How Three Schools View the Success of Literacy Coaching: Teachers', Principals' and Literacy Coaches' Perceived Indicators of Success

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HOW THREE SCHOOLS VIEW THE SUCCESS OF LITERACY COACHING: TEACHERS', PRINCIPALS' AND LITERACY COACHES' PERCEIVED INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Dr. Kristen Ferguson

──────── **Abstract** ────────

This paper investigates how the participants in literacy coaching (teachers, literacy coaches, and principals) perceive the success of their literacy coaching programs. This qualitative study uses data from interviews and observations of literacy coaching from three schools in Ontario, Canada. Four perceived indicators of success were found: growth in student achievement, improved teaching, an increase in professional dialogue in a safe environment, and a commitment to the literacy coach. While the study did not collect student data, the beliefs of teachers, literacy coaches, and principals are significant as perceptions of self and group efficacy can predict outcomes. This research suggests defining the success of literacy coaching is complex and recommends literacy coaching programs be evaluated using a variety of measures.

Introduction

Literacy coaches are educators who work with teachers to improve both teaching and student learning in literacy. Within the last decade, literacy coaching has become a popular form of professional development utilized in schools in Canada and the United States (Lynch & Alsop, 2007). But while popular, it has been noted by researchers and educators that the research supporting the use of coaching is limited (Askew & Carnell, 2011; Casey, 2006; Dole & Donaldson, 2006). There are only a handful of research studies that investigate whether coaching is successful and if, in fact, it has made an impact on teaching and learning. Defining successful literacy coaching is, of course, subjective. What is success in literacy coaching? Is success improved tests scores, a change in teaching practices, or other indicators? Who determines literacy coaching's success –teachers, principals, coaches, administrators, or the government? This paper is a part of a larger research study that also examined the relationships among the players in literacy coaching (Ferguson, 2011a) and the role of the coach (Ferguson, 2011b). This portion of the research seeks to reveal how the participants in literacy coaching (teachers, coaches, and principals) define and view success within their own literacy coaching programs. The research question guiding this paper is: how do principals, literacy coaches, and teachers view success in a literacy coaching program?

Indicators of Success in Literacy Coaching in the Literature

When reviewing the extant literature on literacy coaching, two main indicators of success emerge: increased student achievement and the changing of teaching practices.

Increased Student Achievement

There are many anecdotal accounts that describe the positive effects of literacy coaching on student achievement (e.g. Sturtevant, 2004; Walpole & McKenna, 2004) or research implies a relationship but does not make direct links between literacy coaching and student achievement (e.g. Lapp, Fisher, Flood, & Frey, 2003; Morgan et al., 2003; Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, & Schock, 2009). Some literature does directly explore the connection between literacy coaching and student achievement; however, the results of these studies are inconsistent. Booth Olson & Land (2008), Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2010), and Carlisle and Berebitsky's (2011) have found a positive connection between literacy coaching and student achievement. But the research of Cusumano, Armstrong, Cohen, and

Todd (2006), Feighan and Heeren (2009), and Marsh, McCombs, and Martorell (2012), report that literacy coaching had no effect on student achievement. These studies are briefly reviewed in the following section.

First, Booth Olson & Land (2008) used a quasi-experimental design to study secondary school literacy coaching in three school districts over three years in California. They found that students in classes whose teachers were supported by literacy coaching showed significant gains in writing achievement. Booth Olson & Land (2008) conclude that when literacy coaching is used in conjunction with professional development, it provides an initial boost to the effectiveness of writing instruction, and this boost is sustained in following years.

Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2010) investigated literacy coaching in the early primary grades (K-1) in one school district in the United States. Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2010) used hierarchal linear modeling and multiple regression modeling to study literacy coaching and its relationship to student reading achievement. The researchers found that in-class coaching activities, such as observation, are more likely to lead to increases student achievement than other coaching activities. While the study is limited to the effects of only 5 literacy coaches, the results of the impact of literacy coaching on student achievement are promising.

Carlisle and Berebitsky (2011) conducted a larger quasi-experimental study researching the impact of 21 literacy coaches on first grade students and teachers in Reading First schools across Michigan. The authors found that teachers who received literacy coaching were more likely to implement a literacy initiative than their peers who had not received coaching as professional development. Moreover, students in the classes of coached teachers showed greater improvement in word decoding than those students in classes whose teachers did not work with a coach. Carlisle and Berebitsky (2011) believe results should be interpreted with caution because the sample was relatively small and because the control and experimental groups could not be randomly assigned, due to the fact that literacy coaches were mandated in Reading First schools.

