LITERACY COACHING: A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN A LITERACY COACH AND PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

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LITERACY COACHING: A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN A LITERACY COACH AND PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to examine and document how an early literacy coach differentiated coaching interactions with three preschool teachers to meet their individual needs. This study was conducted in an urban Great Lakes state in which the Head Start program and a local University were engaged in an early literacy initiative. The participants included one literacy coach and three preschool teachers that she coached.

Three research questions guided this study: (1) How does an early literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model; (2) What, if any, similarities and/or differences occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across with three preschool teachers; and (3) In what ways, if any, does an early literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?

Data collection included field observations, interviews, digital recordings, and pertinent documents. Data analysis included an *a priori* code structure derived from the literature and emerged through multiple readings of the data from which themes emerged. Data gathering and analysis was on-going throughout the study.

Data analysis revealed several findings: (1) Synergy was created through cohesive contexts—the varied interactions in each of the contexts contributed to deep learning. Goal setting and purposeful planning to address the established goals were key to creating the synergistic and cohesive framework. (2) Reflection was prevalent during
every phase of planning and execution of the interactions and varied learning opportunities. (3) Targeting the coaching conversations involved gathering data from classroom observations and student assessments. The literacy coach utilized several tools to focus the observations, while simultaneously video recording the instructional episodes. The literacy coach determined the strengths of the teachers and what needed to be strengthened during the analysis of teacher and student data. She also considered their personalities and dispositions when planning for and mediating reflective conversations with the teachers. (4) Differences in supporting the teachers during the conversations were another technique used to support teachers. The literacy coach varied her level of support from most support to least support through telling, modeling, directing, and questioning.
DEDICATION

To my immigrant grandparents who came to this country with hopes of building a better life than what they had in Italy for themselves and future generations:

August and Grace Argenti

Enrico and Raffaela Piscione

To my beloved cousin who was one of my biggest cheerleaders and supporters. I am so sorry that our Lord took you so suddenly and unexpectedly before you could see me to the end of my journey. I love you and miss you Andrew Sobek.
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Keen interest in literacy development and coaching to assist teachers; knowledge cultivation.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

It has been more than 25 years since the publication of *A Nation at Risk Report* (1983). This report raised public interest in the status of education in this country and more specifically perpetuated the notion that our schools were declining in effectiveness. More recent evidence indicates that educators must start earlier, before children reach school age to narrow the achievement gaps (NAEYC, 2009). The joint position statement of the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998) stated “from birth through age eight—are the most important period for literacy development” (p. 1). Research indicates that by age three educators can predict children’s success later in school based upon their foundational literacy knowledge (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Moreover, there is compelling evidence that children who enter kindergarten with strong emergent literacy skills are in a position of being successful in formal school learning experiences (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001).

Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999) determined that children who are most likely to have difficulty with learning to read are those who begin school with “less prior knowledge and skill in relevant domains, most notably general verbal abilities” (p. 15). In their report of *Child Trends*, Halle et al. (2009) indicated that disparities which are
evident at nine months are even larger by 24 months across cognitive, social, behavioral, and health outcomes. These disparities impact children’s ability to learn. Hart and Risley’s (1995, 2003) studies of different SES groups found that the accomplishments of the participants at age three did predict later performance in school. The vocabulary use at age three correlated strongly with reading comprehension. In addition to smaller vocabularies, children in poverty were adding words more slowly than children in the other SES groups. In addition to the number and quality of words heard, children in poverty experience many more verbal “discouragements” (corrections) than “encouragements” in their homes.

To explain the achievement gap between varied SES groups, Stanovich (1986) described the Matthew Effect. It is a borrowed phrase from the Bible whereby the rich get richer, the poor get poorer. He used the term “wealthier” to describe those students who have the foundation to start to learn in formal settings. As Hart and Risley (2003) argued, those students with the necessary foundation for learning to read stand a better chance at learning to read successfully. It is not that the children from the varied groups do not learn or cannot learn, but those who enter school prepared to learn, learn at a faster rate than those not prepared. Thus, the gap between the diverse SES groups continues to widen (Neuman, 2006).

Efforts have been made to close the achievement gap. Previous initiatives to provide intervention for low SES groups such as Title I traditionally have been implemented during the school-age years. However, over time there is still a widening of school success between the groups. Why this difference? Converging research indicates that early, positive experiences provide important background knowledge that is
necessary for literacy acquisition (NAEYC, 2009; Neuman, 2003). Evidence indicates that educators must start earlier, before children reach school age to narrow the achievement gaps (NAEYC, 2009). The joint position statement of the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1998) stated, “Although reading and writing abilities continue to develop throughout the life span, the early childhood years from birth through age eight—are the most important period for literacy development” (p. 1). It is important for educators to provide enriching literacy learning opportunities for those children who have not had such opportunities outside of the school (NAEYC, 2009). The emphasis on the importance of early childhood learning has implications for the quality of preschool instruction and the training of those teachers who work with these children.

It is widely believed that teachers affect students’ achievement (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1998a; Snow et al., 1998). Snow et al. (1998) stated that to meet the needs of students “a well-designed reading program, delivered by an experienced and competent teacher, may be successful in bringing most students to grade level or above during the primary years” (p. 11). Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991) found that “excellent [author emphasis] classrooms can compensate for less than ideal home conditions, but that ideal home conditions . . . cannot always compensate for very poor classrooms” (p. 161). According to Snow et al. (1998), excellent instruction is the best intervention to prevent difficulties when learning to read. In a recent preschool study, Hamre et al. (2010) found that children in classrooms in which teachers exhibited higher quality of delivery in
instructional activities and language modeling made significantly greater gains in early literacy skills across the preschool year.

There has been a shift in comprehensive reform efforts focused on building teacher capacity. Professional development efforts of the past have failed to yield the effects hoped for—that of improving student achievement in all SES groups. Currently efforts are being made to improve teacher effectiveness and thereby improve student achievement (Shore, 2009). School districts are working to fill the achievement gaps through professional development for teachers. Evidence indicates that traditional forms of professional development have not had an effective impact on teaching practices. Showers and Joyce (1996) found that workshop types of professional development lack support for teachers to transfer new learning into improved classroom practice. Given the apparent lack of success of these traditional forms of professional development, schools sought other ways to impact teacher effectiveness. While schools have started to implement an embedded type of professional development, the research regarding the effectiveness of this type of model is only starting to emerge (Walpole & McKenna, 2008).

A site-based or job-embedded professional development model that includes instructional coaching has emerged as a promising alternative to the “one-shot workshop” type of professional development, because the one-shot workshop type of professional development lacks the follow-up for teachers that can affect their instructional practices (Joyce & Showers, 1982; Lloyd & Modlin, 2012; Snow et al., 1998). Embedded professional development refers to a collaborative model of professional development that occurs within the context of the school district in which educators work (Gallucci,
DeVoogt VanLare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010). This type of embedded professional
development model uses instructional coaches who mediate between professional
development and the daily lives of teachers. Showers and Joyce (1996) also indicated that
coaching must “operate in a context of training, implementation, and general school
improvement” (p. 1).

Literacy coaches are one example of this type of instructional coaches, and
literacy coaching has emerged as a component of an embedded professional development
model as teacher quality has moved into the forefront of the education reform agenda.
Literacy coaches provide “ongoing support for the implementation and instruction
components” of reading and language arts (International Reading Association [IRA],
2004, para. 6). There is a belief that literacy coaching has the potential to lead to
increased, research-based teaching practices ultimately leading to increased student
learning outcomes. However, literacy coaching is being implemented without a full body
of research to support it (Walpole & McKenna, 2008).

Most of the literature regarding coaching is filled with the qualifications of
coaches (Frost & Bean, 2006; IRA, 2004; Shanklin, 2006), and how to implement a
coaching model (Bean, 2004; Costa & Garmston, 1994; Vogt & Shearer, 2003). Evidence
regarding the impact of professional development for teachers with a coaching
component is beginning to emerge that supports the effectiveness of coaching teachers of
preschool populations (Landry, Swank, Smith, Assel, & Gunnewig, 2006; Neuman &
Cunningham, 2009; Neuman & Wright, 2010). In order to improve children’s school-
readiness skills, especially for those from high poverty backgrounds, it is important to
make sure those teachers of children in the earliest years have a foundation in early
literacy development and of oral language development as it relates to literacy (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). It is widely believed that literacy coaching can improve instructional practices and ultimately increase student achievement (IRA, 2004; Neufield & Roper, 2003).

Just as teachers’ abilities are varied, so are the abilities of individuals who are put into coaching positions. One question that comes up throughout the research is how coaches differentiate to meet the needs of teachers. A recent study by Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) indicated that more research is needed regarding the language coaches use, the actions coaches take when working with teachers, and the effectiveness of the professional development provided to coaches. Shidler (2009) concluded that “more time (spent coaching) is not always better. It is the type and quality of interaction that becomes a deciding factor” (p. 459).

According to Rodgers and Rodgers (2007), the primary role of the literacy coach is to scaffold teacher learning and reflection. This is accomplished through the interactions between literacy coaches and teachers. Lyons and Pinnell (2001) identified different formats for professional interactions. They can include groups of teachers with a common purpose such as study groups or action research. They also advocated combining varied connected contexts. A prominent format that interactions occur is in one-on-one conferences during the coaching cycle. The coaching cycle includes a pre-observation conference, observation, and post-observation conference. During the pre-observation or planning conference coaches and teachers discuss what is to be observed during the classroom observation as well as the date and time of the observation. Coaches and teachers clarify lesson goals and objectives, teaching strategies, evidence of student
learning, as well as identify the focus of the coaches’ data gathering and procedures for gathering the data. During the classroom observation, coaches document evidence of student learning as well as teaching strategies and decisions. During the post-observation or reflecting conference, coaches mediate between that which was observed and teachers’ reflections. This conference usually begins with teachers summarizing their own assessment of the lesson. Using data collected during the observation, coaches use reflective questioning to support teachers to draw relationships between their actions and student achievement (Costa & Garmston, 1994).

How or what actions a coach takes during a post-conference may depend upon teacher needs and the coach’s ability to scaffold teachers to meet their needs. Just as teachers differentiate for instruction, so must coaches differentiate to meet the needs of the teachers with whom they work. An examination of what and how a coach does in a conference can provide valuable information for training provided to coaches.

Problem

Schools need to find ways to train teachers in techniques to effectively teach all children how to read. Traditional forms of professional development have not had the desired effects of changing teacher effectiveness or improving student learning and achievement. Coaching as an embedded model of professional development holds promise to impact teacher effectiveness. Literacy coaching as part of an embedded professional development model has emerged to provide teachers with the tools to effectively teach all children and help them learn to read. How coaches meet the needs of teachers is not adequately addressed in the coaching literature.
Purpose

This qualitative case-study examined and documented how a literacy coach, whose primary responsibility is literacy coaching, differentiates to meet the instructional needs of three preschool teachers in a Head Start program. The focus of this study was on the coach’s interactions with three teachers she coaches.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. How does an early literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model?
2. What, if any, similarities and/or differences occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across with three preschool teachers?
3. In what ways, if any, does an early literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?

Assumptions

Coaches and teachers work in complex sociocultural settings and the decisions they make are driven by their past experiences and their work environment. It is assumed that the literacy coach and teachers who are participants in this study are ethical professionals who will report their actions and rationale in a truthful manner.

Definition of Terms

Case Study Research. “A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations,
interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).

**Differentiation.** Efforts to meet individual teacher needs.

**Embedded Professional Development.** “Professional learning occurring during the school day in collaboration with colleagues” (National Staff Development Council (NSDC), 2001, p. 12).

**Instructional Coaching.** The process of providing “intensive, differentiated support to teachers so that they are able to implement proven practices. Instructional coaches have excellent communication skills, respect for teachers’ professionalism,” and in-depth knowledge of the teaching practices shared with teachers (Knight, 2009b, p. 30). “Coaching occurs when a more knowledgeable professional works closely with another professional to increase productivity or to meet some predetermined outcome” (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007, p. 5).

**Literacy Coach.** Professionals who work in preschool. The primary responsibility of the literacy coach in this study is coaching.

**Literacy Coaching.** The process of providing instructional coaching with a focus on literacy. “Literacy coaches support teachers in making instructional changes or decisions in order to improve student achievement in reading and writing” (Deussen et al., 2007, p. 5). Literacy coaching “focuses on providing professional development for teachers by providing them with the additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practices. Literacy coaches provide essential leadership for the school’s entire literacy program by helping create and supervise a long-term staff”
development process that supports both the development and implementation of the literacy program over months and years” (IRA, 2003, p. 6).

*Professional Development.* “The means by which educators acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for all students” (NSDC, 2001, p. 2).

*Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach.* “Professionals whose goal it is to improve reading achievement in their assigned school or district positions. Their responsibilities and titles often differ based on the context in which these professionals work, and their teaching and educational experiences” (IRA, 2010, p. 49).

*Traditional Professional Development.* Courses, workshops, and presentations by “experts” (NSDC, 2001, p. 2).

*Triangulation.* “The use of multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories to increase the soundness of research findings” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005, p. 558).

**Summary**

Education reform in the United States has shifted from a focus on intervention for students to building teacher capacity. Evidence indicates that the traditional forms of professional development have not been effective in fostering improved student outcomes. Instructional coaching has emerged as a form of on-going, job-embedded professional development for building teacher capacity and thus student achievement. In this type of professional development teachers receive professional development in the context of their district and school focusing upon district and school goals. Instructional coaches support and scaffold teachers in a given content area. The focus of the literacy
coach is assisting teachers in building content knowledge and implementing research-based practices in the area of literacy. The literacy coach and three preschool teachers in this study employed a cyclical process of pre-observation conference, observation, and post-observation conference. In addition, the coach and teachers met in other professional settings. The interactions between the literacy coach and the teachers were the focus of this study. How a literacy coach scaffolds teachers to meet their individual needs can be valuable in the training of literacy coaches.

This study used a qualitative; case study design in a U. S. Department of Education funded preschool setting. A description of this collaborative initiative is included in chapter three.

In Chapter II, I present a review of the literature pertaining to professional development, literacy coaching, and a theoretical foundation for this study. Given that the study is situated in a preschool setting, I report a review of the literature regarding emergent literacy. Chapter III contains a description of the methodology used for this study. Chapter IV presents an analysis of the data and findings of the study. Finally, Chapter V provides a discussion of the results, conclusions, and implications for professional development for literacy coaches and research.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

*Putting a quality teacher in every classroom is key to addressing the challenges of reading achievement in schools. Knowledgeable, strategic, adaptive, and reflective teachers make a difference in student learning.* (Pimental, 2007, p. 1)

According to Sturtevant (2003) and Darling-Hammond (2000), literacy coaching has emerged as a component of an embedded sustained professional development model as teacher quality has moved into the forefront of the education reform agenda. Literacy coaching is not a simple linear process but rather is viewed as a very complex process (Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Rainville & Jones, 2008; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). It has emerged as a response to improve literacy achievement and reduce the student achievement gap or perhaps more importantly the “teaching gap” (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). As stated by Stigler and Hiebert (1999), “School learning will not improve markedly unless we give teachers the opportunity and the support they need to advance their craft by increasing the effectiveness of the methods they use” (p. xvii).

According to Lyons (2002), there is a belief that the relationships between literacy coaches and teachers will improve teachers’ instructional practices and thus ultimately improve student achievement. This literature review discusses topics related to literacy coaching, including rationale for literacy coaching, theoretical framework related to
literacy development and teacher professional development, emergent/early literacy, lessons learned from the past, shift in comprehensive school reform, coaching models, qualifications of literacy specialists, and differentiating to meet teacher needs.

**Rationale for Literacy Coaching**

*If you want to build a community of learners, so that every day, teachers learn from their teaching and from working with colleagues, a highly trained coach is so important. In fact, all teachers need this type of ongoing, onsite professional development. It truly is the only way to improve teaching. (Kirby, 2010, Inspire, OSU, p. 20)*

Coaching has emerged as a component of professional development for the purpose of building teacher capacity to improve teaching practices and thereby improve student achievement. Literacy coaching is one type of content coaching. Literacy coaching provides ongoing consistent support for implementation of instructional components. According to Poglinco et al. (2003), coaching should be conducted in a nonthreatening and nonevaluative setting and affords the opportunity to see the results of coaching work with students. Teachers are given the opportunity to practice new skills or hone skills with the support of a coach. Teachers who have coaching support are more likely to implement research-based instructional practices more frequently and appropriately than teachers working in isolation (Showers & Joyce, 1996). The advantage of this design of professional development over other traditional forms of professional development is that it is responsive to teachers’ needs (Walpole & McKenna, 2004) by providing targeted supports to teachers (King et al., 2004). Coaches can bridge district initiatives and school practices. This type of professional development reduces isolation among teachers (Joyce & Showers, 1980).
Based on their research, Bean, Draper, Turner, and Zig mond (2010), Elish-Piper and L’Allier (2007), and Neuman and Wright (2010), noted that student achievement was higher in classrooms with teachers who engaged in professional development with coaching as opposed to those without coaching. However, it is difficult to show causal relationships between professional development and student achievement because of the complexities of other intervening variables (Guskey & Sparks, 1996).

**Rationale for Literacy Coaching in Preschool**

According to Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) and also Snow et al. (1998), children’s success later in school can be predicted based upon their foundational literacy knowledge. Children who enter kindergarten with strong emergent literacy skills are in a position of being successful in formal school learning (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). This is an important responsibility, and it is a concern that early childhood educators providing learning experiences for preschool children vary in their level of education, ranging from a high school diploma to a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education (IRA & NAEYC, 1998; Walpole & Meyer, 2008). Neuman and Cunningham (2009) demonstrated that professional development alone did not have a positive effect on improvements in the implementation of research-based practices in preschool. They did find there was some improvement in teaching practices when professional development in the form of coursework plus coaching was implemented. Walpole and Meyer (2008) proffered that literacy coaching can bridge the gap between previous learning opportunities and the burden of preschool educators to provide effective language and learning experiences for children.
The National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Association of Reading (IRA) issued a joint position statement on developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). In that statement they make clear that narrowing the achievement gaps should be a high priority for early childhood educators (and policy makers). Early childhood programs need to provide more extended, enriched, and intensive learning experiences for those students who have not had a wealth of learning opportunities required to succeed in school (NAEYC, 2009).

There are several caveats to implementing a coaching model. One caveat is a clear definition of coaching. There are many definitions and variances of what is considered coaching. In addition, districts or programs need to be clear on the goals and expectations. If the goals and expectations are not clear, then what the coach does in the field may not be consistent with district goals and expectations (Russo, 2004). Site-based coaches need their own professional development to continue to hone their skills (Neufield & Roper, 2003). And finally, programs need to secure teacher and coach release time in which to work, and there needs to be support by all participants (Neufield & Roper, 2003).

**Theoretical Framework Related to Literacy Development and Teacher Professional Development**

Adult learning is a complex phenomenon that can never be reduced to a single, simple explanation. Rather, I think what we have is an ever-changing mosaic where old pieces are rearranged and new pieces are added. (Merriam, 2008, p. 94)

In this section constructivism is presented through multiple lenses; most notably that of Vygotsky and also transformative theory. The theoretical underpinnings of this
study were based upon the principles of constructivism. Constructing knowledge, 
mediation, zone of proximal development and scaffolding are presented.

Transformative theory also supports this study. It informs us on how adults come to understand the world in which we live or as Merriam and Caffarella (1999) stated, “how adults interpret their life experiences, how they make meaning” (p. 319). Important ways of knowing in our adult world involve critical reflection, discourse, and action to bring about change. These are discussed, and also included are strategies used in transformative professional development.

**Constructivism**

Throughout our educational history, psychology has greatly influenced curricular and instructional decision-making, especially the way in which learning is defined, studied, and understood. Two learning theories that have been influential are behaviorism and maturationism. A third theory, constructivism, is the most current psychology of learning (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Duffy and Cunningham (1996) discussed constructivism as “an umbrella term for a wide diversity of views” (p. 2). They described learning as an active process of construction as opposed to “acquiring knowledge” (p. 2). Instruction in the constructivist paradigm is viewed as a process of supporting the construction of knowledge as opposed to communicating knowledge. As Duffy and Cunningham pointed out, learners can only know what they have constructed, and we cannot “know” what someone else has constructed. Bruner (1962) wrote, “Vygotsky’s conception of development is at the same time a theory of education” (p. v). In the constructivist paradigm, instruction is the process of supporting the construction of knowledge. From
this perspective the educator’s role is to provide learners with opportunities and incentives to construct knowledge (von Glasersfeld, 2005).

Constructivism is a learning theory in which the learners construct knowledge in the social context with peers or more knowledgeable others. Vygotsky’s theory of learning is based upon four principles: (a) knowledge is constructed, (b) development and the social context in which learning takes place cannot be separated, (c) learning can lead development, and (d) language has a central role in cognitive development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Mooney, 2000). Learning described in the Vygotskian tradition “is that it creates the zone of proximal development . . . , learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

One of Vygotsky’s best known concepts is the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Del Rio & Alvarez, 2007). It is defined as

*The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. . . . The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86; author’s italics)*

Or as Wells (2000) iterated, “the zone in which an individual is able to achieve more with assistance than he or she can manage alone” (p. 55). It is through assisted performance that learning occurs. It is not so important who supports the learner but that learning or performance is achieved. The more knowledgeable person can be a peer as well as an adult. Vygotsky’s work was primarily with children, but the processes can be observed in
adults as well or are compatible with much of adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Tharp & Gallimore, 1995).

Important to an understanding of the zone of proximal development is the development of scientific and spontaneous concepts. Simply stated, scientific concepts are those concepts developed within the framework of formal schooling or in the structured activity of classroom instruction. Spontaneous concepts are those formed through a person’s own reflections on everyday experiences (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Hedegaard (2007) explained concept formation regarding preschool age children, that spontaneous concepts are connected to a child’s activities in everyday settings. These concepts are connected to a child’s family and community life; whereas, “scientific concepts are about academic matters” (p. 248). Vygotsky iterated (as cited by Daniels, 2007) that these two modes of concept formation are tightly connected, developing simultaneously. According to Hedegaard (2007), the spontaneous or everyday concepts dominate the young child’s concept formation but changes about school age when the development of scientific concepts dominates. Vygotsky posited that scientific concepts could not be transmitted, but rather they undergo development depending upon the learners’ ability to comprehend the concepts. He viewed scientific and spontaneous concepts as developing in opposite directions; scientific concepts as working their way down and spontaneous concepts as working their way up, then meeting each other (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Vygotsky, 1986). This construction of knowledge occurs within the learner’s zone of proximal development (Daniels, 2007; Hedegaard, 2007).

The notion of scaffolding by Vygotsky refers to the assistance from a more knowledgeable other given to the learner, be it a child or adult. Scaffolding occurs within
the learner’s zone of proximal development to enable the novice to operate at a higher level. The scaffolding provided by the more knowledgeable other or expert varies within the learner’s zone of proximal development. For example, when learning language, parents provide an infant with mature language. They vary the amount of contextual support by restating important words, using gestures, and responding to the child’s speech by focusing on the meaning as opposed to the grammar. At the beginning of the learning process the adult provides more scaffolding gradually giving more responsibility to the learner (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

Tharp and Gallimore (1995) proposed a four stage model of scaffolding much like the “handover principle” (p. 35) posited by Bruner. It is a recursive loop between the beginning of building capacity and the development of capacity. Scaffolding may have to be given in new and different contexts or in order to assist the learner to transfer the new learning to new situations (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Tharp and Gallimore (1995) further attested that in order for teachers to be able to effectively scaffold learners, they must possess a “profound knowledge of subject matter” (p. 35).

Wertsch (2007) identified mediation as being a theme that permeates Vygotsky’s writings. In his analysis of Vygotsky’s writings, Wertsch indicated that Vygotsky did not give mediation a “unified definition” (p. 179); but that it emerged in his texts in several ways. Bodrova and Leong (2007) defined mediation as “the use of signs or symbols to represent behavior or objects in the environment” (p. 20). Speech is described as being “the most important sign-using behavior in children’s development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 126).
Wertsch (2007) distinguished between two general types of mediation: (a) external and (b) implicit. External mediation is described as being intentionally and overtly introduced into problem solving activities. This is frequently accomplished by an outside party, and the “materiality” of the signs tends to be “obvious and nontransitory” (p. 191). Implicit mediation usually involves spoken language. It is not that these types of mediation necessarily function in isolation, but rather it is their fusion that is crucial in human development. Language is described as the “universal tool that has been developed in all human cultures . . . it is also a mental tool because each member of the culture uses language to think” (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 18). Speech is a powerful means of mediation. It is through speech that “learners prepare themselves for future activity; they plan, order, and control their own behavior as well as that of others” (p. 126). The external social experience is converted into internal understanding. Language facilitates the shared experiences for building cognitive processes (Bedrova & Leong, 2007; Moll, 2001; Mooney, 2000).

Vygotsky described external signs, artifacts, and tools as allowing humans to master a changing environment. Psychological tools include, but are not limited to gestures, language; systems for counting; mnemonic techniques; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, and maps. The semiotic mediation is important to all aspects of knowledge co-construction; they are used to connect the external and the internal (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Moll, 2001). Kozulin (1986) noted that both material tools and psychological tools are artificial formations, yet “naturally social” (p. xxv). He further explained that “material tools are aimed at the control over processes in nature; psychological tools master natural forms of individual behavior and cognition” (p. xxv).
The implications for scaffolding teachers during coaching interactions through a Vygotskian perspective are delineated by Rodgers and Rodgers (2007). They stipulated that effective scaffolding involves assisting at the right level of “sensitivity” (p. 74). Important features of scaffolding are the “how”, “what”, and “when”: how often help is given, what kind of help is given, and when help is given. To effectively scaffold teachers, literacy coaches need to look at the teachers’ participation in literacy activities as a measure of change. From a Vygotskian perspective, an observation is a “necessary” step in understanding how teachers currently participate in an activity. In subsequent observations, coaches note changes in the teachers’ participation in activities. Then coaches can plan support that scaffolds teachers’ understandings. A salient feature of scaffolding is the use of language and artifacts used during coaching interactions between literacy coaches and teachers are an affirmation of tools used for mediation within the teachers’ zones of proximal development. Through their thoughtful observations, coaches can note changes in teacher performance and then plan appropriate support to scaffold teachers.

The construction of knowledge is a complex process (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996; Fosnot, 2005; von Glasersfeld, 2005). In this section the development of concepts notably working in the learner’s zone of proximal development was discussed, as well as mediation and scaffolding. Discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of this study including transformative theory follows.

**Transformative Theory**

Transformative theory was first introduced by Mezirow as a way to explain how adults change the way in which they interpret their unique world. As adults we seek
better ways to understand our world; this includes how to negotiate and act upon our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings (as cited in Taylor, E. W., 2008). Grounded in communication with others, adults use their prior interpretations to develop new or revised interpretations of meaning of their own experiences to guide future actions. Mezirow acknowledged that not all learning is transformative. We can add to our schemes or learn new schemes (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Transformational learning involves three phases: (1) critical reflection on one’s assumptions, (2) discourse to validate the reflective insight, and (3) action. Most often the process is set in motion by a disorienting dilemma. Critical reflection involves questioning how we view the world. Learning to reflect in a critical manner is a developmental process requiring time and continuous practice to develop. It can be developed through the use of reflective journals, through joint peer dialogue or discourse, and critical questioning (Taylor, E. W., 2008). As noted by Criticos (as cited in Merriam, 1993), having an experience is not enough to affect transformation; it is the critical reflection that affects intellectual growth. To reflect critically we must examine our underlying beliefs and assumptions that affect how we make sense of the experience or to understand the problem (Cranton & King, 2003; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Merriam (2004) described three types of reflection: (1) content, (2) process, and (3) premise. Reflection on content is reflecting about the experience. Process reflection is thinking about how to handle the experience. Premise reflection involves examining our assumptions, beliefs, and values about the experience. It is premise reflection that can lead to transformative learning.
Discourse is described as a conscientious effort to build common understandings (Merriam, 2004). Ideas and evidence from our colleagues help us to consider our own views in a new light (Cranton & King, 2003). Discourse can take place in groups, in one-to-one relationships, and formal educational settings (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

As noted by Mezirow, action follows critical reflection and discourse. Action begins with an awareness of the need to change. This need arises through critical reflection and discourse. There needs to be a feeling of solidarity with others committed to change. Finally, we need to learn what actions are appropriate in particular situations to implement change (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Cranton and King (2003) discussed the application of this theory to professional development for educators. When we critically examine our practice and develop alternative perspectives of understanding of that practice, we are led to understand what to do. Strategies for transformational professional development are developing action plans, reflective activities, data analysis, case studies, curriculum development, and critical theory discussions. Constructivism and transformative theories have been discussed. Constructivism provides the framework for literacy development. Both constructivism and transformative theories frame professional development and literacy coaching. This literature review continues with a discussion about influential legislation and reports affecting education in America.

**Influential Legislation and Reports**

Federal legislation as well as commissioned reports has impacted reform in our schools. Public interest in education was sparked by *A Nation at Risk Report* (NRR, 1983). In essence this report asserted that the United States has educational problems, and
that the problems needed to be addressed by the nation. The reform efforts stemming from this was largely implemented in secondary schools. Whereas, *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) also iterated education problems in the U. S., and that these needed to be addressed as a nation. The reform efforts stemming from this act were implemented in the early elementary education arena (Gardner, 2008). One reform effort was the *Reading Excellence Act* (REA, 1998). The purpose of the *Reading Excellence Act* was to improve reading instruction and students’ reading performance through the implementation of scientifically-based reading research (SBRR) instructional practices (Mesmer & Karchmer, 2003; Pennycuff, 2006). All of the above served as an impetus for professional development for teachers.

In addition to the aforementioned federal legislation there have been many reports that impacted literacy instruction and the research agenda (Goodman, 1998; Vogt & Shearer, 2003). These reports included research synthesis as it pertains to reading and language arts: (1) *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Child* by the National Research Council (NRC) (Snow et al., 1998); (2) *Every Child a Reader* by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) (Heibert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson, & Paris, 1998), and (3) *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (National Reading Panel, 2000). Critical analysis, most notably of the National Reading Panel, indicated that the methods and selections of the studies used to analyze were too limited (Cunningham, 2001). However, such documents have driven policy and reform efforts (Vogt & Shearer, 2003). Such efforts include Reading First (K-3) and Early Reading First (PreK) calling for the implementation of research-based,
instructional practices and professional development for educators. This discussion will continue with an emphasis upon school reform efforts.

**Shift in Comprehensive School Reform**

In the past, educational interventions focused on working with at risk students. However, in recent years the focus has shifted to improving instructional practices by teachers. As part of Johnson’s “War on Poverty” (1964), the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) was passed by Congress in 1965. ESEA emphasized equal access to education and established high standards and accountability (Standerfer, 2006). Several federal initiatives were implemented under ESEA. Two of these initiatives included Title I and Title II. The focus of Title I was to improve reading, writing, and math achievement of students in poverty. Title II focused on improving library resources and other materials for high poverty schools. Under Title I, designated teachers provide interventions to students identified as needing extra help in reading and math. Another initiative was Head Start, a federal program geared to boost the school readiness of low-income children by providing preschool education as well as health and nutrition services (What Works Clearinghouse, 2010). The program was initiated under the Johnson administration following his declaration of The War on Poverty in his State of the Union Speech in 1964 (acf.hhs.gov).

A paradigm shift in policy moved from student-centered to teacher-centered initiatives. The Reading Excellence Act (1998) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) provided for professional development for teachers. Such initiatives included Reading First, targeting kindergarten to grade three teachers and Early Reading First which targeted preschool teachers. These initiatives provided large amounts of money for
professional development targeting improved reading instruction, which is discussed in more detail in the next section. The goal for these initiatives was improved student achievement (Mesmer & Karchmer, 2003; Pennycuff, 2006). Professional development for educators is not a new concept; however, the type of professional development deemed effective has shifted (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This shift in the approach to professional development is discussed further in the next section.

**Professional Development**

As indicated in the previous section, there has been a shift in focus from student-centered to teacher-centered educational reform efforts in the United States. These reform efforts are apparent in the change in professional development efforts for educators. Darling-Hammond (2000) analyzed policy data from all 50 states. She indicated that reform strategies in the 1980s that relied primarily on student testing instead of investments in teaching, demonstrated little success in increasing student achievement. She also indicated that policies focused on increased teachers’ salaries and standards did not yield expected results. Darling-Hammond also concluded that high quality teachers or teachers who were fully certified with a major in the field in which they were teaching were a more powerful predictor of student achievement than teachers’ education levels. She stated, “this research indicates that the effects of well-prepared teachers on student achievement can be stronger than the influences of student background factors” (p. 33). Thus, recommending that states consider investing in the improvement of teacher quality in addition to other reform efforts which can help in achieving the goal of increased student achievement.
It is well known that change is not effortless. According to Fullan (1985), change is a complex process. He explained that individual change is a process whereby teachers alter their ways of thinking and doing, of developing new skills and of finding meaning and satisfaction in new ways of doing things. Change is reflected in Guskey’s (2002) description of high quality professional development.

Guskey (2002) described high-quality professional development as an essential component of current reform efforts. He described three goals of professional development: (a) change in classroom instructional practices, (b) change in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs, and (c) improved (or change in) student achievement. To illustrate these changes, Guskey (2000) proffered a model of teacher change:

Figure 2.1 Guskey’s model of teacher change.

Guskey (2000) explained that although this model appears to be simple, it is a highly complex process and posits that change is probably more cyclical than linear. According to this causal model of change, teachers’ attitudes and beliefs do not change until they see results in improved student learning. He affirmed that there are also many other factors that impact changes. Guskey and Sparks (1996) also explained that evaluation of any professional development, including coaching, when planning, begin “with the end in mind” (Guskey, 2000, p. 89) and then plan backwards for professional development. This is also supported by Covey (1989) as Habit 2 in The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.
The theme of change permeates the literature. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) stated:

the vision of practice that underlies the nation’s reform agenda requires most teachers to rethink their own practice, to construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and to teach in ways they have never taught before—and probably never experienced as students. (p. 81)

Hoffman and Pearson (2000) articulated that the context for teaching has changed as has our society, thus the standards for teaching in the past no longer support teaching and learning in our changing society. To be prepared for complex changes, teachers need appropriate professional development. They distinguished between training and teaching in professional development for teachers.

Teacher training is described as a “top-down” (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 81) mode of professional development in which teachers are fine tuning existing, known strategies and learning new ones (Hoffman & Pearson, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 1980). Hoffman and Pearson described teaching as a method of building on what is already known and increasing teacher expertise. Joyce and Showers (1980) posited that effective professional development should include theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and classroom application. To facilitate deep learning beyond skills training, professional development needs to include reflective, discursive, and dialogical strategies in order to become reflective and responsive practitioners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hoffman & Pearson, 2000; NSDC, 2001).

Providing professional development is viewed as a very visible activity by literacy coaches. Research identifies a few principles of effective professional development: it should be: (1) grounded in inquiry, (2) collaborative, (3) sustainable over time, (4) connected to and derived from teachers’ work with students, and (5) needs to be
tied explicitly to improving instructional practices (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Neufield & Roper, 2003; Shaw, 2007).

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC; 2001) delineates 10 standards of effective professional development. The standards are divided into three areas: (1) Context: built around on-going collaboration, supported by skillful leadership, is continuous and reflective; (2) Process: based on student data, designed and planned by and for educators, it is aligned with a comprehensive improvement plan, and it is evaluated from multiple perspectives; (3) Content: the focus should be on student achievement, designed to promote cultural competence, and based on research. Guskey (2000) purported that ignoring any one of these dimensions can significantly diminish the effectiveness of professional development; and thus the likelihood of improved student achievement.

Various forms of professional development for educators are described in the literature. These can be divided into two categories; traditional and embedded. Within these two categories there are various ways of implementing these models. The discussion that follows will describe the more familiar traditional concept of professional development followed by embedded professional development.

**Traditional Professional Development**

Traditional professional development is in several formats. One type of professional development includes bringing in experts outside of the school district. This type of professional development is delivered in several different designs. Educators attending university courses or workshops represent one design. Providers conducting a workshop for teachers in their district are another type of professional development.
Several names such as sit-and-git, drive by, and one-shot have been coined to describe these types of professional development. Teachers are expected to reenter their classrooms with new knowledge and implement that which was learned. This type of professional development offers no support, no collaboration with peers, no or little change in instructional practices, thus no gains in student achievement (Guskey, 2000). Darling-Hammond (1998b) iterated that one-shot workshops are ineffective in building teacher capacity, because there is no follow up and support for teachers after the workshop.

**Embedded Professional Development**

An embedded professional development model has emerged as a form of staff development to improve teaching capacity and thereby increase student achievement. According to Guskey and Sparks (1996), high quality professional development is critical to improved student learning. This form of professional development is based upon sociocultural theories of learning, and is situated in the workplace of the participants. It involves collaborative endeavors of the participants and focuses on problems of instructional practice generated by the teachers and colleagues or coaches. This model is also termed “relationship-based” (Buell, Han, Blamey, & Vukelich, 2010). In this type of professional development model, educators support each other while implementing instructional practices (Gallucci et al., 2010).

Professional development has emerged from a sit-and-get (traditional) format to an embedded format with coaching. In the traditional format, teachers attend workshop sessions or classes and are expected to return to classrooms with new knowledge imparted to them to implement what was learned without any support; whereas,
embedded professional development with coaching draws upon sociocultural constructivist practices. In this type of model, teachers work collaboratively with a content coach and colleagues. Together they construct new knowledge in their work place with the support of a coach and/or with each other affording them opportunities to implement research-based instructional practices in a collegial environment (Russo, 2004; Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

Several coaching models are described in the literature. The following section will provide a review of coaching models recommended for the preschool context since this is the setting for this study. This discussion will begin with a working definition of literacy coaching.

**Coaching Model(s)**

*Every school should have access to specialists, including speech and language clinicians, English as a second language teachers, resource room teachers, and reading specialists who have specialized training related to addressing reading difficulties and who can give guidance to classroom teachers.* (Snow et al., 1998, p. 333)

Several models of coaching are discussed in the literature. This discussion of coaching models will include the chain of instructional improvement model posited by J. Taylor (2008), types of coaches, and embedded models of professional development. The discussion will begin with a definition of literacy coaching. Many definitions of literacy specialist/coach abound in the literature (e.g., Bean, 2004; Deussen et al., 2007; IRA, 2004; Knight, 2009b; Moran, 2007; Nowak, 2003; Smith, 2006; Toll, 2005). For the purpose of this study the definition posited by McKenna and Walpole (2008) was used. This definition is influenced by the work of Joyce and Showers (2002):
Coaching is a strategy for implementing a professional support system for teachers, a system that includes research or theory, demonstration, practice, and feedback…this notion of coaching rests on the following sequence of assumptions:

1. The instructional methods teachers employ influence student achievement;
2. Variations in the methods themselves and in the quality of teacher implementation are considerable;
3. Coaching can help teachers implement specific methods and abandon others; coaching can help teachers improve the quality of their work;
4. The effect of coaching can be gauged by changes in student achievement as a result of this altered practice. (pp. 4, 5)

The work of the literacy coach is a seamless extension of professional development. It is not viewed as a stand-alone school or district improvement strategy. Instead it is viewed as a job-embedded extension of professional development that is linked to district and school goals which responds to the different needs of teachers and students (King et al., 2004). If done well, the teaching capacity of teachers should be apparent in their practice (IRA, 2004; Snow et al., 1998).

