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The Perspectives of Preschool Teachers on Instructional Coaching

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The Perspectives of Preschool Teachers on Instructional Coaching

By Melanie Smith Clough

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Leadership, School Counseling & Sport Management
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

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DEDICATION

*In Memory of Nona*

*xoxo*
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My heartfelt thanks to the faculty of the University of North Florida who have changed my life through the passion, rigor, and dedication contributed to the doctoral program.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers describe instructional coaching. Instructional coaching has become a leading form of professional development in educational settings, yet there is a lack of empirical evidence that explains and clarifies it. One aspect of instructional coaching that is not known is how teachers perceive it. In order to gain understanding about instructional coaching, the perspectives of the teachers could provide valuable insight to benefit those involved in the practice. Instructional coaching and the schools where coaching takes place are complex in nature. Through the use of one-on-one interviews, an in-depth look at teachers’ perspectives provided insight into some of these complexities. Fifteen teachers in six child care centers participated in this study.

Two qualitative strategies—inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) and educational criticism (Eisner, 1998)—were used to analyze interview data from which three themes were formed: (a) instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity, (b) instructional coaching requires a supportive environment, and (c) instructional coaching increases children’s learning opportunities. The themes are perspectives from which to view and understand instructional coaching in preschool classrooms.

One conclusion in this study was that all three themes were substantially supported by extant literature and empirical research. The implication for policy and practice is that instructional coaching is contingent upon change and change is difficult due to resistance by teachers and systemic issues. Five recommendations are highlighted in this study: (a) instructional coaches should demonstrate a high level of proficiency in educational knowledge and practice, (b) coaches should be involved in on-going professional development that includes communication training, (c) teacher supervisors should be involved in instructional coaching as
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ional leaders, (d) instructional coaching should be intentional, and (e) instructional coaching should have child learning as its primary focus.

Further research is needed to better understand the perspective of teachers in the field of early childhood education; the perspectives of instructional coaches in the field of early childhood education; and how to effectively involve teacher supervisors in the coaching process to develop teacher leaders and support them to assume the duties and responsibilities of highly effective instructional leaders who influence deep, sustained learning facilitated by problem-solving- and creativity-focused instruction.
CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

In recent years instructional coaching has become the prevalent form of professional development in education, yet not enough work has been done in the education research field concerning coaching (Gallucci, Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010; Knight, 2007; Trombly, 2012). Currently, instructional coaching is a professional development method used by the public school system as well as by child care resource and referral and training agencies throughout the United States and the federal Head Start Program. Because large monies are devoted to this endeavor, research is needed to determine the level of effectiveness coaching has on changing teacher behavior (Knight, 2011).

Researchers assert it is the quality of instructional experiences in preschool that have the greatest impact on school success (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). What still needs to be known is what impact instructional coaching has on preschool teachers, and further, what impact teachers who have received instructional coaching have on the quality of educational experiences of young children. This study examined instructional coaching, specifically, the perspective of teachers on instructional coaching.

Statement of the Problem

Instructional coaching has become a leading form of professional development in educational settings, yet there is a lack of empirical evidence on instructional coaching. What is not known is how teachers perceive instructional coaching. In order to gain understanding about
instructional coaching, the perspectives of the teachers can provide valuable insight to benefit those involved in the practice.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers describe instructional coaching. Instructional coaching and the schools where coaching takes place are complex in nature. Through the use of one-on-one interviews, an in-depth look at teachers’ perspectives provided insight into some of these complexities.

**The Research Questions**

This study sought answers to the following question: How do preschool teachers involved in instructional coaching perceive and describe coaching? The ancillary questions addressed: How do they describe the impact of instructional coaching on their work? What parts of instructional coaching do teachers describe as effective? What parts of instructional coaching do teachers describe as ineffective?

**Definition of Terms**

This study used several terms and concepts that warrant explanation. The definitions provided ensure a shared understanding of the terms as they are used throughout this study.

**Coaching v/s Mentoring** – Day (2001) offers a sensible distinction between coaching and mentoring, two terms that are often incorrectly used interchangeably. Day defines coaching as a “practical goal-focused form of one-on-one learning” (p. 590) with the targets for development being “self-knowledge, behavioral change, and career development” (p. 588). He defines mentoring as an “advising/developmental relationship, usually with a more senior manager” (p. 588) with development targets of “broader understanding, advancement catalyst,
and lessons learned/avoid mistakes” (p. 588). Coaching, rather than mentoring, is the method of professional development that was the focus of this study.

**Instructional Coaching** – For the purpose of this study, *instructional coaching* is defined as “a strategy that seeks to improve student achievement by enhancing teachers’ knowledge and skill, in both pedagogy and subject-area content, through job-embedded, ongoing professional development” (Trombly, 2012, p. 11).

**Preschool Teachers** – Preschool teachers are those who are employed to care for and educate children ages three to five years.

**Professional Development** – In the review of literature for this study, the terms *training* and *professional development* are often used interchangeably; however, for the purpose of this study instructional coaching is considered a form of *professional development*. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) identifies *professional development* as "a comprehensive, substantiated, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement" (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010, p. 14).

**Teacher Behaviors** – Throughout this study, the term *teacher behaviors* is defined according to guidelines by James Stronge (2007) as personality, classroom organization, planning for instruction, observation of student progress and capability, and professionalism.

**Theoretical Framework**

Instructional coaching is grounded in Vygotsky’s social learning theory that employs interactions in a natural setting to enhance understanding of both learners and coaches (Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). For preschool teachers, who are often isolated from other adults throughout the day, instructional coaching brings professional and personal interactions into the classroom and provides opportunities in the natural setting for
teachers to observe and to be observed, to engage in meaningful discussion within learning communities, and to solve school-related problems with the aid of knowledgeable and experienced professionals.

Second, according to Simon’s (2009) interpretation, the Gestalt theory of learning is an underlying principle of coaching in that growth and development are a direct result of contact between individuals and their environment. As explained by Simon, the contact between individuals and their environments inevitably results in change, and change is typically resisted unless there is trust in the resulting change. From that premise, Simon argued that Gestalt theory supports the need for building rapport and trust between teacher and coach that facilitates the teacher’s openness to learning. The bond between the coach and teacher in instructional coaching is formed and strengthened over time as they share knowledge and reflect on effective practices (Knight, 2006, 2007, 2011). As a result of that trust, the teacher is able to take risks and try new strategies, sometimes breaking long-held beliefs and practices.

Third, Day’s (2001) theory of leader versus leadership development plays a significant role in understanding coaching as a method of improving an individual’s skills and knowledge rather than that of the organization as a whole, with the obvious overall result of organizational improvement. The coaching aspect of the leader versus leadership theory is explained by three propositions, which are as follows:

(1) coaching effectiveness is enhanced to the degree that individuals are carefully selected for coaching, matched with a compatible coach, and willing to change, (2) the quality of an individual’s relationship with an organization is positively associated with the effectiveness of coaching for development for that individual, (3) coaching strengthens a recipient’s social capital, and (4) the use of implementation intentions as part of coaching increases the amount and extent of behavioral change observed. (Day, 2001)
Hence, instructional coaching, which focuses on the development of individual teachers, contributes to the improvement of the whole school as individuals become more confident and more willing to share ideas and strategies.

Finally, instructional coaching, according to Knight (2006, 2007, 2011), is more successful than traditional forms of professional development because it provides the support that teachers need to implement the learned strategies and practices. Knight’s (2007, 2011) coaching model for teachers is based on a partnership approach where collaboration between teacher and coach occurs through many conversations. His instructional coaching model, Partnership Learning, is based on seven key interactions between coach and teacher—equality, choice, voice, reflection, mutual learning, dialogue, and praxis (Knight, 2007, 2011). These interactions are used to engage teachers in incorporating research-based practices into their classrooms in four main areas: classroom management, content, instruction, and assessment of learning (Knight, 2006).

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the theoretical framework that guided this study. This graphic demonstrates the direct influence of Vygotsky’s social learning theory (Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007), Simon’s (2009) interpretation of the Gestalt theory, Day’s (2001) theory of leader versus leadership development, and Knight’s (2006, 2007, 2011) partnership coaching model on the practice of instructional coaching for teachers as a means of professional development that influences their interaction with children. Specifically, Vygotsky’s social learning theory supports interactions between coach and teacher in the natural setting of the classroom (Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). Being in the natural setting makes coaching more relevant to teachers and offers a comfortable place to practice new strategies. Simon’s (2009) interpretation
of the Gestalt learning theory supports the notion of rapport and trust building between coach and teacher through sustained interactions in the natural setting. According to Gestalt principles, the growth and development of the coachee is advanced through contact with the coach and awareness of self, which makes the teacher open to learning new practices (Simon, 2009). Day’s (2001) theory of leader versus leadership maintains that the building of skills and knowledge occurs through the process of coaching. This new knowledge acquired by teachers impacts the learning organization as a whole. And finally, Knight’s (2006, 2007, 2011) partnership coaching model asserts support and collaboration as a component of instructional coaching. Through the relationship and trust between coach and teacher, a supportive environment is provided that allows the teacher to try new things.
Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory (Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007)

Gestalt Learning Theory (Simon, 2009)

Day’s Theory of Leader versus Leadership Development (Day, 2001)

Knight’s Partnership Coaching Model (Knight, 2006, 2007, & 2011)

**Figure 1.** A theoretical framework of instructional coaching.
Methodology

This qualitative study used open-ended questions in interviews with preschool teachers to understand and represent the participants’ voice as knowledge. This study specifically employed in-depth interviewing of preschool teachers who have been coached by an instructional coach within the last two years. This approach gave voice to those who had experiences with coaching and provided insight into how they perceive coaching and its influence on their philosophies and practices.

Significance of the Study

Much effort in education is by trial and error (Akilli, 2011; Hagger, McIntyre, Wilkin, & Wilkin, 2013). Research could validate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of instructional coaching and may reveal the strengths and weaknesses of this practice. This research study is significant to the field of early childhood education, because it could advance understanding about the impact of instructional coaching in preschool classrooms by seeking understanding about the interactions between teachers and coaches, the knowledge gained, the benefits perceived, and the changes that occur. There may also be implications for future research and policy development, because coaching may be seen as a viable alternative to traditional forms of professional development for the advancement of preschool teachers in lieu of or in addition to their pursuit of higher education.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was delimited to those factors that were relevant to the study such as the number of preschool teachers who have participated in instructional coaching through the Guiding Stars of Duval (GSOD) program in Jacksonville, Florida and who volunteered to participate in the study. This study was also limited to instructional coaching and not mentoring.
or executive coaching. Furthermore, the study was limited to a qualitative in-depth interview design.

**Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made for the purpose of this study: a) preschool teachers are not always receptive to instructional coaching, b) preschool teachers realize value in some parts of instructional coaching, c) preschool teachers sometimes find instructional coaching to be overwhelming or requiring more work, and d) preschool teachers are candid in responding to semi-structured open-ended interviews.

**Summary and Organization of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to advance understanding about the effect of instructional coaching in preschool classrooms as perceived by the teachers who are coached. Instructional coaching has the potential to impact teacher behavior. This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides the background information and the purpose of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, and definitions of key terms as they relate to instructional coaching. Chapter Two provides an analysis of the secondary and primary literature related to the study. Chapter Three discusses the research context, the participants, and the procedures and methodology used in this study. Chapter Four offers the analysis of the study. Finally, Chapter Five provides a discussion of the results with recommendations for practice and future research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is a review of the literature on coaching as a means of professional development, coaching in education, and coaching for school reform. The chapter begins with an explanation of the search process, followed by a review of the literature, and concludes with an explanation of the trends and gaps, the conceptual framework, and a summary of the chapter. The three main categories of the literature review are coaching as professional development, instructional coaching in education, and instructional coaching for school reform.

Search Process

Extensive searches of multiple databases were used to identify theoretical and empirical literature related to instructional coaching, specifically Dissertations & Theses at University of North Florida (UNF); Dissertations & Theses; Education Full Text; ERIC; JSTOR; Google Scholar; and ProQuest Social Sciences. Several dissertations were reviewed to examine previous research and their findings on instructional coaching. Theoretical and empirical research articles were also evaluated to identify the most current empirical studies related to instructional coaching. Although there are numerous studies on coaching, there is a dearth of empirical evidence on instructional coaching.

Coaching as Professional Development

In order to maintain a competitive edge in the global marketplace, businesses designate critical training dollars in annual budgets for the purpose of providing new information, methods, and techniques to their workforces. Human resource personnel spend time and money planning
professional development and training activities and coordinating travel to conferences for their employees. American businesses spend in excess of $130 billion annually on employee development (Hagen, 2012).

In the 1990s, professional development took on a more profound meaning and became part of popular culture with the publication of Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 43; Senge, 1990). Senge’s notion of a *learning organization* was that of a vivacious, social unit where the synergy of individuals learning together results in a greater overall effect than if one learns in isolation (Merriam et al., 2007, pp. 43-44; Senge, 1990). Subsequently, the idea of lifelong *learning* took shape and was discussed in a 1996 publication, *Learning for All*, by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 47; Senge, 1990).

All forms of training, however, are not effective. Vygotsky’s theory of learning suggests social relationships are essential elements of understanding new information (Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). However, typical modes of professional development are one-day workshops or concurrent conference sessions where participants have mostly passive roles in the learning process (Knight, 2007; Kretlow, Wood, & Cooke, 2009; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). These traditional forms of training have been found to be mostly ineffective (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Knight, 2007; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rush & Young, 2011; Wei et al., 2010). On the other hand, learning through social interaction has been recognized as an attribute of effective professional development and training (Heineke, 2013; Knight, 2007; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Scott, Cortina, & Carlisle, 2012).
Vygotsky's theory of learning supports coaching as an alternative to traditional professional development and as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills for improving job performance (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). Coaching as a form of professional development and training offers learning that is fundamentally social and collaborative, with participants taking an active role in their own learning (Knight, 2007; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Scott et al., 2012). These on-the-job learning experiences are also an alternative to formal education for teachers to gain needed expertise to develop sound teaching practices (Barnett, 2004).

The term coach has deep historical roots nationally and internationally. Initially referring to one charged with training and leading an 1800s rowing crew, the term eventually came to represent any person responsible for helping athletes improve performance (Hagen, 2012). As early as the 1840s, the term coach was used in a broader sense to include one who better prepared learners to improve performance, such as an education tutor, a voice coach, a writing coach, or a professor as coach of a graduate student. By the 1900s the term also involved a salesperson who enhanced the profitability of a sales team (Hagen, 2012). Eventually, Mintzberg defined and promoted coaching as a catalyst for producing improved performance in employees in the general workforce (Hagen, 2012).

Initially, coaching was employed only for those considered deficient in some way. It was not until the 1980s that coaching became a training model used for the purpose of improving the overall organization; however, in many instances it is still used primarily to improve perceived deficiencies (Ellinger, 2008; Hagen, 2012). As the notion of coaching as a developmental practice became increasingly popular in the business world, definitions of the term appeared in numerous publications. These definitions share the concept of individualized guidance and
encouragement by means of some type of intervention process for the purpose of performance improvement through knowledge acquisition, as well as improved effectiveness through refined skills (Ellinger, 2008; Hagen, 2012; Hamlin, Ellinger, & Beattie, 2008; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010).

Even with its popularity as a means of improving the organization, coaching is often overlooked as a viable means of personal development. Merriam et al. (2007) published a comprehensive review of the literature on adult learning, but did not discuss their methods of selecting and identifying empirical studies; however, a substantial amount of empirical research was included in the extensive review. The intended audience for Learning in Adulthood was educators of adults; it was organized as a resource for practitioners and as a textbook for college education courses (Merriam et al., 2007, pp. ix-x). The authors cited numerous studies that showed the primary motivation for adult learners is job training (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 62). In a thorough discussion of Malcom Knowles’s theory of andragogy, teaching strategies for adult learners, the authors pointed to empirical research that indicated adult education must take into account adults’ need for self-direction and independence (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 85). However, the authors cited inconclusive results in studies which set out to determine whether achievement and satisfaction are impacted by the adult learner’s role in the planning of his or her own learning (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 90). Markedly missing from this review was any mention of coaching as a method of adult education. There was limited discussion on mentoring, but only as it relates to different learning theories.

Coaching in the business world evolved into two distinct domains, manager-as-coach and executive coaching (Hagen, 2012). Whereas the former involves a philosophical leadership style of a leader within an organization, the later involves the service of an outside professional
whose role is solely to improve performance of the one being coached (Hagen, 2012). Presently, coaching is an emerging industry in many countries, including the US, and is often specialized by profession (Hamlin et al., 2008).

**Instructional Coaching in Education**

One such specialized coach is the *instructional coach*. Instructional coaching is an enhanced form of professional development in that it provides intensive, individualized guidance to teachers for the purpose of implementing research-based, effective practices in the classroom in order to improve student achievement (Knight, 2007; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Skiffington, Thelning, Phillips, Lyon, & McDonald, 2010; Washburn, & Elliott, 2011; Wise & Hammack, 2011). Instructional coaching can take place on a wide spectrum of intensity, depending on the amount of time spent and the topics included (Rush & Young, 2011; Scott et al., 2012). Less intensive coaching involves relationship building and facilitating collaborative meetings, yet more intense coaching practice involves rapport building, demonstration lessons, observations, reflective feedback, assistance with lesson planning, environmental support, and customized one-on-one training (Gallucci et al., 2010; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Rush & Young, 2011; Skiffington, Washburn, & Elliott, 2011; Scott et al., 2012; Thelning et al., 2010; Wise & Hammack, 2011). Instructional coaches are often more specialized and focus solely on the area of literacy through the improvement of the teachers’ skills in the use of effective practices for teaching literacy (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Scott et al., 2012; Thelning et al., 2010; Wise & Hammack, 2011).

Some deem instructional coaching as a relatively new form of professional development for teachers (Kissel, Mraz, Algozinne, & Stover, 2011; Rush & Young, 2011). However, Lynn and Ferguson (2010) noted that although literacy coaching is fairly new to public education, *peer*
coaching, or mentoring, is not. The intentionality of instructional coaching marks the difference. There were calls for policy reform of professional development in the 1990s, because traditional workshops and trainings were shown to be ineffective in impacting practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Knight, 2007; Kretlow et al., 2009; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rush & Young, 2011). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 generated a focus on student achievement and teacher accountability (Heineke, 2013; Knight, 2007). This emphasis on outcomes presented a climate for more intensity in teachers’ professional development, specifically on improving the quality of their instruction (Knight, 2007). Reading First, a federal program focused on improving literacy, was a spawn of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Scott et al., 2012). Literacy coaches have been an integral part of the Reading First program in numerous states, as coaching for professional development meets federal guidelines for funding mandates (Scott et al., 2012). In 2004, the International Reading Association published its position and recommendations for literacy coaches (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). The Standards for Professional Learning were revised in 2011 to reflect a need for teachers to collaborate and reflect in order to improve practice and impact student outcomes (Heineke, 2013). These new standards are in direct alignment with instructional coaching as a means of professional development (Heineke, 2013).

Although there is a vast amount of literature on the practice of coaching, some researchers make the assertion there is a lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of coaching (Ellinger, 2008; Gallucci et al., 2010; Hagen, 2012; Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). Hagen (2012) conducted a robust review of the literature on coaching in general and on managerial coaching using Torraco’s stage review method; however, the researcher stated there was a lack of studies available on managerial coaching, specifically its effectiveness on job
performance, and noted his was the first review of the literature on this topic. He reviewed coaching within the context of organizational improvement rather than performance improvement. None of the studies reviewed by Hagen involved the perspectives of those who were coached.

In his review, Hagen (2012) determined studies do show a positive relationship between coaching and organizational commitment and indicated a negative relationship between coaching and employee turnover. Likewise, time spent on coaching had a positive relationship on performance improvement. There is a need for more rigorous and more relevant research on the impact of coaching, specifically for identifying the factors of coaching that most influence performance outcomes (Hagen, 2012; Heineke, 2013).

