first conversation, almost half of the scaffolding support was at the questioning level. It appeared that the majority of Hannah's questions focused on facts equipping her with essential information to build a foundation for the conversation.

It also was found that 31% of the scaffolding support Hannah provided during the first conversation was at the telling level. This may be due to the fact that Dawn was a novice teacher to kindergarten and Hannah felt her role as a coach was to give her helpful information. A vast amount of information she provided was in response to Dawn's concerns about her students. Most of these concerns pertained to factors other than academic achievement in the classroom. Hannah offered her information that would assist Dawn in handling these concerns.

Analysis indicated that there were 22 incidents in the first conversation in which Hannah directed Dawn toward something helpful. The majority of this assistance dealt with following the appropriate protocol to assist student needs. In addition to this kind of help, Hannah directed Dawn toward several practices and techniques that would benefit her reading instruction. Hannah had acquired many of these practices from her years as a speech therapist.

The scaffolding support offered by Hannah in the second coaching conversation was mostly at the telling level. Hannah provided Dawn with information that would help her complete the Reading First data analysis forms. She also gave substantial information about the

DIBELS assessment and how the data would guide her in creating appropriate intervention groups for her students.

It was found that 23 of the 78 references coded for scaffolding were at the directing level. Not only did Hannah tell information concerning the data analysis forms, she also directed Dawn toward the necessary steps to complete them. Furthermore, she directed her toward actions that helped her scrutinize the data to identify specific strengths and weaknesses of each student.

During the second coaching conversation, only 21% of scaffolding support was at the questioning level. The majority of Hannah's questions were to confirm or acknowledge informally an understanding of what had been said. She also asked several questions that required Dawn to share facts that would serve as a foundation for further discussion. Most of these questions were aimed toward information about the student data resulting from the DIBELS assessment.

## 4.5    HANNAH AND SANDRA: CONVERSATION 1

### 4.5.1  CONTENT

Hannah and I arrived at Sandra's room a few minutes prior to the scheduled coaching conference. Sandra greeted us upon our arrival and introduced her students to me as they were preparing to leave the room for music class. Once the classroom was empty of students, Sandra invited us to join her at a small table in a corner of the room.

We exchanged pleasantries, which created a comfortable tone for the start of the audiotaped coaching conversation between Hannah and Sandra. Hannah mentioned to me that

she and Sandra have a long history together in the school district. Hannah explained that Sandra was one of the first teachers with whom she had developed a co-teaching relationship during her early years as a school speech therapist. She said, "During my early years as a speech therapist, Sandra and I would plan lessons to co-teach in her classroom. She has always been open to ideas and suggestions I can give to her, but more often than not I am the one who is learning from her."

As Hannah glanced at her watch, she announced that they should begin their discussion due to their limited time without students. Hannah commenced by explaining to Sandra the purpose of their conversation:

> Sandra, this morning I would like to compare how your students did on their latest STEPPING STONES (SFA quarterly assessment) with the DIBELS. This will give us a good idea about how the kids are progressing and to see what changes may be needed for their intervention groups.

After Hannah articulated her goal for the meeting, Sandra opened her assessment binder that was next to her on the table. It was evident that Sandra's binder was very organized as she opened it and displayed the assessment results. Hannah had prepared similar binders for all of the teachers in the school to be used as tool for managing the data. She indicated that the binder has been very helpful in her meetings with teachers as they discuss student progress.

The table below shows the variety of content that Hannah discussed with Sandra during their conversation. Analysis indicated that there was a total of 39 references coded for content at 10 different nodes. Examination of the data revealed that 28% of the content references were coded as tutoring. Even though Hannah did not initially mention tutoring as one of her goals for the conversation, she referred to it after the talking began. She said, "As we discuss each student

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and the progress he or she is making, let's also create a list for those students who need tutoring

support." Sandra appeared to be in agreement with the suggestion as she acknowledged it was a

good idea.

**Table 18**

**Content: Conversation 1**

| Content | Number of Coded Content References | Percentage of Coded Content References |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Assessment | 1 | 3 |
| Grouping | 4 | 10 |
| Phonemic Awareness | 2 | 5 |
| Phonics | 1 | 3 |
| Nonacademic Factors | 2 | 5 |
| Student Data | 4 | 10 |
| Success for All | 2 | 5 |
| Speech | 5 | 13 |
| Special Education | 7 | 18 |
| Tutoring | 11 | 28 |
| Total | 39 | 100 |

It was found that 18% of the content referred to special education issues. Sandra relayed

to Hannah that she was concerned about a few students who were very delayed in their academic

progress. They discussed one particular student who Sandra insisted needed to be tested for

potential learning disabilities. Below is a part of the conversation addressing this issue:

H: How is Travis doing? He is getting tutoring help, right?

S: Yes, he is going to tutoring. But it is not enough support for him. He is really

struggling in about everything. He is one that I want tested in January.

H: Okay. I talked with the counselor the other day about some of the kids who may need

testing. I mentioned Travis and said there were some concerns.

S: Yeah. He can do no work on his own. I read his files and he has only been

recommended for speech services. I think we need to go further than speech with him.

H: Okay. He is an early intervention child, so that recommendation refers he continues with speech and language. I know that I have said this before, but when a kid is really young like Travis it is hard to get him to qualify for learning support because there is not a big difference in the gap. We require our students to do a lot more in kindergarten than usually expected of a five year old. It makes it difficult to achieve the gap necessary to be identified for learning support. I expect the discrepancy will become more evident a little later. Does this make sense?

Sandra nodded in agreement to Hannah's explanation and seemed to appreciate the fact that Hannah already had acknowledged her concerns for this student to the guidance counselor. It did not appear that Hannah had overstepped her boundary as a coach in this situation, but instead was regarded as a member of a team trying to find the best solution to a problem.

Consistent with the goal set for the conversation, Hannah and Sandra frequently discussed student data and grouping. Using the data from the SFA quarterly assessment and the DIBELS, they pinpointed strengths and weaknesses of each student. This talk led to the type of instruction the students were receiving in their intervention groups and also where changes needed to be made. During their conversation, they often tied the topic of speech and language (13%) to reading concerns, especially in the areas of phonemic awareness and phonics.

Very seldom did the conversation include content related to students' health, absenteeism, family problems, etc. Based on the outcome of the conversation, these issues at the time did not appear to concern Sandra. She focused on other areas more specific to her students' academic progress.

## 4.5.2 SCAFFOLDING

Table 19 illustrates that 40% of the scaffolding support that Hannah offered Sandra during their coaching conversation was telling. However, it was found that only a few of the 19 incidents in which she provided information would be considered in-depth. She mostly gave Sandra information that did not necessitate details, a possible rationale for the low number of words counted at this scaffolding level. Because Sandra had taught kindergarten for several years, Hannah might not have felt it necessary to elaborate her talk.

This is shown in the example below of an incident exemplifying how Hannah provided information about a student experiencing speech difficulty:

H: Joe is one of your speech kids. I noticed that he continues to really struggle with blending his sounds.

S: Yeah, he does. I hoped he would be making better progress than he is. Sometimes it is hard for me to understand him.

H: I know. It takes time to fix the way he is producing the sounds. I think I am going to pull him into one of my groups. I can help him with his speech placements.  He can use the extra help.

The information that Hannah gave Sandra was based mostly on her observations in the classroom. Her manner was direct as she tried to equip Sandra with solutions to students' problems.

**Table 19**

**Scaffolding: Conversation 1**

| Scaffolding Levels | Number of Coded Scaffolding References | Percentage of Coded Scaffolding References | Words per Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| Telling | 19 | 40 | 499 |
| Demonstrating | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Directing | 14 | 29 | 291 |
| Questioning | 15 | 31 | 92 |
| Total | 48 | 100 | 882 |

Analysis revealed 14 references during the conversation in which Hannah directed Sandra to something helpful. Most of these incidents pertained to grouping students for instruction. For example, she suggested that they could pull a few students experiencing oral language difficulties into a small group for Hannah to teach during her scheduled time in Sandra's classroom. Other incidents of directing were aimed toward the steps she suggested Sandra take in order to get new students on the tutors' schedule. She also guided Sandra toward actions she needed to take to refer two students for special education evaluations.

Analysis also showed that 31% of Hannah's support was at the scaffolding level of questioning. Even though 15 references were coded for questioning during the conversation, the data revealed that she used only a total of 92 words. This suggests that Hannah apparently did not need to ask extensive questions in order to build a foundation for their conversation.

The table below illustrates the distribution of questions that Hannah asked during her coaching conversation with Sandra. It shows that 40% of her questions were those that pressed Sandra to reflect critically in her responses. The following is an example from the conversation representing this type of questioning:

H: Let's talk about Jack. I see his DIBELS scores placed him at the strategic level. How

would you compare these results to his abilities in class? What do you feel is holding him

back?

**Table 20**

**Distribution of Questions: Conversation 1**

| Category of Question | Specific Function of the Question | Number of Coded References | Percentage of Total Questions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Questions eliciting information | Focusing on facts | 5 | 33 |
| | Suggesting implications | 1 | 7 |
| Questions pressing for reflection | Developing critical assessment | 6 | 40 |
| Questions shaping understanding | Promoting point of view | 1 | 7 |
| | Pressing for rethinking or restating | 1 | 7 |
| | Confirmation of understanding | 1 | 7 |

Hannah forced Sandra to reflect and analyze the student's performance in the classroom

in order to provide a rationale for why he scored at strategic on the DIBELS. Her analysis led to

a vigorous discussion about the student's weaknesses in his reading abilities that served Hannah

well in her coaching support. Sandra sought Hannah's advice about a few new strategies that she

wanted to try with the student. They both felt it was a good idea to plan a future meeting to

discuss whether the strategies were effective and what would be their next steps for the student.

It was found that 33% of Hannah's questions were to obtain facts from Sandra. In order to seek basic information about the students, she often would ask Sandra questions that required short responses. Some of the questions she asked included: "Is Kristen still receiving tutoring support?" or "Have you spoken with the counselor about referring Toby for testing?" Although the questions did not elicit elaborate responses from Sandra, they proved to be useful to Hannah as she attempted to establish an effective dialogue about the students' progress.

Analysis indicated that only one incident occurred for each of the remaining questions shown in table 20. The majority of these incidents pertained to questions Hannah asked to shape understanding during the conversation. For instance, one question sought Sandra's point of view on whether they should wait until January to refer a student to be tested for special education services. Another question required Sandra to restate a comment she made about speaking to the guidance counselor, and the last question was a simple confirmation of understanding that Hannah asked at the end of a comment by saying, "Do you know what I mean?"

## 4.6    HANNAH AND SANDRA: CONVERSATION 2

### 4.6.1   CONTENT

I joined Hannah and Sandra at the small conference table in Hannah's room where the coaching conference took place. They were eagerly engaged in a discussion about the Reading First conference that Sandra recently attended. Sandra shared information about the sessions and other aspects of the conference. She also acknowledged that she was going to present this information to the faculty at the next common planning meeting.

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Utilizing a familiar format to begin her coaching conversations, Hannah explained to Sandra her goals for the meeting:

Sandra, this morning I want to talk about the recent DIBELS scores for your students and where we think they should be placed in their new intervention groups. Also, I want to go over the Reading First data analysis forms with you to answer any questions you may have about completing them. However, I can see that you have already completed your forms and are ready to go. Great! This does not surprise me that you have already thought this through before today. So, let's talk about how you analyzed the data to decide the groups.

Hannah and Sandra immediately became engaged in conversation about the students' scores on the DIBELS and how they reflected the progress each was making in the classroom. There was a total of 36 references coded for content at five different nodes (see table 21). This suggests that their conversation was not broad in terms of content, but limited to specific topics aimed for deeper discussion. Analysis revealed that 33% of Hannah's talk pertained to grouping students for intervention instruction. Mostly, she discussed the plan Sandra created for her new intervention groups. It appeared that Hannah trusted the plan and was willing to follow Sandra's lead in the conversation. This is demonstrated in their dialogue:

H: I see you have already formed your new groups. Great! Tell me how you did this.

S: Okay. What I did was look at the DIBELS and really analyzed those students who did not meet benchmark. I looked at the areas that were deficient and decided if the scores were really reflective of what I see of them in the classroom. I also noticed that even though a few students made benchmark, I know they still need intervention in certain areas.

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H: I agree with you.

S: For example, Bobby scored at benchmark. However, I noticed that he needed to score 25 on initial sound fluency, and he got 13. So, I placed him in a strategic group for this area because I know he needs extra help with the sounds.

H: Excellent. This is what you should do. That is the whole idea behind the intervention groups. The groups should have flexibility to move the kids between the groups to meet their needs. I know you realize that the scores are indicators and you have to use your best judgment. Good job.

**Table 21**

**Content: Conversation 2**

| Content | Number of Coded Content References | Percentage of Coded Content References |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 5 | 14 |
| Grouping | 12 | 33 |
| Phonemic Awareness | 6 | 17 |
| Phonics | 4 | 11 |
| Student Data | 9 | 25 |
| Total | 36 | 100 |

Table 21 illustrates that 25% of the content references were coded as student data. These references pertained to Hannah talking with Sandra about the DIBELS assessment scores for her students. Often, Hannah would comment on how well the students performed on the assessment. For example, Hannah mentioned that she was pleased how well a certain student scored on the segmentation part of the assessment. However, she acknowledged that she was not surprised since she knew that Sandra had really "drilled" the students on segmenting words.

Data analysis indicated that there was a combined total of 10 references coded as phonemic awareness and phonics. Incidents of these topics during the conversation pertained to

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the instruction Sandra had been using with the students to reinforce their early reading skills. Hannah praised Sandra for implementing simultaneous oral spelling (a multisensory spelling method) in her phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. She held the position that simultaneous oral spelling reinforced these skills and students benefited from it.

During this coaching conversation, there were five incidents in which Hannah discussed the DIBELS assessment directly. Most of these incidents pertained to her explanation of how the assessment measured certain skills. For example, Sandra was surprised to find that two particular students did not score at benchmark. She argued that they knew all of their sounds and wondered why they performed poorly on the initial sound fluency subtest. Hannah provided a rationale that described the differences in how the test measures this skill and how it is taught in the classroom. She said it often is the "nature of the beast" that determines how well students perform on the DIBELS.

## 4.6.2   SCAFFOLDING

As shown in Table 22, 48% of the scaffolding support provided by Hannah during the conversation was at the telling level. This level also encompassed the greatest number of words used in her talk. Even though Hannah appeared to follow Sandra's lead in the discussion topics, she continued to provide her with helpful information. Most of the information that Hannah provided dealt with assessment issues and the Reading First data analysis forms. Hannah spent time telling Sandra why the forms were required by Reading First and how they could provide a closer lens on analyzing student data.