In his discussion of instructional coaching in general, J. Taylor (2008) discussed coaching in the context of a leadership role and thus an “indirect process of influence” (p. 22). He suggested examining coaching based upon three teacher mediating outcomes: (a) teachers’ thinking, (b) teachers’ motivation, and (c) knowledge regarding instructional practices.
Figure 2.2. J. E. Taylor’s chain of instructional improvement (2008, p. 23).

The column on the left illustrates influential factors, as well as coaching. The other factors in the model may moderate coaching. Part of a teachers’ schemata are understanding, motivation, and knowledge, all of which are prerequisites for changed instructional practices, and thus students’ outcomes. Taylor’s “chain of instructional improvement” exemplifies the complexity of change in teacher schemata leading to change in instructional practice, and thereby improved student achievement.

Neufeld and Roper (2003) described two types of literacy coaches: change coaches and content coaches. Change coaches assist administrators to reorganize resources and build leadership related to site-based goals. In this framework they are viewed as “administrators in learning” (Walpole & Meyer, 2008, p. 72). However, in their study of coaches in Reading First schools, Bean et al, (2010) reported that the coaches were not change agents, but they were problem solvers, resource coordinators, data managers, and consultants. Content coaches focus upon the teachers’ subject
knowledge by helping them to deepen their theoretical and content understandings, and implement research-based instructional practices. In addition, they provide formative feedback and provide needed resources. The content coach provides feedback and support from the stance “that as a knowledgeable, critical friend” (Walpole & Meyer, 2008, p. 72).

Walpole and Meyer (2008) suggested that the best literacy coaching model encompasses both change and content. This combined model engages administrators, teachers, and parents in a shared commitment to improving the achievement of young learners. In a presentation at the National Reading Conference (2008) synthesizing research on literacy coaching, Walpole and McKenna stated, “These studies make clear that building leadership will inevitably influence the nature of coaching in specific settings” (para. 11). They found that literacy coaches in South Carolina were part of leadership teams to build common language and commitments within a school. In a middle school project, literacy coaches served as part of the principal’s leadership team entrusted with the job of gauging levels of program implementation, problem-solving, and the reporting of the on-going effectiveness of schoolwide professional development.

Walpole and Meyer (2008) described several types of coaching models for preschool. One type of coaching model is a training or externally designed model. This type of model is a model in which new innovations, curricular material are being introduced into a school, district, or curriculum. In the training model the purpose of the training is to establish understanding and fidelity of the curricular initiative. Program representatives from outside the district train personnel within the district (coaches). This model involves school level planning and formal professional presentations. Student data
are used for lesson planning, grouping, and reflection. In-class support includes observation and formal implementation walk-throughs. Examples of this type of model are the Reading Recovery Training Model (train the trainer) and Success for All (SFA).

Another type of coaching model is referred to as a process model. This type of model is not connected to any specific curricular initiative, and can be adapted to any curricular enterprise. Examples of a process model are peer coaching or cognitive coaching (Walpole & Meyer, 2008). Peer coaching was developed by Joyce and Showers in the 1980s. This model supplies support to teachers as they implement strategies presented during traditional professional development sessions. Teachers act as coaches for each other. Observation feedback is not the focus, but rather collaboration and support provided by peers as educators focus on improving their teaching practices. This is not meant to be used where a complete overhaul of the curriculum is the goal.

Cognitive coaching blends cognitive psychology and collaboration emphasizing the intellectual processes involved in teaching. The cognitive coaching model utilizes a cycle of planning, observing, and reflecting. In this cycle the coach and teacher collaborate to plan (establish teacher’s goals and identify the coach’s role), the coach observes that which was planned (gather data), and a meeting to reflect upon the data gathered during the observation (Costa & Garmston, 1994). In this model the teachers rather than the coaches are in charge of their learning. Walpole and Meyer (2008) suggested that this model may not be appropriate where schools are initiating broad-based changes.

Walpole and Meyer (2008) delineated what they called “hybrid models” (p. 78) of professional development. These are described as models where the focus is on multiple
coaching strategies applied within specific curricular contexts. Three such models described are whole-school reform, team-based, and demonstration classroom model.

The demonstration-focused reform model as described by Poglinco et al. (2003) is standards-based. The school is already committed to a curricular plan specifying allocated time for reading, writing, and math instruction. This model employs the use of a demonstration classroom. The coach works with groups of teachers. The coach spends six to eight weeks teaching in a model classroom to build personal knowledge and expertise with the curriculum. After this period of time, the coach then moves to a demonstration classroom to show what was learned in the model classroom. The group of teachers observes the coach in the demonstration classroom teaching over a period of three to four weeks. After the period of observing the coach, the coach then moves from class to class observing the teachers as they implement that which was learned giving formative feedback and support as needed. Once the needs of teachers have been met, the cycle continues with another group of teachers. An example of this model is America’s Choice Model.

The team-based reform model is described by Neufield and Roper (2003). Like the demonstration-focused lesson model, the team-based reform model is a team-based cycle of work. However, it is similar to Japan’s lesson study. During eight-week cycles, the coach works together with teams comprised of five to eight teachers. The cycle includes analyzing student data to guide the team towards a focus to design a course of study. The team selects professional reading related to the identified focus. They meet one time a week to go over the readings. Part two of the cycle takes place in a lab site, which is one team member’s classroom. It is here where the team experiments with the
new instructional practices. This involves a preconference to determine the focus of the lesson and the observation by the team. One member teaches the lesson while the other team members including the coach observe. The team debriefs following the lesson focusing on effective teaching. Follow-up strategies, after this team observation lesson, include the coach observing the individual teachers or modeling for individual teachers. An example of this model is the Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) model implemented in the Boston Plan for Excellence in the Boston Public Schools. This organized model allows the coach to serve in multiple sites: two days in each building working with one team from each building with the fifth day for the coach’s preparation (Walpole & Meyer, 2008). Miller and Stewart (2014) described the Community Coaching Cohort Model (CCCM). The focus was on team coaching as a way “to build generative practices within each school” (p. 292). This model employed a three phase approach implemented over nine weeks: (1) selection, research, and development of the inquiry topic, (2) observation of the literacy coach teaching the lesson developed by the team, and (3) development of another set of lessons by the team. It differs from the CCL in that the coach teaches the lessons observed by the team followed by team debriefing. Between the modeled lessons by the coach, teachers receive individual coaching.

The third hybrid model is the whole-school reform model described by Walpole and McKenna (2004). As the name indicates, this model is designed for whole-school efforts in struggling elementary schools. The literacy coach activities include scheduling and designing assessment that informs instructional decisions, and selecting curricular resources. In addition, the literacy coach provides formal professional development outside the classroom as well as ongoing inside-the-classroom. The purposes of the
formal professional development is for the coach to present research findings to inform teachers’ work, sharing student data, and choosing and leading professional book studies. The strategies used by the coach during the inside-the-classroom professional development include observing teachers and providing them with formative, supportive, specific, confidential feedback, and modeling. This model assumes a balance between the activities and reflects the characteristics of the specific center (Walpole & Meyer, 2008).

Literacy coaches, one type of content coach, are an extension of an embedded professional development model. Their job is complex requiring them to be problem-solvers, providers of professional development and reporting the effectiveness of professional development efforts; appraising the effectiveness of program implementation, analyze data, support teachers in the implementation of research-based instructional practices with formative feedback, etc. Literacy coaches must meet the needs of the staff and schoolwide goals from the standpoint of a knowledgeable colleague, not as an administrator. In the next section, a report is provided on a few recent studies regarding professional development and coaching initiatives.

**Impact of Embedded Professional Development and Literacy Coaches**

Studies attributing the effects of an embedded model of professional development with literacy coaching are scant (Borman & Feger, 2006); however, districts are implementing coaching as an approach to building teacher expertise without the benefit of empirical evidence of its effectiveness (Sturtevant, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2008). Studies are emerging demonstrating the impact of literacy coaches. Summarized here are recent studies related to professional development and coaching situated in preschool or kindergarten settings.
In one study conducted over three years by Scanlon, Gelzheiser, Vellutino, Schatschneider, and Sweeney (2008), three treatments were implemented: (a) teachers who received professional development only, (b) teachers who received professional development plus literacy coaching, or (c) small group intervention for at risk students. Data were gathered on both student achievement as well as classroom language arts instruction. The findings suggested that all three treatments were effective in reducing the incidence of early reading difficulties. They also found that with improvements in classroom instruction, more students made progress, suggesting that the more effective the instruction, the greater the growth demonstrated by students receiving the instruction. Another finding regarding the effects of the professional development was that teachers devoted more time to language arts instruction; however, that time was not evenly distributed across all areas of language arts.

Landry et al. (2006) conducted a quasi-experimental statewide intervention targeting preschool teachers’ instructional improvement in the area of language and early literacy. The study was conducted across two years in 20 Head Start sites. Randomly selected children’s performance was measured in year one of the study in classrooms of the control teachers and target teachers in year two. Teachers with two years of training were compared to those teachers with one year of training. Teacher training was extended across the school year with ongoing in-classroom mentoring for the target group. The control group received training in year two. Researchers reported that there were greater gains for children in the target classrooms than for those in the control classroom in all areas, notably for language skills in year two. Teachers also reported a new awareness of the importance of language and literacy development, differences in children’s skills,
demonstrated an increase in confidence and morale, and commitment to their importance as teacher. The researchers also reported that the presence of a research-based, early literacy curriculum, higher levels of teacher education, and full-day versus half-day programs were significant moderators of the intervention effectiveness. These findings varied by site.

Another study by Armstrong, Cusumano, Todd, and Cohen (2008) was conducted in Head Start sites. These researchers explored the impact of an Early Learning Opportunities initiative. Included in the study was a literacy coaching component designed to increase participants’ ability to generalize Heads Up! Reading curriculum in their classrooms. Target teachers received professional development as a college course during two summers with mentoring during the implementation year. The control group was offered training during the second summer. The results indicated that all participants benefited from the professional development opportunities. Those who received coaching had an advantage with respect to growth in knowledge, skills, and confidence in implementing the new strategies into their classrooms. Qualitative evidence gleaned from the focus groups regarding coaching indicated enjoyment for the extra help, encouragement, and accountability. There were one or two participants who felt their coach was judgmental and those who did not have a coach noted that they wanted one. Overall, participants reported that their involvement in this initiative resulted in positive changes within their classrooms both in their own development and the children’s growth in literacy development.

Lonigan, Farver, Phillips, and Clancy-Menchetti (2009) reported on their study conducted in Head Start and Title I district preschools. They evaluated the impacts of a
literacy-focused curriculum and two types of professional development on emergent literacy skills. The preschools were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions: (a) business as usual control, (b) a literacy-focused curriculum with workshop-only professional development, or (c) a literacy-focused curriculum with workshop plus in-class mentoring professional development. The curriculum implemented was the *Literacy Express Preschool Curriculum (LEPC)*. The curriculum focused on three key early literacy skill domains: (a) oral language, (b) phonological awareness, and (c) print knowledge. The curriculum included thematic units used to provide a coherent and integrated environment for preschool children to learn emergent literacy skills. Researchers used descriptive statistics to compare differences among the groups in child outcomes as well as classroom measures. Their findings revealed significant and moderate effects for the curriculum. However, there were small, mostly nonsignificant effects of professional development across child outcomes and classroom measures. Implications discussed included the possibility of creating early learning environments for children at-risk that include more powerful instructional interventions than have been typically implemented in early childhood education. They also stressed the need for higher levels of teacher-directed activities, focused activities, as well as small-group and individualized instruction than is typically provided by traditional early childhood curricula.

These studies indicate the complexity of assessing the effectiveness of the effects of professional development, with or without coaching. They also demonstrate that other components impact teacher effectiveness and thus student achievement. There are many roles for literacy specialists in reform models, requiring them to be highly qualified in
order to be able to bridge the gap between what teachers are doing and what needs to be done to close achievement gaps. In the following section a more detailed discussion is presented about the roles and rigorous qualifications of literacy coaches (specialists).

**Roles and Qualifications of Literacy Specialists**

The literature is scant and emerging regarding the effectiveness of literacy coaching (Neufield & Roper, 2003), but there is a prolific amount of educational literature regarding coaching, most of which is descriptive and prescriptive in orientation (Biancarosa, Byrk, & Dexter, 2010). This section focused on the roles and qualifications of literacy specialists/coaches.

The IRA position statement (2004) suggested three levels of coaching, thus suggesting a continuum. These levels of coaching are based upon Bean’s work. Level 1 helps to develop relationships. Some of the actions of the coach are providing materials, identifying issues or needs, developing curriculum with colleagues collaboratively, participating in a study group, and assessing students. Level 2 is more formal and intense. The coach/teacher dyads begin to focus on the areas of need. The various coaching activities include co-planning lessons, facilitating and leading team meetings, and making professional development presentations. Level 3 is the most intense level. The coach can be found modeling, co-teaching, observing with reflective feedback, analyzing video lessons or audio exchanges between teachers and students.

Given these varied levels of coaching and the job expectations, the qualifications of literacy coaches are rigorous. The IRA (2004) published a position statement outlining the qualifications, which are also iterated in Rodgers and Rodgers (2007). Literacy coaches “must be excellent teachers; have in-depth knowledge of the reading process,
assessment, and instruction; have experience working with teachers, and be excellent presenters” (p. 16).

To be effective, the literacy coaches need to have a strong knowledge base, have good communication skills, be flexible, and be able to work well with adults in this capacity. The literacy coaches need to adhere to the key principles of coaching and professional development: grounded in inquiry, collaborative, continuous, connected to and derived from teachers’ work with students, and needs to be tied explicitly to improving instructional practices. Literacy coaches need to be trustworthy, non-evaluative, and flexible (Bean, 2004; Walpole & McKenna, 2004, 2010).

Bean (2004) outlined several principles of effective coaching. Literacy coaches need to share their plans and ideas with the teachers with whom they will be working. The teachers need to understand that the literacy coach’s job is not evaluative, but is one of support to teachers to do the job of teaching more effectively. Literacy coaches need to explain what the process means and what it does not mean.

Bean also emphasized the importance of getting teacher input. This makes the coaching process collaborative. Responding to teachers’ input (needs and ideas) allows the coaching to be responsive, thus more effective. Coaches need to provide the necessary support needed if changes will be made in classroom instruction. The support may be in the form of supplemental materials, additional training or information, modeling, co-planning and co-teaching, etc.

Effective coaches take time to develop the trust needed to be effective. Bean suggested starting with those willing to participate, thus all involved parties are more
relaxed. Research consistently stresses building trust by keeping conversations confidential (Bean, 2004; Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

The roles of literacy coaches are varied and reflect the diverse needs of the staff with which they work. These roles can be separated into three categories: instruction, assessment, and leadership (IRA, 2004). In the area of instruction, coaches support, mentor, and assist teachers to implement curriculum, instructional strategies, and interventions for students. In addition, coaches model lessons using research-based strategies, assist teachers in planning and delivering effective instruction, and provide interventions to struggling students.

In the area of assessment, literacy coaches guide teachers to realize the importance and use of screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments. Coaches assist grade-level teams in the analysis and use of student data to identify and plan appropriate instruction to meet all students’ needs. They may support and assist teachers with the assessment of students using various measurement tools. As a member of the building literacy team, coaches review student data and assess the progress of meeting grade-level goals. Along with student data, data from classroom observations and discourse with teachers are used to make program implementation adjustments and plan appropriate professional development.

Literacy specialists may be in the leadership role in a school or district. Shaw (2007) as well as Neufield and Roper (2003) described literacy coaches as change agents. They have an impact on making changes in the school. This role is evident in a recent report by Blachowicz et al. (2010). They attributed the increase in student achievement in low performing Chicago Public Schools to the work of the literacy specialists. As leaders,
literacy specialists engage in a variety of activities which overlap into the other discussed roles. They provide appropriate materials, offer instructional suggestions, model instructional strategies, facilitate professional development, mentor new teachers, and coordinate the reading program. In addition they may oversee the school’s assessment system, are liaisons to the community and work with parents to build a strong school/home communication system. They use multiple approaches to affect change by building learning communities where those involved, work together to increase effective literacy instruction (Bean, 2004; Blachowicz et al., 2010; IRA, 2004; Shaw, 2007).

In this era of accountability, it is no wonder the qualifications of literacy specialists are so rigorous. As coaches, they must have a vast amount of knowledge. Their expertise is important to be able to meet teachers’ needs. The literature for differentiating to meet teachers’ needs is explored in the next section.

**Differentiating to Meet Teacher Needs**

*Expert teaching entails attention to where their students are as readers and writers, cognizance of the next goals in view for student development and the skillful organizing and execution of appropriate instruction in response. (Byrk et al., 2007, p. 46)*

Much has been written about differentiating to meet student needs, but what about meeting the needs of teachers? Just as educators are expected to differentiate to meet the needs of the students they teach, so too should literacy coaches differentiate to meet teachers’ needs. In their study, Buell, Han, Blamey, and Vukelich (2010) found that coaches can provide individualized professional development, empowering teachers to be more motivated to make necessary changes in their instructional practices. As coaches differentiate to meet the needs of teachers they are modeling responsive and
constructivist learning and teaching, becoming learner-centered (Annenburg Institute, 2004). Guskey and Sparks (1996) noted that both teaching and learning are complex processes, and are embedded in diverse contexts. Merriam and Cafferrela (2004) emphasized that teachers have their own unique characteristics in terms of experiences, knowledge, and pedagogy. So it stands to reason that literacy coaches need to be responsive or to differentiate to meet teachers’ needs. Guskey and Sparks (1996) described three factors that must be considered when planning professional development: (a) content characteristics, (b) process variables, and (c) context characteristics. These characteristics formed the basis for the National Staff Development Council, and are also iterated by Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) for differentiating to meet the needs of students. The content characteristics answer the question “what” of professional development (e.g., new knowledge, skills, and understandings). Process variables answer the question how. This includes types and forms of professional development and the way activities are “planned, organized, carried out, and followed-up” (Guskey & Sparks, 1996, p. 2). Context characteristics answer the questions who, when, where, and why. This includes the organization or culture in which the professional development takes place.

How do literacy coaches differentiate to meet the needs of the teachers with whom they coach? Several methods, tools, and interactions coaches may use to differentiate to meet teachers’ needs will be explored. Such methods, tools, and interactions include data analysis, surveys, daybooks (journals), using video or audio recordings to reflect upon classroom practice, and coach/teacher discourse.
Data Analysis

Data from varied sources are used for differentiating to meet teacher needs. These sources include data from student achievement, diagnostic, and progress monitoring, teacher observations, curriculum based measurements and rubrics or protocols of teaching practices used during classroom observations (Bryan, Ergul, & Burstein, 2008; Byrk et al., 2007; McKenna & Stahl, 2003; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina, 2010).

According to Denton, Swanson and Mathes (2007), the use of student assessment data is an important component of coaching. Johnston (2005) discussed the purpose of assessment in two ways: (a) assessment as a means of gathering and interpreting data to inform action, and (b) in practice; data interpretations are constrained by our views of literacy and students, the assessment conversations in which we engage, and the range of actions we can imagine. Conversations can impact student learning by creating learning communities that sustain conversations about teaching and learning that are data-driven. These conversations revolve around making teaching, learning, and interpretations better.

McKenna and Stahl (2003) noted that assessment as inquiry promotes student-centeredness. The interpretation of data supports teachers and coaches reflection on students’ understandings and literate abilities. This type of inquiry falls within the constructivist theory of knowledge. Love (2005) explained that the inquiry process involves raising questions, examining student learning, and sharing findings with colleagues.

According to Byrk et al. (2007), data from rubrics of teaching practices sources are used by literacy coaches as formative resources for guiding literacy professional
development activities in comprehensive literacy instruction as well as for scientific research. These types of tools can be used to assess teacher expertise over time as well as guiding literacy instruction for students. The data can also guide literacy coaches to differentiate individual teacher learning and for organizing communities of practice within a school as well as guiding coaches to focus their observations in classrooms. The information provides for targeted feedback to individual teachers as well as identifying school-wide professional development priorities.

Several researchers have developed rubrics for measuring teacher practice (i.e., Hough, Bryk, Pinnell, Kerbow, Fountas, Scharer, 2008; Walpole et al., 2010). Pianta, La Paro, and Hamre (2008) developed and published the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The CLASS instrument focuses on the teacher-student interactions. The framework of this instrument is based upon the “structure and nature of teacher-child interactions likely to contribute positively to students’ development as a consequence of experience in the classroom” (p. 112). Other instruments have been developed to evaluate early literacy environments. Three commonly used instruments are the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (Smith, M. W., Dickinson, & Sangeorge, 1998), the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation: Pre-K Tool (Smith, M. W., Brady, & Anastasopoulos, 2008) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised Edition (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005). These instruments are used to provide formative feedback to improve the quality of classroom environments.

A deeper goal in professional education is to develop teachers as reflective practitioners (Bryk et al., 2007). The assessment data can aide literacy specialists to guide teacher self-reflection (Buell et al., 2010; Walpole et al., 2010), as well as differentiating
coaching and professional development to meet teacher needs (Fitzharris, Jones, & Crawford, 2008).

**Surveys**

Various other tools are used to determine the instructional and or knowledge needs of teachers. One such tool, but in different forms are surveys. Surveys can be used to assess how teachers view themselves as literacy instructors, reflecting upon their own strengths and needs. Surveys can also be used to have teachers prioritize professional development topics. These instruments are used to tailor professional development to the needs of teachers. Using data from these instruments informs literacy coaches as to the needs of the staff with whom they work. Literacy coaches can then design professional development sessions to include whole staff, team meetings, and/or one-on-one coaching conversations to meet both staff and coaching goals (Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Shoniker, 2011).

**Video and Audio Recordings**

Other tools used by literacy coaches to differentiate coaching are video or audio recordings. The teacher may use this tool independent of the coach or together. It gives both the opportunity to observe and/or listen to interactions of teacher and students thereby reflecting upon the lesson. The teacher and coach can identify the success and challenges encountered during the lesson. A discussion can include brainstorming for ideas for possible next steps. This can also be used for baseline data; a pre- and post-coaching to demonstrate teacher growth over time (Costa & Garmston, 1994; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007).
Journals

Journals or daybooks are used to reflect on the impact of the literacy event. Quick-writes can be used to summarize a literacy event. Questions can be recorded to guide teachers’ thinking about pedagogy. Through this reflective journal writing teachers and coaches can formulate topics for further investigation (Stover et al., 2011).

According to Rodgers and Rodgers (2007), central to coaching is the ongoing dialogue about teaching. Lawrence and Snow (2011) described oral discourse “as a context for learning” (p. 322). Literacy coaching is a context in which discourse occurs. Teachers’ and coaches’ discourse is an opportunity to facilitate reflection on teachers’ classroom practice as well as to scaffold tools teachers. This assertion is supported by other researchers (i.e., Bean, 2004; Belcastro, 2009; Costa & Garmston, 1993; Duncan, 2006; Hayes, 2010; Heineke, 2009; Nowak, 2003; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). During dialogues with literacy coaches, teachers have the opportunity to think and reflect about their instructional practices and about the ways to improve it through the facilitation of literacy coaches (Darling-Hammond, 1998b; Duncan, 2006). It is during coaching interactions that teachers and coaches co-construct their knowledge about emergent literacy practices. Shidler (2009) found in a study focused on coaching Head Start educators that dedicated time between teachers and coaches for critical reflective conversations as well as focusing on specific content, modeling techniques and instructional practices was necessary for teacher growth.

According to Rodgers and Rodgers (2007), discourse about instructional practices and knowledge building, takes place in several contexts: (a) one-on-one, (b) small group, cluster or team, and (c) whole group professional development sessions. They described
the use of questioning to move a conversation to a deeper level of reflection and thinking about teaching and learning. These researchers cite the work of Morgan and Saxton as the basis for the different kinds of questions to support teachers and coaches as they work together. Three categories of questions are highlighted: (a) questions for eliciting information, (b) questions for shaping understanding, and (c) questions pressing for reflection.

As noted by Fullan (1985), change is a complex process. Many tools and methods for differentiating coaching interactions with teachers are used in the embedded professional development model. These include, but are not limited to, data analysis and interpretation of varied forms of data collected from both student assessments, observations in classrooms using rubrics of teaching practices. In addition audio and video recordings of literacy events, surveys of different types, journal reflections, and discourse can be used by literacy coaches in their daily practice of coaching. As previously discussed, this study is in a preschool setting; therefore a discussion of early literacy follows.

**Emergent Literacy/Early Literacy Development**

Early literacy is the level of literacy development in which one would expect coaching in the preschool context to be of prime importance. The current understanding of literacy development indicates that the preschool age is the period of time when the foundation of literacy skills is developed, and will likely benefit children for a lifetime (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006). As stated by Dickinson and Neuman (2006) “that adequate understanding of the emergence of literacy must integrate children’s acquisition of language and print-related skills . . . , in addition to social and emotional development”
(p. 3); therefore, “the burden of responsibility for preparing young children for reading success falls squarely on the shoulders of early childhood educators” (Buell, Han, Blamey, & Vukelich, 2010, p. 29). A great deal is known about the long term effects of the early experiences of children in learning how to read in the later years (Patore, Cassano, & Schickedanz, 2011). Presented in this section are influential theories of literacy development, historical influences, definitions of emergent and early literacy, early literacy development and developmentally appropriate practice.

Maturation theory influenced reading instruction from the 1930s to the 1950s (Tracey & Morrow, 2012), fostering a reading readiness perspective that is no longer accepted (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Morphett and Washburne (1931) proposed that reading instruction should not begin until a child was six and a half years old. This was based upon their findings that children of this age scored better than younger children on a test of reading comprehension. The proponents of the reading readiness perspective advocated a hierarchical approach beginning with prescribed perceptual skills and then progressing to letter/sound correspondence, words, phrases, sentences, etc. These skills were taught in isolation using workbook pages or worksheets to practice the skills until mastery was demonstrated. It was believed that when children reached mastery of the prescribed skills, they would be able to put them all together and read. It was also believed that children needed to learn to read before introducing written composition. Reading readiness professionals believed that children acquired little knowledge about and experience with print prior to formal instruction (Vacca, Vacca, Gove, Burkey, Lenhart, & McKeon, 2006). This age/delay instruction position existed for 40 years (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).
A shift in educational thinking was influenced by the launching of Sputnik in 1957. The launch of this Soviet satellite raised questions about the adequacy of American education. The decision was made to make the curriculum more rigorous and to begin instruction as early as possible. In addition to this global triumph by the Soviets, a significant social revolution was occurring in America. Supporters of social equality argued that we must not wait to provide early intervention in helping to achieve equality for all children. Research focused on infants indicated that preschoolers knew much more than once thought. Bloom’s studies on intelligence were published. The media began to publicize the new attention to early childhood. *The Process of Education* by Bruner in 1960 influenced the thinking of educators about getting children ready to read as opposed to waiting till they seem ready. During this same time period, Durkin was publishing reports about early readers and on efforts to teach preschoolers to read (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Marie Clay (1996) first used the term “Emergent Reading Behavior” in the title of her unpublished dissertation (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Tracey & Morrow, 2012). The term emergent literacy was later coined by Teale and Sulzby (1986) to “capture the essence of this new way of thinking about young children’s reading and writing development” (Teale, 1995, p. 71). Teale (1995) explained that the use of this term describes the body of work that relates to how the development of reading and writing concepts, behaviors, and dispositions proceed and develop into conventional literacy. Emergent literacy theory is built upon beliefs regarding the ways in which early literacy develops in young children. These beliefs include: (1) children’s development of reading, writing, listening,
and speaking are all interrelated, and (2) literacy development starts at birth and is continuous and ongoing (Morrow, 2001; Tracey & Morrow, 2012).

Neuman and Roskos (1998) proffered another point of view regarding the terminology of early literacy explaining that it better reflects reading and writing as a developmental continuum as opposed to a skill that one either acquires or does not. They posited that the terms emergent and conventional (authors’ emphasized) suggest a beginning and end point between skill emerging and conventional practices. Roskos, Christie, and Richgels (2003) further stipulated the use of the term early literacy (authors’ emphasized). They described this term as “the most comprehensive yet concise description of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that precede learning to read and write in the primary grades (K-3)” (p. 53). A cursory look at the literature indicates that the terms emergent literacy and early literacy are used interchangeably.

Marie Clay (1966, 1991) indicated in her research that children come to school with knowledge about literacy. This knowledge is learned though children’s interactions within their everyday environments (Y. Goodman, 1980, 1996). Clay (1998) also indicated that educators must realize that prior to entering school, children’s experiences have resulted in “learning different things in different ways in different cultures and communities” (p. 1). Educators should focus on what children can do, and then build on that foundation. Goodman’s (1973, 2003) research, especially that of miscue analysis builds on the foundation of what students have in the development of their language and literacy. Durkin’s (1966) study of children who learn to read prior to formal education found several characteristics in the homes of early readers: (a) children were read to by a parent, (b) children tended to be persistent, serious, and neat, (c) children talked about
sounds of letters, (d) children had access to numerous and various types of reading materials, (e) older siblings helped by playing school at home, and (f) writing materials were available.

The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) report (2008) acknowledged 11 variables that represent early literacy skills, also known as, precursor literacy skills because they are predictors of later literacy development. The variables identified were alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters or digits, rapid automatic naming of objects or colors, writing or name writing phonological memory, concepts about print, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language, and visual processing. As with any report of far reaching effects on policy and practice, a critical examination was published in the *Educational Researcher* (2010, May). The International Reading Association (2005) iterated that “those characteristics of children from birth through age 5 that are most closely linked to later achievement in literacy: Oral language development, phonological/phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, print knowledge, and invented spelling” (p. 1). Also identified are numerous types of experiences that are “crucial in early literacy development” (p. 1). These experiences include storybook reading, discussions about books, listening comprehension, and writing.

Storch and Whitehurst (2002) analyzed code-related (conventions of print, beginning forms of writing, alphabet knowledge, letter-sound correspondence, and phonemic awareness) and oral language abilities (semantic, syntactic, and conceptual knowledge) acquired by the end of preschool. Code-related and oral language play significant roles in reading achievement at different points in time. Code-related skills
predicted decoding skills in beginning readers whereas oral language had an indirect
effect on decoding in the early grades through its effect on phonemic awareness. The
discussion in the next section is a review of early literacy development including oral
language and vocabulary development, phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, print
knowledge, developmental writing and preschool experiences.

**Oral Language and Vocabulary Acquisition**

Oral language and vocabulary are regarded as a foundation for literacy
development (Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2004; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The children who are most likely to have difficulty with learning to read are those who begin
school with “less prior knowledge and skill in relevant domains, most notably general
verbal abilities” (Snow et al., 1998, p. 5). In their report of *Child Trends*, the Council of
Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2009) indicated that disparities of child outcomes
are evident at nine months and are even larger by 24 months across cognitive, social,
behavioral, and health outcomes. These findings impact the child’s ability to learn.
Further research has shown that the accomplishments of the participants at age three
predicted later performance in school. The vocabulary use at age three correlated strongly
with reading comprehension. In addition to smaller vocabularies, children in poverty
were adding words more slowly than in the other socioeconomic groups in their study

Interventions for at-risk children ages three to five have been and are supported
by the U.S. Government. Watch Me Grow and Head Start are examples of early
interventions for students “at risk” for school failure. The Watch Me Grow program
services children from infancy to age 3. Head Start provides services to three- to five-
year-old children. Early Reading First (ERF) is a more recent initiative geared to provide intervention for the at-risk population. It services three to five year olds. The following discussion provides a summary of Halliday’s language development theory. A connection is provided to emphasize the importance of language and vocabulary development to later success in learning to read.

As noted by the Center on the Developing Child (2007), it is important to consider reports of how people learn language specifically related to brain development. “The basic architecture of the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood” (p. 8). This architecture is built over a progression of sensitive periods. Certain circuits are formed that are associated with explicit abilities, such as language. Complex skills develop over time building on circuits and skills formed earlier. The early experiences create a foundation for lifelong learning. A strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Vygotsky’s theory of basic learning encompasses language development. In order for language to develop, adults need to interact with children. He believed the origins of speech are social. Speech has two functions: (a) public speech in which language is directed at others to communicate and (b) private speech, which is audible but is self-regulatory and is not for communicating with others. Adults need to encourage, motivate, and support children to promote language development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Sulzby, 1986).

Halliday (1975) discussed language development in terms of its functions. He views language development in infancy as a response to the child’s environment—a sociolinguistic point of view. The child interacts with his environment to communicate
for differing purposes or functions. Halliday posited that the young child uses his voice to achieve certain fundamental goals.

The observable functions as discussed by Halliday (1975) begin about the age of nine months. The set of functions in which the child learns to mean are instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative, and informative.

Halliday (1975) considered the functions to be in three phases. Phase I functions are a socio-linguistic approach to early language development. The development includes the concept of cultural transmissions and the processes of socialization in the child’s environment. This phase is the child’s initial linguistic system, which is summarized in Table 2. It is thought that except for the informative function, mastery of all the other functions are needed to transition into adult language. These social functions are summarized with examples given in Table 2.1.
Table 2.1

Functions of Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Used to satisfy needs</td>
<td>“Give me dat.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Cookie Mommy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory</td>
<td>Used as a means of persuasion; control others</td>
<td>“Do as I tell you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“No sleep now.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>Used to develop interpersonal relations</td>
<td>“Me and you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“You want to play.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Used to develop self-awareness and to express feelings</td>
<td>“I don’t like it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heuristic</td>
<td>Used to explore one’s world</td>
<td>“Why?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“What are the cows for?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>Used to build worlds separate from the world of reality</td>
<td>“Let’s pretend.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Let’s play space.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Used to communicate information to others.</td>
<td>“I’ve got something to tell you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I’ll tell you how this works.”</td>
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*Note. Adapted from Halliday (1975).*

Halliday (1975) noted that during Phase II (approximately 16 ½ - 18 months), the child transitions from Phase I to adult language. It is during this phase that the young child makes quick advances in vocabulary, structure, and dialogue. The learning of vocabulary allows the child to produce new meanings within the functions and to combine the functions. The child is using words in the context of his observation in the environment and recall. The new words function as a way of categorizing that which is observed. These new words also provide the earliest use of language as a means of learning. This phase ends when the child demonstrates mastery of the principles of grammar and dialogue. He thus transitions to the adult language system.
Phase III (approximately 36 months) is characterized by the child learning the adult language system. Entering this phase is marked by the child’s ability to use language to learn. This does not mean the child has mastered the English language, but the child has constructed a system that is organized in the same way as the adult language (Halliday, 1975).

Language develops within the social context of the infants/children and their family. It is an interactive process. For example, parents respond to the infants’ sounds, the infants in turn respond to the parents. They interact such as in a peek-a-boo game. It is through the social interactions and perceptions that the infants/children learn the oral speech, vocabulary, and grammatical systems used in the society in which the children live (Halliday, 1975).

Hollich and Houston (2007) explained that language is constructive in that infants will produce utterances. These utterances will mimic the phonological sounds of the language in which infants are hearing in their environment. Words and then sentences are constructed. Children use the context and grammar rules of the language used in their social interactions to construct words and sentences.

How is vocabulary related to language? Vocabulary defined by Kamil and Hiebert (2005) is “the knowledge of meanings of words” (p. 3). Vocabulary acquisition develops concurrently with language. There are two types of vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary is those words that the child understands. Expressive vocabulary are words the child understands, can retrieve, and use verbally, and later in writing (Kamil & Hiebert, 2005; Roskos et al., 2004).
The development of language and vocabulary are very complex—children do not develop in a vacuum. There does not appear to be any one component in the children’s environments that does not contribute their development. All the while, they are developing cognitively as well as physically. As the children are able to explore their environment and begin to initiate dialogue, their language and vocabulary begin to grow quickly (Baker, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1998).

There is a rapid growth in vocabulary during the preschool years, as previously stated. Hart and Risley (1995, 2003) demonstrated in their two-year longitudinal study that there is a marked difference in vocabulary acquisition and the quality of those words among socioeconomic groups. It was also demonstrated that those students with more working vocabulary continue to develop vocabulary at a greater rate than those with limited vocabulary knowledge. Biemiller and Slonin (2001) posited that by the age of three and onward children should be developing at least 2,500 words per year. Children ought to be exploring a minimum of two new words a day (Roskos et al., 2004).

According to Biemiller (2003), it has been demonstrated that the lack of adequate vocabulary can ensure children will experience failure in text comprehension. Therefore, teachers need to be purposeful in the selection of the words they choose to teach, such as in the context of shared book reading. Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002) considered words in three tiers: (a) Tier 1 words are basic words children usually learn in everyday conversation, i.e., clock, up, baby; (b) Tier 2 words usually appear frequently in mature language users, i.e., absurd, disrupt; and (c) Tier 3 words appear infrequently during conversations and are associated with a specific domain, i.e., graph, magnifier. A focus of teaching words needed for comprehension of a text would include Tier 2 type words for
fictional texts; whereas selecting Tier 3 words to explicitly teach when reading an
informational text with children. Many words can be learned through the shared book and
themed play experiences in preschool. According to Biemiller (2001), children’s listening
vocabulary is approximately two years ahead of reading vocabulary. As Morrow (2012)
pointed out, children comprehend language and vocabulary before they utter their first
word.

The acquisition of language is fostered by interactions between the child and an
adult. Vocabulary development or word learning occurs as part of language acquisition.
Children’s language grows according to their needs to use it and is acquired through their
social interactions. Children’s exploration and language inventions are controlled by their
own maturity. Language cannot grow without the interaction with people and texts that
introduce new vocabulary, concepts, and language structures (Biemiller, 2003; Bruner,
1980).

Fostering language and vocabulary development in the young child occurs on a
daily basis through social interactions with the young child. Rich conversations with
responsive adults are the best source of exposure to words (Burns et al., 1999; Hart &
Conversations can be about experiences children have had or are having. They can also
be in the context of storybook reading. During conversations with children the adult can
assist or scaffold the child expand words into sentences or sentences that are more
descriptive by asking questions and encouraging the child to tell more. The more
meaningful and substantive the conversations, the better it is for developing vocabulary
and oral language (Morrow, 2012). It is recommended that teachers embed vocabulary instruction during these experiences (Newton et al., 2008).

