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EXAMINING THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF A LITERACY COACH FOR  
LITERACY IMPLEMENTATION IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL SETTING

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to understand the role and responsibilities in the decision-making strategies and actions of a literacy coach while implementing literacy practices within secondary school setting. The influence of these decisions upon instructional practice within the school setting through professional development was also explored. The qualitative study utilized a case study theory methodology in the process of data collection and analysis. Purposeful sampling was used to select four secondary schools defined as post-primary grade, including middle school that was currently implementing a coaching model with active literacy coaches. Data was gathered through on-site, semi-structured one-on-one interviews conducted in the school setting where the literacy coach and corresponding teacher worked. Teachers and coaches responded to a series of four questions that explored the coach's roles and responsibilities impacting student learning at the school level, literacy coaching decisions made focusing on literacy practices at the school setting, how decisions are enacted, and the influence decisions had on school staff's instructional practices regarding whether they impeded or enabled the practices. Field observations were conducted and examination of school demographic and achievement data were reviewed for each site. As a result of the study, the researcher developed ten themes from the secondary school settings: data collection and analysis is utilized to inform instruction, training provided by coaches gives teachers new knowledge to help struggling readers, coaching techniques enhance teacher responsiveness and student engagement, principal support provides a positive coaching environment, collaborative

atmosphere accelerates coaching ability to develop and improve literacy practices, trust and relationships with coach building foundation for professional growth, district level decisions impact schools, communication maintains consistency for all stakeholders, coaching decisions enable purposeful instructional practices, coaching decisions may impede instructional practices in the school setting.

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**DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the people that I cherish most in my life: my husband, Mark, and my children, Kyle and Regan. I love you three more than words could ever express, you give my life happiness and purpose. For Kyle and Regan, it is my hope that I model the strong work ethic that my parents instilled in me and through my example you believe that you can achieve anything you dream as a possibility. For Mark, I am forever grateful for your patience, understanding and steadfast love for me.

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## CHAPTER 1

### **Introduction**

In grades 4 through 12, students that have reading difficulty number over eight million in our nations' schools (Lee, Griggs, & Donahue, 2007). Long term National Assessment of Educational Progress data (NAEP) illustrates that our older students are not prepared for the text structure of print they may encounter in the workplace. Studies show current adolescent literacy skills are minimal compared to what is needed to be successful in rigorous college courses (American College Test [ACT], Inc., 2006). There exists an achievement gap, according to recent NAEP results between the reading and writing scores of White and ethnic students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Ethnic students scored lower in reading in 2005 as compared with 1992, as did White students. Additionally, in 2005 males and females scored lower than 1992 (NCES, 2006). Difficulties with reading contribute to the decision many students make as they leave high school without a diploma (Ehren, Lenz, & Deshler, 2004). As adolescents move into the world of work, they will be expected to master more complex reading and writing tasks than the generation before them. Mastery of reading and writing skills will be needed in order to disseminate the multi-dimensional media and information that will flood their world (International Reading Association [IRA], 2000). Literacy will help them conceptualize possibilities and invent realities. These skills will give them the ability to survive in a sophisticated and evolving future world. For all students to graduate high school prepared with

career and college readiness skills, secondary schools need to refocus and revamp their literacy strategies that are threaded in core curriculum. U.S. economic competitiveness in the current global society demands that the workforce is academically proficient to compete with other developed nations.

Fundamental, basic literacy skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking. These key components support learning in all secondary content areas. Literacy is the critical foundation needed for success. Without literacy, students are at an immediate disadvantage as they try to pursue their own personal goals and aspirations. While literacy skills for elementary students have improved in the past three decades (Wise, 2009), literacy rates of adolescents have stayed dormant. Primary schools have embedded literacy practices in every aspect of instruction, however, secondary school settings have not. There are many challenges that can be associated with adolescent literacy, many of which extend beyond secondary schools. By late elementary grades, students have learned the basic reading and writing skills as applied in material in mostly self-contained homeroom settings. As students leave elementary school and enter secondary level, they need to apply learned literacy strategies to different disciplines, texts, and situations. Professors indicate that students are unable to integrate literacy strategies that they bring to the complex texts used at the university level (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2007). As the shift to content-area learning occurs at the secondary level, teachers need to help students develop skills necessary for the varied, specialized texts students will be exposed to as they shift to many, varied disciplines (NCTE, 2007). Due to limited data for adolescent learners prior to this decade, few people noticed the decline and slow erosion of literacy at the secondary level in our country until the

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) created an accountability environment that spotlighted the unique circumstances of adolescent readers (Sturtevant, 2003).

In the secondary setting during regular instruction, students are not able to make needed improvements in their reading skills. Our nation's youth have a strong domination of social English, yet when utilizing academic English students struggle with reading and writing. Attaining age-appropriate reading skills will accelerate the progress of students as they become more dependent on informational text (Schifini, 2006). Possible contributions to the problem are escalating totals of students living with hardships that poverty brings, higher number of transient students, and rigorous state standards and assessments making academic life traumatic and extremely stressful for students who are not able to master reading skills (Diamond, 2006). Factors such as variations in school funding and teacher competence affect student success (Klein, 1999). A significant concern involving teacher preparation is that many new teachers have not taken a reading methods course and experienced teachers have not had exposure to teaching strategies that will help them assist struggling adolescent readers. There will be an increasing challenge to educate struggling adolescent readers as our nation's population grows in the types of diverse students that enter the elementary and secondary setting.

Adolescent literacy is complex and students bring a variety of challenges that require an array of interventions and instructional strategies. Many teachers have reported that they feel unprepared to assist students who struggle in reading and are reluctant to teach reading skills. There is a strong secondary teacher philosophy shared by many that "it is not their responsibility" to teach students how to read. Students should enter the middle and high school as proficient readers (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Structural barriers such as reading assistance housed in special education in secondary schools (Barry, 1997) and reluctance toward reading

specialists has hindered the advancement of work with struggling adolescent readers. Reading assessments are needed for reliable data to monitor student learning in the content areas, however few instruments exist for diagnosing adolescents' reading ability (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). System barriers such as multiple, large class sizes driven by bell schedules, graduation requirements driven by high stakes test results, and traditional secondary curriculum that requires large quantities of factual information adopted by state standards contribute to the growing problem (Sturtevant, 2003). In order to address the multitude of literacy demands in the secondary setting, specific professional development that is targeted to literacy gaps is needed. If professional development is strategic and meaningful, the outcome has shown increased student achievement (National Reading Panel, 2000). Teachers need this support to learn how to thread literacy strategies in the content area classes that permeate secondary schools.

An essential part of the movement to improve adolescent literacy skills in many secondary schools consist of utilizing literacy coaches. The primary coaching role has been documented (IRA, 2006; Walpole & McKenna, 2004); however, coaching in the secondary setting does not have clearly defined roles, requirements, or certification. The coaching movement appears to have potential as a vehicle for professional development compared to past traditional practices; however research has not documented specific, measurable links at this time. The coaching model has been implemented in an assortment of models according to different school and district scenarios without a systematic study (Snow, Ippolito, & Schwartz, 2006). Although the models vary in approaches, there are several showing promise throughout many areas of the country serving diverse students in diverse settings. Coaching has also

become a new focus for educational improvement through several educational foundation sources of funding throughout the nation.

Secondary coaches have a job with circumstances and environmental factors that vary from their counterparts in the primary grades (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009). In the secondary setting, literacy coaches may feel isolated with the structure of departments, less flexible curriculum reflecting traditional lecture style, and adolescent students with a wide variety of literacy deficits. Literacy coaching is a powerful process with great prospects, however, a satisfactory wealth of knowledge and many wide ranging skills are needed to perform adequately, particularly at the secondary level in the coaching role (IRA, 2004).

As professional support is considered for teachers using literacy coaching as a model, balance is needed with time providing support inside classrooms and with time providing support outside the classroom (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). The coaching role has shifted from direct teaching as implemented in the primary setting to a leadership role in providing professional growth opportunities for teachers in the secondary setting (IRA, 2004). The *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches* were developed to better define the secondary coaching role (IRA, 2006). The standards have a leadership strand which identifies competencies in collaboration, job-embedded practices, and evaluators of literacy needs. Coaching as a leadership position will provide differentiated support to teachers as they implement various instructional practices to enhance literacy skills in all secondary classes. Professional development programs that are supported by literacy coaches can prove effective if they are responsive to the needs of individuals in each building and allow varied learning approaches so teachers can connect researched best practice strategies, protocols and observations using their own teaching experience (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). As a consideration,

the coaching model has received national attention and is consistent with research evidence that defines instructionally focused, ongoing support for professional development in producing successful outcomes (Guskey, 2000). The coaching movement seems promising as a new form of professional growth for teachers with coaches spending most of their time increasing the instructional practice of teachers while operating as a site-based, ongoing professional developer (Snow et al., 2006). Secondary literacy coaching is an approach that has received notice as a way to improve both teacher instructional literacy skills and student literacy outcomes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Currently, most secondary schools and teachers do not implement instructional strategies that promote advancement of adolescent students' literacy growth. As history has shown, most secondary teachers do not take ownership for teaching reading to students in their content area classes. In the secondary setting during regular instruction, students are at a great disadvantage if they do not possess reading skills that are grade appropriate. A recent study showed that successful literacy skills are a key indicator of graduation preparedness (ACT, Inc., 2006). Given what we know regarding adolescent research, it is critical that we assist with application of literacy instructional strategies of middle level and high school teachers (Sturtevant, 2003). Coaching creates the types of sustained, instructional focused, collaborative interactions in schools that research suggests as most effective for improving instruction (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Regardless of the assurance that coaching will enhance literacy instruction in the secondary schools, few studies have directly assessed the impact of literacy coaching on instruction and learning (Joyce & Showers, 1996).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the work of a literacy coach does regarding student learning through their decision-making strategies and actions while implementing literacy practices within secondary school setting. The influence of these decisions upon instructional practice within the school setting through professional development was also explored.

## **The Grand Tour Question to Guide This Study**

An overarching grand tour question guided this study. In this qualitative research study, the research questions focus on exploring how a literacy coach in a secondary school setting makes decisions around literacy implementation within a school setting.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the literacy coach's roles and responsibilities regarding student learning at the school level?
2. How does a literacy coach make decisions focused upon literary practices at the school setting?
3. How are the decisions enacted that are made by a literary coach?
4. What influence do these decisions have on school staff's instructional practices?
  - a. How do these decisions enable instructional practices among staff?
  - b. How do these decisions impede instructional practices among staff?

## **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this qualitative research determined the role and responsibilities that inform the decision-making strategies and actions of a literacy coach while implementing literacy practices within secondary school setting. In addition, a determination was made

whether these decisions influence instructional practice within the school setting through professional development. Currently, secondary teachers do not put into practice instructional strategies that connect content with literacy strategies to enhance learning within specific disciplines. Studies show successful literacy skills were key indicators of preparedness for high school graduation, postsecondary school success, and career readiness (ACT, Inc., 2006). It is critical that secondary teachers be given the skills needed to enhance their instructional practices to incorporate literacy in all content areas (Sturtevant, 2003). The coaching model has key components that are parallel to the types of sustained, instructionally focused practices that research suggest are most effective for improving instruction (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Few studies have evaluated the role of literacy coaching on instruction and student learning, despite the promise of this method at the secondary level (Joyce & Showers, 1996). There was an abundance of research on isolated literacy practices for adolescent learners, yet there was a void of information regarding these strategies used across all content areas in a secondary setting. The potential of literacy coaching at this level needed additional investigation to support its effectiveness in order to create professional development conditions that ease instructional improvement in the area of literacy.

### **Researcher's Role**

It was important for the reader to recognize the researcher's role in the preparation of this study. Currently, being in the position of Director of Secondary Education in Illinois for a large unit district that has implemented the coaching model in grades K-12, the researcher was interested in further study of literacy coaching at the secondary level. Due to initial limited knowledge of the factors related to decline in adolescent literacy skills in the secondary setting, there was a need to research this phenomenon. In addition to information gleaned from

research regarding adolescent literacy, there was a desire to learn about the role of the literacy coaching model in supporting students in the secondary setting and its relationship in improving instructional practices of teachers. Having seen a positive influence in the literacy coaching implementation at the middle and high school level in the inaugural year of the researcher's district, a long term outcome has not been established. The coaching model utilized in the researcher's district is not precise. The coaching role in the secondary settings in the district of the researcher was not distinct; therefore, the researcher remained objective during the study. Illinois school districts that were implementing a literacy coaching model were contacted to determine interest. The researcher established sample participants from the population gathered after the literacy coaching districts were selected. The connections established during the selection process were necessary in order to find districts that had a literacy coaching model at the secondary level and were willing to participate in the case study. The researcher gained an agreement of individuals in authority to provide access to participants in order to conduct interviews. An informed consent form was utilized for participants to sign before they engaged in research. The data collection process included a semi-structured interview process utilizing established protocol for recording information. The researcher had no previous connections to the research sites contacted. There were no personal associations with the research site personnel interviewed during the data gathering component of the research, therefore there was minimal bias in data collection or reporting of results.

### **Definitions of Terms**

In an attempt to clarify terminology, the following terms are identified:

*Coaching*: additional support needed for teachers to implement various programs or practices.

*Literacy*: the ability to read, write, speak, listen, and think effectively - enables adolescents to learn and to communicate clearly about what they know and what they want to know (Meltzer, 2002).

*Literacy coaches*: master teachers who provide essential leadership for the school's overall literacy program. Assist content area teachers in addressing reading comprehension, writing, and communication skills that are particular to their disciplines. This includes activities that promote instructional methodologies, improve staff's capacity to use data, as well as actions directly aimed at supporting content area teachers at the building level with model teaching, observations, debriefings and classroom follow-ups and small group learning of new content and pedagogy (IRA, 2006).

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

**Delimitations.** The questions during the interviews allowed open, thoughtful responses from participants. Interviews were conducted in the natural setting of the school where the staff members are currently employed.

**Limitations.** There was a restricted time period in which to perform interviews at the secondary setting, as the interviews were conducted in the first semester of one school year term. This limited the data collected from interviews as it revealed information from a prescribed short time span. An additional limitation was the lack of diversity in the type of participant (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age) since the participants were limited to literacy coaches and one teacher that was directly connected to the coach. Each participant received information regarding interview protocol and their rights as human subjects in research. Not all interviewees are equally articulate and perceptive, which might vary the depth of the responses from the interview. The researcher's presence in the interview process may have biased

responses and could provide indirect information filtered through the views of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Lastly, clarification of the researcher's bias toward literacy coaching model was articulated in researcher's role.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study looks at the role and responsibilities in the decision-making strategies and actions of a literacy coach while implementing literacy practices within secondary school setting. This research reviews key components of the adolescent literacy dilemma and its connection to coaching models by looking at a brief history of adolescent literacy, factors relating to literacy decline, potential barriers, the role of a secondary literacy coach and the potential impact of coaching as a professional development model. The methodology of the study is defined in conjunction with determination of sample selection, data collection and recording procedures, and the establishment of validity and reliability. Results from the interviews are reported through descriptions and themes extracted from the data after analyzing participant information. A discussion of conclusions regarding research questions is reported in addition to recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Review of Related Literature**

In the United States over six million students in the secondary setting are struggling readers (Joftus, 2002). National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates that less than half of students in grades 6 - 12 possess reading skills to be successful in school (Lee et al., 2007). Almost 25% of adolescents are unable to identify the main idea in a passage or to understand basic informational text (Kamil, 2003). Without mindful, systemic literacy instruction, many high school graduates will be unable to perform successfully in college, forced into remedial courses without college credit or obtain low-skill, low-paying jobs (American Diploma Project [ADP], 2004). In order to compete and succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, high school graduates need to be expert readers, writers, and communicators. Future adults will be expected more than any time in history to be literate in a variety of contexts. In order to be successful in the workforce, adequately provide for a family, and be an informed citizen, these young adults will need advance levels of literacy skills. Millions of dollars have been spent on elementary literacy improvement. However, children who are excellent readers in third grade will not keep this successful pace and eventually fail in secondary grade academic tasks if there is not a strong emphasis of reading at the secondary level (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). There are many factors that contribute to the high number of older struggling readers; yet one would argue that secondary teachers nationwide should take responsibility for assisting adolescent

students with literacy skills. There is a feeling of unpreparedness and lack of expertise in how to teach reading through content area even though secondary school teachers understand the importance of literacy (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). A hopeful possibility for literacy intervention includes employing literacy specialists to assist secondary teachers in the secondary setting who seem to lack the confidence and capacity to embed reading strategies in their content specific classrooms. The coaching model parallels effective research based professional development. Included in this model is local, site-specific, instructionally focused collaborative learning instead of traditional pull-out models (Guskey, 2000).

### **A Brief History of Adolescent Literacy**

Currently, teachers of students in grades 6-12 do not implement instructional strategies that provide needed support for adolescent literacy development. For much of the history of reading, secondary teachers have felt that it was not their job to teach reading strategies at their level. However, the concept of literacy at the adolescent level is not new. As early as 1920, literacy advocates were suggesting that in order to help students at the secondary level teachers needed to teach comprehension with complex text (Moore, Readence, & Rickelman, 1983). Teachers during that timeframe discovered that many students had difficulty moving from picture books and primary literature to more rigorous textbooks utilized in the secondary classes (Sturtevant, 2003). Artley (1994) stated the following to secondary content area teachers:

Every classroom teacher has the direct responsibility for developing those reading skills and abilities essential for adequate comprehension with his particular area of instruction, as well as for applying to his content field and making functional those skills and abilities being developed by teachers in other areas of instruction. (p. 470)

In the remaining 20<sup>th</sup> century, advocates for literacy charged ahead with an increased focus on reading-focused instruction in the secondary schools (Sturtevant, 2003). Although limited studies during this time period emerged, when compared over time, reading programs in the 1990s versus those in the 1940s revealed that there was an encouragement for secondary teachers to be teachers of reading even though there was no “time, money, training or support to do so” (Barry, 1997, p. 530).

During the 1980s, some states in the nation required all secondary teachers take a course in content area reading for certification (Farrell & Cirrincione, 1986). Also in the 1980s, teachers who were called reading specialists held special certification and worked in secondary school settings throughout the United States. Federal projects funded some of these teachers (Sturtevant, 2003). The impact of the reading specialists from this time period has not been studied on any wide basis, partly because there were so few at the secondary level. The reading specialist position was greatly reduced or in some cases eliminated due to lack of funding in the late 1980s and 1990s (Vogt & Shearer, 2003).

Federal, state, and local policymakers were convinced that educational success depended on a strong foundation in the early learning years; therefore in 2003 the newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act allocated billions of dollars to states and districts to establish reading programs for students enrolled in kindergarten through third grade. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) created the Reading First Program to support elementary schools; however no program was created to support literacy interventions for adolescent students. In fact, high schools were only mentioned twice in the first draft sent to Congress in 2001. Additional provisions were eventually added that affected high school students.

