Principals' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Reading Coaches and the Necessity of Reading Coaches within Elementary Schools

by

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Abstract

Achieving 100% literacy is an important goal for many schools. Over the past 5-10 years, government legislation and federally funded programs such as Title I, No Child Left Behind, and Reading Initiatives, such as the Alabama Reading Initiative, have emphasized the importance of effective literacy instruction in order to achieve 100% literacy (Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001). To promote effective literacy instruction, literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches has become an important avenue of support for instructional reform; however, due to the lack of research, little is currently known regarding the effectiveness of the work of reading coaches. If reading coaches are to be successful at improving literacy instruction and student reading proficiency, it is important for them to carry out their job responsibilities effectively. If daily responsibilities are carried out effectively, it is hoped that reading coaches can have a positive impact on student learning.

This study was designed to add to the limited amount of research on reading coaches. The purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study identified principals' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of reading coaches at performing their daily job responsibilities. Secondly, this study investigated whether or not principals perceived reading coaches to be a necessity within schools.

Thirty-five elementary school principals from one school district were invited to participate in the study by completing a 20 item five point Likert type scale questionnaire that measured their perceptions. The questionnaire also included a five item demographic section

that included gender, age, education level, years of experience, and school enrollment. Twenty-eight principals completed this study's questionnaire, yielding a total of 80%.

Based on the five point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree), one is the lowest possible score, and five is the highest attainable score. The findings of this study indicated that principals viewed reading coaches as being effective at carrying out their daily responsibilities. The overall mean score of principals' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of reading coaches was 4.6 out of a possible score of 5. The results also indicated that principals viewed reading coaches as being a necessary part of their schools' faculty. The overall mean score for the need for coaches within schools was 4.62.

Independent samples t-tests and Spearman Correlations were used to determine if there were significant differences and significant relationships between principals' perceptions and the five demographic areas. No significant differences were found.

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List of Abbreviations

ARI   Alabama Reading Initiative

IRA   International Reading Association

NRP   National Reading Panel

SBRR   Scientifically Based Reading Research

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Historical Background

Over the past 5–10 years, government legislation and federally funded programs such as

Title I, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and Reading First Initiatives have emphasized the

importance of effective literacy instruction in elementary schools (Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton,

2001). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, a report of the National Research

Council (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) which focused on the need for improving the quality and

effectiveness of reading programs and instruction for young children, stressed the importance of

well-prepared teachers of reading in the classroom and recommended that schools have "reading

specialists who have specialized training related to addressing reading difficulties and who can

give guidance to classroom teachers" (p. 33).

During the late 1990s, as a result of declining reading scores on national assessments,

legislators came to realize what educators had suspected for some time, many children and

adolescents in the United States were not becoming proficient readers (Vogt & Shearer, 2006).

In response to Congressional mandates to help parents, teachers, and policymakers understand

the importance of effective literacy instruction, the federally funded National Reading Panel

(2000) issued the report, *Teaching Children to Read.* The National Reading Panel (NRP)

reviewed over 100,000 studies on reading instruction, specifically research conducted in grades

kindergarten through third grade because those are the critical years for reading development.

Perhaps the greatest impact on reading reform in recent years is the NCLB law of 2002. According to NCLB every student will achieve 100% proficiency, which includes 100% literacy by 2014. In order to achieve this goal, the U.S. Department of Education along with the NRP established the United States Reading First Initiative. This federally funded initiative was aimed at helping every child become a successful reader by establishing high-quality comprehensive reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade (United States Department of Education, 2005).

In order for states and school districts to receive these federal funds, they were required to provide professional development for teachers to learn how to implement scientifically-based reading research programs that fostered children's phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Vogt & Shearer, 2006). This law changed the face of reading instruction and emphasized the need for qualified reading coaches in the schools (Dole, 2004).

Reading coaches are needed to help teachers with the implementation of specific reading programs, as well as provide the necessary professional development and resources needed to ensure reading success for all students. As of 2006, according to the United States Department of Education Reading First Initiative alone, there were more than 5,600 schools with full-time reading coaches on staff to provide job-embedded professional development for teachers (Moss, Jacob, Boulay, Horst, & Poulos, 2006).

The International Reading Association, a respected worldwide professional organization of educators whose mission is to promote reading by continuously advancing the quality of literacy instruction and research, has established guidelines for reading coaches. Through its position statement entitled *The Role and Qualifications of the Reading Coach in the United States*, the International Reading Association has developed eight job descriptors/responsibilities

for reading coaches. According to the International Reading Association's position statement (2004), a reading coach is responsible for:

1. conducting professional development

2. providing ongoing assessment and instruction

3. helping to set reading program goals

4. helping staff members achieve those goals

5. interpreting the reading program to parents and community

6. demonstrating appropriate reading practices

7. working with struggling readers

8. keeping staff members aware of current reading research.

Statement of the Problem

Even though the International Reading Association has set forth guidelines for reading coaches, a coach's roles and responsibilities may differ in any given situation. Because of this, many are unsure of exactly what it is the reading coach does. In many instances, the reading coach's role is misunderstood by principals because there is little consistency in the training, backgrounds, and skills required for such positions, and there is little consistency in the general competence of coaches, in part because there are no nationally agreed upon definitions or standards for the roles (International Reading Association, 2004). With such a varying degree of roles and responsibilities, it is no wonder that many have their own perceptions of what the reading coach's responsibilities and duties are. This can greatly impact the effectiveness of a reading coach within a school. If reading coaches are ineffective, it can lead others into questioning the need for reading coaches within schools.

However, with the push to employ reading coaches in the schools across the United States, one can assume reading coaches have been effective at performing their specified duties. Also, with the proliferation of reading coaches within schools, one can assume educational administrators view reading coaches as being a necessary part of a school's faculty. However, there is a lack of research in the field to confirm either assumption. There is a need for empirically grounded research to assess the effectiveness of reading coaches at assuming these roles and carrying out job responsibilities. It is also important to determine if reading coaches are viewed as being a necessary part of a school's faculty.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the study identified principals' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of reading coaches at performing their job responsibilities. Because the International Reading Association is well established as a leader in reading research and practice, their established job descriptors for reading coaches were used in this study. Secondly, the study determined if principals viewed onsite reading coaches as being a necessary part of their faculty. For the purpose of this study, elementary school principals were utilized because they are typically the ones who hire and supervise onsite reading coaches. The perceptions of school level administrators are also important because they play a pivotal role in actualizing the role of the reading coach in ways that will support the advancement of teachers and, in turn, the quality of educational opportunities offered to students (Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008). The information obtained and conclusions reached from this study will add to the limited amount of existing research on reading coaches.

Methodology

This study involved 35 elementary school principals from a southeastern metropolitan school district in Alabama. All 35 principals have at least one reading coach on their faculty. The data collected used quantitative methodology, a questionnaire. According to Creswell (2003), a questionnaire design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of participants in a study.

The questionnaire was used to determine principals' perceptions of reading coaches, as well as determine if reading coaches were viewed as a necessary part of the school's faculty. The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was designed with a Likert-type scale to provide an understanding of overall effectiveness. The questionnaire was developed using the International Reading Association's guidelines for reading coaches. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data.

Research Questions

The research for this study was guided by the following questions:

1.   To what extent do principals perceive reading coaches to be effective at carrying out the duties set forth by the International Reading Association?

2.   Do principals perceive reading coaches as being a necessary part of their school's faculty?

3.   Is there a statistically significant difference between male principals and female principals on their overall perceptions of their reading coach?

4.   Is there a statistically significant difference between the education groups (degree/certification level of principals) on their perceptions of the reading coach?

5.   Is there a statistically significant relationship between the principals' age and their perceptions of the reading coach?

6.   Is there a statistically significant relationship between the principals' years of experience and their perceptions of the reading coach?

7.   Is there a statistically significant relationship between the school enrollment at the principals' school and their perceptions of the reading coach?

Significance of the Study

Literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches has become an important avenue of support for instructional reform; however, little is currently known regarding the effectiveness of the work of reading coaches. There is a lack of research on the effectiveness of reading coaches within schools. If reading coaches are to be successful at improving literacy instruction and student reading proficiency, it is important for them to carry out their job responsibilities effectively. If daily responsibilities are carried out effectively, reading coaches can have a positive impact on student learning. Therefore, the focus of this research is to determine principals' perceptions of reading coaches.

The findings of the study will be beneficial in determining the effectiveness of reading coaches within the district participating in this study. The results from the data can be used by the local school system(s), state departments of education, federal and state reading initiative programs, and national educational agencies to make educational decisions regarding the use of reading coaches within schools. These educational decisions can improve how reading coaches perform their day to day duties.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms have been identified for this study:

Coaching Cycle—A gradual release continuum used by the reading coach to help teachers with their instructional practices. The ultimate goal of the continuum is improved student learning/achievement. The cycle consists of planning, modeling, reflection and feedback, side-by-side practice, teacher practice, and observation. Student data and classroom observations are used to determine the reading coach's focus (Alabama Reading Initiative, 2006).

Facilitator—Someone who skillfully helps a group of people understand their common objectives as well as helps them to develop a plan to achieve the objectives.

Five Components of Reading (5 Big Ideas of Reading)—Specific reading skills established by the National Reading Panel that specify what children need to know by the end of third grade in order to be successful life-long readers. These include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Gradual Release of Responsibility—The gradual release of responsibility occurs over a period of time. Professional development, scaffolding, and support are provided to an individual while he/she learns a new skill, strategy, or concept. The responsibility of understanding and using the skill, strategy, or concept is gradually released to the individual.

International Reading Association (IRA)—The IRA was founded in 1956 as a professional organization for those involved in teaching reading to learners of all ages. IRA's mission is to promote reading by continuously advancing the quality of literacy instruction and research worldwide.

National Reading Panel (NRP)–A panel created by the federal government to review research-based knowledge on reading instruction.

No Child Left Behind—A 2002 landmark law that mandated education reform designed to improve student achievement. Its main purpose is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education.

Professional Development—Hands-on training to keep current with changing practices in a profession or in the concept of lifelong learners.

Reading Coach/Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach—Someone who, in addition to providing assessment and instruction, conducts professional development, helps to set reading program goals, helps other staff members achieve those goals, interprets the reading program to parents and community, demonstrates appropriate reading practices, and keeps staff members aware of current reading research. (IRA definition)

Reading Initiatives—Federal or state funded initiatives, such as the Reading First Initiative, aimed at helping every child become a successful reader by establishing high-quality comprehensive reading instruction for all children in kindergarten through third grade.

Scientifically Based Reading Research Programs (SBRR)—Reading programs/instruction that provide rigorous systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

1. Limitations to this study may be influenced by the extent that the instrument in this study measures the perceptions using a Likert type scale instead of verbal responses.

2. Limitations to this study may be influenced by the extent that principals will respond to the questions based on what they believe is the appropriate or desired answer and

not respond based on their own true perceptions and/or actions.

3. This study was limited to assessing the perceptions of elementary school principals in one district (small population).

4. All survey items are subject to the interpretation of the reader.

5. The questionnaire was specifically developed for this study, and is the only method for gathering data in this study.

Although this study attempted to add to the limited amount of research involving reading coaches, it is important to consider that this study only included one school district. A small sample size may not accurately represent the population, so caution should be used if making generalizations. Also, because of the discrepancies in the roles, responsibilities, job qualifications and requirements for reading coaches within school districts, the generalizability of this study to other school districts is limited.

Assumptions

1. Assumption to this study is that all participants in this study will respond to the questions honestly.

2. Assumption to this study is that the instrument used is a valid instrument to measure the perceptions of elementary principals.

3. Assumption to this study is that all participants in this study have perceptions regarding the roles and responsibilities of the reading coach.

4. Assumption to this study is that there will be no significant differences and/or relationships between principals' perceptions and gender, age, level of education, years of experience, and school enrollment.

Summary

The proliferation of reading coaches began as a response to the increased attention to reading achievement and the achievement gap in the United States, mainly those brought on by federal legislation such as Title I and No Child Left Behind (International Reading Association, 2004). The literacy coaching arena represents new territory for many. There is a growing movement to foster awareness of the standards, roles, and responsibilities of reading coaches across the United States (Bauman, 2007).

Because the profession of literacy coaching is currently evolving, there is a lack of research in the field. The goal of this study was to have a significant impact on the effectiveness of reading coaches, as well as contribute to the current literature regarding literacy coaching.

Organization of Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the study, identifies the research questions to be addressed, and presents an overview of the purpose, significance of this study, limitations, and assumptions. Specific terms for the study are also defined. Chapter II discusses the conceptual framework and theories of literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches. It also discusses current literature concerning literacy coaching and reading coaches. Chapter III describes the methodology that was used to complete the study. Chapter IV includes presentation of data and findings of the study. Chapter V contains a summary of the findings, conclusions, discussions, implications for educators, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this review of literature is to establish the conceptual framework of

literacy coaching, clarify the definition and the responsibilities of reading coaches, examine

research regarding the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches, discuss the importance of

principal support for the reading coach, as well as provide information regarding the use of

reading coaches to promote effective teacher instruction. Because reading coaches are often

labeled as reading specialists, the literature review will also discuss the differences and

similarities between the two. Relevant studies, theoretical articles, books, and reports regarding

the roles and responsibilities will be included in the literature review.