How does the development of vocabulary and language affect reading proficiency or learning to read? Reading is defined as “the use of one’s language ability to decode and comprehend text” (Morrow, 2001, p. 92). Growing up to be a reader is dependent on knowledge about language and print. By the age of three, the ability to predict reading proficiency at the end of grade 3 exists (Biemiller, 2003; Hart & Risley, 2003). Research has demonstrated that vocabulary is essential to reading comprehension. Rapid vocabulary acquisition occurs in the pre-literate years, i.e., before children are reading (Biemiller, 2001; Lervag & Aukrust, 2010). In her synthesis of research, Juel (2006) shared that beginning first graders vocabulary not only predict their reading ability at the end of first grade, but “also their 11th-grade reading comprehension” (p. 412). Growth in word recognition is hindered if an unknown word is not in the child’s oral vocabulary (Juel, 2006). According to Biemiller (2001, 2006), it is not until reading texts involving age-normal vocabulary demands does vocabulary become a significant predictor of reading comprehension. It is in third and fourth grades that grade level content texts demand readers to be fluent in word recognition skills and average or above in vocabulary development. He further attested that having both of these does not guarantee comprehension, but the absence of one of them ensures a low level of comprehension.

What about children who are English language learners or those with different dialects as the school register? How can teachers support these students? Include print in the classroom that is the children’s first language, create books together in their first language and share their stories, give them opportunities to read and write with others
who speak their language (parents, aides, other children), select books for storytelling that lend themselves to using props, i.e., *The Jacket I Wear in the Snow* (Neitzel, 1991). A viable strategy to meet these students where they are in their language and vocabulary acquisition is the language experience approach, such as creating books together. Why is this approach important? It is based upon the learner’s point of view. It says to individual children that what I think is important, what I think I can say, what I say can be written by me or others, and it can be read by me or others. How does the language experience approach build on what the children know, build vocabulary, or increase children’s oral language acquisition? First, it begins with the children’s oral language. The teacher and students discuss what was experienced. The teacher uses open-ended questions to keep the conversation moving. Finally, the teacher and children decide what to include in their language experience story. The teacher is the recorder for the children. It is their language, their words, from their experience (Morrow, 2012; Stauffer, 1970). Other strategies to support English Language learners include pictures, demonstrations, videos, hands-on activities, clear enunciation, repetition and paraphrasing, controlled vocabulary and idioms, and using slow but natural levels of speech (Vukelich, Christie, & Enz, 2012).

Language and vocabulary development are linked to success in learning to read. Language is an important emergent literacy skill that is known to predict later reading competence. Sufficient oral language indirectly affects learning to read in grades one and two. Students use phonological skills at this level which are dependent upon oral language. Once children begin to read grade level content texts, it is vocabulary knowledge and oral language that is the precursor to reading comprehension. Research
has shown that language lays the foundation for comprehension of texts (Biemiller, 2006, 2001; Landry & Smith, 2007; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Halliday’s language acquisition model describes language development by its functions. Infants communicate their needs in the instrumental stage to verbally communicating their needs to others in the informative stage (Halliday, 1975).

Learning to talk and to read evolves through the process of experiencing language in multiple social contexts. These contexts begin in the home where infants are completely dependent upon adult caregivers for all interactions. Other social contexts could include child care providers and preschool. Literacy begins to develop with language development. The development of language and vocabulary is the foundation on which learning to read is built (Biemiller, 2003, 2006; Burns et al., 1999; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). According to Hart and Risley (1995, 2003), the development of vocabulary is related to the environment in which the child is living. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that a vocabulary gap between different socioeconomic groups exist and that it increases throughout school. Thus, it is very important for teachers and caregivers of preschool-age children to provide meaningful contexts in which to engage children in conversations. As Morrow (2012) stipulated, children imitate the language of the adults with whom they engage. In addition, children construct their own words when they do not know a conventional one in order to convey their thoughts.

Interactive storybook reading is a daily activity that adults can use to not only build vocabulary and language, but to build valuable background knowledge that will be needed to comprehend texts when learning to read. According to Snow and Ninio (1986) book reading is a “powerful source . . . of learning about language” (p. 117). These texts
should include not only fictional stories, but informational texts as well (Holdaway, 1979; Newton, Padak, & Rasinski, 2008). Given that the language of texts is different from conversational language, children need daily experiences with text (Nagy, 2007, p. 63). Many contexts and strategies for purposeful vocabulary and oral language have been documented. Shared book reading and play are prominent activities in preschool. These are discussed in more detail in the following section. In addition to these activities, the discussion of early literacy continues with print knowledge, phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, developmental writing and preschool experiences, concluding with developmentally appropriate practice.

**Print Awareness**

Print awareness, defined by Harris and Hodges (1995), is a component of emergent literacy. They describe print awareness as young children’s growing recognition of the conventions and characteristics of written language. According to Snow et al. (1998), young children learn much about the concepts of print during the preschool years. They also specified that “children who begin school knowing less about the nature and purposes of books and reading are less likely to be high achievers in reading” (p. 165).

Adams (1990) contended that children need to learn that print conveys meaning. She stressed the importance of children’s awareness of how print is formatted, that its meaningful units are words, and that the words are made up of letters. In addition to meaning, Paratore, Cassano, and Schickedanz (2011) iterated that children must develop an awareness of the many functions of print and that the organization of print varies according to its function. For example, a grocery list differs from a restaurant menu.
which also differs from a storybook (Purcell-Gates, 1996). Paris (2011) pointed out that there seems to be little predictive power of concepts of print when letter naming and phonemic awareness are included in the regressions. He contended that this may be because letter naming and phonemic awareness are taught at about the same age as print awareness, and “they emerge from the same kinds of shared reading experiences, so the intercorrelations of the three variables remove their unique variance” (p. 232).

Children learn about print through their interactions through shared book reading. Adams (1990) advocated the teaching of the concepts of print during interactions with adults during regular and interactive explorations of print. McGee (2007) explained how adults can use shared reading events to develop concepts about print. For example, while reading aloud to children, adults can use a pointer to point to the words while reading. This technique helps to direct children’s attention to the text. Eventually children will engage in “finger-point reading” (p. 82). During finger-point reading children begin to point to individual words as they are being read. Throughout this activity the adult is providing explicit instruction about letters, words, and the spaces between words. During regular reading and writing activities throughout children’s preschool day, adults can embed instruction by explaining where they will start to read or write, where they are stopping. Before reading a text, adults can show the cover and read the author and/or illustrator (McGee 2007; NRC, 1999; Roskos, Christie, & Richgels, 2003).

Marie Clay (1979) (as cited in Adams, 1990 and Paris, 2011) developed the assessment of children’s Concepts about Print (CAP). The purpose is to assess young children’s growing knowledge of the nature and function of written text. The CAP assessment includes 24 items which include a variety of concepts about the functions and
conventions of print (Paris, 2011). Clay (1991) explained that the story (Sand or Stones) is read to the child and the child is asked to help the assessor. The assessor then asks various questions pertaining to the concepts of print (i.e., front of the book, what a letter is, what a word is). This assessment has been adapted by others using any familiar book (i.e., Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004).

**Phonemic Awareness/Phonological Awareness**

Phonemic awareness (frequently used interchangeably with phonological awareness) is an awareness of the smallest units of sound—phonemes (IRA, 1998). Phonemic awareness is part of an overarching concept called phonological awareness. Phonological awareness refers to “the ability to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language (including the ability to distinguish or segment words, syllables, or phonemes) independent of meaning” (Goodson, Layzer, Simon, & Dwyer, 2009).

Phonemic awareness has been identified in the research as being causally related to being able to learn to read, and thus a prerequisite for the young reader (Adams, 1990; NELP, 2008; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001) stated, “poor phonological processing skills are the hallmark of poor readers” (p. 16). According to Adams (1990) there is a relationship between letter knowledge and phonemic awareness, and that both are critical for the acquisition of reading. Lonigan (2006) explained that phonological processing plays a key role in learning to spell. He further explained that “children who are better at detecting and manipulating syllables, rhymes, or phonemes are quicker to learn to read” (p. 78). Lonigan iterated that a reciprocal relationship between phonological processing and letter knowledge in preschoolers exists—children
who learn the names of letters have an advantage of learning the sounds of letters. However, the level of children’s phonological awareness influences the learning of letter names. Lonigan, Burgess, and Anthony (2000) reported that oral language development, specifically vocabulary growth, has an influence on the acquisition of phonological awareness.

Adams (1990) suggested a developmental sequence whereby children achieve awareness in more complex ways as they mature. She reported that the “most primitive level” (p. 80) involves rhyming—knowledge of nursery rhymes followed by oddity tasks (comparing/contrasting sounds of words for rhyme or alliteration). Higher levels include blending and syllable-splitting, segmentation, and phoneme manipulation. Research supports this developmental sequence as reported by Paratore et al. (2011). After children show an understanding of the phonological awareness of words and syllables, teachers can then begin to focus instruction that will develop phonemic awareness. This would include analyzing, synthesizing, and manipulating the phonemes of words (Vukelich & Christie, 2004). Anthony, Lonigan, Driscol, Phillips, and Burgess (2003) suggested a “quasi-parallel” progression: awareness of word-level units (words and syllables)—awareness of subsyllabic units (on-set and rime segments)—awareness of phonemic units. It was noted that it is not necessary to master each level before progressing onto another level.

The IRA (1998) stipulated that combining explicit phonological awareness training with interaction with print is the best strategy for preschool children. Roskos et al. (2003) suggested that phonological awareness experiences should increase children’s awareness of the sounds of language in a playful way. These types of activities should
include playing games and listening to stories, poems, and songs involving rhyme, alliteration, and sound matching.

What does a preschool teacher need to know in order to scaffold English language learners in the development of phonological awareness? Paez, Bock, and Pizzo (2011) reported a transfer of phonological awareness between English and Spanish at the end of preschool. Schickendanz and Collins (2013) reiterated this transference between languages in their statement that “children whose home language is based on an alphabet can transfer phonological awareness skills from English to their home language” (p. 101) and vice versa. They stress that effective phonological awareness instruction needs to be explicit and there needs to be an adequate amount of exposure. However, it is not disputed that there is an advantage to providing such instruction in children’s first language. As with monolingual learners, teachers can begin first with children’s first names in tasks, and also use the English words the children are learning and frequently used in the classroom. Pictures of target words also help children to keep the target word in mind.

As indicated previously, there is a reciprocal relationship between phonological awareness and letter knowledge (Adams, 1990; Lonigan, 2001). This discussion of emergent literacy continues with that of alphabetic knowledge.

**Alphabetic Knowledge**

Goodson, Layzer, Simon, and Dwyer (2009) defined alphabet knowledge as knowing the names and sounds associated with printed letters. Paratore et al. (2013) explained that letter-name knowledge includes upper- and lower-case letters as well as its level of automaticity, letter-sound knowledge, and an understanding of the alphabetic
principle in which letters represent sounds in spoken words. Adams (1990) explained that an understanding of the alphabetic principle depends equally on the knowledge of letters and “explicit awareness” (p. 304) of phonemes.

The importance of alphabet knowledge was underscored by the NELP (2008) report and by Snow et al. (1998) in Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children. Snow et al. (1998) identified three obstacles shown to influence children’s ability to learn to read. One important obstacle in learning to read is difficulty in understanding and using the alphabetic principle. Failure to understand that written spellings systematically represent sounds of words makes it difficult to recognize printed words and to understand how to learn and profit from instruction, thus “word recognition can be inaccurate or laborious and thus comprehension of connected text will be impeded” (pp. 315, 316).

Where might preschool teachers begin to teach about the names of letters? Bloodgood (1999) identified letters in children’s own names as among the first letters learned, which can serve as a springboard into other phonological understandings, such as beginning sounds. A sequence of acquisition was cited by Paratore et al. (2011): upper-case letters and then gradually lower-case letters; letters in children’s first names, and other meaningful letters from words encountered often are learned before other letters, letters with few overlapping features (O/E) before those with similar features (B/D). Invernizzi (2003) suggested when planning explicit teaching and initial sorting activities to use letters with few similarities.

In alignment with developmentally appropriate practices for preschool, good teachers use a variety of strategies to teach children of diverse needs and backgrounds. Excellent teaching involves using researched-based practices while building upon what
children already know while providing for social, emotional, and cognitive growth (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). According to Bowman, Donovan, and Burns (2001), certain activities have been identified that foster emergent literacy skills. In addition to identifying letters and words they also cited story reading and dialogic reading, providing materials for scribbling and writing in pretend play, and participating in classroom conversations. This discussion will continue with an emphasis on two prominent research-based strategies; shared book reading and dramatic play.

**Shared Book Reading**

Holdaway (1979) first introduced educators to shared book reading. His intent was to provide young children in preschools with a familiar bedtime activity in the classroom; however, how does a group of preschoolers cozy up to one adult with a little book and be able to enjoy this shared experience? Holdway introduced the idea of using enlarged print or what has come to be called Big Books. Teachers are able to read from this enlarged text, allowing all children to be able to see and listen to the story being read. He recommended using a variety of texts in addition to stories such as songs, rhymes, chants, and poems. Roskos, Christie, and Richgels (2003) recommended that informational books should be part of children’s regular shared reading experiences, and that teachers should read aloud to children once or twice a day. They iterated rereading books to children for varying purposes, stressing that familiarity increases the likelihood of children attempting to read favorite books on their own.

According to the NELP Report (2008) shared reading is described as “a parent reading a picture book with a toddler or a teacher reading a book to a class of preschoolers—are reading practices that are widely recommended to promote language
and other skills related to early literacy development” (p. 153). Harris and Hodges (1995) described shared reading as “an early childhood instructional strategy in which the teacher involves a group of young children in the reading of a particular big book in order to help them learn aspects of beginning literacy, as print conventions and the concept of word, and develop reading strategies, as in decoding or the use of prediction” (p. 233). Blachowicz and Fisher (2011) cited other terms for shared book reading—read-alouds and shared storybook reading explaining that they are used interchangeably. McGee (2007) distinguished between shared reading and interactive read-alouds. She explained that during shared reading children join in the reading by saying the text with the teacher. The teacher focuses on elements of phonological awareness and concepts about print; whereas interactive read-alouds is a format for developing vocabulary and comprehension.

Reading stories to children is universally thought to be an important activity during the preschool years for children’s language and literacy development (Karweit & Wasik, 1996). The National Research Council (2001) referred to shared reading as “the foundation of emergent literacy . . .” because this activity “embraces goals of education advancement, cultural uplift, and literate discourse” (p. 186). Wells (2000) found that reading to young children was the single most important activity for preparing children for the acquisition of literacy. Teale and Sulzby (1996) articulated that literacy is regarded as a “complex sociopsycholinguistic activity” (p. 131). Shared book reading is a socially created interactive activity.

In their synthesis of the research on the effects of story reading on literacy and language development, Karweit and Wasik (1996) reported several findings: repeated
readings of the text is important for children with low ability and the readings increase
children’s engagement in and comprehension of the story; teachers should present
information before and after the story but limit questions during the story reading to those
that focus on the analysis of the story and predictions of the story events; teachers should
provide explicit instruction in vocabulary words to help children to learn new words;
children’s responses during story reading in small group sizes positively affected the
number of novel words used by the children; and story reading is a positive strategy for
building children’s vocabulary. Shared book reading is an invaluable strategy in the
preschool years. It can be used to develop oral language, comprehension, vocabulary,
phonological awareness, concepts about print, and alphabet knowledge (Beauchat,
Blamey, & Walpole, 2009).

According to the NELP Report (2008) and supported by Schickedanz and McGee
(2010), there is no significant effects on child outcomes based upon how the shared book
reading was delivered (i.e., parent vs. teacher or computer). Schickedanz and McGee also
stressed that shared story book reading alone may not be enough as opposed to high
quality “shared reading combined (author emphasis) with other language and knowledge
support activities” (p. 327).

Shared book reading is a developmentally appropriate practice for young children
(Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NELP, 2008; Schickedanz & McGee, 2010). What seems
to matter most in order to enhance student outcomes on oral language and print
knowledge skills is shared book reading experiences that are “more intensive in
frequency and interactive in style” (NELP, 2008, p. 163).
According to Morrow and Gambrell (2001), “In early childhood, reading to children has always been the most common practice for implementing literature-based instruction” (p. 350). It is apparent that just sitting and reading a text to preschool children is not enough to optimize the read aloud experience. Interactive shared book reading is a complex strategy used for varying and intentional purposes during repeated readings of a given text. A continuation of the discussion of prominent instructional strategies will follow with a review of dramatic play.

**Dramatic Play**

The following discussion is a very narrow view, looking at what researchers say about literacy through play, specifically dramatic or mature play of three to five year old children prior to formal schooling. Play is a developmentally appropriate practice in preschool (NAEYC, 2009). According to Burns et al. (1999), dramatic play is an important aspect of early childhood environments because it can promote children’s literacy development.

Morrow and Rand (1991) indicated that play is a context in which literacy development may occur in young children. This was reiterated by Pellegrini and Galda (1993) in their statement that play was beginning to be viewed as “a major component in the development of young children’s literacy” (p. 164). Bodrova and Leong (1998) credited Leont’ev and Elkonin as designating play as a “leading activity” (p. 116) for children in preschool. Leong, Bodrova, Hensen and Henninger (1999) described leading activity as “the activity that promotes development to the highest degree—for preschool this is play” (para. 11).
Pellegrini and Galda (1993) described the early work on symbolic play as stemming from Piaget’s theoretical orientation. In symbolic play the child is able to use objects to represent something else or they can also execute symbolic transformations independent of objects. They further explained that cognition, in Piagetian research, is conceptualized as a “central processing metaphor” (p. 163). Applying this metaphor to symbolic play-literacy suggests that competence in symbolic play reflects a general symbolic cognitive ability. Therefore, symbolic play should be related to literacy as well as other aspects of cognition.

According to Vygotsky (1978), three elements must be present to be considered mature play: (a) an imaginary situation, (b) roles, and (c) rules. An imaginary situation is created by children which is rule-based but in a “concealed form” (p. 95). The rules are not like that of a game where the rules are laid out in advance, but rather they stem from the imaginary situation and each role in the imaginary play episode. Children take on roles during imaginary play episodes. In so doing, only certain actions are associated with that role. Each role has implicit rules associated with it. For example, if a child takes on the role of mother, only certain maternal behaviors associated with that role is acceptable. Play provides a wider background for children’s needs and consciousness as compared to the instruction-development relationship. It is during play that a zone of proximal development is created. “In play a child always behaves beyond his average age . . . ; it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (p. 102).

Christie (1991) indicated that a clear definition of play is difficult to articulate. He identified several terms to describe dramatic play—sociodramatic, symbolic, pretend, fantasy, and make-believe play. He defined dramatic play as play in which “children use
make-believe transformations and role-playing to act out scripts and stories” (p. 27). He presented six characteristics that set play apart from other social behaviors, and are reiterated by Rowe (1998). These include: (a) nonliterality, (b) means over ends, (c) positive effect, (d) flexibility, (e) voluntary, and (f) internal control. Nonliterality is characterized by play in which internal reality takes precedence over external reality. Children create new meanings for real world objects, and roles are transformed within the play episodes. Means over ends occur when children’s focus is on the activity rather than on an end product. Positive effect is marked by children’s signs of enjoyment, such as laughter and smiles. Flexibility is exhibited during play when children try novel combinations of ideas and actions. Play is voluntary—it is freely selected. Play involves internal control. Children are in control of the play episode determining the course of events.

Researchers are demonstrating that literacy events can be embedded in dramatic play. In their critical analysis of relating play and literacy, Roskos and Christie (2001) reported three major findings that play can serve literacy in several ways: (a) by providing settings that promote literacy activity, skills, and strategies, (b) serving as a language experience that can build connections between oral and written modes of expression, and (c) providing opportunities to teach and learn literacy. Neuman and Roskos (1989) reported that when simulated play settings (post office, restaurant, and doctor’s office) that are familiar to children and filled with literacy-related objects, children engaged in literacy activities that were meaningful to them and with other children. For example, children used reading and writing to pretend to record information, to negotiate meaning between print and the user, and to make events more
meaningful in play, thus demonstrating meaning making with print while engaged in activities of their own choosing. This was reiterated by Christie (1991) when play areas are stocked with theme-related reading and writing materials, children engage in literacy behaviors during dramatic play. For example, if a restaurant play area is implemented in the classroom, customers will use menus to select and order their food while waiters/waitresses will write out the orders. Such theme-related play activities allow children to refine their growing conceptions of the functions of written language and provide meaningful practice with emergent reading and writing. Neuman and Roskos (1997) further attested that when children participate in authentic activities, the activity in context provides opportunities for using knowledge and strategies representing “critical cognitive work” (p. 30) in their literacy development. However, according to Morrow and Rand (1991), it is not enough to just add theme-related literacy materials to existing centers. They found that in order for dramatic play to have an impact on the development of children’s emergent literacy, teachers needed to engage in play training procedures with their students. Play training involves teachers guiding children in the use of the materials during free-play time and modeling behaviors by participating as a co-player with the children when the materials are first introduced.

In his synthesis of the literature on play and early literacy development, Hall (1991) suggested that teachers who provide literacy-rich play opportunities for their students:

- Have access to a better view of what children actually know about literacy.
- Allow themselves to observe literacy behavior in the widest possible contexts.
- Give children opportunities to demonstrate what they know.
- Allow children the chance to help each other through the cooperative work in play.
• Through the diversity of play situations offer children maximum opportunity to explore new ways of representing meanings and using literacy.
• Offer children a purposeful rationale for engaging in literacy and literacy-related behaviors.
• Acknowledge that children can control aspects of their own learning.
• Facilitate the “natural” emergence of literacy. (pp. 20-21)

Morrow and Schickedanz (2006) identified various roles of adults in literacy enriched dramatic-play contexts ranging from uninvolved to the role of leader. They concluded that the most effective roles allow for responsiveness to children’s behavior, “allowing for reciprocal influences between children and the adult” (p. 275).

Roskos et al. (2003) suggested an integration of instruction based upon a theme and suggest that the potential of play can be enriched if it includes before, during, and after kinds of scaffolding. Neuman and Roskos (1997) posited that engaging children in authentic literacy practices may be an important form of learning, but it is only one; children also need instruction that stimulates conceptual as well as factual knowledge about literacy.

In closing with regards to play and literacy development, that while children are engaged in pretending during dramatic play, they also pretend about literacy. During symbolic play children will designate one object to be something else; i.e. a broomstick that becomes a horse (Strickland, Snow, Griffin, Burns, & McNamara, 2002). Children’s scribbles, when writing a prescription in a pretend veterinarian’s office or an order in a pretend restaurant, are making meaning as they practice emergent writing. When children are reading a magazine in a waiting room, or reading a menu in a pretend restaurant they are practicing and demonstrating their knowledge of reading (Morrow & Rand, 1991; Roskos, Christie, & Richgels, 2003). As Vygotsky (1978) discussed, during imaginary play episodes, children function within their zone of proximal development. As other
researchers have demonstrated (Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Roskos & Christie, 2001), integrating and creating play areas within the context of a theme and including related literacy props, children engage in literacy activities. Morrow and Rand (1991) stipulated that engaging in play training procedures when introducing new materials will have a greater impact on the development of children’s emergent literacy. As stated by Morrow and Rand, “play is an ideal setting which allows the young child to practice, elaborate, and extend emergent literacy abilities” (p. 397). Through dramatic play, preschool children learn about the functions of written language within the varied contexts of play themes (Owocki, 1999). A continuation of the discussion of emergent literacy will follow with a review of writing.

Writing

According to Morrow (2012) reading and writing purposes are very similar, that of constructing meaning. Whereas during reading, readers respond to what is read, writers deal with meaning by constructing text. Readers and writers engage in similar activities to accomplish their goals: generating and organizing ideas, monitoring their thoughts, problem solving, and revising how to think about ideas. Children also learn about reading and writing in similar ways. Schickedanz and Casbergue (2009) iterated writing is intentional. Clay (1998) asserted that there is a reciprocal relationship between early reading and early writing (author emphasis) emphasizing that learning to read and write should be taught simultaneously, not separately. Furthermore, the NELP report (2008) identified writing as one early literacy skill that had “medium to large predictive relationships with later measures of literacy development” (p. vii). In this section the focus is on the development of early writing, the relationship of early reading and
writing, creating a context for writing, developmentally appropriate practices, guidelines for implementing research based practices, and the usefulness of the informal assessment of writing including the collection of varied writing samples.

As stated previously, writing is meaning making. Writing is part of a child’s literacy learning journey. Vygotsky (1978) posited that literacy learning begins with drawing, then writing, and finally reading. Children learn first that writing is a way of communicating in their informal home environments. Children have diverse experiences of seeing environmental print (Clay, 1998). They observe parents and older siblings writing grocery lists, paying bills, writing notes, emails, text messages, notes to each other, sending and receiving birthday cards and invitations (Clay, 1998; Morrow, 2012). Developmental writing stages have been reported by many researchers with most agreeing that they are not well defined or necessarily sequential: a continuum beginning with children playing with drawing and writing, to communicating through written messages, to writing narrative and expository text (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008; Gentry, 2007; Soderman & Farrell, 2008; Sulzby, 1986). Children move from controlled scribbling, to recognizable objects that they name from about the ages of three to six. The scribbling eventually begins to look like print, including linearity, horizontal orientation, and arrangement of letter like forms (Morrow, 2012; Sulzby, 1986).

Reading, writing (and speaking) develop simultaneously, and interrelatedly (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Clay (1975, 1998) described a reciprocal relationship between early reading and early writing. Writing and reading draw upon the same sources of knowledge. According to Clay (1975), while learning to read, children rely mainly on
fluent oral language to garner meaning from the text. Writing demands that the learner attend to the features of the “language hierarchy” (p. 2) — the child must use letters to build words, words to build phrases, and then phrases to build sentences and stories.

According to Schickedanz and Casbergue (2009), writing in preschool begins with oral language. Children first learn to compose through talk. Preschoolers tell about events in their everyday lives, retell stories from favorite books or television shows, act out stories in dramatic play, explain their drawings/paintings, and talk about something of interest in their classroom. During oral exchanges with students, teachers frequently probe for more information thus encouraging them to extend their explanations. They asserted that composition begins with oral language and when children begin to write they rely on oral explanations of their renditions.

Name writing is important for the young writer (McGee, 2007). Children’s names are the first words most children learn to recognize and before they learn to identify any individual alphabet letters (Bloodgood, 1999), and is usually the first word children learn to write (Clay, 1975). When children begin to write (pretend write) they will usually use the letters of their name. Some evidence indicates that name writing helps children’s phonological awareness and their general ability to match sounds and letters. The letters in children’s names are usually the first letters they learn. It sets the stage for them for learning to decode and spell later on (Neuman & Roskos, 2007). Clay (1998) pointed out that “mastery over writing one’s own name begins the clustering of letters” (p. 138). Other benefits for name writing have been described in the literature: (a) it is personal, thus it is motivating, (b) it provides a set of words for reading (one’s own name and those
of classmates), and (c) it can be a focus of instruction (Neuman & Roskos, 2007; Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2009).

There are many ways to encourage young children to write. Opportunities to write abound in a literacy rich preschool classroom. Schickedanz and Collins (2013) explained that keeping real purposes for writing as a guide, teachers need to provide writing opportunities during play (i.e., writing letters, notes, signs, and lists). According to McGee (2007), shared writing is a public activity that demonstrates the purposes of writing. The purposes she identified are (1) creating functional texts in the school environment (i.e., creating and composing invitations for a guest speaker to visit, writing cards to others, writing menus) and (2) recording information about ongoing classroom activities (i.e. field trips, guest speakers, center activities, read-alouds).

Gerde, Bingham, and Wasik (2012) described 12 guidelines for research-based practices to guide preschool teachers for integrating writing activities in children’s daily routines. Some of these have already been discussed above: build writing into your daily schedule, accept all forms of writing, explicitly model writing, scaffold children’s writing, encourage children to read what they write, encourage invented spelling, make writing opportunities meaningful, have writing materials in all centers, display theme related words in the writing center, engage in shared writing experiences, make writing a way to connect with families, and use technology to support writing.

Ray and Glover (2008) explained how teachers can create a context that is supportive of young writers. They asserted that teachers must first believe children are writers. This belief is conveyed to children through our actions and the environment that teachers create for writers. The environment includes time, space, and materials so that
children can do the work of writers—write books about topics that interest them. Ray and Glover also explained that how teachers respond to writers as being more important than the environment. When teachers talk about the children’s books they have written the same way they talk about favorite professional authors, they affirm the children’s identity as an author. Putting the children’s books in the class library and allowing the young authors to read their books to others affirms the belief that they are authors.

Informal assessment of early writing is also important. Young children’s attempts at writing tell us things that children notice about print; however we must be cognizant that children can perceive more than what they may be able to write during this early phase of development (Clay, 1975). Schickedanz and Casbergue (2009) noted that; teachers should collect samples of children’s writing from varied contexts, date each piece, and supply anecdotal notes describing how and where the writing was produced. Anecdotal notes also describe who was present, the help that was provided, questions the child asked, and if the writing was copied from some source. Children’s writing development is “multidimensional” (p. 75); making marks, moving to scribbles to recognizable letters. They create words beginning with strings of symbols or mock letters/words without consideration to sounds. This gradually gives way to the use of letters. Noting the context of children’s writing is important as children may write a very important deliberate message using drawings with some use of print, or scribbles; whereas, the child may pretend to write a grocery list or telephone message with just scribbles during pretend play.

The NELP Report (2008) identified preschoolers’ emergent writing as an important part of their literacy development. Writing should be meaningfully integrated
into the preschool classroom (Gerde et al., 2012). This section discussed the development of early writing, the relationship of early reading and writing, creating a context for writing, guidelines for implementing research-based practices, and informal assessment of writing. This section on early literacy will conclude with a discussion of developmentally appropriate practices.

**Developmental Appropriate Practice (DAP)**

In 2005 the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA) published the position statement *Literacy Development in the Preschool Years* in which they stressed the importance “for children’s social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language and literacy development” (para. 1). Along with the IRA’s Preschool Literacy Collection (Morrow 2004), and the jointly published *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children* (1998) they further delineated the early literacy and oral language experiences that should be an important part of the preschool curriculum.

According to the position statement published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), developmentally appropriate practice refers to practices “that are informed by what we know from theory and literature about how children develop and learn” (p. 10). Early childhood educators facilitate children’s learning by helping them to reach achievable and challenging goals. The practices used by educators should be appropriate for the children’s age and developmental level, requiring educators to be responsive to both their social and cultural contexts in which they live. The goals and learning experiences should be suited to their learning as well as development, yet challenging enough to promote their progress and
interests (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006). Best practice refers to knowledge of how children learn and develop. The position statement, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs: Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* (2009) delineates 12 principles of child development and learning which forms a basis for decision making in the early care and education of children ages birth through age 8. These principles can be integrated into classroom teaching:

1. All areas of development and learning are important.
2. Children develop best when they have secure relationships.
3. Children learn in a variety of ways.
4. Children’s experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning.
5. Development and learning advance when children are challenged.
6. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.
8. Development and learning result from an interaction of maturation and experience.
9. Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.
10. Early experiences have profound effects on development and learning.
11. Learning and development follow sequences.
12. Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation and promoting language, cognition, and social competence (naeyc.org).

In addition to the above principles of child development and learning that inform practice, NAEYC also included in its position statement three core considerations, five guidelines for effective teaching, and effective DAP teaching strategies. Three areas of knowledge practitioners need are identified as key in order to make decisions about their classroom practices. Copple and Bredekamp (2006) stressed that *intentionality* (authors’ stress) is a “cornerstone” (p. 7) of developmentally appropriate teaching. Knowledge to make informed decisions include: (a) knowing about child development and learning, (b) knowing what is appropriate for each child, and (c) knowing what is culturally and
socially appropriate for each child and his or her family. Instructional decisions must include knowing what typically developing students are like on a broad continuum of age and development coupled with knowing about routines, activities, curriculum, and various interactions that are effective with a given group of children along with how each child functions as an individual and within the context of family, culture, social group, community, linguistic norms, past experiences, and current circumstances. Teaching and learning is a complex process requiring expert decision making (NAEYC, 2009). Children, especially at-risk students, benefit most from teachers who have the knowledge, judgment, and skills to make informed decisions (NAEYC, 2009; Snow et al., 1998).

**Summary**

Literacy coaching is being implemented in school reform efforts as a component of embedded professional development. Yet, little research regarding what transpires during coaching interactions between literacy coaches and teachers is available. Descriptive and prescriptive writings have been written about what should be occurring during coaching interactions. The complexity of adult learning is presented within a constructivist theoretical framework, including transformative theory. The consensus that teacher content knowledge as well as pedagogy knowledge is important in developing effective instructional practice. As Fullan indicated, change is complex, and as noted by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin educators must rethink our practices. Two models of change were discussed. Guskey’s model of teacher change illustrates that in order for teachers to change, their beliefs must change first, but they must see evidence from students’ achievement results. Also discussed was J. E. Taylor’s chain of instructional
improvement, which underscores the many other influences on teacher change besides coaching.

This chapter provided a broad overview of literacy coaching as well as providing a discussion of a rationale for literacy coaching, specifically in the preschool setting. Education is influenced by many factors, therefore influential U. S. legislation and research reports that have effected a paradigmatic shift from student-centered to teacher-centered initiatives to improve student learning was explored.

Traditional and embedded models of professional development were discussed, with literacy coaching being an important component of effective professional development. Within the framework of embedded professional development literacy coaching can be viewed from different perspectives. The literature included several models of coaching: training or externally designed model, process model, and cognitive coaching. Another type of model which Walpole and Meyer called hybrid models was delineated: demonstration-focused reform model, team-based reform model, and whole-school reform model.

Literacy coaches wear many hats. Their roles as coaches are contextual, varying from context to context and within context. The rigorous qualifications of literacy coaches, based upon the IRA position statement as well as the work of many researchers are included. Given that this study of literacy coaching interactions is situated in preschool, a discussion of early literacy was provided. This included definitions of emergent and early literacy. Research related to early literacy in the areas of oral language and vocabulary acquisition, print awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, and writing. Prominent research-based instructional strategies that were
discussed included shared book reading and dramatic play as they relate to early literacy development. Finally a discussion of developmental appropriate practice as outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children was included.

The next chapter delineates the methodology employed in this case study of coaching interactions with preschool teachers.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into if and how a literacy coach differentiates coaching interactions with three preschool teachers to meet their individual needs. By employing the single-case study design I was able to document if and how one literacy coach differentiated to meet the teachers’ needs. Stake (1995) stated that the purpose of a qualitative case study is to “seek greater understanding of the case. We want to appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of the case, its embeddedness and interaction with its contexts” (p. 16). This chapter describes the features of the research design including sampling, description of the participants, sites, methods of data collection, and analysis. Issues of subjectivity, reliability, and validity are also discussed.

Epistemology and Purpose

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), epistemology is the way in which humans view the world. It is through individuals’ epistemological lenses that we understand how knowledge is constructed. Researchers who view that physical and social realities are independent of the researcher subscribe to the positivist research paradigm. This objective reality remains relatively constant across time and settings. The dominate method for collecting data through this paradigm lens involves collecting numerical data on observable behaviors of samples and using statistical methods to analyze the data.
Those who view reality as being socially constructed subscribe to the interpretivist paradigm. The researcher’s “self” is an integral constructor of the social reality being studied as opposed to the objective reality of the positivist. The dominate method for collecting data through this paradigm lens involves discovering the meanings and interpretations of the phenomenon examined by studying cases intensively in natural settings and conducting an inductive analysis of the data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The positivist lens is largely associated with quantitative research, whereas the interpretivist lens is associated with qualitative research (Willis, 2007).

This study was situated within the interpretivist paradigm. I observed and interpreted the phenomenon under investigation within the social world of the participants. The purpose was to examine if and how a literacy coach interacted with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development setting to meet each preschool teacher’s instructional needs during coaching interactions.

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided this study:

1. How does a literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model?
2. What, if any, similarities and/or differences occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across three preschool teachers
3. In what ways, if any, does a literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?
Qualitative Design Decision

The qualitative case study approach is consistent with “the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Determining when to use case study design over another research design depends upon what the researcher wants to find out. Yin (2009) suggested that this research design is the preferred method when “how” and “why” questions are posited by the researcher. He further explained that case study design is favored when the researcher has little or no control over the events, and the focus is on “contemporary phenomenon” within real life contexts. Merriam (1998) further delineated that the case study design is an appropriate choice if the researcher is interested in process and what it can reveal about a phenomenon. Process is characterized by a desire to understand the processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that shed light on an issue. This study sought to find out if and how a literacy coach differentiated coaching interactions with three preschool teachers to meet their instructional needs. By employing the qualitative case study design, I gained an understanding of the process and an in-depth understanding of the early literacy coaching interactions.

The case study design was selected for what it can reveal about a phenomenon. It allows researchers to gain knowledge from the perspective of the participants of a phenomenon to which we would not normally have access. Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed context as being bounded, thus defining a case as a “phenomenon of sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). The bounded context also separates a case study from other qualitative research designs. I needed to observe the coaching interactions to be able to gain the desired knowledge of how a literacy coach interacts with preschool
teachers to meet their individual needs as well as any similarities and/or differences within and/or across each of the teachers. Through observing these interactions, I was able to witness and document how the literacy coach interacted with each teacher and in what ways differentiation occurred to meet their individual needs. To be able to understand the perspective of the participants, data from interviews were utilized. In addition, I also requested and examined the documents the literacy coach used during the observations. Thus, the use of “multiple sources of evidence” and triangulating the data yielded the insights and knowledge I was seeking in this study.

**Research Design**

The rationale for a qualitative case study aligns with the purpose of this study. The characteristics of a case study as discussed by Merriam (1998) are descriptive, heuristic, and particularistic. This case study was descriptive in that literacy coaching is a complex process. Case study methodology allowed me to explore and explain the complexities of the coaching process within the given context. The heuristic quality of the case allowed for explaining what happened and why. It is particularistic as the focus is on a “particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (p. 29). Stake (1995) indicated that the focus of case study is not generalization, but “particularization” (p. 8). This study focused upon the coaching interactions during the cyclical coaching episodes between the literacy coach and individual teachers as well as other interactions within this embedded professional development model. The cycle included a one-on-one pre-conference for planning, the in-class observation by the literacy coach, and the post-conference intended for feedback. Other interactions included interactions during small group sessions called tutorials and an all staff professional development session. Another
characteristic to consider regarding particularization is the specificity of focus. Merriam (1998) indicated that it is a good design for practical problems arising from everyday practice. Given that the focus of this study was the unique interactions between the literacy coach and the teachers she coaches, the qualitative case study was a good choice.

The strength of case studies as iterated by Rossman and Rallis (2003) is the “detail, complexity, use of multiple sources to obtain multiple perspectives” (p. 105). It was the triangulation of the data obtained from observations, interviews, and examination of critical documents that resulted in a thick description that in turn allows the reader to interpret and decide the applicability of the findings to another setting.