At the beginning of 2000, few people, including Congress knew what was happening inside the classrooms of the nation's secondary schools. Little data existed at the time and it did not seem urgent, however most of it was inaccurate or misleading (Wise, 2009). The NCLB-era created a test score accountability environment that spotlighted the needs of adolescent readers (Sturtevant, 2003). "Over the past decade, reams of research have proven that in far too many of the nation's secondary schools, we don't just have a problem, we have a national crisis that demands a national response" (Wise, 2009, p. 370).

### **Status of U.S. Adolescent Literacy**

There are over eight million students in grades four through 12 that struggle with literacy skills including reading and writing in our nation's schools (Lee et al., 2007). Data from the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that 70 % of students in eighth grade fell below the proficient level (NCES, 2007). Students demonstrated their reading comprehension skills by responding to questions about various types of reading passages in the contexts of literary experience, gaining information, and performing a task. A nationally representative sample of more than 350,000 students in grades four and eight participated in the 2007 reading assessment. Comparing these results to previous years the average reading score for eighth-graders was up one point since 2005 and three points since 1992; however, the trend of increasing scores was not consistent in all assessment years (NCES, 2007). In comparing 1992 and 2005, the percentage of students performing at or above the Basic level increased, but there was no significant change in the percentage of students at or above the Proficient level (NCES, 2006). White, Black, and Hispanic students all scored higher in 2007 than in 1992; however, the achievement gap for minority students and White students did not narrow, except for the White-Black gap at grade four (NCES, 2007). The most recent

results for 12<sup>th</sup> graders report approximately 60 % of students are performing below grade level (NCES, 2008). According to NAEP results, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders did not show significant improved scores from 1992 to recent tests (NCES, 1999, 2006). Among the 38 states and jurisdictions that participated in the 1998 and 2007 eighth-grade reading assessments, six states showed higher than average scores in 2007, and seven states showed declines (NCES, 2008).

For many adolescent students, continued difficulties with literacy skills are a primary reason to drop out of school (Ehren et al., 2004). The published updated graduation rates for African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans at 55.3%, 57.8%, and 50.6%, respectively, are compared with a White graduation rate of 77.6% (Wise, 2009). Graduation rates are a fundamental indicator of whether public schools are engaging and educating youth to be productive members of society. All students graduating from high school should be able to read and write, so they can have a higher quality of life. More than 70% of high school graduates take the next step into two- and four-year colleges, but almost 28% of those immediately take remedial English courses (ADP, 2004). Yet 53 % of all college students take remedial courses because they did not gain the skills needed in secondary schools (NCES, 1999). It is estimated that 32 % of college-bound high school students have little likelihood of succeeding in college English courses due to inadequate literacy skills (ACT, Inc., 2006). Significantly fewer Blacks and Hispanics than Whites attain bachelor's degrees. Although many factors contribute to this, preparation received in high school has been found to be the greatest predictor (ADP, 2004). Literacy-reading, writing, speaking, and thinking are fundamental skills that link to academic success. A recent study showed that successful literacy skills are a key indicator of how well prepared students are to graduate from high school (ACT,

Inc., 2006). For all students to graduate high school prepared for college, and lead productive lives, secondary schools need to focus their efforts on improving literacy.

Long-term NAEP data (Perie & Morna, 2005) and other studies (ACT, Inc., 2006) show that improvement in the literacy skills of older students have not kept pace with the increasing demands for literacy in the workplace. Employers are paying for the lack of academic preparation among workers. One study estimates that remedial training in basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics for new employees in a single state costs nearly \$40 million a year (ADP, 2004). A key predictor of achievement in mathematics and science is the ability to read (ACT, Inc., 2006). Our economy, with the current global perspective, demands the youth of American to have more advanced literacy skills than those required of any previous generation (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Over the past decades there have been significant shifts in the economic environment for American workers. According to Wise (2009) “the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that 90% of new high-growth, high-wage jobs will require some postsecondary education” (p. 371). In the past, a high school dropout could find a position in the manufacturing or agricultural sectors that would support a family in a middle class lifestyle. The reality of global economy dictates that many jobs once held by dropouts or workers with a high school diploma are being automated or going overseas, which significantly diminishes the chances of minimally educated Americans supporting themselves and their families. U.S. economic competitiveness is unsustainable with poorly prepared students moving into the workforce.

Although dropouts each year suffer the most direct impact of their decision, the United States can no longer ignore the costs and losses associated with an education system that yearly produces 1.2 million dropouts. Over the course of his or her lifetime, a high school dropout

earns, on average, about \$260,000 less than a high school graduate. The class of 2008 dropouts will cost the nation more than \$319 billion in lost wages over the course of their lifetimes (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). The cumulative costs for these young people and the nation represent a significant loss for individual opportunities and the economy. Currently, the United States' high school graduation rate ranks near the bottom among developed nations belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). On standardized international assessments of academic proficiency American secondary students score mediocre. "In 2003, the United States ranked 15<sup>th</sup> of 29 OECD countries in reading literacy" (Wise, 2009, p. 372). American educational progress has not answered the demands of the modern workplace and the progress of globalization. An increased awareness of the academic crisis in our nation's secondary schools and its impact on not just individuals, but on the health of our nation's economy and ability to compete in a global society has gained the attention of policymakers, researchers, and educators.

### **Factors Related to U.S. Adolescent Literacy Decline**

While literacy skills for elementary students have risen over past 30 years (Wise, 2009), adolescent literacy rates have remained stagnant. Biancarosa and Snow (2006) noted that "many excellent third-grade readers will falter or fail in later-grade academic tasks if the teaching of reading is neglected in secondary schools" (p. 1). Elementary schools have embedded literacy practices in every aspect of instruction; however secondary school settings have not. Correlation evidence suggests that motivation to read school-related texts declines as student's progress from elementary to middle school. The strongest decline was observed among struggling students (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992).

One of the most important goals for literacy instruction with adolescents is to increase their ability to comprehend complex text. Students need to obtain facts or literal meaning from text at the very minimum. Post elementary grades require students to obtain more than basic information, content in the secondary schools insist that students use text to make rich interpretations and thorough conclusions with supporting evidence. Most state and national literacy standards demand that secondary students embrace literal comprehension to be considered proficient readers. The revised framework for the NAEP indicates that eighth graders “should be able to summarize major ideas, provide evidence in support of an argument, and interpret causal relations” (National Assessment Governing Board, 2007, p. 4).

Adolescent literacy is complex. Students bring a variety of challenges that require a wide range of interventions and instructional strategies. Some students struggle with decoding and reading words accurately, but these students make up the minority of older struggling readers. Older struggling readers can read words accurately, but cannot comprehend. Other students cannot read words with enough fluency to comprehend; still other students can read fluently enough, but lack strategies to help them comprehend when they read. There are some struggling readers that can apply strategies, but not in a variety of text settings due to limited practice with text structure (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). There are many reasons why adolescents have difficulty making sense of texts, and there are many manifestations of these difficulties.

Reading assessments are needed for reliable data regarding students’ strengths weaknesses, and progress in learning content and developing literacy (Afflerbach, 2004). Summative assessments such as quizzes, end-of-chapter tests, district and statewide tests, and standardized measures of reading are used frequently in secondary classrooms. Formative

assessments are needed to understand and track students' literacy development; they may include teacher question, teacher observation, and performance assessments. Diagnostic assessments provide teachers with a more precise understanding of individual students' strengths and weaknesses (Kibby, 1995). Currently, few instruments exist for diagnosing adolescents' reading ability (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003).

During regular classroom instruction students are not able to make needed improvements in their reading skills, so they are unable to meet grade level standards. Many teachers have reported that they feel unprepared to assist students who struggle in reading. Teachers also believe that teaching reading skills in content-area classes is not their responsibility (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Although research has shown that what is taught and the amount of time spent teaching it account for the greatest variance in student achievement (Strickland & Alvermann, 2004) secondary teachers are many times reluctant to teach reading skills.

Professional development needs to and differentiate between literacy demands and diverse disciplines such as science, social studies, and English. Appropriate professional development has been shown to produce higher achievement in schools (National Reading Panel, 2000). Teachers need this support to focus on instructional techniques they can use for struggling readers in core classes.

Structural barriers exist in the secondary setting when working toward literacy improvement. Researchers have found (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Hurwitz, 1999) that teachers adjust assignments or methods of presenting content rather than helping students learn the discipline-specific strategies needed for content area work. Other research (Darwin, 2003) suggests that content-area teachers expressed resistance to the work of high school reading

specialists whose job is to provide students with additional help outside their regular class structure. Finally, when schools institute programs to help struggling adolescent readers and they are housed within special education programs (Barry, 1997). This eliminates the potential for all struggling readers to get the assistance needed. A small proportion of students are served in this type of system which does not allow for optimum learning opportunities.

### **Potential Barriers for Change**

Several barriers impede efforts to build literacy support that is effective in middle and high schools. These obstacles involve a variety of factors such as belief systems on the part of secondary school educators, inadequate professional development, organizational and structural impediments, lack of understanding about what needs to be done, lack of focus, and unwillingness to make the changes necessary in supporting adolescent literacy development (O'Brien, 1995). In our nation's schools, secondary school educators often find that their students do not have the necessary literacy skills to use reading and writing effectively to learn content in each area of discipline (Kamil, 2003). We know historically there has been a resistance from educators for reading instruction in content area classrooms (Artley, 1944; Moore et al., 1983; Sturtevant, 2003). Practices have been documented that illustrate teachers adjusting assignments to avoid text reading (Schoenbach et al., 1999) and many times specific reading programs in the high school setting are housed in special education classrooms (Barry, 1997). Students have difficulty comprehending complex texts and potentially other related manifestations that bar understanding (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). In addition, there are limited assessments defining reading deficits at the secondary level (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Secondary educators know that the literacy issue needs to be addressed but are overwhelmed by the task of identifying and applying research-based strategies (Meltzer, 2002).

Researched teaching methods that were developed to increase literacy levels for adolescents during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are still advocated today (Sturtevant, 2003). Teachers must use a variety of strategies based on the needs of students and their current ability levels, however secondary school instruction is resistant to change.

Studies that expose reasons for lack of research-based instructional practice implementation point to several structural and contextual constraints within schools. Multiple, large class sizes that are taught within a 45 - 60-minute class period is not compatible with many content literacy instructional strategies known to improve student's abilities (O'Brien, 1995). Traditional secondary curriculum requires large quantities of factual information often adopted by district and state guidelines, which leaves little time for thoughtful study or critical thinking about concepts taught (Sturtevant, 2003). Recent policy initiatives required by NCLB have increased the demand for high-stakes tests that places an emphasis on memorization of large amounts of factual information instead of increasing the amount of thoughtful reading and writing a student must complete (White, Sturtevant, & Dunlap, 2003). Professional development opportunities for teachers are weak, expensive, and many times are the first thing to be cut when budgets are tight (Gallagher, 2002). In addition to the listed constraints is the philosophy that many secondary teachers do not believe that they should include literacy-related strategies in their instructional practices (Sturtevant, 2003).

### **Literacy Coaching in Primary and Secondary Setting**

Across the nation, many school districts are finding ways to develop programs that improve adolescent literacy. An integral part of this movement includes literacy coaches as a key improvement to literacy teaching and learning. The role of primary literacy coaches has been well documented (IRA, 2006; Walpole & McKenna, 2004), however the roles and

expectations of secondary literacy coaches are not clearly defined. There are many common responsibilities of literacy coaches regardless of the age of students, but there are clearly important differences (Snow et al., 2006). These differences suggest that secondary literacy coaches have a job with circumstances and environmental factors that vary from their counterparts in the primary grades (Blamey et al., 2009). In addition, secondary coaches face challenges that are considerably easier to tackle in the lower grades or may not exist in the elementary setting (McKenna & Walpole, 2010).

At the primary level, younger students have fewer competing social pressures than adolescents and usually embrace positive attitudes toward school and reading. Secondary teachers and administrators may lack awareness of the need for differentiation and intervention whereas elementary staff generally recognize there is a need for this type of instruction to enhance literacy practices (Snow et al., 2006). The scope of a secondary literacy coach's role is challenged by departmentalization making it easier for students to slip through the cracks in middle and high schools in addition to working with a large number of teachers in several different departments instead of smaller homeroom classes as practiced in the elementary setting (Blamey et al., 2009). Teachers at the secondary level do not see their primary job as teaching reading and writing; therefore have less awareness of literacy needs of students (Sturtevant, 2003). Complicating matters further, adolescent students have a wider variety of literacy skills and deficits in addition to comprehension demands from different content disciplines (Rand Reading Study Group, 2002). A secondary coach may feel isolated from their colleagues as they don't belong to one department or an administrative team, in addition to potential resistance from teachers who feel that literacy is taking time away from needed direct content instruction (Blamey et al., 2009). Curriculum is less flexible and reflects traditional

lecture style instead of varied approaches to instruction. This leads to heavy pressure in covering content standards in the time crunch of 45- to 60-minute periods and adds to the challenge of modeling good content literacy practices (Sturtevant, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2010). Although there is a wealth of research on isolated literacy practices in the secondary grades; there is a void of specific research detailing how instructional practices improve adolescent literacy skills in a variety of contexts. Coaches have fewer proven strategies to apply to low motivated students that have a wide skill range and potentially have experienced many past literacy failures (Snow et al., 2006).

Meeting the challenges at the secondary level may in part depend on the school context. The potential of literacy coaching at this level has led professional organizations to propose new standards that define the role of the secondary literacy coach.

### **Key Elements of Secondary Literacy Coaching**

In a historic partnership, the International Reading Association (IRA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), and National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) created standards for middle and high school literacy coaches (IRA, 2006). These key organizations pooled their talent to specify what “literacy coaches must know and be able to do to function effectively to train faculty in literacy techniques” (IRA, 2004, p. 3). Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches represent an ideal and are organized in two parts; 1) leadership standards and 2) content area literacy standards.

The leadership standards require the role of the literacy coach to assume the following competencies; (a) collaborators, (b) job-embedded coaches, and (c) evaluators of literacy needs (IRA, 2006). As a collaborator, the literacy coach functions effectively in the secondary setting

by working with the school's literacy team to determine need for improvement in the area of literacy and promote positive, productive relationships with the school staff. The coaching role includes observing and providing feedback to staff individually or collectively on instruction related to reading, writing and communication strategies in core content areas of English, language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Lastly, as a proficient evaluator of literacy needs within various subject areas, the coach uses data to guide faculty in the selection, use and analysis of assessments to make educated decisions in order to examine student work, monitor progress and guide instruction.

The content area literacy standard applied to coaching is driven by demands of specific core areas by accomplished middle and high school teachers (IRA, 2006). This standard addresses the challenge to develop and implement literacy strategies into the distinctive academic venue that each core area represents.

Many standards that have been developed represent an important step in defining the expectations for the role of a secondary school literacy coach (IRA, 2006). The leadership standards are broad and the content area standards are specific to English, mathematics, science and social studies and the relation to literacy strategies to each area. Secondary coaches should be "master teachers who provide essential leadership for the school's overall literacy program" (IRA, 2006, p. 7), although it is not expected for literacy coaches to hold a degree in all content areas they serve. The goal is for coaches to possess necessary expertise in literacy and assist secondary content area teachers in addressing reading, writing, and communication strategies that are specific to their disciplines in the secondary school setting.

## **The Role of a Secondary Literacy Coach**

The role of the reading specialist has evolved given the recent focus on reading achievement at federal, state, and local levels for adolescent learners. In 2000, the International Reading Association released a position statement arguing the role of a reading specialist has three parts: leadership skills, diagnosis and assessment skills, and instructional skills all serving the overall goal of improving student learning (IRA, 2000). With the changing roles have come a variety of new titles, such as reading coach and literacy coach. Arguments have been made that the role of the literacy coach is to fulfill a leadership role by serving as a teacher, a grant writer, a planner, a researcher, and a teacher (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). The level of leadership needed to conduct such broad expectations is not yet available in most school settings through the coaching role. Currently there is inconsistency in training and skills required for such positions.

The standards specify “that ideal secondary literacy coaches are skilled listeners, problem solvers, and relationship builders” (IRA, 2006, p. 8). Personal attributes are important to the success of a middle or high school literacy coach. According to a national survey conducted from secondary literacy coaches, “The model secondary literacy coach is first and foremost an optimistic person” (Blamey et al., 2009, p. 319). In addition to optimism, coaches need to be expert communicators and collaborators.

Coaching provides additional support needed for teachers to implement various instructional programs or practices. It is imperative that coaches are excellent classroom teachers themselves. Their teaching experience should parallel the levels of the teachers they will coach.

“Reading coaches should have in-depth knowledge of reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction,” however, “in order to help teachers, coaches need to have strong command of a range of effective instructional methods, materials, and practices” level (IRA, 2004, p. 7). Coaches must be literacy experts. “The coach should have background knowledge in literacy development and content-specific literacy instruction” and should be “able to draw from this extensive personal knowledge when problem-solving with teachers” (Blamey et al., 2009, p. 320). Being skillful with the complexities of observing and modeling in classrooms and providing feedback to teachers is a necessity.

“Along with expertise in literacy instruction, the secondary coach continues to pursue his or her own learning by actively pursuing venues for developing knowledge” (Blamey et al., 2009, p. 320). Many coaches continue to take course work that enhances their knowledge or utilize support groups in the form of book clubs, study groups or small group training.

“The balance of coaching activities has shifted away from direct teaching to providing professional development for teachers in a leadership role” (IRA, 2004, p. 43). Reading coaches should have experience in working with teachers to improve their practices (IRA, 2004). As Blamey et al. state, “They provide differentiated support to teachers based on need, rather than creating a one-size-fits-all program” (p. 321). Coaches utilize classroom and school-wide data to help make decisions regarding instruction and professional development.

Literacy coaching is a powerful intervention with great potential; however, coaches need a sufficient depth of knowledge and range of skills to perform adequately in the coaching role (IRA, 2004). The varied skills will allow the coach to successfully differentiate assistance in assorted settings while working with needs of diverse teacher and student needs within the school or district they are serving.

## **The Coaching Model in Practice**

Implementation of literacy coaching models can vary in approaches in different settings. All demonstrate the many ways that literacy coaches are being effectively used for the ultimate goal of giving adolescents the skills they need in order to graduate from high school with college and career readiness skills.

Literacy coaching is an investment that requires forethought, planning, and reflection as well as ongoing support. As school leaders consider implementing a literacy model that includes coaching at the secondary level, several considerations need to take place (Toll, 2009). Engaging the staff in a discussion that the value of literacy coaching and the value of building teachers' capacity and supporting teachers' growth will help them become better problem finders and more flexible problem solvers. Carefully reviewing models and selecting literacy coaches that have a well-developed personal characteristic in addition to strong knowledge of literacy learning and instruction is an important process so expectations are clearly defined. Clarifying expectations of coaches, leaders and teachers early in the process will accelerate the positive outcomes. Consideration could be given to name the coaches *learning coaches* instead of *literacy coaches*. Such coaching still attends to reading and writing for understanding, but the title will make clear that student learning, not reading and writing alone is the desired outcome. Developing a coaching team or literacy team may be necessary in secondary schools that have large staffs in order to provide support for the literacy coaches and to communicate student learning goals to entire staff.