It was found that 28% of the scaffolding references were coded as directing. It appeared that most of Hannah's directing was aimed at assisting Sandra in finalizing her new intervention

groups. For example, Sandra was uncertain about a few students' group placement and sought Hannah's opinion. Hannah directed her toward the data that suggested the most appropriate grouping for them.

**Table 22**

**Scaffolding: Conversation 2**

| Scaffolding Levels | Number of Coded Scaffolding References | Percentage of Coded Scaffolding References | Words per Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| Telling | 12 | 48 | 579 |
| Demonstrating | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Directing | 7 | 28 | 328 |
| Questioning | 6 | 24 | 40 |
| Total | 25 | 100 | 947 |

Analysis suggests that 24% of Hannah's support was at the scaffolding level of questioning. It was also found that Hannah used only 40 words to ask the combined total of six questions during her coaching conversation with Sandra. Table 23 below displays an in-depth analysis of the types of questions Hannah asked.

**Table 23**

**Distribution of Questions: Conversation 2**

| Category of Question | Specific Function of the Question | Number of Coded References | Percentage of Total Questions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Questions eliciting information | Focusing on facts | 1 | 17 |
| Questions shaping understanding | Promoting point of view | 1 | 17 |
| | Confirmation of understanding | 4 | 66 |

Of the questions, 66% were a confirmation of understanding. There were four incidents in which Hannah asked, "Do you know what I mean?" during her conversation with Sandra. Again, this type of question often was asked by Hannah as a means to keep the conversation flowing. The question never warranted a lengthy response, but usually generated a "yes" answer from Sandra.

Hannah asked one question that focused on facts. While examining the Reading First data analysis form completed by Sandra, she asked her how many students reached benchmark status on the DIBELS assessment. Hannah also asked one question to get Sandra's point of view. Hannah was concerned that the required Reading First forms might cause some complaints among the teachers. She wanted to know whether Sandra felt the analysis forms would benefit the teachers in examining the student data. Sandra replied that the forms not only would be helpful but would provide a necessary paper trail to track the student groupings.

### 4.6.3 SUMMARY

An analysis was conducted on two coaching conversations conducted by a literacy coach, Hannah, and a veteran kindergarten teacher, Sandra. It was found that Hannah approached both conversations with set goals. For the first conversation, she wanted to compare student scores on two diagnostic assessments in order to gauge academic progress. Her goal was extended to assisting Sandra in creating a list of students who could benefit from the tutoring services the school provided. Hannah's goal for the second coaching conversation was aimed at analyzing student data in order to formulate new intervention groups for Sandra's students. This process also included the required completion of Reading First data analysis forms outlining the instructional plan for each intervention group.

Both conversations were transcribed and coded for content. In the first conversation, analysis revealed that 39 references were coded at 10 different nodes. A large portion of the content discussed by Hannah pertained to tutoring services for the students. Because Sandra sought advice about a few students who were struggling academically, Hannah spent much time discussing issues dealing with special education. During the conversation, Hannah often would use her expertise in speech and language to help Sandra find possible solutions to the difficulties some students were experiencing in phonemic awareness and phonics acquisition. The conversation focused primarily on academic issues and seldom veered toward discussions about the students beyond the realm of the classroom.

Analysis indicated there were 36 references coded for content at five different nodes for the second conversation. The limited amount of nodes suggests that the conversation was aimed at specific topics for deeper discussions. It was found that the majority of Hannah's talk revolved around grouping students for appropriate instruction. There also were pockets of discussion about student data and assessment issues. Hannah often assisted Sandra in making connections between the student data and assessment measurements. This helped Sandra understand why specific students might not have performed well on the assessment as expected.

Both coaching conversations were analyzed for the levels of scaffolding support Hannah provided Sandra. It was found that the majority of support Hannah offered in the first conversation was at the scaffolding level of telling. However, there were only a few incidents in which Hannah provided information to Sandra that would have been considered as in-depth. Analysis revealed several incidents when Hannah directed Sandra to something helpful. Most of these pertained to grouping students for appropriate instruction. It was found that Hannah asked Sandra questions during the conversation, a majority of them pressing Sandra to reflect critically

in her responses. These questions seemed to generate vigorous discussion about student performance on the diagnostic assessments and in the classroom.

Hannah also asked questions to elicit facts from Sandra. Even though these questions did not require lengthy responses, they were essential in building a foundation for further coaching.

The most scaffolding support offered by Hannah in the second conversation also was at the level of telling. Throughout the conversation, she gave Sandra information to assist in discovering possible solutions to various problems or provided her with other helpful information. Data analysis suggested that Hannah also used directing as a scaffolding support for Sandra. Most of Hannah's directing was toward helping Sandra formulate appropriate intervention groups for her students. Findings showed very few questions asked by Hannah during this conversation with Sandra. Most of the questions were not on a deep cognitive level but were rudimentary questions simply to confirm or acknowledge an understanding of their discussion at the moment.

## 4.7    COACH'S ENGAGEMENT WITH TEACHERS IN CONVERSATIONS

A number of factors affected the way Hannah engaged Rick, Dawn, and Sandra in the coaching conversations. In this part of the analysis, I address my third research question: *In what ways did the literacy coach alter engagement with the different teachers during the coaching conversations, and what teacher characteristics affected her engagement?*

First, I present a cross-analysis of the two coaching conversations that Hannah had with Rick, Dawn, and Sandra. I compare the data and interpret the patterns that emerge to describe how Hannah altered her engagement with the teachers in the conversations. For each

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conversation, I compare across the three teachers the nature of content that seemed to be the primary foci, the scaffolding support that Hannah provided, and the types of questions she asked to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking.

Second, I discuss the differences in the types of coaching relationships Hannah had with the teachers. I describe factors that contributed to how she altered her engagement with Rick, Dawn, and Sandra during the coaching conversations.

### 4.7.1    CONVERSATION 1

#### 4.7.1.1 CONTENT

Table 24 below shows content emphases for each of the first conversations between teacher and coach. As portrayed, Hannah's content focus differed depending on the teacher with whom she talked. One of Hannah's goals for the conversation was to talk about the tutoring services provided for the students. Consistent with her goal, Hannah discussed this topic most frequently with both Rick (27%) and Sandra (28%). However, Hannah did not spend as much time discussing tutoring services with Dawn (12%). With her, she talked about grouping students for instruction (23%) and issues related to nonacademic factors (21%). These foci occurred because Hannah wanted to ascertain the progress the students were making in their intervention groups, so she spent much time inquiring about their academic achievement, and Dawn often directed the conversation toward issues students were experiencing outside the classroom. Consequently, Hannah spent time discussing these nonacademic factors with her.

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**Table 24**

**Content: Conversation 1 (Percentage of Coded References)**

| Content | Rick | Dawn | Sandra |
|---|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 8 | 4 | 3 |
| Concepts of Print | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| English Language Learner | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Grouping | 11 | 23 | 10 |
| Phonemic Awareness | 5 | 8 | 5 |
| Phonics | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Nonacademic Factors | 12 | 21 | 5 |
| Student Data | 15 | 5 | 10 |
| Special Education | 9 | 0 | 18 |
| Speech/Language | 11 | 15 | 13 |
| Success for All | 0 | 9 | 5 |
| Tutoring | 27 | 12 | 28 |

Hannah frequently discussed student data with Rick (15%). During the conversation, they analyzed recent diagnostic assessments to pinpoint the reading strengths and weaknesses of each student. However, Hannah did not get the opportunity to discuss student data in depth with Dawn (5%), even though she brought assessment results with her to the meeting.

Hannah talked about special education issues with Sandra (18%) more than Rick (9%) or Dawn (0%). Sandra was concerned about a few students who were struggling academically in her class and wanted to discuss these issues with Hannah.

With all three teachers, Hannah often discussed topics related to speech and language. Given her experiences as a speech therapist, she often provided helpful information about speech and language acquisition skills.

## 4.7.1.2 SCAFFOLDING

Data representing the scaffolding support offered by Hannah for each teacher in the first conversation are displayed in Table 25. Again, there were differences across teachers, although

Hannah primarily used questioning and telling as major approaches to scaffolding. Analysis revealed that the most support provided to Rick (51%) and Dawn (48%) was at the questioning level, to be discussed later in this section.

The second highest scaffolding support that Hannah provided Rick (37%) and Dawn (31%) was at the telling level. Hannah provided Rick with information about how to relate his instruction to student data. Hannah gave Dawn possible solutions to concerns about her students in and outside of the classroom.

**Table 25**

**Scaffolding: Conversation 1 (Percentage of Coded References**

| Scaffolding Levels | Rick | Dawn | Sandra |
|---|---|---|---|
| Telling | 37 | 31 | 40 |
| Demonstrating | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Directing | 12 | 19 | 29 |
| Questioning | 51 | 48 | 31 |

Hannah provided Sandra (40%) with the most scaffolding support at the telling level. The talk generally focused on Hannah's observations about specific students in Sandra's classroom.

With all three teachers, Hannah provided some scaffolding support at the directing level. These were incidents in which she distinctly directed the teachers to take action. These actions ranged from suggesting various instructional strategies and techniques to taking the necessary steps for referring students for special help.

Although Hannah did not provide Rick or Sandra with any scaffolding support at the demonstrating level, she did demonstrate for Dawn (2%). She showed her how to use phoneme boxes with the students to isolate sounds in words.

**4.7.1.3 TYPES OF QUESTIONS**

Table 26 shows the percentages of the different types of questions Hannah asked each teacher during the first conversation. There are differences in the types of questions she asked, although the two major types of questions used overall were those that elicited information (focusing on facts) and those pressing for reflection (developing critical assessment).

# Table 26

**Distribution of Questions: Conversation 1 (Percentage of Total Questions)**

| Category of Question | Specific Function of the Question | Rick | Dawn | Sanda |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Questions eliciting information | Focusing on facts | 21 | 43 | 33 |
| | Suggesting implication | 5 | 9 | 7 |
| | Revealing experience | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Questions shaping understanding | Focusing on connections | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Pressing for rethinking or restating | 17 | 7 | 7 |
| | Promoting point of view | 21 | 5 | 7 |
| | Demanding interpretation | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| | Confirmation of understanding | 2 | 0 | 7 |
| Questions pressing for reflection | Developing hypotheses | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| | Focusing on future action | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Developing critical assessment | 26 | 29 | 40 |

A good proportion of questions Hannah asked Rick (26%) and Sandra (40%) were questions that required them to develop a critical assessment, especially about student data and student academic performance. These questions forced them to balance their feelings with intellectual analysis (Morgan & Saxton, 1994). Her questions required Rick and Sandra to analyze student data and assess the students' achievement in the classroom in deep and meaningful ways.

Almost half of the questions Hannah asked Dawn were those focusing on facts (43%). Dawn was a new teacher at the school and Hannah seemed to understand that she needed to determine whether Dawn possessed certain basic information needed as a foundation for the conversation. Dawn's responses allowed Hannah to gauge where her coaching support might be most helpful. Moreover, Hannah wanted to develop a good coaching relationship with Dawn and seemed to ask questions that Dawn could answer easily, which allowed for ease in conversation and rapport.

However, Hannah also asked Dawn questions that pressed for more in-depth responses. Findings show that the second highest percentage of questions she asked were those that developed a critical assessment (29%). Unlike questions asked of Rick and Sandra, these questions more often required Dawn to assess the students' abilities and progress she observed in the classroom rather than discussing student data.

Hannah asked Rick questions that promoted his point of view (21%) more often than asking those questions of Dawn and Sandra. She seemed to engage Rick more deeply in the conversation by asking for his opinion. This does not imply that Hannah did not value the opinions of Dawn and Sandra, but the fact that she often described Rick as "willing to be coached" might have created a different coaching relationship with him than with the others.

### 4.7.2    CONVERSATION 2

#### 4.7.2.1          CONTENT

The content Hannah discussed with the teachers varied during the second coaching conversation, as shown in Table 27. Hannah most frequently discussed student data (33.9%) and grouping (25.8%) with Rick. She assisted Rick in analyzing the student data to guide the instruction for his intervention groups, which was her goal for the conversation.

**Table 27**

**Content: Conversation 2 (Percentage of Coded References)**

| Content | Rick | Dawn | Sandra |
|---|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 18 | 30 | 14 |
| Concepts of Print | 3 | 10 | 0 |
| Grouping | 26 | 6 | 33 |
| Phonemic Awareness | 13 | 13 | 17 |
| Phonics | 6 | 10 | 11 |
| Student Data | 34 | 25 | 25 |
| Success for All | 0 | 5 | 0 |

Hannah's conversation with Sandra was primarily about grouping students (33.3%). Although Hannah discussed student data (25%) with Sandra, they did not spend much time analyzing it. Her focus was more about helping Sandra define the intervention groups that would best meet her students' needs.

Hannah discussed assessment with Dawn (29.9%) more often than Rick or Sandra. Dawn was new to administering the DIBELS and Hannah wanted to ensure she grasped an understanding of it. She also talked about student data with Dawn (25.4%). She helped Dawn to make connections between the assessment and the student data. However, there was very little

discussion about grouping students (6%). Although Hannah tried to keep the conversation on track toward her goals, she realized the importance of discussing other topics relevant to Dawn's needs.

### 4.7.2.2 SCAFFOLDING

The levels of scaffolding support Hannah provided did not vary much across the three teachers (see table 28). She predominantly used telling as her approach to scaffolding. She spent time providing the teachers with information about a new school-wide instructional plan for the intervention groups. She also spent time explaining the rationale behind the Reading First student data analysis forms that each teacher was required to complete.

**Table 28**

**Scaffolding: Conversation 2 (Percentage of Coded References)**

| Scaffolding Levels | Rick | Dawn | Sandra |
|---|---|---|---|
| Telling | 42 | 40 | 48 |
| Demonstrating | 1 | 10 | 0 |
| Directing | 28 | 29 | 28 |
| Questioning | 29 | 21 | 24 |

Hannah provided an equal amount of scaffolding support at the directing level for Rick (28%), Dawn (29%), and Sandra (28%). However, the foci of her directing were not the same for all three teachers. Hannah mostly directed Rick and Dawn toward actions to assist with the DIBELS data analysis and completion of the data analysis forms. On the other hand, Hannah spent time guiding Sandra toward the best grouping placements for her students.

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Although Hannah provided very little or no scaffolding support at the demonstrating level for Rick (1%) and Sandra (0%), she did offer a little of this support to Dawn (10%) by demonstrating phonemic awareness strategies she could use with her students.