Another characteristic of case study design that was inherent in this study is the role of the researcher. In qualitative case study the researcher is viewed as the instrument of the study (Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2003), meaning that the researcher is the data collection instrument and as such the data are mediated through the researcher. Merriam described four stances researchers may assume during observations of the given phenomenon studied: (1) complete participant, (2) participant as observer, (3) observer as participant, and (4) complete observer. My relationship as an observer most closely approximates “observer as participant” (p. 101). In this role the researcher’s observer activities are known to the group. A more in-depth description of my relationship to this group is discussed in this chapter in the subjectivity section. These distinctions suggest a continuum from a full participant to being a complete spectator. Researchers’ reflection “is an essential mediator in the research process” (Watt, 2007, p. 83). It is the use of reflection throughout the study in which researchers consider how their own assumptions and behavior may impact the inquiry. As researchers write and reflect upon the data the
study can move forward and provide new insights (Watt, 2007). As the researcher in this proposed study, I maintained a reflective stance throughout the study as I collected, interpreted, and summarized data with a constant vigilance on my personal influence upon the participants and the findings.

**Access, Setting, and Participants**

Given that the purpose of qualitative research is to gain in-depth knowledge of a given phenomenon, researchers need to select participants with and from whom the most can be learned. Maxwell (2005) discussed that qualitative researchers typically select participants and setting deliberately in order to provide the information needed to answer the research questions. As noted by Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative samples tend to be small and “nested in their context and studied in depth” (p. 27).

This study employed purposeful sampling in order to answer the research questions. The sample for a single case study included one literacy coach and three preschool teachers who were coached by this literacy coach. One criteria used for selecting this sample was convenience. As explained below, I had access to a site which employs several literacy coaches, each working with several preschool teachers. The particular sample considered for this study was recommended informally by the program director because the literacy coach was an information rich sample. The selected literacy coach was asked to select three teachers she coaches who would be an information rich sample and would allow me to observe and document the one-on-one coaching episodes. Traditionally these are considered private interactions between the literacy coach and teacher. Also, I needed them to agree to an interview a few days after the observed coaching episodes. In addition, I needed them to allow me to electronically record these
private coaching conversations and interviews. This single case study allowed me to study in depth how a literacy coach differentiated coaching interactions with preschool teachers to meet their individual needs “to yield the best data” (Yin, 2009, p. 91).

**IRB Assurances**

I developed a professional relationship with the director of the Early Reading First initiative (the gatekeeper) at the University while I was working as a literacy instructor through the state’s Department of Education’s on-line professional development series. She and I had an informal conversation in which we discussed the proposed study and the possibility of conducting the study at the sites in which she is involved. She gave me verbal permission and asked that I meet with all the literacy coaches in order to discuss the study and get feedback from them (personal communication, January 27, 2011). I complied by meeting with the literacy coaches on May 23, 2011. They verbally indicated their willingness to participate. I obtained written permission from the gatekeeper(s) and informed consent from all the participants. Drafts of the letters are in Appendices A and B.

I obtained permission from the gatekeeper(s). These include the director of the program and each site building administrator. Informed consent was obtained from the literacy coach and teachers who agreed to participate so that I may use the data from the collection of documents, observations, and interviews. Pseudonyms for all participants and sites were used to protect their identity. All documents were secured in my home office, and electronic documents were password secured on my computer and Dropbox.

In accordance with the guidelines of The University of Akron regarding the protection of human participants, a request for review was submitted to The University of
Akron Institutional Review Board (IRB). Approval was requested to observe and interview four participants for this study. Approval was requested to video and audio record the observations and the interviews. IRB approval was received March 23, 2012 (Appendix J); participant recruitment and data collection began immediately with the first observation commencing on April 2, 2012.

Setting

The setting for this study was a Head Start Program in an urban city in a Great Lakes state. The Head Start Program was involved in a three-year Early Reading First initiative in collaboration with a university in that city. Head Start is a federally funded program that provides preschool for at-risk students. This program serves over 300 at-risk children in five Head Start sites in high poverty communities throughout the city.

The Early Reading First/Head Start program goals address high priority knowledge and skills preschoolers need to learn; high priority knowledge and skills teachers and teacher assistants need to teach; the design of high quality 21st century language and literacy-rich environments; active parent engagement; and mobilizing the community around strong preschool literacy education. (Project Abstracts, 2009)

The exact sites were determined based upon the selection of the teachers. Two sites were involved in this study. Two teachers were at site A, and one teacher was at site B.

Participants

**Literacy coach.** Literacy coaches participate in monthly training to hone their coaching skills and continue to build content knowledge as well as participating in professional development along with the teachers in the preschool program. One job of literacy coaches is coaching teachers. They assist classroom teachers with implementing
research-based strategies for preschool in the areas of oral language development and literacy. There are four literacy coaches working in the Early Reading First (ERF) and Head Start initiative. The ERF director made recommendations of which literacy coach is highly qualified and would provide the information rich data desired for this study. The literacy coach was selected based upon the belief that she would provide information rich data as well as being highly qualified. Each of the literacy coaches are assigned specific teachers they coach. The selected literacy coach was asked to select three of the teachers she coaches to participate in this study. The participants needed to be willing to have me observe their one-on-one coaching episodes, and to have me document the post-conferences using digital audio and video recordings. They also agreed to allow me to observe and record their interactions during their tutorials and staff professional development sessions. In addition, I needed them to agree to an interview with me following their observed post-conferences. Likewise, these were also digitally recorded. This type of purposeful sampling is referred to as network sampling (Patton as cited in Merriam, 1998). The participants were one literacy coach and three preschool teachers whom she coached.

**Teachers.** In this Early Reading First initiative with Head Start each literacy coach is assigned four teachers in the preschool. The literacy coach was asked to select three of the teachers she coached who were willing to allow me to observe and video record the coaching interactions and who would be good sources of information during interviews following the coaching episodes. The demographic information of the participants was obtained during interviews with each of them. Table 3.1 summarizes the demographic information of each participant.
Table 3.1

Demographic Information of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years in Head Start/university collaborative</th>
<th>Years in Head Start</th>
<th>Highest degree level</th>
<th>Certificate/licensure</th>
<th>Total years teaching</th>
<th>Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Literacy Coach</td>
<td>2.75 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Masters/doctoral student</td>
<td>1. Preschool-grade 2. Reading 3. Literacy Specialist Endorsement</td>
<td>25 in early childhood</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Associate/working toward bachelor</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Kendal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kendal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Bryant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were not equally forthcoming with information during the study. Paula, the literacy coach, was very forthright. She and I met six times throughout the data collection process, as well as engaging in phone conversations to clarify my observations of her interactions with the teachers.

The teachers varied in how much information they shared. Amy seemed to be very transparent and inquisitive. During tutorials she was the quickest to respond to Paula’s questions or ask questions. The one-on-one conferences were filled with rich dialogue between her and Paula. She and Paula were able to delve into more topics during their one-on-one conferences compared to the other two teacher participants. During the interview with me, she was willing and did expand upon almost everything asked.
Sally seemed to be very thoughtful regarding her interactions. Paula described her as being slow and steady, having to slow herself down so as not to overwhelm Sally. During my interview with Sally, she nodded her head indicating she did not want to elaborate on some of what was asked, such as implementing the instructional protocols (Interview, PR_ Sally, May 15, 2012).

Megan appeared very guarded in her responses. She would give one word or short responses. An example from a one-on-one conference is:

Paula: …tell me what you thought about your physical proximity to the children.
Megan: Close.
Paula: Tell me more about that.
Megan: Engaging.

Megan eventually did open up, but not until page 8 of the transcript (PC, Megan, April 19, 2012, pp. 1-8). Megan was also absent from one of three tutorials during this study, thus part of a one-on-one conference was Paula sharing and discussing the content from the missed tutorial so Megan would have the same information as the other teachers.

Throughout the reporting of the data in Chapter IV, I tried to choose excerpts from the various interactions that best illustrated the theme being discussed. Therefore, examples from the three teacher participants are not equally illustrated.

**Data Collection**

Willis (2007) discussed the purpose of qualitative research from the interpretivist viewpoint as pushing for understanding “of the topic of study in context” (p. 105). The preferred data sources to support this line of inquiry are those that are “close to the point of application” (p. 111). Merriam (1998) emphasized that the primary means of collecting
data in qualitative research are field observations, interviewing, and document analysis. Yin (2009) discussed three principles that are relevant to data collection. Principle 1 is using multiple sources of evidence. He also contended that the strength of case study research is the “opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” (p. 114). The use of multiple data sources allows for the development of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2009). This is discussed further in the Reliability and Validity section of this chapter. This study drew upon the data sources outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection tool</th>
<th>How it will be used</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Log Trail</td>
<td>Audit trail</td>
<td>To document how data will be collected, categories are developed, and how decisions were made throughout the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>To record my perceptions of what was happening in the field and during the interviews. These were expanded into descriptive, personal, and analytic notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview transcripts</td>
<td>Observation transcripts</td>
<td>To document the information from the interviews and observations. To code and analyze the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes</td>
<td></td>
<td>To list, operationalize, and note code changes for data analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Observations</td>
<td>Observations of Literacy coach and Preschool teachers</td>
<td>To study the interactions between the literacy coach and preschool teachers during the coaching episodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Literacy coach</td>
<td>To investigate how a literacy coach differentiates to meet teachers’ needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>To investigate the teachers’ understanding of how a literacy coach differentiates to meet their needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2

Data Collection Tools and Procedures (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection tool</th>
<th>How it will be used</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documents/Taping/Photos</td>
<td>Instructional documents</td>
<td>To understand how the literacy coach prepares for one-on-one coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>episodes with teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio and Video taping</td>
<td></td>
<td>To document the exact transactions during the observations and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To document the nuances of body language and the stress and pitch of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the speech of the participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To document the use of any documents by the participants during the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coaching episodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital photos</td>
<td></td>
<td>To document the context of the coaching interactions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A discussion of these data sources follows.

**Observations**

Stake (1995) discussed observations as being a technique researchers use to increase their understanding of the case being studied; however, it is recommended to look at a few aspects of the observations. The aspects to look at are “identified by the issues” (p. 60). Yin (2009) emphasized that researchers should keep the research questions with them as a reference when out in the field. This kept me on track during data collection. Site observations of these coaching interactions were necessary to garner an in-depth description of how an early literacy coach differentiated coaching interactions with preschool teachers to meet their individual needs. Documentation of these observations was in the form of note taking, video and digital recording, and digital pictures. I arrived early so I could make notes and take pictures of the physical site in
which the coaching interactions took place. In addition to note-taking during these observations, I digitally videotaped and audio recorded the coaching sessions.

The digital audio recordings served to document the coaching conversations including the stress and pitch of the participants’ dialogue. The video recordings documented the nuances of the participants’ body language as well as the use of any documents obtained during the literacy coach’s in-class observations. In addition, the video accurately documented the physical context of the coaching sessions and captured things not seen (Maxwell, 2005). Although this information could be garnered from the video recording, I found it easier to transcribe from a digital audio recorder. Snippets of the video recordings were used during the interviews for clarifying what occurred during the observed conferences. The audio recordings were transcribed as soon as possible after the observations. Field notes from the video recordings were used to further describe the nuances of body language, the setting, and any documents being used during the coaching episodes. Given that my purpose was to gain an in-depth understanding of how an early literacy coach differentiated coaching interactions with preschool teachers to meet their individual needs, I transcribed the digital recordings of the conversations. I reviewed the video recordings to notate if and what documents were used during the coaching conversations. These were entered into my audio transcripts as descriptive notes. Field notes were typed and expanded within 24 hours of each observation. Most audio recordings were transcribed within 72 hours of their occurrence. All transcripts, notes, documents, videotapes, and pictures were organized and categorized to be able to easily retrieve them as needed (Yin, 2009).
Field Notes

Researchers use field notes as a written record of their perceptions in the field. Rossman and Rallis (2003) discussed writing field notes as being needed “to systematically record your impressions, insights, and emerging hypothesis” (p. 195). They continued to explain that according to Geertz (1973), writing up of the raw field notes into usable data is when researchers begin to write thick descriptions. As recommended, I expanded the field notes as soon as possible (within 24 hours) after the site observations and participants’ interviews. This allowed for an accurate documentation of the event. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) subscribed to reviewing and expanding the notes the same day as they were written in the field, as remembering the details declines rapidly. This allowed me to expand them into descriptive, analytic, and personal notes.

Descriptive notes are a detailed description of the visit in chronological order. These notes may include sketches or actual pictures of the setting and participants as well as notes of the dialogue between participants. These notes enabled me to visualize that which was described. Analytic notes include the researchers’ thoughts, ideas, and impressions about what is occurring during the observations or interviews. Questions may emerge; problem identification may arise, as well as understandings of the patterns and themes observed. In essence, analytic notes are a type of data analysis that is ongoing throughout the study. Personal notes are those notes in which researchers reflect upon how they feel about or react to that which was observed. It is during the reflective note writing that researchers begin to recognize and deal with their own subjectivity (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).
Interviews

Maxwell (2005) cited Becker (1970) that “interviews enable you to collect ‘rich’ data . . . that are detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on” (p. 110). Qualitative researchers strive to portray multiple views of the case (Stake, 1995). The interviewing technique is the “crucial way to get rich, detailed data about how people view their worlds” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 182). Interviewing the participants, which included the literacy coach and the teachers, is the method I used to gain this understanding, referred to as the emic perspective.

Stake (1995) viewed the researcher as being a “repository” (p. 66) during the interview. He suggested scheduling a time and place to immediately prepare a facsimile and interpretive commentary of the interview as opposed to digitally recording the account. After reconstructing the account of the interview, it should be submitted to the interviewee “for accuracy and stylistic improvement” (p. 66). Maxwell (2005), on the other hand, asserted that a digital recording and subsequent transcription of the interview is significant in documenting this transaction. I am a novice researcher and ascribe to Maxwell’s view. I digitally recorded the interviews and transcribed them within 72 hours. The greater the time spans between the coaching episodes and interviews, the more the level of recall may decrease. I developed semi-structured interview protocols—one to be used with the literacy coach and one to be used with the teachers (Appendices C and D). The interview questions are reflective of the literature and the purpose of this study. The use of a semi-structured interview protocol as opposed to a structured interview protocol allowed me the freedom to follow up on ideas that emerged during the interviews, following the lead of the participant while addressing the purpose of this study. The
interview questions allowed me to better understand the processes of the literacy coach and how the literacy coach and teachers interpret the coaching. I had a content expert critique the questions I developed, ensuring I addressed the purpose and questions guiding this study. The questions were piloted with a literacy coach and two preschool teachers who did not participate in this study. This allowed me to check for language, understanding, and participant interpretation of the questions.

All transcripts, notes, digital recordings, and pictures were organized and categorized to be able to easily retrieve them as needed (Yin, 2009). A copy of the Interview Transcript is in Appendix E.

Documents

Hodder (1994) described documents as being “prepared for personal rather than official reasons” (p. 393). Such written texts are important in qualitative research because the information may be different from and may not be available in spoken form. In addition “texts endure and thus give historical insight” (p. 393). Such texts can be used with other forms of evidence to compare and understand the biases of each. These material items can “give insight into the thought processes of an individual” (p. 398).

Stake (1995) recommended that when reviewing documents, researchers should use the same line of thinking as when observing and interviewing. Researchers should also be open to unexpected clues. These may be analyzed for frequencies and contingencies. Documents from the field can serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly.

In addition to the documents created from transcribing the observations, interviews, and field notes, the literacy coach used written research-based instructional
protocols developed to assist them during their classroom observations. The information garnered from these observation tools or instructional protocols were used to guide the post-conferences with the classroom teachers. The focus of this study was not on the actual classroom observations, but on the interactions between the literacy coach and preschool teachers. The information from these documents was used to develop a deeper understanding of the focus during the conferences. The literacy coach did share the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument and Shared Book Reading protocols during the classroom observations. She did not share the actual documents with me; however, information gleaned from these documents was evident during the post-conferences with the teachers. It was my intention to find out if and how these protocols were used to help prepare for the post-conferences. Several other documents were prepared by the literacy coach that was used during tutorial and professional development sessions. Copies of these were shared with me. Field notes were written upon them, analyzed, and clarified by the literacy coach during subsequent interviews. The literacy coach met with me five times in addition to the final interview. In those conversations we did discuss each of the documents that were shared with me. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested using a document summary form to be attached to any documents gathered in the field. The purpose was to explain its significance, give a summary, put it in context, and to include field notes (Appendix F). Given my novice status, I used this form with documents gathered in the field. A brief description of each observation instrument follows.
Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process in which researchers make sense of the data (Merriam, 1998). It is an ongoing, complex process and begins with data management (Creswell, 2007). It is further described in qualitative research as a recursive spiral as opposed to a linear process (Creswell, 2007; Grbich, 2007). The process involves defining the question, going out into the field, examining the data collected, adjusting the various tools of questioning, sampling approach, design aspect and data collection in light of emerging issues, and then returning to the field to find out more. This process continues until no new data emerge and the question has been answered.

Miles and Huberman (1994) subscribed to an analytic strategy to make sense of the data. This involves writing marginal notes in the researcher’s field notes including reflective passages, writing summaries of the field notes, identifying codes and writing memos, noting patterns and themes, and making contrasts and comparisons.

Data analysis is ongoing or occurs simultaneously throughout the study, meaning that analysis begins immediately after each observation or each interview and continues as long as the researcher is working (Maxwell, 2005). Each observation and interview was transcribed as soon as possible after the interaction. Each document was read. I wrote notes and memos on each transcript and other documents used by the literacy coach. These notes pertained to what I saw or heard in the data. My study questions were at the forefront. I read to find evidence to support or not support the questions. All documents were read and reread to determine tentative ideas about categories and relationships (i.e., What or if there is a relationship between the documents used during the coaching conversations and how were they used to differentiate to meet teachers’ needs?).
Data Management

As discussed previously, Creswell (2007) stressed that data analysis begins with data management. Merriam (1998) also iterated the importance of data management especially in case studies. Multiple sources of data were used to gather data: field observations, participant interviews, and documents from the field. The digital recordings of the observations and interviews were transcribed by me. All documents created as well as those used by the literacy coach were indexed. They were numbered, dated, and given a reference number connecting them to my field notes. The transcriptions and field notes were coded as well as pertinent documents from the field.

Merriam (1998) stressed that collecting and analyzing the data is a complex process and should occur simultaneously in qualitative research. Yin (2009) recommended creating a data base for organizing all the documents as well as the digital recordings. Creating a data base “markedly increases the reliability of the entire case study” (p. 119). The data base serves as a warehouse of the data collected. Like a warehouse, it is organized and documents the data collected. The data base allows researchers to easily access specific data during analysis (Merriam, 1998). In addition, it allows for an audit trail, thus increasing the reliability of the study (Yin, 2009). An audit trail is a complete documentation of the research process used in a case study (Gall et al., 2005). It enables other researchers to be able to review the data making it possible for them to replicate the process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data were maintained in four places: (1) on the researcher’s computer, (2) in the researcher’s Dropbox, (3) in an external hard drive, and (4) in designated notebooks. The
electronic storage was password sensitive. The hard copies and electronic backup storage were secured in my home office.

Coding

Coding as described by Maxwell (2005) is a “categorizing strategy” (p. 96) used to facilitate a comparison between things in the same category. Initially the coding of the data began by developing an *a priori* list, which is rooted in the literature. The data were coded initially according to the *a priori* list (Appendix G). Other codes emerged during data analysis and with subsequent conversations with the methodologist. As a starting point to develop a coding list, I first considered what tools the literacy coach used during the classroom observations to focus her attention. These included the various instructional protocols and other information from documents created based upon her observations. I also included student data from formal and informal assessments that mediated literacy coach/teacher conversations. The literacy coach’s goal to nudge the teachers to become more reflective in their instructional practices was an area that emerged during her reflective conversations with me. She was very specific about a source she refers to in her own questioning techniques. She referred to Rodgers and Rodgers (2007). I did include the types of questions recommended by Rodgers and Rodgers to foster different kinds of thinking (i.e., to elicit information, questions to press for reflection). After sharing this with a content expert, it was suggested to include types of responses by the teachers as well. During reading and coding of the transcripts, it became evident that I should also include kinds of responses from the literacy coach to the teachers’ questions and/or comments (i.e., supportive, suggestive). Upon more research and data analysis, scaffolding was added to the coding list.
I adapted the work of Rodgers (2004) as described in Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) to categorize the level of scaffolding provided by the coach during her interactions with teachers. Rodgers (2004) described these scaffolding actions during one-on-one tutoring sessions with struggling readers. Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) adapted and described these actions related to coaching interactions between literacy coaches and teachers. The levels of support from least to most supportive are questioning, directing, modeling, and telling. These are defined with examples from the data in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Scaffolding Actions From Least to Most Supportive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples (from my data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>The literacy coach asks the teachers a question</td>
<td>“What were your intentions for that?” (Data chart, LC and T1, April 10, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>The literacy coach directs the teacher to take a specific action.</td>
<td>“What I need you to do is catch up these three [students’ assessments] from week four and six. Let me know when you get them done” (Data chart, LC and T2, April 19, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>The literacy coach assumes the teacher’s role and demonstrates a problem-solving action.</td>
<td>Literacy coach uses the think aloud strategy to demonstrate self-reflection while using a video clip of her singing (Data chart, LC and T3, May 2, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling</td>
<td>The literacy coach tells or provides the teacher with specific information.</td>
<td>“…it seemed like there was a nice balance between what you were doing and she (teacher assistant) was doing with the kids” (Data chart, LC and T1, April 10, 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from E. Rodgers (2004); Rodgers & Rodgers (2007).
Within cycles of interactions between the literacy coach and teachers, I coded these categories to reveal the level of support garnered by the literacy coach. A sample of this analysis is provided in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Coded Literacy Coach’s Action Within a Coaching Episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction cycle</th>
<th>Type of action by the literacy coach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy coach</td>
<td>Well, I’m willing to help you with this because it concerns me so much…I would be willing to draw up a very simple letter, show it to you, give me your feedback, and then see if a graduate assistant can work on a couple of these things [alphabet letter activities for parent/child summer activity packet] (Transcript, T3, May 9, 2012, p. 10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During a second round of coding, I described the content of the interaction. I indicated this in parenthesis next to the type of action exhibited by the literacy coach. This allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the content of the help given. During the time of analysis, this seemed to be relevant in order to have a deeper understanding of the level of scaffolding provided (Journal, p. 66, September 23, 2013).

**Member Checking**

Member checking is a recursive strategy employed in qualitative research to enhance internal validity (Merriam, 1998). The process involves researchers writing up their tentative interpretations following an observation or interview. Researchers then give this to the participant(s) to read in order to verify the results. This process is ongoing throughout the data collection. By using this strategy researchers are able to represent the
emic perspective. Following feedback from the participants, researchers can correct any factual errors or they may need to collect more data to resolve discrepancies (Gall et al., 2005). Member checking was implemented by sharing the summaries with the literacy coach and classroom teachers for their feedback of accuracy and completeness. I communicated with the participants via email. I attached my summaries to them, and they in turn emailed affirmations to me. Throughout the data collection and afterwards, the literacy coach clarified what I was observing during multiple conversations with her. Such clarification included, but was not limited to, actions during her interactions with the teachers, how she planned for the interactions, or the documents she used during the interactions.

**Data Displays**

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), creating data displays is part of data analysis. They are a way of organizing the condensed information “that permits conclusion drawing and action” (p. 11). They described several types of displays: matrices, graphs, charts, and networks. Miles and Huberman contended that making a matrix of findings by the data sources and or methods aids the researcher to see how well they are supported. The researcher should note any inconsistencies and contradictions.

Initially, I looked for clusters of meaningful text that is coaching as opposed to text that is not coaching (i.e., During the shared book reading . . . versus . . . How are you today?). Once the meaningful texts were identified, they were marked with colored pencils based upon their similarities. As previously discussed in the coding subsection, I then analyzed the data to code them according to the *a priori* list. The coded data chunks were recorded in a matrix (Appendix H). The code list changed based upon what
emerged during the observations and interviews. Displaying these data enable researchers
to delve deeper into the meaning such as looking for trends, patterns, and themes; making
contrasts and comparisons (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As data were collected, analysis
involved looking for patterns and themes within the case. Then comparisons were made
between teachers, looking for ways in which the literacy coach may or may not differ in
her support to each of the teachers and if so, how and why she differs in her interactions.

In review of data analysis for this study, analysis began with organizing the data
base (prior to the first observation). Data analysis was a recursive process. Following a
day in the field, the field notes were expanded, followed by transcribing the digital
recordings. Marginal notes were written on the documents in preparation for the
interview with the teacher participants and literacy coach. Analysis for chunks of
coaching talk was marked on the transcriptions. The interview protocol was amended to
reflect thoughts that emerged from the observations. The same process was followed after
the interviews. In addition, field notes were added to the transcriptions based upon data
gleaned from the video that is not evident on the digital recordings. Summaries of the
coaching observations and interviews were written and submitted to the participants to
verify my findings. Coding of the data initially began with the *a priori* code list but was
amended as information emerged from the observations, interviews, and documents.
Chunks of data were entered into a matrix to aid in the review of the data for emerging
themes that answered the questions of this study.

**Validity and Reliability**

Merriam (1998) stressed that “All research is concerned with producing valid and
reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (p. 198). Quantitative researchers use different
procedures than qualitative researchers. Quantitative studies employ manipulation of a given variable and measured with a certain measurement instrument. The validity of the tool measures what it says it measures. The reliability of the tool measures something consistently (Salkind, 2008). Statistics are used to describe the psychometric properties of scores in quantitative studies (Gall et al., 2007). Qualitative studies employ methods that are not explained statistically. In general, qualitative researchers use words to describe the phenomenon under study. The decision to include a piece of evidence in the research is determined by researchers based upon their perspective. Therefore, qualitative researchers employ techniques to corroborate the rigor or the validity and reliability of a given study.

Yin (2009) posited three principles of data collection which address the validity and reliability of qualitative case study research: (a) Principle 1 is using multiple sources of evidence, (b) Principle 2 is creating a case study database, and (b) Principle 3 is maintaining a chain of evidence. The following discussion will include these principles along with the tests used to “establish the quality of any empirical social research” (p. 40), and the techniques that address the issues of validity and reliability.

**Validity**

Validity in research is a crucial issue in research design (Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Maxwell (2005) discussed validity as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106). He further explained validity in terms of “validity threat . . .” (p. 106, author emphasis) or the way researchers might be wrong. The threats can be thought of as “alternative explanations” (p. 106). He suggested that researchers need to use strategies to identify
and try to rule out any plausible threats to validity. Maxwell (1992) delineated five types of validity used to assess the trustworthiness of a study: (a) descriptive validity, (b) interpretive validity, (c) theoretical validity, (d) generalizability, and (e) evaluative validity. I will describe the first four as they are applicable to this study. I will also include a discussion of the methods used to address the validity threats.

Descriptive validity is described as the accurateness of researchers’ accounts of what is observed and heard (Maxwell, 1992). This also includes the interpretation of that which is inferred from other documents such as data from the instructional protocols used by the literacy coach in this case study. The strategies employed in this qualitative case study were digital and video recordings, digital pictures, and note taking during the direct observations of the coaching episodes and interviews of the participants. The recordings were transcribed as soon as possible following the observations and interviews. The video recordings documented the literacy coach’s use of any documents used during her in-class observations as well as the stress and pitch of the participants’ speech, and the body language of the participants. The digital pictures and video documented the physical environment in which the one-on-one coaching sessions occurred. These were analyzed, dated, and given a reference number connecting them to my field notes. I also maintained and documented an audit trail through a rich description of the phenomenon under study. Respondent validation or member checking was employed to solicit feedback from the participants regarding the accurateness of my description. This allowed me to identify my own biases and possible misunderstandings of what I observed.

Interpretive validity is “grounded in the language” of the participants (Maxwell, 1992, p. 289). The interpretation rests in the researcher’s ability to accurately report the
findings in the emic perspective. The participants’ meanings are interpreted by the researcher based upon the data assembled from the participants’ explanations and triangulated with other data sources. This study employed triangulation of the data sets derived from the direct observations of the coaching interactions, interviews of the participants, documents used by the literacy coach during her in-class observations, video and digital recordings of the coaching episodes, and my notes. As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1995), matrices and charts were used to triangulate the data. Such displays can supply the information needed to provide explanations of the phenomenon being studied and why things are happening the way they are (p. 90). Alternate views were garnered from a member of the dissertation committee or content experts. Also, member checking from the participants during the inquiry served to corroborate the findings.

Theoretical validity “addresses the theoretical constructions that the researcher brings to, or develops during, the study” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 291). This study was grounded in the constructivist theoretical perspective as discussed in chapter II. Wells (2000) discussed language as being a powerful means to support and extend thinking through dialogue between individuals in a form of collaborative meaning-making. It was these conversations between the literacy coach and preschool teachers that were studied to gain a deeper understanding of how the literacy coach scaffolded teachers to new insights regarding their observed teaching practices.

Threats to Validity

Maxwell (2005) contended that “validity threats are made implausible by evidence, not methods” (p. 105). We use various methods to get the evidence. This single
case study included one literacy coach and three preschool teachers she coached to use literacy research-based practices. The purpose was to gain a deep understanding of how the literacy coach differentiated to meet the needs of each of the three preschool teachers during their interactions.

Various strategies that were used to enhance validity are discussed in this chapter. The techniques used in this case study to control for threats to the validity were repeated observations of the phenomenon, video and audio digital recordings of the observations and interviews, member checks, triangulation of the data, clarifying my biases, and maintaining a chain of evidence. In addition I shared my initial findings with a member of my committee who was able to offer alternate explanations and suggestions.

I developed a chain of evidence during the on-going data analysis through the creation and use of matrices and charts as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). During the writing of the final report, I linked the purpose of the study with the questions and citing evidence from the data which was stored in the database for later retrieval.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is a process in which researchers use multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) iterated that triangulation “is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it” (p. 266). Stake (1995) contended that triangulating the data increases the confidence in our interpretations. This study employed multiple methods previously discussed. Each source has different biases and strengths so as to “complement each
other” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Multiple sources of data were used allowing for verification of my findings by triangulating the data.

**Generalizability**

Generalizability in qualitative research is problematic (Maxwell, 1992). In quantitative research generalizability is the ability to generalize the findings to other populations not directly studied. The purpose in a qualitative case study is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon to be studied and may only be applicable to a similar group. One aspect discussed by Maxwell is generalizing within the group studied, or internal generalizability. A second aspect is generalizing to other groups, or external generalizability. In this single case study the purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of if and how a literacy coach differentiated to meet three preschool teachers’ instructional needs. Thus, internal generalizability was more applicable to this proposed study. Creswell (2007) discussed the “rich, thick description” that allows readers to be able to decide whether the information can be transferred to their settings. I provided enough information about the process, the setting, the participants, and the outcomes. If the description resonates with the readers, then they are more likely to generalize the findings to their own setting.

**Reliability**

Yin (2009) explained reliability as “demonstrating the operations of a study—such as the data collection procedures . . .” (p. 40). The data collection procedures should be explicitly outlined so that they can be repeated with the same results. Merriam (1998) iterated that traditional reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be
replicated. In qualitative research researchers “explain the world as those in the world experience it” (p. 205). Merriam argued that in qualitative research “replication . . . will not yield the same results (p. 206). She concurred with Guba (1985) regarding the results in terms of “dependability” or “consistency.” In other words, given the data collected the reader must decide if the results are consistent and make sense. Yin (2009) contended that creating a data base (Principle 2 concerning data collection) “markedly increases the reliability (stress by author) of the entire case study” (p. 119). Creating and maintaining a case study database allows for the possibility of other researchers to review the evidence directly. Miles and Huberman (1994) described documenting or keeping a detailed record of the procedures as a way of connecting with varied audiences. The audiences described are “self, readers of the research reports, and other researchers who are interested in secondary analysis of the data” [author emphasis] (p. 280). In this proposed study, I maintained a database of the collected, coded, and analyzed data. In addition documentation in the form of a log trail was maintained (Table 3.1).

Principle 3: Maintain a chain of evidence as posited by Yin (2009); this becomes evident in the final write up of the report. The reader of the case study should be able to follow the logic of the researcher from the questions of the study to the final conclusions. This was operationalized by including reference and citations to relevant portions of the data housed in the database. Displaying data in matrices during the data analysis aids researchers in building a logical chain of evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In summary, I operationalized the various techniques described during this proposed study to control for validity and reliability while also addressing biases of the research that may arise. Triangulating from multiple data sources enabled me to control
for descriptive and interpretive validity as well as reliability. As the analysis of data was completed and written, the participants were given my drafts to review and write comments as to the accuracy of what was reported about my observations and interviews. Revisions were made accordingly, hence addressing issues of descriptive and interpretive validity as well as generalizability. In addition, I discussed online with more knowledgeable others regarding my findings throughout the data collection and writing. This allowed me to seek opposing viewpoints. A database was created for retrieval of the data. A chain of evidence is evident by the creation of matrices and charts to aid in the analysis of data and through the eventual writing of the final report which addresses descriptive validity as well as increasing the reliability of the information. Theoretical validity was addressed throughout the writing as I referenced constructivist thinking to support this study. Discussion of researcher bias and subjectivity is addressed in the next section.

**Bias and Subjectivity**

**Bias**

Maxwell (2005) iterated the traditional explanation of bias as being “what you bring to the research from your own background and identity has been treated as “bias,” something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component of it” (p. 37). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) stated the opposing view of subjectivity as “something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise” (p. 104). Merriam (1998) recognized that biases “are inherent” in qualitative research. As discussed earlier, the researcher is viewed as the primary instrument of the study (Merriam, 1998; Rossman
& Rallis, 2003). Therefore, all data collection and analyses are filtered through the lens of the researcher. Researchers bring to the study their world views, epistemological lens, and perspectives on the topic being studied. It is important that qualitative researchers be sensitive to the biases existing in both the researcher and participants.

Researchers employ various tactics in order to control for bias during all phases of the research process. Such tactics have been described in the above discussion of validity and reliability. Rossman and Rallis (2003) discussed one tactic employed in qualitative research is to explicitly delineate the purpose and questions of the study (Chapters 1 and 3). They also stressed being meticulous about documenting the “deliberate and conscious” (p. 179) process in a way that is understandable to others. They recommended keeping a log of the process (Table 3.1). The log I maintained included my reflections regarding possible instances of bias.

Gall et al. (2005) dealt specifically with interviewing and observations. They suggested that audio taping the interviews and using a structured interview format will reduce the effects of bias. In addition, formulating the questions for the interviews should be tied to the study questions. The interview questions should be reviewed by others for the purpose of addressing signs of bias in the questions. These tactics are discussed in the data collection section of this chapter. The presence of the observer during the observations of the phenomenon being studied “are likely to have some impact on the persons being observed” (p. 135). It is suggested that observers remain as unobtrusive as possible and not to begin recording of data immediately. This may allow the participants to get accustomed to the presence of the observer and engage in their customary behavior. My first site observation was during a small group meeting between the literacy
coach and the teachers she coached. I did not digitally record the interaction during that first observation. The literacy coach introduced me at the beginning of the session, but forgot to have me talk with the teachers in order to obtain their permission to record the interactions until the end of the session. Therefore, I only had field notes and the documents used during the first tutorial session for analysis (Field Notes, April 2, 2012).

Qualitative researchers triangulate the data from multiple sources to control for errors and bias by seeking corroboration from other data sources (Gall et al., 2007). Willis (2007) suggested having others who may hold different biases, read drafts of the on-going analysis. This allows for opposing views of the researchers analysis and conclusions. During the final analysis and reporting of the conclusions, qualitative researchers do not generalize to the public but rather to the participants that are studied.

**Subjectivity**

The perspective and role of researchers in qualitative research is important because of how closely involved they are with the data collection and analysis. Quantitative researchers use some kind of instrument that involves statistical analysis. Qualitative researchers are the data collection instrument. Maxwell (2005) pointed out that researchers bring their own experiential knowledge to the study. They are closely tied to the study by their interest which motivates them to engage in the study. Researchers should not impose their own “assumptions and values on the research” (p. 38).

Maxwell suggested writing identity memos for the purpose of reflecting upon one’s own goals and relevance to the research. These memos can also be used to explore the researcher’s assumptions and experiential knowledge. Peshkin (1988) demonstrated a
form of writing using ‘I’ statements to monitor researcher’s subjectivity. The purpose
being to become aware of where “self and subject are intertwined” (p. 20). He argued that
researchers should identify their subjectivity throughout their studies, not as a
retrospective exercise after the data has been collected.

In this study I used a reflective stance to monitor my subjectivity during data
collection, analysis, and case write up. The following section describes my own
subjectivity including my experiences and any connections that are or are not related to
the study. I shall also note any connections with the participants or settings in this study.

Positionality Profile

Biases are inherent in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). The researcher is
viewed as the primary instrument of the study (Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2003),
thus data collection and analyses are filtered through the lens of the researcher. My stance
in this qualitative single case-study was best identified as observer as participant. In this
position the researcher’s activities are known to the group (Merriam, 1998). Given that
this was a case study, and I was the collector of the data, it was necessary to address my
own potential bias that could come to bear on the collection and analysis of the data.

From the beginning of the study I disclosed to the participants my experience in
education, in the classroom, and as a literacy specialist. We met and discussed the
purpose of the study, their roles as participants, and the data collection methods to be
used. It was also fully explained that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

I can be viewed as an insider in the area of literacy education including literacy
coaching. My passion for literacy is exemplified in my educational background. My
degrees and endorsement include a Master of Science degree in reading and the literacy
specialist endorsement from the Ohio Department of Education. My varied experiences and ongoing studies in education have formed my beliefs and practices as a teacher and literacy specialist. At the time of this study, I had more than 30 years of experience as an educator at the elementary school level in an urban district. I had many successful years of teaching in the classroom. I taught first, fourth, and fifth grades, children with learning and behavior disorders; reading intervention specialist under Title I, and I tutored kindergarten children in the area of literacy. The last seven years of my career in the public schools was that of a literacy specialist/coach with teachers of preschool through grade three.

As a literacy specialist/coach, I had extensive training through Ohio’s Reading First Initiative, the Literacy Specialist Endorsement Program, and the Early Reading First Initiative. I was also trained through the mentoring program from the Ohio Department of Education. This was in addition to my masters in reading. My experience actively mentoring and coaching teachers within an embedded professional development framework in literacy research-based practices spanned several years. My training, reading and work experiences in the field has formed my beliefs related to literacy development and literacy coaching. However, it was working directly with the preschool program as a literacy specialist that really opened my eyes to the importance of the quality of teaching during this period of growth and development for children in this age group. I was totally amazed at what the children in this age group are capable of doing and learning.