Many states and school districts have appointed literacy coaches to improve literacy outcomes. Coaching has become a new focus for educational improvement through several sources of funding throughout the nation. The Annenberg Foundation has committed \$31

million to coaching in Pennsylvania; Florida has devoted over a third of its \$90 million literacy initiative to coaching; and coaching has been adopted as the model for professional development in the Boston, Dallas, New York, and Philadelphia public schools (Snow et al., 2006).

There are a variety of models that are showing promise throughout many areas of the country serving diverse students in a variety of settings. In Vancouver, Washington each high school has at least one literacy specialist who coaches other staff members and teaches Academic Literacy classes. The Academic Literacy curriculum builds on the foundation of Reading Apprenticeship, an instructional framework developed by WestEd. This model allows a teacher to assume the role of master reader by mentoring students and making his/her own reading process visible. Students are encouraged to read for recreation, gain insights into their own reading processes, and develop problem-solving strategies. In their sophomore year students can move on to Academic Literacy II. Students who are reading close to their grade level receive benchmark instruction and advanced students are given work that extends and enriches their learning. A balanced approach to improving literacy is used including block periods for reading and language arts for trained teachers, after-school tutoring by trained teachers, a specific reading class for students identified with difficulties and strong professional development to support reading instruction. This multi-tiered approach is working as demonstrated on the WASL test where 73% of Vancouver's 10<sup>th</sup> graders met state standards up from 50% two years prior to that (Davis & Barton, 2006).

After a comprehensive literacy audit conducted by the Center for Resource Management, Noble High School, a school of more than 1,100 students in rural southern Maine, hired a literacy coach. The literacy program contained four focus areas: literacy

assessment, school culture, literacy across the curriculum and targeted intervention.

Administration of the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) to all students, the Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR) for students below proficiency on the SRI, a teacher survey assessing knowledge of research based literacy strategies and a student literacy survey to identify students' perceptions were administered annually to assess progress. A school-wide sustained silent reading program was implemented to change the culture of a school that did not embrace reading based on audit results. Direct coaching is provided to individual teachers by assisting with lesson designs, implementing effective literacy instruction through modeling, and helping to recognize appropriate texts which support students while matching teaching strategies and practices. The use of targeted interventions for struggling readers supports the well-rounded program. In spring 2005, 64% of students in grades 9-12 were reading at or above the proficient level and in 2006, 84% of the students were reading at these levels according to SRI results (Perks, 2006).

Reading proficiency scores on the Virginia Standards of Learning tests have increased from 64% in 1998 to 94% in 2004 for students at JEB Stuart High School in suburban Falls Church, Virginia (Guensburg, 2006). The student body is 66% second-language learners and more than 50% below the poverty line. A professional development program was designed with a core repertoire of 15 literacy immersion strategies for teachers at the secondary level. The positive effect on scores has been attributed to the involvement of the school literacy coach who observes teachers in their classrooms, models strategies and offers discrete follow-up suggestions. This gave the confidence needed in order for content teachers to include strategies in their daily instruction. A quarterly in-service training is conducted for all new teachers in

order to provide consistency in literacy strategies and instructional vocabulary, which provides consistency, essential for reluctant readers (IRA, 2006).

Although too early to see long term effects of the collective work of literacy coaches at Sunset High School in Beaverton, Oregon it is clear content-area teachers are weaving literacy instruction into everyday lessons. At Beaverton's Sunset High School, literacy coaches work one-on-one with a set of teachers for three weeks before rotating to the next group. They model strategies for teaching literacy skills, help create lesson plans, and visit classrooms to watch those plans in action and assess how well they work. They also organize staff-development workshops for the entire faculty (Rubenstein, 2006). The effectiveness of the secondary coach is partly measured by their ability to understand and be accepted by secondary content-area teachers. Due to the short supply of secondary literacy specialists, Beaverton is following a current trend to hire seasoned, respected teachers and train them in literacy.

The Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) began in 1998 as a K-3 initiative, but is now a K-12 statewide initiative that includes voluntary participation by 132 middle schools and high schools throughout the state. The goal of ARI is to “significantly improve reading instruction and ultimately achieve 100% literacy among public school students” (Alabama Department of Education, 2003). The comprehensive program places a literacy coach in every participating school. School faculties must vote (85% support is required) in order to join ARI. A key component of this program includes an intensive literacy two-week summer training for all staff in a participating school. Although initially funded the first year by state and federal dollars, participating schools use business partnerships, local district money and state funds to continue involvement in the program (Sturtevant, 2003). The role of the literacy specialist includes helping teachers learn new strategies, often by modeling. Coaches are seen as a vital part of the

school leadership team, a resource to bringing a continuous stream of new ideas to school faculty, and taking the lead in assuring that individual student assessment is done regularly and thoroughly. Ongoing collaboration among teachers, principals, coaches and leadership from the Department of Education is essential. The ARI has been annually reviewed. According to a report completed in 2001, “on average, ARI schools outperform schools not in the ARI” (as cited in Sturtevant, 2003, p. 14). Key factors that attribute to positive scores are,

The school has a full-time reading specialist with in-depth, hands-on reading instruction experience, teachers reinforce comprehension skills for all students throughout the school day and across the entire curriculum, and the principal is strongly committed to the reading initiative and knows how to provide education leadership in the school. (as cited in Sturtevant, 2003, p. 14)

In the Boston Public Schools, the coaching component includes an eight-week cycle of inquiry and study, regular demonstrations of teacher strategies in classrooms, and follow-up between the literacy coach and the individual teachers. Each day a Boston coach will meet with a teacher for one block of 80 minutes, conduct a class observation for another block, and have a meeting with an administrator for a third block (IRA, 2006). Based on needs of the building, the coach will work with an individual teacher to strengthen the literacy strategies blended in the delivery of the content material. This allows content area teachers to become keenly aware of lesson planning and delivery through the assistance of working closely with a coach in a block of designated time.

### **Potential Impact of Coaching Model as Professional Development**

Teacher education in the United States has become a critical component as we continue to understand and acknowledge the challenging skills teaching requires. Teachers must be

capable to assist all students in becoming proficient readers and writers (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Designing and implementing comprehensive professional development systems may be challenging, however professional support must be responsive to the needs of individuals in each building (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Varied learning approaches allow teachers to connect procedures, theories, and observations with their own teaching experiences (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

Professional development programs that are effective can provide continued site-based support for teachers while building essential knowledge about the important role all teachers have in helping students develop reading and communication skills at the secondary level. Additionally, middle and high school teachers need help to understand that their students can develop content knowledge at the same time that they are improving in literacy (IRA, 2006).

Current practice suggests employing literacy coaches as a promising avenue to assist content area teachers at the secondary level. In order to preserve the integrity of adolescent students retaining literacy skills, the position of literacy coach has been created. According to Showers, Joyce, and Bennett (1987), in order for teachers to learn new instructional practices and apply them successfully in the classroom, they must have opportunities to:

- *Understand the theory and rationale for the new content and instruction.* Adult learners need to understand the reasons for a change, the relevance of the new content and the likelihood that the change will increase student performance.
- *Observe a model in action.* New instructional practices should be modeled early in training.

- *Practice the new strategy in a safe context.* Practicing with other teachers in the same discipline will enhance learning opportunities while creating a comfortable atmosphere.
- *Try out the new practice with peer support in the classroom.* Literacy coach provides support and feedback through classroom observations.

Teachers are more likely to use the new instructional strategy and continue to implement on a regular basis if these elements are included in ongoing professional development rather than one-time workshops (Showers et al., 1987). The coaching model being adopted nationally is consistent with current research evidence on professional development. Research states that a local, site-specific, instructionally focused, ongoing professional development generally produces a more successful outcome than a traditional pull-out model (Guskey, 2000).

As literacy coaches consider a comprehensive system of professional support, they need to balance time providing support inside and outside classrooms (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Knowledge building sessions allow the coach to determine what to teach and how to teach it. This promotes confidence and addresses anxiety about changes in literacy instruction. Well organized workshops are useful if they give teachers the *big picture* and have a purpose, provide modeling and demonstration of instructional strategies, allow for active involvement from participants, and encourage self-reflection as teachers become problem solvers (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005). Literacy coaches must help teachers understand data as part of a professional support system. Assisting teachers with collecting and interpreting data for individual students, a specific class or school-wide is a powerful tool of literacy coaches (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Study groups provide an opportunity for teachers to improve

instructional practices through collaboratively planning for school improvement and studying research on best practices (Murphy, 1992). Another effective activity for study groups is examining their students' work and responding to the results of student assessments. Study groups must be purposeful and focused on improving student learning (Guskey, 2003). The focus of study groups needs to be on research-based instructional strategies for which there is evidence of effectiveness and not forums for teachers to vent frustrations without a focus on solutions. Book clubs are other ways that literacy coaches provide professional support outside the classroom. These are important because they enhance the collegial climate for teaching and learning by allowing all participants to reflect on ideas expressed in text while making connections to prior knowledge and experiences of everyone. Book clubs can build relationships while coaches and teachers are working together to learn about research and how it enhances their instructional practice (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). A system that includes presentations, observations, coaching, modeling, or study groups will not make a difference to teachers and children unless it directly supports a well-articulated, research-based, building-level program.

The practice of coaching in teachers' classrooms can take different forms such as modeling instruction, co-planning to integrate new instructional approaches and strategies into daily lessons (Joyce & Showers, 1981). Co-teaching builds a collaborative relationship, and peer coaching encourages teachers to observe each other and reflect on their own practices (Daniels, 2002).

The coaching movement seems promising as a new form of professional development compared to past traditional practices; however, sources of information about adolescent literacy coaching are few. It has been implemented in a variety of ways according to local

conditions and understandings without a systematic study. A coach can envision themselves as a tool for movement towards implementing professional development. Since coaches spend most of their time increasing skills and knowledge of teachers and administrators, they are operating as a site-based, ongoing professional developer (Snow et al., 2006). Literacy coaches have been defined as (Taylor, Moxley, Chanter, & Boulware, 2007) “full-time teacher leaders who have been relieved of their classroom responsibilities so they can provide professional development, modeling, classroom coaching, and other services to improve students’ reading and writing” (p. 22). These teacher leaders have been found to be effective when they support the implementation and monitoring of research-based literacy interventions so classroom teachers know how to infuse literacy skills into their instruction (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005). Although student learning is the goal of the coaching model, the immediate need is to focus on adult learning.

### **Summary**

Sturtevant (2003) states that “given what we know about adolescent literacy, it is imperative that we put that knowledge to work by getting into the repertoires of middle level and high school teachers” (p. 20). The literacy coaching model is an approach that has received notice as a way to improve both teacher professional development and student literacy outcomes. Coaching creates the types of sustained, instructional focused, collaborative interactions in schools that research suggest are most effective for improving instruction (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Despite the promise of coaching for supporting enhanced literacy instruction in the secondary schools, few studies have directly assessed the impact of literacy coaching on instruction and learning (Joyce & Showers, 1996).

The researcher in this study hoped to understand the role and responsibilities in the decision-making strategies and actions of a literacy coach while implementing literacy practices within a secondary school setting. Exploring the influence of these decisions upon instructional practice within the school setting, through professional development, determines the impact of teacher learning at the school level. As decisions are enacted, how are they determined to allow for gradual release to create instructional independence versus interdependence? Finally, what influence do these decisions have on school staff's instructional practices? How do these decisions enable instructional practices among staff and how do these decisions impede instructional practices among staff? Information gleaned from this study will help determine what literacy decisions are direct, which are collaborative and which are facilitative.

The coaching model has great potential; however the investment of time, money and personnel needs data to support its effectiveness in coaching decisions in order to create professional development conditions that facilitate literacy instructional improvement and student literacy success.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Research Methods**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the work a literacy coach does regarding student learning through their decision-making strategies and actions while implementing literacy practices within a secondary school setting. The influence of these decisions upon instructional practice within the school setting through professional development was also explored.

### **The Grand Tour Question to Guide This Study**

In this qualitative research study, the research questions focused on exploring how a literacy coach in a secondary school setting makes decisions around literacy implementation.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the literacy coach's roles and responsibilities regarding student learning at the school level?
2. How does a literacy coach make decisions focused upon literary practices at the school setting?
3. How are the decisions enacted that are made by a literacy coach?
4. What influence do these decisions have on school staff's instructional practices?
  - a. How do these decisions enable instructional practices among staff?
  - b. How do these decisions impede instructional practices among staff?

## **Methodology**

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Merriam states “the design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress” (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). According to Creswell (2009), the social-constructivist “holds assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (p. 8). This type of research relies on the views of the participants of the situation being studied. Questions in the research are designed to be expansive and general in order to allow meaning to be constructed from the participants in their setting. They are open-ended in order to concentrate on the processes of interaction between individuals in the context of the setting where participants live and work.

## **Strategy of Inquiry**

Creswell describes case study research as a practice that “involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The systems examined in this research are secondary school settings in Illinois that utilizes a literacy coach. Stake supports the notion that a secondary school is a bounded system by stating that “case study research is not a methodology but a choice of what is to be studied (i.e. a case within a bounded system)” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Summarizing the process rather than outcome justifies a case study. “Case studies help us to understand processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object” (Sanders as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 33). The

process of decision-making strategies and actions of a literacy coach while implementing literacy practices within a secondary school setting will highlight the outcome of the implementation.

### **Data Collection**

The settings of this research were secondary schools defined as post-primary grade, including middle school and/or high school grades that were implementing a coaching model with active literacy coaches. “Purposeful sampling is a qualitative technique of predetermining which members of a population may provide the most beneficial information” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 378). The sample was determined from Illinois school districts that were implementing a literacy coaching model. The researcher contacted administrators in Illinois that had direct contact with districts implementing the coaching model in order to receive a roster of potential literacy coaches for the study. A complete roster of literacy coaches was generated in the state of Illinois. A letter of recruitment was used to identify and recruit prospective subjects after the roster had been reviewed for potential participants. Possible sites were taken from this roster with an attempt made to represent a wide variety of literacy coaching experience as stated in Creswell, “employ maximum variation as a sampling strategy” (Creswell, 2007, p. 129), in order to describe multiple perspectives.

A triangulation of data reflects an attempt to secure an understanding of how the setting, participants, and artifacts impact the decision-making process for literacy coaches. Denzin and Lincoln, (2005) state “The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding” (p. 5). Data were gathered through on-site interviews and field observations “as the researcher builds an in-depth picture of the case” (Creswell, 2007, p. 132). Interviews, observations, and school achievement data were used.

Each semi-structured, one-on-one interview was conducted in the school setting at a place designated by the building principal. The literacy coach and a randomly selected collaborative teacher chosen from a roster provided by literacy coach were interviewed separately. All interviews lasted approximately one hour and followed a standard protocol, included in Appendix A. The protocol included open-ended questions that reflected the central questions of the study. These questions were the core of the interview protocol as reflected by Creswell (2007) “bounded on the front end by questions to invite the interviewee to open up and talk” (p. 133), then ended the interview with a question about “Who should I talk to in order to learn more?” The questions were created by the researcher and were asked in the same order to both teacher and literacy coach. In order to refine the interview questions and procedures, a pilot test was conducted using interview questions. Two secondary literacy coaches in the researcher’s district participated in a pilot test to refine data collection plans and develop relevant lines of questions.

The pilot case was selected based on convenience and access to the literacy coaches. The interviews were recorded. To ensure confidentiality, participants’ names and schools were changed during transcription. Specific characteristics of the literacy coach such as years of experience were used to demonstrate comparisons in data collected. Consent from the interviewees to participate in the study was obtained, included in Appendix C.

A half-day was spent at the participating school providing time for collection of data through field observations. A tour of the school with the literacy coach including observations of classrooms allowed the researcher to collect perceptions and become familiar with the school environment. An observation protocol identifying attributes of a literacy rich environment was used during the tour, see Appendix B. Observations were recorded utilizing the Environmental

Scale for Assessing Implementation Levels (Dorn & Soffos, 2007) in addition to descriptive notes.

Achievement data was analyzed utilizing the Illinois Interactive Report Card Website. This site is managed by Northern Illinois University and included comprehensive demographic, student/teacher population, and Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) data for all Illinois schools. Comprehension reading scores of schools in the study were analyzed.

### **Procedures**

Flick stated “qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus” (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). Data analysis for a qualitative study involves moving deeper into understanding the data as Creswell (2009) stated “some qualitative researchers like to think of this as peeling back the layers of an onion” (p. 183), in order for researchers to interpret meaning of data collected. The procedure involved in qualitative inquiry consists of analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings.

Different methods of data analysis are identified in qualitative research as defined by steps from two authors (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998). In this study, steps included:

Step 1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis.

Interviews and field notes were typed and transcribed. Data were arranged according to source.

Step 2. Read through all the data.

Read and reflect on overall meaning of data while starting to generate general ideas of what participants are saying. Consideration was given to overall depth, credibility, ideas and information.

Step 3. Code the data.

Coding involved taking text gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences into categories, and then noting relationships among categories.

Creswell (2009) suggested that researchers analyze data in a case study by using codes that address topics readers would expect to find based on past literature, codes that are surprising or not anticipated, codes that are unusual and codes that address a theoretical perspective in the issue.

Step 4. Use the coding process to generate a) description and b) themes.

Identify issues within each case and then look for common themes that transcend the cases (Yin, 2009). Researcher reported meaning of the case by first providing a detailed description of each case and then an analysis of themes within the case, called a within-case analysis. A cross-case analysis provides a thematic analysis across the cases and allows for interpretation of the relationship within cases (Creswell, 2007).

Step 5. Narrative representing findings of the analysis.

Merriam stated “Conveying an understanding of the case is the paramount consideration in analyzing the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 193). The understanding was derived from information gleaned through analysis of themes, in addition to lessons learned from the researcher’s personal interpretation of data. Findings confirmed past information or suggested new questions for further research that had not been predicted earlier in the study (Creswell, 2009).

## **Validity**

Creswell defines validity as “the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Validity is based on whether the conclusions are accurate from the viewpoint of the researcher. To ensure validity in the study, the researcher used peer debriefing, triangulation and member checking. Peer debriefing enhanced the accuracy of the account. A colleague of the researcher in the Indiana State University doctoral cohort reviewed and asked questions about the study. The colleague determined if the content resonated with people other than the researcher through this process. The second strategy was triangulation. In triangulation, multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories may be used to provide evidence (Creswell, 2007). This strategy was used in order to examine evidence from the three data sources used in the study. Interviews, field observations and analysis of academic data were reviewed to determine if there was justification of themes (Creswell, 2009). Merriam (1998) defined member checking as a process where the “researcher takes data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (p. 204). “This technique is considered to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 208). “Member checking allows the researcher to take data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2007 p.208). The researcher conducted member checking by taking back part of the preliminary analyses consisting of themes to participants to allow them to comment and share their views on the written findings. A focus group in each setting was conducted including the participants interviewed for the member checking procedure.