Rush and Young’s (2011) study of instructional coaching in Wisconsin public schools consisted of surveys only. The researchers had access to all 3,000+ participants, teachers who had been coached, and about half chose to respond to the on-line survey, which included numerical and categorical scale questions as well as open-ended questions with provisions for adding additional information. Rush and Young found the majority of teachers who participated in their study placed high value on instructional coaching and indicated a desire to continue as participants in coaching. Implications of the study indicated a need for differentiation within the roles of coaches, so that their focus become more streamlined to specific areas, as well as a need for prioritization of goals within the particular educational programs using coaching.

The results of two studies indicate follow-up coaching more effectively sustains teacher changes after in-service trainings (Kretlow et al., 2009; Sailors & Price, 2010). However, there is a limited amount of data on the perspectives of coaches, and even less on the perspectives of teachers (Kissel et al., 2011). Scott, Cortina, and Carlisle (2012) found that teachers believed
coaching more beneficial when consistent, predictable structures were in place. Data connecting the effectiveness of coaching to child outcomes are also limited, but do indicate that coaching has a positive impact (Scott et al., 2012).

Kissel et al. (2001) conducted a four-year mixed-methods study of 20 North Carolina preschool instructional coaches which considered the perspectives of the coaches in defining their roles and identifying the changes they would recommend to their coaching roles. Participants in the study worked in preschools across the state that were either urban public preschools or subsidized private preschools that served children considered “high risk.” The 20 coaches completed a 16-item survey with a Likert-type scale to rank their perceptions of the priority placed on coaching behaviors. The Spearman-Brown formula was used to adjust internal consistency reliability of the survey. The coaches were also given the opportunity to add descriptive comments to each item on the survey and were also asked to answer open-ended questions at the end. In order to provide more depth, the researchers also conducted naturalistic inquiry in the form of semi-structured interviews. The results of the study revealed that coaches perceived the three following areas as most important to their role: content expert, rapport builder, and professional development facilitator. Kissel et al. noted the need for coaches to extend their reach beyond the classroom so that their influence is recognized and valued more by administrators and communities.

In order to examine the particulars of what was occurring, Heineke (2013) viewed one-on-one coaching through the lens of sociocultural theory by observing coaching interactions between four teachers and their reading coaches in order to examine the particulars of what was occurring. While 29 reading coaches within the same county in a southeastern state were invited to participate in the study, only four volunteered. From teachers with whom these coaches
would be working, Heineke randomly selected one teacher. He conducted an audio-taped coaching discourse, completed semi-structured interviews, and a kept a log of data sources. Heineke employed both an interpretive analysis and a structural analysis of the data and then compared the two across four pre-determined dyads. The comparison of the two analyses and the post-interviews served as triangulation in the study. Three contextual elements were established from the study: roles and responsibilities of coaches varied greatly and many managerial tasks took precedence over actual instructional coaching; positive relationships were highly regarded by both coaches and teachers; and standardized testing requirements often directed the discourse of coaching. Patterns that were constructed from the study indicated that coaching is more directive than responsive, with discourse decidedly dominated by the coach; teachers are more likely to progress during the discourse by extending the talk; and coaches are consistently sensitive and responsive to questions, yet often fail to follow through on comments by the teachers. Heineke concluded that more research is needed to identify the elements that affect the quality of coaching.

According to Hagen (2012), the effectiveness of coaching can be measured in two distinct areas—individual and organizational. Much of the literature that exists measures the effectiveness of coaching on the individual in terms of job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, performance, commitment to quality, and citizenship behavior (Hagen, 2012). A smaller body of literature relates coaching effectiveness to the organization in terms of increased productivity, higher customer service, and lowered costs (Hagen, 2012). These studies show relationships between coaching and outcomes, but do not establish causation (Hagen, 2012; Scott et al., 2012). This means that more research is needed to examine the relationships between coaching practices and student outcomes (Scott et. al, 2012).
Building trust is typically considered the most critical element for successful coaching (Heineke, 2013; Kissel et al., 2011; Knight, 2007; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Simon, 2009; Thelning et al., 2010; Trombly, 2012; Wise & Hammack, 2011). However, elementary teachers in the Young and Rush (2011) study indicated the most valued aspects of coaching as modeling of effective instructional strategies.

Lynch and Ferguson (2010) conducted a qualitative study on the perspective of 13 literacy coaches in Ontario’s urban elementary schools and found that the perceived barriers to coaching include difficulty in time allocation, lack of administrative support, resistance by teachers, large coaching loads, limited resources, and unclear role expectations. A limitation of the study was that rather than being full-time coaches, all of the participants were also working in their own classrooms and only made coaching visits 1-2 times every six weeks. Young and Rush (2011) also found instructional coaches to have heavy caseloads with only a small portion of teachers receiving intensive coaching.

Galluci et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal, qualitative case study with three school districts using coaching as reform for instructional practice. The researchers were specifically concerned with the context within which instructional coaching takes place. Interviews, observations, and archival data were used to study the complexity of coaching. Social-cultural theories were the lens from which this data were analyzed. The researchers found that coaches are often learning at the same time as those they are expected to coach and that supportive learning environments are necessary for coaching to be successful. The researchers asserted the need for more empirical evidence to help educators understand the role of instructional coaching to improve the process and practice of professional development.
Knight’s (2007, 2011) research over the past decade involved a partnership between the Topeka, Kansas school board and the Kansas City University Center of Research. These two entities created a program, Pathways to Success, which involved the implementation of instructional coaching in all of Topeka’s middle and high schools. Knight’s inquiry in Kansas involved nine schools over seven years and dozens of ethnographic interviews of the stakeholders involved in the project, as well as quantitative data, that gave a foundation for validating instructional coaching practices that Knight discussed throughout his books on this topic. Additionally, Knight (2007) conducted hundreds of interviews of teachers across the nation and was involved in a second partnership with Maryland’s State Department’s Special Education Department’s Passport to Success program. Knight (2007, 2011) has advocated for collaboration between teacher and coach which results in a partnership that brings about real change in instructional practices.

**Instructional Coaching for School Reform**

Empirical studies have certified that high quality preschool experiences have long-term, significant impact on children’s later success in school if teachers are highly qualified, and that these effects are even more pronounced for disadvantaged children (Barnett, 2004; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). The quality of teaching and teacher interactions are believed by many to be the most important factors impacting student outcomes (Mashburn, Hamre, Barbarin, Burchinal, & Howes, 2008; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Pianta et al., 2005; Scott & Dixon, 2009; Thelning et al., 2010). Preschool teachers, however, have varying degrees of education, knowledge, and experience in effective teaching strategies (Phillips, Clancy-Menchetti, & Lonigan, 2008). Policy determines the level of quality those
children receive by mandating teacher-child ratios, teacher qualification requirements, program monitoring, and resources available to families (Mashburn et al., 2008).

Nineteen of 38 state funded voluntary preschool programs do not require four year degrees and less than half of those working in child care settings have this qualification (Barnett, 2004). Although funding is not provided for increasing teacher qualifications for preschool programs, accountability for school readiness continues to increase. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends preschool teachers have an associate’s degree or comparable training in early childhood education (Mashburn & Pianta, 2007).

As a means of reform, Barnett (2004) advocated for a combination of formal education requirements and demonstrations by coaches. A goal of the preschool instructional coach is to improve the quality of experiences in the preschool classroom. High quality programs are associated with higher child outcomes (Mashburn & Pianta, 2007). Coaching provides professional development and training on topics related to improved quality, such as the learning environment, teaching strategies, effective practices, curriculum planning, child screening and assessment, and behavior management. Furthermore, the partnership developed between teacher and coach refines the practice of teaching through a deeper understanding of research-based knowledge.

The Literacy Collaborative is a well-developed coaching model focused primarily on improving student outcomes in literacy (Wei et al., 2010). Although Knight’s (2007, 2011) instructional coaching model is the most prevalent comprehensive model nationally, countless school districts, early learning coalitions, and other educational organizations have developed their own organic models in an attempt to meet the ever-increasing demands for performance
outcomes. Although there are various coaching models being implemented across the nation, there is one common objective: supporting teachers to apply effective practices to improve teaching strategies.

Instructional coaching should enhance a teacher’s self-reflection skills so that she is able to determine what does and does not work with students in order to better facilitate learning (Barkley, 2005; Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, & Schock, 2009; Skiffington et al., 2011). This idea was demonstrated by a qualitative study involving 24 schools in the Minnesota Reading First Professional Development Program examined the interactions among teachers and coaches in order to identify what elements of their conversations were viewed as most effective (Peterson et al., 2009). The researchers observed coaching conversations among teachers and coaches and discovered that in addition to using research to increase understanding of effective practices or analyzing student outcomes, teachers were more likely to make changes to their own instruction when they took part in reflective feedback involving concrete data, such as video and observation notes (Peterson et al., 2009).

**Themes, Trends, and Gaps**

There is a dearth of research on coaching as a means of professional development. Empirical evidence is inconsistent and inconclusive relative to methodology and conclusions. Participants in the studies reviewed were involved in coaching on a wide spectrum of intensity, from several contact hours per day to only monthly visits, and a variety of practices, including demonstrations, observations, reflective feedback, and conferencing. There is also a scarcity of empirical evidence regarding the perspectives of teachers on instructional coaching. However, the findings of the studies that are available do indicate positive attitudes by participants towards coaching as a means of professional development. Though there is vast variation in the types of
coaching models being implemented nationally, the support of teachers to apply effective practices to improve teaching strategies is the common impetus.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the notion of coaching as a means of individual development for the purpose of improving schools and positively enhancing student outcomes. Instructional coaching is a professional development practice that includes rapport building, demonstration of direct instruction, reflective feedback, and conferencing. Because traditional forms of in-service and professional development have been ineffective, school reform has begun to rely more heavily on intensive, one-on-one professional learning in the form of instructional coaching. However, the inconsistency with which it is implemented across programs and the lack of empirical evidence about its effectiveness compel more research on the topic.

Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of the major concepts in this study. It shows the relationship among the main concept of instructional coaching with the three ancillary concepts: traditional professional development, implementation of instructional coaching, and empirical evidence about instructional coaching. Specifically, instructional coaching replaces traditional forms of professional development because of the lack of relevancy, reflection, and follow-up in the traditional forms (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Knight, 2007 & 2011; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). As opposed to teachers attending an off-site training and then returning to the classroom with no further interaction with the trainer, coaching allows a relationship of trust to form between coach and teacher, which involves a continual conversation about the implementation of new strategies. Because there is not one method followed, instructional coaching involves various forms of implementation in terms of delivery, duration,
and intensity (Rush & Young, 2011; Scott et al., 2012). This inconsistency in coaching delivery makes it difficult to generalize research findings. Moreover, additional research on instructional coaching could generate empirical evidence, which is currently deficient, thereby compelling the need for further research that could inform policy making and practice (Ellinger, 2008; Hagen, 2012; Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). This study was designed to do just that.
Figure 2. A conceptual framework of instructional coaching.
Chapter Summary

Chapter Two presented a review of the related literature on coaching for professional development, instructional coaching in education, and instructional coaching for school reform. The chapter opened with a description of the historical context of coaching in general and coaching for professional development followed by the current research on instructional coaching. Additionally, this chapter supported the need for further study of teachers’ perceptions of instructional coaching. Developing a deeper understanding of instructional coaching and its impact can guide future work in this field, thereby making it stronger and more effective. By focusing through qualitative research on the experiences and interpretations of preschool teachers who have participated in instructional coaching, their unique perceptions could become the catalyst to advance understanding while giving voice to their beliefs, views, and experiences. The next chapter discusses the design and methodology used to examine preschool teachers’ perceptions of instructional coaching.
CHAPTER 3
DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to advance understanding about the effect of instructional coaching in preschool classrooms as perceived by teachers who have been coached. Preschool teachers were defined as those who are employed to care for and educate children ages three to five years, and instructional coaching was considered a form of professional development. Likewise, instructional coaching was defined as “a strategy that seeks to improve student achievement by enhancing teachers’ knowledge and skill, in both pedagogy and subject-area content, through job-embedded, ongoing professional development” (Trombly, 2012, p. 11).

The results of this study could provide valuable information on the effectiveness of instructional coaching as perceived by those who have been coached. The results could also contribute to the discussion of how instructional coaching should be implemented for preschool teachers.

This study sought answers to the following question: How do preschool teachers involved in instructional coaching perceive and describe coaching? The sub-questions address: How do they describe the impact of instructional coaching on their work? What parts of instructional coaching do teachers describe as effective? What parts of instructional coaching do teachers describe as ineffective?
Research Design

Because the nature of instructional coaching is intrinsically complex, and because examining teachers’ perspectives is an appropriate way to develop understanding about those complexities (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002; Peshkin, 1993), a qualitative design was selected to investigate the intricacies of the coaching process and dynamics as perceived by teachers. This approach is appropriate when the researcher wants to go beyond his or her own perspective and gain deeper understanding of participants’ perspectives and voice. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), “Qualitative interviews have operated for us like night-vision goggles, permitting us to see that which was not ordinarily on view and examine that which was often looked at but seldom seen” (p. vii).

This qualitative study used open-ended questions in interviews with preschool teachers to understand and represent the participants’ voice as knowledge. When using open-ended interviews, the researcher strives to gain understanding of participants’ points of view, feelings, and knowledge through their own words and expressions, and therefore does not need quantitative questionnaires comprised of standardized questions and scales to gain insight into the minds of the participants (Patton, 2002, pp. 16-17).

Educational practice has traditionally been informed by the positivist philosophy, using experimental designs, surveys, and questionnaires to gather data. However, “…depending on what you want to learn, imitating the hard sciences was not always the best approach” (Rubin & Rubin, 2002, p. 19). Test scores and student gains tell only a portion of the education story. According to Tierney and Dilley (2001), “Perhaps in no other field . . . has qualitative inquiry . . . and the qualitative interview become so prevalent in research and in policy-related discussions as in education” (p. 453). In order to understand and describe the perspectives and voices of
students, teachers, and community members, in-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted and analyzed (Creswell, 2003).

This study specifically employed in-depth interviewing of preschool teachers who have been coached by an instructional coach within the last two years. This approach gave voice to those who had experiences with coaching and provided insight into how they perceive coaching and its influence on their philosophies and practices.

**Description of the Study Setting**

Until 2005, Florida’s 4-year-olds had limited opportunities for obtaining school readiness skills; they could learn at home, attend a private preschool, or enroll in a day care where skills may or may not have been taught or taught effectively. Recognizably, little consistency in teaching practice or content was provided among these three alternatives.

The 2005-06 school year marked the beginning of Florida’s Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program, which was enacted into state law (Office of Early Learning, 2013) just one year prior. The law provided little direction for the program and split the responsibilities among The Agency for Workforce Innovation, the Office of Early Learning (OEL), the Department of Children and Families, and the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE). The VPK standards were issued by the FLDOE in 2011. The OEL created a rubric for scoring curricula submitted by publishers and private entities and subsequently developed a state-approved curriculum list (Florida Department of Education) in 2011. Child care centers that agreed to participate in VPK received stipends to purchase a curriculum from the state’s approved list, employed a teacher with at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) certification, and initiated a program under minimal accountability obligations.
Ten years later, Florida has more 4-year-olds enrolled in a state-funded prekindergarten than any other state in the nation (Armario, 2012). Policy determines the level of quality those children receive by mandating teacher-child ratios, teacher qualification requirements, program monitoring, and resources available to families (Mashburn et al., 2008). However, Florida VPK teachers are not required to have a credential higher than a CDA certificate, yet they are responsible for that last critical year of developing school readiness skills. Although an approved curriculum is required, many of these teachers lack deep understanding of how to develop effective lesson plans, link learning activities to state standards, use research-based teaching strategies, and ultimately improve child outcomes.

There are currently 37 states and US territories that have implemented quality rating systems, whereby child care centers receive a score based on indicators of quality for rating the programs (Mayoral, 2013). Although Florida is not one of the 37 with a state-wide system, there are Early Learning Coalitions within the state with their own quality rating systems (Mayoral, 2013). In 1999, the state of Florida established Early Learning Coalitions through state statute 1002.83 (Office of Early Learning, 2013). Early Learning Coalitions in Florida are state entities that locally administer Florida’s early learning programs (Office of Early Learning, 2013). All 67 counties in the state of Florida are part of one of the 30 coalitions within the state. Each coalition is governed by a board of directors (Office of Early Learning, 2013). The Early Learning Coalition of Duval in Jacksonville, Florida created the Guiding Stars of Duval (GSOD) in 2004.

Each year there are approximately 85 early learning sites actively participating in the GSOD Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS). This voluntary program is open to any child care center in Jacksonville, Florida that holds a school readiness contract with the Early Learning Coalition. Program participation provides an early learning specialist who spends at
least one day per week in the child care center’s classrooms and who coaches teachers on effective practices. Child care centers participate in the program for an average of two years before receiving a star rating. Therefore, coaching is also typically a two-year progression that occurs while the child care center is working on the GSOD validation process. As a part of the process of obtaining a star rating in the GSOD program, teacher behavior and learning environments are assessed using valid and reliable instruments, such as Early Child Environmental Rating Scale-Revised; Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale-Revised; Classroom Assessment Scoring System; and Infant Toddler Responsive Caregiver Checklist. In addition to this data, the Florida Institute of Education conducts quantitative studies of child outcomes in participating child care centers. However, the perceptions of those who are coached have not been considered in the presentation of yearly outcomes or in the planning of coaching procedures.

For the purpose of providing support through instructional coaching, these GSOD sites have traditionally been divided into three geographic regions: the Northside, the Southside, and the Westside. Likewise, the instructional coaches that serve these sites have also been divided into three teams to represent the three geographic areas. The make-up of each team has varied throughout the years of the GSOD program, but typically had at least four instructional coaches and one team leader who supervised the coaches and provided support to the directors of the participating child care centers. For this reason, sites for this study were selected from all three geographic regions of Duval County: three from the Northside, three from the Westside, and three from the Southside. Nine sites were initially contacted because this is a manageable level for the researcher. By selecting sites from each of the three areas, participants’ perspectives and experiences were documented from a variety of instructional coaches. The three from each area
were randomly selected and were not child care centers I have personally worked with as an instructional coach or team leader. For the purposes of GSOD, the Northside designation includes the urban core of Jacksonville and encompasses Health Zone One, a designation by the city as an area where families live in high-crime, distressed neighborhoods and 40% of children are in poverty. The Southside designation includes all neighborhoods south of the St. Johns River, including the beaches. The Westside designation comprises all neighborhoods west of the St. Johns River and south of Interstate 10.

**Role of the Researcher**

My role as researcher was as an interviewer. During the data collection phase of a qualitative study, the researcher is the tool for collecting data to answer the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). My goal as interviewer was to gain a deep understanding of the practice of instructional coaching and its impact on teachers.

As a director of programs for the Jacksonville Early Literacy Partnership and Jacksonville Journey Early Literacy Program, I supervise the coaching work of 16 coaches and provide leadership for child care center directors throughout Jacksonville, Florida. This role provided entrée into the selected child care sites.

It is my view that instructional coaching does, in fact, have a positive impact on the quality of educational experiences of young children. Having worked as an instructional coach for three years and then as a leader of coaches for eight years, I have witnessed many positive changes in learning environments, teaching strategies, and teachers’ attitudes that appeared to be directly related to instructional coaching. I believe instructional coaching is a wise investment with a high rate of return on tax dollars. However, I am keenly aware that my perspective is
limited to what I know and have experienced as a coach, a leader and trainer of coaches, and a
director of programs.

Furthermore, who I am has influenced my choice to use a qualitative design for this
study. I place high value on multiple perspectives, which I believe bring us to the best decisions
and most profound understandings.
Participant Selection and Data Source

To control bias and thereby bring legitimacy to the study, intentionality was used in selecting the participants. The selection criteria, excluded child care centers where I have been an instructional coach or team leader and included an equivalent number of participants from each of the three geographic areas used in the Guiding Stars of Duval (GSOD) program. If there had been a large pool of voluntary participants, additional selection criteria would have included demographic information for the purpose of creating a diverse group of participants.

The data sources for this study were 15 preschool teachers employed in 6 child care centers participating in the GSOD program. All willing participants were selected from each of the six sites. The teachers who were selected had been assigned an instructional coach within the past two years who worked with them for approximately two hours per week at least three times per month. This coaching process occurred for at least two years. Therefore, these teachers were legitimate sources for the purpose of gaining understanding of their perspectives on coaching and its impact on the educational experiences they provided for their students, as they have had the opportunity to work with an instructional coach for at least two years.

Participants were selected using a purposeful sampling, which allowed participants who shared similar experiences with instructional coaching to be selected for the study. I called all nine sites, three from each of the three geographic areas, explaining my research and inviting them to participate. All nine of these sites shared the experiences of being participants in the GSOD program and all have had instructional coaches assigned to the each classroom in their centers.

I followed up with e-mails to the centers (see Appendix B). Once center directors agreed to participate, I distributed letters to each of the teachers on staff who worked with three-year-
olds or four-year-olds, inviting them to participate in the study. I followed up with on-site visits to secure participation agreements from 1-3 teachers at each of the nine sites.

**Development of the Interview Protocol**

The data collection instrument used in this study was an interview protocol of semi-structured open-ended questions to be used as a guide for a conversational approach (see Appendix A) (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The interview protocol is a form that includes information about the interview, such as time and date, as well as demographic questions and interview questions. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study in order to protect the participants’ identity.

The interview protocol contained 16 open-ended questions. In order to capture participants’ thoughts, knowledge, experiences, and beliefs about the subject, open-ended questions were most appropriate in that participants were prompted to respond in their own words (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2004). Follow-up questions were used to clarify responses and to deepen understanding. I identified and developed similar interview questions in 2011 in a doctoral qualitative research class at the University of North Florida. The questions were developed using my knowledge and experience in the field and my involvement in instructional coaching. The questions were then reviewed by Dr. Elinor Scheirer and were revised by me as a result of discussion with Dr. Scheirer.

**Data Collection and Management Procedures**

In-depth interviews were conducted over a two month period. Each interview began with an explanation of the purpose of the study as well as the voluntary nature of the study. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview and was read to each participant at the beginning of the interview. Participants were asked to sign the informed consent form (see...
Appendix G) at the onset of the interview. Furthermore, participants received an assurance of identity protection with the use of pseudonyms explained to them. Participants were also informed of the availability of transcripts of their interviews at the end of the research period.

To preserve the accuracy of the interview, with participants’ permission, one-on-one interviews were digitally recorded on two audio recorders and later transcribed. Pre-determined interview questions were used, and probing and clarifying questions were employed as needed throughout the interview (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2004).

Data was stored on the University of North Florida’s secure server and was password protected with only those involved in the study having access. Those involved in the study other than myself included the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Warren Hodge, chairperson; Dr. Elinor Scheirer, methodologist; Dr. Katrina Hall, committee member; and Dr. Claudia Sealy-Potts, committee member.

**Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability**

The terms *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability* were first proposed by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 as an answer to concerns of qualitative researchers with the inapplicability of the traditional terms of quantitative research—*validity, generalizability, reliability, and objectivity* (Krefting, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Credibility is the extent to which the research is believable (Krefting, 1991). To enhance credibility and to avoid misinterpretations of interview responses, member checking was employed. Member checking provided a means of verifying the transcribed data to ensure accuracy in how their responses were represented. Member checking was achieved by providing the interviewees with transcripts of their interviews and following up with them to verify their concurrence with the correctness of the transcriptions. Furthermore, triangulation was employed by using multiple
data sources through a purposive sampling of participants from multiple sites that represented all three geographic areas of the study. In the event the participants referred to any documents during the interview, the opportunity to view these documents was taken in order to further understand participants’ responses.

Transferability is the extent to which the results of a study can be transferred to other contexts (Krefting, 1991). Thick, rich descriptions were used to ensure transferability of the data. These thick, rich descriptions in qualitative studies deepen the reader’s understanding of the setting of the research (Eisner, 1998; Patton, 2002). This deeper understanding provides a means of relating to the data that will help the reader relate results to his or her situation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Because instructional coaching is being implemented in a variety of ways, thick, rich description will give readers a basis for determining whether or not their experiences with instructional coaching parallel those of the preschool teachers in this study.

Dependability is the extent to which the research findings are reliable and could be repeated (Krefting, 1991). In qualitative research there is the “assumption that the social world is always being constructed and the concept of replication is itself problematic” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 253). In consideration of dependability, detailed description of the research context was provided as well as detailed description of the processes used throughout the study.

Confirmability is the extent to which the research findings are supported by the data and could be confirmed by another researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In consideration of confirmability, I detailed my assumptions and used triangulation of multiple sources in order to reduce the instance of researcher bias during data analysis. Additionally, I provided a detailed description of the research procedures and only discussed what was conveyed through the
research. By providing a thorough explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures used in the study, warrant and transparency were increased.

**Organization and Analysis of the Data**

After examining several qualitative data analysis strategies, I decided the most appropriate method for analyzing data in this study was a combined approach that included educational criticism (Eisner, 1998) and inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002). Eisner referred to *connoisseurship*, which he defined as the art of appreciation, and *education criticism*, which he defined as the art of disclosure. Eisner encouraged researchers to provide criticism with its subject matter by examining and revealing the attributes that are central to experiences, situations, or phenomena. Because I have experience as a classroom teacher, an instructional coach, a quality support team leader, and a director of programs, I am a connoisseur of both education and instructional coaching. Furthermore, I have three degrees in education that provided experiences which have deepened my knowledge of the theory and practice of instructional coaching. By conducting an extensive review of the current literature, I have broadened and deepened my understanding and enhanced my expertise.

By using education criticism to analyze my data, I followed Eisner’s (1998) guidelines for description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics. Description is the thick, rich details given about all facets of the data, including transparency about the process, as well as describing the context of the study. Interpretation refers to the screens used to make meaning of the data, such as the literature reviewed on the topic prior to beginning the research. Evaluation is the judgment placed on the data. Thematics refers to the pervasive messages developed from the data. Following these strategies for analyzing the data enabled me to use my knowledge and
experience, but to also see beyond what I already know to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of how preschool teachers perceive instructional coaching.

Providing thick, rich description of the data precluded limited analysis by extending my perception and developing and clarifying my understanding of the data. To interpret the data, I employed inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002), including memoing and coding techniques to deconstruct each interview response and categorize the data. Memoing, or writing my thoughts about how I believed themes or patterns were forming in the data, brought codes to a conceptual level during the analysis phase (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

As guidelines for forming the initial coding categories, I used a literature screen from Stronge’s (2007) categories of teacher behaviors—the teacher as a person, classroom organization, planning and organizing for instruction, monitoring student progress and potential, and professionalism. The data manager tool I used was Microsoft Excel, in which I set up color-coded columns for each category. I used corresponding colored highlighters to mark data within the transcriptions and then document those markings in the Excel document with interview number, page number, and paragraph number under the related category. However, I modified the initial categories according to what was presented in the data, thereby using open coding.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), “In qualitative studies . . . the researcher is guided by initial concepts and developing understandings that she shifts or modifies as she collects and analyzes the data” (p. 208). By immersing myself in the data, I developed themes and patterns using my education criticism, informed by Eisner (1998). The themes were supported and corroborated by strong evidence from the data. The pervasive messages from the data were then presented to inform the reader and provide deeper understanding of instructional coaching.
**Limitations**

This study was limited to preschool teachers who have participated in instructional coaching through the Guiding Stars of Duval (GSOD) program in Jacksonville, Florida and who volunteered to participate in the study. This study was also limited to instructional coaching and not mentoring or executive coaching. Furthermore, the study was limited to a qualitative in-depth interview design.

One limitation to in-depth interviews was time. The time needed for in-depth interviews is typically 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. This may have limited the number of participants to fewer than would be desired by the researcher, as hearing from as many who are available would be the preferred number of interviews to conduct. Also, in-depth interviews use open-ended questions, which permit and encourage the participants to answer without restrictions (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Yin, 2010). Follow-up questions are then completely based on participants’ answers.

Additionally, the demographics of race and ethnicity were not addressed in this study. These are important variables when considering coach-teacher relationships. Failing to collect and analyze data for both variables were oversights, which if addressed, could have enhanced the robustness of the data and contributed to the credibility of the results. However, while these omissions should be addressed in future studies, they do not detract from the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

Another limitation may have been the inability of preschool teachers to articulate their thoughts. Some teachers may not be accustomed to sharing their thoughts and feelings. Follow-up questions that are probing in nature were significant for this reason. Furthermore, some teachers may not have readily put thoughts and ideas into words. Appropriate time to process
the questions and give answers was important. Additionally, non-verbal communication was also valuable to the study.

Furthermore, from my experience supervising instructional coaching, I have found that teachers are sometimes inclined to give the answers they think I am seeking, rather than being completely straightforward regarding their feelings about instructional coaching. To preclude this, teachers were informed ahead of time and reminded during the interview that their perceptions were valuable to the study and could contribute to future coaching practices. Teachers were informed ahead of time and reminded during the interview that their responses were completely confidential.

Additionally, the variability with which instructional coaching is implemented across the nation, coupled with the variability of the contexts within which those programs take place, make it difficult to apply the understanding gained from one study to the practice of coaching in another setting; however, transferability can occur.

**Ethical Considerations**

Professionalism and integrity were used throughout the study to protect the participants from harm or adverse effects. I gave each participant a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix G), and I also read it to them. Participants’ confidentiality was protected throughout the study by coding site names and by giving each participant a pseudonym, which was used throughout the data collection, analysis, and interpretation phases of the study. Pseudonyms were assigned by using every day names for which I am familiar. Participants were also reminded of their right to voluntarily withdrawal at any time from the study.
After dissertation committee approval, I completed and submitted a request to UNF’s International Review Board (IRB) for its approval. Once IRB approval was granted, the participant selection process began, followed immediately by interviews.

Due the large size of Jacksonville and the number of child care centers that participate in the GSOD program, it would be difficult for anyone to determine the identity of the participants. Nevertheless, I have safeguarded the identity of each site and each participant by adhering to the principles, guidelines, and laws that protect human subjects. I approached every aspect of the study with honesty and integrity and was as accurate as possible in describing the processes used.

The password protected storage of electronic data was encrypted and stored on UNF’s secure server and will be destroyed five years after the study ends. Participants were not allowed to see responses of other participants. The only people who have access to the data are me, my dissertation chair, the IRB board, and federal officials, if deemed necessary.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the qualitative methods that were used to conduct the study. Open-ended interviews were used to give voice to the participants as they described their perceptions and experiences with instructional coaching in their own words.

The chapter also discussed the setting of the study, the sampling strategy, the interview protocol, and data collection procedures. A combined approach to data analysis—educational criticism (Eisner, 1998) and inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002)—were used to makes sense of the data. Moreover, the chapter addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study.

Each preschool teacher involved in instructional coaching through the GSOD program has had unique experiences with instructional coaching. This study examined their experiences,
and the feelings, knowledge, and beliefs that have resulted from them. There is a dearth of research on instructional coaching. Therefore, the results of this study could be significant in developing understanding about the practice of instructional coaching. The results could also inform and contribute to the knowledge base on instructional coaching. Furthermore, data may provide beneficial information for policy development and implementation of instructional coaching as a form of professional development for preschool teachers.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The fourth chapter of this study addresses the analysis of data collected from 15 interviews of preschool teachers employed in six child care centers. The study explored the perspectives of preschool teachers on instructional coaching and addressed the following research questions:

1. How do preschool teachers involved in instructional coaching perceive and describe coaching?
2. How do they describe the impact of instructional coaching on their work?
3. What parts of instructional coaching do teachers describe as effective?
4. What parts of instructional coaching do teachers describe as ineffective?

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

The chapter begins with a discussion of my experiences collecting and analyzing the data. Subsequent to this discussion, I give an account of how connoisseurship (Eisner, 1998), researcher as tool (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988), and reflexivity (Patton, 2002) were used in the analysis and discuss the data analysis strategies used in the study.

During analysis of participants’ interviews, two data analysis strategies were employed—inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) and educational criticism (Eisner, 1998). The data were organized into eight categories and provided a means for developing thematic relationships within the data. Based on the data analysis, three themes were developed—instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity; instructional coaching requires a
supportive environment; and instructional coaching increases children’s learning opportunities. The discussion of the analysis is organized around these three themes, which provide a framework from which to view and understand the perspectives of preschool teachers about instructional coaching.

**Experiences Before and During Data Collection**

The setting for the study was six child care centers in Jacksonville, Florida. The semi-structured interview (Patton, 2002) provided the most appropriate way to collect descriptive data regarding teachers’ perspectives of instructional coaching. Both structured and follow-up questioning were used. Data collection occurred from December 18, 2014, through January 2, 2015. For ease of access to participants, the data were collected during Duval County school system’s winter break. Although the child care centers are not a part of the school system, they typically follow the school system’s calendar for their Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) classes, which results in lower enrollment during this time period. However, lower enrollment also brings about reduced hours for teachers; therefore, I had to go to the child care centers on the dates selected by their center directors or risk not being able to complete the interviews. This meant conducting more interviews in one day than desired.

I first contacted the directors of nine child care centers by telephone and followed up with an email message (see Appendix B). All nine directors verbally agreed to participate in the study. However, only six of the nine responded to the follow-up email by faxing back a signed letter of support (see Appendix C). After receiving the letters of support and the International Review Board Memorandum of Approval with Exempt Status (see Appendix D), I sent emails with potential dates for interviews and allowed the directors to select the date and provide the time and location for each set of interviews at the center (see Appendix E). In the email to
directors to request dates, I also included a copy of the letter of invitation to participants (see Appendix F) and a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix G). I explained that I would read this consent form to each teacher and obtain their signatures on the date of the interview, and that I would appreciate the directors sharing a copy with the teachers for preview.

On the scheduled dates, I met with each participant on an individual basis and described the study, read aloud the informed consent form, and explained the reason for my preference to record the interviews. Participants were assured information would be kept confidential and pseudonyms would be used to protect their identities and the identities of their child care centers.

From the six child care centers who returned the letters of support, 15 teachers were identified as potential participants. All 15 agreed to the interviews, and all 15 signed the informed consent form and agreed to allow the interview to be recorded. On the day of the interviews, participants were given a copy of the signed consent form for their records. Two interviews were conducted in the early morning hours of Thursday, December 18, 2014; five during the afternoon hours of Thursday, December 18, 2014; one during the morning hours and one in the afternoon hours of Friday, December 19, 2014; one during the afternoon hours of Monday, December 22, 2014; one during the early morning and two during the afternoon of Tuesday, December 23, 2014; and two during the afternoon of Friday, January 2, 2015.

The directors of the child care centers determined the interview times and locations. The schedule of interviews felt hectic at times, but each teacher was relaxed and willing to talk as the interviews took place. None of the directors of the six child care centers were physically present for the interviews, and none asked about the information collected during the interviews. I did not observe teachers feeling uncomfortable while talking openly and honestly. All 15 interviews
were conducted at the participants’ child care centers, either in an office area or an empty classroom. The range of the duration of the interviews was between 16 to 39 minutes.

As the demographic data in Table 1 show, teachers’ experience varied from 4 to 34 years of classroom experience. The number of years each teacher worked with an instructional coach varied from 1 to 16 years; however, most participants answered questions about their most recent experiences, and made remarks about previous years only to make comparisons. Of the 15 teachers, two spoke Spanish as their first language, but they also had a solid command of the English language. The highest credential held by teachers also varied: 10 of the 15 had a national Child Development Associate credential; 1 had an out-of-field B.A. degree; 1 had a B.S.Ed. degree; and 1 had a M.Ed. degree. All 15 teachers and all eight directors were females. Pseudonyms were used to identify each teacher.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years of Participation in Coaching</th>
<th>Highest Credential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CDA 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>college degree 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix A), probing and follow-up questions were used as needed to obtain more detail or additional information. My expertise in the field facilitated the construction of open-ended questions
and the analysis of the participants’ responses. My professional experience and knowledge allowed me to ask appropriate follow-up questions to clarify the participants’ explanations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Participants were given opportunity to express their experiences without interruption or influence other than an occasional nod or “Mmm” from me, the interviewer, to encourage the progression of the conversation.

According to Howe and Eisenhart (1990), transparency is required in describing the process of data analysis in order to bring credibility to the study. The actual process of data analysis was lengthy and complex. Transcription immediately followed data collection, but, due to the number of interviews collected in a given day, this process often carried over to the following weekend and/or the following week. I listened to each interview several times in order to ensure accurate transcription. Transcripts and audio recordings were encrypted and stored on the University of North Florida’s secured server. Following transcription of all interviews, a copy of each participant’s transcript was hand delivered for review and correction. A postage-paid envelope was provided for returning the document with corrections or comments. All 15 participants responded that they would review the transcripts when they had the time. Eleven of the 15 participants returned the envelope. Nine of the 11 returned transcripts had no comments or markings. Two of the 11 returned transcripts had corrections to their own grammar, but had no changes to the content. No response was received from the other four participants, and I therefore proceeded to analyze the data.

**Connoisseurship, Researcher as Tool, Subjectivity, and Reflexivity During Data Analysis**

In order to bring credibility, warrant, and transparency to my study, the concepts of connoisseurship, researcher as tool, subjectivity, and reflexivity were considered and
addressed during the data analysis process. These elements of qualitative research are discussed in the next sections.

**Connoisseurship**

According to Elliot Eisner (1998), connoisseurship is “a means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest” (p. 68). My special interest is education, specifically the practice of instructional coaching. Through my experiences as a classroom teacher for 11 years, an instructional coach for three years, and a leader in the field of instructional coaching for eight years, I have attained a high degree of connoisseurship. Likewise, I have further developed that art of appreciation through formal education with a Master’s of Education degree, an Education Specialist degree, and an intensive study of the current literature during my doctoral work.

Eisner’s term, the enlightened eye, is a metaphor describing the manner in which a connoisseur is in tune to the particulars inherent to a specific field. My connoisseurship in education and instructional coaching was fundamental to my understanding of the particulars expressed in the description of experiences with instructional coaching shared by the preschool teachers in the interviews I conducted. Notably, my connoisseurship was the basis used for identifying and coding significant ideas, statements, and patterns in the data, and for later interpreting that data.

**Researcher as Tool**

I initially gained entrée into the child care centers through my position as Director of Early Learning at Episcopal Children’s Services. As a part of my responsibilities, I regularly send informative emails to the directors of child care centers participating in the Guiding Stars of Duval (GSOD) program. Although most of the directors do not know me personally, my name is
easily recognizable. Many have met me at trainings sessions I have led or assisted with conducting, and some have met me when I have visited their centers to observe coaching in process. The teachers, likewise, may have seen me at professional development events or in their centers, but most do not know me. I did not specifically make my connection to GSOD known to them, but they may have made the connection themselves.

As Director of Early Learning, I supervise and direct the work of the instructional coaches who impact teachers in these child care centers. The coaches’ perceptions are continually elicited by me. Furthermore, there is annual quantitative data to support our work (Florida Institute of Education, 2006; Wehly 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012). However, no one has ever focused on how teachers perceive the practice of coaching. Therefore, my interest in teachers’ perceptions grew from my natural curiosity due to the dearth of this type of information, as well as my experiences and knowledge of the field. Throughout the process of research and data analysis, I had to be mindful of my role as a tool, which involved the interchangeability of my role as a leader in the field of instructional coaching and as a researcher in my study (Kanuha, 2000; Milner, 2007). Certainly, I had a vested interest in the research. My motivation was my inherent belief in coaching as a meaningful form of professional development for teachers. Being cognizant of this, I made every effort to approach the interviews openly and objectively, and was particularly vigilant about listening to the teachers and being completely willing to hear all they shared, including any perspectives that might have been unsupportive of coaching practices.

Likewise, my position as a leader in the field and my familiarity with the practice of instructional coaching, along with my role as researcher, contributed to a rapport with participants and gave me a better understanding of their experiences. As a connoisseur of
education and instructional coaching, I was able to use my background and knowledge to construct probing questions, use my sensitivities regarding participants’ responses to ask clarifying questions, and later to interpret teachers’ perceptions (St. Louis & Barton, 2002).

**Subjectivity**

According to Peshkin (1988), “researchers should systematically seek out their subjectivity . . . while their research is actively in progress. The purpose of doing so is . . . to be aware of how their subjectivity may be shaping their inquiry and its outcomes” (p. 17). As a research tool in the process, I had to be cognizant of my subjectivity and how it could influence the way I analyzed the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Milner, 2007; Patton, 2002; Peshkin, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As a part of my awareness of my subjectivity, and as a way of limiting bias in my study, I stated my assumptions at the beginning of the study (Patton, 2002). The following assumptions were made prior to data collection: 1) Preschool teachers are not always receptive to instructional coaching; 2) Preschool teachers realize value in some parts of instructional coaching; 3) Preschool teachers sometimes find instructional coaching to be overwhelming or requiring much work; 4) Preschool teachers are candid in responding to semi-structured open-ended interviews. These assumptions were a direct result of my experience and knowledge of the literature. I was mindful of them throughout the research process and tried to prevent them from unduly shaping the interviews or the analysis of the data. For example, while reading the transcriptions, being aware of the four assumptions helped me to catch myself when I began to read too much into what the participant was saying.

**Reflexivity**

Patton (2002) described reflexivity as being intentional about self-awareness and acknowledging one’s own viewpoint. Watt (2007) noted that “by engaging in ongoing dialogue
with themselves through journal writing, researchers may be able to better determine what they know and how they think they came to know it” (p.84). This notion aligns with Finlay’s (2002) reflexivity approach of *introspection*, which I used throughout my journaling process. Finlay described introspection as a necessary part of the process that acts as a catalyst for interpreting data and forming general perceptions. Being aware of one’s beliefs is only the beginning of reflexivity; writing about them forces a deeper level of metacognition that serves the purpose of bringing to the surface any barriers to honest and careful analysis of the data. In addition to stating my assumptions, I also wrote my reflections about my perspective through the expression of my thoughts. In 2011, as I was beginning the intense examination of literature, I was not yet certain of the methodology of the study. I wrote, “On second thought, I may not want to survey teachers. I really want to know the complexities involved in coaching.” This statement revealed that I had a desire to delve deeper into the intricacies of coaching and how it influenced teachers and their work. Through journaling, I also fleshed out my research questions by listing what I really wanted to know.

Moreover, during the interview process, I made notes about my perceptions of participants’ behaviors and responses. For example, about one I wrote:

Betty was inconsistent. At times her words and body language screamed, “I don’t believe in coaching!” and then she would relax and describe how it impacted her positively. Aren’t we all a little bit like that when it comes to change in the workplace? (December 2014)

Furthermore, after I completed all interviews, I began to reconsider my decision to use Stronge’s (2007) teacher behaviors as a literature screen for coding the data. In my journal I wrote:

Now that I have this massive amount of data, and I have become somewhat familiar with it just from the interviews themselves and the process of transcription, I feel there are many repetitive ideas throughout. I have the urge to put off the use of the literature screen and first use open coding to see what emerges. I think I will talk to Dr. H. about that. It’s interesting to me that I didn’t choose grounded theory in the beginning. It’s more in
line with how I think. I believe it was the term in my Qual. notes “NO preconceived notions” that threw me off. I thought Eisner would be safer, since it would be hard to not have preconceived notions. Now that I have data, I understand how it speaks. (January 2015)

Likewise, as I moved through the data analysis process, I used journaling to clarify my thoughts and state my subjectivity. The following journal entry is another illustration of this process:

I’m surprised that individualization is something so many teachers learned from coaching. I would have thought it was a hoop they jumped through rather than a practice that was continued willingly after the coach was gone. (January 2015)

These examples demonstrate my metacognition throughout the research process as I continued to be aware of myself as tool. They certainly give credence to Finlay’s notion of introspection as catalyst for interpretation.

**Data Analysis Strategies**

The analysis of the interview data involved a combination of two analytic strategies—inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) and educational criticism (Eisner, 1998). Figure 3 depicts the intersection of these two data analysis strategies. Rather than using two separate strategies in a linear fashion, I used inductive analysis and educational criticism as interactive and interrelated strategies to inform and guide the analytic process, which contributed to the search for meaning, in particular the perceptions and voices of the teachers who have experiences with instructional coaching. Although Hatch’s (2002) steps to inductive analysis were followed, they were influenced heavily by Eisner’s (1998) educational criticism, which is explained throughout the subsequent sections. Using these two analysis strategies simultaneously facilitated deeper understanding of the data. Data analysis began during collection and transcription as I began to make sense of the data by journaling my thoughts. I then immersed myself in the data by reading the transcripts straight through several times in
order to become closely connected to participants’ responses (Patton, 2002) while also obtaining a holistic view of the data (Hatch, 2002).

*Figure 3.* An overview of data analysis strategies.

Inductive analysis and educational criticism have particular features. First, educational criticism facilitates understanding of the perceptions of preschool teachers about instructional coaching through the description and interpretation of the qualities inherent in their descriptions of their experiences and situations (Eisner, 1998). Eisner’s educational criticism model consists of four dimensions—description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics. Description is the thick, rich details given about all facets of the data, including transparency about the process and descriptions of the study context. According to Patton (2002), description takes the reader into
the setting to view what occurs as if the reader is present. By providing thick, rich description of the data, analysis is facilitated by extending perception, as well as developing and clarifying understanding of the data. Description is used throughout this chapter.

Eisner’s (1998) concept of interpretation refers to the screens used to make meaning of the data, such as the literature reviewed on the topic prior to beginning the research and/or personal experience or connoisseurship. Although I did not use one specific literature screen, such as Stronge’s (2007) teacher behaviors, my knowledge of the current literature, as well as my connoisseurship in the field, provided screens for the initial code development.

Eisner’s (1998) concept of evaluation is the judgment placed on the data. It allows the reader to assess the educational value of the data. My connoisseurship in the field provided a basis on which to evaluate the significance of the data during the inductive analysis process.

Eisner’s (1998) concept of thematics refers to the pervasive messages evident in the data. Again, my connoisseurship allowed me to develop the recurring themes and ideas present in the data and to eventually integrate them with the extant literature and theories.

These data analysis strategies enabled me to use my knowledge and experience, but to also see beyond what I already know to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of how preschool teachers perceive instructional coaching. Each step in the analysis process provided a closer look at the multi-layered complexities of teachers’ experiences with instructional coaching and thereby contributed to my knowledge of the practice.

Inductive analysis, as the second analytic strategy, provides an immersion into the particulars of the data in a systematic search for patterns of meaning, themes, and categories (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002). Hatch (2002) provided a framework including nine steps for the novice researcher to use as a guide in moving from the particular to the general. I used these
steps, integrated with Eisner’s (1998) educational criticism, to make sense of the data. Table 2 provides a visual representation of the intersection of the two data analysis processes used in this study.

Table 2

*The Intersection of Data Analysis Processes Used in this Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read the data and identify frames of analysis.</td>
<td>interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis.</td>
<td>interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify salient domains, assign them a code, and put others aside.</td>
<td>interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reread data, refining domains and keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data.</td>
<td>interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide if your domains are supported by the data and search for examples that do not fit with or run counter to the relationships in your domains.</td>
<td>interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete an analysis within domains.</td>
<td>interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for themes across domains.</td>
<td>interpretation and thematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains.</td>
<td>interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline.</td>
<td>interpretation and description evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding and Theme Development

As explained previously, educational criticism provided a basis for inductive analysis, as these two processes were used interactively. Step One of Hatch’s (2002) framework is to “read the data and identify frames of analysis” (p. 162). Eisner’s (1998) interpretation dimension was used in this step, as I used my knowledge of the current literature and personal experience to make meaning of the data. I began my exploration of the data by coding the interview transcripts. From my knowledge of the literature and my experience with instructional coaching, I recognized language specific to the practice of coaching and subsequently began labeling those sections of the data with descriptive terms. Each term represented ideas in the content (Hatch, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, in the interview with Alice, the participant described coaching this way: “She will do a lesson herself so I can see. And the next time I will do the same thing.” From this, I created two codes, coach demonstrations and coach observations. These terms may not ever have been used explicitly by participants during the interview, as this is not the typical language of preschool teachers. However, from my own connoisseurship (Eisner, 1998) as a former instructional coach and as an education leader, and from knowledge of the current literature (Knight, 2007), these terms are common to my profession and matched the content of the teachers’ responses. As Alice repeated those concepts in subsequent responses, I continued to code her data as coach demonstrations and coach observations. Likewise, when other participants’ answers were similar to Alice’s, I coded their data with these codes. This process of coding line by line (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was repeated with other codes that represented ideas in the data. Because of the massive amount of data, the coding process was arduous and messy at first. I expected this experience, but I continued using Hatch’s procedures consistently until I felt I understood and could interpret the data.
My method of coding was first to organize the data in an Excel document so that the codes could be inserted in columns adjoining the data. I then sorted the codes and accompanying data for deeper examination and refinement. By sorting the codes alphabetically within Excel, I was able to determine where I had been inconsistent in terminology. For example, I realized I had switched back and forth between the terms *individualizing* and *individualization*. For the purpose of clarity, I then changed both terms to *child individualization*. This was easy to do with a simple “find and replace.”

My next step was to immerse myself in the codes to determine which were closely connected and could therefore be combined as one. Again, using Eisner’s (1998) interpretation dimension, I relied upon my knowledge of the current literature and professional experience to make these decisions. One example of this was the use of codes such as *math lessons*, *phonological awareness lessons*, and *letter recognition lessons*. Using my knowledge of the field and the literature, I combined these types of codes into a new code, *school readiness skills*. According to Konold and Pianta (2005), “At a very broad level, readiness can be characterized in terms of children’s functioning in relation to cognitive and social areas, both of which are areas shown to predict performance in the early grades of school” (p. 175). The specific terms used by participants were in reference to lessons demonstrated and resources provided by their coaches for the purpose of providing teachers with more knowledge about teaching the readiness skills that their children are assessed on each year through the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment skills (Florida Department of Education, 2008; Office of Early Learning, 2015). The process of code refinement was ongoing; even as I began to write the descriptive narrative, I continued to combine and refine the coding terms.
This initial coding provided a way to categorize the data and provided a basis for later descriptions of patterns within the data. By sorting the columns alphabetically within Excel, I was also able to read all of the coded information together, which facilitated the identification of patterns. Codes that occurred frequently were considered salient in the minds of participants.

In addition to using codes representing ideas in the data, I also color-coded data in the following manner: red font for any comments I perceived as being adverse about coaching; orange font for any comments I perceived as being favorable about coaching; and blue font for any comments I perceived as related to the benefits of coaching. I was not sure at the time what I would do with this information; however, to respond to the voice of the participants and to respect their points of view, I acknowledged when it appeared to me they were saying something unfavorable. Overall, color coding was not central to analyzing the data and only served as a visual indicator of how I perceived the data. In my journal I wrote:

I’m marking positive comments about coaching or coaches in bold orange. I think there is significance in those comments being brought into the conversation without me asking the participant specifically about her opinion of coaching or coaches. (December 2014)

This color-coding technique also showed the frequency of occurrence of these types of comments. It was easily noted that there were very few red, or negative, comments about coaches or coaching, and that most came from one participant. About this, I wrote the following observation in my journal:

I’m marking specific negative comments in bold red. I find it interesting that there aren’t many of these. I wonder if it’s because the participants think I only want to know the positive elements or if their rapport with the coach is also a layer of protection for how much they will share about the coaching process. (December 2014)

A key component in inductive analysis is the creation of domains, or categories of meaning, that reveal the relationships that exist within the data (Hatch, 2002). Step Two of Hatch’s framework is to “create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within
frames of analysis” (p. 162). “Domains are categories organized around relationships that can be expressed semantically” (p. 165). In the present study, domains were constructed from the data, the researcher’s connoisseurship, and the literature. Again, Eisner’s (1998) interpretation dimension was used interactively with this step of inductive analysis. I began this process of creating domains by re-reading the codes and color coding the patterns of thought evident in those codes. I used colors to create a visual representation of the relationships among the concepts in the data. Color-coding these patterns of thought also revealed the frequency of categories found in the data, which is a necessary phase in the inductive approach. It was easy to then go back and analyze data by color code, which aligns with Step Three of Hatch’s framework, “identify salient domains, assign them a code, and put others aside” (p. 162). These colors indicated the domains in the data which became the basis for the development of the themes.

This process of color coding led to the identification of eight domains pertinent to the experiences of the participants—pedagogy, teacher knowledge, teacher improvement, rapport, teacher time, child learning, classroom environment, and parent involvement. Table 3 depicts the progression from terms to semantic relationships, to domains, and to themes (Hatch, 2002).

The table illustrates how the coding of participants’ terms and phrases in the data led to the designation of domains used to further categorize the data. Likewise, the semantic relationship of each coding term is shown as it relates to the domains. These relationships support the process of thinking analytically about the connections among the coding terms present in the data that led to the identification of domains.
Table 3

Identification of Domains and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Terms</th>
<th>Semantic Relationships</th>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach demonstrations</td>
<td>To Improve</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Instructional Coaching Is a Means of Building Instructional Capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher observations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach-teacher conferences</td>
<td>To Increase</td>
<td>Teacher Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information resource</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ willingness to learn/change</td>
<td>To Promote</td>
<td>Teacher Improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application &amp; practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director Involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/encouragement</td>
<td>Leads to</td>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>Instructional Coaching Requires a Supportive Environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach attitude/personality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach support &amp; availability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate time for coaching</td>
<td>To Respect</td>
<td>Teacher Time</td>
<td>Instructional Coaching Increases Children’s Learning Opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling of coaching sessions</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child portfolios/assessments</td>
<td>To Promote</td>
<td>Child Learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child individualization</td>
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<td>School readiness skills</td>
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<td>Teacher-child interactions</td>
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<td>To Promote</td>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
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<td>Learning centers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent conferences</td>
<td>To Support</td>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
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<td>Parent communication</td>
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Step Four of Hatch’s framework is to “reread data, refining domains and keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data” (p. 162). Prior to finalizing the domains, and to ensure that the data supported the coding terms and the resulting domains, I read through the domains numerous times while also journaling my thoughts about the process, for example:

Mirror lessons are mentioned often, but I think I need to combine this term with coach demonstrations, since that is essentially what a mirror lesson is. (January 2015)
Most teachers mentioned learning from their coaches how to make formal child observations. Since this is ultimately a part of child portfolios, I am combining these terms. (January 2015)

By writing about my thought processes, I was able to refine categories until I felt I had captured the terms that best described participants’ voices.

Step Five of Hatch’s framework is to “decide if your domains are supported by the data and search for examples that do not fit with or run counter to the relationships in your domains” (p. 162). I read the data by color-coded segments to confirm that the domains did indeed reflect the experiences described by the participants and to verify that there were adequate data to support those domains. Likewise, I considered examples that were not suitable for the categories. As a result, domain names were revised, added, and removed. For example, the domain pedagogy seemed too broad and two additional domains were created, teacher knowledge and teacher improvement. As an additional measure, I employed peer review by asking an expert in the field, whose professional background and experience parallels mine, to read selected parts of my coded data to ensure the codes were appropriate for the matched data. This step of domain refinement was concluded once I felt confident about the appropriate use of terms within the data to support each domain.

Step Six of Hatch’s (2002) framework is to “complete an analysis within domains” (p. 162). This step involves evaluating and expanding domains to search for distinct relationships and for other possible ways to organize them. As Hatch cautioned, however, domains do not always change during this step. After this analysis, my domains remained as they were. This step of inductive analysis was used interactively with Eisner’s (1998) interpretation dimension, as I examined the data to determine what was significant and whether or not there was significant evidence to support each domain.
Step Seven of Hatch’s (2002) framework is to “search for themes across domains” (p. 162). After the domain verification process, I then began to develop themes by considering connections among the domains (Hatch, 2002). This analysis of the domains involved interpretation of data through educational criticism, as I developed a sense of awareness of the teachers’ experiences and became involved in the process of bringing meaning to the data by attaching meaning to those experiences. This step was also used interactively with Eisner’s (1998) thematics dimension as the pervasive messages in the data were initially recognized. Specifically, as I considered the pervasive messages, I relied on my experience and the literature as I pondered the following questions: What do these eight domains have in common? How are they different? What is the goal of each? What is their significance to instructional coaching? To teaching?

From this process, three themes were developed that served to connect the pieces of the data together and attach meaning to the experiences of the preschool teachers. The three themes predominant in the data were as follows: instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity; instructional coaching requires a supportive environment; and instructional coaching increases children’s learning opportunities.

Step Eight in Hatch’s (2002) framework is to “create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains” (p. 162). The three thematic relationships, as shown in Table 3, organize the discussion of the analysis. Although each theme is described separately, the experiences of preschool teachers relate to more than one theme at a time, as each overlaps the others. For example, motivation and encouragement is an integral part of a teacher’s willingness to learn and change. These two codes relate to two themes, but one has influence over the other. Likewise, classroom resources provided by coaches related to coach
demonstrations in that those resources were often given to the teacher after the coach demonstrated a lesson that incorporated the resource. Furthermore, scheduling of coaching sessions was dependent upon director support and involvement. Again, Eisner’s (1998) interpretation dimension was used to make these connections within the data.

The next section addresses Step Nine of Hatch’s (2002) framework, which is to “select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline” (p. 162). Along with those excerpts, I used educational criticism to provide rich description and interpretation of the data. This required my knowledge of current literature and my professional experience with instructional coaching. For each of the three themes—instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity; instructional coaching requires a supportive environment; and instructional coaching increases children’s learning opportunities—I used excerpts from the data to support the domains within each theme for the purpose of enlightening the reader about preschool teachers’ experiences with instructional coaching. The following sections discuss how the domains related to the themes.

**Instructional Coaching Is a Means of Building Instructional Capacity**

This section discusses the theme *instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity* as it relates to how preschool teachers view instructional coaching. Educational criticism (Eisner, 1998) was used to portray the teachers’ perspectives through thick, rich description. The description of the domains in the theme, *instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity*, incorporates excerpts from the data that reflect the participants’ voices.

The preschool teachers in this study described instructional coaching as a means of building instructional capacity for teachers. Capacity building is an ongoing process that contributes to the growth and development of individuals and groups, and produces meaningful
change (Day, 2001; Fullan, 2011; Jaquith, 2012). Moreover, Jaquith describes instructional capacity as “the collection of resources for teaching needed to provide high quality instruction” (p. 2). Those resources are defined by Jaquith as instructional knowledge, instructional materials, instructional relationships, and organizational structures. Likewise, the participants in this study described their experiences with instructional coaching as focusing on improved pedagogy, thereby increasing their knowledge and improving their practice.

**Pedagogy**

In order to build instructional capacity, teachers must improve the art and science of teaching children (Knowles, 2011). Although the preschool teachers in this study did not commonly use the term *pedagogy*, they did in fact describe the ways in which instructional coaching led to the improvement of their teaching practices.

All 15 participants described coach demonstrations as the primary means by which they acquired knowledge about teaching during the coaching sessions. For example, in discussing what teachers learned about teaching practices, Autumn explained, “with me, I’m like a visual, so learning by seeing her teaching the kids, I would implement that into my lesson plans.” Similarly, Dacia stated, “To see her do the lesson, and then to see myself, like, ‘Ok, I don’t quite do it like that. Ok, let me try her technique.’ And I’ve learned new techniques for teaching the lessons.” Through coach demonstrations, teachers were able to watch and focus on the particulars of a well-delivered, developmentally appropriate lesson, which served as a foundation for improving pedagogy in instructional coaching.

Related to coach demonstrations were teacher observations. Participants depicted a predictable cycle of turn-taking, in which coaches would demonstrate a practice while teachers observed and took notes, and then teachers would demonstrate the practice while the coach
observed and took notes. When this cycle occurred within the same coaching session, it was referred to by the participants as a *mirror lesson*, meaning teachers mirrored the coaches’ same lesson immediately after observing it. When the cycle continued the next week, but the teacher had the added task of planning her own lesson, it was described as the *teacher’s turn* to do a lesson. As Autumn noted, “When she come [sic] back, it is our time to show her.” Most teachers who discussed these teacher observation sessions also mentioned the feedback given to them afterwards. As one participant, Caroline, put it:

> Then I get to do it with the children. Then the next time, I get to plan a little lesson and do it myself. And it doesn’t have to be [pause] I don’t have to use the material that she has given me—it’s a guideline for me—and I have tons of my own stuff, so I just pull out from my own stuff that seems relevant to . . . the goal was that she gave me, and then I’ll do it and she’ll critique me.

Although the word critique can have negative connotations, teachers described coaching feedback in a highly positive manner. Caroline later explained, “If there was anything to improve on, she always does it in a, well, she’s very sweet, so it never comes across in a mean manner or like, ‘You don’t know how to do it.’” Likewise, Danielle explained her coach feedback this way: “They can share that with us later that maybe we could have done a little bit more of this, but we did this really well.” By being observed in practice and receiving specific feedback, teachers began to refine the art and science of teaching.

> The critical part of improving pedagogy is learning and implementing new strategies to fit a particular situation (NAEYC, 2009). Teachers described a variety of new methods learned from coaches. For instance, teachers talked about learning to incorporate more hands-on activities, strategies for different types of learners, and methods of behavior management. Frances conveyed, “Hands-on. More hands-on. Just getting the kids more involved in what you’re doing, and you’ll be amazed at how you catch their attention, like their focus.” Similarly,
Danielle stated, “There were a few kids that obviously . . . just cannot sit still in a chair. We have had them stand beside me while we’re working on a lesson.” Furthermore, Barbara made the following observation:

I feel as if coaching has helped me to become a more attentive teacher and more of a listener. Because sometimes when we may be doing an activity, everybody’s always yelling at me and yelling and I’ll be like, “No, no, no, settle down.” And you know, instead of trying to settle them down, actually listen to what it is they have to say. So I have become a better listener.

Teachers in this study described many approaches to teaching learned from their coaching experiences. Hands-on activities, managing students’ behavior, allowing children freedom of movement during lessons, and developing listening skills are examples of new approaches.

Another teaching strategy mentioned frequently was small group instruction. In preschool classrooms, it is common for teachers to use circle time as the only instructional time, which means all children in the class are gathered together at one time and expected to sit still and listen to a somewhat lengthy lesson and read-aloud. The participants in this study shared experiences with small-group instruction during coaching sessions and described it as a practice that they found beneficial when they continued to use it as one of their regular teaching strategies. Small-group instruction, as described by the participants, took place when teachers worked with three or four students at a time, as opposed to the whole group at once. As Danielle explained about introducing new words to children:

And then they have a better understanding of what that word is, because you not only hit it in your small group, but then you hit it with the large group. But I guess . . . before I didn’t realize how much that worked, until with coaching, I feel that that really helped guide you to teach that way.

Similarly, Dacia described the most beneficial part of coaching:

the small group lessons I really enjoyed . . . Just to see them being taught in another perspective that gave me a different outlook on how I might could teach that lesson, even
though maybe the way I taught it wasn’t the wrong way, but it taught me to look at a
different perspective.

These strategies learned through coaching demonstrations and feedback sessions contribute to
improvement of how teachers approach the art and science of teaching.

**Teacher Knowledge**

In order to build instructional capacity, teachers must increase their knowledge of the
elements of teaching that promote student learning (Spillane & Louis, 2002). The coach-teacher
conference is a time set aside on each coaching day for the coach and teacher to sit down
together to discuss expectations and strategies that work together to promote student learning
opportunities. One participant, Frances, described the conference time this way:

> We do have conferences. We do individually and then we do it also as a team. Basically, it prepares you for the next coaching session. Like just to tell you what we need to be working on, and so that comes with schedules, that comes with calendars, that comes with any information that is new.

Through these conference times, coaches are able to address concerns, relay new information,
and set goals for improvement. Teachers also portrayed the conference time as the place where
they received that specific feedback mentioned previously. Another participant, Jade, noted:

> After she goes through all the classes that she coaches, then we conference with her in the afternoon. And then she talks about what we did for that day, what we could do better, you know, shows us different things we can do with the children to increase their learning, so it works out really good.

Similarly Barbara explained:

> Some of the other things we talked about were different ways that we could enhance literacy in our classrooms. We talked about . . . ideas for our classroom. They would bring us different things like word wall cards or different resources that we could use. And if we had any questions for them in reference to if we needed any help with anything, she was always good about talking with us about that.
Teachers in this study described these coach-teacher conference times as a means of learning more about ways to promote student learning as well as a time to discuss issues they may have been experiencing.

Teacher knowledge is also impacted through time spent adequately planning and preparing for teaching. Teachers mentioned this quite often. Belinda put it quite simply, “Teaching [pause] what I’ve learned is being prepared and ready.” Likewise, Edna relayed, “Well, one, how to make better use of my time. That was really important to me.” Likewise, Beth expounded:

It has influenced my teaching a great deal. Just to prepare myself as a teacher when I come inside the classroom. To be ready, you know, to be prepared, to have my materials if I know what I’m going to teach. Just be prepared with the curriculum. Don’t come in and be unprepared, because then that will make your children unprepared. Just to be prepared that morning.

Through coaching, teachers expressed having a deeper understanding of why it is important to be well prepared for teaching and to use time effectively.

Teacher knowledge is also impacted by the new information coaches bring to the teachers during coaching sessions, both formally and informally. Teachers described a more formal process of obtaining new information from coaches. The participants talked often about the coach as an information resource—as someone to whom they could turn for advice or knowledge about any subject related to teaching. Behavior management was mentioned most often as a topic about which teachers asked for help. Danielle explained, “So I just had a lot of behavioral problems. And so it’s guidance. Having her there for guidance. That was nice. Very nice.” For example, Frances noted, “So that’s the benefit of coaching—the information that is being presented to you and brought to you at your doorstep at work.” Blaire summed up the increase in teacher knowledge this way, “So if you get this insight from someone who has all the tools
and necessities to teach you these things, then you are only going to be benefitting the child’s education.”

**Teacher Improvement**

In order to build instructional capacity, teachers must be involved in an on-going process of development (Day, 2001). The first step to change is a willingness to do so (Kotter, 1996). Participants in this study professed to an openness to the process of improvement through coaching. Denise explained how coaches can best benefit from coaching:

> To be willing to listen and take changes. And that’s hard. And to accept when somebody is coming into your class. To accept somebody coming into your class and they are teaching. Yeah. There’s a lot of people that wouldn’t [pause] I’m, “Come on in!”

Likewise, Dacia explained it this way:

> And I think if you’re really a professional, that you’ll take that criticism constructively and not take it to heart, because most of the time, criticism, it’s not meant to be personal. It’s just for growing. It’s just for your growth, so I think taking the criticism constructively and just thinking that it’s not personal. It’s not against you and it’s going to help you grow to be a better teacher. I think that’s really important. We all don’t like [pause] it’s hard to hear. I’ve even said to (Director Name) before, “Well in my world I’m perfect,” but I know I’m not so.

Teachers in this study expressed a willingness to accept the coaches and the new information and strategies the coaches brought into their classrooms. The changes teachers discussed were related to their own improvement, and they described a trusting relationship with coaches who allowed them to try new approaches to teaching.

Participants also perceived colleague collaboration as a part of their development process. As mentioned previously, coach conference times were conducted both individually and with the team of teachers in the center. In addition to that formal collaboration time, teachers also mentioned ways they began to share coaching topics with one another on their own. Frances
revealed, “And then I also share it with my co-workers. Sometimes maybe they don’t know, so I’ll share it. If they don’t know, I may say, ‘Hey, look at this.’ And then we talk about it.”

Another way teachers described their own improvement was through the application and practice of what they learned in coaching sessions. As Barbara described it:

Normally what I try to do throughout the course of the day once [the coaching session] is over is try to go back over something that we did or the coach did from that activity just to kind of reinforce it or go back over it again.

Moreover, Alice declared, “Because I’m using everything that I learned. And I think it is very good.” Teachers often expressed putting into practice the new information and strategies brought to them by the coaches. These strategies were conveyed by the teacher as beneficial to them as well as to their children.

To build instructional capacity, teachers need the support of their leaders. In child care centers, those leaders are the center directors. Because center directors are often overwhelmed with the daily tasks of running the business, and because many are not educators by profession, the professional development of their teachers is often neglected. When an instructional coach joins the team, the director, more often than not, does not immerse herself in the process.

Participants in this study view that lack of involvement unfavorably. Almost all of those interviewed talked about the need for center directors to become more involved in the process and to communicate better with the coach and teacher about topics related to coaching. Belinda put it simply, “Just be on the same page with the coaches.” Caroline expanded on this thought:

I think teachers need their supervisors to say, “Oh, I talked to the coach, and she said you are working on this” or “I heard you are doing a really good job” or “I heard maybe you need some help with this. Is there anything I can do to help you?” Or, you know, the supervisor comes by and says, “How’s that going? You know, you’ve been seeing the coach for a couple of months. How do you feel? Do you feel you are getting a lot out of that?” I think sometimes supervisors get really busy and they forget to check in with their teachers. And it’s always good to have that support from the supervisor and know that
yes, your teacher is working with a coach, but you as a supervisor are encouraging and supporting the teacher as well.

Several teachers also mentioned the need for all agencies involved in quality improvement to streamline their efforts by having consistent requirements. As Barbara explained:

The director should go hand in hand as far as the resources or supplies or whatever it is that we will need. And . . . whatever it is that we get from the coaches as the teacher, if we could, in turn, go back to our director to say, “Hey, this is what she and I or he and I talked about or what we came up with,” then it all goes smoothly through, versus saying, “Hey, we gotta do this according to [Center Name],” or “We gotta do this according to ELC,” or “We gotta do this according to [pause]” Like one way.

Teachers expressed a need for more support from their leaders in the teachers’ quest for improvement. Likewise, participants described a desire for more collaboration among the early learning agencies that work with their centers.

However, not all teachers discussed director support in a negative manner. One participant, Autumn, shared her experience with director support after her tedious preparation for the classroom assessment portion of the validation process in the Guiding Stars of Duval (GSOD) Quality Rating Improvement System:

Because she sees all the frustration and all that we did and all of that and then how I was taking stuff home so I could get everything ready and all of that. I got $100 for making, you know, the place look good and I have a card that says, “Thank you for the improvement of everything.”

This teacher acknowledged the strong impact of being recognized for her efforts to improve the school.

In summary, participants acknowledged that involvement in coaching was instrumental in building their instructional capacity through a focus on improved pedagogy, an increase in teacher knowledge, and the promotion of teacher improvement. Building teachers’ instructional capacity increases the likelihood that student learning will improve, which is the ultimate goal of instructional coaching, or any other educational endeavor.
Instructional Coaching Requires a Supportive Environment

This section discusses the theme instructional coaching requires a supportive environment as it relates to how preschool teachers view instructional coaching. Bolman and Deal (2003) described organizations as comprising four frames: structural, human, political, and symbolic. Similarly, the participants in this study described the creation of an environment for coaching as one that involves changes to the structure of a teacher’s day, or teacher time, as well as to the building of relationships between individuals, or rapport. The process of educational criticism (Eisner, 1998) enabled the portrayal of the teachers’ perspectives. The description of the domains reflected in the theme, instructional coaching requires a supportive environment, incorporates excerpts from the data that reflect the participants’ voices.

Rapport

In order to create an environment that is conducive to coaching, teachers and coaches must build trust (Heineke, 2013; Kissel et al., 2011; Knight, 2007; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Simon, 2009; Thelning et al., 2010; Trombly, 2012; Wise & Hammack, 2011). Although preschool teachers do not commonly use the term rapport, they do, in fact, describe the ways in which instructional coaching leads to the development of a mutual trust between coach and teacher. All 15 participants described having positive relationships with at least one of their coaches.

The most prevalent aspect of rapport-building described by the participants was the encouragement and motivation bestowed by coaches. As mentioned earlier, the child care center directors, or teacher supervisors, were not as actively involved as desired in the daily practices of teachers and their classrooms. Therefore, it was the coach who provided specific feedback to
teachers about their teaching practices. Caroline described the most beneficial part of coaching this way:

    My cheerleader. [pause] I think it’s very beneficial to a teacher to have that encouragement and to have that support. That’s really beneficial to you as a teacher, and it makes you feel good. It makes you, “OK! Yes! Somebody gets that I’m working really hard!”

Autumn described coaching in a similar manner:

    It helps the teachers to lift them up. And there is always somebody telling you what you are doing good and what did you need to improve, because sometimes you don’t get that from your boss. They are always trying to get things ready for people to come to the center.

Teachers in this study expressed appreciation for the support and encouragement they received from their coaches and often noted that the recognition from the coaches was the only positive reinforcement they received.

    In addition to encouragement, teachers also described their coaches as motivators who inspired them to further their education or to make significant changes in their practices. Edna expressed, “I would say, ‘Oh no, I’m not going to do anything else. I don’t have the time.’ And she said, ‘No, you need to get your CDA.’ You know, it’s a push to get you to do all that.”

Autumn talked about the inspiration this way, “Because she would come and she goes, I mean, ‘Don’t be afraid. Just try.’ And sometimes we try and try and she says, ‘Yes!’ and you see the results and you see she really cares.” Such encouragement and motivation act as catalysts for change through empowering teachers to try new things and expand their education (Covey, 2004; Kotter, 1996). In so doing, a supportive environment for coaching is created.

    Another aspect of creating a favorable environment for coaching is the attitude and personality of the coach. As Dacia expressed, “Someone that’s upbeat, that’s positive, that has a good outlook. Someone that you can relate to [who] puts a positive spin on what you’re doing,
even if you’re not really . . . there yet.” Likewise, Blaire explained, “Me and her was cool. We laughed; we talked; we learned together. I mean, I made her day; she made my day.” However, one participant relayed an experience with a coach who was less than personable. Danielle noted, “Definitely has to be bubbly. We had three different coaches over the time period. The first one, she wasn’t super talkative.”

In addition to coach personality and attitude, teachers conveyed a need for coaches to be supportive and available to them. Often this support was expressed in experiences with coaches who provided information and resources to teachers outside of their normal coaching session times. For example, Danielle shared,

But I asked her to send me a copy of it, so she went ahead and emailed me a copy of it. And so I felt very comfortable in talking to her and asking her, “Hey, do you have this? Do you have that?” And that helped me out a lot.

Likewise, Edna stated,

If you have questions, they take the time to make a phone call then to ask. You know, “They’re asking me this” [imitating a coach on the phone]. And, if they can’t get the answer on that particular day, they will call back in and send an email to me. I love that. Because it’s like what you said matters.

Teachers in this study frequently expressed an appreciation for the time coaches spent following through with teacher requests for materials and information. Personable coaches were also held in high regard by the participants.

**Teacher Time**

In order to create an environment that is conducive to coaching, time must be appropriately scheduled for the coaching sessions to take place. Time spent in coaching influences the development of teacher efficacy (Shidler, 2008; Toll, 2006). According to participants, coaches in this study typically spent an hour per week in their classrooms during
morning instructional time and one-half hour to one-half hours per week in conference time with
the teachers. Two participants in this study described the use of time in a negative manner, and
indicated the coach needed to be more respectful of the teacher’s time. Frances relayed her
experience:

If we’re on a time schedule here, and you’re not going to be on time, sometimes just pick
up the phone just to say that you’re going to be 15, 20, or 30 minutes late. That way I can
do my planning and adjust accordingly. That’s my biggest pet peeve is time
management.

However, six participants expressed a need for more coaching time, indicating the time they
spent with the coach was inadequate. When asked how she would improve coaching, Danielle
explained, “Having more time to talk about the lessons and to talk about different things that are
required to do.” Denise put it simply, “Have them more.”

Participants expressed a need for more time observing coaches demonstrating
instructional strategies as well as more time meeting with them to discuss topics related to
teaching. One participant noted that it would be helpful at the onset of the coaching relationship
if the coach came more often than only once per week. Additionally, teachers expressed a desire
for coaching to continue in some form even after the center completed the validation process for
the Guiding Stars of Duval program.

In summary, participants acknowledged that successful involvement in coaching required
the creation of an environment for coaching through rapport building between teacher and coach
and through commitment to coaching time. By creating an environment supportive of coaching,
teachers would receive the greatest benefit, which, in turn, would indirectly impact children
through improved learning, undoubtedly the fundamental purpose of instructional coaching.
Instructional Coaching Increases Children’s Learning Opportunities

This section discusses the theme *instructional coaching increases children’s learning opportunities* as it relates to how preschool teachers view instructional coaching. The effect of high quality learning experiences on child development is profound in that it better prepares children for school and for academic success (Belsky et al., 2007; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005; Howes et al., 2008). Therefore, increasing children’s opportunities for learning in preschool is essential. The preschool teachers in this study described instructional coaching as it relates to increasing children’s learning opportunities through a focus on child learning, the classroom environment, and parent involvement. *Thick, rich description*, a process in educational criticism (Eisner, 1998) facilitated the portrayal of the teachers’ perspectives. The description of the domains involved in the theme, *increasing child learning opportunities*, incorporates excerpts from the data that reflect the participants’ voices.

**Child Learning**

In order to increase child learning opportunities, teachers must be intentional about the practice of teaching (Epstein, 2007; Gronlund & Stewart, 2011). One way teachers expressed their focus on child learning was through the use of child portfolios and formative and summative assessments as means for gathering data about what children know and need to know. Barbara explained the portfolio this way: “We have a binder that we keep as far as like the progress of the children, how they are progressing, different areas they need help with.”

Instructional coaching included an emphasis on teaching teachers how to write child observations in order to assess learning. Autumn described this observation process in simple terms: “Because you can observe a child and know exactly what you need to work on.” However, several teachers shared their perspective regarding the overwhelming responsibility of
child observations. They often referred to them as “paperwork.” Alice discussed the least beneficial part of coaching:

Paperwork. Too much paperwork. When we have to do all those observations over and over again. I mean, I understand that’s a good thing, because that way you go back and you see, I mean, what’s going on today, you compare to another day. And then when you go back a month, you can say, “Well, he has improved.”

Similarly, Beth explained:

Well the observations [pause] if I would have had less kids, but I have 14 kids. I had to sit down every day and do that. It was a lot. Like I say, it’s a lot of paperwork, but it helps you in the long term.

Teachers in this study consistently described the process of child observations as one that required more time than teachers were able to adequately give.

Related to the practice of completing child observations is the practice of child individualization. Coaches often worked with teachers to make sense of data collected on children and how to use the data to inform teaching practices by individualizing instruction according to each child’s needs. This teaching practice requires the teacher to use formal and informal assessment data, such as observations, work samples, or direct measures of ability, to plan and implement individualized goals for children. Belinda explained how assessment data were used:

To know where they’re at and to apply it. To know what I need to [do] when creating my curriculum. Ok, we’re having a problem in this area—early literacy or math. And that helps me to create my curriculum, to be able to apply what they need.

In reference to how coaching was beneficial, Evelyn noted, “I’m doing more individualized lessons.” Barbara explained it this way:

We sat down and talked about the different activities that were presented to the children. We talked about some of the goal setting that some of the kids needed that was not quite . . . meeting those milestones, as far as assessment. So we would sit down and talked about what kind of strategies that we could come up with to better help those children to be prepared for kindergarten.
Teachers in this study frequently expressed how coaching provided support to teachers in implementing individualized lessons for children according to their needs.

In addition to a focus on assessment data and individualized instruction, teachers in this study also described the focus on school readiness skills during coaching sessions. School readiness skills for preschool children included the domains common to early learning standards, such as print awareness, letter recognition, phonological awareness, science exploration, counting, graphing, and early addition and subtraction skills (Florida Department of Education, 2008; Office of Early Learning, 2015). However, in addition to cognitive skills, these school readiness skills also included socio-emotional skills (Halle, Hair, Wandner, & Chien, 2012; McTurk, Lea, Robinson, Nutton, & Carapetis, 2011; Morrison, 2011; Sahin, Sak, & Tuncer, 2013). When asked how her philosophy of education had changed through coaching, Belinda expressed, “Oh, tremendously…it just taught me a lot... how important it is for them to learn these different skills to be ready for kindergarten.” Many teachers also shared how they still use the skills lessons the coaches demonstrated. Caroline explained it this way:

Well, I have a teacher book. And I put the lesson that we’ve worked on in my teacher book. And my teacher book is divided up into certain sections. And so the lessons are then divided up in to letter recognition, number recognition, compound words . . . and then, when I need to work on that again, I go to that lesson that’s in the book, and I read it over and remember what she talked about.

Likewise, Belinda talked about the topics that are most important for coaching, “The most important thing the topics should be, I mean for readiness . . . applying the things they need to be ready for kindergarten.”

Also related to child learning is a focus on teacher-child interactions. In the past few years, a shift in the field of early childhood education has occurred from an emphasis on classroom environments towards a concentration on teacher-child interactions as the most
significant indicator of quality (Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn, 2010). Moreover, empirical evidence exists to support the notion that the quality of teacher-child interactions in preschool impacts children’s later school success (Curby et al., 2009; Guo, Piasta, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2010; Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008). In Jacksonville, Florida, the Early Learning Coalition of Duval developed the Guiding Stars of Duval (GSOD) Quality Rating Improvement System as one way to recognize child care centers for their efforts to improve the quality of their learning environments. The teacher assessment tool used in the GSOD system changed in 2013 from the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which paralleled the profession’s move to focus on interactions. This shift in the GSOD system directed a shift in coaching, as well. The participants in this study were coached during the 2013-14 school year on the importance of improving the quantity and quality of teacher-child interactions.

In response to how coaching impacted teaching practices and what was most beneficial from coaching, most teachers referred to the focus on child learning through improved interactions. In response to what took place during coaching, Jade explained, “She will come in and she will do an activity and I sit back and I listen to what she said to the kids and what their responses back on their open ended question, and I write that down.” Jade expounded on this later in the interview:

I guess they teach you like how to talk to the children, how to use your open ended questions, instead of just talking with… at them…you’re asking them questions…instead of just…they’re just giving you a yes or no answer, they’re continuing with a sentence.

Likewise, Evelynn explained:

And you have to be informative to the kids. And have the kids talk to you. So they can talk back to you and you give them a little hint, but not all the question so they can be verbally [sic], because that is one of the big things that everybody is looking at.
Blaire described what she learned about teaching practices:

“Tell me why you are doing that,” [imitating herself talking to the children], and it taught me to ask them different open-ended questions to get them to tell me more about a simple answer that I could have got, “Yes.” You know, the different practices on that taught me more of how to teach them, how to instruct them, how to explain to them why I’m doing this, why it’s important they do it this way just for the learning experience.

Dacia described this process similarly:

Oh, I’ve learned a lot, but now just to pinpoint it down. I really learned how to elaborate on my interactions. And how to really take the time to slow down, let the children answer, and not answer for them. And kinda learned how to probe them to get more information from them without just answering it for them.

Blaire explained how children responded to the focus on interactions:

I did, ‘cause it’s more one-on-one. More wording is going on. It’s just not like, “This is what you have to do,” and I’m gone. You know what I mean? It gave them like a chance to ask me a question like, “Well why did you tell me that?” or it just brought up their communication and vocabulary skills and it [pause] as I see them asking more back in response, it’ll give me more to respond to ask them and get their input on it. So I think it did. Because there were some things that I just didn’t realize that I was doing that maybe I needed to stop doing or I need to take a different route with my questioning. And just to [pause] giving the children time to actually develop their own thought, because it takes them time to really think about what they want to say, and it’s not that they don’t get it, it’s just that it takes them a little time just to step back and listen to them and let them think it out first.

Teachers in this study described change in their own instructional practice through a deeper understanding of the importance of child interactions. Although the focus of coaching assessment shifted in 2013 from a focus on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) to a focus on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) by name, none of the participants mentioned the new tool by name. They did, however, make references to their scores or to the CLASS Dimensions Guide, which is a “blue book” coaches use when conferencing with teachers about improving interactions. For example, Blaire noted, “Well, it’s a lot as far as the whole new Dimensions and the whole book of it. It kind of brought a different insight to me as far as on the instruction.” Likewise, Caroline explained:
So my scores went up at the end of the year; so that was good. That was my focus . . . making sure that I was saying those things more often and getting my kids to think. And now it’s just second nature when we sit down, “And how do you know?” and “What makes you think that?” And I hear that coming out way more now.

Teachers in this study most often expressed the focus on child interactions through descriptions of their changed practices, but sometimes referred to the tool used to assess those interactions. Many participants described their improved questioning techniques and how those strategies improved children’s language skills.

**Classroom Environment**

To increase child learning opportunities, teachers must create a developmentally appropriate learning environment with adequate learning resources in various learning centers established and organized throughout the classroom (Mashburn & Pianta, 2007; Reid & Ready, 2013). Based on my professional experience with instructional coaching, resources could include classroom materials for learning centers, learning resources to accompany demonstration lessons, visual aids to serve as reminders for teachers to do and say certain things, PowerPoint presentations to guide conferences, and articles about topics related to coaching. One way teachers expressed their focus on child learning was through the classroom resources given to them by their coaches. Edna, for example, referred to learning resources brought to the classroom by her coach:

Especially if I’m doing something with numbers with the kids or I’m doing something with alphabets [sic] or they’re [coaches] bringing in the books or with the pictures and we can make the sounds and stuff. Just utilizing the equipment, the items and stuff that has been brought in by them, has really helped me a lot.

Blaire affirmed, “I love the stuff she brings, because it’s needed and it’s fun and it’s not just like boring.” In talking about the visual aids the coaches contributed, Caroline had this to say:

I had to teach myself to be more vocal and to help my children think and use their vocabulary more. So it was nice to get the aids that I have. Posters up, you know, “Think.
Thus, the coaches provided specific resources to facilitate learning for both the children and the teachers. However, one participant did not agree with the money spent on coaching or on classroom materials delivered by coaches to her center, a franchised national chain. She felt the money should be spent on a “mom-and-pop type center” with more limited resources. Betty explained how she felt about having resources brought in to her classroom:

You know, you make so much money [motioning towards the office]. I just [pause] and then bring us toys? I just don’t believe in that. I just couldn’t see it. I was like, when they first came in, I was like, “What are you doing here?” I said, “Do you know how much money they [parents] pay for my room? What are you doing here? You need to take your time and put it on a center that maybe doesn’t have that and bring them the toys they need.” They [motioning arms around room] shouldn’t need anything.

One way teachers expressed their focus on learning environments was through intentionality with the classroom learning centers. Learning through play is a key component of quality early education programs. Edna mentioned this focus, “How to make better use of my time… that was really important to me. How to get my classroom set up for the students. For me, those were key learning points.” Betty also spoke about setting up learning centers, “I mean like with the centers. They [coaches] teach you how to do your centers. If your room is not organized the way it should be, they’ll help you to reorganize it to get it to where it should be.” Thus, most teachers in this study expressed a deeper understanding of using quality learning environments as a way to increase child learning opportunities.

Related to the set-up of learning centers is center management, which is a system for children to have free choice of learning centers through self-management. One participant, Betty, noted, “She’ll tell you what you need to have in each learning center. How many you need to have. How many children should be in each center.” Autumn also mentioned center
management, “How you transition to the table to the different centers and stuff like that. That was very, very helpful.” In this study, teachers described learning how to improve the learning environment and make it more effective by implementing center management strategies taught by the coaches.

**Parent Involvement**

In order to increase child learning opportunities, the primary caregiver, or family of the child, should be involved in the child’s success (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Wen, Bulotsky-Shearer, Hahs-Vaughn, & Korfmacher, 2012). One way teachers expressed their focus on increasing learning opportunities was through improving the effectiveness of parent conferences. One component of the Guiding Stars of Duval (GSOD) program is a requirement for biannual parent conferences. Prior to these meetings, coaches instruct teachers on how to share assessment data that measures children’s progress. Denise described this process:

> I had my conferences with the parents. After I tested all the children and evaluated what they could do and what they couldn’t do and where they stand at, I had conferences with all the parents and brought them all in and talked to all of them.

Similarly, Autumn had this to say about coaching: “It helped me with the parents to be able to discuss with them like, ok, maybe we need to work more on this [to] improve.” This statement is an example of the way teachers expressed having a better understanding of the importance of interacting with parents through formal conferences.

Another part of the GSOD requirement is parent communication. Centers participating in GSOD must document three different types of on-going communication efforts, such as newsletters, active websites, parent bulletin boards, and parent volunteer opportunities. Thus,
during their sessions with teachers, coaches taught and modeled strategies for improving communication with parents. Alice discussed the topics she and her coach covered:

Everything. I mean if we have any concern about any children, about how they behave. What can we do to help them? We set up goals for them. How can we talk to parents, to our director? A lot of information.

Another participant, Frances, talked about parent communication:

And also for parents, because they want information, and they’ll say, “Ok, what do you guys do?” And I can go and revert [sic] back to the handbook and say, “Hey, this is what our coach gave us. Maybe you can try these techniques at home.” Because some of these parents are new, and they don’t know where to go or the websites [available] so it’s accessible.

Although most participants were supportive of the desirability of parent communication, not all were comfortable with the increased responsibility. Betty described how she felt about the GSOD requirement to talk to parents more often:

Things that we didn’t do before, now we gotta do. You know, before we couldn’t talk to parents. There was no communicating with the parents. You had a conference and that’s it. You did not stand at the door and communicate with them. Now all of a sudden, ’cause we’re going through all these changes, (Center Name) changed—did like a 360. Things that we couldn’t do before, you’re changing just for this.

This participant demonstrates that as in any professional environment, not everyone agrees with everything in the field, even when supported by empirical evidence on developmentally appropriate practice.

In summary, participants emphasized the importance of increasing child learning opportunities through their work with coaches on promoting child learning, improving classroom environments, and increasing parent involvement. By creating more opportunities for children to learn in preschool, teachers are better preparing children for school success.

At this stage of the data analysis, it is my responsibility as the researcher to determine whether or not my interpretations of the data accurately reflect participants’ voices about
coaching as a worthwhile professional development practice. I used Eisner’s (1998) evaluation dimension, which provides an opportunity to judge the value of the research. I used my connoisseurship to help make that determination. Not only does the literature support coaching as a worthwhile professional development practice (Knight, 2007; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007; Skiffington et al., 2010; Washburn, & Elliott, 2011; Wise & Hammack, 2011), but my interpretation of what the participants in this study said about coaching supports the practice as well. The two themes—*instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity* and *instructional coaching increases children’s learning opportunities*—clearly indicate the value of coaching for early childhood education.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the analysis of data collected from 15 semi-structured interviews of preschool teachers in six child care centers in Jacksonville, Florida. The semi-structured interviews were used to capture the voices and obtain the perspectives of preschool teachers on instructional coaching. This chapter also discussed my experiences with the data collection process and an account of how connoisseurship (Eisner, 1998), researcher as tool (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988), and reflexivity (Patton, 2002) were used in the analysis. Two data analysis strategies were described—inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) and educational criticism (Eisner, 1998). The discussion of the analysis was organized around three themes, which provided a framework to view and understand the voices and perspectives of preschool teachers about instructional coaching. The three themes developed from the analysis of the data were *instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity; instructional coaching requires a supportive environment;* and *instructional coaching increases children’s learning opportunities*. Chapter 5 discusses conclusions drawn from the study,
recommendations for practice, implications for further research, and implications for policy formulation and adoption.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The previous chapter included an analysis of the data to find meaning in the perceptions of preschool teachers about their experiences with instructional coaching. Fifteen preschool teachers shared their perceptions through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interview data were analyzed and described using inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) and educational criticism (Eisner, 1998).

This final chapter contains six sections. The first section summarizes the purpose of the study, the related literature, and the methodology. The second section provides a discussion of the results and conclusions of the study. The third section explains the relationship between the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that guided the study. The fourth section presents recommendations for the practice of instructional coaching. The fifth section offers implications and recommendations for future studies. The final section provides implications and recommendations for policy formation and adoption.

Summary of Purpose, Literature, and Methodology

In education, we love numbers. We obsess over scores. We use quantitative data to inform most all decisions. Instructional coaching in Jacksonville, Florida, is no different. For the eleven years I have been a part of the early intervention program in child care centers in this area, we have been driven by “outcomes” measured by quantitative means to determine the impact of instructional coaching of Jacksonville’s preschool teachers. However, numbers are only a small piece of a complicated puzzle. When dealing with the complexities of people, we
need to hear their voices. We need to attach meaning to the patterns in what is seen and heard. Qualitative research allows us to do just that.

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers describe their experiences with instructional coaching, which was defined as “a strategy that seeks to improve student achievement by enhancing teachers’ knowledge and skill, in both pedagogy and subject-area content, through job-embedded, ongoing professional development” (Trombly, 2012, p. 11). Instructional coaching in schools is complex in nature. Through the use of one-on-one interviews, an in-depth look at preschool teachers’ perspectives provided insight into some of these complexities. Because the nature of instructional coaching is intrinsically complex, and because examining teachers’ perspectives is an appropriate way to develop understanding about those complexities (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002; Peshkin, 1993), a qualitative design was used to explore the particulars and subtleties of the coaching process as perceived by teachers. This approach was appropriate because I wanted to go beyond my own perspective and gain a deeper and clearer understanding of participants’ perspectives and voices.

This study sought answers to the following question: How do preschool teachers involved in instructional coaching perceive and describe coaching? In addition to the overall research question, several sub-questions formed the framework of this study: How do teachers describe the impact of instructional coaching on their work? What parts of instructional coaching do teachers describe as effective? What parts of instructional coaching do teachers describe as ineffective? These additional questions along with the overall research question provided a basis for creating interview questions used to elicit responses from the participants. The focus of these questions influenced the review of the related literature.
Chapter Two provided a review of the related literature regarding instructional coaching and provided a deeper understanding of the phenomena being explored. The review of the literature began with a description of the historical context of the act of coaching and its evolution into a form of professional development in the business world and then into the field of education. The following theoretical frameworks guided the literature analysis pertinent to this study: Vygotsky’s social learning theory (Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007); Simon’s (2009) interpretation of the Gestalt theory of learning; Day’s (2001) theory of leader versus leadership development; and Knight’s (2007, 2011, 2012) instructional coaching model. Specifically, the following categories were discussed in the review of literature: coaching as a form of professional development; instructional coaching in education; and instructional coaching for school reform.

The review of literature led to the formation of a conceptual framework that provided support for the need to do more research on coaching as a means of individual development for the purpose of improving schools and enhancing student outcomes. The conceptual framework for this study was developed relative to the idea of coaching as a means of individual development for the purpose of improving schools and enhancing student outcomes. The review of the literature indicated traditional forms of face-to-face in-service and professional development workshops are often ineffective due to a lack of time for reflection and follow-up discussion about implementation attempts. Therefore, school reform has employed more intensive, one-on-one professional development in the form of instructional coaching. However, according to current literature, the inconsistency with which coaching is implemented across programs and the lack of empirical evidence about its effectiveness commands more research on the subject.
The concepts identified in the review of literature provided a basis for structuring the interview questions used in the data collection phase. Data collection involved semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 preschool teachers from six child care centers in Jacksonville, Florida.

**Discussion of Data Analysis with Conclusions**

Two data analysis strategies were employed in this study—inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) and educational criticism (Eisner, 1998). The discussion of the analysis was structured around three themes, which provided a context from which to view and understand the perspectives of preschool teachers about instructional coaching. The three themes were *instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity; instructional coaching requires a supportive environment; and instructional coaching increases children’s learning opportunities*. The themes are interrelated, because data discussed in one theme were linked to other themes. The common element among them is their relationship to instructional leadership and professional learning in preschools. Each theme provides an opportunity to improve the leadership role of coaches, teachers, and supervisors. The improvement of instructional leadership in child care centers is compelled by mounting pressure for preschool children to produce learning outcomes that support their readiness for kindergarten. No longer are preschools simply child care centers where children receive custodial care while parents are working. Preschools are now expected to create lesson plans based on state standards and cover these learning objectives thoroughly while assessing learning and differentiating instruction. Due to these stringent requirements, strong instructional leadership is essential. Implications and recommendations for practice, future research, and policy will be discussed later in this chapter.
Instructional Coaching Is a Means of Building Instructional Capacity

The first theme, instructional coaching is a means of building instructional capacity, illustrated that preschool teachers portrayed instructional coaching as a way to build their own instructional capacity. Capacity building is a continuing development of a person or group for the purpose significant improvement (Day, 2001; Fullan 2011; Jaquith, 2012). According to Day (2001), coaching is a “practical goal-focused form of one-on-one learning” (p. 590) with the targets for development being “self-knowledge, behavioral change, and career development” (p. 588). Fullan (2011) described capacity building as the development of deep motivation in teachers to achieve excellence in their abilities by providing them with encouragement and support for the purpose of continued growth and overcoming barriers. Jaquith (2012) defined instructional capacity in terms of providing teachers with the necessary resources to support high quality instruction. Similarly, the participants in this study described instructional coaching in terms of the development of their pedagogy, the increase in teacher knowledge, and the advancement of teacher improvement.

Building instructional capacity involves the development of the art and science of teaching children (Knowles, 2011). Participants described their own improvement in pedagogy through regular participation in coaching demonstrations that provided opportunities for teachers to observe the components of a well delivered, developmentally appropriate lesson. Likewise, participants described teacher observations as another form of building instructional capacity. Teacher observations provided an opportunity for preschool teachers to deliver a lesson while the instructional coach observed.

These coach demonstrations and teacher observations were not random occurrences, but rather were depicted by the participants as a part of a scheduled cycle, in which coaches
alternated between demonstrations of a practice and observations of teachers in practice. Participants elaborated on this sequence to explain that when teachers demonstrated a lesson immediately after the coach demonstration, it was a *mirror lesson*, meaning the teacher emulated the coach’s exact lesson during the same session. Likewise, when the teacher demonstrated a lesson the week following the coach’s demonstration, it was described as the *teacher’s turn* to do a lesson.

Furthermore, teachers in this study depicted their improvement in pedagogy through reflective feedback as a critical component of building instructional capacity. Participants described the importance of the coach providing insight into how they conducted the lessons and providing time for discussion and reflection on how teachers could improve their practice. All participants who discussed these feedback sessions conveyed it as a positive experience, noting that the manner in which the feedback was given was helpful and tactful. Teacher’s experiences were consistent with Knight’s (2011) work which included reflection as one the six principles of instructional coaching and expressed the significance of allowing teachers time to think about ideas presented through coaching and to ask questions that prompt deep thinking about those ideas.

Additionally, teachers in this study described their improvement in pedagogy as a means of building instructional capacity through the acquisition of a variety of new teaching methods from coaches. Participants shared about learning to incorporate more hands-on activities, receiving new strategies for different types of learners, trying new methods of behavior management, and using small groups for instruction. This is consistent with Jaquith’s (2012) notion of building instructional capacity through the provision of instructional resources to support high quality instruction. Jaquith identified and discussed four types of instructional
resources—instructional knowledge, instructional resources, instructional relationships, and organizational structures (p. 2).

In order to build instructional capacity, teachers must increase their knowledge of the practice of teaching. Participants in this study revealed that the coach-teacher conference time was a way for them to increase knowledge about teaching. Teachers expressed being able to address concerns, receive new information, and review goals for improvement during this weekly scheduled conference time with their coaches. Moreover, teachers described the teacher-coach conference as the place where they received reflective feedback. Teachers’ experiences were consistent with Knight’s (2011) work which included dialogue as one the six principles of partnership coaching and expressed the importance of a time for coaches and teachers to share ideas about instructional practice.

According to Lewis et al. (1999), teacher preparedness is one indicator of a high-quality teacher. Likewise, teachers in this study described how their instructional capacity increased through time spent with their coaches learning to adequately plan and prepare for teaching. Teachers related having acquired a deeper understanding about the importance of scheduling time for planning and preparation and connected this improved practice to more effective teaching.

Additionally, teachers in this study indicated their knowledge of teaching was impacted by new information coaches brought to the coaching sessions. This is consistent with Jaquith’s (2012) work which indicated instructional knowledge is one of the four types of instructional resources essential to building instructional capacity. Participants described this process of gaining new information as both a formal and informal process. According to the participants, the coach was an information resource—someone whom they could rely on for advice or
knowledge about the particulars of teaching. Behavior management was mentioned most often as a subject which teachers needed guidance. Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering (2003) indicated classroom management is one of the most important roles of a teacher. This is also consistent with Knight’s (2006) four categories of instructional coaching: classroom management, content, instruction, and assessment of learning.

In order to build instructional capacity, teachers must take part in the on-going process of improvement. Participants expressed that receptiveness to the process of improvement through coaching was a necessary element for building instructional capacity. Teachers reported that they applied and practiced what they learned through coaching sessions, which is a strategy supported by Knight’s (2011) notion of praxis, the need for teachers to put their ideas into action into meaningful ways. Praxis is one of Knight’s (2011) six principles of instructional coaching. Participants also identified colleague collaboration as a part of their improvement process. This collaboration was described as increased team conference times where teachers shared and learned from one another. This type of collaboration is supported by Vygotsky’s social learning theory (Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007) and is consistent with Jaquith’s (2012) work, which indicated instructional relationships is one of the four types of instructional resources essential to building instructional capacity.

To continuously improve in teaching, teachers need the support of their leaders. Participants noted this as a critical area of need in their development process and described their supervisors as being negligent in the involvement of the process of coaching. According to Jaquith (2012), organizational structures are one of the four types of instructional resources necessary to building instructional capacity and those structures include collaboration with formal instructional leadership roles. According to Backor and Gordon (2015), “The goal of
instructional leadership is to facilitate the improvement of teaching and learning” (p. 105).

Furthermore, research supports the connection between effective instructional leadership and positive outcomes (Backor & Gordon, 2015; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Marzano, 2005).

Professional development is a way to build instructional capacity. In summary, participants acknowledged that participation in coaching played an essential part in building their instructional capacity through a focus on improved pedagogy, an increase in teacher knowledge, and the promotion of teacher improvement. Therefore, the conclusion drawn from this study regarding instructional capacity is that teachers involved in instructional coaching can improve their capabilities through increased knowledge and reflective practice when there are regular opportunities for coaching demonstrations, teacher observations, and conference times. This finding is consistent with Knight’s (2011) instructional coaching principles and Jaquith’s (2012) instructional resources needed for instructional capacity. By building the instructional capacity of teachers, skills will be developed that aid personal growth, which in turn improves their abilities as learning leaders who impact their learning organizations and set their preschools apart as leaders in the field of early learning within their communities. This connection between skill development, personal growth, learning leaders, and preschools as early learning centers is supported by Day’s (2001) theory of leader versus leadership.

**Instructional Coaching Requires a Supportive Environment**

The second theme, instructional coaching requires a supportive environment, illustrates that preschool teachers portrayed instructional coaching as a process that involves changes to the structure of a teacher’s day, or *teacher time*, as well as to the building of relationships between people, or *rapport*. Rapport building is supported by Knight’s (2011) notion of equality as one
of the principles of instructional coaching that allows teachers to feel secure in sharing their thoughts and feelings and by Jaquith’s (2012) concept of instructional relationships that provide an openness to learning. Likewise, the need for teacher time is consistent with Jaquith’s organizational structure as one of the necessary resources for high quality instruction.

The predominant facet of rapport building depicted by teachers in the study was the encouragement and motivation given by coaches. As mentioned previously, the child care center supervisors are not as engaged in the daily practices of teachers and their classrooms and coaching as teachers desired. Furthermore, teachers portrayed the coach, rather than the center director, as the leader who provides critical feedback to teachers about their teaching practices, and this, formed a basis for trust and respect. In addition to providing encouragement and motivation, participants also attributed coaches with giving inspiration for continued education and improved practices.

Other elements that created a favorable environment for coaching are the attitude and personality of the coach. Participants described coaches favorably when they were bubbly, engaging, and energetic. In addition to coach personality and attitude, teachers expressed a need for supportive and available coaches. Frequently, teachers described occurrences when coaches provided information and resources to them outside of the normal coaching day.

Scheduling time for coaching sessions also enhanced and supported teacher learning. A few participants conveyed this need for coaching time by describing negative experiences when the coach was not respectful of the teacher’s time and showed up late or not at all. Yet, most teachers shared a desire for additional coaching time, specifying the time they spent with the coach was insufficient.
In summary, participants described effective coaching as including rapport building between teacher and coach and commitment to coaching time. Both of these perceptions are supported by Knight’s (2011) principles of instructional coaching and Jaquith’s (2012) instructional resources. Therefore, the conclusion drawn from this study regarding creating an environment for coaching is that teachers involved in instructional coaching may receive maximum benefit when favorable relationships are established between coach and teacher and when adequate time is provided for regular, scheduled coaching sessions are nurtured by ongoing communication and commitment among coach, teacher, and supervisor. By creating and maintaining a supportive environment for coaching, teacher supervisors, who are in charge of many of the systemic issues that impede effective coaching, could assert themselves as instructional leaders by providing the support needed for the implementation of research-based instructional strategies for the purpose of increasing children’s learning opportunities. This is in agreement with Simon’s (2009) interpretation of the application of Gestalt’s principles of contact with the environment as a catalyst for change. According to Simon (2009), the contact between individuals and their environments causes change, and because change is often resisted unless there is trust in the resulting change, Gestalt theory supports the need for creating supportive environments that promote risk-taking by teachers.

**Instructional Coaching Increases Children’s Learning Opportunities**

The third theme, instructional coaching increases children’s learning opportunities, demonstrated that preschool teachers described instructional coaching that focuses on child learning and increases learning opportunities for children, enhances the classroom environment, and encourages parent involvement. These advantages of instructional coaching are consistent with research that shows the connection between children’s learning outcomes and school
readiness skills and their participation in a high quality preschool classroom (Belsky et al., 2007; Howes et al., 2008; Gormley et al., 2005; Melhuish et al., 2008). The impact of high quality preschool experiences on children’s cognitive abilities is evident in increased test scores and preparation for kindergarten (Oliveira, 2013).

Participants expressed learning from their coaches a process of establishing and sustaining child assessment to impact child learning. Teachers described working with coaches to develop child portfolios and formative and summative assessments as a means of gathering data about what children know and need to know. One specific area discussed frequently in the study was the use of observation as a tool for child assessment. Teachers mentioned this often as an overwhelming, yet beneficial, element of developing a deeper understanding of their students. According to Moon (2005), valid and reliable assessments are the foundation for guiding instruction.

Associated with portfolios and assessments and child observations is the practice of individualizing instruction for children. Participants described how coaches worked with them to make meaning of the data teachers collected on children’s learning and how to allow that data to inform instruction through individualization. Differentiated instruction is a teaching strategy that recognizes and supports children’s diverse learning styles and development (Tomlison et al., 2003; Tomlison, 2001).

Furthermore, teachers in this study revealed an emphasis on school readiness skills during coaching sessions. School readiness skills for preschool children include the domains common to early learning standards, including both cognitive skills and socio-emotional skills. Teachers indicated a greater understanding of the importance of these skills and indicated a continued focus even after coaching was concluded. Research indicates children who participate
in learning experiences in a high quality classroom have a cognitive advantage associated with higher achievement scores on school readiness assessments (Belsky et al., 2007; Howes et al., 2008; Gormley et al., 2005; Melhuish et al., 2008; Oliveira, 2013; Pianta et al., 2005).

Additionally, teacher-child interactions were expressed as an essential coaching outcome that increased child learning opportunities. Teachers described an emphasis by coaches on how they interacted with children in terms of the quantity and quality of questioning techniques and conversations held. Teachers portrayed an awareness of the importance of these interactions on children’s later school success and often mentioned teacher-child interactions as the key lesson learned about teaching practices from coaching and the most beneficial aspect of coaching. A few teachers made comments about their own assessment scores in this area or about the focus on assessments during coaching. However, the overall perception was about the benefit for child learning. Empirical evidence suggests high quality teacher-child interactions are the most significant factor influencing learning in a child’s preschool experience (Brophy-Herb et al., 2007; Curby et al., 2009; Guo et al., 2010; Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008).

Moreover, to increase child learning opportunities, teachers must create a developmentally appropriate learning environment. Teachers credited their coaching experiences with improving the learning environment through classroom resources given to them by their coaches. The resources included classroom materials, such as blocks and fine motor activities for learning centers; learning resources to accompany demonstration lessons, such as puppets and learning games; visual aids to serve as reminders for teachers to do and say certain things, such as signs and charts; PowerPoint presentations to guide conferences, and articles about topics related to coaching. One teacher in the study did not believe money should be spent on coaching or on classroom materials for her particular center, because her center was a
franchised national chain, which she believed had the potential to purchase more resources than centers owned by sole proprietors.

Another way teachers conveyed coaching as a focus on child learning was through the deliberate attention given to classroom learning centers. Teachers described experiences where coaches provided assistance with the proper set-up of a preschool classroom, including furniture arrangement and materials they needed. Teachers also expressed how their coaches provided support by creating center management systems, which offered free choice through self-management.

In addition to an emphasis on learning environments, coaching helped teachers improve child learning by increasing parent involvement. Participants described how coaches supported them in using assessment data to make formal conferences with parents more productive and meaningful. Similarly, teachers described how informal communication with parents improved as a result of their coaching experiences. This is consistent with research that shows a strong correlation between parent involvement and child success in school (Carlisle, Stanley, & Kemple, 2005; Keys, 2002; LaRocque, Kleiman, Darling, 2011; Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005; Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, & Efrem, 2005; Pena, 2001).

In summary, participants described increased child learning opportunities as a benefit of coaching through a focus on child learning, enhanced learning environments, and parent involvement. Therefore, the conclusion drawn from this study regarding increasing child learning opportunities is that teachers who experience instructional coaching may provide more learning opportunities for children when coaching is based on child assessment data to inform instruction and to improve interactions between teachers and their children. When preschool teachers take more control of learning experiences and learning environments, as well as the
communication with parents, they will establish themselves as instructional leaders, as opposed to the common conception of preschool teachers as custodial caregivers. This is in alignment with Knight’s (2007, 2011, 2012) Partnership Learning coaching model, which promotes the teacher’s autonomy as leader in her classroom.

**Relationship between the Conceptual/Theoretical Frameworks and Results**

This study was framed by three major concepts centered on the practice of instructional coaching. First, instructional coaching is a professional learning process that replaces traditional professional development because traditional professional development lacks relevancy, reflection, and follow-up provided by traditional forms (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Knight, 2007; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). Secondly, instructional coaching involves various forms of implementation in terms of delivery, duration, and intensity (Rush & Young, 2011; Scott et al., 2012). Finally, research on instructional coaching could generate empirical evidence, which is currently deficient, thereby compelling the need for further research that could inform policy making and practice (Ellinger, 2008; Hagen, 2012; Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010).

Furthermore, several theories helped refine and make predictions about instructional coaching in preschool classrooms. The theories that framed this study—Vygotsky’s social learning theory (Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007), the Gestalt principles of contact and awareness as a means of rapport building (Simon, 2009), Day’s (2001) theory of leader versus leadership development, and Knight’s (2006, 2007, 2011, 2012) partnership coaching model—provided a lens through which to view the practice of instructional coaching for teachers as a means of professional development that influences their interaction with children. Knowledge and application of these theories, as well as the concepts used to
frame the study, could have profound impact on professionals who are employed as instructional coaches.

Vygotsky’s social learning theory supports the notion of coaching taking place within, not just the organization, but the classroom itself (Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007). The classroom is the teacher’s natural environment. It is where the teacher typically plans, teaches, and assesses learning. Participants in this study described successful elements of coaching as events that occurred during teaching time—demonstration lessons by the coach, observations of teachers’ lessons, assistance with the learning environment, and modeling of interactions with children. This study supports a need for coaches to have knowledge of the importance of centering coaching time around daily classroom activities so that teachers learn within the context of their natural environments. As noted in the conceptual framework, conducting coaching in this manner addresses lack of relevancy, time for reflection, and follow-up, which are problems common to the traditional forms of professional development. Effective coaching is an organic process that provides opportunities for productive interactions between coach and teacher and results in effective teaching and deep learning.

Likewise, coaching that takes place within the natural setting of the classroom confirms the concept of the variation that occurs in implementation in terms of delivery, duration, and intensity. However, that variation of implementation is not necessarily a negative aspect of coaching, because it provides a platform for individualized learning based on teachers’ specific needs (Knight, 2007).

According to Simon’s (2009) interpretation, the Gestalt principle of contact and awareness supports rapport building as a necessary component of successful coaching. Participants in this study described the effectiveness of coaching as it relates to a positive
relationship between teacher and coach. Furthermore, effective coaching was defined by the participants as a practice that promotes change in instructional practices and increases child learning opportunities. According to Simon’s interpretation of the Gestalt theory, the growth and development of individuals is a direct result of their contact and awareness with their environment, which, in coaching, is primarily dependent upon the relationship between the coach and coachee. Therefore, this study supports a need for coaches to understand the impact of their contact with teachers as a catalyst for change to occur. This rapport between coach and teacher responds to the problem noted in the conceptual framework of a lack of relevancy, reflection, and follow-up in the traditional forms of professional development by providing a supportive environment for teachers to relate new practices to their own classrooms while having time to reflect on the value of those practices and receive follow-up communication from coaches. Again, the variation of implementation noted in the conceptual framework can be a constructive component of coaching when it provides opportunities for individualizing based on teachers’ distinct needs (Knight, 2007).

Day’s (2001) theory of leader versus leadership development supports coaching as a method of improving an individual’s skills and knowledge base rather than that of the organization as a whole, with the overall result of organizational improvement. Instructional coaching, which focuses on the development of individual teachers, contributes to the improvement of the whole school as individuals become more confident and willing to share ideas and strategies. Participants in this study described their experiences with coaching as an opportunity to improve instructional practices, not only through interactions with the coach, but also with their colleagues. These teachers related collaborating more often with other teachers as a result of coaching experiences with competent, caring coaches. Participants also portrayed
their learning organizations as having benefited from the practice of coaching by obtaining desirable ratings on the Guiding Stars of Duval Quality Rating Improvement System. Thus, this study supports a need for coaches to recognize the impact of individual development on the organization as a whole. As discussed elsewhere, the variation of implementation stated in the conceptual framework can be beneficial to teachers when it presents occasions for individualizing coaching based on teachers’ needs (Knight, 2007).

Knight’s (2007) instructional coaching model asserts support and collaboration as principal components of instructional coaching. Because coaching provides the support that teachers need to implement learned strategies and practices, it is more successful than traditional forms of professional development. Participants in this study provided numerous examples of their opportunities to practice new strategies in a supportive coaching environment. These teachers described doing mirror lessons with their coaches, in which teachers observed strategies demonstrated by their coaches and then immediately emulated those strategies after the observation with a different group of students, as well as planning and implementing their own lessons while coaches observed. Additionally, Knight’s coaching model for teachers is based on a partnership approach where collaboration between teacher and coach occurs through many conversations (Knight, 2011). Similarly, participants in this study described their experiences with coaching as effective as a result of regular conference times between teacher and coach. Teachers conveyed these conference times as feedback sessions that focused on their instructional practices, as well as time to discuss any topic related to teaching. Furthermore, Knight (2006) suggests these coach-teacher interactions are used to engage teachers in incorporating research-based practices into their classrooms in four main areas: classroom management, content, instruction, and assessment of learning. In the same way, participants in
this study described their experiences with effective coaching as connected to these categories. Hence, this study supports a need for coaches to develop a partnership with teachers for the purpose of providing support and collaboration that allows teachers to practice and implement new strategies for the purpose of child learning. The partnership approach responds to the need expressed in the conceptual framework to provide relevancy, reflection, and follow-up that are notably lacking in traditional forms of professional development. Yet again, the variation of implementation acknowledged in the conceptual framework is supported through the individualization that occurs when teachers and coaches have strong relationships that are centered on teachers’ needs (Knight, 2007).

Finally, this study on instructional coaching responds to the conceptual frameworks’ call for more empirical evidence that could inform policy making and practice (Ellinger, 2008; Hagen, 2012; Heineke, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). Although this study has addressed several aspects of coaching and its practice in preschool settings, there is a need for more empirical studies that address other issues and answer other questions. In the next two sections, implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and further research are addressed.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This study addressed implications for professional development for preschool teachers and their experiences with instructional coaching. Preschool teachers in this study brought valuable information to the surface as they related the positive and negative factors that impacted their instructional practices. Ultimately, effective instructional coaching is contingent on change. Change is difficult, not simply because it is readily resisted, but because it involves systemic issues, such as schedules, support personnel, planning, goal setting, materials, and communication (Hull, Balka, & Miles, 2010; Simon, 2009). Before change can occur through
coaching, rapport between coach and teacher must be developed (Hull et al., 2010; Knight, 2012; Oliveira, 2013; Simon, 2009). Rapport, however, is not an action that happens in a precise moment, but rather a process of relationship building that evolves over time. It is from this notion of rapport as a necessary foundation for effective coaching that the following implications for practice are offered.

1. *Instructional coaches should demonstrate a high level of proficiency in educational knowledge and practice.* Rapport building is dependent upon trust. The foundation of trust in professional development is determined by the level of expertise exhibited by the instructor. Coaching involves one-one-one learning through observation, demonstration, and feedback. Therefore, those charged with helping teachers enhance their knowledge and instructional skills should be high caliber educators with proven abilities and knowledge of current research in education.

2. *Coaches should be involved in on-going professional development that includes communication training.* Rapport building is dependent upon communication. Coaches must be adept at all forms of communication. At the onset of the coaching relationship, teachers may be able but unwilling to interact meaningfully in a coaching experience. Therefore, coaches need strategies for responding to this resistance. Throughout the coaching relationship, coaches must be able to clearly convey information in a manner that is easily received by the teacher. Most importantly, coaches are charged with giving critical feedback to teachers concerning their teaching abilities and practices, which require coaches to be educated in how to communicate constructively.
3. *Teacher supervisors should be involved in instructional coaching as instructional leaders.* Rapport building is dependent upon teamwork. Although rapport between teacher and coach is critical, the instructional team should include the teacher supervisor. Interaction among these stakeholders is necessary so that children, the primary recipient of improved teaching practice, will realize the greatest advantage. Communication should include, but should not be limited to scheduling, instructional focus, goals, and support needed. Because instructional coaches do not perform the role of evaluator, teacher supervisors may need training on how to be a part of a coaching partnership. Furthermore, teacher supervisors may need research-based training on the critical nature of preschool experiences in early education.

4. *Instructional coaching should be intentional.* Rapport building is dependent upon respect. Respect relates to professional development in that instructors and their students are expected to have regard for one another’s time by showing up and contributing to meaningful content. Likewise, coaches, teachers, and teacher supervisors must be committed to schedules and communication so that conflicts and misunderstandings are minimized and limited resources, like time, are respected and maximized. Additionally, coaches should deliver well-planned content that is consistent with teachers’ needs. This should also provide opportunities for teachers to practice and implement research-based principles and strategies. The role of coaches as instructional leaders compels on-going professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills.

5. *Instructional coaching should have child learning as its primary focus.* Rapport building is dependent upon shared vision. Instructional coaches should keep child
learning at the center of coaching content. While pressures from mandated assessments and state and school requirements will wrangle for top priority, and daily annoyances will provide persistent obstacles, coaches must possess and foster a profound passion for improving learning opportunities for children. All efforts of coaching should be continually filtered through this screen and refined accordingly, with the understanding of the vital role preschool experiences have on children’s preparation for kindergarten as the central focus.

**Implications and Recommendations for Future Studies**

This qualitative study explored preschool teachers’ perceptions regarding their experiences with instructional coaching. Further exploration of these factors could be worthwhile to stakeholders and policy makers involved in the teacher development at any level. The study offers several recommendations for future research.

1. *Further research is needed that seeks to better understand the perspective of teachers in the field of early childhood education.* Studies of this nature may support the conclusions of the present study. It is common practice for teachers to have new training and programs forced upon them with little regard for how they view the trainings or programs. It is also customary to measure only what has been implemented by analyzing student scores. Teachers’ perceptions should be respected and valued, because they have first-hand knowledge of the intricacies of what works and does not work well in classrooms. Their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives as instructional leaders could inform policies that result in effective professional development processes like coaching.
2. *Further research is needed that seeks to better understand the perspectives of instructional coaches in the field of early childhood education.* Studies of this nature may complement the conclusions of the present study. Instructional coaches encounter distinct challenges and successes. Their voices and perspectives as instructional leaders may also inform policy that improves coaching as an effective professional learning strategy.

3. *Further research is needed that seeks to better understand how to effectively involve teacher supervisors in the coaching process for the purpose of developing and supporting their skills as instructional leaders.* Preschool teachers are often supervised by a center director or manager whose knowledge of research-based instructional practices may be limited. Furthermore, these center directors may have multiple responsibilities and limited time to communicate with instructional coaches. The unique nature of child care centers and the roles of their leaders should be considered, along with the vital part these leaders have in the educational experiences of young children.

**Implications and Recommendations for Policy Formulation and Adoption**

The results of this study have implications for policy formulation and adoption. Preschool teachers in this study shared important information about their experiences with coaching that impacted their instructional practices.

1. *Policy makers should formulate and adopt policies that encourage and facilitate professional learning that includes instructional coaching as a means of building instructional capacity that is based on the teacher’s instructional needs and the children’s learning needs.* Early learning is in the political arena as a worthwhile
education expense that increases children’s school readiness skills and has the potential to prevent future crime. While monies are being allocated to provide more opportunities for children to have quality preschool experiences, little thought is given to the education and experience levels of those who are charged with this critical task. By recognizing instructional coaching as an appropriate means of offering professional learning opportunities to preschool teachers, policy makers could bring positive change to the instructional practices of those who often do not have formal training. By keeping child learning opportunities as the central focus of instructional coaching, research-based practices could be implemented more consistently throughout our nation’s preschools.

2. Policy makers should formulate and adopt policies that encourage and facilitate professional learning that fosters a culture that supports and nurtures shared instructional leadership. Instructional coaching requires a supportive environment. Leaders in child care centers and preschools may not always have the knowledge or resources to provide such an environment. Therefore, it is imperative that the implementation of instructional coaching include information and funded mandates that support the success of the professional development effort and prevent instructional coaching from occurring in a vacuum within preschools settings.

Chapter Summary

This final chapter summarized the purpose of the study and the related literature and methodology, discussed results and conclusions derived from the analyzed data, identified and discussed implications for instructional coaching, and suggested recommendations for future research. Research confirms that it is the quality of instructional experiences in preschool that
have the greatest impact on school success (Barnett, 2004; Barnett & Hustedt, 2003; Burchinal et al., 2010; Halle et al., 2012; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Therefore, the critical role of coaches, preschool teachers, and center directors as instructional leaders must not be overlooked. States vary in credentialing requirements, learning standards, and development opportunities for preschool teachers (Barnett, 2004; Burchinal et al., 2010). As the nation continues its progression in this area, instructional coaching will continue to be a significant part of the professional development process. For that reason, research must continue in the field of early education, specifically as it relates to instructional coaching in early childhood education. Yet, just as coaching must not succumb to the pressures of mandated assessments and constraints, research must also maintain as its primary focus and emphasis on instructional and professional learning opportunities for teachers and meaningful, effective learning opportunities for children.
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doi:10.1080/0966976022000044726


doi:10.1207/s1532480xads0904_1


doi:10.3102/0013189X07309471


APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Research topic: Examining the perspectives of preschool teachers on instructional coaching.

Time: __________

Date: __________________________

Place: _______________________

Interviewee: _________________

Demographic Data

1. What is your highest level of certification or education?

2. How long have you been teaching?

3. How long have you participated in coaching?

4. Have you had more than one coach in that time frame?

Questions

1. What takes place during a coaching session?

2. What do you talk about with your coach?

3. What have you learned about teaching practices from your experience with coaching?

4. Other than coaching, what other ways do you learn about teaching practices?

5. How has coaching influenced your teaching?

6. How has your philosophy of education changed during the coaching experience?
7. What do you do when the coach leaves?

8. What would you do to improve coaching at your school?

9. What makes a good coach?

10. What kind of support do teachers need from their supervisors in order to get the most out of coaching?

11. How can teachers most benefit from coaching?

12. Which topics should coaching have as a top priority?

13. What did you find most beneficial from coaching?

14. What did you find least beneficial from coaching?

15. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about coaching?
APPENDIX B

Director Cover Letter E-Mail for Entry to Site

Dear Child Care Center Director:

As we discussed, I have attached the form that needs to be signed and faxed back to . If you can do that today, I would greatly appreciate it! Below are the details that I summarized for you in our call. Again, thank you so much!

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Florida in the College of Education and Human Services. As a partial requirement for my doctoral degree, I am conducting a research to study the perspectives of preschool teachers on instructional coaching. The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to access the child care center and speak with participants in order to schedule a date, time, and place to conduct the interview at their convenience. At no time will the interview sessions interfere with your school’s instructional program. With the participants’ permission, I will tape the interview using multiple audio recorders. I will transcribe the data and following transcription, I will provide participants a copy to review. I will make transcripts of the recordings, code the transcripts with pseudonyms, and then destroy the recordings.

Data from this study may be published. However, pseudonyms will be used to protect participants’ identity and the identity of the child care centers. Participants' names and the child care centers will be kept strictly confidential, and I will not release information to anyone in a manner that could identify the participants or the child care centers. All data collected will be encrypted and stored on the University of North Florida’s secure server. Only my dissertation chair and I will have access to the data.

Preschool teachers’ participation in the study is voluntary, and they may decline to answer questions with which they are uncomfortable. Thus, they may choose to skip questions they do not wish to answer or withdraw their participation without penalty or loss. Once the study is complete, I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the results if you so desire. In the meantime, if you have any questions, you may telephone me at or send an email to

Thank you for your professional courtesy.

Sincerely,

Melanie Clough
Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX C

Director Letter of Support

On behalf of _______________________________(child care center name), I am formally indicating my awareness of the research proposed by Melanie Clough, a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at the University of North Florida. I am aware that Melanie Clough intends to conduct her research by conducting one-on-one interviews with our preschool teachers on the topic of instructional coaching.

I am responsible for employee relations and am the center director. I give Melanie Clough permission to conduct her research in our child care center.

If there are any questions or concerns, I can be contacted at my office at (___) ______-______ or by e-mail at _________________________________.

Date ________________ Printed Name of Center Director

Date ________________ Signed Name of Center Director

Date ________________ Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent

Date ________________ Signed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent
APPENDIX D

IRB Memorandum of Approval

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 11, 2014

TO: Ms. Melanie Clough

VIA: Dr. Warren Hodge
      Leadership, School Counseling & Sports Management

FROM: Dr. Jennifer Wesely, Chairperson
      On behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board

RE: Declaration of Exempt Status for IRB#582458-1:
    “The Perspectives of Preschool Teachers on Instructional Coaching”

Your project, “The Perspectives of Preschool Teachers on Instructional Coaching” was reviewed on behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board and declared “Exempt” categories 2 & 4. Based on the recently revised Standard Operating Procedures regarding exempt projects, the UNF IRB no longer reviews and approves exempt research according to the 45 CFR 46 regulations. Projects declared exempt review are only reviewed to the extent necessary to confirm exempt status.

Once data collection under the exempt status begins, the researchers agree to abide by these requirements:

- All investigators and co-investigators, or those who obtain informed consent, collect data, or have access to identifiable data are trained in the ethical principles and federal, state, and institutional policies governing human subjects research (please see the FAQs on UNF IRB CITI Training for more information).
- An informed consent process will be used, when necessary, to ensure that participants voluntarily consent to participate in the research and are provided with pertinent information such as identification of the activity as research; a description of the procedures, right to withdraw at any time, risks, and benefits; and contact information for the PI and IRB chair.
- Human subjects will be selected equitably so that the risks and benefits of research are justly distributed.
- The IRB will be informed as soon as practicable but no later than 3 business days from receipt of any complaints from participants regarding risks and benefits of the research.
- The IRB will be informed as soon as practicable but no later than 3 business days from receipt of the complaint of any information and unexpected or adverse events that would increase the risk to the
participants and cause the level of review to change. Please use the Event Report Form to submit information about such events.

- The confidentiality and privacy of the participants and the research data will be maintained appropriately.

While the exempt status is effective for the life of the study, if it is modified, all substantive changes must be submitted to the IRB for prospective review. In some circumstances, changes to the protocol may disqualify the project from exempt status. Revisions in procedures that would change the review level from exempt to expedited or full board review include, but are not limited to, the following:

- New knowledge that increases the risk level;
- Use of methods that do not meet the exempt criteria;
- Surveying or interview children or participating in the activities being observed;
- Change in the way identifiers are recorded so that participants can be identified;
- Addition of an instrument, survey questions, or other change in instrumentation that could pose more than minimal risk;
- Addition of prisoners as research participants;
- Addition of other vulnerable populations;
- Under certain circumstances, addition of a funding source

Investigators who plan to make any of the above changes should contact the IRB staff so that the review level can be changed as necessary. If investigators are unsure of whether a revision needs to be submitted, they should contact the IRB staff for clarification.

**Use of Documentation:** In Attachment A you indicated that "No other documents/records/data samples will be used, unless the teacher initiates the use of a document." Please note that the use of child records or artifacts or other existing records that are neither publically available nor entirely anonymous may not be used in this research unless you seek a prior amendment from the IRB in order to include those materials. This exemption does not cover the use of the above described materials. The amendment must be submitted, reviewed, and approved before the above described records can be used for this research. For more information, please contact a research integrity administrator.

**Your study was declared exempt effective 12/11/2014.** Please submit an Exempt Status Report by 12/11/2017 if this project is still active at the end of three years. However, if the project is complete and you would like to close the project, please submit a Closing Report Form. This will remove the project from the group of projects subject to an audit. An investigator must close a project when the research no longer meets the definition of human subject research (e.g., the data are de-identified and the researcher does not have the ability to match data to participants) or data collection and analysis are complete. If the IRB has not received correspondence at the three-year anniversary, you will be reminded to submit an Exempt Status Report. If no Exempt Status Report is received from the Principal Investigator within 90 days of the status report due date listed above, then the IRB will close the research file. The closing report or exempt status report will need to be submitted as a new package in IRBNet.

All principal investigators, co-investigators, those who obtain informed consent, collect data, or have access to identifiable data must be CITI certified in the protection of human subjects. As you may know, **CITI Course Completion Reports are valid for 3 years.** Your completion report is valid through 11/16/2015 and Dr. Hodge’s completion report is valid through 10/10/2017. The CITI training for renewal will become available 90 days before your CITI training expires. Please renew your CITI training within that time period by following this link: [http://www.citiprogram.org/](http://www.citiprogram.org/). Should you have questions regarding your project or any other IRB

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**UNF IRB Number:** 582459-1  
**Exemption Date:** 12-11-2014  
**Status Report Due Date:** 12-11-2017  
**Processed on behalf of UNF’s IRB by KL"
issues, please contact the research integrity unit of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs by emailing IRB@unf.edu or calling (904) 620-2455.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within UNF's records. All records shall be accessible for inspection and copying by authorized representatives of the department or agency at reasonable times and in a reasonable manner. A copy of this memo may also be sent to the dean and/or chair of your department.
Dear Child Care Center Director:

I am ready to proceed with my research. I have attached the participant invitation letter for you to distribute to the teachers you have identified as potential participants in this study. I have also attached the informed consent form that I will read to your teachers and ask them to sign before I begin the interview. If you can give them a copy to read ahead of time, that would be great!

I can come at whatever time is most convenient (naptime, etc). I have 15 questions to ask, so it should take about 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Please let me know the first and last names of the teachers in your 3's, 4's/VPK classes that have been coached and also which date and time you prefer for each of them.

I have the following dates set aside:

Thursday, December 18th
Friday, December 19th
Monday, December 22nd
Tuesday, December 23rd
Monday, December 29th
Tuesday, December 30th
Wednesday, December 31st
Friday, January 2nd

Please let me know if different dates are desired.

Thank you for your support,

Melanie Clough
Director of Early Learning
APPENDIX F

Participant Invitation Letter

Dear Preschool Teacher:

My name is Melanie Clough. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Florida in the College of Education and Human Services. As a partial requirement for my doctoral degree, I am conducting a research to study the perspectives of preschool teachers on instructional coaching.

The purpose of this letter is to request your permission for a semi-structured open-ended interview. I would like to learn about your views on instructional coaching. Prior to conducting the interview, I will discuss in person the informed consent form at a place, time, and date that is convenient to you. I will ask you to read and sign the consent form before the interview begins. I will provide you with a copy of the consent form to keep for your records. The interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes and will be conducted at your convenience. With your permission, I will tape the interview using multiple audio recorders and you may decline to answer questions with which you are uncomfortable. I will make transcripts of the recordings and then code the transcripts with pseudonyms. Following transcription, I will provide you with a copy to review. After reviewing the transcript, you may withdraw your response to any question, or make changes or clarifications as you see fit before you return the transcript to me. I will accept your changes or clarifications to the document.

Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and that of your child care center. Your name and the name of your child care center will be kept strictly confidential, and I will not release any information you give me to anyone in a manner that could identify you or your child care center. There are no foreseeable risks and no compensation involve for your participation. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to skip questions you do not wish to answer or withdraw your participation from the study without penalty or loss. Once the study is complete, I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the results if you so desire. If you have any questions, you may telephone me at or send an email to

Thank you for your professional courtesy.

Sincerely,

Melanie S. Clough
APPENDIX G

Informed Consent Form

University of North Florida Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

Dear Participant:

I am Melanie Clough, doctoral candidate at the University of North Florida in the College of Education and Human Services. I am conducting a research to study the perspectives of preschool teachers regarding their experiences with instructional coaching.

For the purpose of this study, preschool teachers are defined as those persons employed for the care and education of children ages three to five years.

I would like you to participate in a semi-structured open-ended interview to learn your views about instructional coaching. Your participation in this study will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes of your time. With your permission, I will tape the interview using multiple audio recorders, and you may decline to answer questions with which you are uncomfortable. I will make transcripts of the recordings and then code the transcripts with pseudonyms. Following transcription, I will provide you with a copy to review. After reviewing the transcript, you may withdraw your response to any question, or make changes or clarifications as you see fit before you return the transcript to me. I will accept your changes or clarifications to the document.

Data from this study may be published. However, pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and that of your child care center. Your response will be kept strictly confidential, and only my dissertation chair and I will have access to the data. Data collected will be encrypted and stored on the University of North Florida’s secure server. Audio recordings will be destroyed immediately after the completion of my dissertation.

Monetary and/or other compensations or inducements will not be given for taking part in this study. This study does not present any financial costs to you, the participant. One possible benefit from taking part in this study is an intrinsic value of knowing that you are contributing to educational endeavors which support student learning. Furthermore, this study will aim to gain understanding of those factors influencing instructional coaching.

Additionally, there are no foreseeable risks for taking part in this study. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to skip any question you do not wish to answer or withdraw your participation without penalty or loss. Once the study is complete, I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the results if you so desire.

You may talk to my dissertation chair, Dr. Warren Hodge, at any time about questions and concerns you may have about this study.
If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of North Florida’s Institutional Review Board Chairperson, Jennifer Wesely, at or by emailing her at irb@unf.edu

Thank you for your professional courtesy.

Sincerely,

Melanie S. Clough

Dr. Warren Hodge (Dissertation Chair)
College of Education
University of North Florida

I ________________________________ (print name) attest that I am at least 18 years old and agree to take part in the study *The Perspectives of Preschool Teachers on Instructional Coaching* conducted by Melanie Clough and the University of North Florida. A copy of this form was given to me to keep for my records.

Signature: ________________________________ Date: _________________________
VITA

Melanie Smith Clough

Education

Doctor of Education in Education Leadership
University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida,
*Dissertation: The Perspectives of Preschool Teachers on Instructional Coaching*
Graduation: December 2015

Education Specialist in Middle Grades
Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia, August 1997

Masters of Education in Middle Grades
Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia, August 1994

Bachelor of Science in Middle Grades Education
University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, June 1991

Certifications

Lastinger Certified Instructional Coach
The Lastinger Center at the University of Florida, April 2015

Teachstone CLASS Preschool Assessor
Teachstone, 2011

Professional Experience

Director of Early Learning
Episcopal Children’s Services, Jacksonville, Florida, 2014–present

Certifier of Coaching Videos
Lastinger Center at the University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, 2015–present

Adjunct Professor in Early Childhood Education
University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida, 2015–present

Director of Jacksonville Early Learning Partnership and JAX Journey
Episcopal Children’s Services, Jacksonville, Florida 2012-14
Team Leader of Jacksonville Early Learning Partnership
Episcopal Children’s Services, Jacksonville, Florida 2008-12

Early Learning Coach
Episcopal Children’s Services, Jacksonville, Florida 2004-08

Teacher
Pierce County Middle School, Blackshear, Georgia, 1991–2002

Published Work

*Links to Early Learning* preschool curriculum
Episcopal Children’s Services, 2014

Guest Columnist
*The Blackshear Times*, Blackshear, Georgia, 2004-present

“The M List” weekly feature
*The Blackshear Times*, Blackshear, Georgia, 2002-03

Honors

Star Performer
Episcopal Children’s Services, 2008

Teacher of the Year
Pierce County Middle School, 1995