This case study has given me the opportunity to document the very private conversations between the literacy coach and teachers, to reflect upon those interactions,
and also specifically investigate how a preschool literacy coach differentiates to meet the instructional needs of the teachers she coached. This was a different experience for me, observing, recording, and listening to the literacy coach as she reflected upon her coaching interactions.

This study did not take place in the school district in which I worked, thus I had no contact with the participants until the beginning of the selection of participants. My position as a researcher had no bearing on their work with each other or in their classrooms. All of my data was kept confidential; pseudonyms were used throughout the study and shared only with the dissertation committee. As the researcher in this study, I did keep my opinions to myself and gave no advice when solicited by the participants in this study. My work in this area motivated me to delve deeply into how a literacy coach differentiates to meet the needs of the teachers whom she coaches. A data collection timeline follows.

**Data Collection Timeline**

Data collection began as soon as possible after the Institutional Review Board approved the proposal. Given that this was a case study, the timeline was based upon the literacy coach’s schedule with the teachers she coached. The timeframe for on-site data collection was April 2 to June 29, 2012 or the end of the academic school year in which the preschool operated.
Table 3.5

Data Collection and Analysis Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection tool</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site Observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorials</td>
<td>April 2, 16, and 30, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>May 15 – June 8, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Coach</td>
<td>June 7 and June 11, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Coach (informal)</td>
<td>Ongoing throughout the study, especially following coaching interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>April 23, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents/Taping/Photos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>Procure during the time of their introduction during the coaching interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Summaries</td>
<td>Completed within 24 hours after procurement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio digital taping</td>
<td>During each site observation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>Completed transcribing August 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video taping</td>
<td>During each site observation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Photographs</td>
<td>There were taken before, during, and after the site observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Handwritten before, during, and after each site observation. These were expanded and typed within 24 hours of each site observation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Finished by December 15, 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

This chapter discussed a single-case study approach used for the purpose of studying how a literacy coach differentiated to meet preschool teachers’ instructional needs during one-on-one coaching interactions. The following questions align with the purpose:

1. How does a literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model?
2. In what ways, if any, does a literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?
3. What, if any, similarities and/or differences occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across three preschool teachers?

The rationale for proposing a single-case qualitative study supported the purpose and questions of this study. The epistemological lens for this type of research was explored. This study included a single case. The participants were one literacy coach and three preschool teachers who engaged in coaching interactions.

The data sources used in this study were direct site observations, interviews with the participants following transcription and analysis of the observations, and documents pertinent to the coaching interactions. Data management was discussed. I managed the data electronically and in hard copies. Data analysis was consistent with a qualitative case study design. It was on-going as data were collected.

Institutional Review Board assurances were discussed to include permission from the gatekeepers and informed consent from the participants, anonymity of the participants and field sites, and application was made to the IRB for approval.
Validity and reliability as they apply to qualitative research were discussed. Tests of validity specifically descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, and generalizability were delineated. I assumed an on-going reflective stance in dealing with issues of bias and subjectivity. In addition, I included a personal positionality profile statement. Finally, a data collection and analysis timeline was included.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Literacy coaching has become one form of professional development to improve teaching practices. Research indicates that student outcome gains are influenced by a student’s teacher more than any other school factors (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Although much has been written about literacy coaching, much of the writing has been descriptive in nature and pertaining to grade school. In order to close the achievement gap, the emphasis has shifted to literacy practices in preschool. This study sought to examine the interactions between a preschool literacy coach and three preschool teachers in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how a literacy coach differentiated her interactions to meet their individual needs.

This study was situated within a collaborative between Head Start and a local university in an urban area located in a Great Lakes state. The results of this study are based upon the analysis of data collected relative to the following three questions which guided this qualitative study:

1. How does an early literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model?
2. What, if any, similarities and/or differences occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across three preschool teachers?
3. In what ways, if any, does an early literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?

A single case study design was used to answer the research questions. This enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the interactions between a literacy coach and the teachers she coached. Data collection procedures consistent with single case study research included observations of the literacy coach and teachers’ interactions, digital recordings of the observations, interviews, pictures, and documents related to the interactions. Qualitative analysis procedures were used to determine common themes across the data. There were a total of four participants in this study: one literacy coach and the three preschool teachers she coached.

During this study, multiple coaching interactions between the literacy coach and the three preschool teachers were observed. Each teacher formally met one-on-one with the literacy coach two times during the study. These are referred to as post-conferences because they followed a classroom observation by the literacy coach. These conferences were the third part of the coaching cycle used: pre-conference → observation → post-conference. In addition, the teachers met in a small group with the literacy coach, referred to as tutorials. These small groups consisted of the literacy coach and four teachers she coached. One time a month the entire preschool staff met for a full day of professional development at a designated off-site location. The researcher observed a total of six one-on-one interactions, three tutorials, and one professional development session, and part of one literacy coach’s planning session.

Each research question is addressed separately in this chapter. Common patterns that emerged are discussed and illustrated by examples from the data. The second
question is addressed by a within-case analysis. This allows for an in-depth perspective of the similarities and differences during coaching interactions with the three teachers. The third question encompasses the specific actions the literacy coach utilized to differentiate the coaching interactions and how she determined the teachers’ strengths and needs.

**Research Question 1**

How does an early literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model?

The purpose of this question was to determine how the literacy coach interacted with the teachers in an embedded professional development model. To investigate this question, the researcher observed and digitally recorded the multiple interactions between the literacy coach and teachers during various contexts. To determine how the literacy coach interacted with the teachers she coached, transcripts of the recordings from the observations and interviews, field notes, and documents related to each session were analyzed. The following themes emerged from the data in regard to research question one that focused on coaching interactions: synergy created through cohesive contexts, reflection, and differences in supporting teachers. Pseudonyms were used throughout the presentation of data to protect the privacy of the participants as well as references to students. In order to preserve the voices and authentic language of the participants, quotations and dialogue were transcribed near verbatim. There were times during the recordings that exact words were not discernible because of noises in the environment, participants interjecting while another was speaking, sidebar conversations, or interruptions during the recordings. A discussion regarding the predominant themes that emerged follows:
Synergy Created Through Cohesive Context

Analysis of the data revealed purposeful connections between the contexts. How the connections were achieved was revealed during interviews with the literacy coach and teachers, as not all interactions or meetings were observable. Planning and goal setting seemed to be the key to achieving cohesiveness and synergy in this program. Synergy refers to parts of a system working together to produce effects that are greater than one part alone (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). The literacy coach explained that all the literacy coaches met once a month for their own professional development and for the purpose of developing a plan for the staff professional development. The literacy coaches’ professional development session was led by the lead researcher, a literacy expert. The lead researcher from the research team conveyed her expectations for what we need to implement next with the teachers; and we [the literacy coaches] decide, do they [the teachers] know about this already. Is there one particular area that seems to be more difficult for them to implement in their instruction? Let’s work on this at the PD. (LC Interview Transcript, June 6, 2012, pp. 6-7)

The four literacy coaches then shared the needs of the teachers they each coached. They determined a general need to focus upon during the staff professional development as indicated in the literacy coach’s statement,

for example, we’ve been talking [on-going before this study] about the CLASS observation tool. They’re going to have another CLASS observation. What are a couple of areas we know everyone would benefit hearing more about? We just decide among the four of us who’s going to do what, and just share the load. (LC Interview Transcript, June 6, 2012, p. 7)

Following the literacy coaches’ professional development session, they met at another time to plan together what each of them presented and to give feedback to each other regarding their individual presentation plans. Their focus was for each to delve into
one dimension of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument and to be consistent with the goals during the professional development (Field Notes, LCs’ Planning Session, April 19, 2012).

What emerged was a cohesive framework in which each of the contexts and the interactions that occurred in these contexts created a synergistic effect in the program. The framework within this professional development model included planning and implementation of learning experiences by the literacy coach(es) for each of the intended audiences and in each of the contexts as illustrated in Figure 4.1.

![Diagram of framework for cohesiveness creating synergy](image)

Figure 4.1. Framework for cohesiveness creating synergy.

The off-site location of the all-day, staff professional development was on the lower level of a public library in a nearby community. The staff consisted of teachers, teacher assistants, custodial and office personnel, the University director and assistants, Head Start program director, literacy coaches, and the external evaluation team. There
were several meeting rooms that accommodated everyone both for their whole staff sessions, smaller breakout sessions, and coursework sessions. The main meeting room was set up with rectangular shaped tables and chairs facing the front of the room. A continental breakfast was served at the entrance to the room as the staff arrived. While the staff completed their breakfasts and visiting with their colleagues from the different Head Start sites from around the city, the literacy coach in this study opened up the session with an overview of the day, displaying the agenda through a Power Point at the front of the room.

The staff engaged in their first joint activity with colleagues with whom they were sitting during this time. The literacy coaches gave the staff the document, Questions and Statements: Do they sustain or interrupt play (PD, HO_2, April 23, 2012). The staff analyzed and identified statements by adults during children’s play that would either sustain or interrupt play. They discussed their results with the group, restating selected statements into statements that would sustain play. These were recorded on chart paper by one of the literacy coaches. This activity with the whole staff set the stage for the ensuing breakout sessions in which the staff actively participated in another problem-solving activity in smaller groups.

In the second activity, selected statements from the above scenario were chosen in which the staff was encouraged to create problem solving questions to encourage critical thinking in their students. One example during this small group session follows:

Literacy Coach: What could be a problem they [students] might encounter when building with blocks?

Staff Member: Something that they’re building keeps tipping over.
Literacy Coach: What would be a question you might be able to ask that would help them to think about ways to solve their problems?

Staff Member: What do you think we can do to stop it from falling or tipping?

Literacy Coach: That’s an excellent example of a prompt!

The literacy coach explained that asking problem-solving questions while the children are engaged in different play areas is an attribute of “concept development” (one of the CLASS dimensions; PD, Transcript, CD, April 23, 2012, p. 2). The activity was not abstract. The goal was to encourage adults to ask questions to foster analysis and reasoning in the preschoolers with whom they work. These types of activities illustrated in the above scenarios allowed the staff to think about questioning, collaborate, share, and apply it to episodes that occur in their classrooms.

The lead researcher presented aggregated data showing growth over time of the implementation of shared book reading, read aloud, and the play protocols. The data reflected assessment points from the fall 2011 to spring 2012. The staff discussed the improvement over time as well as survey results regarding the implementation of literacy practices exemplified in the instructional protocols.

The staff separated into three already established groups for coursework during the last hour of the day. The course observed during this study was the literacy coaches and the group that was creating an integrated curriculum with a focus on literacy. This group of professionals met during their professional development sessions monthly for part of the day and wrote curriculum guides for theme-based learning. They combined elements from the themes in the Head Start curriculum and Harcourt Trophies amending as needed to create a curriculum that met the literacy needs of their students. The group of writers worked collaboratively during the professional development sessions as well as...
independently between the professional development sessions, and emailing what they wrote to the literacy coaches. The writers piloted each theme-based curriculum guide in their classrooms and then came together to revise it before having it printed, bound, and distributed to the rest of the staff. The curriculum guides they created were comprehensive, making connections of early literacy across the curriculum (PD, Transcript, April 23, 2012).

Engaging in this type of collaborative inquiry fostered the deep learning in the area of early literacy as well as other content areas. While writing the integrated curriculum, the staff connected the curriculum to the Head Start learning outcomes and the state early literacy standards. Writing the integrated curriculum for the program created cohesiveness in the curriculum throughout the Head Start program in this city. The collaborative nature of this endeavor provided an avenue of support between and among the staff beyond those in their individual buildings.

According to Rodgers and Rodgers (2007), whole group sessions are important contexts for supporting school-wide reform efforts. The above scenarios demonstrated learning opportunities that involved problem solving during the staff professional development. The goals for the day were established during the literacy coaches’ professional development; including the continued exploration of the given dimensions of the CLASS observation instrument. These goals were shared with the staff during the opening commentary by the literacy coach. During the different sessions, the literacy coaches facilitated joint inquiry, documenting their work by recording it on chart paper, and the curriculum writing eventually was bound and distributed to all. The staff members who were not involved in the curriculum writing course simultaneously
participated in either a technology course or oral language development course. These were facilitated by other experts from the University or research team.

Learning did not stop at the end of the monthly professional development. With the same overarching goals, the literacy coach and the teachers she coached met two times per month for one hour in a small group called tutorial. These were coach led, and they met in one of the teacher’s classrooms after all students were dismissed. These sessions were extensions of learning that started in the staff professional development. The literacy coach extended the teachers’ knowledge by elaborating upon what was introduced during the staff professional development session, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument previously discussed (Interview, LC, June 6, 2012; Field Notes, PD, April 23, 2012). For example, to prepare for the tutorials, the literacy coach requested that the teachers bring their Classroom Assessment Scoring System manuals. During one session they read and discussed the research reported in the manual related to emotional support. In another session they delved into concept development. In addition to reading and discussing, the literacy coach planned activities in which the participants were actively engaged (Summary, TU_2, April 16, 2012; Summary, TU_3, April 30, 2012). One problem solving activity involved the teachers sharing how they handled negative behaviors in their classrooms. The teachers identified negative behaviors that occurred in their classroom, followed by brainstorming of ideas of how they can react in those situations. The literacy coach recorded their ideas on a chart (Table 4.1) (Field Notes, TU_1, April 2, 2012; Pic 2, TU_1, April 2, 2012).
Table 4.1

Negative Student Behaviors and Teacher Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Student Behaviors and Teacher Actions Behavior</th>
<th>What you could do</th>
<th>What else you could do Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misbehaving at home/class</td>
<td>• I can tell you are going to have a bad day. negative</td>
<td>• Ignore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Redirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o What’s going on?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Reassure them that they can have a good day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonconforming behavior</td>
<td>• Try different things</td>
<td>• Redirecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Find what works</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning appropriate behavior</td>
<td>• make sure they [students] understand the rules</td>
<td>• Use positive music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cures – a book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative attitude</td>
<td>• “You need to do this.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the on-going learning about the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument, the literacy coach and teachers engaged in data analysis and planning literacy instruction, reviewing teacher actions described in the program’s instructional protocols, reading about and discussing different domains and dimensions of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument, and connecting the elements of the instrument to their instructional practices. In addition, they discussed elements of the instructional protocols used during observations by the literacy coach.

The interactions, which were coach led, addressed common needs of the teachers or how to extend and deepen their learning about the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Their interactions revolved around the curriculum, sharing research-based instructional strategies, early literacy practices, and technology in their classroom. They were supportive of each other
drawing from their own classroom and learning experiences, even offering to meet to help with technology issues brought forth.

The literacy coach observed in the teachers’ classrooms and met with them informally every week. They also engaged in formal (planned) observations followed by scheduled one-on-one feedback post-conferences. The interactions during these one-on-one conferences were an opportunity for the literacy coach and teachers to engage in private conversations regarding what was observed regarding their individual instructional practices, and provided targeted feedback (Teacher Interview Summary Chart, pp. 1-2).

A second type of one-on-one conference to emerge did not follow a direct observation. Instead the literacy coach provided the teachers with student alphabet letter knowledge assessment data from their classes. The focus of this coaching conference was to analyze the student data. The literacy coach and teachers determined which students were not making progress, those who met or exceeded benchmark, and planned for instruction to meet student needs. Student data represent student achievement and teachers’ impact on student learning. The goal of professional development and coaching is improved student achievement. Therefore, student data were a basis for many conversations. The literacy coach and teachers used the student data sessions and analysis of teaching to discuss and plan for effective instruction for their students’ learning.

During interviews with each of the teacher participants, the teachers were asked to rate the impact of the coaching opportunities in the various contexts on their own professional growth or learning. The scale used was 5 (High Impact) to 1 (No Impact) for each of the contexts: (a) whole staff professional development, (b) tutorials, and (c) one-
on-one interactions. Overall the three teachers ranked each of the contexts as having a fairly high impact on their professional growth. The lowest rating attributed to any of the contexts was a 4. Amy and Megan indicated that the one-on-one interactions were the most helpful for their professional growth (T Interview Summary Chart, pp. 1-2). Megan also shared, “It’s always better one-on-one to me than in a group and the professional one, you know; you’re getting bits and pieces, and you’re with other people. I’m not one of those types of learners—I like one-on-one” (Megan_Interview Transcript, June, 7, 2012, p. 6).

During the time of the data collection for this study, one overarching goal for the teachers was to deepen their knowledge regarding the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument and to connect the elements of the dimensions explored in this tool directly to their instructional practices. This observation instrument was based upon effective teacher-student interactions (Classroom Assessment Scoring System Manual, 2008). The staff professional development served to introduce certain dimensions of this observation instrument through joint problem-solving activities and discussion, followed by a more in-depth analysis and application of the elements to the teachers’ practices during the tutorials, and finally the one-on-one conferences to focus on individual teachers’ strengths and areas of need as compared to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument. The integration of learning about this observation instrument and implementing it through the literacy coach’s observation and formal one-on-one post conferences is demonstrated in Figure 4.2.
What occurred as a result of these interactions was a simultaneous building of background information and implementation of the instrument. The teachers were learning about the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument during their professional development and tutorials with other staff members as well as with the literacy coach, and then addressing the specific needs of the teachers during the one-on-one post-conferences.

The interactions in the various contexts provided support from other experts in addition to the literacy coach and other colleagues in the program. There appeared to be a recursive loop between learning something new, delving deeper into the new knowledge
during tutorials, and implementing into individual classrooms. In addition to the other experts, the staff provided support to each other offering different points of view, sharing of ideas, and collaboratively problem solving. It was during the one-on-one interactions that the literacy coach and teachers discussed their individual needs, both the strengths and those that needed to be improved.

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC, 2001) explained that in order for deeper understanding to occur in adults, multiple opportunities to interact with a given idea or procedure through active learning is necessary. Addressing the needs of the teachers was a complex process. There was a focus on building knowledge, joint problem solving, data analysis, questioning, reflection, and planning throughout each of the different interactions in each of the contexts. It was not the individual contexts alone that contributed to supporting the teachers, but the varying interactions among the groups within the contexts—each teacher building and expanding upon that which was explored during any one of the contexts creating synergism in the program. It was during the planning process that goals were established, and how to achieve those goals were thoughtfully planned, and then implemented in each of the described contexts. Cohesiveness among the contexts was evident in this study. In keeping with the framework of this program (Professional Development → Tutorial → One-on-one), there was a clear line of evidence of developing a deeper understanding of the importance of emotional and instructional support for preschool children and the effects of the teachers’ actions on preschool children in their classrooms. Certain dimensions of the three domains of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument were explored as a whole staff during the professional development on April 23, 2012. The
literacy coaches investigated specific dimensions in more detail and through group inquiry during breakout sessions during the staff professional development. The literacy coach elaborated on the emotional support domain, specifically with the dimension “positive climate” during the observed tutorials. The purpose of the coaching observations and subsequent post-conferences focused upon the emotional support domain of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument.

Cohesiveness was established through goal setting and purposeful planning for the formal interactions in each context.

Reflection

Reflection was pervasive throughout this study. It was evident in every interaction and in every context observed including the many conversations in which the researcher and literacy coach engaged. The first time the researcher met with the literacy coach one-on-one to discuss a tutorial recently observed, she was in her office with a set of headsets on, watching a video and taking notes. As the researcher entered the literacy coach’s office she explained that she was preparing for a conference with a teacher. She was reviewing a video recorded during an observation and noting those elements to address during a coaching interaction (April 4, 2012). Davis (2005) described reflection in terms of process and reflection. “First there is the doing (process); then, the thinking on the doing (reflection). Finally, there is a redoing (process informed by reflection) that restarts these interactions again” (p. 13). In the above scenario, the literacy coach had observed an instructional episode using one of the instructional protocols. In preparation for the one-on-one conference with the teacher, the literacy coach actively triangulated and reflected upon the data to determine the teachers’ needs as well as their strengths.
How the literacy coach fostered reflection with the teachers is noteworthy. She was very thoughtful during her own analyses of the data, being mindful of questioning in order to encourage reflection. According to Morgan and Saxton (2006), questioning is important to connect to the material being learned and to think about the meanings that are being made. The literacy coach used questioning or reflective statements during the varied interactions. Examples of questions or statements with the curriculum writers to foster reflection were: “Describe your experience [as curriculum writers]. What did you find difficult? Would you participate in a curriculum development class again? Why?” (Transcript, PD, Curr, April 23, 2013, p. 2).

Two distinct pages in the curriculum guide that was shared with the researcher were reflection pages for the teachers. Questions were offered to guide the teachers to “Pause and Reflect” (Curriculum Guide, p. 14). This was at the end of the first week of the study, and again at the end of the study. Examples of questions at the end of the study were: (a) “If you had to change any part of the study, what would it be?” (b) “Do you have other thoughts and ideas?” (Curriculum Guide, p. 66). These were written into the curriculum guide to encourage the teachers to reflect on their own about teaching as they proceeded during their teaching of the theme-based topic.

The literacy coach created various reflective documents used during the three tutorials with the teachers. The documents were based upon the dimensions in the CLASS instrument being examined and applied to the teachers’ instructional practices. Examples of questions on these documents included: “Were there any situations where there was disrespect in your classroom? How did you handle them? Tell me what you did to acknowledge a child’s emotions and comfort, assist, or support the child.” (TU_1,
This line of inquiry encouraged the teachers to think about their individual instructional practices, share their ideas with the group, and to think about possible future actions in similar situations. Examples of questions to encourage reflection during these group discussions included: “How do you deal with negative behavior? How will you apply that to your teaching?” The collaborative work described above encouraged the teachers to reflect upon how they talk with their students, and to think about how they can restate negative sounding statements into a statement that conveys a positive expectation. The purpose was to develop a deep understanding of creating a positive climate in their classrooms by being cognizant of how the adults interact with their students. The teachers reflected upon their own practices, discussed their reflections with their colleagues, and planned for possible future interactions with their students. As noted by Rodgers and Rodgers (2007), it is the ability to reflect on and use the information to plan instruction that will support teaching.

The literacy coach and teachers used analysis of video recordings of the teachers’ instructional episodes during the one-on-one conferences. Questioning and statements pressing for reflection were used to engage teachers in the analysis of their video recordings. Examples of questions used to foster teachers’ reflections were: “Okay, you said you pulled someone closer to me. What were your intentions?” (Amy, TR, April 10, 2012, p. 2). “Why do they [students] do those things? Tell me what you thought about your physical proximity to the children” [CLASS dimension] (Megan, TR, April 19, 2012). “Look at what is happening with their attention to the book. Tell me what you’re thinking about. What do you think is happening right here [a segment in the video]?” (Sally, TR, May 2, 2012, p. 7).
The literacy coach self-reflected upon her interactions with the teachers. She and the researcher met on four separate occasions following the staff professional development, tutorials, and one-on-one conferences with the teachers. During these discussions she reflected upon what had occurred, what she was expecting, as well as surprises, and why she proceeded the way she did with the teachers. In one conference with Amy, the literacy coach noted that Amy indicated that she was surprised at how few letters one of her students knew during the collaborative data analysis conference (Transcript, PC, May 21, 2012). The literacy coach shared her reflection of the conference with Amy:

She has one child in her class …, who is the lowest in ALK [alphabet letter knowledge] of all the kinderbound children. He only knows three alphabet letters, but he is very verbal, and he speaks in very advanced complete sentences with a lot of descriptive adjectives. So this is an example that just because you [teachers] observe something at face value, that doesn’t necessarily mean that there isn’t more underneath that’s lacking. (Summary, Amy, PC, May 21, 2012, p. 2)

The literacy coach also communicated to the researcher that based upon her observations over time, she was concerned that Amy engages in too much instruction of alphabet letters in isolation as opposed to instruction in meaningful context. Amy’s revelation of how few letters the particular child in the above scenario knew served as an opportunity for the literacy coach to discuss the differences between instruction in meaningful context versus isolated or out-of-context instruction of alphabet letters (Transcript, Amy, May 21, 2012). The literacy coach was then able to move forward with background information regarding instruction in meaningful contexts.

The literacy coach specifically discussed reflection during the second tutorial observed. She used the think aloud strategy to demonstrate reflection on how the conversation was moving along during the session with the teachers.
Literacy Coach: I feel like I’m really dragging this thing way long, but it’s super super important, and I think that as teachers we probably don’t always pay attention to what we’re doing. I can tell you I don’t always pay attention to what I’m doing. I’m thinking about that right now and paying attention to myself right now, and I’m thinking I’m doing a lot of talking and I need to let you guys have a turn. *(Telling; demonstrating reflection-in-action using think aloud strategy)*

Amy: That’s why I lose my train of thought, because I’m thinking about what I say.

Literacy Coach: It’s like a metacognitive process and it’s really helpful to try to pay attention—how I am saying this to the kids. *(Telling; background knowledge)* Is there a way that I can show them [students] I have a positive expectation for them? *(Questioning; moving conversation forward)* Does this make sense? *(Questioning)* *(Transcript, Tutorial 2, April 16, 2012, p. 9)*

After reflecting out loud, she responded to Amy’s thought by telling the teachers that reflection on one’s practice, or reflection-in-action, is like a metacognitive process. Then to move the conversation forward, she used questioning related to the topic that was being discussed—restating a negative comment with a positive expectation.

Reflection throughout the study was evident during the interactions in each context. Activities were planned for the interactions to include reflection or thinking about teachers’ instructional practices. Pinnell and Rodgers (2002) described self analysis and self reflection as “thinking our way forward” (p. 189). Using video segments of instructional episodes and student data to analyze and reflect were used consistently. Questioning was a salient feature during the interactions between the literacy coach and teachers. Guiding the teachers to analyze and reflect upon their instructional episodes and upon student data fostered discussions upon research-based instructional practices as well as building background knowledge in the given areas under discussion.
Differences in Supporting Teachers

It would be easy to coach teachers if they all had the same needs (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). Consistently supporting teachers as they implement research-based instructional practices is what literacy coaches do (Poglinco et al., 2003). The dialogue between the literacy coach and teachers she coaches is a key component of successful coaching (Duncan, 2006). Supporting the teachers to address their different needs was apparent during the numerous interactions observed and discussed during interviews with the participants.

Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) enumerated four different levels of scaffolding from most support to least support: telling, modeling, directing, and questioning. Although these levels suggest a continuum, during any given coaching interaction observed the literacy coach varied her scaffolding responses to the teachers. Following is a description and purposes of the levels of scaffolding.

The literacy coach used telling support for a variety of purposes. The purposes that emerged were to state the purpose of the coaching session, to affirm teachers, to restate for clarification, to give the teachers information regarding program goals/requirements, to offer feedback, to build background knowledge or to give information to deepen the teachers’ understanding.

Modeling or demonstrating support refers to an action whereby the literacy coach assumes the teacher’s role and demonstrates a problem-solving action. Modeling can be for an untold amount of purposes. In the case of a preschool teacher, a literacy coach can anticipate modeling any instructional strategy related to early literacy such as shared book reading, using a K-W-L chart, or working on a behavior management strategy such
as redirection. This study only addressed literacy coaching outside of the teachers’ classrooms; therefore, modeling was only observed during the coaching interactions in the aforementioned contexts. Examples of modeling that occurred were for the purposes of redirection, self-reflection, planning, adapting plans to meet the needs of students, questioning, and the think aloud strategy. According to data from the interviews with the literacy coach, when she used modeling in the classroom it was for a specific purpose. During modeling episodes, the teacher was given an opportunity to observe what was specified during a pre-conference in the teachers’ classrooms and with their students (Interview, Literacy Coach, June 6, 2012, p. 13). The teacher participants reported that modeling was very helpful to them in order to become cognizant of what they were doing during instructional episodes (Teacher Interview Summary Chart, p. 1).

Directing support refers to the literacy coach directing or suggesting the teacher take a specific action. During the coaching interactions, direction was given for various purposes. Examples of these purposes included assessing children, preparing materials such as alphabet letter materials to go home over the summer, using instructional time to adapt instruction to meet students’ needs, and creating intervention groups based upon student data.

Questioning support was used to scaffold teachers in the various contexts observed and for multiple purposes. Morgan and Saxton (2006) described questioning for three different purposes. These purposes are questions for eliciting information, shaping understanding, and pressing for reflection. Questioning was used to find out more information about teaching episodes, students, or what the teachers needed from the literacy coach. Questioning was also used to clarify what teachers said, to deepen the
teachers’ understanding, and to encourage teachers to reflect upon their interactions with students during instructional episodes.

Scaffolding by the literacy coach during coaching interactions is illustrated with selected excerpts from the varied discussions. Each type of scaffolding identified is discussed from most support to least support: telling, modeling, directing, and questioning. Following each statement or question, the level of scaffolding is identified in parentheses.

As indicated previously, telling was used by the literacy coach for a variety of purposes: to state goals of the session, to affirm teachers, to restate for clarification, to give the teachers information regarding program goals or requirements, to offer feedback, and to build background knowledge. Part of a discussion during a tutorial session focused on end-of-year program requirements, specifically observations, which were fast approaching. One of the observation tools used to observe the classrooms was The Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) tool. When using this tool, the observer is looking for multiple types of evidence in the classroom environment including work by students and jointly created work that is hanging on the walls. The work of all students and student/teacher created work indicates learning in the classroom. Kendal had just recently been painted so the teachers were instructed not to hang anything on the walls for a specific period of time. Amy queried:

Amy: …do they (observers) know…that everything was painted and everything had to be taken off the walls?

Literacy Coach: Yes …I emailed Marion (observer from the research team) and I told her about that…and I have pictures of what you had up… *(Telling: giving information)* (Transcript, Tutorial 2, April 16, 2012)
The literacy coach addressed Amy’s concern, and by having already taken an action she demonstrated anticipating the teacher’s concerns.

The following excerpt from a one-on-one interaction with Megan illustrated telling to give information to build the teacher’s background knowledge. The literacy coach had used the CLASS tool during her observation. The focus at this point in the conversation was about positive climate as iterated in the CLASS manual.

Literacy Coach: …do you remember what we read and talked about with positive emotional climate when we started with this book [CLASS manual]…do you remember us reading this paragraph and discussing the difference between low risk and high risk kids? *(Questioning; to elicit understanding)*

Megan: Probably. I don’t remember.

Literacy Coach: Lower risk kids are going to probably have a lot of emotional support at home, a lot more positive interactions in the climate. Kids who are higher at risk are going to be kids who are not getting emotional support…so what…these researchers were trying to tell us is that if kids who showed significant and emotional problems in kindergarten were placed first in classrooms with lots of emotional support they made progress at the same kind of levels as their lower risk peers…but, if there were high risk students who were placed in a classroom offering lower levels of emotional support, they fell further behind. *(Telling; background information to deepen understanding)* *(Transcript, Post-conference, Megan, April 19, 2012, p. 12)*

Given that the teacher indicated she did not remember what had been previously discussed during a tutorial, the literacy coach used telling to clarify the difference between low-risk and high-risk students and how the emotional environment impacts their learning. The literacy coach also used telling to clarify or restate what a teacher has shared, so that they have the same understanding or intersubjectivity. This exemplified scaffolding at the right moment. This was not previously scripted or planned, but rather stepping in when the teacher needed the scaffolding *(Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007)*. Telling was also used for the purpose of restating to clarify for understanding. This was
illustrated in the following excerpt during a tutorial in which the teachers are restating negative comments to reflect a positive expectation for students:

Literacy Coach: I like the way so and so is listening. (Telling; restating) How does that help? (Questioning; for reflection)

Amy: Because then they want your [teacher] attention. The other children want your attention because they’re listening now.

Literacy Coach: And what is so and so doing at this point? I like the way...
(Questioning/telling; moving the conversation forward)

Amy: Because that person is listening…if you say I like the way Jaylo is listening to the story, I won’t bring any of the negativity to that other child, and then when they get it together I’ll say, Oh, I like the way you’re listening [student previously not listening] or I like the way you’re sitting.

The literacy coach offered an interpretation of what was shared with all the teachers in this statement:

Literacy Coach: …what I hear you saying is—here’s a child who is a good role model for others. (Telling; for clarification, building background knowledge)

Amy: …can’t you use that? (Questioning for clarification; seemed uncertain of herself)

Literacy Coach: Absolutely. (Telling; affirming the teacher) (Transcript, Tutorial 2, April 16, 2012, p. 8)

Telling was used for several purposes throughout the interactions between the literacy coach and teachers. Some of these telling statements were demonstrated above. The literacy coach used telling to clarify, restate, build background knowledge, affirm the teachers, state goals for coaching sessions, and to give feedback. According to Rodgers (2004), telling is the level of scaffolding that offers the most support.

This discussion continues with the level of support referred to as directing. As already reported, directing support was used for the purpose of suggesting an action the teachers should take. There were many instances of directing documented during the
literacy coach’s interactions with the preschool teachers and in the various contexts discussed. Several purposes for directing that emerged from the data were planning, setting the purpose for the interaction, soliciting parent help, assessing children, materials preparation, and wrapping up an interaction. Directing was used most frequently with planning. During their final interviews, the teacher participants reported co-planning with the literacy coach as helpful (Teacher Interview Summary Chart, p. 1). Planning included many topics. The topics included planning instruction which included student grouping, instructional activities, materials to go home, curriculum for the summer, and adapting instruction to meet student needs. The following excerpt was an example of directing during an interaction with Amy.

Literacy coach: … can I give you another suggestion to consider? I brought these to you if you would like to use them this summer [hard copies of planning templates] and I can give them to you on the computer. I think you like to do the writing out on paper. I’m like that too. Some teachers like to do the writing and some like to do the computer. I brought you a blank template. I was thinking since you’re kinda already considering developing a curriculum guide for your rocks topic study, why don’t you start planning like next week, I’m going to do these books [using think aloud to model selecting books for shared book reading].

In this particular coaching interaction, the literacy coach and Amy were planning for instruction for the summer session. Many ideas were brainstormed relative to instructional activities such as grouping for alphabet letter knowledge instruction and selecting vocabulary to teach during shared book instructional episodes. The teachers used a few different templates for planning an integrated curriculum. The literacy coach adapted the templates for the summer session (Handouts 1, 2, Post conference, Amy, May 21, 2012). The last level of scaffolding to be demonstrated is questioning.

Questioning support during interactions with the teachers dominated the literacy coach’s prompting during coaching episodes. She used all three types of questions when
interacting with teachers. It appeared that the purpose and scaffolding needed dictated the
type of question. The following excerpt illustrated an example of questioning during a
one-on-one conference with Amy. The literacy coach observed and recorded two
different instructional episodes in Amy’s classroom; a shared book reading and play or
center time. She used the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument
in which to focus her observations, specifically “positive climate,” and a dimension of
“emotional support.”

Literacy Coach: Let’s start with this form that we talked about yesterday. I just
kinda want to start with your reaction during the two times I was in here
observing CLASS for environmental support today. (Telling the purpose) Before
we talk about these, do you think you are pretty aware of yourself as a teacher and
what was happening? (Questioning; fostering reflection)

Amy: So much was happening. I was going back and forth from one spot to
another spot. I know I spent time with Samuel, Cameron—a question I may have
been aware of; what I was doing was trying to make sure that Cameron had a
place to play.

Literacy Coach: Right…were you aware of the play time and where you were in
the room and your purpose? (Questioning; fostering reflection)

This interaction demonstrated the literacy coach’s use of questioning to prompt Amy to
think about her actions during this observation. The literacy coach used this technique
consistently throughout her post-conferences with the teachers, but depending on the
specific teacher need, questioning was used for different purposes. By probing the teacher
about her proximity, the teacher was drawn into the conversation regarding this
observation as opposed to the literacy coach jumping in immediately with feedback.
Opening a feedback discussion in this manner allowed the coach to get the teacher’s
perspective of what was occurring.
This next segment is from the same post-conference with Amy in which the literacy coach supported Amy using questioning, directing, and telling. Questioning was used for different purposes: to foster teacher reflection, for clarification, and keeping the conversation moving forward. Telling was also used for different purposes: stating the purpose, restating for clarification, feedback from the observation, giving Amy information to deepen her understanding, and reflecting upon what Amy stated:

Literacy Coach: Marcus made a comment of you changing the spots. I wasn’t sure if that meant because we rearranged the room, the balloons or bringing them [students] closer [to the teacher] if that was changing the spots. *(Telling; clarifying)*

Amy: Well, some of them I changed their spots; I kept them closer to me to try to see, to test things out instead of having the one….I pulled Samuel closer to me. I got Jay closer to me.

Literacy Coach: Okay, you said you pulled someone closer to me. *(Telling; restating)* What were your intentions when you said that? *(Questioning; foster Amy to reflect)*

Amy: I want him to be closer, to like behave.

Literacy Coach: So you would… [Amy interjects before Literacy Coach finishes statement]

Amy: Not rolling around things like that. And also the same thing with Jay. I brought him closer. *(Reflecting/stating why she moved the children closer)*

Literacy: Okay, so you could definitely say that you arranged those things in your physical proximity with the intention of anticipating problems and planning for them. *(Telling; restating for clarification)*

Amy demonstrated an understanding of why her proximity to the student was important; however, she did not confirm the literacy coach’s restating for clarification. She continued to discuss a specific student’s behavior accommodations. In the next exchange the literacy coach restated to clarify Amy’s actions.
Literacy Coach: But basically it sounds to me that you were fully aware who you were placing and why. *(Telling; restates for clarification)*

Amy: (agree with nod of head) and Jay gave a second chance since we already rearranged the room, I wanted them to be closer, (to see) if that would help.

Literacy Coach: So in terms of proximity, you’re thinking about where you had the kids for the first session that I observed and for the second one I observed while the children were playing you were talking about that you moved to different areas. *(Telling; clarifying)* Is that something [Amy’s presence during circle time and play time] you feel answered the question about physical proximity? *(Questioning; fostering Amy to reflect as related to the CLASS)*

Amy: Yeah and I usually do move around the room with play, and I think with all 15 kids. I had all 15 kids today; most of them were on that side. We had 1, 2, 3 going on over here plus housekeeping, plus discovery, plus table toys. I may not have gone over there because I was over here, but Miss Diane [teacher assistant] was over there [gesturing to different play areas in the room].

Amy’s reflection demonstrated an awareness of what was going on in the room and where the adults were in relation to the children. This relates to the dimension positive climate, specifically the adults’ proximity to the children described in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument.

Literacy Coach: So you feel that everything was covered. It was hard for me because I was thinking about every component of CLASS…just focus on positive climate and focus on teacher sensitivity so there is a lot to be said for that too; that it’s not even emotional support. *(Telling)*

Amy: (Gestures showing concern).

The literacy coach at this point began to give her feedback. She did this by sharing the observation form with her handwritten notes and scores from the observation.