Analysis shows that Hannah used questioning as a scaffolding support during the second conversation. The percentages of her total questions were similar across all three teachers. A more in-depth analysis of the types of questions she asked follows.

### 4.7.2.3 TYPES OF QUESTIONS

The types of questions Hannah asked the teachers are shown in Table 29. More than half of the questions (66%) asked of Sandra were those that confirmed or acknowledged an understanding of what was being discussed. Questions such as "Does that make sense?" or "Do you know what I mean?" seemed to a tactic Hannah used to keep the conversation flowing. She frequently asked these questions of Rick (38%) and Dawn (38%), too.

# Table 29

## Distribution of Questions: Conversation 2 (Percentage of Total Questions)

| Category of Question | Specific Function of the Question | Rick | Dawn | Sandra |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Questions eliciting information | Focusing on facts | 48 | 31 | 17 |
| | Suggesting implication | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Revealing experience | 0 | 13 | 0 |
| Questions shaping understanding | Focusing on connections | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Pressing for rethinking or restating | 0 | 19 | 0 |
| | Promoting point of view | 5 | 0 | 17 |
| | Demanding interpretation | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Confirmation of understanding | 38 | 38 | 66 |
| Questions pressing for reflection | Developing hypotheses | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Focusing on future action | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Developing critical assessment | 5 | 0 | 0 |

Of the questions Hannah asked Rick, 48% focused on facts. These questions basically asked him to identifying specific data from the DIBELS results. Obtaining this type of information assisted Hannah in extending her work with Rick.

Hannah asked Sandra (17%) and Rick (5%) questions to obtain their point of view. These questions elicited opinions about the Reading First data analysis forms and whether they would serve a useful purpose.

Of the questions Hannah asked Dawn, 19% pressed for restating. These questions forced Dawn to clarify or explain a statement she had made. This allowed Hannah to be in a better position to assist her. Hannah also asked Dawn questions to get information about Dawn's past experiences (13%); specifically, she was interested in learning more about the experiences Dawn had with SFA at another school.

## 4.8    COACHING RELATIONSHIPS

In the following section, I describe the differences in the types of coaching relationships Hannah had with Rick, Dawn, and Sandra during the conversations, building on the data obtained from the conversations as well as the interviews with Hannah and the three teachers.

### 4.8.1   HANNAH AND RICK: COLLABORATION

Hannah's coaching relationship with Rick can be described as one built on mutual respect and trust. According to Hannah, "Rick has grown tremendously into a fine kindergarten teacher during his four year tenure at the Garrett Kindergarten Unit."

While observing their interactions during the coaching conversation, it was apparent that Hannah assumed not only the role of a literacy coach, but also that of a nurturer. She once commented that Rick reminded her of her own son in many ways with his strong determination and perfectionism. She jokingly attributed her good coaching relationship with him to this fact. Hannah agreed that she has to approach each teacher in the building differently. She commented, "Every teacher is different in many ways. It is my job to know how hard to push and when to pull back." This was evident in the type of feedback she provided Rick during their conversations. Hannah often provided him with general positive feedback to praise the positive steps he was making toward quality teaching practices. When asked how she approached Rick in the coaching conversations they shared, she was not hesitant to respond. She summed it up by stating:

> First of all, even though I am the coach and I know what my opinion is about each of the students in his room, I still respect and value his input and opinions. I respect Rick as a teacher and know what he tells me is carefully thought out. For example, I know he has thoroughly scrutinized the student data prior to our conversation this morning. He comes equipped knowing what is or is not working with his kids. So, because I know his work ethic and concern, I often go into his room to seek his opinion more than he may want mine!

Hannah did not identify Rick's lack of teaching experience as a concern in how she approached her coaching conversations with him. She said:

> Rick can handle things in his classroom better than a lot of teachers who have been teaching for years. It is his willingness to try new things and listen to what I have to say that makes coaching him so easy.

Hannah went on to discuss Rick's personality as being respectful and polite, which also contributed to the ease of having coaching conversations with him. The conversation was about student grouping decisions based on data. Hannah requested each teacher to complete several forms that outlined the intervention groups, their strengths and weaknesses, and their intended instructional plans for each group. Hannah was concerned about the paperwork that she was requesting each teacher to complete in compliance with a Reading First directive, so she asked Rick for his opinion. She commented:

> I am so afraid that the teachers are not going to want to complete this paperwork. I feel they will tell me that they just want to form their groups without having to write the paperwork, too. I can see their point, but I also have to do what is being requested of me. So, I asked Rick several times during our conversation what he thought about the paperwork. Honestly, I think he was too polite to tell me something negative even if he did feel that way. But, he was at least respectful enough to say that it was helping him to look at the data and make sense of why he should look at it closer by completing the paperwork. I think the conversation about it went well, but then it could just be Rick's personality.

Overall, it was found that the dominant factor that appeared to affect how Hannah engaged him in coaching conversations was his *willingness to be coached*. This meant that he was eager to listen and apply whatever he learned from their conversations. His strong work ethic and respectful demeanor served as a safe haven for Hannah in which she felt very comfortable coaching him. Their personalities blended well as they established a mutual respect for each other's work. Because Rick possessed these characteristics, the lack of his teaching

experience did not affect how Hannah engaged him in conversations. It appeared that they had built a solid foundation to support future coaching conversations.

### 4.8.2   HANNAH AND DAWN: MENTORING

"I need to take baby steps with Dawn," Hannah replied when asked how she approached Dawn in her coaching conversations. She rationalized her comment by noting that Dawn needed a great deal of coaching support. Hannah explained that Dawn came to the Garrett Kindergarten Unit with teaching experience, but not at a kindergarten level. She said, "When Dawn first came here, she had no idea that so much happened in a kindergarten classroom. I think she was a bit overwhelmed."

Hannah's coaching role with Dawn is that of a mentor. A mentor is defined as a wise and trusted counselor or teacher (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2001). This accurately depicts the interactions observed between Hannah and Dawn during the coaching conversations. It was obvious that Hannah wanted to support Dawn in any way possible. One of her goals was to show Dawn how to analyze student data to drive her instruction. She commented, "I have spent a lot of time showing Dawn how to compare scores on the assessments to make instructional decisions for her students. I have taken this process step-by-step as not to overwhelm her. She is now beginning to pinpoint her students' strengths and weaknesses by using the data. I consider this a big success."

Hannah felt that Dawn had made strides in her teaching practices and communicated this to her during the conversations. There were several incidents when Hannah provided Dawn with explicit positive feedback to encourage her teaching efforts. She indicated that Dawn had gained more confidence in her teaching abilities during the course of the school year and was very

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pleased with her progress. She commented that Dawn had grasped the idea of differentiated instruction and had begun implementing it appropriately. After a coaching conversation with Dawn, Hannah commented:

> I was so happy to hear Dawn talk about the instructional needs of each of her intervention groups. It is good to know she is now thinking along those lines. I feel as though I can see her making progress with these types of decisions.

Hannah shared that she always found the time to answer Dawn's questions. She amusingly stated that Dawn often prefaced her questions by stating, "You probably think this question is stupid." Hannah quickly acknowledged the importance of assuring Dawn that she should always feel comfortable with asking her questions. She explained:

> I want to make sure Dawn knows that I am here for her as a coach. My job is to listen to her questions and help her come up with solutions. I hope that when she goes back to her room after one of our discussions that she is able to feel better about the situation that was bothering her.

On the whole, it appeared that Hannah dedicated a substantial amount of time to coaching Dawn. It also appeared that Dawn was more than willing to seek Hannah's coaching advice. While Dawn's lack of teaching experience at the kindergarten level was a major factor that served as the groundwork for coaching, Hannah believed that her efforts were slowly beginning to have an impact on Dawn's teaching practices. Hannah and Dawn apparently have discovered the value of coaching conversations that can lead to change.

### 4.8.3   HANNAH AND SANDRA: COLLEGIAL

Collegiality, a power shared equally between colleagues, is the best term to describe Hannah's coaching relationship with Sandra. Their professional and supportive affiliation has grown since they first began their teaching career together. At that time, Hannah served as a speech therapist for the school district and often would co-teach reading lessons with Sandra. Hannah commented:

> When I was a speech therapist, Sandra would ask me questions related to speech and language issues. She always wanted to know how she could help her students. Eventually, we decided to co-teach some lessons together to bring in my knowledge on early literacy skills. It was great! We have always had a team approach to helping the kids.

The environment that surrounded the two coaching conversations analyzed in this study was one of respect and ease of dialogue. There never were moments of tension but rather of rapport. Hannah's approach to the conversations with Sandra was "How can I help you?" Hannah explained that Sandra always knows where she wants to go with her students. She laughed as she described Sandra as a plan master. She said:

> She always comes to me with a plan. She usually wants to run it by me and seek my opinion. I have learned that the best way to coaching Sandra is to help her get where she wants to be with the kids. I often just follow her lead.

Hannah explained that she has been co-teaching with Sandra for a long time. She still continues to serve in that role. She further commented:

> Sandra is one of the few teachers who want me to co-teach with her. I will go into her room and she will ask me to teach certain lessons to different groups. I do not have a

problem with this at all. We both know we are on the right track … I guess it is a mutual respect thing.

Hannah quickly acknowledged that she and Sandra share the same philosophy about teaching. They both know the importance of giving the students a good start to reading. She often provided Sandra with explicit positive feedback during the conversations to directly praise her instruction in the classroom. Hannah even mentioned that she often took the role of the learner when talking with Sandra. She said:

Sandra comes with a lot of kindergarten experience. She is good at what she does in the classroom. However, she respects my role as a coach. I can draw upon my experiences as a speech therapist to assist her with those early reading skills that are often difficult for kids. We really work well as a team.

In general, it appeared that Hannah had discovered the essential ingredients to constructing productive coaching conversations with Sandra. Their shared philosophies and mutual respect for one another's work has developed into a firm collegial relationship that has served them well.


## 4.9    SUMMARY


The coaching relationships Hannah had with Rick, Dawn, and Sandra during the conversations were individually unique. Each teacher possessed certain characteristics that influenced Hannah's coaching. Rick did not have a lot of teaching experience, but he put forth a lot of effort in becoming an effective teacher. He embraced the coaching support that Hannah offered and was rejuvenated by their conversations. Dawn was new to teaching kindergarten and

lacked confidence in her abilities to teach at this level. Hannah was cognizant of the extensive amount of support she needed to provide Dawn and sought to create a coaching atmosphere that was positive and nonevaluative. Finally, Sandra was a veteran teacher with many years spent as a kindergarten teacher. Hannah built a coaching relationship with Sandra that emerged from a mutual respect for each other's work over a span of several years. In conclusion, coaching is a complex process of building relationships with teachers that encourage conversations about their teaching practices. Based on the conversations Hannah had with these teachers, it appeared that she had successfully laid a firm foundation for her coaching.

## 4.10    TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONVERSATIONS

Immediately following each coaching conversation, I interviewed the teacher in order to ascertain his or her perception on the conversation's outcome and its relevance to the instruction. Rick, Dawn, and Sandra had uniquely individualized perceptions of the conversations they had with Hannah. In the following, I discuss these perceptions as I address my fourth research question: *What were the teachers' perceptions of the coaching conversations and their effect on their classroom practice?*

### 4.10.1  RICK

Both interviews with Rick took place in Hannah's room as we remained seated at the small conference table where the coaching conversations took place. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed for analysis.

First, I asked Rick to describe what he thought Hannah's goals were for their conversation. Rick easily described her goals by stating:

Hannah's goal for this conversation was to decide which of my students need tutoring services or should continue receiving tutoring. We also had a chance to briefly discuss the progress of each student. I think her first goal was to go down the class list one by one, so we could really see who was coming along and cut the list down to those students who really need the tutoring help. (Conversation 1)

I asked the same question following the second conversation. Like the first time, Rick clearly defined Hannah's goals and discussed how the conversation would help him analyze his student data:

Hannah's goal is to help me really look at my student data in order to meet their need within the intervention groups. The conversation with Hannah gave me a better idea of how to utilize the information we get from the assessments more appropriately. Not only did she show me how to regroup my students into the three levels; benchmark, strategic, and intensive, but now I can see exactly why they were placed into these levels. (Conversation 2)

On both occasions, Rick agreed that Hannah's goals were very reasonable and were applicable to his teaching practices. He said that he always was appreciative of Hannah's coaching efforts and he liked talking to her as much as possible. He stated further:

I am glad that we had the chance this morning to talk about the tutoring situation. I am always a little worried when the tutor shows up and I have to make the decision on who is going with her. Now, it will be a lot easier because the tutor will just work with my strategic and intensive students, and I will be able to focus on the benchmark kids on

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Power Reading (SFA). Yes, Hannah's goals were very reasonable and very helpful to me. (Conversation 1).

Hannah has established a good coaching relationship with Rick and it was evident throughout the conversations that they worked collaboratively to complete their tasks. Rick never questioned the process Hannah used in their second conversation to help him analyze the student data in order to formulate his intervention groups. Rick mentioned to me:

I am the first teacher that Hannah has helped with this new grouping arrangement we are trying in our school. I think it is a good idea for everyone, especially the kids. I think once we get the plan in place it is going to work well. I have a lot of faith in Hannah. She knows my classroom very well. I know that I will take her lead on any information she gives to me and make the necessary adjustments as needed. (Conversation 2)

I asked Rick if he perceived any successes from his conversations with Hannah. He commented:

Just looking at all of the students who do not need tutoring now and will remain in my classroom makes me feel a lot better. Obviously, you want everyone to not need the extra help, but this tells me that the most of my students are really grasping the concepts that I am teaching them. This really makes me excited. (Conversation 1)

Rick was jovial when asked if he thought the conversations brought him any challenges or obstacles he would have to overcome. He laughed as he said, "To tell you the truth, I usually have more challenges than successes. I think Hannah has become used to hearing about my challenges with my students." When pressed to elaborate on the biggest challenge he perceived from the first conversation, he commented quickly that it is not easy to pinpoint just one. However, he felt that discussing a particular student with Hannah made him realize that there is

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so much more work that needs to be done in order for this student to be ready for first grade next year:

> I would say my biggest challenge and one that I really worry about is Kate's progress in my class. She is a repeating kindergarten student, and at the end of last year she only knew 13 alphabet letters. She now has mastered nearly all of them, but there is so much more she needs to know. I think we are at the point of referring her for testing. I want her to do well and find success. I know this year has been difficult for her since she had several changes from last year's kindergarten class. I know I have to keep working with her and find a way to help her retain information until we can identify where her problems lie. So, I guess Hannah and I both know this is a challenge for me. (Conversation 1)

After discussing the success and challenges perceived from the conversation, the interview transitioned into acknowledging whether the conversation with Hannah prompted Rick to think about his current instructional practices. He was not hesitant to respond:

> Talking with Hannah always makes me think or gives me a better idea whether I am doing things right in my classroom. For example, just being prompted by her to look into some research of my own whether one of my students is exhibiting dyslexic characteristics gave us material for a good    discussion. After talking with Hannah, she keeps me fresh and always gives me ideas to use with the kids. Even if it is something we have already talked about, she never minds discussing it again. So, I think it is a good thing that at times Hannah knows me better than I know myself. She always keeps me on my toes. She knows that I can adapt, so she is not worried to throw new ideas at me. If I

see something is just not working, I always try to switch it up and keep going. (Conversation 1)

Having more time to answer his questions was one of the next coaching steps that Rick hoped Hannah would offer. He commented that he always could use more of her time to discuss the new intervention groups in his classroom. He also thought it would be beneficial if she would model a few lessons that he could use with his benchmark group. He laughed when saying, "Even in the way Hannah talks to my students makes a difference. I have found that I often use a softer voice with them after she leaves the room. She tends to keep me on my toes."