In Cusumano, Armstrong, Cohen, and Todd (2006) quantitative study, preschool teachers enrolled in a college level literacy skills course were organized into two groups: one group (N=10) received only professional development from the 15-week course on literacy, while the second group (N=12) received professional development from the same course as well as assistance from a literacy coach. Nineteen teacher-participants who were not enrolled in the course served as a comparison group. Overall, there was no significant evidence of coaching increasing children's literacy skills. Cusumano et al. note that one of the

limitations of the study is that data were collected over a short period of time (4 to 5 weeks) and this might not be enough time for coaching to have an impact on literacy skills. The sample for the study was also small and the authors do not describe who the literacy coach was, what his or her qualifications were, the characteristics of the coaching sessions, or the coaching model used.

Feighan and Heeren (2009) researched literacy coaching using a quasi-experimental study design over a two-year period. They found that teachers supported by a literacy coach implemented specific strategies more than the control group who did not have coaching support. In addition, teacher surveys and focus groups revealed that teachers felt that literacy coaching was beneficial and had positive views about the coaches in their schools. Despite these positive perceptions, literacy coaching was found to have no significant impact on student test scores. The study is also limited by the sample being only one school district and involving only six literacy coaches.

Finally, Marsh, McCombs, and Martorell (2012) conducted a study in Florida about middle school literacy coaching in 113 schools in eight school districts. Using surveys, case study visits, and mandated state literacy tests, Marsh, McCombs, and Martorell (2012) found that teacher and principal perceptions of coach quality were not related to student reading achievement. The literacy coaches' qualifications, knowledge, and experience did not result in increased student achievement; in fact, a literacy coach's years of experience had a small negative correlation to student achievement. The authors note that the study is limited by the fact that the student achievement data only represented one year and did not measure the impact of literacy coaching over time.

Changing Teaching Practices

Another indicator of success in literacy coaching is evident in the literature is that literacy coaching has the potential to change teaching practices. With the exception of the research of Poglinco et al. (2003), these studies are limited by their small sample sizes. However, these research studies are significant as they provide detailed descriptions of literacy coaching in real contexts and are thus reviewed below.

Eighteen teachers and two literacy coaches participated in a study by Swafford, Maltsberger, Button, and Furgerson (1997) about the implementation of a literacy framework using peer coaching. Data were collected through interviews, reflections, videotapes and audiotapes of lessons, and conferences. While there were differences among individual teachers, Swafford et al. found that teachers

were able to make procedural changes, affective changes, and reflective changes in their teaching practice with coaching.

In a qualitative case study at the high school level conducted by Hays and Harris (2003), two science teachers successfully integrated language instruction in their science programs with the assistance of a literacy coach. Both teachers stated that they would have not implemented the writing strategies into their teaching without the literacy coach.

In Ohio, Kinnucan-Welsch et al. (2006) report on a state-wide professional development program that used group professional development sessions for teachers as well as in-class literacy coaching. Six literacy specialists (who acted as coaches) and 11 classroom teachers volunteered to participate in a more extensive aspect of the project, wherein classroom teachers teach and audio record, and then transcribe three lessons with the same instructional focus (Kinnucan-Welsch et al., 2006). After each lesson, the teacher and the coach met for a debriefing session where the coach "scaffolded for intentional shifts in teaching" (p. 431). In one example, a teacher wanted to improve the oral language of her first-grade students and collaboratively planned with the literacy coach, teaching, learning, and assessment strategies. An analysis of student work from these lessons showed an improvement in many aspects of oral language, including an increase in the number of descriptive words, multisyllabic words, and sentences.

Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, and Schock, (2009) studied coaching conversations between literacy coaches and teachers in four schools in Minnesota. The researchers shadowed coaches and transcribed conversations between literacy coaches and teachers. They report that reflective coaching, where literacy coaches coach teachers to become more reflective about their practices, helps teachers change their classroom instruction.

Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) used a quantitative quasi-experimental design to compare the implementation of a specific literacy initiative. The participants were 93 teachers from nine elementary schools who were assigned one of four professional development models to learn and implement a specific literacy strategy: a workshop; a workshop plus modeling; a workshop, modeling, and practice; and a workshop, modeling, practice, and coaching. Tschannen-Moran and McMaster conclude that the implementation of the literacy initiative was significantly higher with literacy coaching than with the other forms of professional development.

Finally, Poglinco et al. (2003) studied 27 schools across the United States using observations and interviews, they found that with literacy coaching, 62% of

teachers were able to implement an America's Choice literacy initiative with fidelity in their classrooms by the end of the first year. The researchers also report a significant correlation (r = 0.75) between the teachers' fidelity in the implementation of the innovation with the literacy coach's fidelity. Thus, the implementation and the teachers' ability to transfer new learning into the classroom are linked to the coaches' ability.