**Reliability**

“Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). “Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Merriam (1998) stated that qualitative research “is not conducted so that the laws of human behavior can be isolated” (p. 205), however due to multiple interpretations “there is no benchmark by which to take repeated measures and establish reliability in the traditional sense” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Gibbs stated that qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 190). In order to secure reliability, transcripts were reviewed to ensure they did not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription. Coding was compared with data. This was accomplished by making sure there was “not a drift in the definition of codes, a shift in the meaning of the codes during the process of coding” (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). Codes were cross-checked with another researcher. Results should be dependable and consistent; they should make sense when considering the data collected. Merriam (1998) stated reliability is somewhat of a misfit when applied to a qualitative study, “the question then is not whether findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 206).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter summarized the methodology that this researcher used to understand the role and responsibilities in the decision-making strategies and actions of a literacy coach while implementing literary strategies within a secondary school setting. The methodology was qualitative inquiry with the interpretive-constructivist theoretical lens. Case

study was the strategy of inquiry. Data collection procedures and analysis were described in addition to verification of validity and reliability protocols.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Findings of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the work a literacy coach does regarding student learning through their decision-making strategies and actions while implementing literacy practices within a secondary school setting. The influence of these decisions upon instructional practice within the school setting through professional development was also explored.

### **The Grand Tour Question to Guide This Study**

In this qualitative research study, the research questions focused on exploring how a literacy coach in a secondary school setting makes decisions around literacy implementation.

### **Research Questions**

1. Do coach's roles and responsibilities impact student learning at the school level?
2. How does a literacy coach make decisions focused upon literary practices at the school setting?
3. How are the decisions enacted?
4. What influence do these decisions have on school staff's instructional practices?
  - a. How do these decisions enable instructional practices among staff?
  - b. How do these decisions impede instructional practices among staff?

## **Presentation of Study Sample**

The setting of this research was Illinois secondary schools defined as post-primary grade, including middle school that is currently implementing a coaching model with active literacy coaches. Administrators in Illinois that have direct contact with districts implementing a coaching model were contacted for a roster of potential school sites for the study. A roster including 12 middle schools was generated from administrators. A letter of recruitment was sent to the listed schools to determine interest in participating. Four schools representing central and northern Illinois were included in the study. The Illinois Interactive Report Card, a portal for Illinois school data created by Northern Illinois University with support from Illinois State Board of Education was utilized to retrieve demographic and achievement data for each setting.

School One represented a mid-size suburban district in central Illinois. Student enrollment was 379 students in a district with 3,409 students. Demographic data included 42% low income and 95% White students. Although this school met benchmark of 81.1% students meeting reading standards on the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT), they did not meet benchmark for reading (68.6%) in the economically disadvantaged sub-group. Therefore, School One did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Pupil-teacher ratio was 17.5 and the district's instructional expenditure per pupil was \$4,727.

School Two represented a small city school in West-Central Illinois. The district enrollment totaled 8,893 students including a school total of 685 pupils. An analysis of demographic data revealed 49% low income and 49.2% White population with 36.8% Black, 9.0% Asian, and 5% Hispanic respectively. School Two met AYP on the ISAT reporting 81.4% achievement in reading for all students. Four subgroups: Black, Asian/Pacific Islander,

students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged all met reading benchmarks. Pupil-teacher ratio was 14.9 and the district reported spending \$6,496 per pupil on instruction.

School Three was located in a suburban district in Northern Illinois. School enrollment was 606 students in a district that totaled 1,711 students. The demographic data was defined as 3% low income with 87.8% White students. Minority student population included Asian (7.4%), Multi-racial (2.6%) and Hispanic (1.2%). Achievement scores reported on the ISAT detail 92.5% of all students meeting reading benchmark standards and 65.1% students with disabilities meeting in sub-group category. School Three met AYP. Pupil-teacher ratio was 11.9 and the district's instructional expenditure per pupil was \$10,738.

School Four was located in a large city district in Northern Illinois. School enrollment was 682 students in a district that totaled 404,589 students. Demographic data reported 99% low income with 99.1% Hispanic students. Additional student population data included White (.1%) and Black (.7%). Achievement scores reported on the ISAT indicated 53.2% of all students meeting benchmark standards. School Four did not meet AYP in overall student groups or in respective sub-group scores: Hispanic (53.1%), LEP (36%), special education (16.9%), economically disadvantaged (53.3%). The school had not made AYP for seven years. Pupil-teacher ratio was 23.5 and the district's instructional expenditure per pupil was \$7,690.

School One and School Three enrolled 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in a middle school setting, School Two enrolled 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a middle school setting and School Four was a K-8 structure. The focus for research in School Four was grades 6-8 and did not include grades K-5.

Semi structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted in each school setting. The literacy coach and corresponding teacher were interviewed separately. All interviews lasted

approximately one hour and followed the protocol in Appendix A. Field observations were completed by touring the school and classrooms utilizing the Environmental Scale for Assessing Implementation Levels (ESAIL) in Appendix B.

### **Presentation of Data**

This section contains the findings from the interviews and field observations. These data were analyzed and sorted by the questions asked as well as identified school.

### **Literacy Coaches Roles and Responsibilities Impact Student Learning at School Level**

**School one.** The literacy coach at this school defined her role as “varied and complicated.” She mentioned “The Board has ideas of what they want and principals have ideas about what coaches are supposed to do” so coaches need to “stand up for themselves and use their expertise to help teachers.” Because the job of a literacy coach is varied, many times she “finds herself being pulled in different directions.”

One of the responsibilities of the coach is data collection. “Teachers do not know how to analyze data” therefore she helps with collection and analysis of achievement and intervention data. Recently the district purchased a new data portal system and it has been determined that the literacy coach in each school throughout the district will assist with data management that is aligned with this new system.

Comprehension Intervention Model (CIM) was utilized at School One. CIM had several underlying interventions that were used in Response to Intervention (RtI). Interventions such as guided reading and comprehension focus groups are strategies that help students who are struggling readers and are not making progress at the same rate as classroom peers. This district had embraced a training program which was led by the literacy coach for classroom

teachers and teachers who were being trained to be interventionists. The training was described as follows:

We have two half-day weekly meetings. On one day, we have some type of reading that is homework, it could be articles or a chapter in a book, but pertains to what we are learning about. Then we have a literature discussion group about the reading. Fridays are modeled after the concept of a ‘behind the glass session.’ We take turns sharing what we have learned about interventions. Everyone in the class watches the teacher do an intervention with a group of students. Then we leave time to debrief with participants.

The coach defined this type of teacher training as “a hands-on and practicum approach.” By describing this type of teacher training and learning as practice, the coach said it was “applicable and real.” Planning and conducting intense training for district teachers was a big part of the coaching role that year. The district used additional grant money to fund substitutes so teachers could attend the two half-day trainings during the contractual day per week and gain graduate credit as well.

In addition to the CIM training, the district supported other types of paid training for teachers which included a writer’s workshop group and a Comprehensive Literacy Model (CLM) group. Writer’s workshop gave the participant skills needed to set-up the workshop model in the classroom. The CLM group learned about reading strategies that could be used in core classes at the secondary level. An open-ended training three times a year was additional training available to teachers. The content of the training was at the discretion of the teachers; the coach “designs and facilitates the training to meet the needs of the teachers.” The trainings were after school and could include a variety of venues for learning such as videos, modeling,

and book study. The trainings were a huge commitment regarding time and planning for the coach.

The coach shared some of her training responsibilities with the other two coaches in the district. Although they worked as a team and supported each other, there were differences in needs of teachers at the primary and intermediate school, than at junior high level. At the primary setting (kindergarten through third grade) the teachers were “open vessels, they want the coach to fill them up with great new ideas and are excited about learning for the most part.” The primary teachers also had “a strong literacy team with many reading teachers and Reading Recovery teachers participating.” Due to the number of interested teachers, “the coach finds herself trying to meet demands of many teachers that want assistance right now.” At the intermediate setting the assigned coach found that the fourth through sixth grade teachers were equally excited about learning new instructional reading strategies and had a strong literacy team supported by reading teachers. This building had a large student population and with a vast number of teachers to serve in addition to an over-extended principal which provided management concerns for everyone. The secondary building had challenges that were different than her coaching peers in the elementary and intermediate setting. At the middle school the content area teachers were not interested in coaching help because “they teach content and not reading.” The coach was working to establish a literacy team at the building level but she did not have strong literacy leaders, therefore she found herself supporting the literacy team on her own. The process was slower at the secondary level as it could not happen quickly, “it is time, planting a seed and waiting to see when everyone is ready to work with this.”

The literacy coach saw all of the described roles as “fitting together” and “embedded in one another.” She stated, “I can’t abandon one of the items to give myself more time because they all go together.”

The corresponding teacher at School One described the literacy coach as someone that helped her learn more about reading instruction within her classroom:

She is just a great resource. I can’t imagine reading the amount of material that she does on a regular basis. When I ask for help with an instructional tool like anchor charts she can tell me exactly where to find information. The knowledge is intense. She constantly sends me email links about new ideas and strategies that link to the training workshops we have.

Modeling new instructional strategies had a huge impact on teachers and gave them the confidence to try something they were nervous about doing:

If there is something that you aren’t ready to do, she will show you how. She will come in and model it in your class and then talk to you afterwards. This type of help happens more than one day, depending on what is needed. She may model a strategy, then we do one together, then I do a lesson on my own while she watches, then debriefing afterwards.

Determining the impact of student learning was complicated especially because the work of a literacy coach is difficult to measure,

We are struggling to find ways to show that we are having an impact on students because people are passionate about the graph...they want to find a ‘program’ out there that they can put numbers into it and show a growth graph.

A concern of the coach was that “there has been some reactive decision-making that has led us to data that won’t be helpful.” Data was important and can show student learning, however the coach admitted “I can’t tell with 100% confidence that it works based on numbers” when linking coaching to student learning. The coach does have data to show intervention work was successful through the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (FPBA) to measure reading skills.

Finding ways to measure success may be found in other sources such as the environment in which students learn. The setting has changed since the literacy coach has arrived, “what I can say is through observations and non-evaluative walk through using the ESAIL document, there has been a lot of effort to enhance the literate environment in all classrooms.” The Environmental Scale for Assessing Implementation Levels (ESAIL) document uses a numeric measurement of “not yet”, “approaching,” and “meeting” to rate classrooms regarding level of implementation in effective literacy practices through organization of the classroom and student engagement.

The difficulty came in showing how to measure a teacher taking initiative to change their practice to become more responsive to student learning or finding ways to depict a teacher taking interest and getting involved. The question became how to measure the act of a teacher that the coach mentors and then changes their instructional habits in a classroom or a teacher self-reflecting about her teaching and wanting to find ways to be more responsive to student needs. Those were the types of things that the coach was paying attention too. The coach believed there were pockets of teacher growth:

People are coming and saying, help me think about this, or come show me how to do this or can we have another book study about this, we want to learn more about this...the amount of reaching out from teachers is the way I am measuring success.

The classroom teacher reported that the impact on student learning was a result of her change in practice:

After the coach works with me, students understand 'why' we are doing it. There is a purpose to their learning. At this level students need to be invested in what is happening. They are a participant and not a bystander, this is their education and this is their future. If students do not understand why they are learning something then what is the point? The coach helps me find ways to apply skills to student's lives so the students stay engaged in their learning.

According to the coach, observing student behavior can be an indicator to determine impact on learning such as "we can see the eyes light up when students get it." There does not seem to be a standard of "what it is supposed to look like at junior high" but the challenge remains "what can we do when kids take their reading underground" instead of having it in the open like at the elementary school.

**School two.** The literacy coach at this school defined her work as coaching heavy. Heavy coaching was needed for long-term impact because it was shifting practice and thinking. This type of coaching was not "necessarily a strategy, it is a way of thinking." It could be described by the coach asking teachers questions such as "how are you shifting your thinking," or "how are you shifting your practice," it is "reaching kids where they are." Although she does not prefer the coaching light approach, she saw herself doing this when a teacher asked her to help with one lesson using a strategy in isolation which was no more than a great activity to

boost a lesson. That type of work was surface level, not producing a long term impact on student learning. “A light coach can be seen as a person that everyone likes, they are a nice person, but aren’t found to be essential to the teaching profession at school.”

The teacher working with the literacy coach in several capacities believed the coach was effective because “she knows what I know.” The coach was involved in training, planning and co-teaching with this teacher. Although there was a professional relationship that drove the effectiveness, there was also a knowledge piece. “The type of support she gives me is directly connected to the type of information I have been exposed to and she can tailor it because she has training and experience in many areas.” The literacy coach “meets people where they are as a result of her being connected to them in many ways.”

The literacy coach provided training for teachers in using different types of intervention strategies. To strengthen the training experience she co-taught in two classrooms each day to assist with implementation of these interventions. This push-in model kept the literacy coach “close to the students but also provides respect from other teachers” as they saw her in the same teaching situation as they were.

The impact of training provided each summer during a structured workshop in collaboration with a local university had been enhanced. In the past when a unit was taught, teacher enthusiasm for implementation in the following school year was evident, however, when the school year started teachers quickly got “underwater because they have a million things to do...they take care of day to day needs and new learning goes by the wayside” after the summer was over. This year the literacy coach continued the dialogue from the summer. “I am the person that keeps the ideas alive in the building with teachers.” A teacher reported that

the literacy coach “is kind of like that conscious that you have” and “she is there but not really there.”

Data prospects were woven into many coaching opportunities especially when working with intervention groups. The coach stated that “the focus of trying to find out what students need, finding and using meaningful data to drive instruction is the key. If you follow that line of thinking and acting, it can only impact student learning.” Collecting assessment data reached into the content area as described by the coach in the following:

Today I was having a conversation with a science teacher about a lesson on cells. She told me what she was going to do, and then I probed her on what about the students who already know what you are going to teach? Then we designed a pre-assessment on the information. We will divide the students into two groups: those that know what to do and those that do not. An alternative activity will be planned for students who already know the information and they can have a more in-depth activity.

Flexibility to create her own schedule allowed the coach to meet needs of teachers in the English/language arts (ELA) department. She was paired with two ELA teachers that had joint collaboration time. Assisting in the planning of lessons with teachers “helps them on a deeper scale.” The teacher reported that “she knows exactly where we are from the beginning so when she steps in a class she knows exactly what to focus on.” The coach was described as providing “eyes on students.” In addition, the planning process provided a trust between coach and teacher as described in the following:

She is very visible and vocal. She can tell you some of the things that you are hesitant to tell yourself. If I ask myself...did that go well? Did I hit the mark on that one? If I

did something that I think is not that good, I may want to sweep it under the rug, but you can't sweep it under the rug. She would say hey...you need to do something about it.

The ELA department also gained extra support as the literacy coach planned with each grade level every week working with content through development of essential questions. The process was successful, "she is aware of what is happening in my class and stays up to date with what is happening in our department so she can provide support when necessary" as explained by one teacher.

Providing support in math, science and social studies demanded a different type of assistance from the coach "because I am not a math or science teacher." In subjects other than reading and language arts "I really go into the strategies and not the content." There was also a "focus on data that they are getting" in a variety of ways in core classes. The literacy coach knew she was "not the expert on the content, is the expert on strategies and how to put it all together." Content area teachers utilized the literacy coach in a variety of ways as described by the coach in an example with math teachers:

I am also working with 6<sup>th</sup> grade math. They approached me and wanted to do some flexible grouping, wanted to do a better job of talking about the big ideas. I was able to sit down with them once a week and pull in the idea of pre-assessments. Now we meet and talk about what we can do with data from the assessments.

The literacy coach had been asked to help teachers who were struggling, but she had found the experience ineffective. Although she admitted "it makes sense when you are outside of coaching to see a teacher struggling and say...help them" but it was "throwing a band aid approach" at the situation. Successful coaching "depends on the receptiveness of the teacher." If a coach had not built a relationship prior to trying to help a struggling teacher "most of the

time it hasn't worked." The best coaching experience was when "I am a continuation of a professional development or I have been approached by a teacher asking for help."

Constant dialogue between coach and teacher had an impact on student learning. The coach believed as teachers become aware of strategies to determine each student's level of learning they had a new responsibility to act:

Once you find out what kids need, there is an obligation to teach them and provide instruction to help them. Now that teachers know, they have to respond. It used to be the case where a teacher would think students were getting it or hope they were getting it but they really weren't sure so they moved on to the next lesson.

The teacher described her enhanced responsiveness to student needs as having an impact on student learning, "I am so aware...hyper aware of what each student is doing, thinking, and where they are at in their learning." Another impact was the support the coach gave by continually finding ways to respond to student needs as shared by a teacher:

She has helped guide a lot of us, using pre-assessment, trying to pull information about our students and then actually looking at students by figuring out what the data is telling us. She is helping in the process and student learning is happening because she keeps asking us what is the data telling us? She is always asking us what we are going to do about it. That is my conscious talking to me, what am I going to do about this information, how am I going to respond to my students' needs.

Increased teacher responsiveness also impacted students learning, "I have done a much better job this year in responding to what my students need in that moment than I have done in the past four years I have been a teacher in this building."

**School three.** The literacy coach at this school listed collaboration as a key component in her role as a coach. She quickly added that dialogue needed to be voluntary between coach and teacher. Although she could organize the structure and “set the stage for people to get together” the opportunities “for teachers to talk” and to “facilitate dialogue” was primarily her role. The coach explained “the fact that people have the same mindset and collaborate and try to help others out is definitely what helps us be successful” in the quest to enhance literacy instruction at their school. The coach also believed the climate of the building and excellent hiring practices contributed to the collaborative spirit teachers have towards each other:

In other districts I worked in when the going got tough, I wanted to leave. In this district when the going gets tough I want to stay and work together to work it out. It is a very collaborative district. We support each other. It isn't all peachy and rosy all of the time. We hire people that are like minded and that is helpful. That accelerates what we do.

Providing additional support such as book clubs and planning professional development for the staff in regards to literacy was also the coach's responsibility. In the past, volunteer teachers would organize featured workshops such as literacy days; however, it would get thrown together the day before the event. The coach was mindful of the needs in the building and “can take time and plan what needs to be done on that day and make sure it is meaningful and done well.” Intervention training was another example of additional support for teachers. Several teachers in the school were being trained on various interventions. The coach provided training and shadowed the teacher at times to ensure the interventions were given with fidelity. The goal of the training was to build capacity of teachers within the building. The professional development model was crafted to sustain the literacy initiatives in place.

Working with intervention groups was 10% of the coach's responsibility. According to the original contract drafted by district administration, the coach was not supposed to work with small groups of students; however, it was happening anyway. The schedule allowed for the coach to work with small groups of students Monday through Wednesday with planning the other two days of the week. The coach liked working with students "it keeps me current with what students are like" and helped her stay connected with classroom teachers when they were struggling with intervention strategies. However, the teacher interviewed was concerned about the focus on interventions as stated, "the coach's role has evolved, part of me believes it has moved too far into an interventionist role." She was worried that the time it took to conduct interventions was time taken from professional development planning with non-reading teachers and opportunities for modeling literacy strategies in the classroom.

Data analysis was conducted in a variety of ways but the most significant data collection was displayed on a data wall. The data wall consisted of a large canvas with pockets. Each student was represented with an index card that had identifying information in addition to data collected from grade level common assessments and standardized tests. Students were placed under four standard based categories: academic warning, does not meet, meets, and exceeds. As students were provided interventions and as formative assessments were given, the cards were rearranged to determine progress of each student so planning could continue regarding the need for interventions. The coach started the data wall concept that year as feeder schools had used the data wall concept for a couple of years. Although the coach was the primary data wall manager, it was her hope that teachers would eventually take ownership of tracking student progress in this manner.

The teacher and coach both believed the coach's responsibilities impact student learning. The teacher trusted when the coach modeled a lesson using literacy strategies, then planned with the teacher in order for the teacher to try the strategy independently and if the teacher had success, they told others. The trickledown effect was powerful at the secondary level "if you can get content area teachers to see something that works and support them when they try it, they will tell others and then it spreads." After working with the literacy coach, a powerful force was created when content teachers had bought in for two reasons:

To see students that struggle with reading and you really didn't know why and now you know why, you can really help them to see where they are breaking down. I didn't always know it. Some students don't do the work and you think it is because they are lazy, but it is really because they don't comprehend. Figuring where the breakdown is can be really powerful. The other thing that is powerful is when students who struggle in school and always have had trouble; you see them using different strategies in school and they really blossom.

Changing teacher practice impacted student learning and "you can never see what they know when you talk at them. When I teach reading, I help them think." Although difficult to capture the impact of student learning, the teacher kept work in a binder so she "can see progress in their thinking and how the strategies they are using changes." She believed students should take ownership of their learning by "writing quarterly analysis of their learning and strategies that they are using." By providing the opportunity to analyze their work, students "should change each quarter and their analysis should be deeper each quarter." Students get additional writing prompts in this teacher's classroom, "I have changed my teaching by incorporating reading and writing strategies into the daily classes." By moving from

worksheets to journaling, students recorded “strategies we are using and complete a writing portion” responding to daily questions derived from class content.

The coach would like to think that her work impacted student learning but “I don’t know if I have hard core data that says, yes it does.” When working with teachers the first thing the coach discussed was determining student outcomes by trying to “have it focus on what the student needs to do.” Teachers reported that “this really worked with my students or you wouldn’t believe what this student did” after a coach had worked with a class. However, there was little evidence linking student achievement to the collaboration of the literacy coach and the teacher. On a small scale it was hard to quantify but “you don’t always know the impact you are making on what you immediately do.” The coach described the impact as a “pay it forward thing,” she continued,

It is hard to quantify this position. It is building relationships, time to listen to a teacher when they are struggling with something. I am someone that they can talk to and will listen to them so that when they go in and try to help the next child, they pay closer attention to that student and try to do a better job of helping him. Or they may help another teacher by listening to that person and helps make that person better. I don’t think you can really quantify everything. You can’t track my good deeds down the line.

I also can’t take it back to me and say it is because of me. I can say it is because of us.

**School four.** The teacher in School Four defined the coach’s role as a mentor in the classroom and support for professional growth. The coach was working to “establish more differentiated instruction in the classroom.” Also, the coach was determining the appropriate staff development based on “what the teacher needs and wants” for their instructional practice based on data analysis. The coach believed she was not in the building enough to make a huge

impact as she was shared with seven other buildings in the large city district. However, working with content area teachers in classrooms such as math, science and social studies impacted student learning because “the students go from one class to another with the same needs and have the same proficiency levels.” The teacher at School Four believed finding ways to help students in the content area “makes a better learning environment for everyone.” The coach stated that she was starting to see “students do things after a lesson that has something to do with literacy especially something like writing down their thinking, discussion logs, and asking a student partner a question.” In the future the coach hoped to see the teachers “facilitating a student discussion” because “a lot of content can be addressed through a conversation.” The coach also saw opportunities in the science and social studies classes as the teachers tended to use the textbook more than other departments. “Helping the teacher learn ways to use the text” would impact student learning as it enhanced their independent reading as they move to the high school level.

At School Four, the literacy coach observed teachers in classrooms “so I can get a feel of what is occurring” and then arranged a “follow-up meeting with the principal.” The observations led to collaboration between the teacher and principal in addition to providing ideas for professional development that was needed or requested. The coach “is an extra person that can come in and provide assistance.”

The coach spent several weeks during the fall, winter and spring administering, monitoring, and analyzing data for school wide tests. The district-enforced Scantron Test was administered to all students in the large city district three times a year. It was a benchmark test that assessed reading, math, and science (for 7<sup>th</sup> grade only). The district-enforced Riverside Test is an online test that was administered three times a year, however the results were

immediate. The Riverside test measured growth as opposed to the Scantron test that measured mastery of grade level skills at the time of testing. The state-mandated Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) test for English Language Learners (ELL) was administered in late January. This test determined the level of literacy for ELL students to establish eligibility for ELL services. The teacher believed the “continuous testing is too much.”

In addition to overseeing the testing environment, the coach monitored an online reading intervention called, Achieve 3000. The online tool “relates to content area within the curriculum.” Students connect to it “at their grade level.” The coach assisted with implementation and data analysis in each classroom. The independent computer program was popular; however the small number of computers limited the availability for all students to utilize in an effective way.

### **Literacy Coach Making Decisions Focused upon Literacy Practices at the School Setting**

**School one.** The literacy coach made decisions in concurrence with the building principal. Last year the coach and principal were not meeting and talking on a regular basis and progress at the school “wasn’t happening and was needed.” Therefore, the coach had a “come to Jesus talk” with the principal and told him “they needed to meet once a week on a regular basis to discuss literacy...we needed to have a discussion about literacy stuff.” This year there was a weekly scheduled meeting with an agenda. The meeting was never moved to a different day or canceled; it had become the catalyst for moving the building forward on the literacy initiative. As described by the coach “this meeting is sacred, we need this time and everyone has a vested interest in the meeting content...this meeting is non-negotiable.” The principal and coach called this weekly episode a “meeting of the minds.” Short term goals were on track

because “we meet once a week to talk together about literacy stuff.” The short term goals were “revisited each week which allows us to keep the goals alive” even though the coach admitted “we aren’t perfect, but we are trying to stay on track.” As the coach reflected about the meeting, she admitted that in another building “the principal does not have a vested interest in the weekly meeting...it is canceled and changed all the time...it isn’t working well...the goals aren’t alive in that building.”

The short-term and long-range goals reviewed in the weekly meetings drove the decisions that the literacy coach made. The short-term goals were written on paper and agreed upon at the building level; however there remained a question about the district commitment to the process. The coach shared that “the literacy coaches in the district want to know where the district is with the commitment.” Teachers were watching to determine whether the work of the coach would continue, “some people think it may be going away.” However the literacy coach continued with established goals set at her building such as developing a workshop model for writing and reading classrooms, intervention training, literacy professional development, and support for teachers through the form of modeling instructional practice in addition to providing teacher resources. The school continued to move forward with the perceived district expectation,

Everyone is being trained and we seem to be moving in this direction, however no one has drawn a line in the sand...the workshop model hasn’t been set in stone because no one at the district level is going to take the hard stand.

Long-range goals were discussed between the principal and coach however they were not “written on paper and are not a commitment at this time.” The coach admitted “in three years we hope to see more workshop-like instruction in the content areas” but the money was

running out and the “human resource administrator is worried about how to keep the professional development going.” The coach was currently tagged as the person to keep the training obtainable because there were teachers in the building that “won’t give up time in the summer to get deep training” so the district had to figure out “how to get the teachers trained during the school year.” The trained teachers were held to a higher standard and there was pressure from trained teachers towards their peers to move forward. This type of pressure helped move the initiatives “their colleagues are saying, here are your books, here is what you need to know, so get going.” The “sustainability to help untrained teachers rests on the shoulders of the literacy coach” especially when budget cuts are needed.

The teacher included the ESAIL document as a “guiding force” at the school setting. Last year each teacher self-rated their classrooms regarding level of implementation in effective literacy practices through organization of the classroom and student engagement. The whole school met to determine what could be done to enhance the literate environment. Teachers reviewed the ESAIL criterion and “determined what is doable, what can the average teacher change through their own independent reading and what professional development is needed.” These discussions were embedded “into the school-wide improvement plan called SWIP.” The ESAIL information “is incorporated into the school plan.” The literacy coach worked with each teacher to compare the self-defined score with the achievement data of students in their classroom.

Professional development was a key ingredient in the school improvement plan. Schedules were changed this year to assist in finding time for teachers to meet on a regular basis during the school day in addition to other meeting opportunities, “there are times that our staff are together after school, department meetings once a week or team time for individual

teachers.” The teacher reported that “this is nice and helps with our literacy plan” because “departments and teachers are at different levels, some are still adjusting and just learning how to do things, yet there are things we can do as a whole group.”

The teacher admitted there are “many layers that happen at one time that all connect” and “each group is working on the area they need to improve.” “The coach was a big part of the process of sharing different parts” and putting them together so everything connects.

**School two.** The literacy coach made decisions based on “what the teachers are telling me.” Although “I have a plan that I want to follow, I need to consider where teachers are.” An example of this was described by the coach as follows:

A month ago I was getting push back from teachers. They were saying “we are done” and “we have had enough.” I planned to use these teachers as a model classroom this semester so other teachers could come and view, but I had to step back because they were not ready for this. I needed to step back and take a look at the situation and determine next steps. We agreed to create the model classrooms second semester.”

In response to this readjustment, the coach and the teachers increased “the level of conversations” and continued the “focus of what these teachers were doing in the classroom and providing support to help them strengthen their skills.” By stepping back, the teachers “continued to reflect on their practice” in anticipation of being a model classroom second semester. The coach felt this would create a richer experience second semester for teachers viewing the model classrooms. The coach reported that “even though they are overwhelmed, they tell me that having you here keeps me on track...and keeps me focused.”

The coach believed in order to move ahead a combination of things needed to happen. “It isn’t just two people working together, it is the right two people working together and timing

of people working together.” For example a corresponding teacher was responding differently this year than in past years working with a support coach due to timing as follows:

A couple of years ago a certain teacher was working with a different type of support teacher. It was not as successful. The teacher was in her second year, learning her own craft and was not as receptive to the notion of coaching/collaboration. However, now she is very receptive to the idea. It is many things combined. It is being a part of a larger group, being able to plan with me and with colleagues that are also working towards this different way of literacy learning for teachers and students.

The coach reported that “things are on a bigger scale this year.” Together, “we have had a school-wide focus and teachers have been able to have collaboration time” which had a huge impact. The coaching model and a “new schedule that allows more opportunity for collaboration” allowed time for coach and teacher to work together which “helps in planning with teachers on a deeper scale.” The coach also attributed the newly developed “release time to spend planning what teachers want all students to know and be able to do.”

In addition to timing of people working together, the literacy coach relied on teachers she had a prior relationship with as she made decisions in the school setting. Having relationships with teachers “definitely accelerates the process.” However the coach believed it was not only the relationship but “it is more the personality of the teacher than the relationship.” “If they are willing to listen and are open to suggestions then maybe that creates a relationship that is different than one like close friends” but could still be helpful as stated by the coach. The relationship is described as a “respect relationship.” The coach said that in order to move forward with decisions, she needed to get through the notion “who are they and why do they think they can tell me what to do” that some content area teachers had at the

secondary level. The coach believed “if you can get through that then you have a receptive teacher and will have a chance to establish a relationship with that teacher which makes a difference.”

When summarizing decisions in the school setting, the coach described herself as a person that has expertise but is not the expert. The coach said she is “not coming in as all-knowing” even though she has “a lot of knowledge, it is about what kids need.” The coach admitted she “has a strategy in her back pocket” that could be used to fix something but says she “is not going to come and fix everything” but would “help figure out what students need and how to respond to that.”

The coach had a variety of teacher styles and expertise to work with, so she adjusted her assistance to meet teachers at their current level as described by a water analogy:

A lot of people think that they need someone to come in and fix their class...that is not what it is, it is more than that! Even if receptive teachers are drowning, you can only give them a life preserver, you can't fix that. You can't make them a captain of their own ship. You are completely coming at a different angle. You can give them some strategies and some help, but they aren't going to be at the level of someone who is already successful and feeling confident in their own teaching as are skilled swimmers.

Those types of teachers can take things to a much deeper level. If you are working with someone who is barely treading water, then you are really just giving them strategies to survive.

The teacher believed decision-making in the school setting was a joint effort between the principal, department chair and literacy coach, “when there is decision-making going on, those three are definitely at the top of the decisions and then it trickles down through

departments...then it impacts what is happening in the classroom.” However, the teacher was quick to add that peers who were involved with training and literacy committee work were valued and contributed to the decisions “because our time there (training and committee work) and ideas received from there (training and committee work) are shared...and then shared with colleagues who are not part of this type of work.” The coach kept “ideas going and rolls them out for other teachers in the building piece by piece for teachers that are willing to implement the practices.” The teacher reported that “it isn’t one thing, but many things that connect together” such as people like her who “have a direct influence over the other teachers to share ideas and watch how they are implemented in the building.”

The teacher was comfortable with many decisions because “I have a constant companion” the literacy coach “is my constant companion.” The teacher was confident that the coach would “put it all together for me and is a resource, at the very least a sounding board.” The relationship between the coach and the corresponding teacher was defined by the teacher, “I have somebody when I am willing to get help and when I am not willing to get help she is still there...it has been a process, definitely a process.”

According to the teacher, goals were made by building principal “in light of what we learn in our summer training, input from the literacy coach and teachers in the building, and advice received from other buildings.” The school was “starting with short term goals in the classes” for the grade level where the coach had direct contact and then “finding pockets of teachers who are interested” in working with her. There would “never be 100% buy-in on everything, but that is okay” because the coach would work with teachers that were receptive first and hoped other teachers would consider working with her who were reluctant at first. As the year progressed, the coach might spend more time in one goal area such as “closer to

Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) I may need to work with teachers in a different way” to prepare for the state assessment in March. Meeting benchmark standards on the ISAT was a school goal. Responsive teaching was a long-term goal for all teachers in the school.

The coach was involved in that process:

I want teachers to feel like when we are done working together, we are not really done.

I don't want it to be an every week or every other day thing or a maintenance thing. I want to continue to build a building-wide vision for responding to student needs and what that means. I don't feel we are ever really done. At the end I would like to think that all students are looking at their student and responding to student needs.

In order to continue the work towards responsive teaching and student learning there were “a lot of things at play at one time. All things are working toward the big picture idea.”

**School three.** The literacy coach made decisions in the school setting by having a strong relationship with the principal. The principal and coach started in the district at the same time; she was hired as a teacher and the principal was hired as an assistant principal. Both staff members moved to their respective positions the same year too. “I have a good relationship with the principal not only because we have an employment history but we have a lot in common...our kids are even the same age.” The strong working relationship was fostered by both attending a conference that featured the topic of coaching and principal relationships in the coach's first year and the principal's first year in each of their current roles. The foundation for the coaching role was mutually established, “I wasn't there to fix teachers and I wasn't going to evaluate anybody.” In the school setting the principal helped the coach with large scale decisions because the coach “is a pleaser” and wanted to make everyone happy. The principal's expertise in that area had allowed the coach “to make more level headed decisions where I

would be tempted to go with my gut quickly...that is good.” The coach helped the principal “understand the literacy part of the decision.” The coach reported that the principal was strong in a lot of areas but if “I want to go in a certain direction such as using a certain tool for comprehension, the principal will listen to me and support me.”

Although the principal was involved in the decision-making process, the coach relied on her connections with the Instructional Media Center (IMC) Specialist and the differentiated coordinator. They met together but also shared information on a regular basis through technology called Google Doc. All three positions worked with students in a unique way, different than classroom teachers. The differentiated coordinator “focuses on the top kids...the students tracked for reading, writing, and math.” The coordinator “works with student and teachers role in helping those students” she had a position like the literacy coach. The team of three specialists connected ideas in finding ways to support teachers in the classroom.

Meeting with the district literacy coaches on a weekly basis helped strengthen the intervention training model that all four buildings were utilizing. “We are all doing the intervention called Comprehension Focus Groups so we have similar things we can talk about.” Although there was only one junior high school in the district “it still helps to talk about things and listen to what they are doing.”

This year the literacy coach had worked primarily with the language arts department due to curriculum revision that she led during the summer. “The language arts department is huge, I am literacy coach for the whole building, however, I spend a great deal of time in language arts.” Prior to the intervention training and the language arts curriculum review, the coach “did more cross-curricular things.”

The content area teacher reported that since the beginning the coaching role was “very collaborative, working closely with all content area teachers.” The coach “goes to content area teachers to seek their expertise and determines how to connect literacy with that. There is a nice balance of working as a team/together.” In regards to working with content area, the teacher stated:

The coach has made sure we don’t just stay focused on our specific subject area. She holds us accountable that we need to focus on structure. It is easy to focus on the teacher, but that is not where there is power. The power is not in what I’m doing but providing students the opportunity to use literacy to get where they are going.

The coach did not feel like she was balanced in working with all departments, she wanted to “get back to content area teachers.” “Some have been very blunt, they have said there is nothing for me, but some of their rooms are amazing.” The coach realized if she did not get back to them “they will be turned off...they will start to feel like second-hand man.”

The decisions the coach made were determined also by teacher interest, “teachers come to me and I never know where they are going to hit me.” When she first started her job as a coach she was scared that “no one would want to come see me” but now she had teachers seeking her help all the time even “putting my lunch in the microwave.”

**School four.** The principal in School Four guided the decisions in collaboration with the literacy coach and teachers. The school was very collaborative. The principal “is very supportive, but wants the process to be seamless...she is concerned that the teachers will feel like this is ‘one more thing’ they have to do.” Student data was reviewed quarterly in a meeting with the principal and teacher. The teacher developed an action plan using current student data. The action plan was reviewed with principal and “although it can be a bit stressful, it fine tunes

instruction and the teacher can really focus on student learning.” The teacher reported that “last year we made some nice gains and I believe the meetings are a large contributor to the gains we have made.”

### **Literacy Decisions Enacted**

**School one.** The literacy coach in School One reported that decision-making was “primarily dependent on what is hot and how they are enacted partly depends on the weekly meeting with the principal and me.” The literacy coach did not assist with making decisions at the district level and sometimes she felt “like things are done to her.” An example shared was a decision by district administration in regards to RtI universal screeners. The literacy coaches in all district buildings had determined that FPBA would be used as a universal screener for all students. All teachers “were trained and everyone was ready to give the assessments.” Prior to the first administration of the FPBA the district level administrators “changed the decision and decided the district universal screener would be a different assessment through a different vendor than FPBA.” This decision was “very disturbing” to all teachers, coaches and building-level administration. The coach felt “there seems to be a disconnect at the district level with what is going on, the literacy coach is caught in the middle at times with decisions.” The coach went on to say, most decisions were “threaded into everything the coach does especially at the district level, but the classroom teacher may not be aware as much.”

The corresponding teacher believed the decisions were “collaborative and teacher driven...the coach is there to facilitate and assist teachers.” The teacher knew there was a district goal to “incorporate writer’s workshop and everyone is moving in that direction.” However, it was “up to each building to implement the process.” The teacher believed that the

school was modeling the decision-making process that teachers used with adolescent students as stated,

Within the building the principal has been very open to ensure that teachers have what they need to make the instructional change happen instead of dictating, this is the process. This is exactly what we want to do with students. We want to give them choices so they can be involved and have an investment in the decisions.

The teacher mentioned that the school improvement team developed goals that drove the literacy decisions at their building, “the team makes the goal and then the teachers have a chance to provide feedback so it doesn’t take forever to make a goal.” The final goals were achievable because when they were written “we look at everything and pull it all apart.” The process was a collaborative effort including all stakeholders as the school improvement plan was developed.

The district standards were aligned with state standards, however the district standards were written in “I can do it” statements. The curriculum was broken down at each grade level and what a student should know and be able to do was defined by statements such as “I can read at my grade level.” New instructional practices infused by teachers in their classroom through the leadership and training of the literacy coach had “shifted the practice and thinking of teachers.” The district “I can do it statements” might need to be “revisited because we have different knowledge now and need to redo the statements that were made several years ago to align with our new practices.”

**School two.** The literacy coach commented that even though her decisions were made by teacher needs, communication was a potential roadblock. Teachers initially in the building were “rumbling about why the literacy coach is working with math and science” and “why isn’t

she with only English and language arts teachers?” The comments led the literacy coach to believe that the coaching role was not defined for all stakeholders at the school level. By design, the coach did not clearly define her role because administration and she “didn’t have it absolutely, completely defined at first.” Within the first month of school this year the coach met with “all teams and talked about what I did, what I could offer to them.” In addition to the meeting, “I typed a one page description of what I do and my responsibilities.” Meeting with teachers and giving a written description helped the coach “define my role” and gave teachers a sense of the coaching purpose in the school setting.

All departments at this school had a professional learning plan which was developed by the teachers within the department. The school had a professional learning plan which was developed by the chairs in each department, the literacy coach and administration. Literacy goals were part of each plan. At the beginning of the year, the coach shared the work from summer training and the key components of the “literacy practice initiative.” By the end of the first quarter each department was ready to review the plan developed at the beginning of school. As part of that review the coach assisted by guiding the conversation as defined by the following:

This is the instruction we used, this is the data we have collected and this is what we are doing with the data. The entire process is walked through with teachers. Then we look at the end product. We also talk about what we learned from this process and what students got out of the process.

As a result of the first quarter reflection, departments were planning on having “a fair for each building department” where each group “will share with their peers what was learned from outcomes of the first semester professional learning plan.” The teacher stated that the

purpose of the fair was to give all teachers a chance to reflect on “what we did, what impact it had on everything” and then that conversation “unfolds...the many layers in our building horizontally and vertically.” The teachers could see that everything “threads across, up and down too.”

**School three.** The literacy initiative was driven by teachers who said “we need this, we believe in this, this is what we want” in addition to strong “administrative support.” The initiative was rolled out at faculty meeting by the literacy coach and lab teachers who were implemented a few years ago to model best practices within the school setting. The teacher believed all staff members enact the decisions made because they were initially part of the decision to hire a literacy coach.

The parents were informed of the literacy initiative through conversations with all teachers at the school including teachers who did not teach language arts and reading. The teachers were confident in the literacy process because they knew it was not just a school-wide effort but much larger. The teachers believed it was district driven because they had seen proof. The teacher shared how their school knew the literacy initiative was alive across the district:

I can tell the difference in the students from a few years ago and now. Since our district is all following same literacy initiative starting in kindergarten our students know what they are doing. The thinking that is going on is amazing. The middle school teachers went to elementary to see what was working for them because they wanted to connect with middle school. It was powerful to see what students could do in 5<sup>th</sup> grade so we knew they were capable of doing that at middle school level. Visiting this classroom and seeing what 2<sup>nd</sup> graders and 5<sup>th</sup> graders could do impacted the decisions of stakeholders such as teachers too.

The literacy coach admitted that the district “moves fast” in implementing district initiatives. The ability to “move at lightning speed” in the district was largely due to “hiring people who are very informed and know a lot” which helped with the capacity to see changes quicker. The fact that the district had “high test scores” gave them the feeling that they had a cushion to be pioneers as they had “nothing to lose.”

At times, some decisions were “enacted by administration such as a recent decision about Terra Nova testing.” The coach admitted that “not everyone was happy about it” but the teachers “need to do it anyway.” When decisions were made that were not teacher driven, but had a direct impact on the literacy initiative, the coach sometimes found herself “in the middle of the decisions and have to communicate them.” The coach had a “tendency to field questions for the principal” and then got in trouble with teachers because she had “a tendency to side with the district.”

The coach believed that the advantage of seeing “how everything goes together” gave a “trust that everything will go together” which helped her make decisions at the building level. The coach was “involved in many parts” and could “see the big picture” but was mindful that teachers could not see the big picture. If teachers were “stressed” as shown by a “teacher who is usually quiet and in most meetings just shakes his head and nods, but storms out after a decision is communicated to faculty,” caused the coach to self-reflect because if “I really see the big picture I am missing something if teachers are stressed.”

**School four.** The teachers in School Four met for “cycle meetings every week.” The literacy coach, assistant principal, special education teachers and teachers who were involved in middle grades met 45 minutes before school. The meeting was organized by the reading teacher due to scheduling conflicts with the traveling literacy coach. Agendas were driven by

teacher input, but focused on student learning and student needs. The culture at School Four was “supportive and collaborative” with a focus to find creative ways to “keep kids in school.” The teacher believed that “families are supportive of students getting help from teachers” and “trust that the teachers will provide the instruction that is necessary for student growth.” Many families could not help their student due to economic barriers; however the teachers “stay positive and help students.”

The schedule at School Four had been adjusted to provide collaboration time for teachers and some meetings held during the day were supported with a traveling substitute. “The school has the attitude we will help our students no matter what” and the teachers believe that “all students have potential.”

### **Influences That Decisions Have on School Staff’s Instructional Practices**

**School one.** Without the coach, the teacher stated that the teachers “would not have a direction” or a “purpose.” The coach “sees the big picture better than teachers can, which is important” so when the teacher got “off track, the literacy coach brings them back.” In determining when to keep teachers on track, the coach admitted that “a part of me feels that I need to stay rigid so I am holding the line” but also needed to “meet the teacher in the middle.” The struggle for the coach in making decisions was to determine what parts of the literacy initiative was “bendable and what is not bendable.”

Creating a focus for teaching that connects to student learning is one way the coach influences instructional practices. This is described by the following teacher’s statement:

Without a coach the department meeting would be nothing but complaining about students, teachers wouldn’t come because they have grading or planning to do. We would be at the meeting, but it wouldn’t move forward. The coach helps us know what

to do. She is a leader. We have a department leader/note taker but the leader doesn't know what to lead. There would not be focus in our department. The coach helps us define what the next step should be once we decide on the goal. The teachers are getting training but we could not take the information that we are getting at that training and do everything on our own. We would still be isolated in our classroom trying things out on our own.

The teacher believed "decisions are driven by teachers." The literacy coach provided the framework for thinking from the training and modeling that was done, however it was up to the teacher to implement the practices that they had learned. The influence the coach had on the instructional practice fostered teacher self-reflection when trying to implement a new literacy strategy or shifting instructional practice by incorporating new knowledge. The support was described by the teacher as follows:

Teachers hit a frustration point and it is harder to get through it than it is to give up. It is easier to give up than to keep trying. The coach is there when teachers reach their frustration point. Coach meets privately with teacher and teacher can really have a meltdown and say what happened? What is going on? Then the coach talks through the problem and doesn't give an answer, but they help fix it by asking a million questions. When they keep prompting you with a million questions, you come to the realization that you had the answer but didn't know it. The coach isn't just handing over the answers; the coach keeps asking the questions. The teacher comes to their own realization with the probing and questioning by coach.

Coaching decisions enabled instructional practice by the support that was provided through coaching for teacher directed decisions. Some literacy decisions were made by

departments. After reading Harvey and Goudvis (2000), the social studies department chose a comprehension focus on connections. This strategy was detailed in the book that was studied. The department decided “they all wanted to practice this strategy.” The teachers were “already trying some ideas” in their classroom. The literacy coach supported this group as they moved forward with their focus on comprehension strategies.

The teacher shared another example of coaching influence in the science department as follows:

The science department did ‘buddy reading.’ The teachers pulled articles, talked about what it looked like in the classroom, what they liked and were able to choose one thing at a time so they could implement in the classroom. Teachers are relieved and comfortable knowing that they may meet with small groups and try something, then go back and talk to colleagues about it. The coach works with the small group and offers support.

The teacher believed instructional practices were changing, “we are working together.” The idea of working together on “instruction and planning” created a unified focus for “what we are doing.”

The decisions made can impede instructional practices when “teachers look at the little things as a barrier to change.” The teacher defined little things like a peer at school defending their reluctance to change by saying “I can’t do it because I don’t have furniture for that.” Although “some teachers feel that in order to do all of the changes they need furniture” the administration and coach hosted a fund raiser to buy some new furniture “which is making everyone excited.” The teacher said when little things were a barrier and the needs were

addressed, it helped “boost our spirit” because “it was the little things” that help “such as new furniture.”

The teacher reported “attitude of some of the staff” could impede instructional practices if they did not fully understand how everything fit together. Some people struggled with “all of the requirements” because they did not see this “as a process.” The teacher admitted “when you are first learning and implementing” it may seem like the only way to change practice was to “follow a checklist” but it “really isn’t the more you do this in your classroom.” Even if teachers agreed with the key components, many felt “like they don’t get to teach anymore.”

The coach reported that “teacher perception” could impede instructional practice if teachers believed that the coach would not help them because “I don’t do workshop approach” or “I am not on the same page as her.” If teacher perception was misguided, then “the system or literacy coach decision doesn’t impede the practice, the teachers may do it to themselves because of the mindset blocker they have.” The coach strongly suggested “perceptions can impede the progress.”

**School two.** The coach believed the instructional practices of teachers were more purposeful. This could be illustrated by the fact teachers “are checking for understanding on a daily basis.” The format used for checking had changed as it was not “just through an end of the chapter assessment” but teachers were “constantly getting information from their students to determine what their students know.” Meaningful instructional practice followed as shown by a science teacher who told the coach “I always did a ticket out the door strategy, but now I am using that information from students to drive my instruction.” That example explained the “shift for some teachers” as “some teachers are just getting information and all of this is new to them.” There were purposeful groupings for teachers as it “isn’t just high, medium and low

groupings now” an example of “new groupings may be that these students didn’t get this concept so I am going to push them in a different direction.”

In determining influence, the coach did not use the measurement of the number of activities a teacher did in a classroom but the quality of activities. The coach could see the “activities are meaningful now.” Teachers were dividing groups and the “activities are based on exactly what level of learning the student needs on a topic such as plot structures and literary devices.” The teachers were “finding out what the student knows and is able to do” to guide instruction instead of “kids that got an A last time.” The coach reported that recently a teacher said “I am going to find out what the students know so I can change my instruction.” The coach could see the impact by “helping them move to a different level, they know why they are doing what they are doing” and was very “cool to watch, just the moments of WOW, it is completely different than what I have done before.”

The teacher stated that “there is a difference in my approach” as “I was always tweaking and evaluating and changing” but the coach provided direction on “how to make the transformation.” Change was a constant in the teacher’s instructional practice, but now it was purposeful change as the teacher had learned to “take my time and slow down.” The coach had reminded the teacher to think about the “why” as change was implemented. By having the coach close by, it seemed like it was easier to change because even though the teacher knew “how to run my class,” the coach provided support and helped the teacher “see how everything fits together.”

By changing instructional practices, teachers knew more about “their students than in the past.” The coach acknowledged “there are some things you cannot assign a data point to

and there are some things that teachers are learning and finding out about their students.” It was difficult to quantify “the impact you are having with students with a chart.”

According to the teacher, the “only time” decisions could impede instructional practices “is when the teacher knows more about the students than the coach does.” The teacher stated “the coach brings an understanding of what is best to respond to student’s need as far as instructional practices, lesson plan designs, but the teacher knows specific things about the students.” For example the coach might say “you need to provide this support, you need to collect data on this student, you need to think about this instructional practice” and the teacher might respond negatively because of the types of students in the classroom. The coach may focus on the lesson “that needs to be done in small groups” yet a teacher may know which “students are not good at working in small groups” so following the prescribed lesson plan in theory was good, but the teacher “knows” their students best. A combined effort could accelerate the instructional practice in such rooms when the teacher and coach work together.

Working closely with teachers on a regular basis took “something away from teachers every day and that is time.” The coach recognized that the time lost for teachers in individual personal planning could impede the instructional practices because teachers might be reluctant to give the time that was needed. The coach was aware of the time commitment as stated in the following:

When I think about how busy my day is and I am working with them during their personal plan time that speaks volumes about their commitment as well. They are really good at what they do.

Stress level of teachers “could be an impediment to the process.” The coach hoped that eventually “I can alleviate that” but the teachers believed that the coach was “looking over their

shoulder.” Eventually the coach hopes to change “that mindset” which “creates a stress level in their life” but knew it was a process of building trust and relationships before the stress of her presence would go away. Instead, the coach wanted teachers to feel the following about her support:

I want to leave teachers with the feeling that even though I am not there when they are teaching the lesson we planned or working with students after we have collaborated on a problem, I want them to have a picture of me there by their side.

**School three.** The teacher at this school reported that the influence of the decisions the coach made on instructional practices could be seen in the classroom. Seeing that the newly shared strategies “works with kids” was very “motivating.” The coach stated that “one way I know it is reaching kids” was when students were using words and strategies in different classrooms in different settings. Students were perceptive and knew when they saw the coach there were different expectations. One student told the coach “you made me think too hard in that last class.”

The change could be noted by the “return customers, if teachers come back and want more.” The coach described indicators of influence as “I am now seeing a change in the content area teachers even three years later...they are coming to me to seek help.” However, the influence on instructional practice could be noted by the change spreading to all teachers including the reluctant ones as stated last summer “I don’t always buy into what you guys are doing, but I think the kids are getting better at reading and writing.”

Changes in instructional practice could not always be seen immediately. “Teachers don’t always bloom on your shift” as the coach further described the process of coaching “the people that I collaborate with now may not connect everything right now but will put it together

later.” Students leave after one year, “but teachers stay with you so you can see when an idea takes root and grows.” Evidence of the impact might be seen with “an idea that was introduced a year ago” and teachers “are still using or they are getting better with” helps the coach to determine instructional impact.

The teacher at this school believed that “the type of relationships that a coach has is very important.” She further stated if a coach “comes off as a know it all, it will immediately impede progress.” The coach needed to be mindful about “respecting staff” and current “relationships” that have been established.

The coach and teacher at this school sited external decisions as having negative influence on decisions that impact instructional practices. These external decisions might have an impact on the coach to implement change. The district moved quickly on implementing new initiatives. Although the speed could be positive, the literacy coach defined this as a potential impediment to instructional practice. The teacher stated “there are too many initiatives” in the district right now. All of the initiatives “are important, but there are too many things going on.” In addition to the rate of implementation, the decision made by the district at the administrative level, then carried out at the building level could impede the coach’s “effectiveness because we are not doing what teachers really want, but what they really need.”

Decisions that were implemented and effective were directly tied to teacher’s reality. If a teacher “cannot see an immediate response from students it isn’t so easy” but “when students respond, teachers were fine.” The challenge for the coach was to “blend everything together” because that helped keep teachers “on board” and realized the possibilities for student learning.

**School four.** The instructional practices of staff members at School Four were impacted by the ability of the literacy coach to use information from the individual quarterly

action plans. The professional development planned throughout the year was based on “common themes from the plans.” Some teachers chose to meet individually with the coach. Together they “plan lessons, model new strategies or even use data to help write the action plan.” The coach “is in tune to the needs of her class and grade level.”

Since the coach was only part time in School Four, the decisions that were made look at segments of the building instead of the whole school as the coach only had time for a few teachers each visit. This arrangement did not allow for sustained support and hindered the progress of the literacy initiative in the building. Additionally, the coach was responsible for the assessment implementation and data analysis within the school. There had been an increase in universal testing for students which had “been very impactful this year.” Although “the coach does not like time away from the teachers,” she attended to the assignment of testing coordinator in this building. The coach and teacher stated that “consistency in the coaching schedule needs to be reviewed for next year.”

### **Environmental Scale for Assessing Implementation Levels (ESAIL)**

The field observations using the ESAIL document revealed areas of strength in creating a literate environment and organization of the classroom in all four schools.

**Strengths.** Respectful talk and attitude among learners were observed in all four buildings. Students were engaged in learning in a variety of ways and meaningful dialogue around purposeful literacy events were observed in many rooms. Teacher-directed and student-directed discussions to promote student thinking were seen in a variety of content areas. Co-constructed language charts were displayed on walls in all classrooms, however only a few examples of student journals were present during the walk-through. The walls and hallways

had many examples of reading and writing responses through drawings, charts, art, and writing artifacts.

The classrooms were organized to promote whole-group, small-group and individual teaching and learning. Most classrooms observed had teacher and student workspace organized with materials organized and easily accessible. Many classrooms had evidence of teachers starting to assemble classroom libraries or had established classroom libraries that were organized and genre labeled.

**Areas for growth.** Collaborative problem-solving and inquiry based discussions were observed in a couple of classrooms in the four buildings. Diverse reading materials were not present in classroom discussions across the curriculum as observed in the walk-through. There were no student logs present in most classrooms during the field observation. Evidence of summative and formative assessments were not visible in most classrooms, however, the data wall in School Three showed results of school wide formative writing and reading assessments.

### **Key Findings of the Study**

On-site interviews and field observations were conducted at four schools serving students enrolled in grades 6-8, representing central and northern Illinois. Achievement and demographic data from Illinois Interactive Report Card, a portal for Illinois school data created by Northern Illinois University with support from Illinois State Board of Education was analyzed.

The key findings are arranged in four sections corresponding to the original research questions. The first section examines the coach's role and responsibility in impacting learning at the school level. The second section explores how a literacy coach makes decisions focused upon literary practices at the school setting. The third section examines how decisions are

enacted. The fourth section explores the influence decisions have on school staff's instructional practices, including how decisions enable instructional practices among staff and how decisions impede instructional practices among staff.

### **Literacy Coaches Roles and Responsibilities that Impact Student Learning at School Level**

**Data collection and analysis utilized to inform instruction.** All schools reported that the collection of data was an important part of the change in instructional practice that impacted student learning. Each school described using data in different ways.

The coach in School One believed that “teachers do not know how to analyze data,” therefore, it was her responsibility to help with collection and analysis of achievement and intervention data. The FPBA data utilized by the coach and teachers showed intervention work was successful with students as seen by grade level reading benchmarks improved. Environmental data collected through the ESAIL document allowed teachers in School One an opportunity to determine the level of implementation of effective literacy practices through organization of the classroom and student engagement.

The coach in School Two used data to “find out what students need by finding and using meaningful data to drive instruction.” The assessments used to collect data for School Two were not as defined as in School One, School Three, and School Four. The coach in School Two worked with content area teachers to utilize pre-assessments so instruction met the needs of all learners in core classes such as math and science. Teachers practiced the concept of flexible grouping with the results of data from assessments.

Data analysis was conducted in a variety of ways at School Three, but the most significant data collection was displayed on a data wall. All students in the school were

represented by an index card and placed in a category that aligned with benchmarks on the state assessment. As students were provided with interventions and as formative assessment progress was recorded, the cards were rearranged to determine progress of each student. The data wall was utilized in feeder elementary schools and was used at junior high school to provide a visual for current student achievement.

Data analysis was an important part of the quarterly action plans reviewed with teachers, principal and coach in School Four. The data drove the plan for student learning in each classroom and the professional development that occurred in the school.

All coaches believed that their work impacted student learning, but they all admitted that they did not “have hard core data that says, yes it does,” or they “can say with 100% confidence” that they have data to prove their positive influence on student learning.

**Training provided by coaches gives teachers new knowledge to help struggling readers.** Professional development opportunities provided by literacy coaches existed in all schools. School One had a mix of “hands-on and practicum approach” that was by offering literature discussion groups, book studies, after-school trainings on self-selected teacher topics, simulation of literacy lessons during release time, and intense intervention training for selected teachers. Specific trainings included key school-wide initiatives such as creating a workshop approach in the classroom setting with a writer’s workshop training. The trainings were “applicable and real” as well as aligning with the school-wide improvement plan. The teacher at School One reported that “after the coach works with me, students understand why we are doing it.”

Intervention training combined with co-teaching was the model that worked in School Two. Teachers responded to the push-in model during their intervention training. The coach in

School Two utilized planning time to provide intense strategies that were custom designed for the instructional setting of the teacher. The teacher described how the coach teaches, models, then gives support when the teacher tries the literacy strategies on their own. The continual collaboration provided sustainability as the teacher shifts current practices to responsive teaching. Training looked a bit different in School Three. The coach provided training through planned monthly literacy days and occasional book clubs. Intervention training was provided for several teachers in the building and the coach shadowed the trainee several times a year to ensure interventions were given with fidelity.

In School Four, school-wide professional development was driven by themes in the teacher's action plans. The coach worked with teachers to find ways to “get the high needs students to succeed and move all kids ahead too.”

#### **Coaching techniques enhance teacher responsiveness and student engagement.**

Although all interviewees admitted it was vital and present in all schools, measuring teacher responsiveness and student engagement continued to be difficult for the literacy coach in each building. The coach saw that a teacher was taking initiative to change their practice to become more responsive to student learning or was self-reflecting about their practice, then sought out the coach to assist. As teachers tried new strategies, the level of involvement in “repeat customers” produced a “trickledown effect” that engaged teachers who had not worked with the coach yet. As peers heard about practices that worked with adolescent learners “they tell others and it spreads.”

In School One, the teacher reported that after her practice shifted with the assistance of the literacy coach, students saw a purpose to their learning which helped them to “stay engaged

in their learning.” Observing student behavior could be an indicator of student engagement as stated by the coach, “we can see their eyes light up when students get it.”

After working with the literacy coach, the teacher in School Two reported her own increased responsiveness to student needs had created the capacity for her to meet student’s needs “where they are in their learning.” The coach helped teachers become aware of strategies to determine each student’s level of learning. The belief at School Two was defined by the coach, “once you find out what kids need, there is an obligation to teach them and provide instruction to help them.”

The teacher at School Three noted many ways she had changed her practices to impact student learning such as moving from worksheets to journaling and adding additional writing prompts. She admitted that “I have changed my teaching by incorporating reading and writing strategies into the daily classes.” Additionally, after working with the literacy coach the teacher discovered that finding out “where the breakdown is” for students who had difficulty and seeing “students who struggle in school and always have had trouble... using different strategies in school,” then watching them “really blossom” was powerful!

The teacher in School Four reported that her colleagues wanted to “make a better learning environment for everyone.” The literacy coach in School Four was helping the teachers discover ways to look at “proficiency levels of students and find ways to continuously move them and hopefully help them be sustainable in their learning.”

### **Literacy Coach Making Decisions Focused Upon Literacy Practices at the School Setting**

**Principal support provides positive coaching environment.** All four school interviews revealed that coaching decisions were made in concurrence with the building principal.

In School One, the coach had a weekly meeting with the principal that allowed for both of them to revisit the short term literacy goals the school established. The meeting helped the principal stay abreast of literacy progress and provided support to the literacy coach as she stayed “on track” due to the frequency of the meetings and the connection with the leadership in the school.

Decision-making in the academic setting for School Two was a joint effort between the principal, department chair and literacy coach. The goals were established by incorporating the content in summer training provided by the district along with “input from the literacy coach and teachers in the building.” Literacy strategies were woven into the theme of the summer training as the coach served as a trainer for that event and connected the information throughout the year.

A strong relationship with the principal was imperative in decisions made at School Three. The coach and principal worked together to establish the “foundation for the coaching role” in the school. The two professionals worked well together because the principal supported the literacy process, yet provided feedback to the coach on the delivery of the information with staff and strategies to implement new decisions that might not be well-received.

In School Four, the principal guided the decision in collaboration with the literacy coach and teachers. The action plans created by each teacher, designed to improve student learning was utilized to determine decisions made at the school level. The principal and coach found emerging themes in each action plan after the quarterly reviews, then the themes drove the professional development and assistance provided by the building coach. At times, the literacy

coach was part of the development of the plans, which enabled her to connect literacy strategies in the plan.

**Collaborative atmosphere accelerates coaching ability to develop and improve literacy practices.** In School One all professional development opportunities that were supported by the coach allowed for teachers to work together in a variety of ways such as large staff meetings after school, department meetings, core team work or partner/individual options. The teacher in School One reported that “each group is working on the area they need to improve” and “the coach is a big part of the process of sharing different parts.”

In School Two, the schedule had been adjusted to allow for collaboration time between teachers for professional dialogue. The “school-wide focus” had made a huge impact in order to help “teachers plan on a deeper scale.” The teacher at School Two believed collaboration needed to have the “right two people working together and right timing of the people working together.” The coach at School Three made decisions collaborating with groups of colleagues that helped support teachers such as the media specialist, differentiated coordinator, and district literacy coaches from other buildings. The support and ideas garnered from the collaboration of these professionals allowed the coach to enhance her service to teachers. The current teaching practice fostered a connection between teachers and the literacy coach. Teachers worked closely with the coach as she was “very collaborative, working closely with all content area teachers.”

In School Four, the teacher described the working relationship with the coach and all staff members as “very collaborative.” The schedule had been adjusted to provide collaboration time for teachers in the contractual school day which provided opportunity for the traveling coach and teachers to interact more comprehensively when she was in the building.

**Trust and relationships with coach build foundation for professional growth.**

School Two built trust and relationships with teachers by making decisions based on “what the teachers are telling me.” The coach adjusted her work with teachers as she got feedback from teachers. This flexibility created an environment where teachers trusted the coach to push when needed, but slow down when they were stressed and overwhelmed. The trust established between the coach and teacher was imperative as the coach worked closely with the teacher in a variety of ways. The coach stated having a coaching relationship with a teacher was different than a friendship and it “definitely accelerates the process.” This difference was described by the teacher in School Two “I have somebody when I am willing to get help and when I am not willing to get help she is still there.” The coach believed if a teacher was receptive, then there was a “chance to establish a relationship with that teacher which makes a difference” in the impact they have on student learning in the classroom.

The coach in School Three stated that a trust had been established with teachers since she started. Teachers were seeking her to find help with literacy in their classroom. Due to the strong foundation established at the beginning of the coach’s tenure all teachers knew the coach was not coming in “to fix teachers” and she was not “going to evaluate anybody.” This established trust that allowed teachers to feel comfortable working with the coach early in the first year of implementation. School Four and School One did not identify teacher trust and relationships as catalysts for decision-making in the school setting.

**Literacy Decisions Enacted**

**District level decisions impact schools.** The literacy coach with principal support made literacy decisions in School One, however the district-level administration made decisions such as changing the type of universal screener used as the staff members were ready

to begin testing with a different assessment they had chosen. Even though the assessment decision was devastating to the staff, the coach in School One stated that most decisions were “threaded into everything the coach does especially at the district level.” The district’s decision to ensure all teachers were incorporating components of writer’s workshop model parallels to the work of the building coach as each building made decisions on how to implement the process in their building.

In School Two, the professional learning plan developed by each department with the literacy coach and administration was a key factor in decisions being enacted. The district required that each department within each school maintained a plan. The plan in School Two incorporated literacy.

The coaching model was supported in all schools in the district where School Three was located. The teachers, parents, and coach reported “they can tell the difference in the students from a few years ago and now.” An unpopular district assessment decision directly impacted the literacy initiative because it was not teacher driven. The assessments provided data to support the literacy focus and even though the coach believed the value of the test assist with the initial reaction from teachers, she found “herself in the middle” of these types of district decisions.

The district where School Four was located required teachers to meet quarterly with the principal to review their action plan, the outcome of those meetings impacted student learning by the assistance provided to teachers for specific classroom needs. The district decision to require additional cycle assessments impacted the ability of the coach to meet with teachers due to her assessment responsibility.

**Communication maintains consistency for all stakeholders.** The school improvement team developed goals that drove the literacy decisions at School One. The teachers provided input to the team and then gave a chance for feedback after the plan was developed. This form of communication helped everyone own the literacy decisions at this school and ensured they were aware of the content of the school improvement plan.

Communication could be seen as a roadblock in School Two if there was misunderstanding about the coaching role in the school. After the coach met with teacher teams and distributed a clear outline of her roles to all faculty, teachers then had a sense of the coaching purpose in the school setting.

All staff members were part of enacting the decisions made in School Three because all teachers were initially the driving force to hire a literacy coach. Parents were informed of the literacy initiative through conversations with teachers at the school. Teachers were confident in the literacy process because they knew it was not just a school-wide effort but was district supported. The coach could “see the big picture” from a district perspective and took responsibility to communicate to all stakeholders so everyone could see “how everything goes together.” Communication with parents was very important in School Four. Due to low income status of most students in this school, the teachers believed that “families are supportive” and they “trust that the teachers will provide the instruction that is necessary for student growth.”

### **Influence Coaching Decisions Has on School Staff’s Instructional Practices**

**Coaching decisions enable purposeful instructional practices.** In School One the coach helped give teachers “direction” and “purpose.” The coach “sees the big picture better than teachers” so when they got “off track the literacy coach brings them back.” The coach in

School One created a focus that connected to student learning. Even though the decisions were driven by the teachers, the coach provided the framework for thinking from the training and modeling that was done. Teacher practices were shifting due to self-reflection and the implementation of new knowledge. Teacher directed decisions were supported by the literacy coach in a variety of ways.

Instructional practices of teachers in School Two were more purposeful as teachers that work with the coach were “checking for understanding on a daily basis.” Teachers were shifting their daily routines of the past into meaningful activities that help them “know why they are doing what they are doing.” The continual adjustment of instruction ensured quality activities that made a commitment to students to find out what they “know and are able to do.” With coaching support, the teacher in School Two stated that “there is a difference in my approach” because the coach provided direction on “how to make the transformation.” The purposeful change needed constant monitoring as the coach helped the teacher see “how everything fits together.”

The instructional practice in School Three continued to evolve as the coach could see how strategies shared “works with kids.” Students using new strategies on a regular basis in different classes throughout the day was evidence of purposeful teaching and learning. Changes in instructional practice could not always be seen immediately. The coach knew that “the people that I collaborate with now may not connect everything immediately but will put it together later.” Evidence of the impact was seen with “an idea that was introduced a year ago” but the teacher was getting better at the strategy so the impact was greater year after year. As the coach described “teachers don’t always bloom on your shift.”

The decisions made with teachers in School Four had been impacted by the ability of the literacy coach to use information from the individual quarterly action plans developed by classroom teachers. This individual connection was purposeful as it accelerated the process of implementation of literacy strategies because they were connected to an identified need from the teacher using current student data.

**Coaching decisions may impede instructional practices in the school setting.** The “attitude of some of the staff” could impede instructional practices if the coach in School One did not plainly communicate how “everything fits together.” Clearly defining the process that the school had embraced to implement all of the pieces of the literacy initiative was imperative. If this was not done, the teachers would be reluctant because they felt “like they don’t get to teach anymore.” The coach in School One stated that if teacher perception was misguided, then “the system of literacy coach decision doesn’t impede the practice” the teachers were the barrier “because of the mindset blocker they have.”

The “only time” decisions could impede instructional practices “is when the teacher knows more about the students than the coach does” as stated by the teacher in School Two. The teacher knows the students on a personal level and that was missing when the coach was assisting with instructional practices. A combined effort was needed through collaboration to help the human factor connect with the researched best practice factor. The increased stress level and the time it took to change instructional practice were two impediments to enhancing literacy practices in the classroom setting. The coach recognized that the time lost for teachers in individual personal planning could impede instructional practices because teachers might be reluctant to give the time that was needed. The coach also recognized the increased stress level

and hoped to change “that mindset” but knew it was a process of building trust and relationships before the stress of her presence went away.

The professional approach the coach used as she made decisions in School Three was critical. The coach believed if she “comes off as a know it all, it will immediately impede the progress.” The coach needed to be mindful about “respecting staff” and current “relationships” that had been established.

The literacy coach needed to make decisions about how she maximized the time she was scheduled at School Four since she traveled between seven schools. The decision to work with sections in the building, whether they were different or the same each visit, did not allow for sustained, intense support that was needed for progress of the literacy initiatives in the school setting. Although effective collaboration was conducted during the scheduled visit, the time between the coach’s appointments allowed for a gap in support. The testing coordinator role assigned to the literacy coach by the district was an impediment as the coach tried to find time to improve instructional practices with teachers. The data collected from the variety of assessments was used to plan for instruction, however the time spent on details of the testing schedule was time away from direct involvement with teachers through collaboration, observation, planning and modeling lessons.

### **Summary**

This chapter included an introduction and presentation of the study sample. Summaries of the interviews, field observations, and examination of school demographic and achievement data were presented. Key findings of the study were described.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

#### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the role and responsibilities in the decision-making strategies and actions of a literacy coach while implementing literacy practices within secondary school setting. The influence of these decisions upon instructional practice within the school setting through professional development was explored.

In this qualitative research study, the research questions focus on exploring how a literacy coach in a secondary school setting makes decisions around literacy implementation.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the literary coach's roles and responsibilities regarding student learning at the school level?
2. How does a literacy coach make decisions focused upon literary practices at the school setting?
3. How are the decisions enacted that are made by a literary coach?
4. What influence do these decisions have on school staff's instructional practices?
  - a. How do these decisions enable instructional practices among staff?
  - b. How do these decisions impede instructional practices among staff?

This qualitative study utilized a case study theory methodology in the process of data collection and analysis. Purposeful sampling was used to select four secondary schools defined as post-primary grade, including a middle school that were currently implementing a coaching model with active literacy coaches. Data was gathered through on-site, semi structured one-on-one interviews conducted in the school setting where the literacy coach and a corresponding teacher worked. Field observations were conducted and examination of school demographic and achievement data were reviewed for each site. To ensure validity, the researcher used peer debriefing, triangulation, and member checking.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Literacy coaches roles and responsibilities impact student learning at school level.**

The roles and responsibilities of the literacy coaches interviewed were varied at each site. When asked about defining her role, the coach in School One responded that it was “varied and complicated” yet the coach in School Two defined her role as coaching heavy meaning the type of coaching was not “necessarily a strategy” but “a way of thinking.” The coach in School Three described collaboration as a key component in her role and School Four’s coach defined her role as a mentor in the classroom and support for professional growth. All teachers and coaches that participated in the research reported that their support in the instructional setting had an impact on student learning, yet had a hard time quantifying the comprehensive impact their coaching role provided. Even though the coaches could not prove with “100% accuracy” that their work impacted student learning, the interviews revealed there were practices in place that support a strong literacy environment for student learning.

An important part of the change in instructional practice in all schools was a result of data collection. Each school collected data on student progress and used it in different ways.

Intervention data produced from small group interventions that were part of the literacy practice in three schools showed that students were transferring new knowledge into their class work in content areas other than reading class. The teacher training in providing interventions and learning “how to analyze data” was part of the literacy transformation in these schools. One coach provided assistance with writing, administering, and evaluating data on common assessments in the core class. The analysis of data from these assessments provided teachers an opportunity to shift their practice from teacher-centered to a focus on learning needs of students. Data analysis displayed by a data wall in School Three and reviewed by an action plan in School Four all addressed the need to thoroughly understand each student’s learning level and to provide opportunities for learning that meet the diverse needs of each adolescent student.

The professional development opportunities provided by literacy coaches in all four schools were based on the needs of the district, building, and specific classroom teachers. Each coach’s training model looked different but the success came with the common practice of basing content on feedback from teachers and input from the building principal. The different types of professional development opportunities such as book studies, literature discussion groups, intervention training, co-teaching, literacy workshops, modeling specific instructional strategies, and coaching shadows provided exposure to many specific needs of teachers in each building. With teachers having diverse background knowledge of literacy instructional strategies that were effective with adolescent learners, varied and multiple approaches were needed to fit the needs of the teaching staff.

Although very difficult to measure, the most important impact on student learning was the teacher responsiveness that emerged when a teacher worked with a literacy coach. The

coach could see the transformation in the teaching practices after they collaborated with a teacher, but the teacher observing a change in student learning and connectedness was what provided the biggest impact. Teachers are aware of what a student knows and is able to do, so they must respond. As described by a teacher “we are breaking down exactly what a student can do and can’t do.” The practice in the classroom changes in addition to “resources that we use with students.” The teachers felt a sense of urgency to assist students because they have a clear understanding of what a student needs by the collection of individual data and learning how to shift their practice to respond. Once a teacher knew a student’s level of learning “there is an obligation to teacher and provide instruction to help them.”

The impact on student learning may not be immediately seen by an instantaneous change, but if the practice of a teacher changes to become more responsive, then student learning will be impacted. If the practice of responsive teaching is spread throughout the school, the teachers and students will start forming a common vocabulary and understanding of texts at a different level that will accelerate learning.

**Literacy coach making decisions focused upon literacy practices at the school setting.** Literacy decisions that were made in each school represent “many layers that happen at one time that all connect.” The key player making the decision was the literacy coach, however, the administration, school atmosphere, and relationship with teachers were the layers that coagulated the literacy learning environment for all stakeholders in the school setting.

Initial planning and focus for literacy work was orchestrated at each school with the principal. All schools but School Four reported that there were team members that assisted with creating the literacy focus such as department chairs, teacher leaders, literacy teams and literacy coach colleagues within the district. The principal was described in all schools as

supportive and a partner in the literacy initiative. Whether the principal took an active role by quarterly personal meetings with teachers to review student growth data, a collaborative role by gathering weekly with the literacy coach to “stay on track,” a cooperative role by jointly meeting with literacy committee and leaders in building to guide initiatives, or a silent, supportive role by observing closely as the coach varies her approach to build literacy initiatives with teachers in the school, they all were seen by teachers and literacy coaches as an integral part of the successful literacy movement in the school setting.

The collaborative atmosphere enhanced the learning environment for students and staff members. All schools had worked to create possibilities for teachers to meet and work together as they sought to find ways to assist their student’s reading comprehension and overall success in the classroom. Teachers partnering with the literacy coach in the form of small groups, team meetings, department groups, grade level teams, structured training sessions, content organized groups, or one-on-one meetings helped provide the information needed to learn new strategies to engage students and become responsive teachers. Depending on the time of year, strategy addressed, specific desire of the teacher(s) involved, and established relationship with staff members each grouping configuration had been successful. By the coach determining the need of the participants and making decisions on best ways to address the desired assistance, the coaching model was successful because flexibility allowed trust and relationships to develop along the way. Additionally, administration helped foster collaboration opportunities by adjusting schedules, finding funds to create paid release time during school day or compensating for additional training/meetings after the contractual day.

During research visits, School Two and School Three defined teacher relationships and trust as paramount for coaching success. Both coaches paid attention to “what teachers are

telling” them and used the information to gauge the speed and targets for further coaching opportunities. The coaching environment in these two schools was flexible and robustly responsive to immediate teacher needs. Teacher willingness to commit to working with a coach in these schools was partly due to reluctant teachers seeing the progress being made with receptive teachers. When teachers had implemented practices that work with students, they were happy to promote the collaboration with the coach and share the success with their peers. The comfortable partnership between coach and teacher accelerated enhanced literacy practices in the school which directly impacted student learning. School One had a more structured model where intervention training and specific literacy training was an established protocol due to additional federal funding provided the last two years. Although the coach in this school made attempts to be flexible and responsive to teacher needs, her time was primarily used in training or planning for training. In School Four, the literacy coaching model had been recently established; therefore the coach was currently progressing with supportive principal guidance. Lack of time to be flexible with teachers was an area of concern for the coach in School Four due to her responsibilities as assessment manager for her assigned schools. However, the coaches in schools one and four recognized the need to readjust their responsibilities in order to have time to build relationships with teachers that they were not currently paired or had developed connections due to schedule issues.

**Literacy decisions enacted.** Literacy decisions were enacted through a structured process in three schools. Documents created by stakeholders in each school such as the school-wide improvement plan (SWIP), professional learning plans, district aligned standards document that provided “I can do it” student statements in each area, and agenda/meeting notes from literacy cycle meetings were formalized structures in practice. In School Three, a specific

written plan was not pointed out, however there was mention of “district initiatives” in the conversation of literacy implementation. The coach and teacher at this school believed the ability to hire “people who are very informed and know a lot” and the “high test scores” the district enjoys were two reasons a formalized plan was not as pertinent in School Three as teacher-driven decisions. In addition to teacher input, decisions were made at the district level that impacted teachers and students. All schools reported that district assessment decisions were not welcome as they were seen as an additional task and did not have teacher input therefore there was not a strong support as teachers did not see the relevance. The coaches in three schools found themselves between teachers and administration by trying to thread literacy and assessment decisions together in their communication to staff at their respective schools.

Communication to stakeholders such as teachers and parents is needed to progress with the shift in literacy practice that is taking place with coaching support. Due to the fact that progress made by coaching support is at times hard to “put in a graph” and display visually, all schools valued open and clear communication.

**Influence decisions have on school staff’s instructional practices.** The positive influence on instructional practice was evident in all schools. The individuality the coach provided to all teachers allowed for increased instructional direction that was driven by teacher need. Although there were overarching key literacy instructional practices that all coaches found important, the initial step was taken when a teacher opened their door and invited the help from the coach. Finding the balance of “what is needed” and “what is wanted” can be tricky for coaches when developing trust and relationships with teachers. Decisions made from student data collection, coaches modeling practices, and teachers observing student progress gained momentum for teacher buy-in at each building. The transformation as a result of

coaching was evident by continual adjustment of instruction in teaching practices throughout the school. The difficulty in measuring how decisions enabled positive instructional practices may not be seen immediately, however the coaches learned to be patient as one reported “teachers don’t always bloom on your shift.”

The positive impact the coaching role had at each school was encouraging; however there were examples where the coaching decisions could impede instructional practice of teachers. Coach’s attitude toward teachers was important because if the coach was self-defined as someone that had all answers, the teachers could be turned off immediately before allowing an opportunity to partner with the coach. In addition to coaching attitude, the teacher attitude was important. The coach needed to be mindful of negative attitudes of the staff and continue to clearly communicate the components of the literacy initiative and the coaching role in each school. Coaches needed to continue to be sensitive to the fact that teachers knew the students best and when planning lessons or mentoring in classrooms, the teacher was the person that had a strong relationship with the students in the room. As teachers found time to work with literacy coaches, planning time before and after school in addition to contractual time might be used for collaboration with the coach. Decreased independent plan time in combination with new instructional practices to implement could heighten the stress level in many staff members. Lastly, if the coach was given too many jobs outside the initial literacy coaching position it could impede the speed at which instructional practices were put in place. One coach was given assessment coordinator duties and another had intense training sessions that took large amounts of time in planning and training sessions that could have been spent with teachers.

## **Discussion of Conclusions**

Literacy-reading, writing, speaking, and thinking are fundamental skills that link to all other academic successes. It is the critical foundation that supports all other learning. There are over eight million students in grades four through 12 that struggle with literacy skills including reading and writing in our nation's schools (Lee et al., 2007). Given what we know about adolescent literacy, it is imperative that we put that knowledge to work by getting into the repertoires of middle level and high school teachers (Sturtevant, 2003). Currently, most secondary schools and teachers do not implement instructional strategies that adequately support adolescent students' literacy development. Coaching creates the types of sustained, instructional focused, collaborative interactions in schools that research suggests as most effective for improving instruction (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Secondary literacy coaching is an approach that has received notice as a way to improve both teacher professional development and student literacy outcomes. This study verified that some of the findings in the research cited previously on the subject of adolescent literacy in the academic setting of secondary schools exist, however can be overcome by implementation of the literacy coach. The findings of this study confirmed the positive influence literacy coaching has on instructional practices of teachers which directly impact student learning.

Some factors documented that relate to United States adolescent literacy decline such as varied student skills, teacher reluctance and a void in professional development (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; National Reading Panel, 2000; Schoenbach, et al., 1999; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004) were being addressed in the four school sites. Teachers found ways to assess student knowledge by administering intervention assessments such as FPBA, common formative assessments in core classes or quarterly benchmark assessments. In

all cases, teachers who worked with coaches learned about new instructional strategies that helped all students grow academically regardless of their learning level. Teachers became less reluctant once they saw success with their students or heard about success in their colleague's classroom after collaborating with a literacy coach. The different professional development opportunities provided in all buildings addressed the varied needs and current knowledge of all staff members.

Potential barriers acknowledged that could impede efforts to build literacy support such as the teacher attitude (O'Brien, 1995) was addressed through communication of a clearly defined process for all stakeholders. Other listed obstacles such as system barriers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Kamil, 2003; Meltzer, 2002; Sturtevant, 2003) were overcome by strong support of administration to adjust schedules for teacher collaboration in a variety of contexts, implementation of research-based interventions and coach/mentoring best practices in the classroom. Literacy coaches were continually updating their repertoire of knowledge and adjusted the approach of the professional development offerings to meet the needs of the teacher in each building. These steps helped to ensure that the professional development was not inadequate (Gallagher, 2002).

Although the role of the primary coach has been well documented (IRA, 2006; McKenna & Walpole, 2010; Snow et al., 2006; Walpole & McKenna, 2004), the roles and expectations of secondary literacy coaches are not clearly defined. Each coach had defined roles and responsibilities in their assigned school. Data collection and analysis was utilized to inform instruction. Coaches assisted in administration of assessments, collection of data and analyzing results. This study found that literacy coaches were seen as supportive by teachers as they provided resources that allowed teachers to adjust their current instructional practices

based on data collected from what they learned about the current performance level of their students. The shift in practice allowed teachers to be responsive in order to increase student learning outcomes. Professional development was a clearly defined role for all coaches. Coaches provided an assortment of differentiated professional growth opportunities for all teachers in each school which directly correlated to teacher responsiveness and student engagement in each building.

Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches require the role of the literacy coach to assume the following competencies: collaboration, job-embedded coaching, and evaluators of literacy needs (IRA, 2006). All roles reported in the study paralleled with the expectations of the adopted IRA Standards. Collaboration is evident in the current practices of all four literacy coaches. They worked with groupings of teachers in a variety of settings to promote literacy practices through professional development opportunities. Their coaching role involved working side-by-side with teachers through mentoring, modeling, planning, co-teaching, intervention implementation and other services to improve students' reading and writing. All coaches had personal attributes such being as skilled listeners, problem solvers, and relationship builders as defined in the Standards (IRA, 2006). All four coaches were literacy experts as they had background knowledge in literacy development and content-specific literacy instruction. Lastly, the coaches interviewed had a strong command of effective instructional methods, materials and practices that were implemented at the secondary level.

The practice at the secondary school sites studied were consistent with research evidence that defines local, site-specific, instructionally focused, ongoing professional development that produces a more successful outcome than the traditional pull-out model (Guskey, 2000). The coaches balanced time by providing support inside and outside of

classrooms. Knowledge building sessions were a key form of delivery in all buildings. All coaches took the lead in delivering training opportunities for all staff members that provided modeling and demonstration of instructional strategies, allowed for active involvement from participants, and encouraged self-reflection as teachers became problem solvers (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005). Study groups were utilized in three out of the four schools. Study groups have been found to provide an opportunity for teachers to improve instructional practices through collaboratively planning for school improvement and study research on best practices (Murphy, 1992). The literacy coaches can be described as teacher leaders who have helped teachers infuse literacy skills into their instruction. Although the goal of coaching is to impact student learning, the immediate task of the coach is to focus on adult learning.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

In the course of this study, the researcher discovered several topics that are significant enough to warrant additional study. They are reported here in no particular order with the researcher's comment.

1. What specific duty of the literacy coach impacts learning the most? In a given day or week, what does a coach spend the most time on and how does that correlate to student achievement?
2. What is the student perception of their learning before and after an intervention? How does the student believe it helps their learning in the content area classes? What tool would be used? If no tool available, could one be developed to assess perception?
3. What specifically does a teacher change first when transitioning instruction after a coach has provided support? What change in practice does the teacher notice?

What change in student response does a teacher notice first? Are certain student responses tied to specific types of instructional strategies? What are they?

4. The current study examined the decision-making process in the secondary setting. An area for further study might examine the decision-making process in the elementary setting and compare the results with this study.
5. How does the role and responsibility of the literacy coach change in year one, three, five? How does the student achievement data change? The current study examined literacy coaching in the secondary setting and did not address the difference in years of coaching implementation.
6. How does the role of the principal impact the effectiveness of a literacy coach in the school setting?

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the role and responsibilities in the decision-making strategies and actions of a literacy coach while implementing literacy practices within secondary school setting. The influence of these decisions upon instructional practice within the school setting through professional development was also explored.

The data was gathered from four secondary schools defined as post-primary grade including a middle school, that is currently implementing a coaching model, with active literacy coaches. This led the researcher to develop 10 themes. These themes were: 1) data collection and analysis is utilized to inform instruction, 2) training provided by coaches gives teachers new knowledge to help struggling readers, 3) coaching techniques enhance teacher responsiveness and student engagement, 4) principal support provides positive coaching

environment, 5) collaborative atmosphere accelerates coaching ability to develop and improve literacy practices, 6) trust and relationships with coach building foundation for professional growth, 7) district level decisions impact schools, 8) communication maintains consistency for all stakeholders, 9) coaching decision enable purposeful instructional practices, and 10) coaching decisions may impede instructional practices in the school setting. The themes were the same in all four school settings regardless of different demographic backgrounds for each school. Each school reported different experiences as evidence to connect with each theme, however the theme was present. While there was no definitive data documenting the coach's roles and responsibilities impacting student learning, anecdotal information was acknowledged through interviews with each teacher and coach.

Field observations revealed that students were involved in engaging learning opportunities through teacher and student discussions. Co-constructed language arts charts were on display and hallways had many examples of reading and writing responses. The classrooms were organized to promote flexible grouping and classroom libraries were observed in most rooms.

### **Summary**

The researcher learned that adolescent learning was not a barrier in any of the schools described in the research. Current gaps in student learning or the student's inability to learn was never revealed. The driving force for the teachers and coaches was about improving their own practice to find ways to enhance the learning opportunities for student growth. The data collected was about the teacher changing their practice, not students changing. Although the desired outcome of coaching involvement is to impact student learning, teachers found themselves shifting their practice. The movement revealed how coaches meet teachers "where

they currently are” so they can help them move forward, but the teachers reported they wanted to “meet students where they are” so they can have a meaningful impact on their learning. The common focus for all school settings was that teachers and coaches wanted to respond to students’ needs effectively and appropriately. The interviews revealed a passion for teaching and learning from all participants in addition to the momentum that was powerful as responsive teaching spread in the school settings researched.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Length of time in position:

Questions:

1. Do literacy coach's roles and responsibilities impact student learning at the school level?
  - What is your role as a literacy coach (collaborating teacher)?
  - What are your responsibilities as a literacy coach (collaborating teacher)?
  - In what ways do you have an impact on student learning?
  - How do you know?

2. How does a literacy coach make decisions focused upon literacy practices at the school setting?

-Who is involved in the decision-making process?

-What do long-range (three-five years) decisions look like?

-What do short-term (one-two years) decisions look like?

3. How are the decisions enacted?

-How are the decisions communicated to stakeholders at school?

4. What influence do these decisions have on school staff's instructional practices?

-What are the indicators of influence?

-In what ways does instructional practice change?

How do these decisions enable instructional practices among staff?

-How do you know this?

-What examples can you share to illustrate?

-In what ways does this impact professional development?

How do these decisions impede instructional practices among staff?

-How do you know this?

-What examples can you share to illustrate?

-In what ways does this impact professional development?

## APPENDIX B: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

### Environmental Scale for Assessing Implementation Levels (ESAIL)

**ESAIL is designed to assess a school's level of implementation in a comprehensive literacy model. Developed by L. Dorn & C. Soffos (2007).**

#### How did the school rate on criterion 1 (Creating literate environments)

Criterion 1: Creating a Literate Environment	Score	Descriptive Notes
1. Reading responses through drawing, writing or art are displayed on walls and in hallways.		
2. Writing drafts and/or published pieces are displayed on walls and in hallways.		
3. Diverse reading materials are enjoyed, discussed and analyzed across the curriculum.		
4. Co-constructed language charts embrace student language and are displayed on walls and in students' notebooks.		
5. Tables, clusters of desks and/or areas are arranged to promote collaborative learning and problem-solving.		
6. Problem-solving is collaborative (pairs or groups) and talk is purposeful.		
7. Engagement is maintained by meaningfulness and relevance of the task.		
8. Respectful talk and attitudes are promoted and used among all learners.		
9. Elaborated discussions around specific concepts are promoted and students' thinking are valued and discussed.		
10. Classroom environment is conducive to inquiry based learning and learners are engaged in constructive interactions around purposeful literacy events.		

Key: NY (1) = Not Yet, A (2) = Approaching, M (3) = Meeting

**How did the school rate on criterion 2 (organizes the classroom)**

<b>Criterion 2: Organizes the Classroom</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Descriptive Notes</b>
1. Routines and procedures are clearly established.		
2. Classroom is designed for whole group, small group and individual teaching and learning.		
3. Teachers' workspace and instructional materials are organized for teaching and learning.		
4. Students' materials are organized and easily accessible.		
5. Students' logs are organized and reflect integrated learning across the curriculum.		
6. Classroom libraries contain an abundant amount of reading material across genres, authors and topics.		
7. Literature for daily instruction is organized and accessible.		
8. Books in classroom library are organized and labeled according to genre, topic and/or by author.		
9. Literacy tasks are organized and are designed to meet the needs of groups and individual learners.		
10. Summative and formative assessments are organized for instructional purposes and documentation.		

Key: NY (1) = Not Yet, A (2)= Approaching, M (3) = Meeting

## **APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

### Examining the Decision-making Process of a Literacy Coach for Literacy

#### Implementation in a Secondary School Setting

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Sandra Wilson who is a doctoral student from the Educational Leadership Administration & Foundations Department at Indiana State University. Mrs. Wilson is conducting this study for her doctoral dissertation. Dr. Robert Boyd is her faculty sponsor for this project. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You are being asked to participate as a staff member of a public school in the State of Illinois and are employed as either a secondary literacy coach or a secondary teacher that works with a literacy coach.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND BENEFITS

The purpose of this qualitative research study will be to understand the impact a literacy coach has on student learning through their decision-making strategies and actions while implementing literacy practices within secondary school setting. The influence of these decisions upon instructional practice within the school setting through professional development will also be explored.

#### PROCEDURES

The data collection process includes a one-on-one interview with the literacy coach and an identical interview with a corresponding secondary teacher that works with the literacy coach in an instructional capacity at the same school. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be interviewed individually. The interviews consist of four questions and will take approximately one hour. The questions you will be answering address your views on the literacy coach's roles and responsibilities and how decisions that are made influence teacher's instructional practices.

The interview will be tape recorded to facilitate analysis of the data. You may refrain from answering a question at any time during the interview.

### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

We expect that any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and we believe that they are not likely to happen. If discomforts become a problem, you may discontinue your participation.

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There is no guarantee of direct personal benefit for you as a participant to be involved in study. The literacy coach will benefit from additional research conducted in secondary settings, as this is an area where there is limited information.

### PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not receive any payment or other compensation for participation in this study. There is also no cost to you for participation.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a code number to let Mrs. Wilson or Dr. Boyd know who you are. We will not use your name in any of the information we get from this study or in any of the research reports.

Participants will be requested to keep all information shared during the interview confidential.

Data collected in this study, will be stored in a locked file cabinet of the home office of the researcher for the required three year period. The transcription and digital audio file will be stored securely in a password-protected folder. At the end of the required storage period, all data collected, including audio-tapes, will be shredded and destroyed.

Results of this study will be included in Sandra Wilson's doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted for professional publication.

You have the right to review material prior to the final oral defense of the study by filing a written request to the researcher.

### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can voluntarily choose to participate in this study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact

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### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

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Printed Name of Subject

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Signature of Subject

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Date