From the interviews, I found that Rick obviously had a lot of respect for Hannah's coaching efforts. It appeared he had developed a solid comfort level when talking with her about his concerns. Rick appreciated the fact that Hannah always seemed to find time, even in the hallways, to discuss matters of importance. He seemed to rely on her experience and expertise which he felt made him a better teacher.

### 4.10.2 DAWN

I sat down with Dawn after each coaching conversation to discuss her perceptions of the meeting with Hannah. Dawn always was very upbeat and commented that she enjoyed being part of this study. The rapport between us was easily established and comfortable during the interviews. I began by asking Dawn what she believed were Hannah's goals for the coaching conversations and whether she felt they were reasonable. Dawn replied by stating her perception of the goals:

I think Hannah's goal for our conversation was to take the data from the test scores and combine them with what I observe daily and talk about the progress my students are making in class. (Conversation 1)

Dawn agreed that Hannah's goal was reasonable because she felt they both needed to find out what was making her students react in class. She further claimed that she did not want to lose her students academically and there were other problems that needed to be addressed. Dawn commented, "Hannah told me who I needed to see about the problems some of my kids are experiencing. I need to find some answers to diagnose these problems." This indication was directed toward her students' behavior rather than academic progress.

Dawn also discussed her perceptions of Hannah's goal for the second conversation. She said:

Hannah's goal for this conversation was to break down my students' scores and see where they were deficient and needing help. Seeing their deficiencies allow me to know where they need to be and what I have to do to bring them up to basic reading. (Conversation 2)

Dawn supported Hannah by claiming they both shared the same goals. She explained that they both wanted to see the children become proficient readers and succeed.

Dawn perceived that several successes evolved from her conversations with Hannah. Referring to the first conversation, she felt she had a better grasp on understanding how well her students were doing both academically and behaviorally. She explained, "Hannah gave her input and I gave my input on each of the students. It was really helpful to discuss how they are doing and what we can do for improvement." She also acknowledged that Hannah's suggestion to

implement the phoneme boxes with her instruction was viewed as a success because it gave her an idea that may help her students with phonological segmentation.

Dawn was somewhat vague in pinpointing successes from the second conversation. She felt there were no successes that impacted her directly, but could see how the data analysis plan would benefit her students. She explained:

I think the students will find success in their new intervention groups. I realize that they are not all going to be successful and I know that there are a few who are going to continue to struggle. But I think the majority of my students will find success in their reading skills within their groups.

I asked Dawn to discuss any challenges that she may have perceived from the conversations with Hannah. She discussed that there were going to be challenges working with the lowest group in her class due to several behavior issues in the room. She made the following comment:

It is going to be a challenge for me because my class, as a whole, has a lot of behavior issues. So to actually work one-on-one with my lowest students is going to be difficult. I don't know how I am going to do this … I have to supervise continuously. Like I said, my     class has a lot of issues. The noise level often gets too high and someone is messing around, so I have to go and speak to them. If I am supposed to be working with my lowest group who really needs my attention, I don't know what to do with the rest of the class. Honestly, I don't know how to make it work. (Conversation 1)

Dawn was very concerned with the classroom management that would be required in order for her to work directly with a group of students. She further mentioned that she has listened to other teachers in the lounge talking about how they manage their groups while the rest

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of their class is on task with other activities. Obviously, Dawn could utilize Hannah's coaching support in resolving this issue.

I inquired whether Dawn perceived the conversations would make any impact on her teaching practices. She responded that indeed a few ideas were taken from the conversations that she would apply to her classroom instruction. I suggested that she elaborate on her response:

For one, I will be more aware to wear the voice microphone to project my voice better in class. I really never had to wear one before, but this school feels all of us should wear them … maybe to grab the kids' attention. So, this is definitely a modification I will make in the classroom. (Conversation 1)

I am going to change how I teach the sounds using the letter wall cards. I am going to use Hannah's ideas to reinforce the kids not to say the picture that goes with the letter, but instead say the letter name. It is confusing with how we teach the letters and sounds. Often the pictures on the cards are distracting them from the letters. So, I am going to be more direct in making this change. Also, I think the phoneme boxes will help all of my students, not   just the low ones. So, I am anxious to use this strategy in my class. I think it will be a great idea. (Conversation 2)

The interviews concluded by my asking Dawn to discuss how Hannah could assist her in the future. In a reflective manner, Dawn responded that this was the most rewarding and challenging job she ever had. She never knew that so much happened in kindergarten and she still is trying to learn how to teach it. She felt that Hannah could help her manage the intervention groups. She wanted Hannah to demonstrate how she could keep the rest of the class on task while she worked directly with other students. Dawn also commented that she would rely on Hannah's advice with the new intervention group plan. She stated:

I don't think I will have a problem placing the students in the appropriate intervention groups, but I want Hannah to look over my plans to see if I am meeting the needs of the students. I trust her opinion. She really knows these kids and knows the data. I know she will help me.

### 4.10.3 SANDRA

Sandra invited me to her empty classroom to conduct the interviews following each of the coaching conversations. The multiple displays of children's work samples and teaching materials epitomized this kindergarten classroom. We sat comfortably at a round table as I began the audio-recorded interviews. My first question to Sandra was about the goals she felt Hannah had set for the conversation and if they were reasonable. She answered:

Hannah always sets a goal for our conversations and they are always reasonable. For example, today she wanted to look at my students' scores on the assessments and discuss their progress. This information helped us get the kids into the right groups for interventions. We also looked at each of the students to decide which ones may need tutoring services. We had a lot to do this morning! (Conversation 1)

Sandra also responded that Hannah's goal for the conversation was reasonable. She explained:

Hannah works with my students all of the time and knows where they are academically. She knows where they need to be and helps us get them there. Her willingness to come into my room and take a group of students really benefits the kids. She also makes sure the tutors are there to help out, too. I think we are all on the same page. (Conversation 1)

Sandra reiterated her thoughts about Hannah's goals in the second conversation. She felt it was important to scrutinize the DIBELS data in order to create the new intervention groups. She also felt that the Reading First data analysis forms were helpful in keeping a written plan for instruction.

Sandra perceived both conversations as productive. She praised Hannah's coaching efforts and acknowledged their co-teaching relationship as being beneficial. I asked her to discuss any successes she may have perceived from the conversations. She was able to address a few:

> I think the biggest success from this coaching conversation with Hannah was the decision to let her take a few of my students for special instruction. She knows which students are still struggling with sounds and blending. She will be able to give them the extra help they need. Also, she will make sure the tutors are taking my students for services. If everything goes as we planned, then our conversation was a huge success. (Conversation 1)

Sandra also pinpointed successes from the second conversation. She felt that they were on the right track by dividing the students into groups that would be taught by teacher teams. She stated that the school had not tried this approach before and hoped it will work. She was adamant in her belief that Hannah's plan for new groupings was a good one.

I asked Sandra to comment on any obstacles or challenges she would have to face because of the conversations. She reflectively responded that her biggest challenge was going to be getting the help needed for a couple of her low achieving students. She elaborated by saying:

> My biggest challenge right now is to get my very lowest kids tested for academic support. I feel as though I have waited long enough to make a referral. I do not have the time to

work one-on-one with them as they need. I guess this challenge has become a success because Hannah knows about these kids. She finally has agreed to move the process along and see the guidance counselor to get the ball rolling. It is very frustrating for me and I know it is for these kids. (Conversation 1)

I also asked Sandra to identify any challenges that might have stemmed from her second conversation with Hannah. She smiled and said that she did not want to lose any of her students to the other teachers for intervention instruction. She felt that the other teachers on her team will do a fine job, but she still feels accountable for each student's academic progress. I asked if she felt this challenge for her ever will be alleviated. She was confident that once the team began to plan the lessons together and start dialoguing about the students, then she eventually will give up some control … maybe.

I asked Sandra whether the conversations with Hannah had prompted her to think about her instructional practices. She claimed that indeed they had. She felt that she now had a plan in place to help the students who were struggling. She further explained that she would have to consider the best instruction to meet the needs of the students who would be divided into different groups between the tutors and Hannah. She felt the academic diversity in her classroom continued to keep her pondering on how to serve all of her students.

Lastly, Sandra and I discussed the next coaching steps that Hannah could offer her. In terms of the first conversation, she hoped that Hannah would make sure the tutors would keep to a schedule and work with the kids on a regular basis. She argued that they often do other tasks in the school that kept them from attending to their tutoring job. She felt confident that Hannah would do what was necessary to alleviate the problem.

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Regarding the second conversation, Sandra felt that Hannah could serve as a good liaison between the teachers and the principal to make sure the plan is accomplished to divide the intervention groups among the teacher teams. She said, "Hannah will make sure the plan will not fall to the wayside. We do not want to do all of this work and start moving our kids around with other teachers and then drop the ball. Our principal supports Hannah's coaching role and will help her establish this plan effectively."

## 4.11    COACH'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONVERSATIONS

In addition to interviewing the teachers, I interviewed Hannah following each coaching conversation to capture her perspective on the conversation's outcome. Below, I address the fifth and final research question of my study: *What were the literacy coach's perceptions of the coaching conversations and their effect on each teacher's classroom practice?*

### 4.11.1  RICK

I began by asking Hannah about her goal for the conversation with Rick. She discussed the predetermined goal she used to guide her conversation and why it was important. Hannah explained:

My primary goal as a coach is to get all of my teachers to look at their student data and use it to make instructional decisions. I need to make sure that the teacher and I are looking at the data in the same way. My conversation with Rick this morning was geared

to looking at his student data to discuss each of their progress and decide whether they need tutoring services or not. (Conversation 1)

Hannah stressed that her overall goal was to engage Rick in a discussion about his students who may or may not need tutoring services. Hannah wanted Rick to use current student data to inform his decision making on the matter. When prompted to explain the rationale for her approach to the conversation with Rick, Hannah commented:

I went into this conversation with Rick today by wanting his opinion about how well he thinks his students are doing. I came armed with the STEPPING STONES and DIBELS data with question marks beside some of the students' names. There were a few that I needed to know if the data were truly reflecting their performance in his classroom. If so, many of these students can be pulled out of tutoring service and that is a good thing. I knew that Rick would be able to work through his class list with me effectively. Overall, I guess the word would clarification. I needed to have him clarify his opinion about his students in order for us to meet their needs better. (Conversation 1)

Hannah justified her rationale for the conversation with confidence. She had a plan in mind for the conversation and seldom steered away from it. This type of discussion was not new to Hannah and Rick, for they often discussed student achievement in past conversations. However, this time they focused on aligning tutoring services with those students needing supplemental instruction.

Similar to the first conversation, Hannah clearly articulated her goals for the second coaching conversation and provided a rationale for why she chose these goals:

My main goal was to get Rick to look at the DIBELS data like we have done in the past, but now really use it to make decisions on where to group his students accordingly. We

are creating new intervention groups, and I wanted to show him how to look at the data to

plan his instruction. I guess I showed him how to look at each student individually; not

just as a class. (Conversation 2)

Hannah argued that that her rationale for this conversation was the ability to "kill two

birds with one stone." She explained that she was able to help Rick use the data to form his new

intervention groups and at the same time complete the Reading First paperwork. The mentioned

paperwork was forms that coaches had to submit to their Reading First technical assistant

delineating their academic intervention plan for each classroom. Hannah was very concerned

about asking the teachers to complete these forms. She commented, "My teachers already have a

lot to do with dividing their students into the groups and working out the new team teaching

approach we are going to use. I hate asking them to complete these forms in addition to their

work. But, hopefully, they will see that the forms align with what they have to do anyway."

Overall, Hannah felt that several successes stemmed from her conversations with Rick.

She was eager to point out a few of them:

This is how it always is with Rick. I mention something to him once and he goes and tries

it out. For example, the other day he stopped me and mentioned that he felt a student

might have dyslexic characteristics. I briefly mentioned to him about some research I

remembered that might be of help to me concerning dyslexia. During our meeting this

morning, he arrived with a printed copy of the research and some other he found on his

own to discuss them with me. That is how it always is with Rick. He really works hard

and wants to be a good and knowledgeable teacher. (Conversation 1)

Hannah elaborated that she felt the second conversation also was successful. She

complimented Rick's adaptability in handling the task of forming his new intervention groups.

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She said, "I threw a lot at him this morning. Not only did he really have to scrutinize his student data, but he had to make decisions on their appropriate grouping. On top of all of that, I threw in the Reading First forms. However, I think he handled it all very well."

I asked Hannah to discuss any challenges she might have perceived from the conversations with Rick. As she reflected, she stated thoughtfully that her biggest challenge is to deal with Rick's disposition. I asked her to explain and she said, "Rick is a worrier who gets frustrated if he does not feel that he has made the best instructional decisions for his students. I know he will run with what I showed him this morning in making his new groups. I just do not want him to fret about this, though. He tends to get caught up in the details and not see the big picture. He is that conscientious of a teacher."