Perceptions of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a person's judgment regarding his/her capability to perform a specific task (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is a key element in performance and success because, according to Bandura (1986), "what people, think, believe, and feel, affects how they behave" (p. 25). Those individuals who have a positive sense of self-efficacy will be more likely to perform a task successfully. The link between teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy and student achievement has been documented in the research (e.g. Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Ashton & Webb, 1986). Bandura (2001) also writes, "to be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions" (p. 1). This sense of agency is not only individualistic, but can also be collective. The concept of collective agency is important in a school setting because educators may work together with shared and common beliefs (Bandura, 2000), and how a group perceives itself may impact the group's outcomes. The collective self-efficacy of teachers in a school has been shown to have a positive impact on both student achievement (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2000) and school-level achievement (Bandura, 1993). In addition, teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy are linked; according to the research of Goddard & Goddard (2001), collective efficacy is both a significant and positive predictor of teacher self-efficacy. In essence, if the group has positive perceptions of its capabilities, this will predict if an individual teacher has positive perceptions of his/her abilities.

There has been some research exploring the effects of coaching on teacher self-efficacy. First, in a small study of three secondary school teachers, Allan's (2007) qualitative case-study research indicates that coaching helped teachers become more skilled and confident leading to an increase in teachers' perceptions of personal effectiveness. Cantrell and Hughes (2008) studied 22 sixth and ninth grade teachers from eight schools in one state to explore the effects of a year-long professional development program. Using efficacy surveys, classroom observations, and interviews, Cantrell and Hughes (2008) report increases in personal and general perceptions of self-efficacy in literacy instruction from

professional development that included literacy coaching. They also found that professional development supported by literacy coaching increased teachers' sense of collective teaching efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and McMaster's (2009) study (previously summarized in the section about literacy coaching and its impact on changing teaching practices) also reports on self-efficacy and professional development. Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) found that literacy coaching has the strongest impact on teacher self-efficacy of reading instruction over other methods of professional development, including traditional workshops, demonstrations, and practice. In addition, pre- and post-tests of teacher self-efficacy demonstrate that self-efficacy of reading instruction actually decreased after some other non-coaching professional development strategies. While limited by its small size, Hoffman's (2009) work produced contrasting results to the research of Allen (2007), Cantrell and Hughes (2008), and Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009). Using a mixed methods approach in one elementary school, the teachers in Hoffman's (2009) study reported self-efficacy was a result of supportive relationships inside and outside of school, risk-taking ability, and their personal motivation for change. While teachers appreciated and valued the literacy-coaching role, coaching did not support or increase teacher perceptions of self-efficacy.

The seminal work of Ross (1992) adds to this discussion on coaching, self-efficacy, and student achievement. Ross (1992) conducted a mixed-methods study with 18 history teachers, 36 classes, and six history coaches in one school district in Ontario, Canada. The author found that student achievement was higher in classes whose teachers interacted more extensively with the coach. In addition, student achievement was higher when teachers had high perceptions self-efficacy. While Ross'(1992) study is relatively small and is not a controlled experiment, it makes a significant contribution to the research between coaching, student achievement, and teacher self-efficacy.

Methods

Qualitative research methods were used to answer the research question: how do principals, literacy coaches, and teachers view success in a literacy coaching program? I used a multi-case study to explore literacy coaching programs in three different schools (Yin, 2003). To collect data about the feelings, attitudes, and experiences of the participants, and to provide a retrospective on the coaching experience, I interviewed teachers, literacy coaches, and principals (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gay & Airasian, 2000). I observed literacy coaches to see coaching

in practice and collected the documents and artifacts used during coaching sessions. The data used to answer the research question were acquired mainly from interviews; however, the information from observations, documents, and artifacts, support the data from interviews through triangulation (Patton, 1990). I previously had been a teacher with this school district, and this familiarity with some of the participants and the school district helped me gain entry into the field. This rapport also helped in setting the participants at ease during observations and interviews (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998).

Participants and Data Sources

The Ontario school district that participated in the study was in its third year of implementing literacy coaching. The three district level literacy coaches were asked to nominate three elementary schools with exemplary literacy coaching programs. Reputational sampling to identify educational contexts that are exemplary is a method used previously by literacy researchers (e.g. Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald, Pressely, & Hampston, 1998). Following the methodology of Pressely et al. (2001), specific criteria for nominations were left to the nominators (the district literacy coaches) but I suggested that they use a variety of indices in making their nominations, including their personal knowledge of the literacy coaching programs, feedback from teachers, literacy coaches, and principals, and student achievement. The rationale for selecting schools nominated as exemplary was not to evaluate exemplary literacy coaching practices, but rather to select literacy coaching programs which are well developed and established thereby providing rich data. I contacted and visited the three schools, literacy coaches, teachers, and principals. All three schools were willing to participate in the study. Because the school district had been focusing on literacy coaching at the primarily level, the district requested that only primary teachers (kindergarten to grade 3) be a part of the study.

School A had a population of 220 pupils, five primary teachers (including the literacy coach), a fulltime principal, and a part-time literacy coach who also taught at the primary level. Similar to School A, School B also had a literacy coach who worked part-time as a teacher and part-time as a coach. School B had a population of 221 pupils, five primary teachers (including the literacy coach), and a fulltime principal. Before assuming the role of coaches, both literacy coaches at School A and B had been classroom teachers at their respective schools for several years. School C was one of the largest schools in the district (475 pupils), had a principal and vice principal, eleven primary teachers, and a literacy

coach who worked part-time as a school coach and part-time as a district literacy coach (this coach had no classroom duties). All three literacy coaches were female. School A and B's coaches were in their first year of being a literacy coach, while School C's coach had been a literacy coach for three years. School B and C's coaches possessed reading specialist qualifications, while School A's coach had no specialist qualifications in literacy.

In each school, the literacy coach, principals, and primary teachers were interviewed, for a total of 27 structured interviews. During the interviews, participants were asked, as a teacher/literacy coach/principal, "how do you view success in the literacy coaching program?" and "what makes for an effective literacy coaching program?" Interviews lasted from a half an hour to three hours in length and were either audio recorded or I took notes, depending on the participant's preference. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience and took place where they requested, often in their classrooms or in the library.

In order to gain a deep insight into literacy coaching, I also shadowed the three coaches over an eight-week period, totaling over 110 hours of observation. School A's coach was observed for 27.48 hours, School B's for 31.41 hours, and School C's for 51.70 hours. I observed coaches during their scheduled coaching time, took detailed field notes, and also kept a researcher's journal. I observed coaches working one-on-one with teachers, planning and participating in professional learning communities, organizing resources, and maintaining student achievement data. For further detail and discussion on the roles of the literacy coaches, see Ferguson (2011b). During observations, I took the role of observer-as-participant, meaning I identified myself as a researcher and used my judgment about when to participate in activities (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). By the end of the eight-week observation period, data collected reached saturation, as observations were repetitive and yielded no new data (Flick, 2006). Occasionally, literacy coaches also participated in informal unstructured interviews which were spontaneous conversations between the coach and me with the purpose of clarifying or expanding on what I was observing.

Data Analysis

The interviews with teachers, coaches, and principals proved to generate much rich data about the perceptions of success in literacy coaching, and the observation field notes provided data complementary to the interviews. I transcribed all interviews and observation notes into a word processing program. To make meaning of the data, I used the data analysis strategy outlined by Bogden

and Biklen (1998). By reading through transcripts and making notes in the margins, I color-coded in order to group emerging broad themes together. I then made a list of preliminary categories based on these broad themes created subcategories. Then each piece of data was numbered and placed under the appropriate numbered category. Category 8 was entitled "Perceptions of Success." An example of a subcategory is 8.2, and it was labeled "Perceptions of Student Growth." This subcategory contained all data that was collected related to student achievement. I reread and sorted the numbered data an additional five times, collapsing some categories and subcategories and recoding some pieces of data. During this extensive process, I sorted and coded using a constant comparative method (Gay & Airasian, 2000), continually comparing data and considering multiple interpretations and meanings.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

As the sole researcher and the main instrument in qualitative research (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990), I tried to limit researcher bias. I tried to be as consciously aware as possible of my personal biases and subjectivity and how it was impacting my study (Peshkin, 1988). I kept detailed descriptive field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) and in my notes, I recorded both descriptions of observations as well as personal thoughts, feelings, and reactions, which were coded as observer comments (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gay, 1996). By keeping a researcher's journal, I was able to explore my subjectivity, feelings, reactions, and judgments about the data as well as my role as researcher (Peshkin, 1988). While complete neutrality is impossible, I did my best to retain a neutral, nonjudgmental position towards whatever themes, content, or conclusions emerged during the coding and data analysis (Patton, 1990). I believe observer effects (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990) and social desirability bias (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1988) were lessened due to my previously established relationships with the participants in the study.

In order to corroborate the data during data analysis, I used triangulation of different data sources (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) to allow for a crosschecking of data (Gay, 1996; Patton, 1990). During data analysis, I also used a constant comparative method (Gay & Airasian, 2000), continually comparing data. I also used member checking (Merriam, 1988) by using informal interviews to corroborate what I saw during observations and to test conclusions with participants.

Results

I found four themes that the players in literacy coaching programs viewed as indicators of success. These indicators are: 1) a perception of growth in student achievement, 2) a perception of improved teaching, 3) an increase in professional dialogue in a safe environment, and 4) a commitment to the literacy coach. Each of these themes will be discussed in detail in the following section.

Perception of Growth in Student Achievement

Teachers, literacy coaches, and principals believed that student learning and achievement had improved with literacy coaching, and student success was gauged in a variety of ways. One method was experiential, with teachers sharing various stories about how student achievement had improved. One teacher stated, "I have seen in this school so many kids succeed," and "I could swear it's because of this program [literacy coaching]." Teachers linked student success directly to successful literacy coaching: "the sign of a truly good literacy coach is that all the classes are thriving," and "if we did not have a literacy coach . . . we would not have moved as far along the spectrum as we have, and I think [we] moved more easily and more quickly because of the literacy coach." This perceived increase in student achievement became an incentive to change teaching practices. One teacher reflected that "we were really thrilled with the results. So it was an easy sell for us."

Another indicator teachers used to gauge student achievement was each student's DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment, Beaver, 2001) or GB+[1] (Groupe Beauchemin, 2002) scores, which were tracked on the school assessment walls. One literacy coach was proud as she explained, "I see such huge growth in student achievement based on our DRA assessment wall and our board [district] literacy assessment data, and I listen to the success stories that teachers share about their students; that's a major indicator of success." During one interview, a teacher told me the evidence of student achievement was clear. He pointed to the tracking wall and said, "Look at the assessment wall and see 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, white cards up there for JKs [junior kindergarteners] reading for level C, B, and A when you know 3 years ago these kids weren't even tracked on the wall until May/June in SK [senior kindergarten]."

[1] GB+ is a French reading assessment similar to DRA. French Immersion teachers used GB+ to assess student reading and regular English classrooms used DRA. Each student's DRA or GB+ score was tracked on a large bulletin board called an assessment wall.

However, it is also significant that the results of the Education Quality and Accountability test, the Ontario provincial large-scale assessment (commonly referred to as the EQAO test), were seldom mentioned during interviews as an indicator of student success. One teacher explained, "I don't think you can just look at the stats, what the tests have done," and went on to tell me that success in literacy should be viewed more broadly. Another thought it might be interesting to examine EQAO tests in the future: "See it in a few years to see if it actually helps, or see what it does." During an interview with a principal, I asked if there had been an improvement in the school's EQAO results, and the principal replied, "Yes, on everything. Everything because we do DRA, GB+, we do Gates-MacGinitie, Canadian Test of Basic Skills, EQAO, all kinds of those standardized tests." The principal, however, was more interested in describing the visible success of teachers adopting the initiatives and seeing visible changes in teaching practices as indicators of success.

Perception of Improved Teaching

Another perceived indicator of the success of literacy coaching was the fact that teachers and principals believed that teachers' literacy knowledge had increased and the quality of teaching had improved with literacy coaching. Before literacy coaching, one teacher said, "we didn't nearly have the background we have now, thanks to the literacy coaches we had." A teacher at another school had a very similar experience. She told me, "I would say thanks to the literacy coach that we're all fairly comfortable with literacy now." Teachers also felt that their teaching had improved with literacy coaching. One teacher stated, "I find my teaching is more effective, the strategies I'm presenting are that much better." Teachers often explained this idea of improved teaching by using phrases related to teaching being raised: "We've brought our level of teaching up," "high expectations . . . if you put them up there, they respond," and "the kids raise up."

Seeing the literacy initiatives being implemented in classrooms was also viewed by teachers, literacy coaches, and principals as an indicator that literacy coaching was successful and that teaching had improved. One teacher stated that "the ultimate test" to measure the success of literacy coaching was to "go walk around the school and you can see that there is evidence" of the initiatives being taught in classrooms. A coach reinforced this idea, telling me, "I do see a difference in the classroom environments, the quality of work displayed, and the quality of assessments given to students." Principals also mentioned that seeing the initiatives being used in classrooms was an indication that teaching is improving.

For instance, a principal stated, "I do see changes in teaching," and when I asked how, the principal responded by saying, "seeing visible changes in classrooms when I do my walkthroughs."

Increased Professional Dialogue in a Safe Environment

Another perceived indicator of success was an increase in professional dialogue amongst teachers. With the literacy coaching program, one teacher said, "I think teachers are more likely to talk to each other." My observations also confirmed that there was supportive professional dialogue in these schools. For instance, during a professional learning community, I observed teachers helping a veteran teacher, who had over thirty years of experience, by talking her though a specific student concern and offering her practical strategies to try. Later, during my interview with this experienced teacher, she explained how pleased she was with the discussion at the professional learning community, but it had taken three years for the staff to feel comfortable enough to have that kind of dialogue. When I asked her if the suggestions from the staff were useful, she responded, "Oh man, yes! Yes. I'm meeting with the parents soon. Extremely helpful." This sharing of ideas was helpful for most teachers, especially newer teachers who wanted advice from their peers; one new teacher explained,

> It was really, really nice to have this group of teachers because they were so willing to share ideas. And it made it so much easier for me as a new teacher, who only had like a handful of ideas. It [literacy coaching] really does open up the environment, and the classroom, and the school.

One coach shared with me how professional dialogue has evolved at her school and how it has impacted teacher self-efficacy:

> I think they [teachers]. . . recognize their worth as teachers more so. You know that belief that teachers make a difference, I think they feel that now; I think they feel that. And I think they have come together and recognize that their doors have to be open and that they can go to each other and that they can share an issue that they're having with a student and that there will be some recommendations that they can bring forward that are worthwhile and it's not a critical piece at all.

We went on to discuss how literacy coaching helped to break teacher isolation; the coach shared this story with me:

> I remember reading once about this little scenario where they talked about how teachers have all these gold nuggets and how we never want to share them. I'm sure I've been guilty of that myself. You know, wow, this is really working, makes me look good, do I want to share that? You know? And I remember bringing that up, and you could almost see this like, as if I'm going to share mine! But I think over the last 3 years, that has really, really changed.

In order for this sharing to occur, teachers need an environment that is safe and "supportive so you don't feel threatened." For instance, one teacher told me, "I have no problem saying this isn't working for me. Or where do I go next? Or help me out here!" She explained further: "Never once has anyone looked down at me and said, oh my god, she's a bad teacher or what is she doing in this role." But building this type of safe environment takes time. She said, "Like, in the first year, everyone sort of sat back, and it was intense. You sort of didn't know what to say or when to say it and how people would take it, because you didn't really know the people well."

As reported in Ferguson (2011a), teachers, principals, and coaches in this study expressed strong feelings of being a "team" and working as a collective. Working with the coach, said one teacher, made the teachers "rally together" All three literacy coaches were proud of the sense of "team" created in their schools. As one coach said, "We've always maintained that we can do any of it together. . . Nobody gets left behind" (Ferguson, 2011a, p. 261).

Commitment to the Literacy Coach

Another perceived indicator of the success of the literacy coaching program was that the teachers in all three schools supported the literacy coach and her work. Every teacher interviewed stated that, overall, literacy coaching had been a positive experience. Teachers also had positive things to say about the literacy coaches; the coach "is doing an awesome job," and they were "fabulous," "great," "amazing," and "outstanding." Even though two of the three literacy coaches were new to the coaching role that year, teachers and principals were still committed to the coaching program and felt that the coaches were performing very well in their roles. Literacy coaches also felt that the support from the teachers was an indicator of success. One coach reflected, "Success could be measured when I have the teachers coming to visit me, too." She continued, "I'm not having to hunt them down necessarily, they just come to me. You know, which means the relationship has built."

When I asked participants how the literacy coaches themselves impacted the success of the literacy program, I was told by both teachers and principals that a literacy coach generally has to be "the right person" for the job. A principal stated, "it's the personality that makes it effective," and that "you need a personality that is going to get along well with staff, but yet still saying this is the way it is, but in a very non¬threatening, listening way." Teachers felt the same way. One teacher told me, "I think the major thing is the personality of the literacy coach. That's what I would say is the first and foremost of importance [to the success of literacy coaching]." Another teacher also felt strongly that her experience with literacy coaching was so positive because of the coach: "I don't know if it would be the same if the coach was a different personality. I find her very approachable and supportive."

The traits of a passion for literacy, dedication, positivity, approachability, flexibility, and humility were common to all three coaches. First, all three coaches were passionate about literacy and truly enjoyed teaching it. Teachers stated during interviews that the coaches were excited about literacy and this passion was almost contagious. The three literacy coaches were also dedicated to their jobs as coaches. During the study, it was a common occurrence to observe literacy coaches missing lunch and breaks to meet with teachers. One teacher told me, "Their time is always our time. They don't sort of say, well this is my lunch, go away or anything. They're there anytime you need them." During interviews, teachers also often made reference to literacy coaches being positive and approachable and said that these are important traits for successful literacy coaching. One teacher explained, "I'm very comfortable going to her. I don't feel dumb. She puts me at ease. It's been very positive. Couldn't ask for a better coach. Right from the get-go, it was great." Another teacher reiterated this idea when she said, the coach is "very approachable, and every time you get constructive criticism, it feels constructive. It feels like, oh yeah, that's a great idea! Not like, oh, I'm doing something terribly wrong. It really makes it easy to go to the coach." The three coaches were also flexible. Several times during my observations, teachers asked literacy coaches to reschedule just before a meeting or would ask for an impromptu meeting with the literacy coach on the spot. The literacy coaches understood how busy teachers are and how teachers often have issues that they need assistance with right away.

When I spoke with literacy coaches about the success of the coaching program, all three coaches were humble and hesitant to take any credit for the program's perceived success. One teacher explained that their coach is so focused

on making the program work that she doesn't realize what she has contributed. This teacher stated, "you [the literacy coach] believe in what you're doing and just work hard at doing it. You don't really realize [it], [but] the people are around you realize." During my interview with one coach, she thought that being part of this study allowed her to reflect on how she has contributed to the success of the coaching program: "having you sit in here with us, just talking in general, I feel good about what we've done, I feel good. I didn't have a whole lot of faith in myself being able to carry out this job before.

Discussion

The literature states that it is difficult to isolate the efficacy of literacy coaching from other literacy initiatives that are simultaneously going on with coaching (Bean, cited in Literacy Coaching, 2007; Lapp et al., 2003; Morgan et al., 2003). Moreover, defining successful literacy coaching can result in multiple interpretations of success. However, to add to the literature on the success of literacy coaching, I examined what the participants' in literacy coaching believed to be indicators of success. Teachers, literacy coaches, and principals believed increased student achievement, improved teaching, increased professional dialogue in a safe environment, and a commitment to the literacy coach were indicators of the success of the literacy coaching program.

Analysis of student achievement data was not within the scope of this research study, but the perception of increased student achievement was found to be an indicator of the success of literacy coaching. The literacy coach indirectly worked with students to improve achievement. As one teacher explained, "It's a chain; the literacy coach helps me, then I help the kids." Working with teachers to change teaching practices had a perceived trickle-down effect, which, in turn, was perceived to lead to student achievement. This corroborates other published literature that finds that teachers, coaches, and principals believe that literacy coaching has a positive impact on student achievement (Feighan & Heeren, 2009; Sturtevant, 2004; Stekel, 2009; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Teachers, literacy coaches, and principals also believed that tests scores such as DRA and GB+ also increased, a finding supporting the quantitative research of Booth Olson and Land (2008) and Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2010) that literacy coaching can improve literacy test scores. It is significant to note that the results of provincial large-scale assessments were not generally viewed as an indicator of literacy coaching success. Instead, participants relied on student data obtained by classroom teachers, such as DRA, GB+. Research indicates the importance of using a variety of student

outcomes, not just standardized tests, when looking at the efficacy of professional development (Hawley & Valli, 2000). It is also important to consider that because literacy coaching was in its third year during the study, it likely took time for schools to see this student growth. As Cusumano, Armstrong, Cohen, and Todd (2006) and Feighan and Heeren (2009) suggest, literacy coaching may take a significant amount of time to impact student achievement. The three schools in the study may not have had such positive perceptions of student achievement in years past.

A perception of improved teaching was another indicator of success found in the study. A number of teachers explained that literacy coaching had increased their content knowledge in literacy. This supports the existing research indicating that teachers can acquire new knowledge about teaching literacy from the literacy coaching experience (Hays & Harris, 2003; Swafford et al., 1997). Another indicator of success related to improved teaching from coaching programs included the implementation of the literacy initiatives in the classrooms. Teachers frequently referred to the visible "evidence" of the new initiatives that they were implementing. This supports the previous literature that literacy coaching can change teaching practices (Hays & Harris, 2003; Kinnucan-Welsch, Rosemary, & Grogan, 2006; Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, & Schock, 2009; Poglinco et al., 2003; Swafford, Maltsberger, Button, & Furgerson, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Teachers in the study felt more confident about teaching literacy, believed that they were teaching better, and that their teaching ability had been "raised up."

Literacy coaching was also perceived to increase dialogue among teachers, and this also helped improve their practice. Teachers, literacy coaches, and principals felt that coaching helped make schools a more open environment by breaking the isolation of teaching; as one coach told me, "those silos are coming down." Teachers in the study often shared their best practices, supported one another with student concerns, and helped one another with teaching strategies. This new sense of team resulting from literacy coaching was also found by Symonds (2003), who reported that this collegiality helps change teaching practices, and by Steckel (2009,) who found that literacy coaching helps break teacher isolation and provides a safe environment for collaboration and risk-taking. While the effect of breaking teacher isolation and creating a team environment is discussed in the literature as a benefit of literacy coaching, it has not yet before been presented as a perceived indicator of successful coaching.

Teachers and principals also highly credited the literacy coaches themselves as a key component to the success of literacy coaching in their schools. Character traits, such as a passion for literacy, humility, positivity, and flexibility were considered crucial for a literacy coach in order for coaching to be successful. These traits helped the teachers trust the coach, and thus, they were willing and eager participants in literacy coaching. There has been other literature written about the characteristics of coaches needed for effective coaching (e.g. Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008/2009; Poglico et al, 2003) and resistance towards literacy coaching (Dole & Donaldson, 2006; Ferguson, 2011a; Morgan et al., 2003). The coaches in this study have a trusting relationship with teachers and there was little teacher resistance towards working with the coach (for a full discussion of resistance in the study, see Ferguson, 2011a). This study finds that the participants in literacy coaching believe that teachers voluntarily utilizing the coach and teachers valuing the coach and her work were indicators of success of coaching. This commitment to literacy coaching is an indicator of success not previously mentioned in the literature.

While Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) caution against relying on perceptions and self-reports of literacy coaching efficacy, self-efficacy is an important construct that influences actions (Bandura, 1986). Teachers, principals, and literacy coaches in the study believed that their teaching and student learning had improved with literacy coaching. The participants felt self-efficacious in their ability to teach literacy due to the literacy coaching program, a finding also reported by Ross (1992), Allan (2007), Cantrell and Hughes (2008), and Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009). The participants believed that they had improved their ability to teach, thus increasing student achievement. While this study did not collect student achievement data, the teachers, coaches, and principals did use assessments such as classroom observations and DRA and GB+ scores as measures of achievement. Increases in student achievement and its relationship to teacher self-efficacy have also been documented by Anderson, Greene, and Loewen (1988) and Ashton and Webb, (1986). The three schools in the study also appear to have a positive sense of collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000). During interviews and observations, the three schools had a definite sense of team and each school had a feeling of a safe, supportive environment for educators. Teachers, coaches, and principals often referred to themselves as a team, reiterating that "we can do any of it together." Literacy coaches helped teachers open up to engage in more discussions and professional dialogue. This new professional dialogue combined with successful student achievement, I argue, created a sense of group agency.

Self-efficacy is an important factor in each of the indicators of success found in this study. Teachers believed their teaching was better than before and that they were more effective because they saw success with students. To quote one teacher, literacy coaching "was an easy sell for us" and as one coach said, teachers "recognize their worth as teachers more now" and believe that "teachers make a difference." Being a part of this study even helped some of the participants reflect on their self-efficacy, realizing that they "feel good about what we've done." Teachers felt that they were a team, working together to better student achievement. Because of this self and group sense of efficacy, I argue that teachers developed a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to the coach and to literacy coaching. Teachers and principals truly believed that the coach herself was a key component to the success of literacy coaching in these three schools.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research and Practice

Due to the small size of the study, the results should be generalized with caution. This study also took place in one school district in Ontario and thus is limited by the characteristics of the school district and the participants. The study is also limited by the use of reputational sampling, as the schools in this study were nominated as having exemplary literacy coaching programs. It is plausible that there could be different perceptions of success in schools where coaching was not deemed as successful.

The sample for the study also has limitations. For instance, in two of the three schools in the study, the literacy coaches were new coaches and prior to their roles as coaches, they were established classroom teachers in their respective schools. These previously established relationships, while beneficial for gaining trust within a coaching relationship, might have impacted teacher and principal perceptions about the coaching program. Teachers and principals may be committed to the coach as an individual and as a colleague more so than as a coach. Also, over the three years that the school district had been implementing coaching, the individuals acting as literacy coaches in these three schools have changed. It is plausible that perceptions of literacy coaching and its success could vary significantly year to year, depending on the individual coach. However, despite these variables, all participants felt committed to the literacy coach and the coaching program.

Another limitation is that this research does not examine student achievement data, but instead focuses on perceptions of teaching and learning. It

is plausible that even though teachers perceive increases in student achievement, these increases may not be statistically significant, as was found by Cusumano, Armstrong, Cohen, and Todd (2006), Feighan and Heeren (2009), and Marsh, McCombs and Martorell (2012). The study is also limited because I did not observe teachers in the classroom, and changes in teaching practices are limited to the reports of teachers, principals, and literacy coaches. Moreover, the subjective nature of defining success may make comparing perceptions of success problematic. What one school context perceives as an indicator of success may not be perceived as an indicator of success in another context; thus, duplicating this study or generalizing the results are challenging.

More studies in different contexts are needed to expand our knowledge of successful literacy coaching. Further research investigating the relationships among literacy coaching, teacher self-efficacy, collective-efficacy, and student achievement would be beneficial. Studying self and collective efficacy longitudinally would also add to the literature on how literacy coaching develops over time. Finally, I urge educators, researchers, administrators, and government officials to measure the efficacy of coaching programs and decide future of literacy coaching in their schools using a variety of measures. Relying solely on student achievement data, such as provincial or state standardized tests, may not provide an accurate or complete picture of coaching, teaching, and student learning (Hawley & Valli, 2000). As described in this study, there are other methods that can be used to reflect on whether coaching has made an impact, including teacher-collected student achievement data (such as DRA and GB+) and teacher, coach, and principal feedback.

Conclusion

The research question guiding this research was: How do principals, literacy coaches, and teachers view success in a literacy coaching program? The participants in the three schools in the study viewed perceived increases in student learning, improved teaching practices, an increase in teacher dialogue, and a commitment to the literacy coach, as indicators of success. Teachers, literacy coaches, and principals also measured success using their perceptions of student achievement, teacher collected assessments, and observations of teachers implementing changes in teaching practices. These perceptions of improved teaching and learning are significant because according to Bandura (1997; 1993), perceptions of efficacy can be influential in determining outcomes. In addition, success in the study was viewed as more than just improved teaching and student learning. Teachers

sharing and collaborating with each other, teachers voluntarily using the literacy coach, and believing strongly in the value of literacy coaching were all perceived as evidence of the success of literacy coaching. These indicators of success cannot be measured using standardized tests. Defining success in literacy coaching is complex, multifaceted, and is also context specific. Literacy coaching is worthy of continuation in schools not only for its impact on teaching and learning, but for its impact on teachers and school culture. This paper fills a void in the current research on literacy coaching by giving the educators actually involved in literacy coaching a voice in determining the success of their literacy coaching programs and by stressing the need to evaluate the success of literacy coaching programs using a variety of measures.

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