In conducting the search for the literature review, it was discovered that there is a lack of

research-based studies addressing reading coaches. This is due in part to the fact that the reading

coach position is relatively new. Much of the research included in the review of literature was

published between 2000 to the present.

Theory and Conceptual Framework of Literacy Coaching

The essential objective of coaching is capacity building (Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutler,

2003). According to Neufeld and Roper (2003) coaching increases the instructional capacity of

schools and teachers by engaging educators in collaborative work designed to contribute to the

development of intellectual capabilities. Effective coaches and coaching models build

instructional capacity which in turn sustains school improvement by applying what is known

about adult learning and change theory. By having an understanding of adult learning and change theories, effective reading coaches can plan and implement professional development opportunities that will help teachers change their instructional practices in order to become better instructors of reading.

According to John Whitmore (2002), coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize performance. Coaching involves helping individuals learn rather than teaching them. In an era of accountability and reform, educators now recognize the need to provide assistance for all teachers. Coaching can provide assistance to those in need (Barr, Simmons, & Zarrow, 2003).

There are three main forms of coaching: curricular/instructional coaching; cognitive coaching; and principles coaching. Curricular/instructional coaching provides professional development in specific instructional areas. Cognitive coaching is a model in which the coach serves as a mediator between a teacher and his/her own way of thinking. Principles coaching revolves around a reform plan that the coach works to enact in a school system (Barr, Simmons, & Zarrow, 2003). Reading coaches can be considered both curricular/instructional and cognitive coaches because they provide professional development in a specific instructional area, reading, as well as help teachers reflect upon their current instructional practices.

Typically, a curricular/instructional coach is onsite within schools supporting teachers in their daily instruction by providing job embedded professional development involving best instructional practices (Knight, 2007). Curricular/instructional coaching provides sustained support to teachers by focusing on instruction. Supporting teachers in their day to day instruction is the key to improving teacher practice, in turn, strengthening the learning outcomes of students (Brown, Reumann-Moore, Hugh, du Plessis, & Christman, 2006).

Under the direction of John Knight, the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas conducted research on its Instructional Coaching Model. The instructional coaching model was developed to provide support to teachers as they implemented the Strategy Instruction Model   The results of the study indicated that instructional coaching "does lead to successful adoption and effective use of proven instructional methods, with one crucial caveat: the coaching program must have strong administrative support and qualified coaching" (Knight, 2007, p. 1).

Through cognitive coaching, coaches help teachers expand their knowledge base by exploring resources within themselves (Garmston, Linder, & Whitaker, 1993). Cognitive coaches afford teachers the opportunity to focus on their instructional practices and explore the thinking behind these practices. Cognitive coaching allows teachers to become more reflective of their teaching practices in order to grow intellectually.

According to Gramston, Linder, and Whitaker (1993), the ultimate goal of cognitive coaching is teacher autonomy: the ability to self-monitor, self-analyze, and self evaluate. Costa and Garmston (2002) state that cognitive coaching allows individuals to modify their thinking to enact change. Through cognitive coaching, reading coaches can provide professional development opportunities that encourage teachers to reflect upon their instructional practices and make changes to improve these practices, which in turn will have a positive effect on student achievement.

Rennick's (2002) yearlong study examined the relationship between a staff development model utilizing a cognitive coaching method and the impact it had on teacher instruction and student achievement. The reading coach participating in the study provided professional development on the Reading Recovery Program to three separate groups of teachers. One group

received daily professional development using a cognitive coaching format that consisted of planning sessions, lesson observations, and reflection sessions with the reading coach. The second group only received two weeks of professional development with the reading coach that consisted mainly of lecture and overview sessions of the program. The third group did not receive any form of professional development from the reading coach.

The literacy achievement scores of each group of students were analyzed to determine the impact cognitive coaching had on student achievement. Because teacher instruction and student achievement go hand in hand, it was hypothesized that the students' scores were directly related to the quality of instruction received. The data revealed that the cognitive-coaching group outscored the other two groups in mean scores on all measures of literacy achievement with significant differences on the majority of the assessments (Rennick, 2002).

In an educational setting, coaching provides the additional support needed for teachers to implement various programs and practices (Nowak, 2003). According to Blachowicz, Obrochta, and Fogelberg (2005), coaching provides professional development and support to teachers to improve classroom instruction. Coaching provides ongoing consistent support for the implementation and instructional components. "It is non-threatening and supportive—not evaluative. It gives a sense of how good professional development is" (Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosemblum, Saunders, & Supovitz, 2003, p. 42).

Literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches is quickly becoming the number one staff development model (Manzo, 2005). In an effort to provide on-going professional development, many schools hire reading coaches as a way to train teachers on the job (McGinnis, 2008). "The coach's major role is to provide professional development and support to teachers in order to improve classroom instruction" (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg,

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2005, p. 55). Research suggests that the quality of teaching makes a considerable difference in student learning (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkerson, 1985). It is important for teachers to have opportunities to learn about research based strategies and pedagogy (Morrow, 2003).

An effective reading coach is aware of the most current best practices in reading instruction. The coach is considered to be the expert in the field of reading at the school (Knight, 2007). The coach's job is to ensure that teachers are knowledgeable of these practices and are able to implement them in their classrooms. This typically occurs through the use of the coaching cycle. Although there are many variations of the coaching cycle, it mainly consists of the following: organized job embedded professional development opportunities, content studies, in-class training which includes demonstration lessons, modeling, support for teacher trials of new instruction, teacher reflection, and coach feedback (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005).

Effective coaches recognize individual differences in teachers. Effective reading coaches understand that students, as well as teachers, come with a variety of strengths and needs, and they know how to start with the strengths and teach to the needs (Coskie, Robinson, Buly, & Egawa, 2005). The coaching cycle model allows reading coaches to work individually with teachers to help them become proficient instructors of reading. The coaching cycle leads to a gradual release of responsibility from the coach to the teacher. Figure 1 shows an example diagram of the gradual release coaching cycle.

Teacher Lesson Observation

⬇

Teacher Reflection and Feedback Regarding the Lesson

⬇

Plan New Lesson with Teacher

⬇

Provide Demonstration Lesson for Teacher

⬇

Reflect with Teacher Regarding the Demonstration Lesson

⬇

Plan New Lesson and Provide Side by Side Practice with Teacher

⬇

Reflection and Feedback with Teacher Regarding Side by Side Practice Lesson
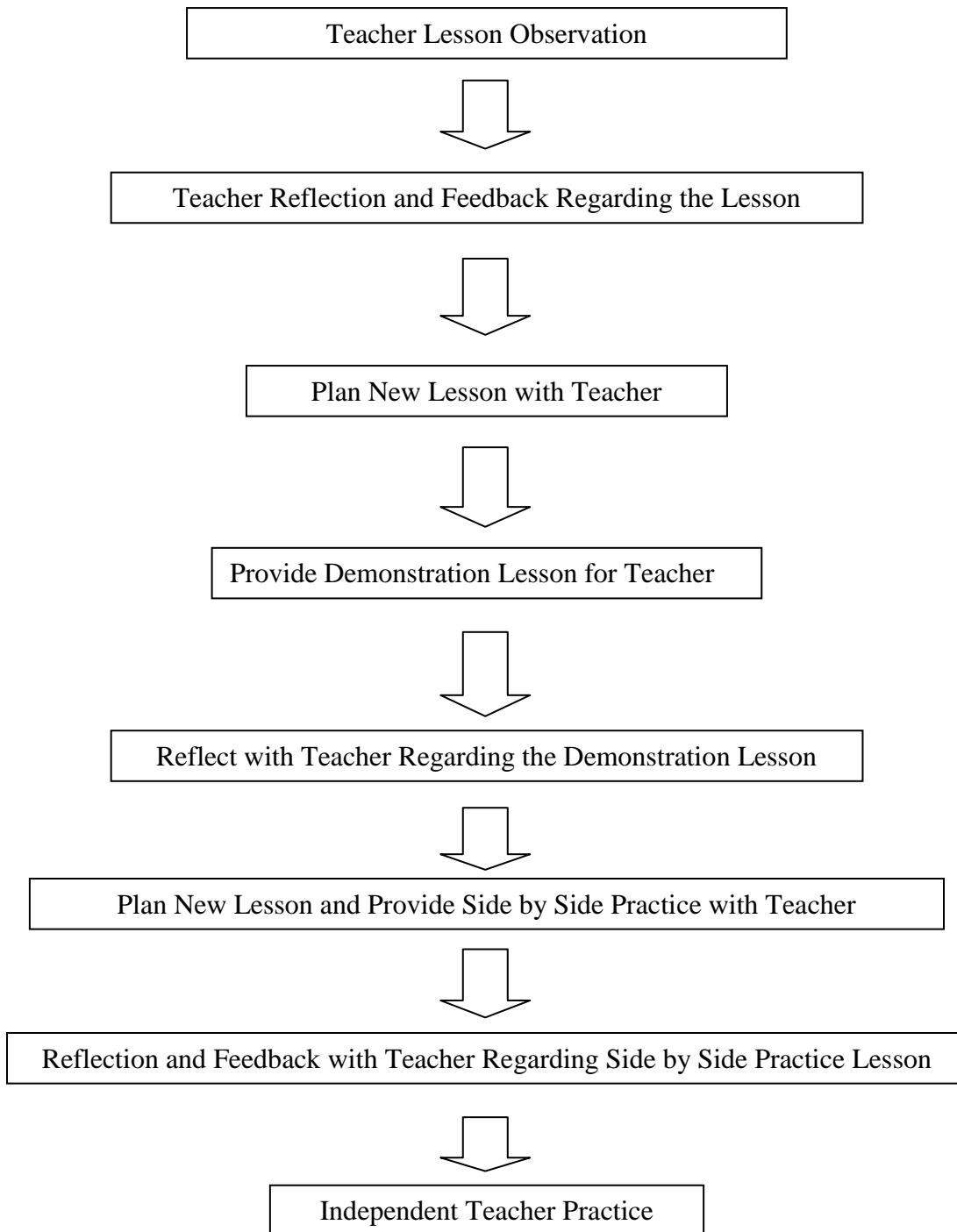
⬇

Independent Teacher Practice

Figure 1.   Gradual Release of Responsibility using the Coaching Cycle Model

Source: Adapted from the ARI Coaching Cycle (ARI, 2006).

"The gradual release of responsibility—from coach to teacher—is key to effective coaching" (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005, p. 58). Gradual release coaching models are designed to fit the best practices suggested by the literature on professional development and learning theory (McCombs & Marsh, 2009). There are numerous variations to the coaching cycle model; however, the main outcome is always the same, gradual release of responsibility. The components within each model are generally the same as well. As previously mentioned, reflection, practice applying new ideas, receiving feedback, observation, and modeling are components typically found in gradual release coaching models (McCombs & Marsh, 2009).

Gibson's (2006) study is indicative of the observation and feedback components of the gradual release of responsibility from the coach to the teacher when learning how to implement specific instructional practices. The study investigated the practice of a reading coach as she implemented the gradual release coaching cycle with a veteran kindergarten teacher who had limited experience teaching guided reading. For guided reading, teachers work with a small, homogeneous group of students using levelized text. The teacher provides scaffolded support while the students learn to read the new text. During guided reading instruction, the teacher teaches useful reading strategies that will help the students develop the ability to utilize meaning, language, graphophonetic/visual information strategically as they learn to read (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Throughout the study, three cycles of data collections were conducted during the months of January, February, and April. Each cycle included: a) observation and video recording of the kindergarten teacher's classroom guided reading lesson, b) observation and video recording of a coaching session (feedback following the lesson), c) observation and video recording of a second

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guided reading lesson (to observe change in pedagogy), and d) audio taping of an interview with the coach.

The findings addressed the coach's ability to conceptualize her coaching practice, the nature of the coaching session conversations, the relationship between coaching session interaction, and a teacher's guided reading instruction. The results indicated that lesson observation and feedback require the coach to have many areas of expertise which can only be developed through time spent coaching, training, and reflecting. The reading coach realized that it is important to be supportive, flexible, and understanding during the entire coaching process.

Although the main purpose of this study was to examine the coaching cycle and its effect on the reading coach, there is a missing link. It is important to understand how the entire process of coaching affects instruction; after all the main goal of the coaching cycle is to help improve reading instruction. This type of research is critical in order to determine the effectiveness of literacy coaching and reading coaches.

Steckel (2009) conducted a case study shadowing two reading coaches as they implemented a gradual release coaching cycle model with their teachers to help improve instruction and change teacher practices. Data for the study were collected through multiple site visits that totaled 56 hours. The visits involved shadowing the reading coaches as they met with teachers, facilitated planning sessions, or worked in classrooms observing or modeling lessons for the teachers and students. Forty-five minute interviews were also conducted with coaches, teachers, and school administrators to determine the effectiveness of coaching on improving instruction. The results of the data indicated that teachers and principals believed the coach to be effective at initiating significant changes in literacy instruction by encouraging teachers to reflect

on their teaching practices. The teachers and principals believed that these changes impacted

student learning in a positive manner.