Hannah assured me that Rick would be able to follow through with the suggestions she offered in both conversations. Her confidence in his abilities led her to make this comment:

> I have absolutely no doubt that he will follow through with anything I suggested to him today. He always does. This is not how it always is with other teachers, though. Sometimes, I know they are not planning on following through with what we talked about. Rick is different. He really     listens and wants to learn. He takes and runs with anything I can offer him. (Conversation 1)

By and large, it was evident that Hannah approached coaching as a team effort. She played as important a part as Rick in finding the solutions to problems. Whether the problem concerned certain difficulties a student may be experiencing or if the tutors were keeping on a schedule, she was an essential ingredient to the resolution. This was apparent when I asked about her next coaching steps for Rick:

My next coaching step for Rick is to continue looking at his student data with him. We have another round of assessments to give and we need to keep identifying the kids that are just not getting it. We need to discuss the next steps for first grade. We need to look at the ones who may need to be referred for testing and then look at the kids we need to push further. I also want to help him with his intervention groups. I am going to model more lessons for him. I think it will help him with his instruction. I plan on helping Rick reach these goals. I think we can do it.

After talking with Hannah, it was apparent that she established direct goals for her coaching conversations with Rick and was able to accomplish them successfully. Her goals were practical and useful to Rick's teaching practices. She also outlined her next coaching steps for Rick with purpose. Future coaching conversations between Hannah and Rick appear to be very promising.

## 4.11.2 DAWN

Hannah revealed that her goal for the first conversation with Dawn was to gather information about each student so they could gauge their progress. She wanted to show Dawn how to compare the DIBELS with the quarterly assessment data in order to match students to best interventions tailored to their needs. Hannah explained her rationale on how she approached the conversation with Dawn:

I wanted to have a conversation with Dawn to talk about what she feels she can do to help her students through interventions. I was encouraged to hear her say that whole group instruction is not what her lowest group needs. So, I am happy that she is thinking along those lines. She is beginning to understand the importance of using the data to make

instructional decisions. However, I do not want to tell her what she should do all of the time. I want her to know that she is doing a good job, especially for her first year here. (Conversation 1)

Hannah proclaimed the need to give Dawn the support a new teacher would need while keeping in mind that it's a slow process. She described this coaching process as taking baby steps with Dawn. She said, "Dawn is beginning to analyze the data to guide her teaching. I have taken small baby steps with her on this. I realize how challenging it can be."

In reference to the first conversation, Hannah acknowledged that she hoped that Dawn would have had her assessment binder in place. However, she did not feel that it was an issue that needed to be dealt with at the time. She said:

I realize that her job is often overwhelming for her this year. I have to make sure she understands where the kids are and where to put them for interventions. I know the other things will fall into place … like her binder not in order for our meeting … that is not a big deal at this point. We just have to keep working on the other things as we go along.

Hannah recognized that both conversations produced successes. After the first conversation, she praised Dawn for being in touch with her students. She explained that Dawn was not tuned in to her students at the beginning. She indicated that this probably was due to the start of the job and learning everything new. However, she felt that Dawn was able to provide information about each student during their conversation. She claimed this as a big success.

In reference to the second conversation, Hannah pinpointed the questions that Dawn asked as a success. She provided a rationale for her comment by saying:

Dawn always has a lot of questions for me. I feel as though I throw a lot at her to deal with, but just the fact that she is comfortable asking questions during our conversation

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suggests that she wants to learn and do a good job. She always tells me how she enjoys talking with me. It makes me happy to help her with solutions to her concerns.

Hannah was concerned about a few students in Dawn's class who were regressing academically. She said her biggest challenge was to assist Dawn in getting these students back on track. She referred to the first conversation when she spoke about this situation and how it was imperative that they resolve the problem soon. She commented:

Talking with Dawn about these students' declining behavior and how it is affecting their learning brought up a major concern. I get very worried whenever I think students have reached benchmark and there is a chance they are going to regress. I cannot think of a bigger challenge for Dawn and me right now than to get these kids back on level.

There was a sense of hesitancy in Hannah's voice as she discussed Dawn's ability to follow through with the suggestions she provided her during the conversations. She said:

Yes, I really do think Dawn will be able to carry out any suggestions I gave her. However, I know it will require a good amount of support from me. I think the job is overwhelming for even the most veteran teachers, so I know that I have to keep a close eye on her. I will ask her continuously how it is going and how can I help her.

Hannah's last comment segued easily into the last question I asked her about the next coaching steps for Dawn. She responded reflectively by stating:

I think my next coaching step is just to be in the classroom with her. I want to model more lessons for her to observe. We are not at the systematic reading instruction (SFA) yet, and I think modeling lessons prior to her teaching it will be of help. Also, I need to be in her room to help her with those students who are not making the progress as before. She could use my help managing the groups more effectively. (Conversation 1)

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She outlined her next coaching steps by recognizing that Dawn would need her assistance in finalizing the data analysis forms for the intervention groups. She admitted that during the second conversation there were many tasks that she required Dawn to complete. She said:

> I think we got a great start in looking at the student data and using it to make the new intervention groups. I think Dawn will be able to finish the analysis forms with a little more help, if necessary. My next coaching step is going to help her work with the other two teachers as they divide the groups. This is something new for all of us … it is going to take time and a lot of patience … but when it is in place it will meet the kids' needs so much better.

In conclusion, Hannah clearly articulated her overall perceptions of the coaching conversations she had with Dawn. Although Hannah often offered praise of Dawn's gains in her teaching efforts, she maintained a realistic perspective about her lack of teaching skills. She was cognizant that Dawn needed coaching support as a teacher new to kindergarten and was willing to assist her in any way. It was evident that their conversations served them well as they explored a myriad of coaching possibilities.

### 4.11.3 SANDRA

Hannah graciously took time out of her busy schedule to talk with me following her coaching conversations with Sandra. I began the interviews by asking about her goals for the conversation. She admitted that she always sets goals for her meetings with the teachers because she does not want to waste their or her time. Hannah discussed her goals for the conversation with Sandra:

The goal I had for my meeting with Sandra this morning was to look how the kids are doing so far in her class. She really has a challenging group this year and I think it helps if both of us look at the data to make decisions that are best for the kids. (Conversation 1)

Hannah provided a rationale of how she attempted to reach her goal in the first conversation. She commented:

I knew that Sandra would have her assessment binder available with her students' recent assessment data. So, we were able to accomplish my goal easily as we examined the students' scores and the progress each were making in the classroom.

Similarly, Hannah's goal for the second conversation was to examine student data in order to create new intervention groups. Hannah was clear about her expectations of this meeting:

My main goal with Sandra today was to find out how she was going to form her new intervention groups. We are implementing a new plan for teaching the groups and I was anxious to see how Sandra was going to divide her kids. Also, I had previously given the teachers the student data analysis forms that are required by Reading First. I was not surprised that Sandra came to our meeting with them completed. Like I said, she always has a plan. (Conversation 2)

Hannah followed her comments by explaining the new intervention block was going to begin the following week and she was wanted to get everything in place with the teachers. Compared to the second conversations with Rick and Dawn, Hannah took a different approach with Sandra. She discussed this with me by stating, "I felt as though I approached this conversation differently than I did with Rick and Dawn. Even though I basically had the same

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goals for the meetings, I approached each teacher differently." I asked Hannah to explain the differences in her approach. She articulated the following:

Sandra came to our meeting with direction. She knew what to do and how to get there. I basically needed to listen and see where I could help meet her goals. Rick, on the other hand, is also organized and good at what he does. But, he does not have the experience behind him. So, I felt that I needed to help him focus more on the data and give him a little more direction. Then, there is Dawn … I felt that I had to tell her a lot during our conversations. She really needed more support from me than Rick or Sandra.

I asked Hannah to discuss any successes she perceived from her conversations with Sandra. She gladly revealed that several successes stemmed from their meetings:

I think we found a possible solution to Sandra's problems with some of her kids who appear to be borderline. We decided that most of these kids appear to struggle with language based skills. So, if I take this group and give them extra instruction in language reinforcement, then it may help keep them from falling through the cracks. Yes, this is definitely a success from our talk. (Conversation 1)

Hannah also discussed the successes achieved from the second conversation. She was pleased that Sandra already had completed the data analysis forms and that she did not have to spend time explaining them to her. Hannah argued that this gave them the opportunity to discuss the student data thoroughly and take the process a step further than she planned.

The next question I asked pertained to challenges. I wanted to know if Hannah perceived any obstacles had evolved from her conversations with Sandra. She smiled while saying, "There are always obstacles or challenges I have to face in my job as a coach." She discussed the

challenges more specific to her conversations with Sandra. She was very open about the lack of tutorial support within the school. She elaborated by commenting:

> I know Sandra and the other teachers get frustrated when the tutors do not show up to take their kids. It has been a problem that has been discussed with our principal. We are so shorthanded sometimes with teacher absences that we have to pull the tutors to teach. I know it is hard for everyone. I guess being cognizant of this situation is a challenge for me. I hope to come up with a solution that will alleviate this problem. (Conversation 1)

Interestingly, Hannah did not pinpoint any real challenges stemming from her second conversation with Sandra. She only mentioned that it would be difficult for Sandra to relinquish control of her students by dividing the groups among the teacher team. She said:

> I know letting some of her kids go to another teacher is going to be hard for Sandra. She feels so accountable for their progress. But, I think once the teachers begin to work together then she will see that she has input regardless who is teaching them during the intervention block.

Hannah was confident that Sandra will follow through with the coaching suggestions that she offered. She explicitly credited their good working relationship as the key reason why she will be able to work with the small group on language-based activities, as planned. Hannah said:

> I have been co-teaching with Sandra for a long time. So, it will be easy for her to let me take a group and work with them. We are both on the same page with the kids. So, there will be no problem with her following through with this plan.

The interview ended with Hannah discussing her next coaching steps for Sandra. She summed up her next steps by saying that she was going to support Sandra by helping her with the kids who need additional instruction. She commented, "Sandra is an excellent teacher, but she

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really could use an extra set of hands with the group she has this year. I think my job is to see that she gets the help she needs with her kids."

# 5.0    CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I summarize the findings and draw conclusions from the research. I also discuss the implications for preparing coaches and suggest recommendations for future research.

## 5.1    FINDINGS

This section presents the most significant findings for each of the research questions addressed in this study:

*Research Question 1 – What was the content of the coaching conversation? That is, what topics or goals seemed to be the primary foci of coaching?*

1. The literacy coach had preestablished goals for her coaching conversations. The content of conversations included data analysis, instructional grouping, and tutorial services. However, she made adjustments throughout based on the varying needs of the teachers.

*Research Question 2 – In what ways did the literacy coach facilitate the co-construction of meaning during the coaching conversation?*

*2a. What scaffolding support did the literacy coach provide to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking?*

1. The scaffolding support the literacy coach provided the teachers during the coaching conversations varied depending on teacher needs as perceived by the coach. With the

more experienced teacher, the coach offered the most support at the telling level. However, with the inexperienced teachers, she generally offered most support at the telling and questioning levels.

2. Although the amount of support the literacy coach provided at the directing level was comparable for all three teachers during the coaching conversations, there was an unequal amount of support offered at the demonstrating level. She used demonstrating as a scaffolding support most frequently for the new teacher inexperienced at teaching kindergarten.

*2b. What types of questions were asked by the literacy coach to facilitate the conversation and prompt teacher thinking?*

1. The types of questions the literacy coach asked the teachers during the coaching conversations varied depending on discussion topics. Although she most often asked the teachers questions that focused on facts, the responses from these questions served as a springboard to engage the teachers in further conversation.

2. The literacy coach asked all the teachers questions that required them to critically assess the specific issue under discussion. These questions forced them to analyze student performance based on classroom observation and student data in a meaningful way.

3. The literacy coach frequently asked the new teacher questions pertaining to her past teaching experiences, especially about the reading curriculum. She did not ask the other teachers any questions during the coaching conversations to elicit information about their past experiences.

4. Although the literacy coach asked all of the teachers questions that required them to discuss their points of view, she most often asked these questions of the two more

experienced teachers. These questions generally pertained to their opinions about the suitable grouping of students for intervention instruction

*Research Question 3 – In what ways did the literacy coach alter engagement with the different teachers during the coaching conversations, and what teacher characteristics affected her engagement?*

1. The literacy coach clearly altered her engagement with the teachers during the coaching conversations. It appeared as though the experiences of the teachers, their relationships with her as coach, teacher knowledge of literacy instruction and assessment, and their willingness to be coached were the primary factors.

2. The literacy coach had a great deal of confidence in the teaching abilities of the more experienced teacher. Her approach to their conversations appeared to be collegial in nature and seemed to build on their close-knit relationship established from prior teaching years.

3. Although one teacher did not have a lot of teaching experience, he had a strong desire to improve his instruction and was very receptive to coaching. His positive attitude toward receiving coaching support appeared to lay the foundation for the collaborative approach the literacy coach used to engage him in their conversations.

4. The literacy coach recognized the extensive coaching support required to assist a new teacher. Moreover, in their conversations, she was flexible and adjusted the conversation to discuss topics other than her preset goals, if they addressed this teacher's needs. It appeared that the coach's role as mentor allowed her to gain the teacher's trust and establish a safe coaching environment to provide coaching support.

*Research Question 4 – What were the teachers' perceptions of the coaching conversations and their effect on their classroom practice?*

1. Although all three teachers felt the conversations with the literacy coach were helpful, there were differences in how each perceived the conversations would influence their classroom practice. The most experienced teacher perceived the conversations as being helpful, reasonable, and applicable to her students' needs. She felt the literacy coach's suggestions would help solve a few problems she was experiencing within the classroom (e.g., student referral for testing, lack of tutorial support, small group instruction). She was confident the coach would continue to offer support as she attempted to overcome these existing problems. Another teacher described his coaching conversations with the literacy coach as an invaluable opportunity to engage in good discussion about his students and his teaching practices. He felt he grasped the ability to analyze student data on a deeper level that would influence his decisions about student group placements and reading instruction. Moreover, he looked forward to having future coaching conversations. Although the least experienced teacher perceived the conversations as helpful in analyzing student data and discussing instructional practices, she felt they were also helpful in serving as a venue to discuss student behavior and classroom management issues. She believed the suggestions the literacy coach offered would allow her to better manage and instruct the small reading groups. Furthermore, she was encouraged that the literacy coach offered to assist her in implementing these practices.

*Research Question 5 – What were the literacy coach's perceptions of the coaching conversations and their effect on each teacher's classroom practice?*

1. The literacy coach's perceptions of the coaching conversations and their effect on classroom practices were similar to those of the teachers. She perceived the conversations with all of the teachers as being positive and productive. Moreover, she believed she accomplished the goals she set for the conversations.

2. The literacy coach was confident that all of the teachers would be able to follow through with the suggestions she offered, but with varied coaching support. For example, she felt that the more experienced teacher did not need support with her instructional practices as much as she needed the coach to serve as a liaison between the principal, school counselor, and tutors to ensure her students would receive certain services to meet their needs. On the other hand, the literacy coach was cognizant that the least experienced teacher would have difficulty implementing her suggestions without intensive coaching support. She argued that it was not enough to "talk" about the ways the teacher could improve her instruction. In order to make a real difference, she would need to work alongside her in the classroom.

## 5.2    FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the *nature of talk* used during coaching conversations. More specifically, this study provided a rich description of the talk that a literacy coach used in coaching conversations with multiple teachers by analyzing the levels of support provided by the coach to scaffold teacher learning and understanding about instructional practices. Based on the findings from an in-depth analysis of the data, I have drawn the following conclusions:

*The literacy coach was intentional in the approaches she used to differentiate her conversation with teachers. Moreover, she exemplified the characteristics that enabled her to hold effective coaching conversations as identified by literature and research; these included strong content knowledge, effective listening abilities, and skillful questioning techniques.*

In 2004, the International Reading Association (IRA) delineated guidelines for the qualifications of a literacy coach. One criterion suggests that literacy coaches should have an in-depth knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction. The IRA argues that literacy coaches cannot be expected to help classroom teachers improve reading instruction if the coaches lack knowledge of the range of effective instructional methods, materials, and practices that can be employed at the levels they coach. Furthermore, literacy coaches must be knowledgeable about reading acquisition and development so they can aid teachers in planning instruction to meet the needs of all students.

The literacy coach in this study possessed strong knowledge in reading content. Her background in speech and language was essential in her work with kindergarten teachers. The coach's knowledge of children's oral language development equipped her with the necessary skills to assist teachers in implementing effective reading practices to meet the diverse needs of students. Moreover, the literacy coach recognized the importance of developing her knowledge beyond the realm of speech and language. She participated continuously in professional development and independently researched information to broaden her understanding of the reading process and reading instruction.

In addition to in-depth knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, and instruction, the IRA posits that literacy coaches must possess the ability to help classroom teachers with

assessments that can guide teachers' understanding of student needs. McKenna and Walpole (2008) support this position by stating, "The overarching job of a coach is to support teachers to match their instruction to the needs of their children, and to pace it so that meaningful outcomes are realized; that cannot be accomplished without student-level data" (p. 55).

The primary goal of the literacy coach in her conversations with teachers was to assist their analyses of student data. Using assessment results make coaching conversations more objectively focused and provides an opportunity for co-planning. Together, a coach and teacher can use progress monitoring results to chart the impact of differentiated instruction (McKenna & Walpole, 2008). Through collaborative discussions, the literacy coach was able to guide teachers to identify practical data that was useful in making instructional decisions.

The literacy coach in this study employed listening abilities that enabled her to foster effective coaching conversations. The coach utilized listening as a tool to gauge teacher knowledge, identify strengths, and pinpoint areas of potential growth. Moreover, the art of skillful listening equipped her with the right feedback at the right time … an element crucial to effective coaching. The coach articulated that sometimes the best coaching is done by being quiet and listening. She explained that teachers often need to have opportunities to talk about their experiences in the classroom and just want someone to listen and understand. The coach argued that without careful listening, she is not able to support teachers where they need it the most.

Throughout the literature on coaching, experts concur that one of the most important communication skills a coach can develop is learning how to listen (Duncan, 2006). When coaches listen more and talk less, they let teachers know they value their thoughts and opinions. Relationships are built as people talk about their ideas and experiences, and realize that those

listening understand "where they are coming from," which leads to mutual trust and respect for one another.

Bean and DeFord (2007) argue that listening allows the coach to explore the myriad of experiences, perspectives, and talents that each teacher brings to the community that the coach and teacher are building together. When coaches are willing to listen to teachers talk about teaching, the conversations embrace a supportive climate to allow the coach and teacher to reflect and analyze teaching practices that are seen as effective and suggest alternatives to those considered ineffective (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007).

By engaging teachers in coaching conversations that promote interactive listening and reflection, coaches can lay the groundwork for the support they may offer teachers. Gibson (2006) investigated the feedback a literacy coach provided to a kindergarten teacher through coaching conversations and found that literacy coaches must be able to implement coaching sessions with high amounts of teacher engagement if they are to be effective. She found that engaged coaching conversations that were effective included specific statements from both the coach and the teacher that resulted in an analysis of instruction.

The literacy coach in this study exemplified skillful questioning techniques that enabled her to foster effective coaching conversations. The coach possessed the ability to ask questions to prompt teachers to think about their instructional practices. Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) explain that "when using questions to think about teaching, the literacy coach needs to solicit conversation by making initial probes regarding teacher knowledge or understanding" (p. 99). Morgan and Saxton (1994) argue that good questions lead to better understanding, and we should be cognizant of different types of questions and why we ask them. In this study, the coach's questions were classified into three different types: questions eliciting information, questions

shaping understanding, and questions pressing for reflection (Morgan & Saxton, 1994). The questions the coach asked were instrumental in helping her recognize the various levels of teacher knowledge and understanding. Moreover, recognizing these levels provided a direction for her coaching support.

Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, & Schock (2009) found that teacher reflection on instructional practices was heightened when the literacy coach referred to data from observation and asked questions to elicit a conversation with the teacher. Furthermore, the questions posed by the coach during the conversation increased the teacher's understanding of how the changes she made to her instruction had affected student ability to learn. Because the teacher had implemented practices that engaged her students to a higher level, she felt she was better connecting her instruction to meet student needs. Through skillful questioning, the coach was able to guide the teacher toward a self-analysis of her instruction that allowed the teacher to identify specific elements that encouraged higher student engagement.

*The nature of conversations was influenced by the teachers with whom the coach talked; important factors included relationship between the coach and teacher, teachers' experiences and their knowledge of literacy instruction and assessment, and willingness to be coached.*

Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) claim that the most essential part of coaching is fostering dialogue or coaching conversations about teaching. Real dialogue promotes a learning environment where teachers through the facilitation of a literacy coach have opportunities to think about their instructional practice and ways to refine it (Duncan, 2006).

Knight (2007) vividly describes authentic dialogue as "a lively conversation between a coach and teacher where ideas can bounce around like balls in a pinball machine, and people can start to communicate so well that it becomes difficult to see where one person's thoughts end and another's begin" (p. 46). Through collaborative conversations of exchanging ideas, literacy coaches have the potential to make the most impact on the work teachers do in the classroom. However, coaches often have difficulty conducting these conversations with teachers.

It is important that literacy coaches build a solid foundation for their conversations based on trust and respect for the teachers of whom they are coaching. Teachers learn more from coaches who are considered to be trustworthy (Bean, 2005; Dozier, 2006; Duncan, 2006; Knight, 2007; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Toll, 2005). A trusting coaching relationship allows teachers to examine and discuss their teaching practices in a safe and nonevaluative environment.

The literacy coach in this study appeared to have built solid, trustworthy relationships with the teachers she coached. Moreover, these complex and individualized relationships influenced the nature of her coaching conversations.

Relationships between coach and teachers usually evolve over time, and establishing good relationships is critical to fostering effective coaching conversations. Toll (2005) states that "a literacy coach who knows a great deal about literacy instruction but cannot develop relationships, build trust, and work with the non-knowledge related issues of teaching will fail" (p. 53).

One way the literacy coach in this study built relationships with teachers was by focusing on their strengths. All teachers have positive elements of strengths in their teaching abilities and it is beneficial for the literacy coach to recognize and build upon them. Dozier (2006) coined the term "celebrations" for the method she uses in coaching conversations to recognize teachers'

strengths. Celebrations allow coaches and teachers to focus on the positive ways they are extending their teaching practices and how students are growing from these practices. Not only do celebrations provide opportunities for the coach to provide positive feedback in their coaching conversations, but gives valuable insight to the teachers' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and where the coach may further her work.

This study's literacy coach frequently offered celebrations as part of her feedback to the teachers during the coaching conversations. She often provided the teachers with explicit positive feedback that directly pinpointed specific teaching strengths and practices that appeared to improve student learning.

Another way the literacy coach built relationships was by not assuming the role of an expert in her conversations with teachers. Toll (2005) argues that being perceived as an expert sets up literacy coaches for failure because no one can be an expert on all aspects of literacy teaching and at all grade levels. Likewise, Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) support the notion that literacy coaches should not dictate to teachers what to do, but rather engage them in collaborative discussions and inquiry; this is how literacy coaches can achieve their most potential. If teachers perceive the coach as the "keeper of wisdom and knowledge" it can create an intimidating, power struggling environment not conducive to productive growth and learning.

The literacy coach recognized the fact that she often was the "learner" in her coaching conversations with teachers. Research suggests that effective coaching relationships are more likely to develop when the literacy coach assumes the role of a co-learner. When a coach takes a co-learner stance, he or she engages with teachers on a collegial level that promotes opportunities for more in-depth coaching. Teachers need to perceive a literacy coach as not always having the right answers all the time, but as a supportive resource and a knowledgeable

other who is willing to find the answers to their questions (Bean, 2005; Casey, 2006; Knight, 2007; Toll, 2005).

I found that the teachers' experiences and their knowledge of literacy instruction and assessment significantly influenced the literacy coach's conversations. Coaches work daily with teachers who come equipped with varied teaching experiences and literacy knowledge. Therefore, it is essential for coaches to understand these variances and have the ability to differentiate the support they provide for teachers. McKenna and Walpole (2008) note the following:

> In adult professional learning situations, much is at stake. A particular challenge for coaches is that adults come with a wide range of experiences, knowledge, and talent. These qualities have shaped how the adults see themselves as professionals. In fact, their self-concept is central to their predisposition to learn, and their experiences have contributed to the formation of that self-concept. This is why it is important to value teachers' past experiences and to make every effort to relate new ideas to previous experiences (Terehoff, as cited in McKenna & Walpole, 2008, pp. 19–20).

Through collaborative conversations, coaches have a unique lens to examine the way teachers think about their classroom practices based on both past experiences and knowledge. In order for coaches to extend a teacher's professional knowledge base, we must understand what the teacher knows and has experienced, and how the teacher learns (Dozier, 2006).

Without a complete understanding of where a teacher is in the developmental process, a literacy coach cannot pinpoint the teacher's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) which is essential in connecting present knowledge to new knowledge. For example, some

teachers will need more explicit assistance while others simply need a gentle nudge of reassurance and recognition to grasp new ideas.

In this study, the coach recognized the in-depth literacy knowledge of a veteran teacher with many years of successful teaching experience at the kindergarten level. However, during the coaching conversations, the coach still was able to direct her coaching support to where it would be the most useful. The dialogue between this teacher and the literacy coach was not about changing the teacher's reading instruction and practices, but pertained mostly to how the literacy coach could assist in other ways. On the other hand, the overall lack of literacy knowledge and effective instruction influenced the conversations between the literacy coach and another teacher. During the coaching conversations, there existed substantial evidence of the coach recognizing the need for intense coaching support for this teacher. She sought to assist the teacher in grasping an understanding of data analysis, learning research-based strategies to direct her instructional practices in reading, and techniques for better classroom management.  Because the literacy coach differentiated her conversations based on teacher needs, she was more likely to succeed in extending the teacher's learning of new literacy practices.

A final and salient factor that influenced the nature of the conversations between the literacy coach and the teachers was the *willingness to be coached.* Knight (2007) recognizes the importance of coaches possessing the skill to get teachers "on board." Teachers must find value in what coaches have to offer before they are willing to form a collaborative relationship with them. Most teachers have experienced professional development programs that often were quick fix solutions and failed. Therefore, it is not a surprise to find that teachers may be wary or resistant to receive coaching support.

Some books and articles about coaching address the ways a literacy coach can respond to resistant teachers who do not want to be part of the coaching process. A common thread running throughout the literature is that literacy coaches often can learn more from resistant teachers than compliant teachers. Toll (2005) recommends that coaches embrace resistant teachers to help guide and refine their coaching practices. When coaches learn more about why teachers disagree with the literacy coaching model, they can prepare themselves better to explain their purpose to others. Also, information gleaned from resistant teachers often provides the coach with a lens to find common ground. Recognizing commonalities may reduce the tension between the coach and teacher, and open a door to the first steps of coaching.

Every teacher deserves high-quality coaching to provide support for implementing change. It is important for teachers to see the reason for a change and why they are expected to make it. They need to be able to link a change in their instruction to an improvement in student academic performance (Duncan, 2006). When teachers recognize the positive impact a coach can make on their teaching practices that can result in higher student achievement, they may be more likely to welcome coaching support.

A study conducted by Ross (1992) on the relationships between coaching and student outcomes found that student achievement was higher in the classrooms of teachers who interacted more extensively with their coach. Although it may be possible to infer that coaching practices contributed to higher achievement, it also is possible that the teachers who were seeing greater student success in the classroom might have sought out the coach for further coaching support.

The teachers in this study were willing to be coached, but for different reasons. One teacher with a few years of teaching experience embraced the coaching support he received. He

described the coaching conversations as opportunities to get good feedback from the coach about his instructional practices and student progress. He saw value in learning from a knowledgeable other to hone his skills in reading instruction and assessment. Another teacher with many years of teaching experience was willing to receive coaching to support her needs in a different way. She saw value in coaching as a means to extend outreach services for her students. The coach was instrumental in serving as a liaison to ensure that tutoring support would be readily available for the students, to encourage the school counselor to expedite the process of student referral for testing students for special services, and to work with the principal to secure the implementation of a new school-wide response to intervention program. The novice teacher to kindergarten was willing to be coached in a broader sense. She was struggling in several areas, which therefore encouraged her to seek coaching support. For example, the literacy coach assisted the teacher in analyzing student data to guide her instruction, suggested techniques to solve management and behavior issues, demonstrated specific strategies to accommodate her students' needs in reading, and offered to help instruct one of the reading groups. I believe one can conclude that in order for literacy coaching to have a significant impact, it is imperative for coaches to be cognizant that teachers' *willingness to be coached* is most often dependent on the possibility that their individual needs will be met.

> *Both the content and scaffolding differed in the conversations between the literacy coach and teachers.*

"It would be easy to scaffold learning if it only involved offering everyone the same kind of help at the same time, disregarding each person's present abilities and understandings or his or her response to the support" (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007, p. 73).

The literacy coach in this study differentiated her approach to coaching in the conversations she held with the teachers. Although the coach planned specific goals for each of the coaching conversations, she often found it necessary to alter her goals based on the content and immediate teacher needs. Her method of coaching conducted in the conversations aligned with what Toll (2005) suggests is critical in good coaching. She claims that literacy coaches need to ask questions, provide resources, offer suggestions, and assist teachers in finding solutions to problems in order to influence teachers' changes, but with an emphasis on the *teachers'* goal. This is the best way to offer coaching support that is respectful in building good relationships with teachers.

The literacy coach determined a leverage point in her conversations with the teachers. A leverage point is known as the point in a process where an intervention can have the greatest effect (Knight, 2001). It is imperative that the leverage point falls within the teachers' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1962) and within the capabilities of the coach. The leverage point most often selected by the literacy coach in the conversations with teachers pertained to student data.

Focusing on student data provided ample opportunities for the coach to scaffold teacher learning based on their knowledge and experiences. Casey (2006) argues that when coaches talk about student data and student performance with teachers, it often reveals what the teacher is most focused on in their teaching. For example, when the literacy coach in this study assisted a novice teacher in analyzing the student data from diagnostic assessments, the teacher most often veered the conversation toward the difficulties she was having with student management and behavior. This gave the coach valuable insight to the teacher's immediate needs and another way to direct her coaching support.

During the coaching conversations, the literacy coach varied the scaffolding support she provided to the teachers. Coaches who effectively scaffold understandings are ready to respond to the learner; this means making decisions about the kind of help to offer and when to offer it (Rodger & Rodgers, 2007). She provided the teachers with the appropriate amount of support they needed for learning at the time they needed it the most. Depending on teacher needs, she worked along a continuum of support consisting of questioning, directing, demonstrating, and telling (Rodgers, 2004). She ultimately had to determine when to offer support and when to let the teacher work through the issue him/herself. For example, when a teacher was concerned about a student who had difficulty with segmenting words, the coach asked questions to understand the instruction the teacher was providing in phonemic awareness. The teacher's responses to the coach's questions provided a springboard to discuss the types of interventions that would suit this student's needs. The kind of support the coach provided at the time encouraged teacher reflectivity and analysis which could lead to a positive change in instructional practices.

*Student data provided the basis for the job-embedded professional development or coaching. It served as the impetus for the conversations held between coach and teachers.*

The literacy coach in this study had an action plan that served as a foundation for the conversations that she held with teachers. Student data were used to help teachers think about how they would provide the instructional support needed by students. In other words, the coach focused on helping teachers link the results of diagnostic assessments to their instructional practices. She highlighted the importance of data-informed instruction in her conversations. She

was actively engaged in a complex process that Walpole and McKenna (2004) define as "translating the data into instructional strategies that would help accelerate the progress of a particular child" (p. 74). The conversations about the student data helped identify the gaps between what the teachers knew and what they needed to know to increase student growth and achievement. Moreover, the literacy coach worked alongside each teacher to support their understanding of student data. She *gradually released responsibility* (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), helping teachers become responsible for transferring new knowledge to best teaching practices.

Student data served as evidence that a change in the teacher's instruction had an impact on student performance (Duncan, 2006). For example, in this study a coaching conversation about current student data revealed that there was a decrease in the number of students requiring tutorial support in a teacher's classroom. While critically examining the student data, the literacy coach assisted the teacher in recognizing the impact his instruction has made on facilitating improvement in reading achievement. Bean (2005) suggests that literacy coaches fulfill many roles in their jobs. However, their primary role is to assist the classroom teacher in providing more effective classroom instruction for all students. One approach is to discuss student data about the child's strengths and needs to help plan instruction that will be effective. As teachers learn to use data to understand student needs, it is more likely they will understand the necessity of differentiated instruction (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005).

By focusing on assessment of actual students in each of the teachers' classrooms, this coach was able to provide highly effective job-embedded professional development (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Being supported on the job enables teachers to increase their knowledge and instructional skills and apply them in the classroom (Duncan, 2006). Literacy coaches engage in

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job-embedded professional development on a daily basis through their interactions with teachers. As Jay and Strong (2008) note, "the literacy coach's direct line to instructional improvement is through coach-teacher interaction" (p. 187). This type of interaction leads to fundamental dialogue that embodies the process of professional development. Duncan (2006) summarizes this process:

> The teacher, with the support of the coach, identifies a challenge to instruction through the vehicle of an action plan. This plan is the teacher's commitment to action. Together the teacher and coach determine how they will work together and gain information to provide quality feedback to the teacher. After the coach works alongside the teacher, they meet for dialogue. The impact of this change is expected to be evident through increased student achievement. (p. 35)

Traditionally, professional development for in-service teachers has been targeted to address teachers' needs by providing them with ineffective, one-shot sessions intended to promote change in instructional practices. The assumption behind these sessions is that knowledge building, without any reference to curriculum and context, will transfer to changed practices. However, Walpole and McKenna (2004) argue that teachers are more likely to "buy in" and change their instructional practices when professional development sessions are practical. In other words, teachers want to learn things they actually can use with children.

Because the primary role of literacy coaches is to provide support to classroom teachers for classroom reading instruction, The International Reading Association (2004) argues that an effective literacy coach must possess an in-depth knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction. Literacy coaches cannot be expected to provide job-embedded professional development and help classroom teachers improve reading instruction and student

achievement if they lack knowledge of the range of effective instructional methods, materials, and practices that can be employed at the levels they coach.

## 5.3    DISCUSSION

The focus of this study was to examine the *talk* a literacy coach used with three kindergarten teachers in coaching conversations. Knowledge of how this literacy coach conversed effectively with teachers about varied content and how she provided scaffolding support to help teachers think about their instruction to meet the diverse needs of the students in their classrooms can offer school districts, universities, and other institutions involved with the professional development of literacy coaches valuable insights for preparing coaches for the conversations they hold with teachers.

Coaching conversations are the impetus that provides classroom teachers a platform to reflect and analyze teaching practices; therefore it is imperative that literacy coaches receive professional development in learning how to hold effective conversations with teachers. Since most of the work done by literacy coaches is verbal, it is important that they learn to develop communication skills that minimize the chances their words will be misunderstood or misinterpreted and maximize trust and communication between themselves and those whom they coach (Toll, 2005, p. 62).

An essential feature of literacy coaching is that it uses the relationships among coaches, principals, and teachers to create the conversations that may lead to behavioral, pedagogical, and content knowledge change (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Literacy coaches must be knowledgeable not only about their content area but also district reform goals, school based instructional models,

achievement standards, and adult learning. In this particular study, the coaching conversations the literacy coach had with the teachers reflected attempts to implement, with fidelity, the Reading First and Success for All initiatives in that school district. Meeting such a range of goals requires that literacy coaches possess strong communication and interpersonal skills, consistently follow through with support for teachers, and demonstrate a willingness to listen and learn (Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

The job of a literacy coach encompasses many activities that include observing teacher instruction, modeling lessons, analyzing student data, and many more. But what is most essential to coaching is fostering dialogue or coaching conversations about teaching (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). Communicating with teachers is the heart of coaching that has the most impact on creating a change for better instruction and improved teaching practices. When literacy coaches learn the art of skillful communication techniques, they often can open doors to discover reasons behind teachers' resistance to change. This can direct the literacy coach toward the right path of providing the necessary coaching support teachers need.

It is essential that literacy coaches receive professional development that affords them the opportunities to learn and practice effective communication skills. Simply having attended a workshop on effective communication a few years ago will not provide much help when a literacy coach is faced with the challenge of holding coaching conversations with teachers on a daily basis. Therefore, literacy coaches must spend time learning and practicing strategic communication skills to help establish professional relationships with teachers (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005).

One way this can be accomplished is by providing opportunities for literacy coaches to observe one another's work. Literacy coaches who are learning to improve their coaching skills

will benefit from opportunities to observe other coaches' practices and receive feedback about their own coaching work. Neufeld and Roper (2003) found that school districts struggle to provide sufficient professional development for coaches that allows them to reflect on their own and others' best coaching practices. However, Deussen et al. (2007) report that coaches would like more professional development in this area. Coaches want to widen their repertoire of skills and deepen their knowledge of adult learning and support. They want to see coach experts in action so they can hone their own coaching skills. Professional development for literacy coaches must prepare them to understand that just as teachers are encouraged to differentiate instruction for students, coaches must differentiate their coaching support for teachers.

Kise (2006) argues that given the high level of effort required for teachers to change their classroom instruction, and given that individuals need different information and scaffolding to succeed, providing differentiated coaching is the most feasible strategy. However, written guidelines advocating instructional coaching often have missed the mark as how to prepare coaches for working with teachers. For example, The National Staff Development Council (NSCD) has provided guidelines for coaching that do not include adapting coaching techniques to meet the unique differences of the individuals being coached. In fact, the NSCD emphasizes coaching as a tool for having teachers implement the same practices uniformly (Kise, 2006, p. 32).

Literacy coaches must be prepared to work with teachers who are equipped with different teaching experiences, knowledge, and strengths. These qualities have shaped how teachers perceive themselves as professionals, and their self-concept is central to their predisposition to learn (Terehoff, 2002). This is why it is imperative that literacy coaches learn to respect these

differences while engaging teachers in coaching support and consider how these differences influence the scaffolding support they plan to provide teachers in coaching conversations.

Coaching does not and should not involve offering all teachers the same kind of help all of the time. In order for coaching to make a significant change in teachers' instruction that may result in higher student learning and improved achievement, literacy coaches must be able to meet the individual needs of teachers by differentiating the support provided for them.

## 5.4    LIMITATIONS

As with most research studies, there exist limitations and this study holds no exception. Below, I address the limitations of this study:

- In this study, the amount of time available to the literacy coach to conduct the coaching conversations limited the extent to which the coach could talk with teachers and the length of time that could be devoted to each conversation.

- Because of scheduled school holidays and teacher in-service days, the coaching conversations in this study extended across a span of four months. The literacy coach may have held other coaching conversations with the participating teachers during this time that possibly influenced the content of the discussions that were analyzed in this study.

## 5.5    RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- In this study, I investigated perceptions of a literacy coach and teachers as to the value they placed on coaching conversations. Although the coach and teachers found the conversations to be helpful, there is a need for the investigator to not only look at the content of coaching conversations but to examine what happens in the classrooms after the conversations. In other words, is there any follow-through to the discussion, and what factors appear to influence such follow-through?

- Research suggests that effective coaching conversations can foster positive changes in teaching practices and instruction. Therefore, a study of literacy coaches who have participated in specific preparation programs that focused on effective conversation techniques, as compared to coaches without such preparation, would yield important information about the effects of such preparation.

- In this study, I looked explicitly at the literacy coach's talk in conversations, but recognized that the teachers' responses and questions influenced the coaching conversations. Studies in which investigators examine the relationship between coach and teacher talk would be helpful in understanding the nature of such conversations.

LETTER TO TECHNICAL ASSISTANT

Dear Technical Assistant,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh working with Dr. Rita M. Bean, professor of Instruction and Learning. I also have been part of the Reading First External Evaluation Team for the past two years. I am beginning a research study that will examine the nature of talk used during coaching conversations with teachers. The findings of this study will help literacy coaches, reading specialists, and school administrators understand the complexities of coaching conversations and support them in their interactions.

I would like you to nominate three Reading First literacy coaches working under your supervision who consistently demonstrate exemplary coaching skills. It is important that the principals of the nominees' schools are in agreement and support your nominations. Each nominee should possess the following characteristics:

1. Possesses in-depth knowledge of the reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction.
2. Has established a good working rapport with teachers.
3. Spends a majority of time working directly with teachers in the classroom.
4.  Confers regularly with teachers following classroom observations.

All I need are the names of three coaches and their schools. I will contact them to ask if they are willing to participate in the study. The information you provide will be strictly confidential and will serve only the purpose of this study.

I appreciate your taking the time to assist me. Please e-mail the information to: ebelcastro1@comcast.net

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Belcastro


**Nominees:** *(Please include coach names and schools)*


Coach 1: _____

Coach 2: _____

Coach 3: _____

# APPENDIX B

## COACH INTERVIEW

Interview Questions:

**How have you been prepared to serve as a literacy coach (e.g., professional development, training, support system networks, professional readings, etc.)? Any other? Has the preparation been adequate? Discuss.**

**Tell me about your school culture or the way teachers and staff members work together.**

**Tell me about your role as a literacy coach in this school.**

- o Discuss the major tasks or activities you conduct during the workweek.
- o At what duties do you spend the most time?
- o What grade levels do you coach?
- o How much of your time do you spend coaching individual teachers?
- o How much of you time do you spend coaching groups of teachers?
- o Discuss the professional development you provide for teachers.

**Let's talk about your beliefs about coaching.**

- o What do you think is the purpose of coaching?
- o What important qualifications should a coach possess?
- o Which teachers do you work with the most? How did you decide this?
- o How do you work with resistant teachers?
- o How does the administration support your coaching efforts?

**COACH POST-CONVERSATION INTERVIEW**

1)      Let's talk about your goals for this coaching conversation. How did you attempt to reach these goals?

        Probes:

        o   content or topics of conversation
        o   rationale for coach's approach to conversation
        o   coach's perceptions about the outcome of the conversation
             o   What successes did you perceive from this conversation?
             o   What challenges did you perceive from this conversation?
             o   Do you feel the teacher will be able to follow through in the classroom with your coaching suggestions?

2)      What are your next coaching steps for this teacher?

**TEACHER POST-CONVERSATION INTERVIEW**

1) Let's talk about the goals for this coaching conversation.
        Probes:

   o Discuss content or topics of conversation
   o Did you feel the coach's goals were reasonable ones for you?
   o Were you in agreement with the coach's goals for this conversation and your understanding of them? Explain.

2) Let's discuss your perceptions about the outcome of the conversation.
        Probes:

   o What successes did you perceive from this conversation?
   o What challenges did you perceive from this conversation?
   o In what ways did the conversation help you think about your teaching practices?

3) How would you like the coach to assist you with your next steps?

# APPENDIX E

# PILOT STUDY

I conducted a small scale pilot study prior to the beginning of this study to get a better sense of how well by coding framework worked. The participants included a school-based curriculum literacy coach and a second grade teacher in an urban school setting.

The pilot study provided an opportunity for me to observe a teacher's instructional lesson and a post-conference between the coach and teacher and to analyze the coaching conversation between the coach and teacher using the three suggested frameworks. The pilot study also was instrumental in pinpointing necessary alterations for the study.

I observed, recorded field notes, audiotaped, and transcribed a coaching conversation between a literacy coach and a second grade teacher. The focus of the post-observation conference consisted of the coach providing feedback on the teacher's read-aloud lesson and discussing her progress with classroom management.

The audiotaped coaching conversation was transcribed and then coded by a university assistant professor and myself. The frameworks supported the analysis with the discovery of new codes. *Celebration-General Positive Feedback* and *Celebration-Explicit Positive Feedback* were

added to the analysis framework. *Celebration*, a term coined by Dozier (2006), is defined as an opportunity for the teacher and coach to recognize ways the teacher is extending and refining teaching practices. *Celebration-General Positive Feedback* ranges from describing general instructional practices that have gone well to offering personal accolades to enhance teacher performance. *Celebration-Explicit Positive Feedback* was another code added to the analysis framework due to its frequent occurrence throughout the coaching conversation. The coach often provided the teacher with positive feedback in a direct and precise manner.

| Pilot Study Transcript | Coding |
|---|---|
| C: Okay. First of all, I just want to thank you for letting us come in today, and to tell you how impressed I am with you and the kids. You guys have come so far. | C-GPFB<br>C-GPFB |
| It is amazing. All of the talks we have had about this child and that child, and all of the problems they've had. | C-GPFB |
| Your calm demeanor and the way you incorporate your directions in a way to the kids: "I see a friend raising his hand when he shouldn't be." | C-EPFB |
| You were reading your story and circulating around the room and you touched somebody and were beside him. He knew what he needed to do. | |
| It was clear expectations about we have talked about and you have put out there for them just everything. | C-EPFB |
| | |
| T: Thank you! I have struggled a lot this year. | C-GPFB |
| | |
| C: I know. I know. The conversations we have had about the kids and how am I (teacher) going to do this? | |
| Trying to get the kids to talk with each other at the beginning of the year, and they couldn't do it. | CLMAN |
| You have come a long, long way. You are the centerpiece of it all. You are calm. You do not yell. | CLMAN |

| | |
|---|---|
| It is funny, for I could hear you say when they were noisily talking, "I will wait." I think you must have picked that up from me (laughing). | C-GPFB |
| You gave clear expectations of we are going to sit, we are going to sit up, we are going to raise our hands. | C-EPFB   CLMAN |
| You do not have your Habits of Talk poster up, but they know them (rules). This is truly a testament to how much they use them and how familiar they are with them. | CLMAN |
| And even later on you stated: "You are not raising your quiet hand." "Listen to the speaker when they are talking." | C-EPFB   CLMAN |
| I don't know you even realize that you are saying all of these things, but all of that is an incorporated. So, it is very obvious that the Habits of Talk poster is a very integral part of your classroom. | C-GPFB   CLMAN C-EPFB   CLMAN |
| T: Yes, we try to use them (Habits of Talk) a lot in here. I know that it would be very chaotic if we didn't. They all want to shout out. Hands are in the air all of the time. When they are raising their hands, they are not listening. So, we talk about it (Habits of Talk) a lot. | C-GPFB   CLMAN |
| C: Yes. Even when the kids were going out and Mr. Smith (assistant principal) was coming in … they were opening and closing the door … they did not miss a beat because you did not miss a beat. It was like, ok, we are reading a story, we are going to sit and listen. We can be interrupted for a minute, but we are going to get right back to it. | |
| So I am so proud of how far you have come. | CLMAN   C-GPFB |
| T: Thank you. It is so nice to hear. | |
| | CLMAN   C-EPFB |
| C: I know it has been a struggle for you. I know you have had days where you want to sit and cry … and you probably did! (laughing). But I think that is part of being | C-GPFB |

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|---|---|
| a first year teacher.<br>[You had pictures of Thomas Jefferson and you had pictures of a prairie dog. You are giving them things to connect. For example, you showed the pictures of a prairie dog. They could have been thinking of a dog … a real dog. Now they have seen the picture, they now know what a prairie dog is.]<br>I could go on and on about how impressed I am with your lesson. | |
| | C-EPFB |
| | C-GPFB |
| T: Oh, thank you. | |
| C: Now, how do you feel things went today? | |
| T: I think it went okay. I was getting a little stressed out because of all the interruptions. I have kids who go out for speech. And the lady out in the hallway, Ms. Cathell, pulls out some of my struggling readers. She pulls them out and works with them and she takes two groups, so they were in and out. I felt like I was a little scattered, but then I realized something I did that I should not have done. Larry was sitting over there (out of a group) when we were talking in groups. | QRca |
| C: Yes, I noticed that. | |
| T: Yes, he and Jack were sitting over there (out of groups) | |
| C: Do they ever get a chance to come back to their group? | |
| T: Yes, yes they do. But you know, I just forgot to bring them back. I should have included them. After it happened, I remembered that they did not get a chance to share (in group discussion).  So that was one of my biggest mistakes today. | QIf   CLMAN   GR |

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| | |
|---|---|
| C: I was wondering about that. I know you try to include them … | |
| T: They have difficulty with group work. Normally, if we have discussions, I try to bring them in. If we have group work, I have them on the computer or sometimes I have them do seatwork. I have tried to bring them back in (with groups) sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. They do get chances to work in groups, but that was something I totally forgot about today. | GR |
| C: Yeah, there is a lot going on. Plus there is testing and it is hard … (looking at observation notes) I did have a question … about their writing. Do you always give them a topic sentence? | |
| T: I don't always. But I did today because the main focus for today's lesson was that they were listening, they were discussing, and we were talking about the story. So the writing … if I were doing a lesson just on writing, I would have gone and had them come up with their own topic sentence, but just for today it was kind of their little writing prompt.  As you could see, we did not get to finish, but I will have them finish tomorrow morning. | W    QIf |
| C: I know the writing (curriculum) works in labs. Do you have the next lab? | |
| T: I have the posters for the next part. It uses more transitional words that a little more advanced writers are using. | W    QIf |
| C: So, you have talked about the other transitional words? | |
| T: Yes, I have. And they have done other writing on "Super Storms" that came from the basal reader. They came up with their | W    QIf |

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|---|---|
| own topic sentence and their own main ideas. We actually wrote it in class. Then I made it at home … I used a green sentence strip to make the topic sentence. But today, I really did not touch too much on that. | |
| C: I know that today was more of a quick write. I understand that, but it was a question I had. | |
| C: This is kind of off the subject, but do they use their writing poster a lot or some? | |
| T: Yes, and I have actually had them use their own sentence strip to make their … (inaudible) | W QIi |
| C: So, how does that work? Do they like it? | |
| T: They like it. It's fun for them, but it takes such a long time. We have done it twice, maybe three times. | W QIi |
| C: Have you ever had them write it and then use highlighters to do the different colors instead of writing on the sentence strips? | |
| T: No. No. I haven't done that, but that is a good idea and I should do that also. We have done stories that I have printed out and we talk about the topic sentence and have used highlighters for that. But I should use highlighters when they write their own. | W QIi |
| C: In our training sometimes we use the sentence strips, but it takes such a long time. We have all the pink, the yellow, and the green all over the table. And then when they get older they have to add a blue. It gets more complicated. So it does take a lot of time to write it on strips, paste it, and all of that.
But just going through and highlighting … and if you have them do it as a group, just | |

| | |
|---|---|
| use highlighters or have them come up and highlight it.  They can still see it, the colors are still there, and it is still meaningful to them, but it is just not as cumbersome as the strips, especially when you are so worried about their behavior. | W    Di |
| T: That is really a good idea. | |
| C: I was just wondering about whether you always give a topic sentence? | W    Di    CLMAN |
| T: No. No, I do not always give a topic sentence. Just for today, I gave it as a writing prompt. However, I should have given them an example, too. I think that would have helped them. Some of them had trouble getting started. What do you think? (asking the coach) | W    QIi |
| C: Um. For a quick write, you could have if you wanted to, but I do not think it is absolutely necessary.<br>That is my personal opinion. I think like you said, the main focus today was on listening and comprehension. And the questions that you asked; were they in the book or did you make them up? | W    T |
| T: They were in the book. | |
| C: I know we have done that too with Accountable Talk. I did not know you had tried to make up some of your own questions.<br> But they (students) seemed to be engaged and your focus was on listening, so I am not sure whether you needed to have a writing example. Maybe I am thinking of kindergarten level where they would have copied what you said anyway.<br>So, you talked about their ideas, and some of them got to writing. You showed them an exemplary example when you walked around and looked at their work. | C    QIf |

| | |
|---|---|
| T: I needed it. He did not use transitional words, but I thought it was a good idea. | W   C-EPFB |
| C: But that was one thing you could use this as an individual conference with him and even show the kids this is how he started and how he is going to make it better because he did not use transitional words, if you want to go that deep.<br>This makes me think of another question. So, where do you go from here? | |
| | W   Di |
| | QRfa |
| T: More writing. We also have to do a little more spelling, and grammar. But we did the last story in there (basal). We read the Columbus story yesterday. It was the main selection. Today is the anthology, and tomorrow is the last selection. I have to go back and look at it. I just might have them use today's writing as a sloppy copy and work with them. We have a writing on butterflies that we have to clean up. We read all kinds of stories about butterflies. They wrote about the steps: what happened first, what happened next. I have them read to be hung up. We did them as group work, and they did not all finish. I remember that I had such a hard time at the beginning of the year with writing, and you (coach) gave me the suggestion to use it (writing) during groups. That helps a lot, so I only have four (writing papers) to worry about with helping them. | |
| C: It may take you several days, but you get to work with each one of them and they feel I think more comfortable and will learn more for it is more personal because you are right there with them. | |
| T: Yes, I think so. So, maybe I will do today's writing as more group work. I wanted to do more group work today, but | T   GR |

| | |
|---|---|
| they were so wound up when we came up (to the room) because half of them were in the cafeteria and half of them were testing, so when they came back to together it was … (teacher made a cheering sound). | |
| C: So, you feel comfortable with the way things are going and with how your work is going? | |
| T: Yes. I feel a lot better than I did at the beginning of the year. Even my boys; I have six boys that are really rough. They have come such a long way. | QRca |
| C: Yeah. Thinking about the Whale table … just to see all of those boys together was surprising to me. I know you do not have as many girls in the class. That is a great table. Just being able to have them sit and have the discussion they had when you asked questions should show you just how far you have come. So, do you need anything from me? I know that I have not been able to be around as much due to PSSA and Terra Nova testing. | CLMAN     C-GPFB |
| T: Not anything I can think of off hand. | |
| C: Well, if you do or something comes up just email me or catch me when I am here at the school. I know we have informal discussions in the hallway, but if you need anything just let me know. | |
| T: I will. I appreciate that. | |
| C: I know how hard you have worked because I remember your face at the beginning of the school year! (teacher and coach laugh) You do not have that look anymore! | |
| T: Yes, it is much better. It is nice. I come to school now … well, you never know what will happen, but I can remember | C-GPFB |

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|---|---|
| coming to school at the beginning wondering who was going to fight today, who was going to scream, and who is going to try and hit me today. (laughs) It was such a rough class, but they have come around. | |
| C: You should feel so proud of yourself for the way you've worked. As much as Mr. Smith has helped or you and I have had discussions, it has been you everyday in here with the kids. Like I said, the calm way you talk to them, the clear expectations you constantly tell them: sit up in your chair, use quiet hands, we are going to get a piece of paper … | C-GPFB |
| T: (interrupts) I wish I did not have to do that all of the time, though. They seem like they need reminded all of the time. | C-EPFB    CLMAN |
| C: I know. But it is not at the expense of what you are trying to teach. You got through your story today, you asked them questions, they did group work, they got started on their writing. Even if they didn't finish it, it seems to me that you got everything you wanted to do this period. It was not that way not too long ago. So, sit back and look at that. Due to your persistence, your firmness, and your fairness, no one is freaking out. | C-EPFB |
| Even though you forgot to include the two boys today in group work, they did not seem worried about it. Jack enjoyed giving great answers today when he was asked. | C-GPFB |
| T: (Laughs) Oh, yes. He is rather long winded, but I can always count on him to respond. | CLMAN    GR |
| C: So, he got to participate even if it was not in a group situation. So, some days you are on and some days you're not. | |
| T: I can't believe I totally forgot about | CLMAN   GR |

| | |
|---|---|
| putting them back with their groups.<br><br>C: Don't worry about it. It makes total sense with all of the things going on in the room. He is no worse for the wear because of it. Just remember, on days that are bad, think about how far you have come. You should be totally proud of yourself and the work you have done.<br><br>T: Oh. Thank you so much.<br><br>       (End of conference) | <br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>CLMAN    C-GPFB |

## E.1    ANALYSIS OF PILOT STUDY DATA

The literacy coach met with the second grade teacher immediately after observing her read-aloud lesson. The rapport between the coach and teacher was friendly and very collegial. The coach began the conversation in a positive manner and seemed to maintain it throughout the conference. It appeared that the coach felt a need to reassure the novice teacher that she had progressed in her teaching abilities since the beginning of the school year, particularly with classroom management, and that it should be celebrated.

Forty-eight segments of the coach's talk during this conversation were analyzed to answer three specific questions:

1) What was the content of the coaching conversation? That is, what topics or goals seemed to be the primary foci of coaching? (see table 30)

2) What levels of scaffolding support did the literacy coach provide the teacher during the coaching conversation to prompt teacher thinking about pedagogical practices? (see table 31) and 3) What types of questions were asked by the literacy coach during the coaching conversation to prompt teacher thinking about pedagogical practices? (see table 32).

**Table 30**

**Content of conversation**

| Content | Number of References | Percentage of References |
|---|---|---|
| Classroom Management | 17 | 35 |
| Grouping | 5 | 10 |
| Writing | 12 | 25 |
| Comprehension | 1 | 2 |

**Table 31**

**Coach scaffolding actions**

| Scaffolding Action | Number of References | Percentage of References |
|---|---|---|
| Questioning | 12 | 25 |
| Directing | 3 | 6 |
| Demonstrating | 0 | 0 |
| Telling | 2 | 4 |
| Celebration-General Positive Feedback | 15 | 31 |
| Celebration-Explicit Positive Feedback | 10 | 21 |

**Table 32**

**Types of Questions Asked by Coach**

| Category | Number of References | Percentage of References |
|---|---|---|
| Questions eliciting information | 9 (total) | 75 (total) |
|    o  Focusing on facts | 5 | 56 |
|    o  Suggesting implications | 4 | 44 |
|    o  Revealing Experience | 0 | 0 |
| Questions shaping understanding | 0 (total) | 0 (total) |
|    o  Focusing on connections | 0 | 0 |
|    o  Pressing for rethinking or restating | 0 | 0 |
|    o  Promoting point of view | 0 | 0 |
|    o  Demanding interpretations | 0 | 0 |
| Questions pressing for reflection | 3 (total) | 25 (total) |
|    o  Developing hypotheses | 0 | 0 |
|    o  Focusing on future action | 1 | 33 |
|    o  Developing critical assessment | 2 | 67 |

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