Literacy Coach: Of all of these things in positive climate, is there something you think you recall in your instruction today you’d like to share that you noticed yourself doing? *(Questioning; to foster Amy to reflect on her practice)*

Amy: …we just did songs, finger play, and then went right into the web, so …since it was less time on the carpet, I think that worked out a little bit better for a positive, plus changing those two children was positive. …I told ‘em at one time they were not in trouble. I was changing the spots so they would feel like I’m
[they are] by the teacher. (Reflection demonstrating changes made in curricular activities and moving students—fostering a positive climate; teacher sensitivity)

Literacy Coach: So that was an example of teacher sensitivity too, where you were explaining to them. (Telling: to affirm Amy and fill in background knowledge relating CLASS and teachers’ actions during instructional episode)

This coaching interaction continued with an analysis of video segments recorded during two separate instructional episodes in Amy’s classroom. Questioning was used to encourage Amy to think about her teaching, what she did, and why. Telling was used to restate or name what Amy did to clarify for understanding and to deepen Amy’s knowledge relating Amy’s actions to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument. Telling was also used to affirm Amy’s reflections. The literacy coach moved the conversation forward, varying her level of scaffolding between telling, the greatest level of support, and questioning, the least amount of support.

Supporting teachers using the scaffolding techniques illustrated during the literacy coach’s interactions with the teachers enabled her to give the support to the teachers that were needed in order to address their needs at the time. Each teacher had different needs as determined from the observations. The literacy coach offered the level of support each teacher needed at just the right moment during their conversations. The literacy coach did not proceed in a direct trajectory from most support to least support. Instead, the level of support varied based upon her perceived needs of the teachers during the coaching conversations. She did not use all the levels of support in any one interaction. The coach used what was needed to meet the teachers’ needs and keep the coaching conversations flowing.
Summary of Question 1 Findings

Themes that emerged from the data in regard to research question one focused on coaching interactions in an embedded professional development model and include: synergy created through cohesive contexts, reflection, and differences in supporting teachers. Goal setting and thoughtful planning were key to creating a synergistic relationship among the cohesive adult learning contexts. Figure 4.1 illustrated the framework from planning to implementation of the learning activities during the different contexts: staff professional development, tutorials, and one-on-one conferences.

Reflection was prominent during all levels of planning and implementation of the various learning activities. Activities that fostered reflection were described. Examples from the research data were illustrated from the varied synergistic cohesive contexts. Table 4.1 illustrated one type of reflective document used to foster reflection on practice during a tutorial. Questioning and reflective statements to press for reflection were utilized during conversations with the teachers especially coupled with data analysis during the one-on-one interactions.

The dialogue between the literacy coach and individual teachers is a critical component of coaching. The literacy coach varied her level of support during the conversations with the teachers. The literacy coach employed telling, modeling, directing, and questioning with the teachers as needed to meet their needs. The purposes for each level of support were discussed and illuminated with examples from the research data. The next question focused upon the similarities and differences that emerged during the interactions between the literacy coach and preschool teachers.
Research Question 2

What, if any, similarities and/or differences occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across three preschool teachers?

This question addressed the similarities and differences regarding the interactions between the literacy coach and the preschool teachers. Data from transcripts, interviews, summaries, field notes, and charts were used to answer this question. The following are the similarities that occurred in the coaching interactions: goal setting and planning, collaborative activities, reflection. Moreover, the following are the differences that occurred in the coaching interactions: the learning process that included data analysis and the focus of data analysis, content presentation in the varied, but cohesive contexts, and the intensity of the interactions. Table 4.2 outlines these similarities and differences.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal setting and planning</td>
<td>Focus of data presentation/discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative activities</td>
<td>Learning opportunities presentation differed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning opportunities</td>
<td>Intensity of the interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several similarities and differences emerged. The similarities to be discussed are goal setting and planning, collaborative activities, learning opportunities, and reflection. The differences to be discussed are the focus of data presentations and discussions, the learning opportunities differed in their presentations, and the variance of the intensity of the interaction.
Similarities

The first similarity among the coaching interactions was goal setting and planning for each of the interactions (Interview, LC, June 6, 2012; Teacher Interview Summary Chart, pp. 4-5). Setting goals and planning for meaningful activities created cohesiveness among the interactions during the varied contexts, creating a synergistic relationship among the contexts. Goals were related to the overarching program goals: “best practice, essential early literacy skills, knowledgeable educators, 21st century learning environments, and engaged parents and communities” (p. 1, PD_HO_1, April 23, 2012). In addition, a community of learners was encouraged versus teachers working and learning in isolation.

The second similarity among the interactions was that the activities planned required the participants to collaboratively engage in joint inquiry. One such activity was engaging in discussions regarding teacher and student data. Data analysis was evident in all of the contexts (PD_HO_1, April 23, 2012; TU1_HO_1, April 2, 2012; TU3_HO_1, April 30, 2012; Amy_FN, May 21, 2012; Megan_FN, May 23, 2012; Sally_FN, May 9, 2012). The discussions focused on improvement whether it was teacher data across time, or student data across time (PD_FN_April 23, 2012; TU3_FN, April 30, 2012). The goal for professional development with coaching is increased student achievement. Data give the teachers a picture of how the staff is doing to meet student needs. Duncan (2006) explained that data analysis allows the staff to discover the gap between what is known and what they need to know to foster student growth.

The third similarity among the interactions was the learning opportunities provided to the staff, and the application of what was being learned to their instructional
practices. On-going coursework was provided monthly during the professional development, which were facilitated by literacy experts (PD_HO1, April 23, 2012). The learning opportunities were related to deepening the teachers’ knowledge about early literacy development. There was a focus upon the CLASS instrument during the duration of this study with an emphasis upon the staff gaining an understanding of the theory and research related to the CLASS instrument, and relating the attributes of the adult/student interactions to the teachers’ instructional practices (Summary, TU_2, April 16, 2012).

Reflective activities were utilized to relate the dimensions and teacher actions described in the CLASS instrument, which is discussed next.

Reflection was another similarity observed during the interactions with the teachers. The literacy coach facilitated reflection through questioning, creating reflective documents relating classroom interactions to the CLASS instrument, and analyzing video clips of instructional episodes in conjunction with the CLASS observation rating tool (Interview, LC_TR_p. 7, April 4, 2012; PD_FN, April 23, 2012). The teachers were also encouraged to create questions to foster analysis and reasoning with their students (PD_TR_ April 23, 2012). The literacy coach engaged in reflection upon her interactions with the teachers as well as upon data collected during observations and student data.

**Differences**

Different learning opportunities abounded in each of the contexts. The differences were in how the content was presented by the coach to the teachers. The staff professional development provided time and opportunity for the staff to participate in on-going structured coursework related to early literacy by a team of experts. The coursework was technology, oral language development, or curriculum writing. The staff
engaged in whole group and small groups during their professional development to collaboratively learn about the CLASS observation instrument (Field Notes, PD, April 23, 2012). The tutorials provided focused exploration of topics relevant to the three teachers and consistent with the program goals. The topics were based upon early literacy practices depicted in the instructional protocols and adult/student interactions explained in the CLASS instrument. For instance, the group read and discussed the research on which the CLASS instrument was based. Reflective documents were utilized to facilitate conversations in which the teachers connected the CLASS attributes to the teachers’ instructional practices, and the application to their classrooms using reflective documents to mediate the discussions (Field Notes, TU_1, April 2, 2012; Interview, LC, June 7, 2012). Another topic explored during a tutorial was assessment, specifically progress monitoring their students. Building the teachers’ background knowledge of assessment was discussed in conjunction with student data analysis (Field Notes, TU_3, April 30, 2012). The one-on-one conferences were individual conversations with teachers that focused upon the teachers’ needs and specific student needs. These conferences were an opportunity in which the literacy coach engaged in conversations in which she shared background information pertaining to the teachers’ individual needs (Interview, LC, June 6, 2012). One example was building background information for the purpose of redirecting students’ inappropriate behavior that Amy requested (Transcript, April 10, 2012).

Varied learning opportunities addressed different learning styles. The professional development included opportunities to see, to hear, and to do activities related to early literacy. Learning was continued during the tutorials, but with different reflective
activities connecting the CLASS instrument to the teachers’ practices. The one-on-one interactions focused on the quality of the implementation of what was being learned. The differences were in the process of the interactions. For example, the literacy coach and staff engaged in a group inquiry activity which focused on questioning in different play episodes in their classrooms during the staff professional development. By the end of the sessions the teachers and literacy coaches generated a list of sentence stems to begin questions in their classrooms. These stems included: What would happen if…?; How would you…?; What would make this…?; I wonder why…? (Summary, PD, April 23, 2012, p. 2). In contrast, reflective documents and questioning were used during the tutorials to stimulate reflective conversations directly linking the teachers’ instructional practices to the teacher actions described in the CLASS instrument (HO_5, TU_1, April 2, 2012; HO_5B, TU_2, April 16, 2012; HO_3, TU_3, April 30, 2012). Examples of these reflective documents are exhibited in Table 4.3 and Table 4.4.

The reflective tool illustrated in Table 4.3 was created for the teachers to reflect upon three of four dimensions of emotional support, a CLASS domain. The teachers were given the reflective tool to guide their self-reflections. They were instructed to record examples during their instructional episodes with their students. An excerpt from each section of this reflective tool is illustrated in Table 4.3.
Table 4.3

Excerpts From Reflective Tool: Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Climate - Tell me about your...:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Conversation with the children (when and where they occurred; what was said, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Climate:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you notice any negative affect behaviors in your classroom? How did you handle it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Sensitivity - Tell me what you did to...:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipate problems and plan for them appropriately.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Handout 5, Tutorial 1, April 2, 2012

The teachers were able to use this tool to guide self-reflection upon their actions during instructional episodes with their students.

Another reflective tool is illustrated in Table 4.4. The purpose of this tool was to foster a reflection by the teachers by restating something potentially negative to saying it with positive expectations.

Table 4.4

Excerpts From Positive Expectations for the Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One way to say it:</th>
<th>Saying it with positive expectations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You aren’t cleaning up like I asked you to.</td>
<td>I really need your help. We have to clean up for the next group. They left it nice for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can tell you’re not listening.</td>
<td>Use your listening ears. I like the way so and so is listening doesn’t bring the negative to the child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Handout 5b,Tutorial 2, April 16, 2012

Table 4.4 illustrated how the literacy coach facilitated the teachers to reflect upon what they say to their students. The purpose was to nudge the teachers to think about future encounters with their students, using language that has positive overtones while
communicating the teachers’ expectations. The National Staff Development Council (2001) iterated that reflection is important to stimulate discussions about teaching and is necessary to promote deep learning and understanding of concepts being explored. In this study those concepts were related to early literacy. Utilizing reflective documents as those described previously and here, stimulated in depth conversations among the teachers and the literacy coach.

As previously discussed, the collaborative activity of data analysis was consistently used to foster discussions related to teachers’ instructional practices and student progress. The differences were in the presentation or focus of the data. The staff professional development data discussion focused on aggregate teacher data regarding the implementation of the formative instructional protocols over the time of the program from the start to the present, and a summative evaluation of a teacher survey regarding the instructional protocols. The discussion gave the staff a picture of how successfully, or not, they were implementing research-based instruction in their daily practices as portrayed in the instructional protocols. The summative survey depicted the staff’s beliefs regarding the implementation of the same instructional protocols. The focus of data analysis during the tutorials was on analysis of video clips of each of the four teachers in relation to specific positive elements of the CLASS instrument and the teachers’ student data. The one-on-one interactions focused on the teachers’ observation data specific to the observed instructional practices as delineated in the observation instrument used. Also, the teachers’ student data for alphabet letter knowledge was analyzed for student needs, and co-planning research-based instructional practices (Field Notes, PD, April 23,
The most salient difference in the interactions between the literacy coach and the teachers was the intensity of the interactions during the one-on-one conferences as opposed to the interactions observed during the staff professional development or the tutorials. The one-on-one interactions were reserved for private discussions in which the literacy coach and individual teachers discussed their specific needs. The literacy coach used several different tools to mediate these interactions. These included video analysis of the teachers’ instructional episodes coupled with the CLASS rating tool and the literacy coach’s field notes on the rating tool. This type of reflective feedback during post-conferences made for the most intense interactions, whereas, the specific needs of individual teachers were not addressed during the staff professional development or the tutorials. This was illustrated in how the data were presented. Aggregate data were presented and discussed during the professional development as opposed to data specific to the individual teachers. Data specific to the individual teachers were presented and discussed during the one-on-one interactions. Positive instructional episodes, with the teachers’ permission, were utilized during a tutorial session.

Most notable was how the literacy coach targeted the needs of the teachers and the levels of support she provided during the targeted interactions. First, the literacy coach triangulated and reflected upon the data gathered during the classroom observations. It was during this analysis and reflection of the data that she determined the greatest needs of the teachers as described in the opening scenario shared in regard to research question 1, Reflection. Given that the literacy coach had been coaching these
teachers for one to two and one half years, she had acquired a substantial amount of data across multiple observations. In addition to data from the most current observations and multiple conversations with the teachers, the literacy coach was able to see patterns and gain a deeper understanding of each teacher’s implementation of early literacy instructional practices. This knowledge over time plus the most current data helped her to provide targeted feedback. Once the literacy coach determined what needed to be addressed during the conferences, she determined how she would proceed. For example, the literacy coach was very concerned that Sally was not reflecting on her instructional practices in regard to how her instruction was impacting student learning. The literacy coach was especially concerned that Sally was not aware of each of her students during large group instructional episodes, but seemed to have more meaningful instructional interactions with her students during small group instruction. Therefore, the literacy coach purposely planned modeling reflection on one’s own practices as shared previously. Then together they viewed, analyzed, and reflected upon video clips of Sally during whole group and small group instruction for the purpose of reflecting upon Sally’s instructional practices (Field notes, PC, Sally, May 2, 2012).

The one-on-one interactions involved collaboratively analyzing and reflecting upon the data obtained during the classroom observations. The literacy coach used questioning to open up the discussions encouraging the teachers to reflect and come to an understanding of what was occurring in their instructional episodes. The program was targeting specific dimensions of the CLASS instrument. It was during the one-on-one interactions that the literacy coach targeted the specific actions of the teachers during
their instructional episodes relative to the dimension(s) being studied as observed during the staff professional development and tutorials.

**Summary of Question 2 Findings**

Several similarities and differences in regard to the interactions between the literacy coach and the preschool teachers were discussed in this section. The most noteworthy similarities and differences in the varying interactions were presented. These included goal setting and planning meaningful activities to encourage a community of learners as well as cohesiveness and synergy in the program framework. Activities that required joint activity especially data analysis provided a picture of how the staff was doing to meet the needs of students. This also revealed the gap between what the teachers know and still needed to know to foster student growth. Varying the learning opportunities addressed different learning styles of the participants. Reflection on one’s own teaching fosters deep learning and understanding of concepts related to what is being learned; that is early literacy in preschool. The one-on-one interactions were the most intense type of interaction because the conversations were targeted to the explicit needs of the individual teachers while providing varied levels of support during the interactions. In the next section the methods employed by the literacy coach to differentiate during interactions with the preschool teachers are delineated.

**Research Question 3**

In what ways, if any, does an early literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?
The purpose of this question was to determine the ways in which the literacy coach differentiated during the various interactions with the teachers she coached. Differentiation occurred during targeted coaching conversations with the three teachers in this study. The ways this coach differentiated was by using data gathered through various tools to determine the teachers’ strengths and needs and by taking into consideration the teachers’ personalities and dispositions. Then the literacy coach used this information to differentiate during the targeted coaching conversations.

**Targeting Coaching Conversations**

Targeting the coaching conversations was essential in determining each of the teachers’ strengths and needs as well as student needs. Addressing the needs of the teachers was the focus of the post-conference interactions; whereas, addressing specific needs of students was discussed during interactions that focused on student data analysis. First the tools employed by the literacy coach to gather data are discussed, followed by how the literacy coach utilized the tools to identify the teachers’ needs, and then a discussion of addressing each of the teachers’ needs.

**Tools used by the literacy coach to gather data.** Observation instruments were the principal tools used for differentiating and mediating the conversations during the coaching interactions. The program used several formative instructional protocols based upon current literature on early literacy development. In this coaching model a protocol is an “organized sequence of teaching behaviors (talk and action) to help children learn” (Neuman, Roskos, Wright, & Lenhart, 2007, p. 94). In addition to the standardized observation instruments that were required, the literacy coach utilized video recordings to document instructional episodes, and student data analysis (see Table 4.5).
Table 4.5
Tools Utilized by the Literacy Coach to Target Teachers’ Strengths and Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative Instructional Protocol</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Literacy Environment: Doors, Entry, and Walls (SLE DEW)</td>
<td>The classroom environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs, Rhymes, Observation Protocol I</td>
<td>Phonemic awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Observation Protocol</td>
<td>This is a “kid watching” protocol while engaged in play. To document the varied levels of play as described in Neuman and Roskos, 2007.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Book Reading Protocol</td>
<td>Interactive book reading with the purposes of developing vocabulary, comprehension of the text and concepts of print.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier1 Say/Tell/Do with whole class</td>
<td>This is a Tier 1 vocabulary instruction protocol approach for at risk preschoolers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 2 Say/Tell/Do/Play Protocol</td>
<td>This is a Tier 2 vocabulary instruction protocol approach for at risk preschoolers (Roskos, 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eBook Nook</td>
<td>This is a Tier 2 vocabulary instruction protocol approach for at risk preschoolers using eBooks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Documentation Checklist</td>
<td>A checklist used by the literacy coach to document program elements observed in the classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Observation Instruments</td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (ELLCO)</td>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Assessment Scoring System Observation Instrument (CLASS)</td>
<td>Adult/child interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Tools</td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video recordings</td>
<td>Document instructional episodes to triangulate data; to mediate reflective conversations with teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Data</td>
<td>Monitoring student progress; to facilitate data analysis and planning conversations to meet student needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The literacy coach formally used the protocols and standardized observation tools at least three times per year and was able to use the information to gauge teachers’ progress over time regarding their instructional practices. The protocols were used as a “road map” (p. 9) for the teachers of how they should be implementing the early literacy strategies depicted in the protocols (Interview, LC, June 7, 2012). The teachers rated the support of the protocols from high support to no support. Overall, the protocols were ranked mostly as high to near high support (Teacher Interview Summary Chart, pp. 2-3).

The Shared Book Reading Protocol had a lot of steps and was fully implemented during three separate readings of the same text. Although a challenge to implement, Megan indicated that the teachers used to ask yes/no questions, “…now it’s more in depth [asking more open ended questions], and you know what the students know and don’t know” (Interview Transcript, Megan, June 7, 2012, p. 8). All of teachers gave the Phonological Awareness Protocol as being the most supportive to them (Teacher Interview Summary Chart, pp. 2-3). Amy stated, “I knew it was important [phonological awareness]. I thought it was more important writing letters [prior to learning about and using the phonological awareness protocol]…. That was one of my reality checks” (Interview Transcript, Amy, June 6, 2012, p. 18).

The teachers were inconsistent of the use of the video recordings during their one-on-one conferences with the literacy coach. Megan reported a neutral stance regarding the helpfulness of the videos, and she did not expand upon this. Whereas, Amy ranked the video support the highest. Although Sally rated the video recordings as not helpful, she did verify their usefulness (Teacher Interview Summary Chart, p. 1). However, it was how the literacy coach used the data from the protocols that assisted her in
determining what the needs of the teachers were, thus, enabling her to target the teachers’ needs during the one-on-one post-conferences.

**Teachers’ strengths and needs** The literacy coach utilized the observation tools to focus her attention on pertinent teacher actions during the observations or to focus on the classroom environment for evidence of on-going learning while simultaneously video recording the instructional episodes. The literacy coach then triangulated and reflected upon the data to identify the teachers’ strengths and needs. The literacy coach also selected segments of the video recordings that were used during the one-on-one conferences to mediate reflective conversations with the teachers (Field Notes, Post conference Amy, April 10, 2012; Field Notes, Post conference Sally, May 2, 2012).

Student data analysis was also a prominent consideration when planning for the targeted conversations. An important goal for the literacy coach was to assist teachers to use data from student progress monitoring assessments to plan for instruction. This goal was reflected in the literacy coach’s statements for the teachers’ considerations, “What are your students doing, and what can you do to help them?” She further explained that fidelity to the implementation of the instructional protocols would yield research-based instructional practices. Then the teachers must consider, “How are the kids receiving it? What are they [students] coming back to you and showing what they know [from progress monitoring]?” (Interview Transcript, Literacy Coach, June 7, 2012, p. 7). A discussion to deepen the knowledge of progress monitoring was discussed during a tutorial (Field Notes, TU_3, April 30, 2012; HO_1_TU3, April 30, 2012). Fostering a deeper knowledge of why we progress monitor was a need for most of the teachers. Then during the one-on-one interactions, student data were used to mediate the discussions
pertaining to the individual teacher’s students (Transcript_Amy, May 21, 2012; Transcript_Megan, May 23, 2012; Transcript_Sally, May 9, 2012). Analyzing data is a direct link to teachers’ classrooms. It was used to inform conversations that involved planning and also discussions on research-based instructional practices. The following excerpt illustrated the literacy coach guiding a coaching conversation into planning for instruction. Student data analysis was utilized to initiate the conversation.

Literacy Coach: …at this point you might say this is your Tier 2 group [gesturing to stack of data sheets] (Telling; to clarify) with an emphasis on what kinds of things can we do to play alphabet games to learn letters. (Telling; instructional games during small group instruction) Have you thought about that? (Questioning; pressing for reflection on instructional activities during small group instruction)

Amy: There are a couple of good games on the computer. Starfall has a couple of good things.

Several pages of transcription indicated a great deal of brainstorming for activities related to alphabet letter instruction. The literacy coach wrapped it up and related the idea of a Tier 2 intervention group to what Amy was doing in the program with vocabulary intervention:

Literacy Coach: Just like the Tier 2 we did with the vocabulary…let’s play a game with them that’s fun. (Directing; relating intervention group for alphabet letter knowledge to intervention for vocabulary development) (Transcript_Amy, May 21, 2012).

Identifying the strengths and needs of the teachers or student data analysis were not all the literacy coach considered when planning for and engaging with the preschool teachers. She was also sensitive to their personalities or dispositions. This is reflected in her statements regarding the teachers, clearly it is about developing relations, and you know where you’re at with each person….I have a teacher who is slow and steady, and I’m not slow and steady, so I have to slow myself down… …another one who is quick, and gets it every time
I bring it up…another one who is inquisitive and wants to know more…” (Interview, Transcript, Literacy Coach, June 7, 2012, p. 8).

The literacy coach indicated that the teachers’ personalities were key to embracing that which was discussed. Because of these differences, the literacy coach adjusted her delivery and expectations. Differentiation by this literacy coach involved identifying each teacher’s strengths and needs coupled with the needs of their students, and the teachers’ personalities or dispositions. The teachers’ strengths, needs, and dispositions are outlined in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6
Teachers’ Strengths, Needs, Personalities and/or Dispositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Dispositions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sally   | • Sensitive to emotional needs of children and their families  
• Making playful, fun activities  
• Redirection | • Reflective practice—developing an awareness of student actions during instructional episodes  
• Strategic planning  
• Time management  
• Assessment—purpose of progress monitoring and using data to plan | • Strong opinions; slow and steady; does not always implement what is prescribed to her or pertains to her, given the half day program  
• Uses time as a barrier to full implementation of research-based instruction outlined in the protocols  
• Not rigid—allowed children a lot of movement |
Table 4.6
Teachers’ Strengths, Needs, Personalities and/or Dispositions (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Dispositions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Megan   | • Classroom management— expectations for students is explicit; takes the time to make sure children know the class routines  
• Creates an engaging environment for students—centers have many activities  
• Technology use with students and for her use  
• Assessment— consistent progress monitoring  
• Data analysis— planning instruction  
• Curriculum— planning for summer  
• Implementation of protocols was adequate, deleting certain steps | • Confident, thoughtful—needs time to think things through; will usually implement what is being suggested, but not immediately; must be her decision; will let literacy coach know when she is ready  
• Resourceful—will search on her own for materials, strategies and share with literacy coach | |
| Amy     | • Curriculum development  
• Creates an engaging environment for students  
• Sensitive to student needs and assists students  
• Circulates/interacts with children during play  
• Implementation of protocols, lower end of high  
• Classroom management— redirection strategy  
• Understanding of instruction in context versus isolated instruction  
• Assessment—use of data from progress monitoring  
• Reflection—not always aware of own actions or impact of actions on children | • Inquisitive—wants to know more  
• Enthusiastic—willing to implement soon after new learning, does not hesitate to request assistance from literacy coach with implementation; if discovers a strategy or activity related to theme will ask the literacy coach for feedback and assistance | |

(Interview Transcript_LC, June 7, 2012)

Sally

The literacy coach determined that Sally had several important strengths as a teacher. Sally effectively used redirection with her students. She was conscientious about making activities with and for the children playful and fun. Sally demonstrated sensitivity to the emotional and practical needs of the children and families. This was evident when
the literacy coach and Sally were planning a packet of alphabet letter learning activities that was sent home at the end of the school year. Sally stated to the literacy coach,

> they [parents] might get angry with an attitude like, how do you know? So I would like to call it ‘fun and games’…to help your child over the summer. …have to put the caption together so it’s not negative….It has to be worded just so they’ll want to do it. (PC_Transcript, Sally, May 9, 2012, pp. 9 - 10)

The literacy coach also determined that Sally had several needs in the area of teaching. These needs were identified during this study based upon the literacy coach’s observations over time. The needs included becoming a reflective practitioner, strategic planning, time management, and progress monitoring for the purpose of planning for students’ needs.

The literacy coach considered the teachers’ personality types and dispositions in her approach with the teachers. The literacy coach indicated that personality was key to teachers embracing or not embracing suggestions, direction, or instructional practices written in the protocols. The literacy coach determined that Sally has strong opinions; she does not always implement what is prescribed. Given that she has half-day classes, her belief is that not all of what was learned pertained to her, using time as a barrier for implementing the instructional protocols fully. She was not rigid with the children and allowed a lot of movement in her classroom. The literacy coach explained that Sally is slow and steady, so she also has to slow down, giving Sally small doses of information (Interview_LC, June 7, 2012: PC_Sally, May 2, 2012; PC_Sally, May 9, 2012).

A very prominent modeling example occurred during a one-on-one post-conference with Sally. A goal of the literacy coach for Sally was to encourage her to think about her teaching practices (Interview, Literacy Coach, May 2, 2012). In this particular interaction, the literacy coach planned to share a video of her rehearsing with
her accompanist for a wedding in which she would be singing. Together, she and Sally
viewed the video on her iPad, and she used the think aloud strategy to model reflection
and problem solving to improve her singing performance.

Literacy Coach: …Saturday morning when I was at worship practice…he and I
are singing in a wedding at the end of the month. … he and I have not practiced
enough, and I said hey I brought my iPad. Let’s video tape ourselves so we can
hear ourselves….I should really go back one. I should video tape our bloopers.
I’m actually in my pajamas, no make-up on, and undone hair. (Telling; setting
purpose)

Sally: That’s ok.

Literacy Coach: …and we make some mistakes in here. (Telling)

Sally: Well you know, you always will until you keep practicin’ and practicin’
and just get it right.

Literacy Coach: … and the other thing is I’m self reflecting and listening to the
types of mistakes I make. (Telling) Here I go. (Telling) You ready? (Questioning)

Sally: Hmmm [yes]

In the above interaction, the literacy coach framed the viewing by explaining the purpose
for watching the video of her singing and providing the setting and the purpose for the
rehearsal. Sally was encouraging. In this next segment, the literacy coach and Sally
viewed the video together on the iPad for the purpose of self reflection.

Literacy Coach: I have heard myself sing a couple of times on this video, and
there are a couple of things that I’m doing that I don’t like. And it might not
bother you, but it bothers me. So in my reflection; there’s actually a lady at our
church who does voice lessons and I talked to her…so she will coach me. … I
could probably pull this off at the wedding, but I would rather fix it because I’m
afraid I will make more mistakes. … it’s the word “how” right here. It’s not high
enough. I’m not hitting it right. I’m afraid of the higher note. I think I can’t hit it,
so I’m not doing it well. (Telling; sharing her self-reflection)

Sally: Ok. So you want a coach to help you get it right.
Literacy Coach: Yes.

Sally: I get it. And you’re my coach. (Transcript, Sally, May, 2, 2012)

In this interaction the literacy coach pointed out the exact word or note she was having difficulty with. She indicated she was afraid that if she did not hit it right, the anticipation of that error could cause her to make other errors. She shared what her issue was as well as her problem solving—getting help from a voice coach at her church. When Sally did not seem to get the literacy coach’s point about self reflection, she reiterated her goal of this exercise in the following statement:

   Literacy Coach: My actual point is the whole self reflection. …I might say I did ok here, but here is something I would like to do better. I would like to fix it.

After recapping the purpose of viewing her rehearsal, the literacy coach transitioned to analyzing video segments of Sally’s shared book instructional sessions with her students. This segment illustrated how modeling was used as a scaffolding technique.

Video snippets of Sally engaged with her students in two different contexts, in a small group and whole group, were viewed during a one-on-one interaction.

   Literacy Coach: I have been anxious and looked at your shared book when you were doing the balls topic study. It was actually the week you were doing the spring book and I want to talk to you…listening to the shared book in the afternoon [Sally has two sessions of different children; one session in the morning and one in the afternoon].

The literacy coach’s purpose was to guide Sally to reflect upon the children’s engagement during the instructional episodes. She and Sally viewed and discussed the engagement of the children during the shared book instructional episodes. The literacy coach attempted to guide Sally to understand that small groups may be a better context for implementing pertinent instruction during shared book reading. In the shared book
teaching episode, one particular child did not appear to be attending and the literacy coach was concerned this child’s behavior may be distracting to other students.

Literacy Coach: I want you to watch the children…think about who you think is getting something out of the instruction and who might not be [getting something out of the instruction].

Sally: Oh, that’s easy to see.

As they continued to watch the children, Sally did not offer any comments, the literacy coach interjected:

Literacy Coach: …I’m really watching her [pointing to a child who is rolling on the carpet, then lying down, and then leaves the group]

Sally: …probably because she hasn’t been here for so long, she doesn’t really know what to do [this is the end of the school year and it is later revealed that high absenteeism was an issue for this child]

Literacy Coach: Look at where she’s going right now. (Directing to focus attention to a particular child’s actions)(Post conference, Transcript, Sally, May 2, 2012, pp.4-5)

This segment illustrated the literacy coach stimulating a reflective feedback conversation with Sally. The literacy coach directed Sally to focus on a particular child when it appeared that Sally did not notice that the child may not be attending and may be distracting other students. Sally indicated, during a subsequent interview with me, that she did not realize what the particular child observed was doing during the shared book episode. This was reflected in her statement regarding using video segments to reflect upon her instructional practices “…Oh, Wow! I didn’t realize Maggie was over there doing that. It (video) does have its benefits” (Interview, Sally, May 15, 2012, p.9).
Megan

The literacy coach determined that Megan had several important strengths as a teacher. One strength exhibited by Megan was classroom management. Megan articulated that she took her time explaining explicitly her expectations to her students in the beginning of the school year. She wanted them to fully understand the classroom routines (PC_Transcript, Megan, April 19, 2012; Interview Transcript, Megan, June 7, 2012, p. 2). Megan created an engaging environment for the students including having varied activities in each of the centers (PC_Transcript, Megan, April 19, 2012). She was quite knowledgeable about implementing technology in her instructional practices as well as for her own purposes. Megan’s confidence and knowledge regarding technology was exemplified in her statement, “Ladies and Gentlemen, sit back and enjoy the show. I know how to add the narration, so I won’t need the music” (Transcript, TU 3, April 30, 2012, p. 6).

The literacy coach also determined that Megan had several needs in the area of teaching. Megan’s greatest need focused on learning about the CLASS observation instrument. As previously discussed, all the teachers in the program were in a learning mode regarding this instrument. An excerpt from a one-on-one interaction regarding the CLASS instrument was presented in research question one, Differences in Supporting Teachers. During a one-on-one conference Megan indicated that she did not remember the content of a conversation during the tutorial April 4, 2012; therefore, the literacy coach provided background information regarding low risk versus high risk children and the importance of the emotional support provided by educators to high risk students (PC_Transcript, Megan, April 19, 2012). In addition, on-going discussions with the
literacy coach regarding data analysis and using the data to plan for instruction were evident (PC_Transcript, Megan, May 23, 2012; Field Notes, TU3, April 30, 2012).

When discussing Megan’s personality type and dispositions, the literacy coach indicated that Megan was very confident in herself. She was thoughtful with regards to what they are learning. She did not usually implement what was discussed immediately, but usually implemented what was discussed after she has thought it through and communicated to the literacy coach if she was not ready to implement what was discussed. When considering the level of fidelity of implementing the instructional protocols, Megan did so at an adequate level, not fully embracing all the steps in certain protocols. This was affirmed by Megan in her statement, “…some things I agree and some things I don’t agree with” (Interview Transcript, Megan, June 7, 2012, p. 5). She did not usually request assistance from the literacy coach with the implementation of research-based instructional activities (Interview, LC, June, 7, 2012). Given her resourcefulness, she would seek varied resources for what was being taught in her class and would share these with the literacy coach (PC_Transcript, Megan, May 23, 2012).

The following excerpt was from an interaction with Megan using student data to mediate the coaching conversation (Transcript, PC_Megan, May 23, 2012).

Literacy Coach: …I wanted to just go back and look at the ALK [alphabet letter knowledge]…Here is the pile [student data sheets] of returning kids. (Telling: setting the purpose/focus)

Megan: Kinder bounds? (Questioning to clarify)

Literacy Coach: …Now, the kinder bounds who are looking pretty sweet [both were reading the line graphs]. I love to see this because this just tells you Mrs. Megan teaches a lot. (Telling: affirming teacher’s efforts) I’m just showing here [pointing to the graphs] the growth of the kids…went from knowing 10 to knowing 21 to knowing all 26[letters]. (Telling: facts from the data)
Throughout this session the literacy coach and teacher continued to discuss individual students who did not make benchmark, who will be going to kindergarten in the fall, and who will or will not be attending the summer session. After Megan reflected upon each of the students of concern, the literacy coach moved the conversation forward and shifted to planning instruction:

   Literacy Coach: …This one [student] here is not too bad but is still pretty low in comparison to your group that is high achieving. (Telling: facts) So, let’s do something. (Directing: to think about instruction to meet student’s needs)

   Megan: …she’s gaining.

   Literacy Coach: Yes, she is definitely gaining (Telling: affirming teacher’s analysis)…we need to think about what we can do to help her. (Directing: to think about instruction to meet student’s needs)

The literacy coach not only guided Megan to identify those students who met benchmark or not, but also to plan for intervention for those students not at benchmark. She moved the data analysis conversations forward into planning for instruction. However, Megan indicated that some of the students identified were not at benchmark, may not be attending summer school. Therefore, the literacy coach shifted the emphasis to what can be done to send things home over the summer.

   Literacy Coach: …What kind of things can you send home?

   Megan: Alphabets…She [child’s mother] can just cut ‘em, and do the concentration type thing…it’s pretty open

Megan was not sure how many and which children would be on her roster for summer school. She anticipated high absenteeism for those she thought would be attending summer school. The literacy coach encouraged her to plan for targeted instruction when the children did attend as suggested in the following excerpt:
Literacy Coach: If I were you, I would be concerned with those four kids [gestures to the assessment data of student]. Any day they show up, think…what alphabet game do I have in the room I want to try? I really feel like it is too much for Alex and Michael to try 26 letters, so let’s just go back to square one…really simple…their names. *(Thinking out loud to guide planning)*

Megan: …we were on that pace of six letters per week. It was too much for this group. *(Reflecting on pacing for the four children)*

Literacy Coach: Well now that you’ve been through the experience of what Tier 2 is like …about which child is not advancing. Do they belong in a Tier 2 group; where I can do some extra things. *(Relating to Tier 2 grouping for vocabulary)* Tuesday I might do…Thursday I might do alphabet knowledge. *(Telling; thinking out loud questions related to instruction for the four children; offering scheduling suggestions)* *(PC_Transcript, Megan, May 23, 2012, p. 9).*

Megan shared her concern regarding the reality of implementing the alphabet letter activities discussed during the one-on-one interaction with the literacy coach. This is exemplified in the following excerpt:

Researcher: How did you feel about that session as far as the goals go for the Tier 2 intervention for those kids?

Megan: What goals I had set up may not happen because the one child we talked about, he’s going to be like in half day kindergarten program that they perform over the summer. So whatever plans I have for him (trailed off). I don’t know what is going to happen to the other one [student]…I don’t even know if he is going to be here over the summer *(Interview Transcript, Megan, June 7, 2012, p. 4).*

**Amy**

The literacy coach determined that Amy had several important strengths as a teacher. The strengths evident from the literacy coach’s classroom observations and interactions with Amy were her ability to develop integrated curricular activities and her fidelity to the implementation of the protocols was the lower end of high. Amy created an engaging literacy rich environment for the students. Observations of Amy’s interactions with her students indicated that she circulated and interacted with students during play,
and demonstrated sensitivity to the children’s needs (Interview_LC, June 7, 2012; PC_Transcript, Amy, April 10, 2012; PC_Transcript, Amy, May 21, 2012).

The literacy coach also determined that Amy had several needs in the area of teaching. The needs of Amy addressed during this study included issues of behavior management, specifically the redirection strategy. Another need addressed in a one-on-one interaction was isolated instruction versus embedded instruction or instruction in context, and a deeper understanding of progress monitoring for the purpose of planning for meaningful instruction to meet student needs (Interview, LC, June 6, 2012; PC_Transcript, Amy, April 10, 2012; PC_Transcript, Amy, May 21, 2012).

The literacy coach also considered the personality and dispositions of Amy. Amy was enthusiastic and inquisitive, wanting to learn more. She would implement that which was suggested soon after her interactions with the literacy coach and requested assistance or feedback from the literacy coach during implementation (Interview Transcript, LC, June 7, 2012). An excerpt from a targeted conversation with Amy regarding redirection follows:

It was observed that a child was hitting the ceiling with a ball during center time. Amy had given him three chances to stop. She gave him a book, but he started to eat it (Transcript, Amy, April 10, 2012). The literacy coach moved the conversation forward regarding redirection with the following question:

Literacy Coach: Do you look back on this and think that maybe there was something else you could have done to redirect him?

Amy shared with the literacy coach her actions and the student’s attributes under discussion:
Amy: …Nathan is very stubborn…I gave him three chances…I asked him several times to go to another area…he does not like to be touched…I was goin’ like this [gesture indicating to come with me] and saying come on let’s go.