Alba-Johnson, et al. (2004) studied the effects of a gradual release coaching model on

teaching behaviors and classroom environments over a 13 month period. One hundred three

preschool teachers from a high poverty urban area in Minnesota participated in the study. The

teachers were placed in either a control group which consisted of 31 teachers or a coaching group

which consisted of 72 teachers.

All 103 teachers participating in the study received seven days of training on an

interactive research-based early literacy program which they were to utilize in their classrooms.

Each session lasted two and a half hours. After the seven sessions, the control group

implemented the literacy program without any assistance or further training. Through the use of

a gradual release coaching model, the coaching group continued to receive on-going professional

development and assistance bi-weekly for six months and weekly during the last seven months of

the study.

Data were collected using the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation

Toolkit (ELLCO). The ELLCO Toolkit, which was administered three times throughout the

study, consisted of four components, a literacy environment checklist, a classroom observation

form, teacher interview, and a literacy activities rating scale. The environmental checklist

documented the use of materials in the reading and writing center areas of the classroom that

promoted literacy. The observation was designed to view teacher instruction, the organization of

materials within the classroom, the use of technology, diversity of students, and how students

were assessed. Following each observation, the teachers participated in a short interview session

where they were asked questions regarding the observation. The literacy activities rating scale

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was used to document the literacy activities observed in the classroom and the length of time associated with each activity. The results of the study indicated that the teachers who received additional support through the coaching model exhibited a higher percentage of growth in all areas of the ELLCO Toolkit. Teachers in the control group showed limited growth. A final analysis of the study indicated that to effectively influence teaching behavior, training alone is not as effective as follow-up support and coaching.

Anthony (2009) investigated the impact of a coaching model on teacher behavior with five third grade teachers. The reading coach provided content studies, model lessons, side by side practice, reflection, and feedback to help teachers improve upon their instructional practices. Data were collected via classroom observations and individual teacher interviews. The results of the study indicated three main findings: 1) All teachers identified literacy coaching as a support for their literacy knowledge and instructional practices; 2) Teachers held positive alternate views of literacy coaching, literacy knowledge, and instructional practices; and 3) All teachers identified literacy coaching as having a positive influence on student learning.

Neufeld and Roper (2002) investigated the effectiveness of a school district's year one implementation of the Collaborative Coaching and Learning Model (CCL) to determine its effectiveness. The CCL model, which is a type of gradual release model, was designed to reduce isolation and to encourage a culture in which teachers visit each other's classrooms to observe, participate in, and share best practices. The CCL also supported schools in deepening teachers' knowledge and use of specific reading programs by assigning reading coaches to schools two days each week for six weeks at a time to work with sets of teachers. The reading coach provided the teachers with professional literature on best reading practices, and conducted observations, demonstration lessons, feedback, and reflection sessions.

Data were collected through observation of the seven CCL sessions, as well as through interviews with the principals, teachers, and reading coaches involved in the study. Findings indicated that the CCL model was successful during its first year implementation at improving teacher knowledge and instructional practices. The researcher stated that although coaching using the CCL model was a sound model to promote teacher practices, some improvements to the model should be made, especially in the definition of roles of the reading coaches and strengthening teacher participation in the sessions.

In summary, coaching promotes instructional growth. It allows teachers the opportunity to learn and improve upon their instructional practices. If used effectively, coaching through the use of the coaching cycle model can have a positive impact on teachers' instructional practices. Through coaching, individuals are able to gain a thorough understanding of an instructional procedure, demonstrate strong skills in implementing the instructional procedure, as well as demonstrate executive implementation of the instructional procedure in their own classrooms 95% of the time (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Job-Embedded Professional Development

Reading coaches help to build the knowledge and skills of teachers by providing support and professional development that focus on teachers' needs. Literacy coaching through the use of a reading coach provides ongoing job embedded professional development tailored to an individual teacher's need (International Reading Association, 2007). Job embedded professional development allows reading coaches and teachers adequate time to engage in meaningful activity embedded in the daily routine over an extended period of time (Kinnucan-Welsch, Rosemary, & Grogan, 2006). Job embedded professional development may consist of training and/or work sessions where teachers are involved in study groups with the reading coach, planning sessions

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with the reading coach, or sessions where the reading coach and the teachers review student data to make instructional decisions (Carroll, 2007).

When planning professional development opportunities, it is important for reading coaches to remain cognizant of the ways adults learn. According to Brookfield (1986), the most effective professional development respects adult learning styles. Knowles (1990) states that adults learn best when they are convinced of the need for knowing the information. Adults need to have control over the nature, timing, and direction of the learning process (Trotter, 2006).

Reading coaches must be aware of the fact that the teachers whom they work with must play an active and thoughtful role in the professional development process. Active learning encourages teachers to become engaged in meaningful conversation, planning, and practice as part of the professional development activity (Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). By being actively involved teachers are able to take what they are learning and apply it to their classroom practices.

Professional development is a major component of literacy coaching. Gradual release coaching models are indicative of job embedded professional development. If used effectively, the coaching cycle model can ensure that teachers' professional development needs are met. It is hoped that through professional development opportunities, teachers will become better instructors of reading which will in turn lead to higher levels of student learning. The ultimate goal of professional development is to improve student achievement (Rosemary & Feldman, 2009).

Roles and Responsibilities of Reading Coaches

Having a thorough understanding of the role and responsibilities of reading coaches can greatly affect the impact that the reading coach has on a school. "Many literacy coaches have been hired without job descriptions or with job descriptions that are vague" (Toll, 2007, p. 24).

In order to be effective, reading coaches must have established roles and responsibilities. According to Shanklin (2006), reading coaches take on the role of a collaborator, working with classroom teachers in order to improve reading instructional practices. They act as facilitators in the teaching and learning process (Dole & Donaldson, 2006). Rather than being evaluative, reading coaches must be supportive if they are to produce desirable changes in practice.

According to the International Reading Association (2004), reading coaches are responsible for:

- conducting professional development

- providing ongoing assessment and instruction

- helping to set reading program goals

- helping staff members achieve those goals

- interpreting the reading program to parents and community

- demonstrating appropriate reading practices

- working with struggling readers

- keeping staff members aware of current reading research.

Roles of Reading Coaches

Figure 2. Roles of Reading Coaches.

Source: Alabama Reading Initiative (p. 2). Reprinted by permission of the Alabama Reading Initiative

Figure 2 shows a pie chart that is indicative of the role of a reading coach. According to Figure 2, student learning is the main focus of the entire graphic. To help improve student learning, the reading coach designates his or her time working with struggling readers, providing professional development to teachers through the use of the coaching cycle and content studies, and influencing a school wide commitment to 100% literacy. Establishing a school wide commitment to literacy consists of involving all educational stakeholders, namely the faculty, staff, parents, and the community in the teaching and learning process of the students in order to improve reading achievement.

As indicated in Figure 2, reading coaches must have a winsome personality. When working with teachers, reading coaches must first develop a positive rapport with teachers. A winsome personality lends itself to positive relationship building between teachers and the reading coach. Characteristics of a winsome personality include having a caring, affirming, and encouraging attitude towards teachers throughout the coaching process. It is important for reading coaches to establish respect, trust, and open lines of communication, as well as strive to cultivate an atmosphere of collegial collaboration and problem solving with their teachers (Casey, 2006).

Role Research

As previously stated, having an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the reading/literacy coach is critical, if the coach wishes to have a positive impact on teacher instruction and student learning. However, research has indicated that there is a lack of consistency in the interpretations of the role and responsibilities of reading coaches.

Feldman and Tung's (2002) research looked at administrator and teacher perceptions of the roles of reading coaches. Seventy-five teachers and nine administrators were interviewed to determine their perceptions of the roles of reading coaches within their schools. The findings of the study indicated that teachers and administrators perceived the coach's role to be that of a facilitator within the classroom by helping teachers review assessment data and plan for instruction. The teachers and administrators viewed the coach as a change agent within the school.

Calo (2008) researched the roles and responsibilities of middle school reading coaches. One of the main goals of the research was to "determine what the reading coaches' roles and responsibilities were in order to move beyond the assumption of what people thought reading

coaches *should* be doing to examine what is actually happening in schools" (Calo, 2008, p. 3). One hundred twenty five randomly selected middle school coaches were surveyed to gather information about their roles, responsibilities, and their experiences as reading coaches. Of the 125 reading coaches, seven from various districts throughout the United States were interviewed to gain greater insight. The findings from the study indicated that the roles and responsibilities were "diverse and multifaceted, and there was not one consistent view of literacy coaching at the middle school level" (Calo, 2008, p. 83).

Carroll (2007) interviewed 30 reading coaches from 12 school districts across the state of Pennsylvania. The researcher interviewed the teachers to determine their background and preparedness, time spent on explicit coaching activities such as modeling and demonstrating, factors within the organization that helped or hindered their work as a coach, what coaches perceived their responsibilities to be, and what problems and possibilities there were with the jobs they performed. Results of the interview data revealed that more than 50% of the reading coaches did not feel prepared for the role when they first began coaching because of their uncertainty of job responsibilities, mainly due in part to a lack of consistency in the duties they were to perform, as well as the expectations of administrators. The way the principal embraced or did not embrace the role was influential in how quickly the coach was seen as a valuable resource within the school (Carroll, 2007).

Through the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, and Supovitz (2003) investigated the role of reading coaches within schools and how the reading coaches worked with teachers both in and out of the classroom. Through the use of surveys, it was determined that the role of the coach was subject to much interpretation. Teachers were unsure of their reading coach's role at the school. The teachers

and reading coaches believed that there were minimal guidelines in place regarding the coach's roles and responsibilities. The researchers suggested that specific guidelines be put in place in order to establish concrete roles for reading coaches.

Through the use of surveys and interviews, Mraz, Algozzine, and Watson (2008) examined the perceptions and expectations of the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaching. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of principals, teachers, and school-based literacy coaches on how literacy coaching can be effectively used and to consider the implications of these perceptions and expectations in terms of the potential for coaching to contribute to the development and implementation of effective literacy programs. The researchers asked the participants to rate their perceptions of reading coaches based on 5 established roles. The established roles included:

1) the reading coach as a resource to teachers

2) the reading coach as a resource to allied professionals and parents

3) the reading coach as a coordinator of the reading program

4) the reading coach as a contributor to assessment

5) the reading coach as an instructor to students.

The results from this study indicated that the role of the literacy coach was currently open to much interpretation. There was no solid evidence that the coaches' roles and responsibilities were firmly established.

Much like the previous study, Bean and Zigmond's (2006) research also indicated that there are discrepancies in the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches. One hundred reading coaches from 161 Reading First Schools documented their time spent while performing their weekly coaching duties. The documentation occurred three times throughout the school year.

According to the results, the reading coaches spent less than three hours a week implementing the coaching cycle with teachers (observation, coaching conferences with teachers, and co-teaching), and devoted more than four hours per week performing duties that did not fall under the category of literacy coaching, such as attending meetings.

The research studies of Mraz, Algozzine, and Watson (2008) and Bean and Zigmond (2006) raise implications for research and practice. "A consistent and clear job description for the role of the coach is desirable. Once a clear job description has been established, the role of coach should be clearly communicated to those with whom the coach works. The effectiveness of reading coaches is greatly compromised when roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined.

Although the previous studies provided insight on the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches, the amount of research on the topic is limited. According to Dole and Donaldson (2006), "the quality and quantity of research on the role of the reading coach is almost nonexistent" (p. 486). Because of the lack of research, it is important to review parallel studies, specifically parallel studies that examine the roles and responsibilities of the reading specialist. Because there has been a shift in the role of the reading specialist to be more of a mentor and coach (Dole, 2004), there is a stronger relationship between the specialist's and coach's roles and responsibilities.

Upon recommendation from the International Reading Association, Quatroche, Bean, and Hamilton (2001) developed a review of literature that summarized what was known about the role of the reading specialist and the various roles they assumed. They examined and reviewed 20 peer reviewed journal articles in the field of reading research and instruction, government documents, papers, technical reports, and ERIC documents that related to the role of the reading

specialist. Quatroche, Bean, and Hamilton's review of literature provided data from previous studies; however, it did not contain a meta-analysis of the information.

The data reviewed was limited to research from 1990 to the year the article was published in 2001. The authors chose to use 1990 as the start date because in the late 1980s major shifts in the role of reading specialists began to occur. These changes were primarily due to guidelines specified in the reauthorization of Title I and its support to improve literacy performance in schools, particularly those located in low socio-economic areas.

Of the literature reported in the review, 18 documents reported on empirical research that was conducted through observations, interviews, and surveys. The participants from the reviewed studies consisted of reading specialists, principals, teachers, and others who had direct contact with the reading specialist. Four prominent themes emerged. These themes included

1)   the roles that reading specialists assume

2)   the changing role of the reading specialist based on the people they work with and the setting in which they work

3)   the difference the reading specialist makes within the school

4)   the functions (responsibility) of the reading specialist.

The results of the literature review indicated that reading specialists' roles included six major responsibilities: instruction, assessment, leadership, resource/consultant, collaborator, and student advocate. The findings from Quatroche, Bean, and Hamilton's (2001) literature review helped to lay the groundwork in the development of the International Reading Association's position statement on the roles and responsibilities of the reading specialist. The International Reading Association's position statement is discussed in greater detail further along in the literature review.

To get a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists, Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, and Wallis (2002) surveyed 1,517 reading specialists (randomly selected members of the International Reading Association) to determine their roles within the schools. Initially 4,452 surveys were sent out, but only 38% were returned. The data collection instrument consisted of 34 multiple-choice responses with additional spaces to add comments.

Based on the responses, 90% of the reading specialists indicated that they worked with students on a daily basis, with 66% indicating that they spent over three fourths of their time in the instructional role. Over 40% indicated that they worked with the classroom teacher in a variety of ways. They served as support teachers, were the major teacher for specific lessons, worked as a co-teacher, and also assisted in the classroom. Of the 1,517 respondents, 99% of them indicated that they were involved in assessment activities. They used a variety of assessments to plan and make instructional decisions. Over 84% indicated that they served as a resource to the teachers by providing materials, ideas, and support.

A large number of the reading specialists indicated that they served in an administrative capacity. These duties consisted of completing Title I paper work, cafeteria duty, and covering classes. Sixty percent of the respondents agreed that their role was to support the literacy learning of all students, especially students experiencing difficulty. The authors concluded that future research is needed to determine if the literacy performance of students can be improved given the current status of reading specialists (primarily an instructor of struggling readers with less emphasis on the resource and leadership role). Since the study was published, there have been changes in the roles and responsibilities of the specialist. These changes will be discussed further along in the review of literature.

Because research is limited on reading coaches, reviewing the previously mentioned studies was necessary. The aforementioned studies served as a parallel link between the roles and responsibilities of a specialist and the role and responsibilities of the reading coach. It is imperative that further research be done on the roles and responsibilities of the reading coach within the schools in order to have a clearer picture of how reading coaches are being used in schools. It is also vital to investigate how these roles are impacting teacher instruction and student learning.

Qualifications, Requirements, and Job Descriptions

Many states have their own descriptions and definitions of the roles and responsibilities of reading professionals (reading specialists, reading coaches, and reading teachers). The qualifications and requirements for the positions vary as well. Dole, Liang, Watkins, and Wiggin's (2006) study examined the state of reading professionals in the United States. Data was received from 48 of the 50 states. Of the 48 states on which data were collected, 33 used the title of "reading specialist" to define their reading professionals, 20 used the title of "reading coach" and 14 used the title of "reading teacher." The reading teacher's main responsibility is teaching reading in grades K–12. Several of the states combined the title of reading teacher and reading specialist (but no coach) and "reading specialist and coach" (but no teacher).

The findings of the research indicate that the reading specialists direct and implement reading programs, provide one-on-one, small group, and pull out instruction. In addition to instruction, the specialists assess students' reading abilities, diagnose reading difficulties, and collaborate with teachers regarding reading instruction.

Of the 20 states having reading coaches, most reported that their coaches conduct a number of different professional activities to assist and support other teachers. For example, one

31

state reported that coaches "spent 100% of their time working with teachers, providing professional development, modeling instruction, planning with teachers, and analyzing student test results." Another state reported that reading coaches: model research-based literacy lessons; collaborate with teachers, principals, supervisors, and reading specialists in order to identify school reading plans; act as a resource for teachers; and assist in teacher planning by articulating the core curriculum in reading and the language arts. Some states also reported that coaches worked with students for a small percentage of time during the school day.

The research found that job descriptions for reading specialists and reading coaches were consistent with the roles and responsibilities defined by the International Reading Association. Coaches appeared to work more with other adults and have more administrative authority in their regular roles and duties. Specialists seemed to spend the majority of their time working directly with students and only part of their time working with other adults.

When it came to job responsibilities for specialists and coaches, they were for all intents and purposes the same, but the states varied in the types of job requirements needed for each position. Some states required additional course work above the bachelor's degree, exit exams, practicums, and previous teaching experience. Other states did not require teaching experience or additional course work.

Even though Dole, Liang, Watkins, and Wiggins (2006) gave valuable insight into the similarities and differences among the states' standards, titles, and qualifications of reading specialists and reading coaches, the data collection procedures seemed to have been flawed. In collecting the data, the researchers surveyed individuals from each state's department of education via email or telephone. If no one was available to participate in the survey, the researchers used information acquired from state department websites. Due to this reason, only

partial information was obtained from some of the states. Partial information can lead to inaccuracies in the findings.

Other studies have also shown discrepancies amongst the states when defining the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications of reading coaches. The International Reading Association (2006) surveyed 140 reading coaches to determine the qualification requirements needed for the position, as well as the duties for which they were responsible. Of the 140 survey respondents, a majority indicated that they primarily worked with teachers. Sixty-seven percent indicated that they focused solely on teachers. Twenty five percent indicated that they worked with both teachers and students. Only 6% reported that they focused on implementing a core reading program. Less than 2% reported that they worked solely with students.

In terms of time allocations, coaches reported spending most of their time assessing students and planning for instruction. They also spent a substantial amount of time coaching teachers. These coaching activities included observing, demonstrating model lessons, and discussing lessons taught.

In looking at the qualifications and requirements for becoming a coach, the only clear prerequisite indicated in the study was having a bachelor's degree and a teaching certificate. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents reported having at least a bachelor's degree. Thirty seven percent indicated that a master's degree was required. Seventy seven percent reported that one to three years of successful teaching experience were required.

Although statistically the sample size (140) used to represent the number of reading coaches across the country is inadequate, it is evident that there are disparities in the standards, job requirements and qualifications of coaches. These inconsistencies need to be addressed.

Additional findings, such as those found in McCombs and Marsh's study (2009) indicated that administrators had common concerns about recruiting and retaining high-quality coaches. Overall, principals were generally satisfied with the qualifications of their coaches, but questioned the skills and knowledge base of their coaches, most notably their ability to support adult learners. Most of the concerns dealt with a lack of understanding regarding the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches, as well as what to look for when interviewing potential candidates for reading coach positions.

The discrepancies between the roles, titles, and qualifications indicate that the state departments of education need to take a closer look at the International Reading Association's position statement on reading coaches and reading specialists and begin working towards standardizing the job descriptions to ensure that they are employing reading coaches who are able to meet the high-quality standards of practice for their positions. By standardizing the job titles, job descriptors and qualifications, one can only hope to see an overall improvement in the quality of reading instruction in schools across the United States (Dole, Liang, Watkins, & Wiggins, 2006).

The Reading Specialist

Although a reading specialist's role differs slightly from that of a reading coach, the two terms are oftentimes used interchangeably. A reading specialist works more directly with struggling students instead of teachers. However, with the current focus on reading achievement at all levels in the educational system, the role of the reading specialist is changing. It is beginning to include the coaching aspect as well. In recent years there has been a shift in the role of the reading specialist. The new role conceptualizes the reading specialist not as someone who

works directly with struggling students, but as someone who works directly with teachers as a coach and mentor (Dole, 2004).

Because of this shift, the International Reading Association has revised its definition of the reading specialist. According to the International Reading Association, a reading specialist, much like the reading coach, is someone who, in addition to providing assessment and instruction, conducts professional development, helps to set reading program goals, helps other staff members achieve those goals, interprets the reading program to parents and community, demonstrates appropriate reading practices, and keeps staff members aware of current research. The major roles of reading specialists are instruction, assessment, and leadership (International Reading Association, 2000). According to research, the reading specialist's role is shifting to more of a coach, but as of yet, they are not completely one and the same. Clarifications between the two need to be addressed at every level.

The Reading Coach

Even though reading coaches frequently act as reading specialists when they provide leadership for school, district, and state level reading programs, their roles go beyond a leadership capacity (International Reading Association, 2000). The reading coach's role is to facilitate development of a school's vision about literacy that is site-based and linked to district goals (Shanklin, 2006). The role of the reading coach should be directly linked to the characteristics of effective coaching. According to Shanklin (2006), there are five characteristics of effective coaching:

- Involves collaborative dialogue for teachers at all levels of knowledge and experience.
- Is characterized by data-oriented student and teacher learning.

- Involves classroom observations that are cyclical and build knowledge over time.

- Is a form of ongoing, job embedded professional learning that increases teacher capacity to meet students' needs.

Effective coaches can help improve teachers' instructional practices and ways of thinking about pedagogy. As previously stated, literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches has become an important avenue of support for instructional reform (Gibson, 2006). If the coach is to be effective, it is important for him/her to carefully consider what is and is not important. According to Dole and Donaldson (2006) there are three big ideas that the reading coach needs to remember in order to be effective.

A coach must first determine his or her coaching focus by deciding what primary goals need to be met. Secondly, whether it is through classroom observation, model lessons, working with individuals, or working with groups of students, reading coaches must ensure that they are frequently in the classrooms assisting the teachers. This brings about the third big idea, which involves the coach establishing himself or herself as someone who is available to help the teachers with their reading instruction. Teachers will not value the knowledge and role of the coach if they believe that the coach cannot be counted on to provide assistance and support. Effective coaching requires a collegial supportive relationship built around trust and mutual goals (Buly, Coskie, Robinson, & Egawa, 2006).

The Principal and the Coaching Process

The principal is the main instructional leader of a school. It is the principal's responsibility to lead his/her school towards a more instructional model that advances student achievement (Bolman & Deal, 2002). His/her vision and leadership capabilities are the driving force behind the instruction that takes place within the school and the academic achievement of

the students. The school's principal is the main change agent when it comes to instructional reform. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) suggest that the leader as a stimulator of intellectual thought, driving force, optimist, challenger, and steward of vision and progress may be at the crux of leadership for significant change. When initiating change and reform, support and direction from the building principal is required (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2001; Fullan, 2002).

Reading coaches can be a catalyst for change in the effort to reform teacher practice/instruction. Because principals are the key instructional leaders within the school, they play a vital role in ensuring that these changes occur both positively and effectively. Literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches can bolster professional development and school culture when principals implement a coaching model that fosters and supports the school's vision (Garmston, 1987; Swafford, 1998). However, without the continued support from principals, coaching can have little to no impact on changing and/or improving teacher practices. It is imperative that the principal supports and accounts for the coaching work at a school (Kral, 2007).

Garmston (1987) suggests that administrators can show support for coaching by: 1) demonstrating they value coaching as a tool for continuous improvement; 2) providing a focus for coaching activity; 3) supplying training for coaches; and 4) modeling positive coaching behaviors. To further foster support, Kral (2007) states that principals should participate in training and coaching sessions along with their staff to show they have a genuine interest in the coaching process.

In order for a principal to effectively support his/her school's coach, it is necessary for him/her to truly understand the reading coach's role and responsibilities. In some cases,

principals have not received a true job description and/or a listing of the reading coach's role and responsibilities. Because of these reasons, some principals do not fully understand the positive impact that reading coaches can have on teacher instruction. This may lead to an environment that makes it difficult for the reading coach to work effectively with teachers.

To ensure that principals have an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches, the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) implemented the use of Principal Coaches. Principal Coaches are typically former principals who have successfully led ARI schools. Principal Coaches work directly with principals by: 1) keeping them abreast of current reading research; 2) providing them with advice on how best to work with and use reading coaches within their schools; and 3) helping them to understand both their role as the principal and the roles and responsibilities of their reading coaches. Principals and reading coaches both have vital roles in improving reading instruction. Principals and coaches need to understand their respective roles and also understand how to work together effectively (Norton, 2007).

Cramer (2007) examined the perceptions of the effects of the relationship between six principals and six reading coaches. The results indicated that the reading coach's relationship with the principal played an essential role in the coaches' perceptions of success. The results also indicated that: 1) The relationship with the principal is necessary no matter how much training the coach receives; 2) Principals must support the coaches by positioning them in the building as leaders who provide a valuable service; and 3) Principals must understand the role of the coach in order to develop a close working relationship.

Bell-Hobbs' (2008) study looked at the role of the principal in the implementation of a literacy coaching model in order to build teacher capacity. The study investigated the function of the school principal as perceived by the school's reading coach, as a change agent in the

implementation process of the coaching model. Findings of the study indicated that principal

leadership is the key to school improvement and capacity building.

Knowlton's (2008) Alabama Reading Initiative case study examined exemplary ARI

Schools. Knowlton's study revealed several themes from all three cases involved. The

overarching theme that made all three schools exemplary schools was outstanding leadership.

The principal was viewed as a key instructional leader within the school and he/she supported all

components of the Alabama Reading Initiative, which included the reading coach and the

coaching process. Additional themes found were stakeholder support and commitment of

dedicated stakeholders.

As previously mentioned, the role the school principal plays can greatly impact both the

relationship the reading coach has with the faculty and the effectiveness the reading coach has at

helping to improve teacher practices. McGinnis (2008) investigated how the relationship

between the principal and the reading coach affected faculty perceptions of the reading coach.

The qualitative study sought to understand the social contexts within the school setting that could

impact coaching effectiveness. Due to the complications of implementing change, and at times a

lack of collaboration between the principal and the reading coach, the study concluded that a

sense of disempowerment occurred among and principals, teachers, and the reading coach, that at

times threatened the professional identities of all involved.

The principal's role in the coaching process, as well as the principal's perceptions of the

roles and responsibilities of reading coaches, can greatly affect the outcome of the coaching

process. "An effective principal mutually supports the coach and the teachers as they

collaboratively work to improve instructional practices and develop professional learning

communities that take on the ownership of improved instruction" (Kral, 2007, p. 2). An

effective principal also truly understands the roles and responsibilities of the reading coach, and the impact that positive coaching can have on teacher instruction.

Though the presence of reading coaches in schools affects its leadership structure (Izumi, 2002), there is a dearth of research that informs us of how principals perceive their own leadership roles when reading coaches are employed. To obtain empirically grounded research on leadership roles and literacy coaching, studies examining the role of the principal in literacy coaching should be conducted.

Summary

"Reading coaching is a powerful intervention with great potential" (International Reading Association, 2004, p. 3). Reading coaches can be valuable resources within schools. However, research has shown that administrative support and understanding of the coaching process and clearly defined roles and responsibilities of reading coaches are necessary in order for coaches to be effective.

"The International Reading Association takes the position that effective coaching is directly linked to the qualifications of a literacy coach" (International Reading Association, 2007, p. 13). Reading coaches are excellent teachers of reading. They have in-depth knowledge of the reading process, acquisitions, assessment, and instruction. They have expertise in working with teachers to improve practices. They are excellent presenters and group leaders. They have experience or preparation that enables them to model, observe, provide professional development opportunities, and provide feedback about instruction to classroom teachers, all of which makes up the coaching cycle. It is suggested that coaches have several years of outstanding teaching experience, and substantial graduate level courses in reading. The International Reading

Association has attempted to define the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications of a coach; however, the descriptors have not been adopted by every state.

Reading coaches are not evaluators. They are facilitators and collaborators of the teaching and learning process. "They support teachers in their daily work" (Dole, 2004, p. 462).

Research has shown that through strategic planning with the teacher, modeling lessons, providing ongoing professional development opportunities, and giving consistent feedback, the reading coach can help improve teacher instruction in reading that in turn will lead to an increase in students' reading achievement (Gibson, 2006). If used in an effective manner, the school's reading coach can have a positive impact on teacher instruction and student achievement.

Improving teacher instruction is the main goal of literacy coaching. "The concept of coaching fills a particular and promising niche in the range of strategies to improve the capacity of teachers to provide high-quality instruction to their students" (Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, & Supovitz, 2003, p. 1). Through the use of the coaching cycle, reading coaches provide job-embedded professional development, in-class training which includes demonstration lessons, modeling, support for teacher trials of new instruction, and coach feedback (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005). The coaching cycle leads to a gradual release of responsibility which is designed to enhance the quality of teacher instruction. Quality instruction leads to an increase in student achievement.

Based on the research discussed in the review of literature, there are still some discrepancies in the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches. In order for reading coaches to be effective, it is necessary for these roles and responsibilities to be consistent. The International Reading Association has set forth guidelines regarding the roles and responsibilities of coaches.

In order to achieve consistency, the guidelines need to be adopted at every state and local educational level.

Some state departments of education across the United States already follow the guidelines established by the International Reading Association. Alabama's department of education is one of them. The Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), which is a part of the Alabama Department of Education, funds the majority of all school based reading coaches in the state. ARI's job description of the roles and responsibilities are aligned with those of the International Reading Association.

Even though ARI has specified guidelines for reading coaches in place, the school's reading coach is only as effective as the leadership will allow him/her to be. Because principals are the main instructional leaders of a school, and the role they play is pivotal in the success or lack thereof in the coaching process, it is imperative that principals are knowledgeable of reading coaches' job description, as well as supportive of the job that they do. If principals are aware of these roles and responsibilities and truly understand how to use the reading coach in his/her school effectively, it is hoped that the reading coach will have a positive impact on teacher instruction.

Although roles and responsibilities have been established for Alabama reading coaches, limited research has been done to measure how principals perceive these roles and responsibilities. There is also limited research on how effective ARI reading coaches are at performing their specified duties.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the study identified principals' perceptions of reading coaches and their effectiveness at performing the job responsibilities established by the International Reading Association. Secondly, because of the recent proliferation of reading

coaches within schools across the United States to help improve teacher instruction, the study

determined if principals viewed onsite reading coaches as being a necessary part of their faculty.

CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Information presented in this chapter is intended to add to the limited amount of research regarding the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches. This chapter contains five sections: (a) the researcher's role; (b) participants; (c) description of the testing instrument; (d) research design and data collection procedures; and (e) data analysis.

The Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) model is recognized by the National Staff Development Council and National Education Association as a literacy program that successfully improves student learning and teacher practice (Norton, 2007). Nine hundred fourteen (914) schools across the state of Alabama are a part of the ARI. All of these schools have at least one reading coach on their faculty.

The job description of Alabama reading coaches is established by the ARI. The ARI's job description is aligned with the International Reading Association's (IRA) definition of the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches. As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study was twofold. First, the study identified principals' perceptions of reading coaches and their effectiveness at performing the job responsibilities established by the IRA. Secondly, because of the recent proliferation of reading coaches within schools across the United States to help improve teacher instruction, the study determined if principals viewed onsite reading coaches as being a necessary part of their faculty.

The Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher for this study was to focus on principals' perceptions of reading coaches. During the period of this study, the researcher held the role of reading coach within the school district. This study provided the researcher with an opportunity to analyze data collected from the district's principals for the purpose of determining their perceptions of how effective they perceived reading coaches to be at performing their designated duties. Because of the researcher's job position in the district, measures were taken to avoid bias and/or an obligation from the participants to respond to the questionnaire in a manner that did not reflect their true beliefs.

Description of the Setting

The study took place in a southeastern metropolitan school district in Alabama. The district has 61 schools, 35 of which are elementary schools. According to the school system's website, there are approximately 32,000 students enrolled in the district.

Over the past six years within the district, there has been a heavy focus on the use of reading coaches to help improve teacher instruction. The reading coaches typically attend monthly professional development sessions to help them improve upon their coaching skills, as well as focus on ways to be successful at performing their daily duties.

All 35 elementary schools within the district have at least one reading coach who is funded by the Alabama Reading Initiative. Schools with more than one reading coach typically fund the second coach through the use of Title I dollars.

The Participants

The population in this study consisted of all 35 elementary school principals from a southeastern metropolitan school district in Alabama. Each principal in the study led a public

elementary school with an ARI funded reading coach on their faculty during the 2008–2009 school year. Since all elementary school principals with building level reading coaches from the school district were included, sampling techniques were not utilized. The population of this study was selected for the following reasons:

1.   The principals involved in this study were charged with direct supervision of a reading coach.

2. Principals are qualified to evaluate the performance of reading coaches.

3. There is a limited amount of research on principal's perceptions of reading coaches.

Description of the Testing Instrument

As previously mentioned, the Alabama Reading Initiative's job description for reading coaches is aligned with those established by the International Reading Association. Because the review of literature did not reveal any published instruments to specifically examine the perceptions of principals of the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches, the researcher developed a questionnaire exclusively for this study. The instrument was developed using the International Reading Association's job descriptions of reading coaches as a guide. The current Alabama State Department of Education survey, which is used to evaluate reading coaches/reading specialists throughout the state, was also used as a guide.

The testing instrument included a place for participants to indicate specific demographic information. The demographic portion was included to determine if there were any significant differences in principals' perceptions based on gender, age, level of education, years of experience as a principal, and student enrollment.

The questionnaire also included a 20 item five point Likert-type scale questionnaire. Following each stimulus statement on the questionnaire, the participants were asked to mark 1 =

Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, or 5 = Strongly Agree. Likert-type

scales can be reliable and valid instruments for the measurement of attitude and perceptions (Gay

& Arisain, 1999).

For validity purposes, the testing instrument was examined by a small panel of experts.

Validity can be established using a panel of experts (Aiken & Groth-Marnat, 2005). According

to Wiersma (1985), an instrument's contents must be examined to determine if it representative

of the identified concepts. Creswell (2003) states that face validation determines if the

instrument, on its face, measures what it purported to measure. Face validation contributed to

the testing instrument's validity.

The panel of experts reviewing the instrument consisted of five Alabama Reading

Initiative administrators and specialists from the Alabama State Department of Education who

were not involved in the study. The panel examined the instrument to determine if the questions

aligned with both the International Association's and Alabama Reading Initiative's guidelines

for reading coaches, as well as examined it to determine if the instrument's questions measured

what they professed to measure. Ross and Shannon (2008) state that "the extent to which our

data collection instruments, or processes, measure what they are supposed to measure is an

indication of validity" (p. 219).

To determine principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of reading coaches, the

statements on the questionnaire correlated directly back to the eight job descriptors/duties

designated for reading coaches by the International Reading Association. Each statement on the

questionnaire was grouped according to content. According to Messick (1994), expert

examination and feedback associated with the design of the research instrument provides

significant documentation that addresses the content aspect of construct validity. Changes to the

instrument were made based on feedback from the panel of experts. The changes included excluding unnecessary statements, rewording statements, and placing the statements in a specific order based on ARI standards to make it easier for respondents to understand. It is imperative for respondents to understand each item on the instrument, as well as understand how to properly respond to the items on the instrument. This is especially true when a researcher designs his own instrument.

According to Fowler (1995), one such way to ensure that scores on an instrument are reliable is to complete a field test. To establish reliability, a field test was conducted using the instrument pertaining to this study. The field test took place in February 2008, after revisions recommended by the panel of experts were made. Eight principals, from school districts, that were not included in the study, completed and returned the questionnaire along with a response sheet to indicate any problems or concerns they had with the questionnaire. Based on the response sheets, the principals did not indicate any issues with the clarity of the questionnaire. Overall, the respondents stated that the questionnaire was easy to follow and understand, which allowed for timely completion.

Also to establish reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was conducted on the testing instrument to estimate internal consistency in the rating scale scores. The test calculated the rating scales' reliability to determine if there was a highly positive relationship between the scale items. A minimum .80 reliability was required. The Cronbach's Alpha for instrument was .92, which demonstrated sufficient levels of reliability.

Items 1–17 on the questionnaire assessed principals' perceptions of reading coaches at carrying out their daily coaching duties. These items were related to research questions 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Items 1–17 were written to align with the eight job descriptors of reading coaches.

Figure 3 shows the relationship between the eight job descriptors of reading coaches and the stimulus statements for items 1–17. Items 18–20 on the questionnaire addressed research question 2. The overall means of statements 18–20 were used to determine if principals viewed reading coaches as being a necessary part of the school's faculty.

8 Job Descriptors	Questionnaire Stimulus Statement Items from Survey
conducting professional development	The reading coach helps teachers establish the routines and procedures needed to teach reading effectively (Statement 7) The reading coach is skillful at helping teachers reflect on their instructional practices (Statement 9) The reading coach effectively observes reading instruction to determine teachers' instructional needs (Statement 10) The reading coach provides feedback to teachers regarding their instructional practices (Statement 11)
providing ongoing assessment and instruction	The reading coach is concerned about the reading achievement of all students (Statement 2) The reading coach effectively collaborates and plans with teachers on a weekly basis to help improve student achievement in reading (Statement 16)
helping to set reading program goals (data driven)	The reading coach is knowledgeable of the school's reading program (Statement 1) The reading coach utilizes data to help our faculty identify professional development needs (Statement 6) The reading coach effectively analyzes student data to make instructional decisions regarding reading (Statement 13) The reading coach helps me to prepare for and facilitate grade level data meetings in an effective manner (Statement 14)
helping staff members achieve those goals	The reading coach is a facilitator of the teaching and learning process (Statement 4) The reading coach is well received as instructional support by my teachers (Statement 5)
interpreting the reading program to parents and community	The reading coach does an excellent job of promoting 100% literacy at our school (Statement 17)
demonstrating appropriate reading practices	The reading coach effectively demonstrates instructional practices (model lessons) for classroom teachers (Statement 8)
working with struggling readers	The reading coach works with struggling readers on a consistent basis (Statement 3)
keeping staff members aware of current reading research	The reading coach meets with me on a regular basis to help keep me informed about the reading program at our school (Statement 12) The reading coach provides ongoing professional development based on scientifically based reading research (Statement 15)

Figure 3. Relationship between Job Descriptors and Stimulus Statement Items.

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

Prior to beginning this study, the researcher was given written permission by the participating school district to survey all 35 elementary school principals who had reading coaches on their faculty. The principals were contacted via electronic mail (see Appendix 2) and informed that within five days they would receive a questionnaire to assess their perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches.

Before conducting the study, the researcher submitted a Research Protocol Review Form to the Office of Human Subjects Research at Auburn University. Upon approval, the researcher began the study.

Within five days of the initial contact, an information packet was mailed to all 35 elementary school principals within the district. Included in the packet were an information letter on Auburn University letterhead (see Appendix 3), the district's approval letter to conduct the study (see Appendix 4), the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), and a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which to return the completed questionnaire. The participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary; and if they chose to participate, they were informed that their responses would remain confidential. The participants were asked to complete and return the questionnaire within two weeks. Of the 35 questionnaires mailed, a total of 28 were returned, giving a return rate of 80%.

Data Analysis

Each of the 28 completed questionnaires contained five demographic categories: gender, age, level of education, years of experience as a principal, and school enrollment, as well as 20 stimulus statement responses to determine principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of reading

coaches at performing their designated job responsibilities. Each of the 20 statements was rated

by principals as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, or 5=

Strongly Agree. The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences (SPSS) 16.0.

Summary

The general methodology of this study was intended to determine principals' perceptions

of the effectiveness of reading coaches at performing their daily duties. The researcher designed

a questionnaire based on the eight job descriptors of reading coaches designated by the

International Reading Association. The questionnaire was examined by a panel of experts and

field tested to establish validity and reliability. After validity and reliability were established

through the panel of experts and the implementation of a field test, the questionnaire was

administered to the participants. The questionnaires were anonymously returned via mail; and

the data taken from the questionnaires were analyzed. The data from this study contained both

descriptive and inferential statistics. Chapter IV of this study will present an in-depth analysis of

the data collected.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Introduction

All 35 elementary school principals within the district where the study took place were asked to participate. Of the 35 principals who were sent questionnaires, 28 participants or 80% returned the questionnaire. All participants had reading coaches on their faculty during the 2008–2009 school year.

The questionnaire for this study was developed to assess principals' perceptions based on the eight job descriptors of a reading coach. The eight job descriptors consisted of: conducting professional development; providing ongoing assessment and instruction; helping to set reading program goals; helping staff members achieve those goals; interpreting the reading program to parents and community demonstrating appropriate reading practices; working with struggling readers; and keeping staff members aware of current reading research.

The researcher investigated principals' overall perception of reading coaches, as well as examined whether a significant relationship ($p < .05$), if any, existed between principals' perceptions of reading coaches based on five demographic areas. The areas included gender, level of education, age, years of experience as a principal, and total school enrollment. Finally, the researcher investigated if principals viewed reading coaches as being a necessary part of their school's faculty.

Included in this chapter are the analyses of the data and the findings of the study. The data presented in this study were collected via a 25 item questionnaire which was mailed to the

participants. The data from the returned questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0. The statistical analysis presented in this chapter

was conducted using the study's seven fundamental research questions. Descriptive statistics,

independent samples t-tests, and Spearman Correlations were used to analyze the data.

Demographic Descriptions

Twenty-eight of the 35 participants invited to participate in the study completed and

returned the study's questionnaire. The descriptive statistics for the participants' demographics

are listed in Table 1. Sixteen (57.1%) of the respondents were female, and 12 (42.9%) were

male. A majority (21, 75.0%) of the principals were 41 years of age or older. The participants'

education was reported as follows: 14 (50.0%) Master's degree, 10 (35.7%) Education Specialist,

3 (10.7%) Doctorate degree, and 1 (3.6%) Other. Over half (16, 57.2%) of the participants had

10 or fewer years of experience as a principal. A majority (17, 60.7%) of the participants

worked at a school with an enrollment between 501–700 students.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Participants' Demographics

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Female	16	57.1
Male	12	42.9
Age		
30 – 34	1	3.6
35 – 40	6	21.4
41 – 45	8	28.6
46 – 50	3	10.7
51 or More	10	35.7
Education Group (Degree/Certification Level)		
Master's Degree	14	50.0
Education Specialist	10	35.7
Doctorate	3	10.7
Other	1	3.6
Years Experience as Principal		
0 – 5 Years	4	14.3
5 – 10 Years	12	42.9
11 – 15 Years	6	24.1
16 – 20 Years	2	7.1
21 Years or More	4	14.3
School Enrollment		
1 – 300	4	14.3
301 – 500	5	17.9
501 – 700	17	60.7
701 – 900	1	3.6
901 – 1,200	1	3.6

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Reading Coach Perceptions Questionnaire

Questionnaire Item	N	*Min.	*Max.	M	SD
The reading coach effectively analyzes student data to make instructional decisions regarding reading.	28	4	5	4.61	0.50
The reading coach effectively collaborates and plans with teachers on a weekly basis to help improve student achievement in reading.	28	2	5	4.46	0.69
The reading coach works with struggling readers on a consistent basis.	28	3	5	4.36	0.73
The reading coach is a facilitator of the teaching and learning process.	28	4	5	4.64	0.49
The reading coach is well received as instructional support by my teachers.	28	4	5	4.46	0.51
The reading coach is knowledgeable of the school's reading program.	28	4	5	4.79	0.42
The reading coach helps teachers to establish the routines and procedures needed to teach reading effectively.	28	4	5	4.68	0.48
The reading coach effectively demonstrates instructional practices (model lessons) for classroom teachers.	28	4	5	4.61	0.50
The reading coach is skillful at helping teachers reflect on their instructional practices.	28	3	5	4.64	0.62
The reading coach effectively observes reading instruction to determine teachers' instructional needs.	28	3	5	4.57	0.57
The reading coach provides effective feedback to teachers regarding their instructional practices.	28	3	5	4.68	0.55
The reading coach meets with me on a regular basis to help keep me knowledgeable and informed about the reading program at our school.	28	4	5	4.68	0.48
The reading coach helps me to prepare for and facilitate grade level data meetings in an effective manner.	28	2	5	4.64	0.73
The reading coach utilizes data to help our faculty identify professional development needs.	28	3	5	4.64	0.56

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Questionnaire Item	N	*Min.	*Max.	M	SD
The reading coach provides ongoing professional development based on scientifically based reading research.	28	3	5	4.61	0.63
The reading coach is concerned about the reading achievement of all students.	28	3	5	4.54	0.64
The reading coach does an excellent job of promoting 100% literacy at our school.	28	3	5	4.61	0.63
Reading coaches are a critical part of the reading program at our school.	28	4	5	4.68	0.48
Reading coaches are essential to improve reading instruction.	28	3	5	4.71	0.53
Reading coaches are needed to help increase student achievement in reading and assure success for all students.	28	4	5	4.71	0.46

*Based on the results of the Likert-type scale questionnaire used in this study, the minimum

(Min.) score possible was one; the maximum (Max.) score possible was five.

8 Job Descriptors	Questionnaire Stimulus Statement Items
conducting professional development (M = 4.64)	Questionnaire Items 7, 9, 10, and 11
providing ongoing assessment and instruction (M = 4.50)	Questionnaire Items 2 and 16
helping to set reading program goals (M = 4.63)	Questionnaire Items 1, 6, 13, and 14
helping staff members achieve those goals (M = 4.55)	Questionnaire Items 4 and 5
interpreting the reading program to parents and community (M = 4.61)	Questionnaire Item 17
demonstrating appropriate reading practices (M = 4.61)	Questionnaire Item 8
working with struggling readers (M = 4.36)	Questionnaire Item 3
keeping staff members aware of current reading research (M = 4.65)	Questionnaire Items 12 and 15

Figure 4. Overall Mean Scores of the 8 Job Descriptors

Results

As stated in Chapter IV, stimulus statement items 1–17 on the test instrument were

aligned with the International Reading Association's eight descriptors of reading coaches (see

Figure 3). The mean scores for the eight job descriptors were determined by finding the central

tendency of the survey items that aligned with each job descriptor (see Figure 4).

Research Question 1

Descriptive statistics were analyzed to determine the extent to which principals perceived reading coaches to be effective at carrying out the duties set forth by the International Reading Association. The responses yielded the following mean scores: conducting professional development (M = 4.64); providing ongoing assessment and instruction (M = 4.50); helping to set reading program goals (M = 4.63); helping staff members achieve those goals (M = 4.55); interpreting the reading program to parents and community (M = 4.61) demonstrating appropriate reading practices (M = 4.61); working with struggling readers (M = 4.36); and keeping staff members aware of current reading research (M = 4.65).

Mean scores for each individual stimulus statement item ranged from 4.36 to 4.79. In relation to the five point Likert type scale used in this study, the researcher can conclude that overall principals agree (4 = Agree) with the stimulus statement item regarding the reading coach. The lowest mean score received pertained to the stimulus statement item: The reading coach works with struggling readers on a consistent basis. The highest mean score received pertained to the stimulus statement item: The reading coach is knowledgeable of the school's reading program.

Based on the results, principals' perceptions were consistent. In comparison to the five point Likert type scale, on average, principals agreed that reading coaches were adhering to the job descriptor guidelines as established by the International Reading Association. The total mean score for questionnaire items 1–17 were used to determine principals' overall perceptions of reading coaches at carrying out their job responsibilities effectively. The principals' responses of all 17 items yielded an overall mean score of 4.60, indicating that principals perceived reading coaches to be effective at performing their daily job responsibilities.

Research Question 2

The overall mean score for questionnaire items 18–20 was used to determine if principals perceived reading coaches as being a necessary part of their school's faculty. Items 18–20 yielded an overall mean score of 4.62, indicating that principals believed reading coaches were a necessary part of their school's faculty.

Research Question 3

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between male principals and female principals on their perceptions of the reading coach. The dependent variable was created by computing a mean composite score from the 20 Likert-scaled items from the survey. The following coding scheme was used for each survey item: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Thus, higher scores represented more positive perceptions, and lower scores represented more negative perceptions. The descriptive statistics for each survey item are listed in Table 2.

The following testing procedures were followed. First, the dependent variable scores were standardized by group, and the resulting z-scores were used to identify outliers. Participants with a z-score greater than │3│ were removed. This process revealed no outliers in the data. The distributions of perception scores for each group are displayed in Figures 5 and 6. Levene's test was not significant, suggesting that the two groups had equal variances. The means and standard deviations of perceptions scores for each group are listed in Table 2. The t-test (Table 4) failed to reveal a significant difference between the female principals and male principals on their perceptions of the reading coach, $t(26) = -0.10$, $p > .05$.
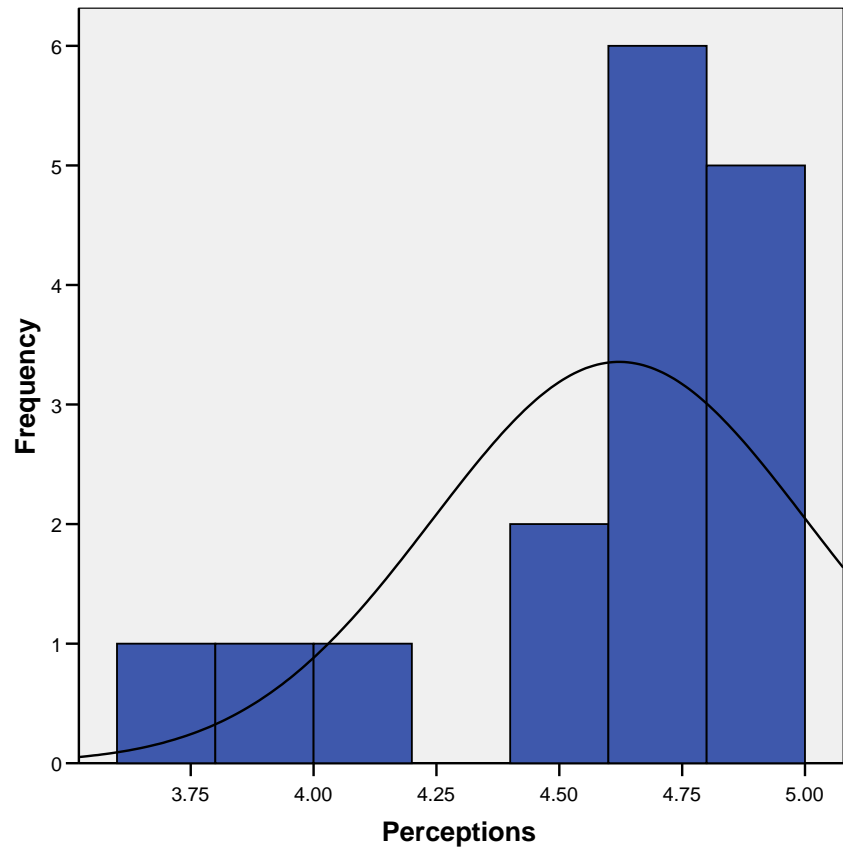
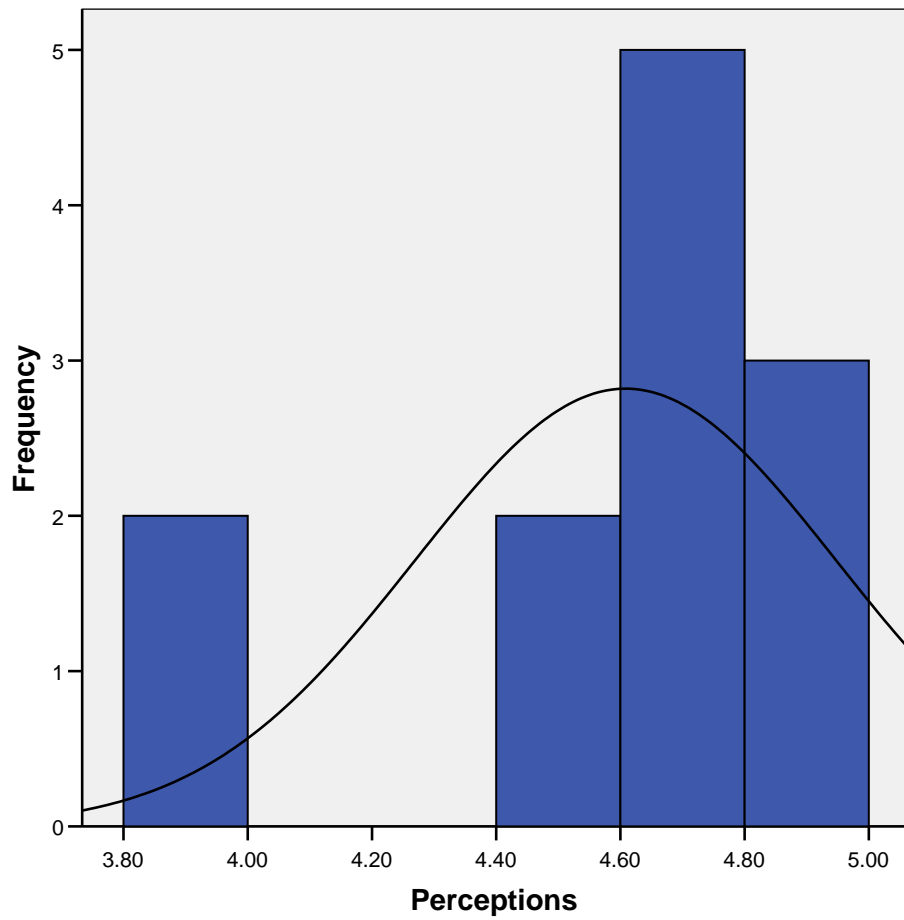*Figure 5*. Distribution of Perception Scores for the Female Principals

Figure 6. Distribution of Perception Scores for the Male Principals

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Perception Scores by Gender

Gender	N	M	SD
Male	12	4.61	0.34
Female	16	4.62	0.38

Table 4

Independent Samples t-test on Perception Scores by Gender

Dependent Variable	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	SE of Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Perceptions of Reading Coach	-0.10	26	.923	-0.01	0.14	-0.30	0.27

Research Question 4

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between the education groups (degree/certification level) on their perceptions of the reading coach. It was necessary to recode the education groups because of sample size issues. The Other education group included 10 Education Specialists and 3 individuals with a Doctorate degree.

The dependent variable scores were standardized by group, and the resulting z-scores were used to identify outliers. Participants with a z-score greater than │3│ were removed. This process revealed no outliers in the data. The distributions of perception scores for each education group are displayed in Figures 7 and 8. Levene's test was not significant, suggesting that the two groups had equal variances. The means and standard deviations of perceptions scores for each education group are listed in Table 5. The t-test (Table 6) failed to reveal a significant difference between the principals with a Master's degree and principals with Other degrees on their perceptions of the reading coach, $t(26) = 1.03$, $p > .05$.
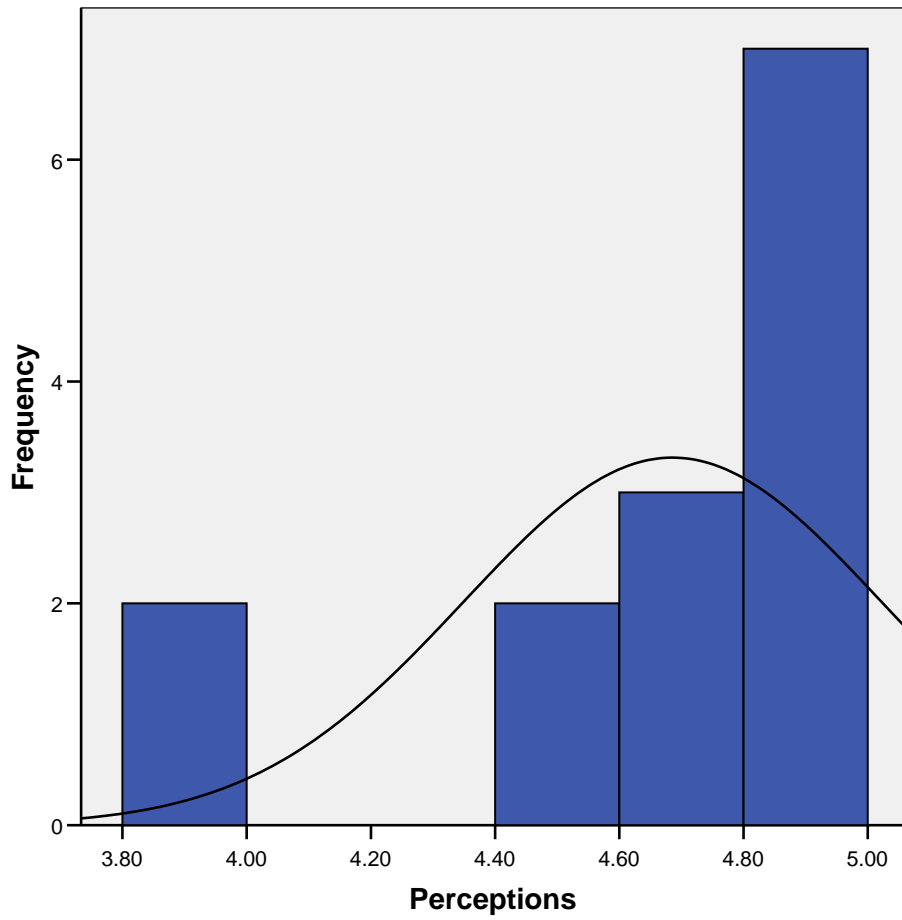
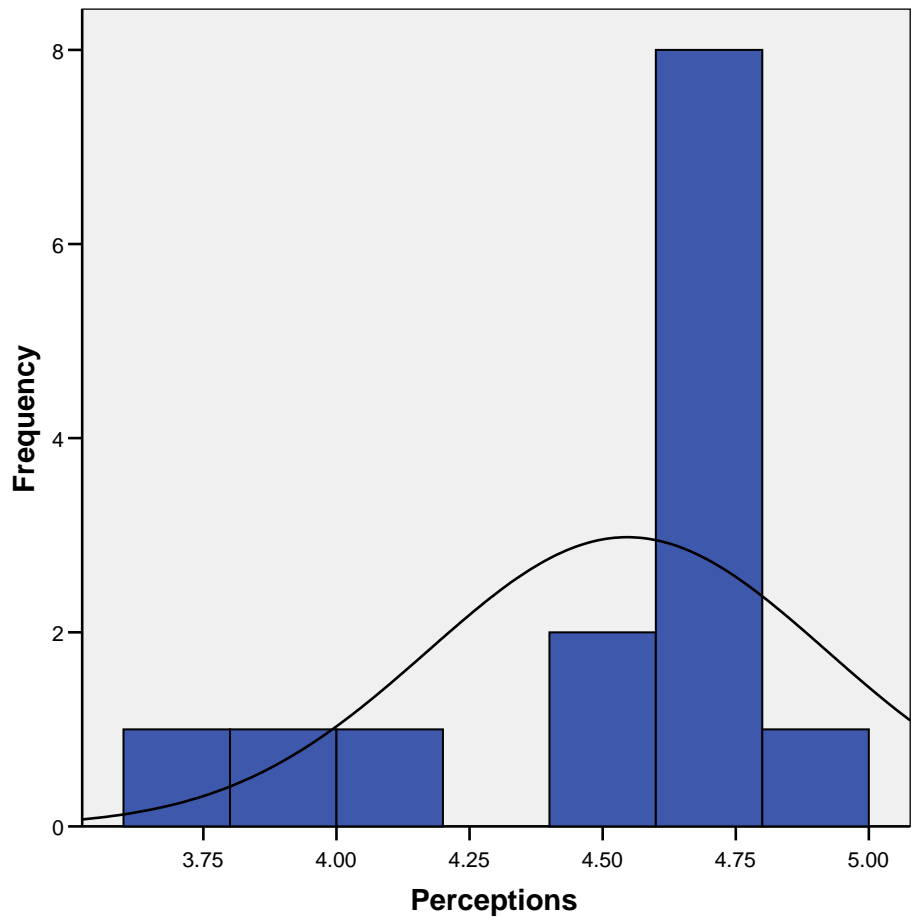*Figure 7.* Distribution of Perception Scores for the Master's Degree Principals

Figure 8. Distribution of Perception Scores for the Other Degree Principals

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Perception Scores by Education

Education	N	M	SD
Master's Degree	14	4.69	0.34
Other Degree	14	4.55	0.37

Table 6

Independent Samples t-test on Perception Scores by Education

Dependent Variable	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	SE of Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Perceptions of Reading Coach	1.03	26	.311	0.14	0.13	-0.14	0.42

Research Questions 5-7

Several bivariate Spearman correlations were calculated to address research questions 5–7. The Spearman correlation is the non-parametric equivalent of the bivariate Pearson correlation. It was used to test these research questions because age, years of experience and school enrollment were operationalized with ordinal scales. The correlation matrix is listed in Table 7. The correlations failed to reveal any significant relationships among the demographic variables and their perceptions of the reading coach. Not surprisingly, the participants' age was positively related to their years of experience as a school principal, $r_{sp} = .52$, $p < .01$. However, the correlations did not reveal any other significant relationships among the variables.

Table 7

Bivariate Spearman Correlations for Research Questions 4 -6

	1	2	3	4
Age (1)	---	.52**	-.19	.19
Years Experience (2)		---	.03	.14
School Enrollment (3)			---	-.18
Perceptions of Reading Coach (4)				---

*Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the findings for this study. The results were based on the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of reading coaches at carrying out their daily duties. The data analysis of the study's questionnaire shows that the scores for each stimulus statement, along with the mean scores for the combined eight job descriptors remained consistent. Mean scores fell between 4.36 and 4.79. One possible reason for the tightness of scores rests with the small number of intervals on a 1−5 Likert-type scale. Results from the independent samples t-test and Spearman Correlation analysis showed that there were no significant differences or relationships between the five demographic areas (gender, education level, age, years of experience, and school enrollment) and principals' perceptions. Based on the perceptions of the population of this study, the analysis of the data indicates that principals perceive reading coaches to be effective at performing their daily duties. Principals also believe that reading coaches are a necessary part of the school's faculty. The next chapter will present a discussion of these findings, implications, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine principals' perceptions concerning the

effectiveness of reading coaches at assuming roles and performing the job responsibilities

designated by the International Reading Association. The study also determined if principals

viewed onsite reading coaches as being a necessary part of their faculty. Chapter I presented an

overview that included the historical aspects of literacy coaching through the use of reading

coaches. The statement of the problem, significance of the study, limitations, delimitations,

assumptions, and definitions of key terms were also discussed. Chapter II included a review of

literature. The literature review presented information regarding coaching theory. The review of

literature also discussed the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches, examined the role of

principal in the literacy coaching process, addressed the differences between reading specialists

and reading coaches, and examined relevant research studies related to literacy coaching.

Chapter III presented the methods involved in designing this study. The testing instrument

design, participant information, research design, data collection procedures, and analysis of the

data were introduced. Chapter IV presented the findings for this study. The findings examined

demographic information of the participants and a statistical analysis associated with their

responses to the testing instrument. Chapter V will provide a summary, conclusions,

implications, and recommendations for further research.

Summary

The findings for this study examined the demographic descriptions, rating scale responses, and the statistical analysis for principals participating in this study. The testing instrument, a questionnaire, consisted of a five item demographic section and 20 stimulus statements that included a five point Likert type scale with which to respond. Thirty five participants were invited to participate in this study with 28 returning the questionnaire. Data were collected over a one month period with a return rate of 80%.

Mean scores were used to examine the rating scaled scores. Principals' responses were consistently in agreement with the rating scale questions. The lowest mean score was received for the individual stimulus statement response, "the reading coach works with struggling readers on a consistent basis." The response yielded a mean of 4.36, indicating that reading coaches may need to improve in the area of working with struggling readers. The highest mean score received was a 4.79 for the stimulus statement, "the reading coach is knowledgeable of the school's reading program." It is positive to see such a high mean score for this particular statement, because in order to be effective, it is imperative for reading coaches to be knowledgeable of the school's reading program.

The overall mean for each of the eight job descriptors also yielded positive consistent results. The means ranged from 4.36 to 4.65. Again, the lowest mean score received was for working with struggling readers. This is mainly due to the fact that only one stimulus response item was aligned with this job descriptor. The highest mean of 4.65 was received for the job descriptor, "keeping staff members aware of current reading research." The next to the highest mean score of 4.64 was received for the job descriptor, "conducting professional development." The four stimulus statement items that make up the "conducting professional development" job

descriptor is indicative of the coaching cycle (reflect, observe, provide feedback). A mean score

of 4.64 indicates that reading coaches are doing an effective job of incorporating the coaching

cycle to provide job embedded professional development. The means for the remaining job

descriptors: providing ongoing assessment and instruction (M = 4.50); helping to set reading

program goals (M = 4.63); helping staff members to achieve those goals (M = 4.55); and

interpreting the reading program to parents and community (M = 4.61) The overall mean for

principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of reading coaches at carrying out their job

descriptions was M = 4.60 indicating that reading coaches are doing an effective job at

performing their daily job responsibilities. The mean to determine if reading coaches are needed

within schools is 4.62, showing that most principals are in agreement that reading coaches are an

integral part of their schools' faculty. Standard deviations for the questionnaire's 20 items

ranged from 0.42 to 0.73, indicating little dispersion of scores around specific means.

 Independent samples t- tests and Spearman Correlation analysis were conducted to

determine if there were significant differences and relationships between the principals'

perceptions and their demographic characteristic. The results from both analysis showed that

there were no significant differences or relationships between the dependent variable—

principals' perceptions—and the participants' gender, age, education level, years of experience,

and total school enrollment.

It can be concluded that principals, regardless of their demographic characteristics,

believe that reading coaches are effective within the district, and that they are a necessary part of

their school's faculty. The overall effectiveness of reading coaches within this district may be

due in part to the fact that the reading coaches receive extensive support from both the district

and state level (Alabama Reading Initiative). The school based reading coaches attend monthly

professional development sessions that foster their growth as reading coaches. Also, district and state level reading coaches visit their schools on a regular basis. During these visits, the building, district, and/or state level coaches collaborate to develop/implement action plans, set reading program goals, and plan professional development opportunities for teachers.

The guidance and support the building level reading coaches receive may have some impact on their effectiveness at carrying out their daily job responsibilities. In turn, it can be concluded that if reading coaches are effective, principals view them as an asset to their faculty.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

Literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches has been lauded as a much needed opportunity to provide ongoing job embedded professional development that is geared towards the instructional needs of teachers. Coaching can serve as a bridge between a vision of improvement and its enactment, through day-to-day support for teachers (Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutlter, 2003). "Coaching focuses its work on teachers as learners" (Ohs, 2006, p. 40). Through the use of the gradual release coaching cycle, teachers receive scaffolded guidance from the reading coach to help support new learning. Loughridge and Tarentino (2005) state that teachers who are given new information with a demonstration, allowed to practice, then receive feedback and collaboration around the practice are 90% likely to master the new practice.

To support teachers in their quest to improve instructional practices, literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches has become a critical element of many major school-wide reading improvement efforts in our nation today (Peterson, Taylor, Burhnam, & Schock, 2009). So enticing is the promise of coaching that in recent years states, districts, and schools across the nation, eager for a means to strengthen instruction and student learning, have rushed to implement literacy coaching (Russo, 2004).

The use of reading coaches to help with reading reform has grown extensively. Although there has been a proliferation of reading coaches over the past 5–10 years, there is little research available regarding the effectiveness of literacy coaching. There are also discrepancies in the job titles, job responsibilities, and roles of reading coaches throughout the United States. A reading coach's job description may differ in any given situation. Because of this reason, many are unsure of exactly what it is the reading coach does.

With such a varying degree of roles, it is no wonder that many have their own perceptions of what the reading coach's responsibilities and duties are. In many instances, the reading coach's role is misunderstood because there is little consistency in the training, backgrounds, and skills required for such positions, and there is little consistency in the general competence of coaches, in part because there are no standardized agreed upon definitions for the roles (International Reading Association, 2004).

"The International Reading Association continues to promote the reading coach model as a professional development approach with vast potential to improve student reading proficiency in elementary, middle, and high schools" (International Reading Association, 2006, p. 1). Because the International Reading Association has suggested guidelines for the roles of a reading coach, job requirements, and job qualifications, school districts that employ reading coaches should follow them. By doing so, nationwide standardization of the responsibilities, job requirements, and job qualifications of reading coaches would hopefully occur.

Implications

Although this study did not address the job requirements or qualifications of the reading coaches employed within the district, it did address the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches. Based on the results of this study, which was guided specifically by the International

Reading Association's established guidelines for reading coaches, it is evident that reading coaches within this district are effectively carrying out their roles and responsibilities. A further study could address the impact that reading coaches have on teacher instruction and student achievement. However, until clear roles and responsibilities of reading coaches are established, it may difficult to link literacy coaching with increased student learning due to inconsistencies in their roles.

It is acknowledged by educators that there is not extensive research on literacy coaching showing clear links between coaching and student learning (Kinnucan, Rosemary, & Grogan, 2006). If research can measure and account for literacy coaching's positive effects on teaching and learning, support systems for sustaining literacy coaching as an essential component of comprehensive literacy instruction can be achieved (Deweese, 2008). Without solid research tying literacy coaching to increased student learning, literacy coaching will go the way of whole language and multiage classrooms where misunderstandings and a lack of reported data on student impact prevented their widespread implementation and acceptance (Buly, Coskie, Robinson, & Egawa, 2006). It is imperative for solid empirically grounded research regarding reading coaches to occur.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Further Research**</div>

Based on the researcher's review of the literature, it was determined that there is much paucity in the research on literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches. There is a need for further research in many areas regarding literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches. It is hoped that through continued research, data will become available to show that reading coaches are having a positive impact on teachers' instructional practices, which in turn will show an increase in student learning.

Recommendations for further research include the following:

- Because this study only examined principals' perceptions of reading coaches in one particular school district, additional research examining principals' perceptions should be conducted using a much larger number of participants.

- Because there are still discrepancies in the job requirements/qualifications, roles and responsibilities of reading coaches, it is important to conduct additional research examining the job qualifications/requirements of reading coaches, as well as to examine how reading coaches spend their time working within schools.

- Research examining teachers' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of reading coaches. It is important for researchers to be aware of teachers' perceptions because teachers work directly with the reading coach to improve instructional practices.

- Research examining teachers' experiences with the reading coach and the gradual release coaching cycle. As previously stated, teachers work directly with the reading coach to improve instructional practices. Positive or negative experiences with the reading coach can greatly impact the relationship with the reading coach, which may impact the effectiveness of the reading coach at helping the teacher to improve upon his/her instructional practices.

- Research examining the impact of reading coaches on student learning. In order to assess the impact of literacy coaching through the use of reading coaches, researchers should look at student data to determine students' progress in reading.

- Research regarding the role and influence of administrators on literacy coaching. Because the role the school leader plays is critical in the development of the role of

the reading coach, research regarding their influence on literacy coaching could be beneficial.

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Principals' Perception
Demographics and General Information Questionnaire

Please circle the response that best describes you:

1. Gender: Male   Female

2. Age: 24-29   30-34   35-40   41-45   46-50   51 or above

3. Level of Education- Highest Degree Earned:

   Master's   Education Specialist   Doctorate   Other _____

4. Years of Experience as a principal:

   0-5   6-10   11-15   16-20   21 or above

5. School Enrollment:

   0-300   301-500   501-700   701-900   901-1200   1201 or more

Principals' Perceptions of Reading Coaches

Please circle the response that best reflects **your perception** of **your** reading coach for each statement. Respond using the following rating scale with the corresponding response choices:

Key:
1 = SD - Strongly Disagree
2 = D - Disagree
3 = N -   Neutral
4 = A -   Agree
5= SA - Strongly Agree

1.	The reading coach effectively analyzes student data to make instructional decisions regarding reading.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	The reading coach effectively collaborates and plans with teachers on a weekly basis to help improve student achievement in reading	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The reading coach works with struggling readers on a consistent basis.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The reading coach is a facilitator of the teaching and learning process.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The reading coach is well received as instructional support by my teachers	1	2	3	4	5
6.	The reading coach is knowledgeable of the school's reading program.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The reading coach helps teachers to establish the routines and procedures needed to teach reading effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The reading coach effectively demonstrates instructional practices (model lessons) for classroom teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The reading coach is skillful at helping teachers reflect on their instructional practices.	1	2	3	4	5

10.	The reading coach effectively observes reading instruction to determine teachers' instructional needs.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	The reading coach provides effective feedback to teachers regarding their instructional practices.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	The reading coach meets with me on a regular basis help keep me knowledgeable and informed about the reading program at our school.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	The reading coach helps me to prepare for and facilitate grade level data meetings in an effective manner.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	The reading coach utilizes data to help our faculty identify professional development needs.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	The reading coach provides ongoing professional development based on scientifically based reading research.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The reading coach is concerned about the reading achievement of all students.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	The reading coach does an excellent job of promoting 100% literacy at our school.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Reading coaches are a critical part of the reading program at our school.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Reading coaches are essential to improve reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Reading coaches are needed to help increase student achievement in reading and assure success for all students.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX 2

Initial Contact Email

Dear _____

My name is Milanda Jackson Dean.   I am a doctoral student at Auburn University. I am also a reading coach in the Montgomery Public Schools district. I am contacting you because I am in the dissertation phase of my doctoral program. I am doing a research study on *"Principals' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Reading Coaches and the Need for Reading Coaches within Elementary Schools"*. The purpose of the study is to assess the views that elementary school principals have regarding the effectiveness of reading coaches at performing their day to day job responsibilities. This study will also assess whether or not elementary school principals view reading coaches as being an integral part of their school's faculty.   I have already received approval from the Office of Curriculum and Instruction to conduct the study. Your participation in the study will be greatly appreciated. Your participation is strictly voluntary.

An information letter, general information/demographic questionnaire, and a 20 item survey will be mailed to you at your school within the next three days. If you choose to participate, please complete the questionnaire and survey and return it in the included envelope. The survey will be completely anonymous. If you choose not to participate, please disregard the information.
If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at jacksmi@auburn.edu, milanda.jackson@mps.k12.al.us, or 334-271-9587.

Thank you in advance,
Milanda Jackson Dean

APPENDIX 3

Auburn University Institutional Review Board Participant Information Letter

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5221

Educational Foundations
Leadership and Technology
4036 Haley Center

Telephone: (334) 844-4460
Fax: (334) 844-3072

**(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP
WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)**

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled

**Principals' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Reading Coaches and the Need for Reading
Coaches within Elementary Schools"**

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to assess the views elementary school
principals have regarding reading coaches. This study is being conducted by Milanda Jackson,
under the supervision of Dr. Allen Dyal, professor at Auburn University Montgomery. I am
interested in learning if principals view reading coaches as being effective at performing their
day to day job responsibilities. I am also interested in learning whether or not elementary school
principals view reading coaches as being an integral part of their school's faculty.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are an elementary school principal who
has a reading coach on site at your school. As the primary researcher, I have chosen to survey
all 35 elementary school principals in the school district as the total population for my study.

If you decide to participate, you are asked to complete a demographic/general information
questionnaire and a 20 item survey. It should take about 10-15 minutes to complete the
questionnaire and survey. Once completed, please place the questionnaire and survey in the
provided stamped envelope. Seal the envelope and place it in the mail. To maintain your
anonymity, the researcher's name and address is written on the envelope as both the sender and
addressee.

I have received permission from the school district to send the questionnaire and survey to each
elementary school principal; however, your participation in completing the questionnaire and
survey is strictly voluntary. The results will be shared with the school district, but I assure you
that all of the data collected from you for my study will remain completely anonymous.

The results of the study may provide valuable insight to the school district. Participants may be
contributing to the improvement of the effectiveness of reading coaches. I cannot promise you
that you will receive any or all of the benefits described. As the primary investigator, I can
assure you that there will be no personal expenses incurred from this study.

Page 1 of 2

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Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill the educational requirements for the Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership: Administration and Supervision of the Curriculum, and for publication in professional journals, and/or presented at professional meetings, etc. You may withdraw from participation in this study at any time without penalty; however, after you have provided anonymous information, you will be unable to withdraw your data after participation since there will be no way to identify individual information.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or its Department of Educational Leadership or the Montgomery Public Schools Board of Education.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Milanda Jackson (334)-271-9587 at jacksmi@auburn.edu, milanda.jackson@mps.k12.al.us and/or Dr. Allen Dyal at adyal@aum.edu. I would like to take the time to graciously thank you for helping me with my study.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or email at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.
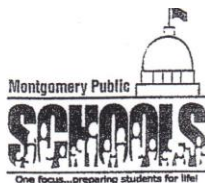
Milanda Jackson-Dean   4-8-09
Investigator's signature   Date

Milanda Jackson Dean
Print Name

The Auburn University
Institutional Review Board
has approved this document for use
from 2/6/09 to 2/5/10
Protocol # 09-024 EX 0902

APENDIX 4

Permission Letter from Participating School District

Montgomery Public

SCHOOLS

One focus....preparing students for life!

The Office of
Curriculum & Instruction
307 South Decatur Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36104
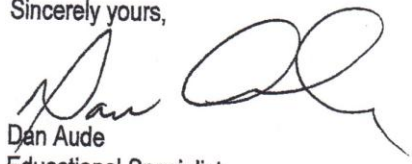334-223-6840

December 11, 2008

Milanda Jackson-Dean
7981 Norris Farms Road
Montgomery, Alabama 36116

Dear Mrs. Jackson-Dean:

The Review Committee for Research in the Montgomery Public School System has reviewed your proposal entitled "Principals' Perceptions of Reading Coaches" and has approved your proposal.

I appreciate your patience and look forward to you sharing the published results of your findings.

Sincerely yours,

Dan Aude
Educational Specialist

/kdp

APPENDIX 5

Permission to Use Graphic in Email from the Alabama Reading Initiative

From: Stone Judy [mailto:jstone@ALSDE.edu]

Sent: Thu 6/11/2009 9:57 AM

To: Dean, Milanda

Cc: Parris Sherrill

Subject: RE: permission to use ARI graphic in dissertation

Hello, Milanda,

We will be happy for you to use the coaching graphic (with permission statement below) in your dissertation. It does communicate the role of a reading coach nicely. We would be very interested in your research results. Thank you for sharing it with us.

Permission to use this graphic depicting "Roles of Reading Coaches" is granted by the Alabama Reading Initiative to Milanda Dean.

Judy

-----Original Message-----
From: Dean, Milanda [mailto:Milanda.Jackson@mps.k12.al.us]