Literacy Coach: So you’re aware of what works for him and what doesn’t work for him. *(Telling; affirming Amy)*

The literacy coach moved the conversation forward with a question:

Literacy Coach: When you gave him a suggestion to go to another place, did you give him specific ideas? *(Questioning; to foster understanding)*

Amy: …I did tell him to go find something to do…I think I said…

After it was apparent that Amy was not sure what she directed the child to do, the literacy coach offered suggestions based upon her own experiences of working with preschool children:

Literacy Coach: …I would like to share with you what I did in redirecting children…I would always try to find them another activity and get them engaged *(Telling; qualifying her background).* I understand…doesn’t like to be touched…you did give him three chances to improve…you tried to give him a book *(Telling; affirming Amy’s actions and insight of child’s personality)*…that doesn’t sound like something that replaced the activity. *(Telling; confirming that the book replacement did not work)*

Amy reflected more about the episode and about what Nathan liked to do:

Amy: …Nathan does like table toys…

After reiterating affirmations of Amy’s initial actions during the episode she shifted the conversation to concrete examples of redirecting:

Literacy Coach: When a child does something like that I explain to him: I have given you three chances and you keep hitting the ceiling. *(Modeling; restating the undesirable behavior)* You have to choose something else. Can I help you pick something else? *(Telling; adult action. Modeling a conversation with a child)* When you redirect, give them some specific ideas. *(Telling; explaining adult action)*

Amy: I could probably let him go on the computer *(Amy’s reflections [the one above and here] demonstrated her understanding of redirecting the child to a desirable activity for the child)*
The literacy coach further explained redirecting children to a desirable activity in the following excerpt:

   Literacy Coach: …has to be a win/win situation. You have to win and he has to feel like he wins also. *(Telling; explaining why to redirect to what the child feels is a desirable activity)*

   Amy: …I think when I had him get a book; I thought it would settle him down… *(Amy reflected further on the episode)*

The literacy coach wrapped up this portion of the coaching conference in the following segment.

   Literacy Coach: …that is a situation where you are aware of the problem, you acknowledge the emotions, and you provide comfort and assistance. I’m almost looking at the redirection …as assistance; you are giving individualized support to that child…you have other kids in the classroom, but at that time, because in your classroom environment everyone was actively engaged…it was very well planned in terms of having enough activities…so focusing with him for a few minutes—you could have worked that out… *(Telling; affirming Amy and suggesting)*

The literacy coach affirmed Amy’s accomplishment of creating an engaging classroom environment for the children. She noted that because the children were so engaged, she could have spent some time with Nathan to redirect him appropriately. The literacy coach offered specific examples of redirecting and background information for Amy to consider for future encounters with children when exhibiting undesirable behaviors.

The literacy coach varied her levels of support during her interactions with the teachers, most notably during the one-on-on interactions. The literacy coach varied her levels of support as needed in the moment to differentiate during the interactions. She used telling, modeling, directing, and questioning in order the meet teachers’ needs during their interactions. She had to decide in the moment when to listen, when to model, when to direct, or when to question. The levels varied during each of the interactions depending upon the teachers’ needs at that moment.

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A noteworthy finding was the format in which the literacy coach approached each teacher during the one-on-one conferences. A distinct pattern arose from the data. The literacy coach would begin with a few minutes of rapport building talk or talk related to their work not necessarily related to the content of the planned coaching interaction. The literacy coach stated the purpose of the session followed by questions to prompt the teachers to share their own perceptions of the instructional episodes observed. This would then be followed by data such as video clips, her field notes on the protocols, or student assessment data. Then, she would introduce her feedback, including the strengths of what was observed as well as what needed strengthening. Throughout the interactions, she skillfully used varying levels of scaffolding as previously discussed. The interactions ended with a brief recap or summary of what was discussed including what each may be doing or implementing. She also asked for feedback regarding her coaching and would end with a thank you for meeting with her (Summary, Amy_PC, April 10, 2012; Summary, T1_PC, May 21, 2012; Summary, Megan_PC, April 19, 2012; Summary, Megan_PC, May 23, 2012; Summary, Sally_PC, May 2, 2012; Summary, Sally_PC, May 9 2012).

**Summary of Question 3 Findings**

Differentiation to meet teachers’ needs was an on-going recursive and complex process. It was evident from the data that the literacy coach utilized a variety of tools to determine the teachers’ strengths and areas to be strengthened. Not one of the tools previously discussed was used in isolation. The literacy coach used the observation tools to focus her attention on specific teacher actions while simultaneously video recording the instructional episodes and writing field notes. The data from the tools were
triangulated to determine the teachers’ strengths and needs observed in the instructional episodes. These same tools were used during the teacher interactions, especially the one-on-one interactions to mediate reflective conversations regarding the teachers’ instructional practices.

Mediating the reflective feedback conversations was complex. The literacy coach and teachers analyzed the selected video segments coupled with the rating tool to reflectively discuss the teachers’ actions and/or the students’ actions. The literacy coach also considered each teacher’s personality and dispositions during the coaching interactions. Student data analysis was also a primary means of mediating the coaching conversations. Monitoring student progress mediated conversations that involved planning and discussion on research-based instructional practices.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine and document how a literacy coach interacted with and differentiated to meet the needs of the preschool teachers she coached. During and after completing the data collection, qualitative analysis procedures were used to identify common themes across the data sources relative to the three questions which guided this study:

1. How does an early literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model?
2. What, if any, similarities and/or differences occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across three preschool teachers?
3. In what ways, if any does an early literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?
These questions were informed by qualitative data collection and analysis methods including observations, digital recordings, interviews, and artifacts that were used to mediate the coaching interactions, summaries, and data charts.

Three themes emerged in response to research question one: synergy created through varied contexts, reflection, and differences in supporting teachers. The coaching model employed in this study was situated within an embedded professional development model. Synergism was created through the multiple interactions during the varied, but cohesive contexts. The varied contexts of the interactions identified were staff professional development, tutorials, and one-on-one conferences. Goal setting and planning was an important feature in order for synergy and cohesiveness to occur. Planning was in two phases. In the first phase, the literacy coaches met once a month for their professional development. Part of their professional development included information regarding the expectations or goals for the staff professional development. Then the coaches met to further delineate how they would plan the professional development to reflect the goals. Implementation of the goals was carried over into the tutorials and finally into the classroom observations and one-on-one conferences.

Reflection was another theme to emerge in connection to the first research question. Reflective questioning was evident in each interaction observed. Reflective activities were planned and implemented in the varied interactions. The reflective activities and questions provided for active construction on the teachers’ learning. Reflection offered an avenue for the teachers to think about their teaching practices, to connect their new learning to their teaching practices, and then to implement what was being learned into their instructional practices with the support of the literacy coach.
Differences in supporting teachers was another theme that emerged in response to research question one. The literacy coach varied her levels of support to the teachers in their interactions. The level of support varied from interaction to interaction, and from teacher to teacher, depending upon the needs of the teachers during their conversations. Research question two addressed the similarities and differences in regards to the interactions between the literacy coach and the preschool teachers. Separate similarities and differences mentioned specifics such as goal setting, planning, etc. The types of activities that were planned and implemented during the varied interactions fostered joint problem solving. Different types of problem solving in the varied interactions contributed to deep learning for the participants. The varied joint problem-solving activities allowed for the participants to deepen their understanding of what was being learned and applied to their classroom practices. The one-on-one interactions were the most intense interaction as the teachers’ instructional needs were targeted. The similarities between and across the interactions were identified and discussed. Goal setting and planning were prominent in creating synergy in the varied and cohesive contexts, along with collaborative learning activities, and reflection. The differences between and across the interactions presented: focus of data presentations, how the content was presented in the varied contexts, the learning opportunities differed in each context, and the process of the interactions.

Two themes emerged in response to research question three: the ways in which the literacy coach differentiated during interactions with the preschool teachers. The themes that emerged in regard to this question were targeting coaching conversations based on teachers’ strengths and needs and differences in supporting teachers based on
their personalities and dispositions. Several tools were used to enable the literacy coach to determine teachers’ strengths as well as their needs and also to differentiate based on teachers’ personalities and dispositions. The tools used during the observations were formative and standardized observations instruments and video recordings of the teachers’ instructional episodes. The literacy coach then analyzed the data from these tools to determine the strengths and areas of need. These tools, as well as student data analysis, were used to mediate targeted conversations with the teachers in one-on-one post-conferences. Reflective tools and data analysis were used to mediate conversations during the professional development and tutorials. These tools were used to strengthen the teachers’ understanding of research-based instructional practices related to early literacy. The literacy coach was able to plan conversations that involved reflection on practice and building background knowledge when needed.

Differences in supporting teachers during the interactions offered a way for the literacy coach to differentiate during conversations in the moment. Scaffolding actions from most support to least support were telling, modeling, directing, and questions. Although the levels of support suggest a continuum, the level of support used varied on a moment to moment basis during the interactions. More help was offered when needed and less help was offered when the teachers were being successful.

Differentiating to meet the teachers’ needs was an on-going, recursive process. It involved identifying the strengths and needs of the teachers and being sensitive to the individual teacher’s personalities and dispositions. Differentiating involved analysis of teacher and student data, reflection of teachers’ practices, planning to strengthen the teachers’ understanding of what was being learned. The literacy coach varied levels of
support on a moment-to-moment basis during the conversations with the teachers.

Noteworthy was the format the literacy coach implemented during the interactions with the teachers: rapport building dialogue, stating the purpose of the coaching interaction, questioning to prompt the teachers’ perceptions of their instructional episodes, data introduced into the conversations, while varying the level of scaffolding as needed. She would end the session by recapping or summarizing what was discussed, questioning the teachers for feedback regarding the coaching session, and ended by thanking them for meeting with her.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this era of teacher accountability, a shift from student-centered to teacher-centered reform has emerged. Literacy coaching as part of a job-embedded professional development model has emerged as one way to close the proverbial achievement gap. The International Reading Association (2004) explained that the increase in reading coaches, “is one of the responses to increased attention to reading achievement and the achievement gap in the United States” (n.p.). Knight (2009b) reported that the rate of implementation for one-shot workshops at best was 15%, whereas professional development with coaching that focuses on implementing research-based practices leads to implementation. Neuman and Wright (2010) reported that professional development with coaching versus professional development without coaching produced significant increases in improvement in teacher knowledge and instructional practices in preschool centers and home-care settings. This current study was situated in a preschool program employing a job-embedded professional development model with literacy coaching.

This final chapter is composed of four major sections. Section one includes a summary of the study including the purpose, research questions, and research methods. The second section presents the results followed by the major conclusions in relation to the questions explored. Next, implications for coaching professional development are suggested. Finally, recommendations for future research are shared.
Study Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine and document how, if at all, an early literacy coach differentiated coaching interactions with three preschool teachers to meet their individual needs. The research questions that guided this qualitative study included:

1. How does an early literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model?
2. What, if any, similarities and/or differences occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across three preschool teachers?
3. In what ways, if any, does an early literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?

This study was situated in an urban Head Start preschool in a Great Lakes state. A single case study design was used to answer the research questions. There were a total of four participants in this study: one literacy coach and three preschool teachers she coached. Data collection procedures consistent with single case study design included observations of the literacy coach and teachers’ interactions, digital recordings of the observations, interviews with all four participants, and artifacts related to the interactions.

Qualitative analysis procedures were used to determine common themes across the data sources. An a priori code structure was derived from a review of the research literature, the researcher’s experience, and a pilot study. It evolved through multiple readings of the data from which patterns or themes emerged telling the story related to the questions. These themes are reported in the next section.
Study Results

The following is a discussion of the findings related to the questions that guided this study. Several themes emerged upon analysis of the data. The themes which emerged are presented first followed by a discussion of the conclusions.

Research Question 1

How does an early literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model?

Synergy created through cohesive contexts. One theme that emerged from the data was the contexts in which the literacy coach and teachers interacted. Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) described coaching as a complex process. Quatroche, Bean, and Hamilton (2001) described context to include the people with whom literacy coaches work as well as the setting or location of the work. The contexts observed varied in several ways and for multiple purposes. Each context was important as the discussions and activities in each of the contexts were clearly related. A clear line of evidence of this relationship was documented. Data garnered from the interviews of the teacher participants indicated that the interactions during the different contexts had a fairly high impact on their professional growth (Teachers Interview Summary Chart, pp. 1-2, July 2012). The contexts that were observed in this study included whole staff professional development, tutorials or small group meetings, and one-on-one coaching interactions. The tutorial sessions included the literacy coach and the teachers assigned to her, of which three were part of this study. Each of the three tutorials observed had different purposes but were all related to what was occurring in the program and individual classrooms. How these contexts are related is demonstrated in the following illustration.
During one tutorial observed, the literacy coach led the teachers in reading and discussing a domain of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Field notes, April 2, 2012). Part of the staff professional development day was used to continue building the background knowledge of the staff regarding the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument. Pertinent information was disseminated to the staff regarding the observation instrument. Open-ended and problem-solving activities connecting the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument to their preschool classrooms were facilitated by the literacy coaches. After exploring specific dimensions of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument, the staff used the observation tool to rate the interactions between adults and preschool children observed in a video clip (Field notes, TU_1, April 2, 2012). According to Dozier, Johnston, and Rogers (2006), this type of activity gives the staff a metacognitive understanding of the process. Becoming metacognitive about adult and preschool children interactions allows them to reflect upon their own interactions with children.

During a subsequent tutorial, the literacy coach and teachers used a document prepared by the literacy coach to mediate a discussion of the specific dimensions of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument and relating the attributes described to their individual actions. The tutorial also served as a pre-conference to the individual classroom observation using this unfamiliar observation tool. Following each of the classroom observations, data from the observations were used to mediate reflective conferences with each of the teachers. One-on-one conferences are supported by Dozier, Johnston, and Rogers (2006) for developing reflective teachers. This focus upon the individual teachers makes it possible to nudge them toward reflection in important areas.
They further stipulate that difficult issues can be addressed during these sessions. Lyons and Pinnell (2001) considered focused conversation, dialogue, and discussion as examples of “extended learning” (p. 172).

These differing contexts formed a system that worked together or what is described by Lyons and Pinnell (2001) as a system that works together in “synergy” (p. 44), thus producing an effect greater than each could accomplish alone. The goals and activities planned for each context served to continue building the teachers’ knowledge regarding early literacy practices, writing an integrated curriculum, how to use and interpret data, and supporting the teachers as they implemented research-based early literacy practices. Important to creating a cohesive system between each of the contexts was goal setting.

Goal setting and planning was the key to creating a synergistic and cohesive framework for deep learning to occur. The external evaluation team and program director determined the overarching goals, and the monthly goals in this embedded professional development plus literacy coaching model. The literacy coaches then planned joint inquiry and reflective activities to engage the teachers within this framework. The staff professional development was where research-based instructional practices and theories were introduced. The tutorial sessions was where the literacy coach delved deeper into that which was introduced during the staff professional development sessions, and finally the one-on-one coaching sessions addressed the specific needs of the teachers while also affirming the teachers’ strengths. Goal setting and planning supportive adult learning activities to meet the goals is supported by the National Staff Development Council (2001).
The literacy coach planned and implemented varying types of collaborative inquiry and reflective activities in each of the contexts in order to meet the goals of the program and individual teacher’s needs. There was a focus on building knowledge of early literacy instructional practices and the importance of emotional support for preschool children. Activities the literacy coach and teachers in which they engaged included joint problem solving, data analysis, questioning, and reflection. Coaching interactions take place within a cultural context, and as stated by Pinnell (2007), this context has a “strong impact on a teacher’s inclination and ability to reflect on teaching” (p. xi). My findings in this study support Pinnell’s emphasis on the importance of a cultural context for coaching interactions.

**Reflection.** Reflection was prevalent in every phase of planning and implementation throughout the study. Reflection was observed during the literacy coach’s planning for interactions with the teachers, during each of the interactions, and reflective questions were written into the integrated curriculum guide. The interactions were thoughtfully planned and implemented based upon the continuous gathering of data. Data collection included observation data of the teachers’ instructional episodes as well as student progress monitoring data over time. The literacy coach triangulated data gathered, identified teachers’ strengths, and prioritized teachers’ needs. Opportunities to foster reflective conversations were purposely planned for in the varying interactions through questioning, video analysis of teachers’ instructional episodes, observation data from various observation instruments, student data, and reflective documents connecting new learning to the teachers’ classroom practices. The literacy coach continuously
reflected upon her actions and interactions with the teachers during and after their sessions.

**Differences in supporting teachers.** Consistently supporting teachers as they implement research-based instructional practices is the main role of literacy coaches (Poglinco et al., 2003). In this study the conversations between the teachers and the literacy coach were the key component in the varied interactions. Various levels of support during conversations were observed from most support to least support. The levels of support offered were telling, modeling, directing and questioning. The literacy coach skillfully modified her levels of support at the right moment of need during the focused one-on-one interactions. She listened to what the teachers were saying and then stepped in at the level of support deemed necessary in the moment-to-moment interactions. The moment-to-moment responsive decisions by the literacy coach were necessary to keep the coaching conversations flowing, but most important was offering support at the right level of sensitivity.

**Research Question 2**

What, if any, similarities and/or differences occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across three preschool teachers?

Several similarities and differences emerged from across and within coaching interactions during the analysis of the data. The similarities that occurred in the coaching interactions were goal setting and planning, collaborative activities, learning opportunities, and reflection. The differences that occurred in the coaching interactions were the focus of data analysis and discussions, content presentation in the varied, but cohesive contexts, and the intensity of the interactions.
**Similarities.** Goal setting and planning meaningful activities were critical to the development of cohesiveness among the interactions, creating a synergistic relationship among the contexts and fostering a community of learners. The goals for each of the interactions reflected the program goals, particularly for early literacy development and research-based instruction. The planned activities fostered collaborative joint inquiry, such as data analysis. Data analysis was a prominent activity in all the interactions. Data included both teacher and student data. Learning opportunities were provided during each of the interactions. Given that the focus during this study was learning about the CLASS observation instrument, opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of the various domains and dimensions were evident in each of the interactions. Reflection was a prominent activity fostered in every interaction and by the literacy coach in preparation for the interactions with the teachers.

**Differences.** The presentation of the content under study was presented differently in the synergistic and cohesive contexts. On-going structured coursework during the staff professional development was offered by various experts. The literacy coach facilitated collaborative group inquiry activities with the teachers. The tutorials were a continuation of what was presented during the professional development and a focus upon common needs of the three teachers coached by the literacy coach. The literacy coach used different activities during the tutorials than those used in the professional development session. For example, the literacy coach used reflective documents which encouraged the teachers to think about their interactions with their students, and then to restate negative statements into positive statements (see Tables 4.3 and 4.4) during the tutorials. In contrast, the teachers engaged in generating open-ended
questions during interactions with their students during center time during the professional development. Both activities fostered a deeper understanding of the teachers’ interactions with their students as depicted in the CLASS instrument.

Data analysis was present in all interactions; however, the presentation of the data differed depending upon the context. Aggregate data from the teachers’ implementation of the instructional protocols were presented by a member from the evaluation team and discussed in terms of trends over time; whereas, video segments depicting positive teacher/student interactions or teachers’ assessment data of their students were presented and discussed during the tutorials. Specific teacher data were reserved for the one-on-one interactions. The one-on-one interactions focused upon the individual needs of each of the teachers and extending the new learning directly into the teachers’ instructional practices through observations and reflective conversations.

The level of intensity during the interactions varied among the contexts. Given that the one-on-one interaction was when the literacy coach addressed the specific strengths and needs of the individual teachers, these interactions were the most intense of all the interactions. Whereas, the interactions were of a more general tenor during the staff professional development, actions of specific teachers were not addressed in the professional development. Instead, brainstorming of ideas was generated during problem solving activities.

**Research Question 3**

In what ways, if any, does an early literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?
**Targeting coaching conversations.** Differentiating to meet teachers’ needs involved targeting the coaching conversations. Targeting the coaching conversations was a complex process. The literacy coach employed various tools to gather data concerning the teachers’ instructional practices. Several observation tools were utilized to focus the literacy coach’s observations (Table 4.5), and she simultaneously video recorded the instructional episodes. Then she triangulated the data, determining the strengths and needs of the teachers. Goal setting and planning for the interactions was based upon what emerged from her data and from the teachers’ requests. Considering the personality type and dispositions was important for the approach the literacy coach used with the teachers and influenced her expectations. Sally needed smaller doses of information at a time. Megan needed time to mull things over before implementing new strategies, waiting until she felt more confident. Amy was very eager, wanting to implement strategies quickly after new learning. The observation tools and snippets from the video recordings were used together to mediate the coaching conversations. The use of video recordings connected the interactions directly to classroom practices. Lyons and Pinnell (2001) iterated that learning is an active process, and the findings from this study support that concept. Using the selected video segments allowed the participants to take part in a “shared experience” (p. 4). Common needs of the three teachers were addressed during the tutorials. One identified common need of the teachers was progress monitoring of students. A professional video was planned as well as a discussion regarding the ‘why’ of progress monitoring for the purpose of deepening the teachers’ knowledge regarding assessment (Handout_1, TU_3, April 30, 2012).
Guskey (1986) posited a change model which rests upon student achievement data. He contended it is not until teachers see a change in their students’ learning outcomes that any significant changes will occur in teaching practices. Data analysis was an important topic discussed during this study by the literacy coach independently and collaboratively with the teachers. This was evident during the staff professional development, tutorials, and the one-on-one post-conference interactions. The most intense data analysis interactions occurred during the one-on-one post-conferences. Two types of data were used: teacher and student data. Teacher data were gathered during observations in their classrooms. The predominant observation instrument used during the time of this study was the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument. Feedback garnered using this instrument was the predominant focus during three of the six observed post-conference one-on-one interactions. Other teacher data included video segments recorded during teachers’ instructional episodes with their students and the notes written by the literacy coach during her classroom observations. The data from these tools were utilized to support the literacy coach’s observation as well as fostering reflection upon the teachers’ instructional episodes. Student data elicited from informal assessments of students’ alphabet letter knowledge were the focus of the other three one-on-one interactions observed.

Data analysis during the staff professional development was facilitated by a member of the evaluation team. It consisted of disseminating aggregate data from observational data elicited from three instructional protocols: (a) Shared Book (Winter 2010 – Spring 2012), (b) Read Aloud (Winter 2010 – Spring 2012), and (c) Play (Fall
2011 – Winter 2012), as well as from the staff survey previously administered (Field Notes, April 23, 2012; Professional Development Handout 1, April 23, 2012).

Data analysis during tutorials also focused upon teacher and student data. The teachers analyzed snippets of video from each of their instructional episodes for positive climate as described in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System Manual (Tutorial April 2, 2012). This was for the purpose of deepening their knowledge of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument, connecting directly to their instruction, and giving each other positive feedback. During a subsequent tutorial the focus was upon student alphabet letter knowledge data (Tutorial Field Notes, April 30, 2012). The purpose for this was determining which kindergarten-bound students had made progress during the year and those who were making slow progress. The next step was planning instruction for those students making slow progress or who were not at benchmark. The planning took place collaboratively with the literacy coach during their one-on-one interactions (Transcripts May 9, 2012, May 21, 2012, & May 23, 2012).

Each of these tools was utilized to target the coaching conversations. They were used together during the interactions for the purpose of mediating reflective conversations in order to build background knowledge and facilitate implementation of research-based, early literacy practices.

**Differences in supporting teachers.** Differentiating also involved varying the levels of support during the interactions. The literacy coach had to decide in the moment when to listen, when to tell, when to model, when to direct, or when to question offering support from most support to least support. This type of support when interacting with
teachers during coaching conversation is supported by the work of Rodgers and Rodgers (2007).

Mediating the reflective feedback conferences was a complex process. It entailed collaborative video analysis coupled with using the observation tool. The literacy coach employed questioning to guide the teachers’ reflections on their instructional practices. Student data analysis was also used to mediate conversations that included identifying students’ needs and then planning for instructions using research-based, instructional practices.

In this section the most salient features that emerged from the data related to the research questions were reviewed. Prominent were synergy created through varied cohesive contexts, reflection, differences in supporting teachers, and targeting coaching conversations. Goal setting and planning were underlying factors in creating a synergistic relationship between the varied contexts, and also to creating cohesive contexts for learning. Guided reflection in each of the contexts was observed in order for teachers to understand their actions during instructional episodes and to connect their actions to research-based practices. Targeting the coaching conversations was a complex process involving the use of various tools to gather and triangulate the data and was then used to mediate the conversations. Data analysis of both teacher data and student data were consistently used to differentiate to address teachers’ and students’ needs, and to stimulate conversations between the teachers and the literacy coach. Differences in the levels of support during the conversations was evident, especially during the one-on-one interactions in which the literacy coach kept the conversations flowing as she skillfully varied her levels of support to meet teachers’ needs at just the right moment.
Conclusions

This study was situated in a context grounded in the constructivist approach to professional development for educators. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999) as well as Tharp and Gallimore (1995), the constructivist processes can be observed in adult learning. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) further attested that transforming adults involves critical reflection, discourse, and action to bring about change. Important to this theory is the belief that knowledge is constructed in the social context with peers or more knowledgeable others. Within this tradition, learning occurs in a zone of proximal development. Lyons and Pinnell (2001) identified several constructivist principles applicable to professional development:

1. Encourage active participation.
2. Organize small-group discussions around common concerns.
3. Introduce new concepts in context.
4. Create a safe environment.
5. Develop teachers’ conceptual knowledge through conversation around shared experiences.
6. Provide opportunities for teachers to use what they know to construct new knowledge.
7. Look for shifts in teachers’ understanding over time.
8. Provide additional experiences for teachers who have not yet developed needed conceptual understanding. (p. 4)

Constructivist principles were evident throughout this study of literacy coaching in a job-embedded professional development model. Various transformative activities were strategically planned and implemented. These included activities in which the literacy coach and the teachers engaged in such work as analysis of teacher and student data including planning for purposeful instruction and writing an integrated curriculum. In order to support teachers during their interactions, the literacy coach varied her level of support with the teachers, working with the teachers in their zones of proximal
development. The literacy coach assisted the teachers in building upon their current understandings, facilitated critical reflection during group interactions as well as during one-on-one encounters, and within the many reflective activities designed to expand their new learning. The most prominent conclusions from the data are discussed next.

**Synergy Created Through Varied Cohesive Contexts**

Synergy was created in this embedded professional development model with literacy coaching. Lyons and Pinnell (2001) explained that learning in different contexts contributes to deeper learning than if only one context of learning is utilized. A hallmark of differentiated instruction for our students is the provisions of varied learning situations in our classrooms. These include whole-class, small-group, or individual instruction. Just as teachers use varied learning situations in their classrooms to teach students to meet their learning needs (IRA, 2010), so do the varied learning contexts allow literacy coaches to meet the needs of teachers (i.e., whole staff professional development, small group, one-on-one). In this study, these differing but cohesive, contexts for interactions with teachers and literacy coaches were diligently planned and orchestrated to meet the varied needs of the teachers. The varied contexts were designed to be a systematic and cohesive framework to introduce and deepen new knowledge. The purposeful learning experiences were grounded in the teachers’ classroom practices coupled with learning about research-based early literacy instructional practices.

Multiple contexts for coaching are supported by McKenna and Walpole (2008). They view the whole staff context as an opportunity to present topics in general that are important in setting a climate for change or focus on issues that pertain to all (i.e., achievement trends, new curriculum). They also view the small group sessions as an
opportunity to work closer with teachers who share common concerns. It is a context in which teachers can support each other and allows for building morale and shared responsibility. And finally, they iterated that the one-on-one interactions are the context in which literacy coaches can focus on the specific needs of individual teachers. In this study, the staff professional development session was a context in which new information was disseminated to all with support from the literacy coaches, the program directors, and colleagues. Information included aggregated data and information regarding the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument. The tutorials or small-group context was another setting in which the coach shared new information with the three teachers she coached. It was also a context in which they explored and deepened their growing knowledge and supported each other in their own efforts in the classroom. The one-on-one interactions allowed for the literacy coach and teachers to address what was critical for their individual needs. Given that observations were made frequently along with video recordings and the use of research-based observation tools, the literacy coach and teachers were able to use their valuable time to focus on the teachers’ specific needs.

The data revealed that cohesiveness among the contexts was achieved through deliberate goal setting with and from the program directors and evaluation team, as well as from the literacy coach’s on-going data collection and data analysis. The four literacy coaches in this setting thoughtfully planned together for the professional development sessions and individually for the tutorials and one-on-one interactions. Purposeful goal setting and strategic planning allowed for varied learning opportunities for the teachers in
this embedded professional development model with literacy coaching, thus, creating a synergistic relationship among the cohesive contexts in this model.

**Reflection**

According to Mezirow (1990), we learn differently when we are learning to perform as opposed to when we are learning to understand. He asserted that reflection enables us to think about our beliefs describing critical reflection as critiquing “of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built” (p. 1). He explained that human action involves consciously drawing on what one knows, unless the action is habitual or thoughtless. Schön (1983) pointed out that effective practitioners usually know more than what they can articulate or possess a “knowing-in-practice” (p. viii). Ferraro (2000) reported that critical reflection upon one’s own practices is an effective technique for professional development, and that professional development should include coaching and study groups in which reflection is on-going. Learning Forward (2011) iterated that integrating reflection and constructive feedback is a means to support continuous improvement with instructional practices. They viewed reflection as a form of “…feedback in which a learner engages in providing constructive feedback on his or her own or other’s practices” (n.p.). Reflection is a technique for creating a culture of learning and change over time.

The data indicated that reflection was one of the most salient findings that emerged from this study. The literacy coach exhibited and discussed with me how she prepared for the interactions with the teachers. Although this study was conducted for a short duration at the end of a three year program, the literacy coach amassed observation data, student assessment data, and developed collaborative relationships with the teachers.
over a period of time. All these data, coupled with her expertise related to early childhood and literacy and effective coaching, allowed her to critically reflect upon her own practice and to develop questions and reflective activities to use during her interactions with the teachers. Schön (1987) reported that coaching involves assisting teachers through talking and modeling about instructional practice and decisions. Bruneau (1990) described problem solving within the context of what was occurring in classrooms. Problem solving was described using a coach in a collaborative dialogue. The findings from this study support the ideas of both Schön and Bruneau.

Data analysis revealed that reflection was an important technique practiced and fostered by the literacy coach in this study. She reflected upon her own actions; she triangulated teacher data and reflected upon what she observed in the teachers’ classrooms; she facilitated the teachers to reflect while engaging them in reflective and problem-solving activities; she modeled reflection; and she explicitly discussed reflection with the teachers. Reflection was on-going and occurred in the cohesive contexts. Reflection was important in order for teachers to look upon their own assumptions about their instructional practices, to understand the why of their practices, and then to make meaningful changes to hone their teaching practices in order to meet the needs of their students.

According to Rodgers and Rodgers (2007), questioning is important to foster deep thinking and talking about teaching. Morgan and Saxton (2006) proffered that when forming questions, we should consider, “What do I want this question to do?” (p. 45). Questioning for different purposes was well thought out by the literacy coach in this study. The literacy coach indicated that she triangulated her data from her classroom
observations to prepare for the post-observation conferences. These data included her notes, observation protocols, student data, informal conversations with the teachers, and video clips of teaching episodes. She would formulate questions as well as select video snippets of the teaching episodes observed to mediate reflective feedback discussions with each teacher.

Lyons and Pinnell (2001) supported reflective conversations because they “build shared understanding and also helps individuals clarify personal thinking” (p. 7). In addition, during an interview (April 25, 2012) following the staff professional development (April 23, 2012), the literacy coach indicated that she tried to model following the teachers’ lead during their interactions. Her statement, “I was trying to follow the lead of the people who I was working with at the time . . . to be a role model to them; that you should follow the children’s lead. . . . I also wonder if following their lead, I went astray a little [from the professional development goals]” (Transcript, April 25, 2012, p. 2). She was cognizant of her actions of modeling research-based practices.

**Targeting Coaching Conversations**

As previously described, the literacy coach used various tools to focus her classroom observations as well as to mediate reflective conversations with the teachers in all of the contexts documented. As iterated by Lave and Wenger (1991) and later supported by Wells (2000) is the concept of artifact-mediated joint activity. This involves using tools such as those used by the literacy coach in this study: video recordings of instructional episodes, reflective documents based upon the observation tool, student data, instructional protocols, and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument. All of these were used in the various contexts to mediate joint inquiry.
Wertsch (2007) explained that external artifacts introduced into problem solving do not usually operate in isolation, but rather in conjunction with spoken language. As emphasized by Wells (2000), artifact-mediated joint activity, “involves change and transformation of participants and settings over time” (p. 60). Data gathered using the tools described allowed the literacy coach to triangulate the data to determine goals to be addressed in each of the contexts.

**Reflective documents.** An important way in which the literacy coach supported the teachers in building their background knowledge regarding research-based practices and relating these practices to their individual classrooms was the reflective documents/activities she prepared and used during the staff professional development and tutorial interactions (Professional Development Handout 2B, April 23, 2012; Professional Development Transcript, April 23, 2012; Tutorial Handout 5, April 2, 2012; Tutorial Handout 5, April 16, 2012; Tutorial Handout 3, April 30, 2012). These reflective tools were prepared based upon the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument. They were used as part of building the teachers’ background knowledge and connecting the research-based practices prominent in this instrument to the teachers’ practices. Implementing reflective activities as the literacy coach did is supported by Cranton and King (2003).

Regarding each of the observed interactions, multiple ways of interacting with the teachers was discussed. The literacy coach facilitated a synergistic coaching environment in the way she used the different tools discussed and interacting with the teachers in the varied contexts. Scaffolding at different levels was evident in all contexts, especially the one-on-one interactions. Teacher observation data and student assessment data were used
consistently to mediate discussions. Different reflective documents were created and used during the staff professional development and tutorials to facilitate reflection and connecting to teacher’s classroom experiences. Video segments were used in all contexts allowing for discussion regarding these shared experiences.

**Data analysis.** Analysis of the data from the literacy coach’s classroom observations and student assessment data was a prominent activity that mediated the interactions between the literacy coach and teachers. The importance of data analysis is evident in this statement by Bean (2004), “There is clear evidence that when teachers use data to make instructional decisions, student performance improves” (p. 141). She further iterated that assisting teachers to use data to make instructional decisions is an important aspect of literacy coaching. The data used for analysis in this study were directly gathered in the classrooms from teacher observations and student assessments. According to Wells (2000) regarding the implications of Vygotsky’s ideas in education, “Transformation of the participants occurs as a function of participation in activities that have real meaning and purpose” (p. 61). Data analysis is viewed as an effective transformative activity by Cranton and King (2003). The data used for analysis were specific to the individual teachers’ classrooms, thus having the authentic meaning and purpose that Wells was referencing. Data analysis is also supported by Guskey’s (1986) change model which depends upon student achievement data.

The literacy coach used the various tools developed to focus her observations and then to triangulate the data gathered to determine the strengths and needs of the teachers to focus the conversations with the teachers in the varied contexts. Setting goals to
address during each of the interactions set the purpose for the interactions as well as the activities in which to engage the teachers.

**Goal setting.** Goals were apparent in the varied interactions of the literacy coach and teachers. Guskey (2000) explained goals in terms of the “intended benefits for staff members and students” (p. 250). The planning of activities for professional development should be determined by the intended outcomes for the participants.

Determining the goals for the various coaching interactions was complex. There were certain program goals the literacy coach needed to consider; there were goals articulated by the teachers; and there were goals she determined based upon the triangulation and reflection upon the data collected during classroom observations and student assessment data. Balancing all of these was a slippery slope. Prioritizing for each of the contexts was also another determining factor for selecting the goals to be addressed (Interview Protocol, Literacy Coach, June 7, 2012, p. 2).

The staff professional development session is a context that best serves disseminating new information for all. It is also an optimal context in which to analyze and discuss program wide data (McKenna & Walpole, 2008). During this time the staff can see where they are the strongest, and also what needed development. This could be in relation to not only teaching strategies but also strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum being implemented. This type of information is important to determine what needs to be supplemented in the curriculum. As part of their professional development, this staff was actively engaged in creating integrated theme-based curriculum guides for their preschool program (Handout 1, April 4, 2012; Field Notes, April 23, 2012; Handout 1, April 23, 2012). This served to fill in the gaps not addressed in their adopted core.
curriculum. Neuman and Dwyer (2009) demonstrated that the core curricular programs for preschool do not adequately address vocabulary development. Furthermore, Neuman (2006) argued that at-risk preschoolers need high quality instruction that integrates knowledge and dispositions for learning with skills. This was substantiated by Palincsar and Duke (2004). They found that when teachers integrated informational texts and reading instruction, they promoted general literacy knowledge, literacy skills, and subject matter knowledge.

The tutorials were also utilized for exploring new information (Tutorial Field Notes, April 2, 2012; Tutorial TR, April 16, 2012). The literacy coach used these sessions for building background knowledge for the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument, student assessment, and applying it to the teachers’ classroom practices. The literacy coach used video snippets of the teachers to identify actions that exemplified “positive climate” (Tutorial Transcript, April 2, 2012) in their classrooms. Analysis of student data was used during tutorials and one-on-one interactions. In both contexts, teachers were guided to group students by need and to plan instruction for those not making progress or making poor progress. During the tutorials teachers were able to share with each other, whereas during the one-on-one interactions the focus was on the specific needs of the students in individual classrooms.

In both of these contexts regarding the observation tool, the literacy coach was priming the teachers for in-depth reflections on their instructional practices. The tutorial also served as a pre-conference to the classroom observations (Tutorial Transcript, April 16, 2012) in which she would be using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument.
Goals for the one-on-one interactions were primarily based upon the classroom observation using the observation tool or analysis of student assessment data. Prepared with video snippets of the teachers’ classroom encounters with students, information from using the observation tool to focus her examination of the teachers’ encounters with students, and any goals articulated by the teacher the literacy coach guided conversations for specific purposes for each teacher. The goal of each of these interactions was articulated by the literacy coach at the beginning of each post-observation session. When student data were used to mediate a conversation, research-based instructional practices were discussed for implementing in the classroom or in the case of Sally, creating a packet of activities to go home over the summer break.

Goal setting, although not written by the teachers, was evident throughout this study and in each of the contexts reported. The literacy coach prepared an agenda for each of the tutorials, and a Power Point handout with an agenda embedded in it was given to the teachers revealing goals and related activities during the staff professional development. Furthermore, the goals of each interaction were articulated by the literacy coach. Goal setting made for purposeful planning for the interactions was evident and meaningful to the participants.

The literacy coach used data gathered during her classroom observations as well as conversations with the teachers to determine goals for the interactions with the teachers. The data the literacy coach gathered were documented in her notes, and the instructional protocols used to focus her observations. Triangulating, analyzing, and reflecting upon these data allowed the literacy coach to plan purposefully to meet the needs of the teachers she coached. This step of analyzing and reflecting upon data
gathered during classroom observations is supported by Bean’s work (2004). The importance of this step is iterated by Bean in her statement, “Each step of the coaching cycle is an important one; however, the step of analyzing/reflecting is critical, for without it, there is little chance of facilitating an impact on teacher performance” (p. 111). Professional learning that includes analyzing and reflecting is supported by Learning Forward (2011). Preparing in this manner for the post-conferences with teachers made it possible for the literacy coach to determine meaningful goals for the individual coaching interactions; thus targeting the coaching conversations to meet the teachers’ individual needs. Teacher interview data indicated that the goals for each tutorial or coaching session were mainly determined by the literacy coach; however, the goals were pertinent to what the teachers needed because they were based upon data gathered during weekly observations and student assessment data (Interview Summary Chart, pp. 4-5).

**Differences in Supporting Teachers**

Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) described varying levels of scaffolding from the least support to the most support during coaching interactions: questioning, modeling, directing, and telling. Simply offering help may not meet the learners’ needs. Rodgers (2004) indicated that the nature of the interactions may contribute to learning. It is the level of support that is provided to the learner that is critical in scaffolding to elicit the desired outcomes. Applying E. Rodgers’ scaffolding model to literacy coaching, Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) emphasized that in coaching interactions it is the quality of the interaction that makes a difference to learning versus the frequency of the interactions. It is evident that the literacy coach in this study utilized four levels of support during her conversations with teachers. The literacy coach varied her level of support during the
interactions as she determined the teachers’ perceived needs during the moment-to-moment interactions. Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) described these supportive coaching actions as “pitching help at just the right level of sensitivity” (p. 74). Varying the levels of support or scaffolding coupled with targeting the coaching conversation served to work within these teachers’ zones of proximal development.

**Similarities and Differences in the Coaching Interactions**

It is evident from the data that literacy coaching as observed in this study was highly differentiated. Coaching interactions in this embedded model occurred in diverse contexts: (a) whole staff professional development, (b) tutorials or small groups, and (c) one-on-one meetings creating a synergetic learning and coaching environment. Although coaching interactions occurred in each context, there were similarities and differences in the foci during the interactions. The implementation of the program goals and/or materials to support those goals was the focus in general during the whole staff professional development. The focus during the tutorials was in general, but the literacy coach also connected to the individual teachers’ classroom practices. In contrast, the focus during the one-on-one interactions was specific to the individual teachers. For example when data were presented during the staff professional development session, the data were aggregated. When data were presented during the tutorials and one-on-one interactions, the teachers were given data particular to their own instructional practices or individual students. Although the literacy coach posed guiding questions to the small group, each teacher applied the questions to their individual student data sets.

The literacy coach used various tools or what Lave and Wenger (1991) referred to as technology of practice to determine the focus of the varied interactions with teachers.
and also to mediate the coaching interactions with the teachers. These included video recordings and notes of teaching episodes, reflective activities, and data analysis using both teacher and student data. Although the literacy coach used the same tools for gathering data, the data were specific to each teacher. In order to determine goals for her interactions during the tutorials and one-on-one interactions, the literacy coach triangulated the data from the observed instructional episodes. She would determine what was most critical to address in terms of improving an element observed and also for affirming teachers’ interactions with their students. As part of her preparation for coaching interactions, she formulated questions to use during the coaching episodes as well as selecting video segments to analyze together fostering reflective conversations. Thus, the goals for each one-on-one coaching episode differed according to the needs of each teacher. During the one-on-one interactions, the literacy coach used the data to mediate the conversations, which differed from teacher to teacher. For example, one goal for Amy was using redirection as a behavior management technique. This was not a goal for the other two teachers; however, one goal for Sally was instructing students in small groups as opposed to whole class instruction, and a goal for Megan was reflection upon emotional support during interactions with her students. All three teachers analyzed their student assessment data collaboratively with the literacy coach. When planning for instruction, the teachers brainstormed for research-based ideas to meet the needs of their students and their own teaching styles. These differed amongst the teachers.

The literacy coach used the identified scaffolding techniques of questioning, directing, modeling, and telling with all the teachers. She listened attentively to the teachers’ ideas and responses to her questions regarding their instructional practices. The
level of scaffolding was not a straight trajectory from the most support to the least support. She varied the level of scaffolding depending upon her perceived need for the teacher at just the right moment. She may have been asking questions to facilitate reflection but used telling to build background knowledge when it was apparent the teacher needed more knowledge to deepen her understanding about an instructional strategy.

Respectful relationships were also important in the dynamics of the interactions. The data indicated that the literacy coach began the interactions with talk aimed at building rapport and ended the sessions summarizing what was discussed, what the next steps for each would be, requesting feedback regarding the coaching sessions, and thanking them for meeting with her. The literacy coach considered the personalities and dispositions of each of the teachers she coached. Amy did not need much nudging regarding the implementation of research-based practices. She would jump in feet first, ready to go with the literacy coach’s supportive feedback. Whereas, Megan liked to have the background knowledge, think about it awhile, hear how the others were doing with implementing an unfamiliar practice, and then implement the research-based practice. Sally needed to discuss research-based practices in small doses—not too much information at one time. She also needed the literacy coach present in order to implement an unfamiliar practice. Specific modeling of reflection was used to meet Sally’s need to learn to use reflection upon her instructional practices. Role playing was used with Amy to demonstrate redirection with preschoolers.

Finally, one of the most prominent similarities and differences was in reflection. The literacy coach fostered reflection in all the contexts described. However, the actions
or activities she planned differed depending upon the context in which the interactions were going to take place. Planning was a collaborative effort among the program’s four literacy coaches for the staff professional development; whereas goal setting and planning for the tutorials and one-on-one interactions was facilitated by the literacy coach. Reflective documents were used during the tutorials to directly connect teachers’ actions as described in the CLASS observation instrument to their actions in their classrooms.

The literacy coach enacted a four step, one-on-one coaching cycle: pre-conference observation → analysis/reflection of data → post-conference. I reported a three step cycle in the literature review described by Costa and Garmston (1994). The literacy coach did not conduct the post-conferences immediately following an observation. She allowed herself time to triangulate the data gathered during the classroom observations. The literacy coach reflected upon the data, preselecting video segments to analyze together during the one-on-one feedback conferences, and she formulated possible questions to pose during the interactions. A goal with all the teachers was for them to analyze and reflect upon their videos for their own strengths and areas that needed support. The questions she prepared were used to guide reflective conversations with the teachers and were specific to each teacher’s observation data. This is supported by the work of Schöp (1987) in which he described coaches assisting teachers through modeling and talking about instructional practices and decisions. Each teaching episode differed from teacher to teacher. The teachers’ needs varied; therefore the one-on-one reflective conversations varied according to the teachers’ needs.
According to Duffy and Cunningham (1996) and also supported by Fosnot (2005), the construction of knowledge is a complex process. Literacy coaching has also been described as a complex process (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). The data in this study illuminated how a literacy coach differentiated to meet the needs of the preschool teachers she coached as well as the complexity of literacy coaching in an embedded professional development model with coaching. The literacy coach in this study continually strived to connect the teachers’ classroom experiences to the varied goals of each of the coaching interactions. She accomplished this in cohesive multiple contexts—whole staff professional development, tutorials or small groups, and one-on-one interactions. Goal setting and planning were underlying factors in creating a synergistic relationship between the varied contexts and to creating cohesive contexts for learning. Active participation of all the teachers was facilitated by using the various tools including data from observation instruments, video recordings, field notes, student assessment data, and reflective handouts and activities to facilitate reflection. Discourse mediated by using these tools fostered reflection on teaching practices, thus developing the teachers’ conceptual knowledge around these shared experiences. Using teacher observation data and student assessment data mediated discussions in which teachers interpreted the data to determine areas of strengths and areas that needed improvement. However, sensitivity to teachers’ personalities and dispositions also was a factor during the interactions. Strategic plans to meet students’ needs were formulated during the coaching interactions.
Implications

The research questions that guided this study emerged from the researcher’s interest in documenting how, if at all, a literacy coach differentiates during interactions with teachers. This study generated many insights into how a literacy coach differentiated her coaching interactions with teachers to meet their individual needs as well as the complexity of literacy coaching in an embedded professional development model. The conclusions from this study have implications for coaching practices with teachers and for the professional development of literacy coaches.

Literacy Coaching Practices

The International Reading Association (2004) emphasized that the primary role of literacy coaches is to support teachers in their classrooms. Recognizing the complexity of literacy coaching, they also delineated rigorous standards for reading coaches. These standards include coaches having high levels of expertise and skills in many areas. These include being “excellent teachers” and have experience in the same levels of teaching as the teachers they coach (n.p.). Also stressed is having expert “knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction” (n.p.). In addition to knowledge, it is suggested that coaches have experience working with teachers to improve their practice and reflecting upon their own practices with the result of adapting to improve instruction, be excellent presenters, and have experience or training that enables them to master all that is involved in observing and providing feedback to teachers. Poglinco et al. (2003) found that even when literacy coaches met the standards; there was much variability in their effectiveness coaching teachers. This appeared to be related to coaches’ background and training.
Although this study only spanned two and one half months at the end of a three year program that included literacy coaching, the researcher was able to observe and document many practices of this literacy coach. As already iterated, coaching is a complex process. Professional development with literacy coaching can be compared to a jigsaw puzzle. The big goal is improved student outcomes. It was not just one practice of this literacy coach or one action she took that contributed to her selected coaching actions. Each action in preparation, each context, each scaffolding level employed, each tool she utilized, and each interaction was one piece of the puzzle, hopefully leading to improved student outcomes. Lyons and Pinnell (2001) described this as a synergistic relationship among each of the actions and contexts within a job-embedded professional development model.

**Reflection.** A coaching cycle includes a pre-conference with the teacher being coached, the classroom observation, and followed by a feedback or post-conference. However, Bean (2004) posited a step between the classroom observation and post-conference. Bean referred to this important step as analysis and reflection of the data collected during the observation. The data indicated that the literacy coach in this study demonstrated a high degree of reflection in preparation for the feedback conferences with the teachers. She did schedule time to analyze the data gathered before meeting with the teachers. This was a significant step in determining the focus of conversations. The literacy coach was very meticulous about analyzing the video recordings for data aligning to what was discussed during the pre-conferences with the teachers. It is during this step that she pre-selected snippets for her and the teacher to analyze collaboratively (Journal, p. 2b, April 4, 2012). When describing their conception of professional development,
Snow et al. (1998) stated, “ongoing support from colleagues and specialists, as well as regular opportunities for self-examination and reflection, are critical components of the career-long development of teachers” (p. 10). Learning Forward (2011) also supports constructive feedback from coaches, colleagues, external experts, supervisors, and self regarding instructional practices.

This type of analysis and reflection is supported by Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development. The classroom observations and then subsequent analysis and reflection foster the critical reflection necessary for literacy coaches to target or differentiate their coaching interactions with teachers allowing literacy coaches to work with teachers in their zones of proximal development. Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) explained from a Vygotskian point of view, learning is “changing participation in an activity” (p. 72). Over a period of time literacy coaches observe changes in teachers’ actions during instructional episodes. By being concretely aware of the changes teachers make or not make, the literacy coach was able to be responsive to the teachers’ individual needs. During this step she also generated questions to pose to teachers to guide reflective conversations. Questioning for reflection during coaching conversations is supported by Rodgers and Rodgers (2007). Morgan and Saxton (2006) described different purposes for questioning, one of which is reflection. They pointed out that these types of questions challenge individuals to think critically and creatively. Questions that help to shape understanding are another category. These types of questions reveal experiences and focus on connections. They also guide individuals to rethink or restate by encouraging accuracy and specificity. Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) reiterated that these types of questions foster discussions about teaching.
**Scaffolding.** Another implication related to literacy coaching practices is scaffolding. When considering scaffolding in the Vygotskian tradition, the literacy coach serves as the more knowledgeable other. Each of the teachers also supports one another in this role. This was apparent during the group encounters during the staff professional development and tutorials. Educators usually think of scaffolding the students they teach, but adults also need support at the right time and within their zones of proximal development to move them forward. Scaffolding was evident in several different formats. The levels, from most support to least support, described by Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) during conversations was prominent during the interactions between the literacy coach and teachers in the three types of contexts observed. E. Rodgers (2004) iterated that just offering help may not be enough to support teachers in their instructional efforts. She proffered that the level of assistance provided is critical to scaffolding. Building upon this premise, Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) stressed that “effective scaffolding is pitching help at just the right level of sensitivity” (p. 74).

During the staff professional development and tutorial sessions, the literacy coach used reflective documents in which the teachers and literacy coach participated in joint activities mediated by the documents. The activities were related to the new learning that was introduced and connecting between the research-based Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument to the teachers’ practices in their classrooms. Wells (2000) described these types of activities as supporting transformation in the individuals. He explained that the outcomes of such activities cannot be completely determined in advance. Rather, the outcomes will be influenced by the “human and material resources available for the making of solutions” (p. 61). The “object of the
activity” (p. 71) is the goal in building the teachers’ knowledge. The teachers build their knowledge as they participate in the shared activity. The literacy coach and teachers co-constructed knowledge during their interactions with one another.

**Data analysis.** Another significant implication related to literacy coaching activities is data analysis. Walpole and McKenna (2004) considered analysis of data to be necessary to support teachers. Literacy coaches build teacher knowledge when assisting them in understanding the data. Walpole and McKenna explained that through knowledge building, literacy coaches direct interactions that address teacher needs as well as student needs. The importance of data driven interactions is demonstrated in their statement that it is “at this intersection that professional support is likely to be most effective” (p. 196). Learning Forward (2011) iterated that increases in student achievement is a “powerful motivator” (n.p.) for teachers during complex change initiatives.

Data analysis in this study was a joint activity facilitated during coaching interactions—both teacher observation data and student assessment data. Observation data were mediated by the use of instructional protocols. These were advantageous for focusing the literacy coach’s observations on specific elements during teachers’ instructional episodes. Monitoring over time of instructional episodes using the protocols was evident during the staff professional development. Data gathered during classroom observations using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument along with video recordings were prominent tools used to mediate one-on-one coaching interactions. Aggregate data were presented and discussed during the staff professional development session. Analysis and reflective conversations regarding the aggregate data allowed the staff to see the levels of improvement as a group over time. Such discussions
allow for the participants to see if program goals are being met, as well as fidelity of the implementation of the instructional protocols that were reported, and what still needs to be accomplished.

Student assessment data were another form of data used to facilitate discussions between the literacy coach and teachers. Focusing upon students’ progress over time allowed for not only identifying students who needed additional assistance to reach program goals, but also to discuss and plan for research-based instructional activities to meet student needs.

In addition to implications for literacy coaching practices, there were implications for the professional development for literacy coaches that also emerged.

**Professional Development for Coaches**

Literacy coaching is a complex journey for both literacy coaches and teachers whom they coach (Killion, 2009). As previously discussed, the International Reading Association has recommended rigorous standards for reading coaches (2004). Frost and Bean (2006) referred to these as the “Gold Standard” (p. 1). In reality, districts are hard pressed to find literacy coaches who possess all the qualifications outlined. Just like teachers, literacy coaches also need on-going professional development to hone their craft (IRA, 2004).

Several implications for professional development for literacy coaches emerged from this study. Research indicated that children’s foundational knowledge can predict later school success (Adams, 1990; Snow et al., 1998). One implication is for literacy coaches to continue learning about research-based practices for improving student outcomes. They should engage in activities that further their professional knowledge and
skills related to literacy and coaching. Literacy coaches need to continue building their content area expertise so they can effectively engage in coaching activities to support teachers’ knowledge (i.e., discuss, model, co-plan). Coaches who do not have a deep knowledge and understanding of what they are sharing with teachers run the risk of misinforming teachers and potentially making it worse for students.

Another implication is scaffolding teachers. In this study, levels of scaffolding along a continuum ranging from most support to least support during interactions with teachers were found to be important: telling, modeling, directing, and questioning (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). Literacy coaches need opportunities to explore the various levels of scaffolding and apply them in their coaching work; when to tell, when to model, when to direct, and when to question. Scaffolding involves developing questions that foster deep thinking about teaching. Costa and Garmson (1994) indicated that a direct correlation between the levels of questions and reflective thought exists. Morgan and Saxton (2006) explained the different levels of questions: to elicit information, shaping understanding, and fostering reflection. Understanding the purposes of the questions asked is important for developing questions for targeting coaching conversations. Learning to reflect upon teaching practices observed and developing questions to foster understanding and reflection is invaluable in coaching work. This is also evident when one peruses books on literacy coaching. Many of them usually have a section dedicated to questioning and some even contain lists of questions or question stems (i.e., Burkins, 2009, p. 53; Costa & Garmston, 1994, p. 222; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001, p. 164; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010, pp. 164-167).
Analyzing and reflecting upon data gathered from classroom observations is a critical step necessary to effectively prepare for interacting with teachers (Bean, 2004). Triangulating data can be a daunting but an important part of this step in a coaching cycle. Literacy coaches may need guidance on how to examine and interpret the data collected. And then how to apply the data garnered to individual teachers’ instructional practices. It is this step that is probably the most salient step in the coaching cycle to prepare to differentiate to meet teachers’ needs. It is during this reflective step that coaches can plan to meet individual teachers’ needs, thus working in their zones of proximal development.

Tools or artifacts used in the profession to foster joint activity to build content knowledge and reflection upon instructional practices are another important implication for professional development. These tools are varied and the activities mediated by the tools are situated in place and time. Wells (2000) argued that each activity is unique because it involves the coming together of particular participants in particular settings with particular artifacts. Each artifact has its own history. Thus, the coming together of individuals, in given settings, using certain artifacts affects the way discourse and shared activity is carried out. In this study the literacy coach employed research-based instructional protocols and other research-based observation instruments, writing curriculum, video recording instructional episodes, field notes, reflective documents connecting the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation instrument to teachers’ instructional practices, and analysis of data was observed. Using program artifacts or developing tools to facilitate focused coaching observations and subsequent
feedback conferences with teachers is important for differentiating to meet teachers’ instructional needs.

Finally, but certainly not least is professional development that includes communication skills for literacy coaches. Duncan (2006) noted that the purpose of dialogue between literacy coaches and teachers is to “develop high quality instruction” (p. 88). Toll (2005) emphasized communicating well with teachers. It is evident, that a good deal of the work of literacy coaches is communicating with teachers. All of the interactions with teachers documented in this study included conversations regarding teaching practices. None of the conversations between the literacy coach and teachers pertained to the coach’s work but rather to the work of the teachers and how the literacy coach supported them. Literacy coaches need to develop communication skills that minimize being misunderstood or misinterpreted. This is supported by Burkins (2009) with her language-scrutinizing exercise for coaches. Fostering coaching conversations about teaching is the most essential action of literacy coaches (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provided an in-depth analysis of how, if at all, an early literacy coach differentiated the coaching interactions with three preschool teachers to meet their individual needs. According to Neufield and Roper (2003), “No one, as yet, has proven that coaching contributes significantly to increased student achievement” (p. 1). This was also supported by Walpole and McKenna (2008) in their review of the coaching literature in which they indicated that coaching endeavors are proceeding without validation of its effectiveness.
Due to the design and nature of this study, the investigation was limited to one early literacy coach and three preschool teachers she coached. Data collection occurred over two and one half months at the end of a three year professional development collaborative between a state university and a Head Start program. Given that this study was for a short duration and with a small population, generalization is not possible. Research is needed on how literacy coaches differentiate to meet the instructional needs of the teachers they coach on a long-term basis.

Also, the interactions that were observed included only formal interactions between the literacy coach and teachers, albeit in three different contexts. Not observed were the informal observations and interactions between the literacy coach and teachers. Research that includes the informal interactions is needed. These interactions can have a bearing on if or how teachers implement that which is discussed.

This study did not document if teachers implemented that which was discussed during the formal interactions observed. Research documenting if and how teachers implement instructional strategies discussed could be beneficial to understanding the benefits of targeted coaching. Research indicating what factors influence implementation in the classroom is needed.

In addition, this study did not document student achievement in relation to the coaching endeavor or improved instructional practices over time of the teachers coached. The study did document if and how the literacy coach differentiated to meet the instructional needs of three teachers. Research focused on the effects of coaching on student outcomes is needed. This could include an examination of student data before and after coaching.
This study did not follow up to document if teachers continued that which was learned after coaching stopped. Research that includes sustainability is warranted.

Scaffolding was a feature during the interactions between the literacy coach and teachers. An examination of the literacy coach’s growth over time beginning with literacy coaches as they start a new coaching endeavor is needed. Also, a study documenting how literacy coaches vary the scaffolding during conversations with teachers over time with the teachers they coach would be valuable.

When discussing literacy coaching with the coach, one of the last things she shared with the researcher falls into the area of teacher beliefs. If we expect to make any changes in the classroom, preschool teachers need to think of themselves as educators rather than day care providers. This is an area of investigation in the preschool arena that should be explored. A valuable topic in this area could be: how can preschool teachers, who view themselves mainly as day care providers, be nudged to provide early literacy, developmental practices in their classrooms? Another valuable topic in this area could be: what effect does preschool teachers’ beliefs have on their instructional practices?

**Summary**

This study sought to document, if and how, an early literacy coach differentiated coaching interactions with three preschool teachers to meet their individual needs. Several findings emerged from the data. It was discovered that the literacy coach engaged in reflective conversations with the teachers that were mediated by the data gathered from classroom observations of the teachers, student assessment data, and reflective documents created to connect teacher actions outlined in the CLASS observation tool to the teachers’ instructional practices. Problem-solving activities were implemented during the varied
contextual interactions that also fostered reflection. Goal setting and purposeful planning were important for creating synergistic cohesive contexts.

Differentiating by literacy coaches to meet teachers’ needs does not involve offering all the same help, but rather listening closely during the interactions and offering the best support to them at just the right time. Developing coaches’ sensitivity to teachers’ needs and scaffolding them appropriately is an area for both research and a topic for professional development for literacy coaches.

It was found in this study that the literacy coach engaged in data analysis and reflection on data garnered during her classroom observations and from student data. This was an important step between the observation and post-conferences with the teachers. It was during this step of the one-on-one coaching cycle that the literacy coach developed the goals and planned for the targeted coaching interactions. This analysis and reflection step in the coaching cycle is recommended by Bean (2004). The literacy coach developed questions during the analysis and reflection step to use in order to guide reflective conversations. Based on this study, an important area of professional development may be to offer opportunities for literacy coaches to explore data analysis, reflection, and questioning techniques to plan for coaching conversations.

Other important areas of professional development for literacy coaches are learning about research-based instructional practices for improving student outcomes, creating and utilizing various tools to focus observations and then mediating reflective interactions. Effective communication skills that minimize being misunderstood or misinterpreted is another area for professional development for literacy coaches.
Several areas of research suggested include research that includes both formal and informal interactions between literacy coaches and teachers. Both types of interactions can have a bearing on teachers’ growth of knowledge and the implementation of research-based instructional practices. Research on differentiation to meet teachers’ instructional needs on a long-term basis is another area to explore. Exploration of sustainability, or continuation of the implementation of research-based instructional practices after coaching is removed is warranted. Noted in the literature is that literacy coaching has been implemented without the benefit of research to demonstrate its effects on student achievement (Neufield & Roper, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2008). Research of student achievement in relation to coaching endeavors is needed.
REFERENCES


Early Reading First. FY 2009: Early reading first grant program 84.359B [Abstract]. Abstract retrieved from www2.ed.gov/programs/earlyreading/erf09abstracts.doc

Elish-Piper, L., & L'Allier, S. K. (2007). Does literacy coaching make a difference? The effects of literacy coaching on reading achievement in grades K-3 in a reading first district. *57th Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, Austin, TX.*


*Project abstracts: FY 2009 early reading first grant program (84.359B).* (2009).


Standerfer, L. Before NCLB: The history of ESEA. Principal Leadership, 6(8), August 15, 2012-26-27.


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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear ,

I am in the doctoral program at the University of Akron. Presently I am conducting research on the coaching interactions between early literacy coaches and classroom teachers. I will be employing qualitative data collection methods in this case study. The methods to be used for this study are direct observation, interviewing, and examination of documents pertinent to the conferences.

The study will focus on how literacy coaches differentiate to meet classroom teacher needs during the cyclical coaching interactions with preschool teachers. You are invited to participate in this research project being conducted by me, Gloria Argenti Hobor.

Participants will be asked to allow me to observe and record their interactions during the one-on-one coaching interactions between March, 2012 and June, 2012. In addition, the participants will be asked to participate in an interview(s) with me. I plan to audio record the interviews. The observations and interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the participants. These will be erased after verification of successful completion of this study. There will be no observing or interviewing of children.

There will be no direct benefit from participation in this study, but your participation will help me to complete my study of literacy coaches and teacher interactions. This information will add to the body of knowledge on literacy coaching.

To ensure anonymity of the participants, no identifying information will be used in the reporting of this research project to my dissertation committee. I will be able to share data collected if they so desire.

Participation in the project is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research project, I can be reached at 440-225-5204 or my dissertation chair, Dr. Ruth Oswald at 330-972-5483. This project was approved by The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at The University of Akron. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Gloria Argenti Hobor
Doctoral Candidate

___ I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form for future reference.
APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

College of Education
Akron, OH 44325-4208
(330) 972.7773 Office
(330) 972.2452 Fax
Date

Dear Participant,

I am in the doctoral program at the University of Akron. Presently I am conducting research on the coaching interactions between early literacy coaches and classroom teachers. I will be employing qualitative data collection methods in this case study. The methods to be used for this study are direct observation, interviewing, and examination of documents pertinent to the conferences.

The study will focus on how literacy coaches differentiate to meet classroom teachers’ needs during the cyclical coaching interactions with preschool teachers. You are invited to participate in this research project being conducted by me, Gloria Argenti Hobor.

Participants will be asked to allow me to observe and electronically record their interactions during the one-on-one coaching interactions between March, 2012 and June, 2012. In addition, the participants will be asked to participate in an interview(s) with me. I plan to audio record the interviews. I anticipate each interview will be from 30 minutes to one hour in duration. The observations and interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the participants. These will be erased after verification of successful completion of this study. There will be no observing or interviewing of children.

There will be no direct benefit from participation in this study, but your participation will help me to complete my study of literacy coaches and teacher interaction. This information will add to the body of knowledge on literacy coaching.

To ensure anonymity of the participants, you will not have to sign a consent letter; however I am requesting that you check below that you have been informed of this project. No identifying information will be used in the reporting of this research project to my dissertation committee. I will be able to share data collected your classroom if you so desire.

Participation in the project is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research project, I can be reached at 440-225-5204 or my dissertation chair, Dr. Ruth Oswald at 330-972-5483. This project was approved by The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at The University of Akron. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Gloria Argenti Hobor
Doctoral Candidate

___ I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form for future reference.
APPENDIX C

COACH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL [REVISED]

Interview questions:

1. Tell me what you believe is the purpose of coaching?

2. Which teachers do you spend the most time? How do you decide this?

3. In your coaching work, describe the contexts in which you coach?

4. Explain how the all staff professional development sessions, tutorials, and one-on-one coaching are related?

5. Describe you prepare for the one-on-one coaching sessions? For the tutorials? For the PD?

6. How do you determine the goals for the coaching sessions? What were your goals for the coaching session with T1? T2? T3?

7. Do you approach each coaching interaction the same? If not, what is your rationale in your approach to the varied coaching interactions? Tutorials?

One-on-one?

Scheduled?

Unscheduled?

All staff professional development?

8. You indicated that various protocols are used during the classroom observations. How does the information from these protocols assist/guide you in your coaching work?

9. What are your perception(s) about the outcome of the conversation(s)? [also touched on this during reflections]
   - Describe your perceptions regarding the outcome of the conversation during the coaching session with T1, T2, T3.
• What challenges do you encounter with the teacher(s)? Are you able to anticipate the challenges with the teacher(s)?
• Given your experience with these teacher(s), do you believe the teacher(s) will follow through in the classroom with what was suggested and discussed?
• How do you support the teachers in the classroom with regards to what was suggested and discussed?

10. Reflecting upon this coaching session, how do you think this session progressed with this teacher?

11. What are your next coaching steps with the teachers: T1? T2? T3?

12. Reflect upon your actions the teachers you coach. Consider how you meet individual teacher needs. Describe how you meet their needs.

13. So tell me about the different ways that you think coaches can interact with teachers.

14. If you were going to put labels on these different ways or approaches, what would they be?

15. What do these different approaches look like in terms of the interactions between a coach and a teacher?

16. How would you describe your session with T1? T2? T3? What particular characteristics lead you to describe it like this.

17. Consider the three years you have been coaching in this program. Describe the change in your focus of coaching with your assigned teachers.
   a. How (if at all) has your focus changed?
   b. What (if at all) has caused you to change your focus?

Demographics:
18. You are a
   ___ teacher
   ___ literacy coach

19. How many years have you been working in the ARS program?
   ___ 1 year
   ___ 2 years
   ___ 3 years

20. How many years have you worked with the Headstart program?
21. What is the highest degree level attained?
   ___ Bachelor
   ___ Master
   ___ Doctoral

22. What are your areas of certification or licensure?
   ___ None
   ___ PreK-3
   ___ Special Ed
   ___ Intervention Specialist
   ___ Reading
   ___ Literacy Specialist
   ___ Other ___________

23. Including this year, how many years have you been a teacher? Literacy coach?
   ___ years
   ___ in preschool
APPENDIX D

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL [REVISED]

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me what you believe is the purpose of coaching?

2. How, if at all, do you prepare for the one-on-one coaching sessions?
   - Tutorials?
   - Professional Development sessions?

3. What do you feel were the goals of this coaching session?
   a. How are the goals determined for the one on one sessions? Tutorials? Professional Development?
      i. Teacher initiated?
      ii. Literacy Coach initiated?
      iii. Teacher and coach collaboratively decided upon?
      iv. Team initiated?
   b. Talk about the content or topic of the conversation.
      i. Do you feel the goals were reasonable for you?
      ii. Were you in agreement with the goals for this coaching session?
      iii. Explain your understanding of the goals.

4. What were your perceptions about the outcome of this session?
   a. What successes did you perceive?
   b. What challenges did you perceive?
   c. How did this session help you to think about your teaching practices?

5. During the one-on-one coaching session, ___________ was (were) discussed. How, if at all, will you implement that which you discussed during this coaching session?

6. Discuss how the literacy coach helps you in your classroom?
   a. How the literacy coach helps you with your individual needs as a teacher?
i. Think about what you have needed…how does the literacy coach help you with these needs…what were her actions

7. The literacy coach engages in many ways and in different contexts to help or support teachers. Consider each separately. Rate the impact of the following coaching opportunities on your professional growth or how these have helped you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching Contexts</th>
<th>High Impact 5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>No Impact 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>One-on-one coaching</td>
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<td>Tutorials</td>
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<td>Professional Development</td>
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<table>
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<th>Coaching Actions</th>
<th>Very Helpful 5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Not Helpful 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-on-one scheduled coaching conversations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grab and Go or One legged coaching conversation (ie. see each other in the hallway, grab the coach to answer question or concern)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment administration</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
8. How would you like the coach to help you in the classroom or with your next steps?

9. In the ARS program, many instructional protocols are used during observations by the literacy coach and as a resource to you of what the research-based literacy practices should look like when you are teaching. Let’s briefly talk about each one. Would you rate the degree in which the use of these protocols supported your professional growth?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocols</th>
<th>High Support</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>No Support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELLCO</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phonological Awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play</td>
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<tr>
<td>eBook</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLASS</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher Comments:**

**ELLCO:**

**DEW:**

**Phonological Awareness:**
Shared Reading:

Play:

eBook:

CLASS:

Demographics:

24 You are a
___ teacher
___ literacy coach

25 How many years have you been working in the ARS program?
___ 1 year
___ 2 years
___ 3 years

26 How many years have you worked with the Headstart program?

27 What is the highest degree level attained?
___ High School Diploma
___ Associate
___ Bachelor
___ Master
___ Doctoral

28 What are your areas of certification or licensure?
___ None
___ PreK-3
___ Special Ed
___ Intervention Specialist
___ Reading
___ Literacy Specialist
___ Other ___________

29 Including this year, how many years have you been a teacher? Literacy coach?
___ years
___ in pre-school
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Project: ________________ Tape #: ________________ Reference Code: ________________ Page #: ________________

Project Name:

Reference Code: _________ Interview/Tape #: _________

Interviewer:

________________________________________________________

Interviewee(s):

________________________________________________________

Contact Information:

________________________________________________________

Date and Time of Interview:

________________________________________________________

Location of Interview:

________________________________________________________

Brief description of interview topics transcribed:

Level of accuracy of transcription and transcription conventions: (Here you should note how accurate the transcription is and what factors affected this level. You should also note your own conventions used such as using all caps for emphasis, line breaks for pauses, etc.)

(Transcript begins below)
APPENDIX F

DOCUMENT SUMMARY FORM

Document Form:

Site: ______
Date received: __________
Document Number: ________

Name or description of the document:

Contact, if any, with which document is associated:

Significance or importance of document:

Brief summary of contents:
APPENDIX G
A PRIORI CODE LIST REVISED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WG</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>Professional development session in which the entire preschool staff and project evaluators attend. This includes: teachers, teacher assistants, literacy coaches, program director, project team, project evaluation team, custodial personnel. Whole group professional development sessions are held once a month all day at an offsite location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TU</td>
<td>Tutorial</td>
<td>Tutorial sessions are small groups of teachers and a literacy coach. Each literacy coach is assigned to coach four specific teachers. The tutorial consists of one literacy coach and the four teachers she coached and occurred every other week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1S</td>
<td>One-on-one, scheduled</td>
<td>One-on-one sessions include the literacy coach and one teacher. These scheduled sessions in this study are the post-conferences, which follows the classroom observation conducted by the literacy coach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1, U</td>
<td>One-on-one, unscheduled</td>
<td>One-on-one sessions include the literacy coach and one teacher. These unscheduled sessions occur randomly throughout the day. These were not observed during this study, but were reported by all the participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coaching Conversations**

| Scaffolding | Varying the level of support the literacy coach gives the teachers during their interactions (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; E. Rodgers, 2004). |
| Questioning | The literacy coach asks the teachers questions for varying purposes (eliciting information, shaping understanding, pressing for reflection (Morgan & Saxton, 2006)). |
| Directing | The literacy coach directed the teacher(s) to take a specific action. |
| Modeling | The literacy coach assumes the teacher’s role and demonstrates a problem-solving action. |
| Telling | The literacy coach tells or provides the teacher with specific information |

**Technologies of Practice (Tools)**
The tools the literacy coach uses to mediate coaching conversations with the teachers (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

| SD | Student data | Data gleaned from student assessments. The purpose is to analyze the data for planning instruction. |
| TD | Teacher data | Data gleaned from direct observations of the teacher during instructional episodes by the literacy coach. |
| VA | Videotape analysis | Refers to the literacy coach and teacher(s) analyzing videotaped instructional lessons. |
| IP | Instructional protocol | Refers to a formative observational tool used by the literacy coach when observing teachers engaged in specified instructional episodes. Each depicts a set of observable teacher actions including talk. Each protocol was designed to focus observations on what specific element in a preschool classroom. These are then used to mediate coaching discussions between the literacy coach and teachers. |
| IPsb | Instructional protocol—shared book | Refers to a formative instructional protocol for an interactive book reading with a focus on before, during, and after teacher actions focusing upon vocabulary development, comprehension, and concepts of print. |
| IPstdp | Instructional protocol—Say/tell/do/play | Refers to a formative instructional protocol for an interactive book reading with a focus upon vocabulary development used as a Tier 2 vocabulary intervention. |
| IPdew | Instructional protocol—door, entryway, walls | Refers to a formative protocol with a focus upon the classroom environment. |
| IPeb | Instructional protocol—eBook | Refers to a formative protocol with a focus upon vocabulary development used as a Tier 2 intervention which uses eBooks. This was used with a select group of children identified as needing extra support with their vocabulary development. |
| IPpl | Instructional protocol—play | Refers to a formative kid watching protocol used while children are engaged in play. It is used to document varied levels of play (Neuman & Roskos, 2007). |
| IPsr | Instructional protocol—songs and rhymes | Refers to a formative instructional protocol with a focus on phonemic awareness. |
| CL | Classroom Assessment Scoring System: Pre-K (CLASS) | Refers to an observational tool used to observe and rate the quality of the interactions between adults and students in preschool classrooms. |

Coaching activities: IRA, 2004

Mat | Materials | Refers to developing or providing materials for teachers. |
Cur | Curriculum | Refers to developing curriculum with teachers and/or discussing curriculum development. |
A | Assessment | Refers to assisting with assessing students. |
CoPl | Co-planning | Refers to planning lessons with teachers. |
MI | Modeling lessons | Modeling and discussing lessons. |
F | Observation feedback | Refers to the literacy coach providing feedback following a classroom observation. |
Avid | Analyzing videotaped lessons | Refers to the literacy coach and teacher(s) analyzing videotaped instructional lessons. |

Reflection

Rc | Reflection of the literacy coach | Refers to the literacy coach reflecting upon her own practice or how a coaching interaction unfolded. |
Rt | Reflection of the teacher | Refers to the teacher reflecting upon her own instructional practices with children. |

Content:

ALK | Alphabet letter knowledge | Knowing the letters of the alphabet; lower- and upper-case. |
PA | Phonemic awareness | The awareness of the sounds (phonemes) that make up spoken words. |
V | Vocabulary development | The teaching-learning principles and practices that lead to children’s growth in vocabulary. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Understanding what was heard during shared book readings.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Planning for play in the various centers in the classrooms and related to the themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang</td>
<td>Language (acquisition)</td>
<td>Discussions around children’s acquisition of language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qst</td>
<td>Questioning students</td>
<td>Questions to pose to children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Str</td>
<td>Teaching strategies</td>
<td>A plan or activity planned to improve children’s learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX H

### INTERVIEW DATA SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5C: COACHING ACTIONS</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Coaching</th>
<th>Counseling</th>
<th>Facilitating</th>
<th>Reviewing</th>
<th>Assisting</th>
<th>Debriefing</th>
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APPENDIX I

STUDY QUESTION CHART/EVIDENCE

Question #1: How does an early literacy coach interact with three preschool teachers in an embedded professional development model?

Professional Development
Whole staff
Tutorial – small
Group: LC + 4
Teachers @ 2 sites
One-on-one – LC
+ individual teachers

Question #2: In what ways, if any, does an early literacy coach differentiate during interactions with three preschool teachers?

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<td>Data analysis – Student</td>
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<td>Data analysis – Teacher: observations</td>
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Question 3: What if any similarities and/or differences, occur in the coaching interactions within and/or across three preschool teachers?
APPENDIX J

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Akron, OH 44325-2102
(330) 972-3588 Office

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

March 23, 2012

Gloria Argenti Hobor
43640 Middle Ridge Road
Lorain, Ohio 44053

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20120123 “Literacy Coaching: A Case Study of the Interactions between an Early Literacy Coach and Preschool Teachers”

Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects for the referenced project. Your application was approved on March 22, 2012. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☐ Exemption 2 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

☐ Approved consent form/s enclosed

Cc: Ruth Oswald – Advisor
Cc: Stephanie Woods – IRB Chair

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution