THE LITERACY COACH AND COMMON CORE IMPLEMENTATION:
A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY IN CURRICULAR CHANGE

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Abstract

Instructional coaching within school districts has become one way to support teachers. Research from Guskey and Yoon (2009) showed the importance of carefully planned and purposeful professional development; this professional development needed job imbedded follow-up and support. Instructional coaching allows for this. Literacy coaches focus on the English Language Arts aspects of the curriculum and specifically seek to improve classroom practice in those areas. With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, literacy instruction is undergoing changes in the classroom. New materials, content, and methodologies need to be incorporated into the instructors’ daily routines. Literacy coaches seek to help teacher navigate this change.

There are two research questions that guided this study: How do the roles and actions of a literacy coach support the adoption and implementation of new curricula based on the Common Core States Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) as perceived by teachers, administrators, and the literacy coaches themselves? and How do teachers feel the literacy coach fits in the cycle of change initiated by a new Common Core curriculum?

This qualitative study used a collective case study methodology. The goal of the research was to give voice to the key players in curriculum implementation: teachers, coaches, and administrators. These key players shared what they felt were the most supportive roles of a literacy coach. This was done through interviews and focus group meetings. Three common themes that emerged included: collaboration, communication, and the modeling of lessons. An additional theme of emotional support was integrated into these roles.

KEYWORDS: Literacy coaching, instructional coaching, Common Core State Standards, professional development, curriculum
Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem of Practice

The Topic

Instructional coaching for K-12 educators has gained in popularity over the past two decades. Instructional coaches specialize in a specific educational content area and provide support to classroom teachers in that subject. Literacy coaches, who focus on improving reading and writing instruction in particular, are now common support personnel in many school districts. The coaches’ work can take many forms. They may coach individual teachers in the classroom by providing demonstration lessons and personalized feedback. They may address large groups of teachers in formal seminars or lead data meetings where student assessment information is analyzed in an effort to determine future instruction. Ultimately however, the goal of literacy coaching is to help establish and support good teaching in classrooms (International Reading Association, 2004).

As educational leaders, literacy coaches aid teachers in adjusting their classroom practice to meet district and state expectations whenever there is a change in policy, curriculum, or expectation. The newly enacted Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a national initiative developed by education commissioners and governors geared toward ensuring all students have the skills needed to succeed in their chosen career paths, have necessitated curricular changes that affect content and methods of instruction in the K-12 classroom. As a consequence, the CCSS have created vast upheaval in classroom practices. Teachers find themselves scrambling to understand how these skills are best taught in their classroom, many times after a single day or two of training with the standards themselves. Because the shift to a Common Core curriculum is new to educators, expectations for direct instruction are not yet explicated. Therefore, the
ways in which literacy coaches can best support Common Core curricular change need to be explored.

The Common Core State Standards were released in 2010. A framework that delineates the skills to be taught at each grade level from kindergarten through twelfth grade, the CCSS seek to revamp public education in a way that has not been done before. Through the implementation of these standards, a common set of skills is taught to all students with the goal that high school graduates would be “college and career ready.” Teachers must shift in their literacy instruction from a focus on literary text, narrative text structure, and pre-reading activities such as frontloading background knowledge to a new focus on informational text, argumentative writing, and text-dependent questioning. The Common Core standards also necessitate a shift in pedagogy. Teachers move from a spiraling curriculum to a mastery-based curriculum. In previous curricula based on state standards, a spiraling curriculum meant that skills were frequently taught and then retaught in higher grades. This allowed students to encounter the concepts and material again and again throughout their education. The new Common Core standards call instead for a mastery-based curriculum that requires a set of skills to be mastered at the completion of each grade. A detailed list of skills are outlined for each grade level with the expectation that students will completely understand and master each grade level’s skills for these skills will not be retaught at higher grade levels. For example, all reading foundational skills, that include phonics instruction, are to be mastered by the end of fifth grade. Similarly, the use of capitalization at the beginning of a sentence is a kindergarten skill. Therefore, all students should use capital letters beginning sentences when they enter first grade and this skill will not be a specified part of the curriculum again. A mastery-based curriculum is meant to change the teachers’ expectations and student performance at each grade level.
Because the Common Core initiative is new, no one is quite sure how this happens. Furthermore, high stakes testing in the form of standardized tests meant to assess this mastery, lend an air of mystery and uncertainty to the curricular changes. Such standardized tests in the form of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Assessment and Smarter Balanced Assessment are in the process of being released and utilized. While teachers want to do their best in the classroom and desire to deliver instruction so that skill mastery occurs, much of the Common Core implementation is still at the trial and error stage.

**Research Problem**

Stress and uncertainty resulting from the implementation of new curricula may cause teachers to halt the initiation and maintenance of the curricular change (Drago-Severson, 2009; Harper & Maheady, 1991). I addressed this problem of practice by discovering how teachers feel a literacy coach can contribute most effectively to their adoption and implementation of a new English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core curriculum at the 4th and 5th grade elementary levels. Grades four and five were targeted in this study because, by the completion of these two grades, the Reading Foundational Skills strand needs to be mastered by the students. The Common Core ELA standards contain 6 strands at the K-5 elementary level: Reading Literature, Reading Informational Text, Language, Speaking and Listening, Writing, and Reading Foundational Skills. At the middle school level, which begins in grade six, the Reading Foundational Skills strand is dropped. Many literacy coaches zero in on the elementary school years in an attempt to make certain these initial literacy skills are in place; grades K-5 lay the base for future reading and writing success. Fourth and 5th graders must master both extensive literacy content such as persuasive writing and non-fiction comprehension as well as advanced phonics and linguistic skills. The many areas of literacy that a 4th and 5th grade classroom
teacher must cover provide the literacy coach multiple opportunities to support instruction. Therefore, the focus for this research remained within this grade span. Through group interviews with teachers, and one-on-one interviews with literacy coaches and administrators, I investigated how literacy coaches can make the change process successful.

**Ever-present Change in the Life of an Educator**

Educators must negotiate change and incorporate new ideas into their lives throughout their teaching experience. They must be able to adapt to the various needs of their students, to instructional and policy changes that are enacted in their buildings, and to national movements such as the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Curricular changes force the education system to adjust how it operates, and teachers need to gain new information. New curricular initiatives create stress, especially due to the new evaluation protocol and demands. Teachers can come to a stand-still in the change process (Drago-Severson, 2009). In order to move forward in a curricular change, teachers must be supported.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

In a paper prepared for the American Federation of Teachers, Louisa C. Moats (1999) wrote that, “The most fundamental responsibility of schools is teaching students to read” (p.2). Titled *Teaching Reading Is Rocket Science*, this report discussed the importance of early literacy skills. Mastery of foundational literacy skills enables students to participate fully in their education and ultimately leads to increased opportunities in and out of the academic arena. As Moats explained, “Research indicates that, although some children will learn to read in spite of incidental teaching, others will never learn unless they are taught in an organized, systematic, efficient way by a knowledgeable teacher using a well-designed instructional approach” (p.7). Approximately a decade after the publication of this paper, Louisa Moats helped create
America’s first national set of educational standards, the Common Core, in an effort to delineate the scope and sequence of reading skills acquired through the K-12 grade span. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) provide a sequential set of proficiencies that will afford students the content knowledge and educational understandings needed to enter higher levels of education. Presently adopted by 44 of the 50 states, these standards are to drive instruction in the majority of the U.S. states.

While the Common Core standards seek to clearly define what must be taught at each grade level, they are complex in nature, building in rigor and depth as the grade levels progress. In the ELA portion of the Common Core, students are to master skills in six main areas or “strands.” Each strand is further subdivided into specific standards to be mastered by the completion of each consecutive grade. Although these skills have been detailed in the 66-page document of the ELA Common Core, teachers are left asking, “How does this actually translate into my classroom?” and “What does this look like in everyday instruction?” Moreover, standardized national tests are newly implemented, so it is difficult to measure the success of implementation thus far.

We know that the best teaching is provided when teachers are confident in their instructional and content knowledge as well as in their ability to instruct. As put forth by McCombes-Tolis and Feinn (2008), “Research has yielded a growing body of empirical evidence to support a direct relationship between teachers’ knowledge and skills about essential components of effective literacy instruction and student literacy outcomes” (p.236). Indeed, when teachers have a solid knowledge base regarding how and what to teach in the classroom, student growth accelerates (Moats, 1999; McCombes-Tolis & Feinn, 2008). For many teachers, the implementation of the CCSS necessitates a shift in their instructional practices and they are
attempting to make quick and effective modifications in their classes. In the past, teachers could depend on teachers’ manuals and basal programs to supplement their reading knowledge (Moats, 1999). We now find ourselves at a critical juncture where teachers do not have the support of text books that are aligned to the Common Core. Significant time is spent as exhausted teachers determine what the Common Core is asking of them and what that skill instruction will look like. As shown in Shulman’s theory of pedagogical content knowledge, “teachers need to master two types of knowledge: (a) content, also known as ‘deep’ knowledge of the subject itself, and (b) knowledge of the curricular development” (InTime, 2001). The literacy coach can support both of these types of knowledge development.

Relating the Discussion to Audiences

Audiences who will be interested in this research include teachers and administrators who seek the best ways to put into practice the new standards. Literacy coaches who desire to support the teachers in the implementation of Common Core curriculum will benefit from seeing how they can be most effective. Finally, Curriculum Coordinators and upper administrators may determine if they feel it beneficial to employ literacy coaches in their districts to further the implementation of the CCSS.

Significance of Research Problem

There has been little research done on exactly how the Common Core State Standards are being implemented and ways in which their execution can be most successful. Primarily, this is due to the recent development and implementation of these standards. While there is general information on supporting change, how it looks to support change related to the CCSS is scarce, with the majority of research focusing on the Mathematic Standards as opposed to the English Language Arts Standards. This is shown in the higher number of doctoral theses published in the
past three years that address Common Core mathematics issues. Many important decisions must be made in school systems as a result of the CCSS. Ultimately, the curricular decisions and monitoring of the CCSS will be done at district and state levels. These decisions range from the purchasing of classroom materials to the creation of new jobs. Such decisions involve large sums of money and will impact instruction for many years to come. Additional research that can inform these decisions would be beneficial so that resources are ultimately used to garner the best results.

Research into this problem takes root my professional experience. As a literacy coach, I am frequently asked about current reading issues: What books can be recommended for their child? Would Hooked on Phonics give a child in kindergarten a head start in reading? How can all children receive the reading instruction they need at school?

Many teachers do not have the knowledge base needed to be effective teachers of reading. Initial credentialing in most undergraduate elementary teaching programs includes one (maybe two) literacy class. Some teachers may not be confident in the literacy skills that form the base of instruction: differentiating between accuracy and fluency, syllabication patterns, and text dependent questioning strategies are just a few areas in need of support (Moats, 1999). Finally, one need that teachers frequently verbalize is their desire for opportunities to collaborate with others (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010; Visser, Coenders, Terlouw, & Pieters, 2010). Current research shows that teacher communication and reflection are a way to build those collaborative opportunities (Blamey et al., 2009; Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Ferguson & Lynch, 2010; Gill et al., 2010; Helmer et al., 2011; L’Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010). This research will help school districts, administrators, and teachers determine how to best use their
energy and resources so that teachers can become more effective in their instruction of the systematic skills laid out in the CCSS.

**Positionality Statement**

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (2011), there are approximately 3.2 million PK-12 public school teachers in America. Once in the classroom, it can be difficult for these teachers to remain current in educational trends and to continue growing professionally. School districts seek to provide opportunities of professional development for their employees. One way some districts support K-12 teachers is through the use of “instructional coaches.” Frequently, these coaches have a specific area of expertise (math, literacy, science, etc.). Responsibilities such as providing professional development, presenting demonstration lessons, collecting and analyzing data, co-teaching, and conferring with teachers are all aspects of this job. In essence, a coach provides leadership, instruction, and support through his/her expertise.

I have been employed as a Literacy/Instructional Coach the past seven years and, while I hold a master’s degree in reading that spans the K-12 grade levels, coaching was significantly new territory for me. I have coached approximately 200 teachers in 10 schools and have worked with multiple administrators. Being aware of the communication skills needed for this job, and being sensitive to the positionality of others, is demanding.

I have supported teachers through professional development, demonstration lessons, data collection, and individualized coaching so that these educators can improve their literacy instruction. I have attempted to provide consistency in our district and keep open lines of communication with personnel both above and below me. Fennell and Arnot (2008) stated that “the researcher must be prepared for the personal and professional consequences of turning one’s
By addressing the role of instructional coaches in this problem, I questioned my own work. Potential consequences of questioning my own beliefs and actions included the possibility that the literature would show instructional coaches were not able to effectively support curricular change. I could have found I am not as “expert” as I would like to think myself and, in fact, that the capacity to consistently demonstrate current knowledge and curricula was not attainable. In my particular situation, this research could have made me question whether my work was meaningful or not. As a dedicated literacy coach, I hoped that my expertise and work was useful. My research questions directly spoke to the group in which I operated; a group that had the ability to influence others. I needed to make certain I remained objective and reported my research so the literacy coach was utilized in the best ways possible. In order to do this, this research incorporated a number of voices that lent multiple perspectives to the role of the literacy coach; teachers, coaches, and administrators were all represented in the study. By drawing on the many experiences of these people and analyzing their points of view, I was able to relate the data that was discovered.

As a coach, a former classroom teacher, and a reading specialist, I was ideally situated to speak to how classroom curricula are implemented and the place of literacy coaches in that process. I knew of the training and supports that were available to both classroom teachers and coaches. With my coaching experience, I had extensive knowledge and training in the ELA Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Fennell and Arnot (2008) made the point that in research it is not only “what is being said,” but “who speaks for whom” (p.534). Speaking as a literacy coach and former teacher allowed me to share many elements of positionality with fellow members of this group. Creswell (2012) stated “you can justify your research problem based on evidence from your workplace or your personal experiences” (p.68). My work as a
literacy coach exemplified this truth; I knew Common Core implementation was a challenge for teachers when I looked around my workplace. I also knew that as a coach I had many different options available to me regarding how to support teachers; many times I did not quite know the best path to take. I felt that I had the experience that had led me to recognize the issue of adjusting to curricular change related to the CCSS. I was well suited to speak to the problem of the undefined role literacy coaches play in curricular change. Most of all, my personal value of educational and intellectual growth made me passionate about this problem. I tempered my passion with the objectivity due a serious research project and looked to other experts and implementers in the field from which to draw data and spoke for a collective group with valuable insights.

**Research Questions and Goals**

The purpose of the research was to investigate what activities and roles used by literacy coaches contribute to successful implementation of ELA Common Core curriculum. Typical roles in which a literacy coach may engage included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Serving as a writer of curriculum
- Providing demonstration lessons
- Leading small and large-group discussions about problems teachers are facing
- Administering literacy assessments
- Facilitating data meetings
- Communicating about literacy needs, eliciting teacher reflection and observations
- Providing formal professional development trainings
- Helping plan classroom lessons and literacy interventions
- Observing and providing feedback around curriculum implementation in a non-evaluative manner
- Providing a trusting relationship and encouragement
- Helping to identify strengths and weaknesses in a literacy program

These roles were discussed at length in the Standards for Literacy Coaching set forth by the International Reading Association (IRA, 2006). Throughout the interviews, participants had the opportunity to talk about which of the roles had the greatest impact in allowing them to implement the ELA CCSS.

Questions

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do the roles and actions of a literacy coach support the adoption and implementation of new curricula based on the Common Core States Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 4 and 5 as perceived by teachers, administrators, and the literacy coaches themselves?

2. How do teachers, administrators, and literacy coaches themselves feel the literacy coach fits in the cycle of change initiated by a new Common Core curriculum?

As a result of answering these research questions, strategies and actions were recommended to educational leaders that help teachers negotiate change initiatives in a positive manner. The information gleaned from Common Core implementation can be extended to future curricular changes.

Organization of this Document

There are five forthcoming sections of this Doctoral Thesis: the theoretical framework, the literature review, the research design, the data, and implications of the findings. First, the
theory of organizational change serves as the framework for this research. Second, an overview of current educational research in the areas of instructional coaching, professional development, and the Common Core places this research into a larger context. Then the specific methodological design of the proposed research is outlined. This research design includes an overview of how and why a qualitative approach that uses a collective case study method is suited to the research questions. Finally, a rich description of the interview information is given followed by a discussion of the findings that practically applies the data to today’s education system.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational Change Theory

Organizational change theory was used as the framework for this research. Organizational change theory attempts to explain how the many pieces of an organization react to a change and the transactions that take place between each piece as a result of a new initiative. The Common Core Standards are a significant shift in educational thought and call for systemic organizational changes in instruction. In order for the education system to survive, and ultimately thrive, the organization must adapt to the change, figuring out how to incorporate new procedures and demands until they eventually return to a state of equilibrium. The education system is in this process of change as the entire system: teachers, coaches, administrators, policy makers, parents, and students determine what the CCSS mean to them. In general, organizational change can occur in a gradual, evolutionary manner or in a sudden (more drastic) revolutionary manner (Burke, 2011). The Common Core State Standards framework is a deliberate change, an initiative that necessitates the sudden implementation of new ELA curricula. Therefore, it is a revolutionary change; “revolutionary change can be referred to as
“planned” change (Burke, 2011). The Common Core State Standards completely overhauls what teachers are expected to cover in their instruction, right down to raising text-complexity levels to new heights, using a carefully planned framework.

**Linking the Theory to the Research**

Organizational change theory is a way of understanding the happenings within a school system. There is a close link between theory and method. “How you study the world determines the way you learn about the world” (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p.xxiii). Organizational change theory sets the stage for the researcher to analyze the role of the literacy coach in the implementation of the Common Core curriculum. Creswell added, “Qualitative researchers have underscored the importance of not only understanding the beliefs and theories that inform our research but also actively writing about them in our reports and studies” (p.15). Organizational change theory informed this research by showing there will be no easy explanation regarding how Common Core ELA curriculum is implemented successfully. By approaching this research using the organizational change lens, it was possible to explore and interpret the data with the understanding that the literacy coach has the opportunity to influence and be influenced by many different aspects of the education system. Organizational change theory shows the complexity of this research. This complexity arose from the numerous interactions of the organization as a whole, groups within the organization, and individual interactions. All of these responses became interwoven to influence the new initiative.

**Justification for the Organizational Change Theory Framework**

There are two main reasons organizational change theory was valuable as a framework for this research. First, “over the course of their careers, teachers encounter endless change” (Hargreaves, 2004, p.287). Indeed, the very nature of teaching invites constant adjustment in
instructional and classroom processes. In part, teachers have new classes of children each year. The emotional and “human” aspects of daily dealing with children and parents make each day unique and unpredictable. Further, the cycle of change initiated from political involvement at both local and national levels invites transformation. Because change can come in so many forms, for the purpose of this research, change will refer to “episodic change” as opposed to “continual change.” Continual change includes the ongoing, small changes that are consistently occurring in an organization. “The phrase ‘episodic change’ is used to group together organizational change that tend to be infrequent, discontinuous, and intentional” (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p.365). This would refer to the implementation of a new policy, the use of a new invention, or the incorporation of a new methodology. A shift in instructional curriculum is an episodic change that causes teachers to feel uncertain for a while as they attempt to regain their confidence and equilibrium using new tools in their day-to-day instruction (Drago-Severson, 2009). Interestingly, although an intentional adjustment in curriculum frequently is well thought out, according to organizational change theory, most changes have unexpected twists. Burke (2011) said,

The implementation process is messy: Things don’t proceed exactly as planned; people do things their own way, not always according to the plan; some resist or even sabotage the process; and some people who would be predicted to support or resist the plan actually behave in just the opposite way. (p.12)

The literacy coach, as a part of the organization, focuses on cleaning up the messy implementation process so that the organization can return to a comfortable equilibrium. As the Common Core State Standards become classroom practice, the literacy coach aids in smoothing the transition so the education system can function.
Second, there is a tight correlation between the success of the change process and the leadership within a school (Spillane, 2009). Research shows that change initiatives rely in part on the people who lead and support the process. According to Spillane (2009), “The success or failure of educational reforms, from standards and accountability policies to efforts to improve teacher quality, will depend in important part on school leadership and management” (p.202-203). Spillane’s research shows that leaders can create a culture that allows the educational transformation to be successful. Literacy coaches are leaders in schools who aid in the creation of a supportive atmosphere. Just having the leaders be central players and involved in the work sets the tone for positive change. Having leaders focus on the diagnosis of problems and the design of the educational reform are also important. Undoubtedly, literacy coaches are leaders in their buildings and active participants in the reform. They help to clarify what is working and what is not working in the cycle of change by encouraging teachers to verbalize how the change is occurring in the classroom. Literacy coaches also help communicate the design, or plan, of the change by spreading information from administrators and reiterating the goals of the new initiative.

The Emotional Nature of Organizational Change

Hargreaves (2004) stated that “change and emotion are inseparable” (p.287). When educators are presented with a new initiative, the initial response to change may be to question how the change will affect them personally. Szabla (2007) noted, that to which organizational change theory refers as an individuals’ three-part response to change, comprises cognitive, emotional, and intentional dimensions. The cognitive response is an individual’s attitude or beliefs about the change. The emotional response is comprised of the individual’s feelings that he or she experiences in relationship to the change. Finally, the intentional response is what the
individual actually decides to do about the change. Szabla’s research showed that an individual’s response to change at these three levels is very complicated and may vary depending on how the alteration is presented. Ideally, the change would illicit positive responses at all three levels. The individual would cognitively recognize the change is beneficial to the organization. He or she would emotionally feel the change is positive, exciting, and a move toward improved outcomes. Intentionally, the individual would implement the change; their actions would reflect an application of the initiative.

Szabla (2007) showed that there is direct correlation between one’s perception of how the change is planned and how the individual responds to the change. This perception leads to either a positive or negative response. An initiative that originates from outside the organization is more likely to garner a negative response than a change that an individual feels is based on the internal needs of the organization. The literacy coach contributes to how educational reform is perceived. Literature on literacy coaching emphasizes the function of the coach as a communicator and one who supports school personnel through professional development. These two roles appear to be directly related to the emotional support needed in negotiating change and the new cognitive knowledge necessitated by curricular shifts. Along with helping to support teachers’ emotional needs, literacy coaches have the opportunity to influence teacher perceptions of the change. As Hargreaves (2009) asserted, “In reality, few people really change unless, at some point, they see the need to do so” (p.2). Literacy coaches have the opportunity through their various roles to clarify how change is beneficial. They can guide teachers to see that a new initiative is based in the needs of the education system. This study delves into the specific actions of the coach that exemplify how this is done.
The Burke-Litwin Model (Figure 1.1, see below) of organizational change theory (Burke, 2011) depicts many interactive components of the change process by visually illustrating how curricular change does not occur because of just one factor. Each component of the organization influences its counterparts, just as those parts in turn influence all other parts of the organization (shown by the fact that all arrows are bi-directional). Factors that are external and internal to the individual are taken into consideration and the feedback loops show how organizational change is complicated in nature and cannot be relegated to simple explanation.
One can use this model to consider the many factors that influence the successful, or unsuccessful, implementation of a new curriculum. The external environment includes the school district at large, the state education policies, national standards, and societal expectations. When the new curriculum is given to the teacher, their reactions are determined by the many factors on this diagram including the following: Does the culture of the building support new
initiatives? Are there systems in place that will aid in the implementation of new teaching strategies? Is the principal involved in this change and does the new initiative fit the mission of the school? This model has been especially useful in guiding how the researcher has approached the methodology, data collection, and analysis within this study. The collective case study, which was the chosen method for this research, allows for a greater number of representatives in the organizations to contribute their experiences, than other methods allow. This enabled the researcher to cover more of the elements listed in this chart, which is important, given the extent to which the literacy coaches’ work fits into so many possible parts of this model. They contribute to the organizational culture supporting change that improves best practice in the classroom. They address individual needs and values when they meet with teachers to discuss successes and challenges. Literacy coaches are part of the leadership, training teachers in new educational material. They provide motivation and skills in the area of literacy. All these factors work together to influence how change is perceived and accepted.

Over the years, many researchers have elaborated on organizational change theory by creating new diagrams or steps in the process. In an effort to clarify the complicated nature of this theory, Lewin (1947) divided the change process into three steps: unfreezing, moving, and freezing. The organization “unfreezes” or sees the necessity of changing its process; things begin to change. Then, there is “moving” as the change takes place and new systems are implemented. Finally, the system “freezes” again when the new systems become locked in place, accepted and running smoothly. Schein (1987) did not believe this process was detailed enough and further described what the individual might do in each of these three steps. While he saw these three steps articulated in the change process, he wanted to further describe the intricacies at each stage. He believed the process could not be relegated to three simple steps and
expanded upon them. He pinpointed what might make people recognize the need for change, such as a confirmation that current practice is not working. His insights included how people reacted to each stage: some people felt anxious, some felt guilty there was a gap between reality and the ideal, et cetera. Schein demonstrated the complex nature of adapting to change. One of the important points Schein adds to Lewin’s steps is the idea that in order for people to “actually change, they must believe that doing so will not cause feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, or loss of face or self-esteem” (as cited in Burke, 2011, p.166). Each individual needs to feel that the change will ultimately be beneficial to them and the system or they will not want to step out of their comfort zone to implement something new. Once again, the literacy coach’s work is integrated into many of these stages, such as creating readiness to change, creating psychological safety, and providing opportunities to implement the new behavior and receive feedback.

By grounding this research in organizational change theory, understanding how the literacy coach fits into the change cycle and where the literacy coach is most helpful in negotiating the change will be clarified. Organizational change occurs at three levels: individual, group, and the large system (Burke, 2011). The work of the literacy coach frequently crosses these three levels. Organizational change theory is a framework that allows the researcher to analyze the role of the literacy coach and CCSS curriculum implementation in great depth and at multiple levels.

**Overview of the Study**

The main goal of this research was to explore the work of the literacy coach and the implementation of the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards in grades 4 and 5 to gain a better understanding of curricular change. The study described what key contributions literacy coaches made when negotiating this change in curriculum as perceived by teachers,
literacy coaches, and administrators. The activities and roles used by literacy coaches that contributed to successful implementation of Common Core curriculum were investigated. Additionally, strategies and actions for educational leaders that helped teachers negotiate change initiatives in a positive manner were extrapolated. The information obtained from this research may be applied to future curricular changes. A collective case study, three southern New England school districts were analyzed and described in an attempt to define the work of the literacy coach in relation to organization change.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Literacy Coach and Curriculum Implementation

Statement of Problem

In the past decade, literacy coaching has been a growing trend in education (Allen, 2006; Toll, 2005). Literacy coaches are educators who serve to build capacity in reading and writing instruction as they work with classroom teachers. Although the literacy coach may work with students during demonstrations or co-taught lessons, the majority of their time is spent working with the classroom teachers. In many cases, the specific job description of the literacy coach is undefined (Allen, 2006; Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009; Toll, 2005). The International Reading Association (IRA) standards identify literacy coaches as being: skillful collaborators, skillful job-embedded coaches, skillful evaluators of literacy needs, and skillful instructional strategists (IRA, 2006). There are no set national qualifications for literacy coaching. - the IRA recommends, however that those teachers entering this position be recognized as excellent teachers, have in-depth knowledge and expertise in working with other teachers, be excellent presenters/leaders, and have the ability to model, observe, and provide feedback for teachers (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009; IRA 2004, 2006; Gill, Kostiw, & Stone, 2010). Literacy coaches work to establish and support good teaching in all classrooms. With the vague definition of literacy coaching, what is the role of a literacy coach in the adoption and implementation of new curricula?

The Literature

Literacy coaches serve as teacher leaders and enable the teachers with whom they work to take on leadership roles as well. Distributed leadership, this sharing of leadership with others, empowers the teachers to become leaders in their schools (Spillane, 2006). The literacy coach
does not seek to stay “in power” for the curriculum initiative, but seeks to raise everyone into leadership in this area. In essence, having a literacy coach lead curriculum implementation is “leadership by design” (Spillane, 2006, p.42), a planned and thoughtful spread of leadership. Spillane (2006) stated that leadership by design can happen in two ways. Either, a designated leader can formally distribute leadership among teachers or structures can be put in place that lead to a distribution of leadership. The literacy coach uses both of these techniques to share leadership.

Literacy coaches serve to empower new teacher-leaders. One of their main roles is that of effective communicator (Blamey et al., 2009; Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Ferguson & Lynch, 2010; Gill et al., 2010; Helmer et al., 2011; L’Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010). The communication used by effective literacy coaches can bring about change and provide opportunities for teachers to be involved in the change process. Additional aspects of the literacy coach’s job, including content support and professional development, build leaders within each school.

Organizational learning occurs best with personal inquiry and discussion (Collinson & Cook, 2007; Drago-Severson, 2009). Collinson and Cook (2007) wrote that there are two kinds of inquiry: direct and indirect. Direct inquiry occurs when teachers test claims and assumptions looking for feedback to inform their decisions. Indirect inquiry occurs when teachers seek to understand how ideas and perceptions help make sense of their surrounding environment and ultimately lead to change. In this chapter, I discuss how the literacy coach fits into the process of curriculum implementation with a focus on how literacy coaches develop these two types of personal inquiry and discussion among educators.
Drawing from the current research on literacy coaching and effective leadership, one can identify five themes that delineate how the literacy coach can effectively aid in curriculum design and implementation. These themes include: communication, collaboration, professional development, support, and encouragement.

**Communication**

Effective coaches demonstrate good communication skills, while data shows that poor communication is a barrier to successful coaching (Blamey et al., 2009; Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Ferguson & Lynch, 2010; Gill et al., 2010; Helmer et al., 2011; L’Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010). Literacy coaches provide communication from principals and district administration regarding curricular expectations, frequently forming a bridge between school administrators and faculty members. Coaches should share the vision for literacy curriculum held by upper administration. Helping to communicate this vision of change to the faculty is an important part of coaching. The communication used by effective literacy coaches brings about change and gives the chance for teachers to be involved in the change process. This is essential for successful innovation (Miller, 2012). Information can be strategically shared by the coach. Teachers can be listened to so that key concerns may be identified and addressed. “When working with teachers, successful coaches know how to maneuver between colleague and expert, walking a delicate line between the two” (Blamey et al., 2009, p. 311). Literacy coaches “begin with the end in mind” (the end being successful curriculum implementation) and communicate the direction educators must travel to meet the goal of successful implementation (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005).

When discussing the curriculum, the coach fosters a reflective attitude in the teachers. It is through self-reflection that teachers can grow in their instruction and it is through self-
reflection that transformational change can take place (Elliot, Brooker, MacPherson, & McInman, 1999). The process of self-reflection is highly personal and necessitates an openness and honesty about oneself; vulnerability is required. The instructional coach is in a unique position to foster relationships that allow this type of trust. This was shown in a survey qualitatively analyzed by Blamey et al. (2009). The top three personal attributes held by “ideal” coaches were: skilled listening, relationship building, and problem solving. Coaches build trusting relationships so that they can engage in open communication around the implementation of the curriculum. When a personal connection is made between the coach and coachee, trust and respect are built. Only then, will a teacher become comfortable enough to truly self-reflect with the coach. In order to deal with the realities of the classroom, the coach must encourage and support this self-reflection (Hsieh, Hemmeter, McCollum, & Ostrosky, 2009). In the transformational model of leadership (Elliot et al., 1999; Miller, 2012), the importance of both communication and the building of relationships are considered. According to this theory, “transformational leaders- through communication processes- create a relationship between leaders and followers that helps followers reach their full potential and has the potential for transforming both the leader and the follower” (Miller, 2012, p.190). The coaches use meaningful communication with teachers to bring out teacher strengths, address insecurities, and ultimately both the coach and coachee develop more fully as educators.

Literacy coaches maintain an on-going dialogue with the teachers around the curriculum that keeps the implementation of the curriculum as a center of focus. When a strong relationship and collegiality flourish, teachers begin to feel secure enough to experiment with new ideas and ways of teaching, ultimately developing an attitude of inquiry (Showers, 1985). Literacy coaches hold non-evaluative jobs that help teachers develop this sense of security with them.
Although, principals are recognized as key leaders in organizational change (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Elliot et al., 1999), their role is that of “boss.” For principals, it may be difficult to have open lines of communication with teachers, especially in areas in which teachers feel insecure. Additionally, principals maintain an evaluative role in the school community, so teachers may be hesitant to communicate questions, concerns, and challenges regarding areas in which they are struggling. Coaches maintain a non-evaluative role, yet provide feedback to the teacher. This creates a greater opportunity to build a trusting relationship between the teacher and coach. Poole and Okeafor (1989) discussed how teacher efficacy and communication effect successful implementation of new curricula; that both need to be present for a successful change. They concluded that having effective teachers does not guarantee a viably integrated curriculum. Instead, a combination of teacher efficacy and communication between teachers influences the success of the implementation. “Inquiry within a community of teachers not only enhances teachers’ knowledge and skills but also increases the social resources of the school” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p.8). Coaches have the unique opportunity to build relationships cultivating reflection and inquiry. Ultimately, this builds teachers’ capacity to analyze new initiatives and determines how these initiatives work within their experience.

Collaboration

“The only way the curriculum in a school can truly be guaranteed is if the teachers themselves, those who are called upon to deliver the curriculum, have worked collaboratively” (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, p.91). Literacy coaches aid in teacher collaboration through group meetings, discussions, and professional conversations in both formal professional learning communities and informal collaborative settings. As leaders in the school, coaches provide both
the opportunities for collaboration and participate in collaborative efforts to address the best ways to apply a new curriculum in the classroom.

Literacy coaches provide formal opportunities for collaboration. One way coaches do this is through the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Typically, a PLC chooses a focus to guide a cycle of inquiry. During the cycle of inquiry, participants implement and analyze change within their classrooms (Nelson, LeBard, & Waters, 2010). A literacy coach can form such a PLC around curriculum creation, implementation, and/or evaluation to help sustain the group’s focus on the curriculum initiative. Professional learning communities provide teachers the opportunity to collaboratively investigate and share experiences regarding the curricular change (Drago-Severson, 2009; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Coaches that solely work on a one-to-one basis do not have the levels of successful curriculum implementation that are found when coaches work both one-to-one and within the context of a professional learning community (Lieber et al., 2009). By creating a wide network of teachers to generate ideas, discuss concerns, and share the burden of implementation, the coach fosters collaboration in the schools. Time and again, the research identifies that one of the most effective ways literacy coaches, and leaders in general, can influence curriculum change is to create opportunities for teachers to collaborate (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010; Visser, Coenders, Terlouw, & Pieters, 2010). A significant reason for the correlation between strong curriculum implementation and PLCs is that this collaboration supports consistent implementation of the initiative (Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamintina, 2010). Teachers felt it was extremely important to vicariously share classroom experiences, successes, and problems in order to further their curriculum implementation (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). Outside of PLCs, literacy coaches can provide other opportunities for collaboration by facilitating grade-level meetings or leading
book studies. For teachers that are just beginning collaborative efforts to improve classroom instruction, these forms of collaboration may make way for deep conversations in a non-threatening setting (Nelson et al., 2010).

Literacy coaches collaborate with individual teachers to help implement curriculum initiatives in the classroom. Coaches plan with the teachers to develop lessons where the new curriculum initiative is incorporated (Hsieh, Hemmeter, McCollum, & Ostrosky, 2009). This collaboration provides a dialogue between the two professionals that will insure the new curriculum is being utilized consistently. Even with one-to-one collaboration, teachers feel empowered to be able to implement curriculum changes. Ultimately, “it is the process of building shared knowledge and the collaborative dialogue about that shared knowledge that builds the capacity of staff to function as high-performing teams” (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, p.85). Past practice had teachers working in the relatively isolated environment of their classrooms. Coaches draw teachers out of their classrooms into a network that fosters an environment of learning (Helmer, Bartlett, Wolgemuth, & Lea, 2011).

**Professional Development**

The literacy coach builds pedagogical knowledge about the new curriculum. Literacy coaches are expected to have a great knowledge base in the area of reading and writing (Allen, 2006; IRA, 2004; IRA, 2006). There is an expectation that literacy coaches have knowledge to share in their area of expertise. This knowledge extends to comprehension of new curricular initiatives. Spillane (2006) defined curriculum knowledge as understanding relating to elements in education such as programs designed for the teaching of particular subjects and topics at a given level, the instructional materials available, and the characteristics that serve as indications for the use of particular curriculum or program materials in particular circumstances. (p.63)
The literacy coach is expected to have a “deep understanding” of the curriculum initiative and the literacy knowledge being implemented (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010, p.144). Literacy coaches share their knowledge with classroom teachers through professional development. This increases the teachers’ confidence with the new material and builds teacher efficacy.

The professional development (PD) offered by literacy coaches may take many forms, but is embedded within the school/classroom. Job-embedded professional development allows the participants to take new knowledge and apply it to authentic classroom settings (Sibley & Sewell, 2011). It is the coach’s job to help teachers transfer pedagogical knowledge to the real-world. They may provide the initial training or teachers may attend an off-site training, but the coach links the theoretical literacy knowledge to everyday practice. “Best evidence research indicates professional development must be ongoing in order to see enduring changes in teacher practice” (Helmer, et al., 2011, p.209). Ongoing professional development through teachers’ meetings, grade level-meetings, and classroom demonstrations helps to establish and maintain the curriculum initiative. Some of the most effective literacy coaches provide professional development that is sustained over time through this job-embedded approach. These coaches individualize the professional development to teachers’ needs, making literacy knowledge relevant to their classroom (Sibley & Sewell, 2011). Frequently, literacy coaches provide demonstration lessons within the teachers’ own rooms to show the new initiative in action.

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) wrote that all teachers benefit from professional development, but school-based PD enables a change in school culture. When teachers’ personal efficacy in teaching literacy is raised, they feel better able to implement new content literacy curriculum (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008).
Support

According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2006), one way principal’s aid in the development of learning communities is to identify facilitators that will further support the instructional focus of the school. The literacy coach can serve as one of these facilitators as they provide demonstration lessons, co-teaching support, and observational data to assist teachers in implementing new curricula. This aids in supporting teachers so they know how the new curriculum should look in their rooms. Through reflection, the literacy coach helps teachers metacognitively assess how they are implementing the new curriculum; she or he walks them through the implementation process so teachers can realize which areas need additional knowledge, practice, or support. The coach also helps them recognize the successes good teaching brings forth. The literacy coach is a knowledgeable person who can provide feedback and give advice about curriculum initiatives. They provide support for the new curriculum via advice, modeling, and guidance (Mohler, Ah Yun, Carter, & Kasak, 2009). Elliot, Brooker, MacPherson, and McInman (1999) wrote of leadership that does not seek to control others, but guides them. The support a literacy coach can offer is demonstrated through providing guided direction and focus.

As literacy coaches seek to support the implementation of the curriculum, they also seek to support the teacher by making the coaching “learner-centered” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p.53). The literacy coach must realize that it is the teacher who is the learner. Ongoing support is crucial to helping teachers move from their current habits to implementation of new ideas (Richards & Skolits, 2009). The literacy coach can provide a safe “holding place” for the teacher where they are supported at their level of knowing and challenged to grow as an individual. While doing this, the literacy coach must hold on to their own beliefs with confidence, still
recognizing and supporting the perspectives of the teachers with whom they work (Drago-Severson, 2009).

**Encouragement**

The literacy coach encourages teachers in their efforts, recognizing their struggles and cheering them on. The literacy coach does not evaluate the teachers, but acts as a sounding board and offers positive guidance to continue curricular innovations even when the new initiatives may be difficult. Encouragement from the literacy coach moves the teacher toward further efforts in the curriculum implantation. The coach may provide emotional support by recognizing efforts the teacher has made with the curriculum initiative. Also, they encourage teachers to explore various teaching styles and be open to new ideas (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2009). Much of this encouragement takes place in the context of responding to Kegan’s and Drago-Severson’s Levels of Knowing (2009). As adults make meaning of the world around them at one of the five levels (impulsive, instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming), the teachers need to be encouraged in their critical thinking. As teachers operate within these levels of knowing, they approach new initiatives and curriculum from their current view of the world. Teachers functioning at a socializing level will be very concerned about pleasing those with whom they work. They will want to hear how their co-workers are adapting. Teachers functioning at an instrumental level will want to understand what is expected and realize that they can fulfill this expectation. At the self-authoring stage, teachers reach a higher level of self-efficacy. They focus on maintaining their own integrity while improving their individual competence and performance. Ultimately, teachers can view their instructional experience through a self-transforming paradigm; they look to see how other people’s thoughts can improve upon their own. Literacy coaches have the opportunity to move teachers along the continuum of
knowing as curriculum is implemented. On-going support is crucial in order to shift teachers from their current habits to the implementation of new ideas (Richards & Skolits, 2009). When the coach meets a teacher and has an understanding of where that teacher is in terms of making meaning, they can give the teacher support that helps the educator feel somewhat comfortable while challenging the teacher to move into a higher level of knowing. This enables the educator to feel validated as a person and expand their perspective in new situations. “In other words, [the coach] must recognize, honor, and confirm who the person is, without pushing urgently for change” (p.58). It takes purposeful and strategic actions to build an environment that is positive, hopeful, and encouraging. The literacy coach must patiently help build this environment. Not only is the teacher’s way of making meaning supported, the way in which they make meaning is recognized as valid and accepted. Jennifer Allen (2006) discussed “small moments of encouragement” and how the literacy coach can bring to light positive classroom occurrences that show growth toward an instructional goal (p.33). Although these are baby steps toward the end product, recognizing positive growth contributes towards a new culture that honors teacher inquiry and experimentation.

Collinson and Cook (2007) wrote about the importance of nurturing an organization’s members’ aspirations for growth. Leaders need to help those with whom they work recognize, develop, and achieve life goals. An environment and attitude that makes this possible includes encouragement. The literacy coach can provide a situated learning context where teachers can grow as individual learners. Providing opportunities for renewal makes up a portion of the encouragement. Psencik (2011) stated,

The great coaches of the world have unique and inspirational ways to lead others to find themselves, to discover their dreams and aspirations, and to generate the courage to
achieve them. Those who aspire to be great coaches diligently seek to capture the art and science of this work. (p.4)

The ability to encourage teachers, while focusing the educator on improving classroom practice, calls for the dual ability of listening to and recognizing the needs of the group and listening to and recognizing the needs of the individual (Psencik, 2011). The literacy coach encourages those with whom they work to look at organizational change through these two lenses and to embrace a vision of growth for both the community and individual person.

Implications

The information gained from this literature review can help schools move forward with organizational change; curriculum change in particular. Collinson and Cook (2007) wrote that organizations must carefully examine the values and assumptions that exist within the system as they enter the change process.

“The process of examining assumptions may temporarily destabilize and increase anxiety in the organizations as members confront basic assumptions, cope with feelings of vulnerability, learn new skills that organizational learning requires, and build trust and community through dialogue.” p.212

The literacy coach can decrease this anxiety through their active communication, collaboration, professional development, support, and encouragement.

Professional Learning Communities

The process of coaching builds communities in the school that are well equipped to meet the challenge of implementing new initiatives. While building this community of learners, the literacy coach consistently reinforces the idea that “curriculum and instruction need constant improvement and that expanding our repertoire of teaching skills requires hard work, in which
the help of our colleagues is indispensable” (Showers, 1985, p.44). This is a shift in culture for educators, who can be slow to embrace change and have weak learning communities (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Collinson & Cook, 2007). The role of the literacy coach becomes that of a leader initiating a change in school culture that accepts and addresses school change as a natural and positive element of education development.

The prominent role of the professional learning community emerges as a structure that allows the literacy coach to engage in the five thematic roles of coaching evident in the research. For teachers, communication, collaboration, professional development, support, and encouragement intertwine to become the basis for professional learning communities. This structure of an established PLC keeps participants moving forward in the focus of their work (Drago-Severson, 2009; Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Nelson et al., 2010). “To build a school that is a true learning center—a place that nurtures adults’ and children’s learning and development—reflective practice and collegial inquiry need to become a part of the fabric of that school’s culture” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p.155). In schools that have professional learning communities, the reflective practice and collegial inquiry become an expected and accepted part of the school’s operation. When professional learning communities are firmly established, the culture of the school shifts to support curricular change. The literacy coach can model the inquiry process, reflection, and dialogue so that teachers see how they can reflect and grow in their practice.

Time

It takes time to develop a culture of learning in an educational setting. Time was cited by Harper and Maheady (1991) as one of the most common reasons given by teachers to explain why curriculum implementation is not carried through. Leadership, resources, knowledge, attitudes, and inquiry must be developed toward this goal and that cannot be done overnight.
This means that the role of the literacy coach must be long term. In order to develop relationships and trust, a necessary base for good communication and collaboration, literacy coaches must have patience. Literacy coaches need to be aware of the situated context of their leadership. Implementation of the initiative/curriculum may look very different at different schools. The coach needs to be aware of the culture of the school, what the teachers bring to the table in past experiences, and the teachers’ current situations so that the work being done is individualized to each school’s needs and present circumstance. Literacy coaches need a high level of interpersonal skill and awareness so that they can be sensitive to situated learning. It is impossible to create a new culture, build meaningful relationships, communicate at deep levels, and support personal and communal growth without being fully invested in the process and contributing great amounts of time to this work. The literacy coach can use his/her skills to help teachers negotiate curriculum change. It is realistic to view the work of a literacy coach as spanning many years, as opposed to one or two years, which may produce only surface-level changes.

The Common Core State Standards

Currently 44 of the 50 U.S. states have determined that they will adopt the CCSS. The CCSS was created by a diverse team of individuals including various educational leaders, administrators, and teachers. The final draft of the CCSS was released in the summer of 2010 and the goal of complete implementation was put in place for the year 2015; this would include the assessment piece of the CCSS. In order to reach a level of full implementation of the CCSS, there needs to be a revolution in the educational system coupled with “a considerable public educational effort” (The common core, 2011, p.1). States are currently in the process of sorting through this revolutionary change.
The CCSS is a “clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce” (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSS], 2011, Home page section). It is not a curriculum in and of itself. Instead it outlines what skills and concepts must be mastered at each grade level and then gives the teachers, school districts, and states the right to determine how those skills will be instructed. In one way, this is a strength of the CCSS. It is possible that teachers can teach in a way that highlights their instructional strengths; they can be flexible in their classroom delivery, and can maintain creativity in their instruction. While it is empowering for teachers to shape how Common Core implementation will look in their classroom, this can be a daunting task.

Formal Common Core-based materials are being rushed to publication in an effort to address the need for CCSS-aligned materials. Teachers may be unsure of the content to be taught and have little to support them. In some districts, directives to ensure that Common Core skills are taught in a unified manner negate the possibility for creative and innovative implementation.

Providing significant professional development for teachers around Common Core adoption has become one way districts are attempting to raise teacher’s self-efficacy in this area. “In teaching, self-efficacy is oriented toward one’s perceived ability to impact future learning and to execute actions to accomplish specific teaching tasks” (Rulison, 2012, p.23). Guskey and Yoon (2009) stated that “no improvement effort has ever succeeded in the absence of thoughtfully planned and well-implemented professional development” (p.497). Districts are trying to provide this professional development (Sheppard, 2013; Kindall, 2013; Rulison, 2012). Studying the standards by having teachers dissect the specific skills at each grade level have become common practice. The literature shows that the most effective professional development
must be purposeful, carefully planned and structured, and include lots of follow-up activities and support (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). As professional development is one of the five most effective roles a literacy coach can provide, they are frequently a part of this change effort.

Conclusion

The literacy coach has the distinct job of synthesizing the needs of the school personnel and providing the support needed to negotiate the curriculum. This provides many exciting opportunities while presenting numerous challenges. Ultimately, the literacy coach can have great influence over the success or failure of a school initiative. Chapter three describes the methodology of this research that will allow for further understanding of the role of the literacy coach in curricular change.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Methodology of the Study

Research Questions

1. How do the roles and actions of a literacy coach support the adoption and implementation of new curricula based on the Common Core States Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 4 and 5 as perceived by teachers, administrators, and the literacy coaches themselves?

2. How do teachers, administrators, and the literacy coaches themselves feel the literacy coach fits in the cycle of change initiated by a new Common Core curriculum?

Overview of the Research Design

This was a qualitative study. Qualitative research can be defined as “an inquiry approach useful for describing trends and explaining the relationship among variables found in the literature” (Creswell, 2012, p.626). I wanted to give voice to participants and to relate how the negotiation of a curricular change can best be supported in the day-to-day teaching experience. By bringing the questions back to the particular experience of the teacher, literacy coach, and administrators these questions set this study up to be qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world and consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln in Creswell, 2013). This type of research is used to explore complex issues by providing explicit details and providing a wealth of information shown through insights that stem from the human experience.

Qualitative research also is the appropriate approach for examining the research questions because it allowed me to acknowledge myself as a literacy coach and recognize the personal experiences I brought to this research. In this way, the dual roles of researcher and participant in the study were held simultaneously. This study delved into how curriculum and teaching
practice is entrenched in teacher competency and professional understanding. Ponterotto (2005) stated, “The researcher and her or his participants jointly create (co-constructed) findings from their interactive dialogue and interpretation” (p.129). Qualitative research afforded me the opportunity to express “empathetic understanding” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.6). My goal was to explore ways in which best-practice can be nurtured within the classroom, specifically literacy instruction at the elementary level. I looked to the teachers themselves and the administrators so that literacy coaches would have a better understanding of how they can be most supportive of their colleagues. As Miles and Huberman (1994) explained, qualitative data refers “to the essences of people, objects, and situations” (p.9). It is the essence of the relationship between the classroom teacher, the literacy coach, the administration, and the Common Core Standards, that I desired to uncover. One of the primary strengths of using a qualitative research approach was that I could “focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what ‘real life’ is like” (p. 10). This research looked at one specific aspect of real life in the elementary school setting. As “an inquiry approach useful for describing trends and explaining the relationship among variables found in the literature,” a qualitative study allowed connections between the lived experiences of the participants and current research and literature to be discovered (Creswell, 2012, p.626).

The goal of this qualitative research was to give voice to the key players in the implementation of new curriculum: teachers, coaches, and administrators. These key players shared what they felt were the most supportive roles of a literacy coach. This was done through interviews and focus group meetings. As a collective case study, this research drew on data collected from three public school systems. In each of the three school systems, there were individual interviews with the administrator that serves as Curriculum Coordinator and a literacy
coach. Also, there were focus groups in each district that consisted of 4th and 5th grade elementary classroom teachers. Data was coded and common themes that emerged were documented. Furthermore, this data was triangulated when themes from the three types of participants: the teacher focus groups, the literacy coaches’ interviews, and the Curriculum Directors’ interviews were compared.

**Paradigm and the Role of the Researcher**

According to the assumptions of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, there is no one truth that can be discovered; instead, reality is “constructed in the mind of the individual” (Ponterotto, 2005, p.129-130). A researcher designing their study in line with the tenets of the constructivist-interpretivist perspective would attempt to interpret the individual truth of the participant by carefully documenting the viewpoint being considered (Butin, 2010). Research in accordance with this paradigm is of a personal nature as it is designed to seek explanation from multiple viewpoints.

Reflection as a component of a study designed to align with the assumptions of constructivism-interpretivism is also very important. I sought to bring hidden beliefs and meaning to the surface and dialogued with the participants to reflect on the participants’ personal experiences. Instructional coaches use reflection as a way to encourage growth in educators. As a literacy coach, myself, reflection is deeply ingrained in my personality and educational experience. This paradigm naturally aligns with my positionality as an educator and a reflective person, hence the methodology proposed for this research. The level of inquiry required in qualitative research aligned well with the inquiry approach of the general inductive method.

Delving deeper into qualitative research, Creswell (2013) outlined numerous traditions or approaches to qualitative research. A collective case study was an effective way to examine the
research questions through a constructivist-interpretivist lens, and this study utilized that tradition. Creswell (2013) stated that “case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (p.97). Using a collective case study allowed me to tell the story of more than one school district. With the many school districts that were in the process of writing and adopting new curricula based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), ample opportunity was available to look closely at the experiences of literacy coaches and the teachers they serve as they go through this change. Specifically, this study focused on three school districts in New England.

**General Inductive Approach**

These specific research questions invited the open analysis that the general inductive approach uses. I attempted to keep an open mind as I entered the data collection and simply invited the participants to share their stories. Conclusions were drawn from the information that surfaced. This is a time when Common Core curriculum is new to educators and the use of literacy coaches remains a growing trend. Educators have stories to tell about their experiences in these areas, specifically how the literacy coach fits into the implementation of this curriculum change is relevant to educators.

As is typical of qualitative research, this study utilized a general inductive approach, which allowed themes to emerge from the data without myself placing preconceived labels and categories in place prior to the initial coding. General inductive analysis “refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes or a model through interpretations made from the raw data to by an evaluator or researcher” (Thomas, 2006, p.238). This research study used the general inductive method to analyze the data. I began with in vivo coding. In vivo coding is a process where the researcher looks for themes that emerge from the
data that is collected. It allows the researcher to identify categories that develop from the words within each interview and focus group. The data was read multiple times in order to flesh out the types of responses that emerged and those responses were then categorized. This allowed “research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas, 2006, p.238).

Instead of labeling themes according to what I might have predicted, the data bubbled up phrases and ideas that became the themes. Then, the categories were further analyzed to produce overarching themes that I uncovered through the data analysis. This research extended the general inductive approach so that I could use pattern coding in my analysis of the data. Pattern coding allowed me to draw explanations and relationships among people, whereas the general inductive approach generally does not do this (Thomas, 2006). Because the focus groups allow for person-to-person interaction within this method of data collection, pattern coding proved useful as the responses were linked together. The hope was that common themes that emerged from the data could be discussed and applied to other potential situations and places.

**Research Tradition**

**Research Approach and Justification.** The research approach used for this study was that of a collective case study. Yin (2014) said that there are a few key elements one can analyze to see if a case study is the appropriate methodology for the study. Of primary importance is the type of research question(s) being asked. If the question uses the “how” or “why” interrogative, than a case study can be a good fit. The collective case study seeks to explore a topic or issue and these open-ended questions allow the focus to be on discovery and exploration. A collective case study was an effective way to gain insight into the research questions that were addressed in this study since both questions used the “how” interrogative.
Also, the collective case study allowed me to determine if the information gathered addressed some type of contemporary social phenomenon or event. Currently, many school districts are in the process of writing and adopting new curricula based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). With the plethora of school districts going through this change, a collective case study provided the opportunity to look closely at the multiple experiences of the teachers, the literacy coaches, and the administration. Creswell stated that “case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (Creswell, 2013, p.97). Using multiple cases allowed me to explore the experience from the perspective of different educational groups (teacher, literacy coach, and administration) actively involved in negotiating this change. This design was appropriate for this study especially because common themes could emerge between these three sources. Additionally, by using cases from multiple school districts, the context of implementation could be explored. By gathering data from three different places, common themes could be drawn from the various situations. If only one school district was examined there would be a greater chance those themes were applicable to only that particular context. Using multiple districts gave the opportunity to observe commonalities between the described experiences.

A collective case study helps with the understanding of complex systems that have numerous interrelated parts. Organizational change theory shows the education system to have many facets that influence one another. By using a collective case study, more than one aspect of the system can be understood better. Data was not from teachers alone nor solely from the literacy coaches or administrators, but instead from these multiple sources. The understanding gained was richer because of this approach.
The development of the Case Study traces back to an inception almost a hundred years ago. Case study research has been used in the social sciences; especially, in areas such as medicine, psychology, political science and law (Creswell, 2013). Case studies also can be found in nursing, business, anthropology, and, of course, education (Yin, 2014). Dating back to the 1920’s, case studies have been used to research a bounded study or studies. Yin (2014) showed how the case study approach has increased in use from 1980 to the present time. Initially, the case study approach was considered “unscientific” as it lacked the raw quantitative data that researchers typically had used in the past. However, the 1960’s brought about the realization that quantitative research had limits, also. The case study picked up in popularity as a way to explain, describe, and understand complex phenomena (Tellis, 1997).

In this research, the collective case study was used with both individual interviews and small focus groups. While individual interviews allow for one participant to tell his or her story in response to specific prompts, focus groups allow multiple individuals to contribute to a discussion around the research questions. Initially, focus groups were used to explore the morale of military men during World War I (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Yin, 2014). The focus group emerged as an alternative method to interviewing in the 1930s (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Small focus groups put participants at ease and allowed for a deeper discussion. Those sharing their experience commented on each other’s remarks and the conversation became multi-layered. In a focus group, the researcher does not have such a prominent role and can step back to let the participants lead the discussion.

Stake (2006) discussed how the expectation within multiple case studies often is to produce an aggregate finding: themes and issues that are common over the case study. In his opinion, there is a major drawback to this approach. He said that the purpose of a case study is
to “display the unique vitality of each case, noting its particular situation and how the context influences he experience of the program or phenomenon” (p.39). Stake asserted that many researchers want to jump in and merge the cases to produce an overall multi-case study. He encouraged researchers to allow time with each individual case study, carefully analyzing them for their separate contributions first. In this study, both the combined themes of the case studies were analyzed and the findings that appeared on a separate basis were explored at the district level. Then, the three districts were analyzed to see if there were any overlapping themes between them. Stake recommended resisting the urge to merge the data too quickly. Therefore, I gave careful thought and analysis to each case study as a separate entity before putting looking at the study as a whole.

**Participants and Sampling Strategy**

Participants were drawn from three southern New England school districts in order to explore the issue as it presents itself in different contexts. The three settings allowed me to determine if I noticed any generalizations that could be drawn from the findings. The methodology made this possible. “The multiple-case sampling gives us confidence that our emerging theory is generic” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.29). To that end, drawing participants from different districts strengthened the methodology so results were applicable to a wider audience. The research began with this purposeful sample: three school districts that represented different socio-economic groups and a range of student populations. All three districts recently had implemented or were in the process of implementing a new ELA curriculum based on the ELA Common Core State Standards (CCSS). “Multiple-case sampling adds confidence to findings. By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does”
(Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.29). Using three districts, as opposed to one, increased the transferability of the data. Yin (2014) says that conducting a single case study is akin to “putting all of one’s eggs in one basket” (p.64). However, the more cases you use, the stronger the research model becomes. Accordingly, while a two case study would have sufficed, using three contexts added strength to the findings.

A focus group can elicit complicated issues of group dynamics. However, for this study, the added benefit of being able to include more participants outweighed any issues that could have developed from a group interview (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). The sample size allowed for three districts with varying demographics to be incorporated into the study. This covered a greater range of experiences. The research was collected from the participants through a single-category designed focus group comprised of teachers from the district, a separate interview with the literacy coach, and a final interview with the administrative-level curriculum director or administrator with a comparable role in each district. The sampling strategy for participants was consistent among districts.

**Recruitment and Access**

The superintendent and/or assistant superintendent of each school was critical in gaining access to the district’s participants. This individual was contacted via formal letter and a follow-up phone call, approximately two days following the letter, to explain the project and to gain their support. Once permission was gained, I solicited 4th and 5th grade teachers for the purpose of a focus group at the elementary schools. A voluntary group teachers from each district comprised the three focus groups. Each focus group was small so every person had significant time to talk. A request (see Appendix B, Recruitment Letter) was made for participants who directly instructed the new ELA curriculum at the 4-5 grade level and had worked with the
literacy coach in the past year. According to Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran (2009), “Well-designed focus groups usually last between 1 and 2 hours” (p.3). This time commitment was specified in the letter. The request for participants was sent out by the superintendent, and delivered via the teachers’ school e-mail accounts. A second e-mail was sent after a one week period had passed to raise the number of participants that volunteered in response to the first e-mail. Additionally, the literacy coach purposefully was chosen for a separate interview. All three districts employed at least one literacy coach. The researcher contacted the literacy coaches via e-mail to further explain the project. Finally, the Curriculum Director or comparable administrator at the central administration level was interviewed. In all cases, ethical protocol was observed and participants were made to understand that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no ill effects. Because there was only one issue to examine (how the coach was a part of curriculum change) and multiple cases were used to understand this issue, the research was identified as a collective or multiple case study (Creswell, 2013). The single-category design of the focus group allowed for concentration on the one issue being examined. All participants were presented with and signed IRB consent forms (see Appendix F, IRB Consent Form and section on the Protection of Human Subjects).

Data Collection

For data collection, the following procedure was followed. Open-ended questions were used for the focus groups and interviews. These were outlined, along with an introduction to the study, and guided the discussion. Similarly, the interview protocol for administrators that served as Curriculum Coordinators and literacy coaches was created. The open-ended nature of the questions led to a degree of flexibility in this experience. I was able to ask clarifying questions at key points in the interviews so that a rich, thick description was obtained from each individual.
Thus, the interviews followed the conversational style espoused by Rubin and Rubin (2012). Yin (2014) discussed how the case study approach is used to explain, describe, illustrate, and enlighten. The open ended questions allowed for the explanations and descriptions to emerge through the group dialogue. Having a set protocol, however, helped with the reliability of the data. The questions included one “ice breaker question”, six substantive questions, and one closing question. This allowed time for the conversation to build, as well as time for questions and added comments at the end of the sessions.

I both moderated the interviews and collected the data. This allowed for the additional transcription and understanding of body language, as well as, notation of the emotions in each interview. Throughout the interviews, I took anecdotal notes regarding this behavior that supplemented the formal transcription of recorded dialogue. At times this included noting hand gestures and personal mannerisms that appeared to add to the feeling behind the words being spoken. For example, many times one of the participants would be nodding her head in agreement with what another person was explaining. I would annotate this behavior. The recorded discussions were then transcribed so further analysis of how teachers view the role of the literacy coach could be performed. Transcription is a time consuming aspect of the research. Therefore, a professional company, rev.com, was hired for the transcription process. In order to further protect the participants, the following steps were taken: The transcriptions were identified numerically and by alphabetically letters. Participants’ names were masked on original copies of the data. Instead using actual names in the data summary and discussion of findings, each participant was referred to as either a “teacher”, “lit coach”, or “administrator” followed by the letter A, B, or C that referred to each of the three districts, thus protecting confidentiality.
The individual interviews with the literacy coaches and Curriculum Coordinators were each approximately one hour in length. The teacher interview groups were given a potential time block of 90 minutes in length, but all were completed within 60 minutes. All interviews and focus groups were held at agreed upon sites. These sites were amenable and convenient for the participants and myself. This ensured that participants felt they could talk freely, confident they were not being overheard or interrupted. All participants chose to meet at location on their school property except for one literacy coach who chose to meet at a coffee shop. Interviews were recorded using high-quality technology in the form of a digital recording on a portable recorder. Recordings were taken using two separate devices at each session, thus ensuring the conversations were captured in case of technical problems with one of the recording methods. This insured that accurate and complete transcriptions were made.

**Data Storage**

Transcriptions were backed up with additional copies as recommended in Creswell (2013). This data was stored digitally on a password-protected computer. All hard copies of the data remained in a locked file cabinet when not being analyzed by the researcher. The written consent form, obtained at the beginning of the study, outlined how the data was to be collected digitally, transcribed anonymously, and stored with the research data so that participants knew their well-being was being considered constantly. Throughout the study, I solely had access to the data. The raw data was not read by others. Upon completion of the study, all digital recordings and hard copies of the data were stored securely and will remain stored for three years. After the three-year waiting period, data will be destroyed; digital data will be erased and hard copies will be shredded.
Data Analysis

According to Stake, when one is analyzing data from case studies, there are a few ways to conduct this analysis (Creswell, 2013). One process of analysis is to use direct interpretation. In direct interpretation, the researcher takes the data from a single moment and pulls it apart. The disaggregated data is sorted to make meaning of that instance. Another way of analyzing the data is to look for patterns. This can be done by looking at the similarities and differences between the various cases. As the data is synthesized, the researcher, then, uses naturalistic generalizations. These are the main findings that the researcher wants to communicate to others with the expectation that the generalizations can apply to other cases. Creswell (2013) also believes a rich thick description should be included in the analysis process. This conveys other facts of the case to the readers. In a broad way, I used the general inductive analysis method. Within this framework, I also used constant comparison analysis (Onwuegbuzie, et al., 2009). Saldaña (2013) discussed the cyclical nature of coding. In this study, two cycles were used. First, categorical aggregation was used as I applied the general inductive approach to coding. The interviews and focus group transcriptions were broken down and coded in the first stage (using in vitro coding) as described by Saldaña (2013). Then, initially coded pieces of data were grouped into larger categories this process “… categorizes coded data based on thematic or conceptual similarity” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 209). Finally, naturalistic generalizations were made, as the researcher identified a handful of themes that emerged from the categorical aggregation. Yin (2014) termed this process, when individual cases that have been analyzed are further studied to determine common themes, as cross-case synthesis.
Trustworthiness

Using multiple methods to validate a study is advisable (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, trustworthiness, quality, and validation of this research study were shown through a variety of methods.

Rich, Thick Description. According to Creswell (2013), “Rich, thick description allows the readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study” (p.252). The practice of writing rich, thick descriptions of the cases allows readers to have detailed information. This gives them the opportunity to determine if the findings can be transferred to other cases (Creswell, 2013). I incorporated my notes on the participants along with the data gained from the interviews and focus groups to form an in-depth description of the cases. In a collective case study, Creswell (2012) advised the researcher to describe the case and the themes that emerge from coding. These rich descriptions helped to create a more comprehensive depiction of the experiences being relayed; greater than that which the transcribed interview could provide on its own. I felt close to the participants because I, too, have had many similar experiences and I have been actively involved in the implementation of the ELA CCSS. This helped me desire to create a rich, thick description (Creswell, 2013).

Triangulation of Data. Triangulation is defined in Creswell (2013) as when “…researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide evidence” (p. 251). According to Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman and Marteau (1997), triangulation is one way a researcher can address the issues of reliability and validity. In this study, the data was analyzed using a coding system; the interviews were coded to identify commonalities. Then, a cross-case analysis was performed in order to look for common themes.
that emerged in all of the data. The interviews were coded first for themes that seemed most apparent in the interviews. The resulting comparison of themes from the three types of participants: the teacher focus groups, the literacy coaches’ interviews, and the Curriculum Directors’ interviews served as a layer of triangulation. “When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings” (Creswell, 2013, p.251). By using the many interviews to show the presence of a common thought, I was able to triangulate the data.

**Peer Debriefing.** Peer debriefing was used when my advising professor asked the “hard questions” of my research. Questions that further clarified my purpose and my analysis allowed me to look deeper into the data as I determined what conclusions could be taken from the analysis. Creswell (2013) mentioned that a peer reviewer or debriefer can act like the devil’s advocate, helping to keep the researcher honest in their interpretation and portrayal of the information. Such discussion allowed me to work through the best and most valid approaches to their data portrayal. Chenail (1995) discussed how trustworthiness is established through an “openness” in the research. He said, “Openness also entails involving “the other” in your research. The other can be the participants in your study and they can also be colleagues who comment on and who read your work” (p.2). The dialogue between my advisor, readers, and myself ensured that I reported the data gathered as honestly as possible.

**Verification.** Verification of the data is necessary to determine if the resulting information is truthful and able to be transferred. “The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for the plausibility, their sturdiness, their ‘confirmability’ - that is, their validity” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.11). In order to determine the quality of the case study, many researchers have written about specific precautions that must take place in a good study (Creswell, 2013).
These included clarity and transparency. Maintaining a clarity regarding the issue being addressed, the description of the cases and themes, and the conclusions drawn from the cases, was important. Chenail (1995) asserted that the reliability of a study is closely related to its transparency. To be transparent, or “open” about the study, I was consistent in the implementation of the research design, giving details of the design and purpose. I also adhered to my plan for data collection, transcription, and coding. The only change that occurred in the planned process was that the focus groups for the teachers were smaller than anticipated. In two districts, two teachers were interviewed at each time. In one district there was only one teacher participant. The researcher let this change be known to all involved parties, including IRB, and documented the change in the research. “Qualitative methodologists are keen on stressing the transparency of their technique, for example, in carefully documenting all steps…” (Chenail, 1995, p.598). Every effort was made to have the research protocol and reporting be accurate, honest, and transparent.

**Threats to Internal Validity**

**Reflexivity.** According to Yin (2014), a methodological threat, called reflexivity, can be created from a conversational interview. Reflexivity is when “your [researcher’s] perspective unknowingly influences the interviewee’s responses, but those responses also unknowingly influence your line of inquiry” (p.112). One way to minimize reflexivity was that I was aware of her positionality regarding the topic being researched.

**Mortality.** There was the possibility that participants who initially agreed to the study could have dropped out from the research. This possible threat of mortality was minimized by having all participation done on a voluntary basis. Only one participant, an administrator, was
unable to participate after initially agreeing to do so. Another administrator, who served in the same position, volunteered in her place.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained for this study. As the study uses human subjects, the IRB proposal addressed any ethical issues that could surface. Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000) stated that consideration needs to be given to autonomy, benevolence, and justice. Autonomy is also termed “respect for persons” (NIH, 2013). All three of these areas were considered in the initial research proposal and through the research collection.

First, I considered the importance of respect for persons. This meant that I recognized each individual was autonomous and was able to make his or her own decisions when well informed. In order for participants to exercise their autonomy, I was transparent with my goals and data collection. Participants were told the purpose and format for the research. This was done verbally at the beginning of each interview as well as in a written form that was approved by the IRB. In this way, the potential participants could weigh the pros and cons of their participation. Informed consent was obtained once each participant determined they wish to participate. Individuals who were not able to make an informed decision (those with diminished authority such as children and cognitively disabled persons) need special consideration. In the case of this study, all participants had full autonomy and such added protections were not necessary. Informed consent was obtained. The researcher followed the fundamental aspects of consent: voluntariness, comprehension, and disclosure (NIH, 2013).

Orb et al (2000) also highlighted that it is important not to cause any harm when conducting research. This falls under the principle of beneficence. In essence, beneficence is the
desire to have the best interests of the participants at the heart of the research. The participants cannot be harmed and the benefits have to out-weigh any potential risks during the course of the research. Throughout the study, the confidentiality of the participants was preserved. The interview questions were of an open-ended nature. This meant there was the possibility that something negative toward the literacy coach, or the curriculum implementation in general, could have surfaced. I ensured that confidentiality was upheld. Transparency in regards to potential risks was important and prospective participants needed to determine if they felt they wanted to be a part of this study or not. The informed consent form did “indicate that participating in the study is voluntary and that it would not place the participants at undue risk” (Creswell, 2013). The Belmont Report (1979) made it clear that this over-arching goal of improving others’ well-being is an ethical decision that is extremely important in research.

It was possible the literacy coaches would feel threatened by this study. There was the risk that negative comments could have been made about their jobs and/or persons. This possibility was addressed with the coaches in a forthright manner. All coaches responded confidently that they realized this possibility and felt it still was valuable to participate in the study. I made every attempt to be clear that the focus of the study was to remain on what activities and roles of the literacy coach are seen as most helpful and beneficial in Common Core implementation.

Finally, I addressed the principle of justice. To ensure “justice”, the researcher needed to assure participants that they would be represented accurately. A high level of trust was cultivated. This helped to allow the participants’ responses to honest. One way this was achieved was to have me ask for clarification anytime I was unsure what a participant meant in the interview. Participants could confirm and elaborate on their answers so that I was able to
make certain their viewpoint would be represented as they truly intended. This especially was important throughout the interviews when vague comments were made. All participants were offered a meeting with a support person should they want or need to debrief following the interviews/focus group meetings. No one chose to do this.

The study followed IRB protocol. “It is the policy of Northeastern University that no activity involving human subjects be undertaken until those activities have been reviewed and approved by the University's IRB” (Northeastern University, 2013). As shown above, ultimate approval for the research occurred at many levels: from the IRB, from the particular site where the research will be conducted, and from the individual participants (Creswell, 2012).
Chapter 4: Summary of the Interviews

Initial Summary of District A

Literacy Coach A

The literacy coach from district A (LitCoachA) began the interview by defining how she saw her role in the schools. LitCoachA worked in a grade K-5 elementary school. In this district, the term “instructional coach” was used instead of literacy coach. LitCoachA said, “My job as instructional coach is to support teachers, in and outside of the classroom, with anything I possibly can.” LitCoachA proceeded to explain that she saw her job as tied to curriculum decision making. Next to the curriculum director, who in this district was also the school principal, LitCoachA said a lot of the curricular decisions came to her. She was a member of the school improvement team and a major decision-maker concerning curriculum implementation and classroom practices. In the past year, LitCoachA had helped select a new Common Core aligned ELA program for her district. This was done with teacher and administrative input, as well as her expertise.

LitCoachA was initially introduced to the new ELA Common Core standards in 2012 while she was serving as a long-term reading substitute teacher. She had the opportunity to attend the professional development (PD) offered in that district. That training included a large consortium that initially exposed teachers to an overview of the standards. LitCoachA described it as a “sink or swim” situation. She said,

I knew I needed to learn about it. First of all to understand [the standard], to be able to teach the students how to understand and use it. I went to a PD [with] a really, really fantastic person. It was the first time I even delved into actually text-based answers. I
found it extremely helpful for somebody else to sit with and to show us one
standard…and the meaning to that standard.

That direct instruction started LitCoachA on her path to learning about the CCSS. In the three
years following, LitCoachA went on to further explore the CCSS and was subsequently hired to
share her knowledge as a literacy coach (in a different district from where she began). Noting
how learning about the standards in a collaborative context helped her personally, LitCoachA
began using the same approach with the teachers with whom she was working. She recalled,

What was helpful was someone sitting with me and showing us some examples, you
know, putting it into action, not just reading about it. Because you could read about it all
you want, but it’s hard to actually put it into action when I was still considering, ‘Am I
even teaching what I’m supposed to be teaching?’

LitCoachA transferred that to her practice as a coach by providing lots of PD in her school.

Negotiating the change to the new expectations was challenging. LitCoachA said the PD
was “pretty well received, but it’s all new information.” She talked about how she attempted to
support the new type of instruction. Some support was given by going into classrooms, helping
the teachers and answering their questions. LitCoachA also shared knowledge both in formal PD
offerings and informally, by helping to locate materials and resources. She affirmed if the
teachers’ new instruction was on target or not and planned instruction collaboratively.
Throughout her support of the new curriculum, LitCoachA provided emotional support to
teachers. LitCoachA stated she and the teachers, “found it helpful to talk to each other and to
bounce ideas off of each other.” In addition to the tangible activities the literacy coach listed,
she repeatedly mentioned those intangible, emotional supports such as reflecting with teachers,
providing encouragement, and building trusting relationships. Even with training and support, she said the change process was slow.

To further promote change in the individual classrooms LitCoachA attempted to build an awareness of good practice. She said, “We are really trying to mix and expose all the teachers to what is the good stuff that is happening in all the classrooms.” LitCoachA did not get to model for the teachers as much as she would have liked, but used group walk-throughs to point out the good things happening and to look for areas of need. During one of these walk-throughs, the literacy coach would bring a small group of teachers to visit another classroom and literally “walk through” the room during instruction time. The literacy coach and teachers would observe how the standards were being implemented in that room and could later discuss what strategies seemed to be working and how those successful practices could be incorporated into other classroom settings.

Overall, LitCoachA identified the direct PD where teachers sat and read the standards to determine what their instruction would look like to have most impacted the instruction of the ELA CCSS. “And really talking about it, ‘What does that look like?’…We would find a particular standard, maybe one they’re struggling with in the classroom, one that’s coming up….We would open that book…and we would highlight the noun or noun phrase that looked really important, and then ‘What does that look like at this grade level?’” She saw that collaborative discussion as invaluable.

According to LitCoachA, in the slow change process, teachers are making progress toward implementing the CCSS. “They’re [teachers] starting to get their stride and feeling confident that what they are teaching is truly related to the standards.” She saw evidence of teachers using the vocabulary of the common core and starting conversations around the
instructional changes. She ended the interview defining herself as a problem-solver. “I will do whatever I can to help them.” LitCoachA readily admitted she did not have all the answers, but that she was willing to figure out the questions as she went along.

**Administrator A**

The curriculum director in District A (AdminA) was also the elementary school principal. She saw herself supporting and coaching teachers through the curriculum change. With the new ELA Common Core curriculum the district had adopted, AdminA saw it as part of her job to make “sure they [the teachers] have the structure and support in place to do that [adopt a new curriculum].” With her guidance, she saw the transition to the ELA Common Core curriculum to have been well planned. “The implementation of it has been very…thoughtful and strategic.” She and the Literacy Coach had a “big picture” view of where instruction needed to be developed.

AdminA was introduced to the ELA Common Core standards about 3-4 years prior through professional development provided by the State Department of Education. She also participated in a professional book club based on the book *Pathways to the Common Core* and attended the National ASCD conference that focused on the common core. In her personal understanding of the Common Core, AdminA cited the collaborative process of talking about the new standards as key to understanding and addressing this big instructional change. She said, “We walked though it together. We talked about it as a group and kind of processed so now that we know that these differences are here, what do we need to do as leaders to support our teachers so that they become comfortable.” When AdminA took her position in District A, she found she had a faculty that was unfamiliar with the CCSS. She began to spread her knowledge through direct PD. She described this professional development.
[We had] professional learning sessions where we planned out the, their first unit of study, or started to collaboratively….So they had professional development…and then I gave them a month to try it. So then we came back and we had a reflection on it. What went well? What didn’t go well? What questions do they have now that they’ve tried it? What other supports do they need?

According to AdminA, the literacy coach was an integral part of the next steps that occurred after PD. The Curriculum Director and Literacy Coach co-led professional learning sessions. According to AdminA, the literacy coach then “provides a lot of support to teachers in finding them resources and kind of vetting resources for them.” The literacy coach also modeled interventions for teachers and did learning walks to share best practices. The curriculum director repeatedly emphasized the collaboration between herself and the literacy coach. Together they designed and held professional development sessions. She summed it up by saying,

We kind of jump in back and forth for each other, and we can do that because we’ve built the, the PD together. We do the first one, the first session together, and we kind of alternate tasks. So I’ll do the first task, she’ll do the second task, and then…but we also are there to see how the other one does it so that when we, you know, when we’re leading the rest of the professional learning sessions. If I have to step out for something, she can continue on, and the same thing.

The one role the Literacy Coach had taken on that had impacted the instruction of the ELA Common Core standards in District A significantly was the collaboration the Literacy Coach had provided by working with teachers to create unit plans based on the new standards. The Curriculum Director cited that the Literacy Coach had given the teachers “guidance and resources and tools” to create Common Core aligned lessons. She said the evidence that this
collaboration was effective was shown in an increase in teacher comfort with standards and a decrease in stress regarding the curriculum change. She stated, “I know the level of comfort has gone up, the level of stress has gone down since they [the teachers] feel like they’re able to do this.” The Curriculum Director attributed this to the personality of the Literacy Coach; that the coach has the ability to empower the teachers so they feel supported while helping them take their new knowledge and become independent in its use.

The Curriculum Director saw the change process as moving forward in her district. She now sees teachers asking for feedback and the opportunity to observe their peers. Overall, she said they were still at the beginning of the implementation process. With the provision of structures and tools teachers can use in the implementation of the new standards and curriculum she expected the change process would continue. Time was noted as crucial to the implementation; time and collaboration.

**Teachers A**

Two fourth grade teachers from District A provided information about their experience with ELA Common Core implementation and the Literacy Coach. One of the teachers had heard about the Common Core in college. The other was exposed initially to the Common Core standards while teaching. She attended professional development trainings both outside the district and within the school. This initial training told what the standards were and that they would be used within the district. Following that training, the district adopted the new curriculum. The teachers explained that sometimes they felt they had to “just figure it out.” They cited how the curriculum director gave them guidelines and that the literacy coach wanted to help, but that they still had to figure out a lot of the curriculum themselves. The change in expectation regarding student reading level (measured in lexile levels) was discussed as well as
the move to higher level thinking. They said, “They’re [the students] expected to do so much more, just, like, that higher level of thinking all the time.” Furthermore, they cited the additional focus on speaking and listening that the new curriculum brought into their rooms:

   Everything is so different now… the vocabulary development, the reading levels, the higher art of thinking, and the collaboration skills and the speaking and listening standards… There weren’t those standards back then….We worked on accountable talk back then, but there weren’t specific standards addressing speaking and listening.

   According to the teachers, this was where the Literacy Coach came in, providing help finding books and materials that they could use in their classrooms. The new curriculum required that they move from a basal reader to materials they gathered on their own, a time consuming process. The Literacy Coach aided in this process, helping to lighten the load for the teachers. Additionally, the coach helped get out important information to the teachers. The teachers found that having the literacy coach answer their questions was most helpful. They said the literacy coach “answers every question we ask!” These teachers made it apparent they appreciated the help. “She’s always somebody we can go to if we have any questions about what we’re teaching or how we can teach it.” “She’s there as our support.” Even if the Literacy Coach did not have the answer for them right away, the teachers were confident she would go find the answer.

   The teachers expressed that the shift to the new CCSS was a challenge. They felt that the change had been a quick one. The teachers said it was difficult to not get overwhelmed with the speed and scope of the change. They ended their interview on a positive note. The teachers said that they had made lots of adjustments in their classrooms and were on the right path toward implementation.
Initial Summary District B

Literacy Coach B

The literacy coach from district B (LitCoachB) had been in that position for approximately seven years. She worked between two elementary schools serving grade K-5 teachers. As a coach, she described herself as supporting teacher instruction, writing curriculum, and facilitating change. When asked to elaborate on what it looked like to facilitate change in her district, LitCoachB said she was the one to bridge bringing information back to the teachers from the state and sharing that information with district leaders and grade level teachers.

LitCoachB discussed how the district’s curriculum needed to change to reflect the new expectations. She was “able to be proactive” and jump into revising their current curriculum. Because the district was ahead of the mandatory nation-wide date for implementation, LitCoachB was able to address curriculum changes one grade level per year for the first four years. She said,

It was really an easy transition, because it was like, okay, we’re not using the GLE’s anymore, we’ll be using the Common Core Standards. What we did do as a district is took more of a proactive, um, view of it that, although the state wasn’t adopting it ‘til, was it last year or the year before, I’ve forgot which year….we knew that our current third graders, were never taking the NECAP. So, because of that, those children sitting in third grade right now, I met with the kindergarten teachers, and we went through the Common Core Standards to see how they looked, to try to change our curriculum in kindergarten.

That year they revised the kindergarten curriculum. The next year, LitCoachB worked with the first grade teachers to revise their curriculum. Year three, she did the same with second
grade and year four, they tackled third grade. The literacy coach led that progressive work. The biggest change for teachers was switching to a mindset that they were not just teaching students to read. Instead, they were teaching students to “read to learn” by applying their reading skills to higher level thinking activities. Prior to the Common Core standards, students would typically have a story read to them and then go answer comprehension questions found in the textbook. Now, students had to work through the text independently or in small groups. Ultimately, students wrote extended responses based on their conversations; responses that forced them to have a deeper understanding of the text than was previously required.

As the curriculum changed, LitCoachB saw herself adjusting her actions to meet the needs of the teachers. Grade level meetings that met for half day sessions allowed for additional time with the teachers to discuss the changes in instruction. Running professional development meetings, the literacy coach disseminated current information. This also gave time for teachers to come together to discuss student work. When asked what she was doing that was most effective, LitCoachB targeted these meetings. She said,

I think having our grade level meetings and discussing those components, I think is what I feel is the most powerful thing that I do with them. Because it forces all of us to really talk about that. What is it, what does it look like? What are we expecting? I think that helps them. It helps them to see what it is that is expected here.

Also worth noting, LitCoachB saw her role as communicating and being a “go-to” person for teachers. She did provide some in-class support, too.

I’m providing some of that support….trying to do some co-teaching. Um..Depending on the classroom teacher, [for] some classroom teachers I’m going in and providing the support. Other ones, I’m going in, ‘cause they don’t feel as comfortable.”
LitCoachB attempted to meet regularly with the principals of her two schools to apprise them of ways they could support the changes occurring in their schools. “I’m kinda like that liason,” LitCoachB explained, linking administration to the teachers.

**Administrator B**

The administrator for District B (AdminB) served as the principal at one of the two K-5 elementary schools at which LitCoachB worked. Also, Admin B was considered the Curriculum Director for these schools. She had been at the school as principal for six years and prior to that had worked as an instructional coach there herself. She also had experience as a Special Education preschool teacher and as a 5th grade teacher. She viewed her job as the instructional leader of the school, although her responsibilities had a great span. AdminB was introduced to the Common Core alongside her Literacy Coach. Her description of the implementation process mirrored the process described by her Literacy Coach. After receiving training on the Common Core standards, the literacy coach facilitated switching instruction one grade level at a time beginning with kindergarten. The principal saw herself and LitCoachB working together to develop this plan. AdminB said, “She [the Literacy Coach] was with Administration” helping teachers with their initial introduction to and training in the CCSS. When describing the change process, AdminB stated, “[LitCoachB] and I learned early on, [go at it] little by little. You can’t do a lot.” They worked on specific things, in order to not overwhelm the teachers. An example of this was their switch to a standards-based report card which the Literacy Coach was instrumental in developing.

As principal, AdminB saw herself encouraging and supporting the teachers through the change to the CCSS. She said her mantra was “Just try it…I’m here to support you.” In her
mind, grade level meetings helped teachers come together to discuss what the implementation of the ELA standards should look like and provided constant communication between the staff.

AdminB pointed out two main changes resultant from the CCSS: Clarity in expectations so that each child was guaranteed the same opportunities and more focused problem solving around helping students achieve Common Core goals. AdminB emphasized that these good things were not always easy. She said, “It’s [the change] not without angst, it’s not without gnashing of teeth, it’s not without long discussions.” Change was seen as a process.

Besides providing PD and facilitating grade level meetings for curriculum writing, AdminB said the literacy coach was a resource and model to not just to her teachers, but to the two principals, also. She cited LitCoachB attending Department of Education meetings in place of the principals and keeping them current on best practices and educational trends. The Literacy Coach’s work on curriculum, how LitCoachB guided the teachers through changing what they were teaching, was felt to have had the most impact in changing instruction to reflect the ELA Common Core standards.

Teacher B

The teacher interviewed from District B (TeacherB) was a veteran teacher who had been teaching in the district for about 15 years. She had taught 5th grade and special education prior to teaching 4th grade for the past four years. TeacherB remembered first being introduced to the Common Core Standards at faculty meetings and professional development training within the district. She described having some initial training and then just beginning to use the standards within the classrooms. Teacher B worked with the other 4th grade teachers and the literacy coach to align their ELA curriculum to the CCSS. At their grade level meetings, the fourth grade teachers had an ongoing process of revising and looking at the curriculum, coming back to
discuss the changes throughout the year. TeacherB repeatedly described the curriculum change as a process. She added, “I don’t think we’re, you know, where we need to be. I think we’re moving that direction.”

TeacherB described LitCoachB as giving a lot of the professional development in the district. “She will run PD for us depending on what the flavor of the day is. That’s what, you know, we’re, we’re hearing about.”

Additional roles of LitCoachB included the Literacy Coach administering some assessments and doing some demonstration lesson. More frequently, TeacherB described LitCoachB as sharing videos of effective teaching. She said, “Seeing it, seeing something done, seeing a video or seeing the materials and actually, ‘Here’s what it looks like’” was how the literacy coach best helped teachers to support ELA curriculum in their classrooms. TeacherB did not see the meetings to discuss curricular changes as beneficial. “Talking about it doesn’t really help.” TeacherB talked about how she frequently finds video examples of teaching instruction online and watches them on her own time to understanding an idea, as the Literacy Coach is not often available for this type of support. TeacherB had gained a lot of support on implementing the new curriculum by working closely with her grade level coworker.

According to TeacherB, change has occurred too quickly in education. She felt the new curriculum was changed and implemented at a pace that did not allow for teachers to have a firm grasp on what they were doing. “You know, maybe we weren’t quite ready to steam it all at once. Maybe we could have focused on one [standard] and done that well and then done the next one and done…We just never do that in education. Never.” TeacherB said the change came without a lot of time to absorb it. They were given PD and then immediately expected to implement the new standards.
Initial Summary of District C

Literacy Coach C

The Literacy Coach in District C (LitCoachC) was a Literacy Coach that served five K-5 elementary schools. Prior to coaching, LitCoachC had been a reading specialist in one of the district’s middle schools. She also had a background in special education. LitCoachC was first introduced to the Common Core standards while she was a reading specialist. Her district held a large training in a school auditorium where the standards were distributed and teachers were trained in how to navigate the long list of expectations. The in-service training was led by the Department of Education. This was approximately four years ago.

As a Literacy Coach, LitCoachC continued to share the Common Core with the teachers. She said,

As a coach, I shared the Common Core in helping teachers set up instruction and meeting with them to set up their groupings and looking at the Common Core standards and what was required at that grade level….I [also] shared the Common Core in gathering materials to support the Common Core at whatever grade level I was working with.

LitCoachC gave the example of meeting with a teacher to disaggregate students’ literacy data. From that data they determined which Foundational Skills in the Common Core the students had already mastered and which standards needed to be reinforced in small group, direct instruction. As a team, LitCoachC and the teacher built a plan for the instruction that was needed. Another way LitCoachC supported Common Core implementation was by providing model lessons that exemplified how the standards could be taught.

The biggest change the Literacy Coach saw once the ELA Common Core standards were adopted was in the classroom instruction. Prior to the Common Core, teachers had a great deal
of flexibility in what they chose to teach. The CCSS focused teachers to teach a specific set of
skills at each grade level. This meant a change in curriculum. LitCoachC explained that the
Units of Study (the curriculum adopted in her district) were a guide for teachers that specified
which skills to teach on which days. However, materials to teach the skills were not provided.
This caused some teachers to be frustrated with the new curriculum. LitCoachC helped teachers
find materials that would enable them to teach the CCSS. Many teachers had to give up favorite
topics they had taught previously to follow the Common Core. LitCoachC felt that teachers
“were pretty much being told what to teach now.”

Data meetings, where the Literacy Coach and the teacher looked at reading data, and co-
teaching were the two biggest pieces of coaching for LitCoachC. At grade level meetings, the
Literacy Coach would come with student data. Students would be grouped into small skills
groups that would target their area of need. At these data meetings, the teachers and literacy
coach would determine how these small groups would look using the data. Together, the
Literacy Coach and teachers would create a plan for instruction and progress monitoring in areas
of weakness. She discussed, and many times provided, materials and different resources for this
small group instruction.

The co-teaching portion of the job was divided into a three step cycle. First, there was a
meeting between the Literacy Coach and the teacher to plan a lesson or a focus for a lesson.
Then, the Literacy Coach would model the activity/lesson. Finally, they would teach a lesson
using the same activity or focusing on the same standard together. This coaching cycle allowed
teachers to see the standards applied in their classrooms. It was these model lessons that
LitCoachC deemed as most effectively addressing the Common Core standards. She said that
teachers wanted to see the standards “in action.”
I think if we can give teachers a coach… [and show] how to present a lesson on certain Common Core standards or topics and provide them with materials to support that, then I think they learn best that way. I think sitting with them and talking to them and providing them with materials isn’t enough. I think the best solution is to model for teachers… to be right in there with them and model with them.

**Administrator C**

The Curriculum Director from District C (AdminC) served at a district, not building, level. Where, in District A and B, the elementary principals were also Curriculum Directors, this was not the case in District C. The administrator in District C was not a principal, but Curriculum Director of grade K-12, a total of 8 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 high school. Her official title was “Director of Instruction and Intervention” and she had been in that position for approximately 18 months. AdminC was first exposed to the ELA CCSS about 4 years prior while she was still working as a literacy consultant in multiple school districts. She knew the districts with whom she was working would need to be looking toward how their assessments and instruction would be shifting due to this change. Immediately, she began helping teachers understand the shifts that would occur by looking carefully at the language of the standards and discussing this in small, grade-level groups. When she was hired by District C, the initial roll out of the standards had occurred and the district was in the middle of the change process. AdminC said that the Literacy Coach shared information regarding the Common Core for her. She said the Literacy Coach did this in a variety of ways including: before, during, and after school trainings. At these trainings, the Literacy Coach moved the teachers past just reading the standards to help the teachers understand them [the standards] at a deeper level.
It’s her [the Literacy Coach’s] work of helping teachers understand them at multiple levels. At a strategy level: What it might look like to teach them. What it might look like to close gaps when you see that students aren’t at benchmark through small group instruction. And what it might look like to teach them at a Tier 1 or core curriculum level.

AdminC identified numerous roles held by the Literacy Coach in District C. The Literacy Coach wrote curriculum across the K-5 grade levels. She provided demonstration lessons for teachers. She was an expert in new curricular programs such as Project Read so that she could help teachers with implementation of the programs. She led small group discussions and data meetings. At these meetings the coach problem solved with teachers who had non-responsive students and made certain that district and state protocol and documentation were followed. The Literacy Coach did not administer assessments. However, she trained new teachers in how to give the assessments themselves.

According to AdminC, the Literacy Coach communicated about literacy needs and acted as a link between the teachers and central administration. “Our coach serves as a buffer between district office and buildings so that it’s a safe place to go when you’re not sure of something, when you have concerns about something and you want them to be channeled upward.” AdminC held meetings with her coach to discuss principle concerns that had been noted across multiple buildings.

There were two primary roles that AdminC felt the Literacy Coach was most effective in supporting the ELA CCSS and the new curriculum that resulted. First, the Literacy Coach’s demonstration lessons were noted as extremely valuable. She said teachers were unsure of the rigor that was required by the standards and seeing the standard taught helped bring the Common
Core “to life.” Second, AdminC said the Literacy Coach’s facilitation of looking at the data was important. This data analysis helped teachers to determine what was going well in their classes and what was not going well. The Literacy Coach could then help align resources to the needs presented in the data so the teachers could meet the specific needs of their students.

AdminC said the teachers in her district were in the mechanical stage of implementing changes. She saw teachers doing what they were asked to, but not personally invested in the changes. AdminC identified next steps as building knowledge around how the Common Core standards are important and necessary. She said, “Our job would be to continue supporting their understanding so we can move them to refining their practice.”

Teachers C

Two fourth grade teachers from District C were jointly interviewed. These women had each been teaching over 10 years. They had been in this specific grade 5 to 6 years each. They described their initial introduction to the standards as attending a beginning of the year staff meeting and being handed the Common Core Standards and told to implement them. The new ELA curriculum, consisting of units of study built around the CCSS were distributed to teachers during a district-wide roll out.

The teachers reported the change to using the new CCSS ELA curriculum as overwhelming. They were still trying to learn about the new standards themselves while teaching the standards at the same time. The result was choppy instruction from the drastic change in materials, planning, and structure of the classroom. One of the biggest changes they faced was how questioning and understanding of text shifted from a surface understanding to a much deeper understanding. Students did not just need to know what happened in the reading, but the author’s purpose, inferential meanings, and meaning behind complex sentence structure
and vocabulary. They said, “I think Common Core…it has all these great components to it, but I do think it’s come very fast. It’s a lot and there’s no time to really make it efficient.”

The teachers in District C saw the Literacy Coach as the one who brought the district initiatives to the teachers’ attention. They also were quick to cite the Literacy Coach as modeling lessons that were based on the CCSS. They talked about specific lessons the coach had done for them that had influenced their instruction. The literacy coach was seen as “supporting the teacher and her class….Everybody has their own different classroom.” They felt working with the Literacy Coach allowed them to really look at the needs of their specific classroom. The Literacy Coach also facilitated data analysis, which they connected with looking at the individual needs of their students.

The most important way the literacy coach supported them in incorporating the ELA CCSS into their classroom was by helping them focus and organize their resources and materials, then showing them how to use them efficiently. They said, “That’s where the coach is…to help us organize and see the big picture and, honestly, there should be a coach in each building.” The coach helped them bring the pieces together, facilitating the organization of the new curriculum.

**Comparison of Themes within the Individual Districts**

**Commonalities within District A**

There were three common themes that were consistent across the personnel in District A. All interview participants discussed the Literacy Coach’s contribution to negotiating the ELA curriculum change to include collaborative discussion, the provision of materials and resources, and emotional support.

**Collaborative Discussion.** Collaborative discussion in District A took place between the administrator and the Literacy Coach during “big-picture” planning and as they shared
information during professional development trainings. AdminA and LitCoachA met together and planned long-term curriculum goals, determining a focus for their professional development at the beginning of the year. AdminA said, “The implementation of it [the new ELA curriculum] has been very thoughtful and strategic.” She talked about working with the literacy coach to determine teacher needs and the direction for future training. AdminA said, “I definitely operate on a team approach.” The theme of collaboration again surfaced as the Literacy Coach and administrator collaboratively gave the trainings for the teachers in their district.

Collaborative discussion also took place between the Literacy Coach and the teachers. This collaboration was mentioned mainly in reference to the grade level meetings held by the Literacy Coach. At these meetings, the Literacy Coach facilitated time where the teachers could determine common goals, talk about common problems, and problem solve together. LitCoachA said, “[Teachers] collaboratively scored once they had student samples. We had a huge group that collaboratively scored and calibrated with the rubric to make sure we were on the same page.” The talk during these sessions centered on coming to a consensus regarding what to expect from the students. Teachers discussed what type of evidence they would need to see in student writing to ascertain if ELA Common Core standards were mastered. The sentiment of “being on the same page” was strong. The coach said grade level meetings were a helpful time where the teachers could bounce ideas off each other. The teachers echoed that they felt the collaborative planning time and discussions aided their implementation of the Common Core State Standards. One of the teachers from District A said, “Sometimes that’s just helpful to have the day out of the classroom to meet together and have people there to support us and maybe we can’t figure out the answer so they can go and figure out the answer.” The Literacy Coach identified these types of collaborative discussion as the one thing she felt was most effective in
supporting the implementation of the ELA CCSS. Looking at the expectations together allowed the teachers and literacy coach to determine the focus for instruction, what outcome they were trying to achieve, and how they were going to get there. She said:

[We’re] really talking about it, ‘What does that look like?’…Having a discussion, looking at one standard, using key details in the text. What does that look like? How can we assess that? What product do we want? So really talking about that….I think they are sitting there in their classroom wondering, having no idea what they’re doing, having no idea what that even means, what does that look like at their grade level. So really, sitting there and talking it through [makes a difference].

A final example of the collaborative discussion theme emerged when all three personnel discussed the learning walks that were held in their building. On these walks, AdminA, LitCoachA, and teachers would literally walk through classrooms to see the ELA Common Core standards being taught. This was a collaborative effort that allowed all participants to recognize the positive changes occurring in instruction and to make note of areas around which future collaborative problem solving might occur. AdminA said this experience allowed teachers to ask for feedback or to ask to observe their colleagues, really creating a sense of all being on the same journey. The discussion that surrounded these walk-throughs enabled the curriculum change to move further forward; it acknowledged the changes that had been made and brought out conversation around what next steps might be to continue the change process.

**Provision of Materials and Resources.** All personnel considered the Literacy Coach’s provision of materials and resources that were ELA Common Core aligned to be crucial in supporting the curricular change. AdminA, LitCoachA and the teachers from District A brought up the way the Literacy Coach helped support the change in curriculum by researching which
materials would be best used in the classroom to support the new standards. In all the interviews, it was mentioned that the Literacy Coach had leveled the texts in the classroom so teachers would know which books were appropriate for their classes. This was a time consuming job and made the implementation easier.

The Literacy Coach was viewed as a resource herself. The teachers listed this as the most valuable way the Literacy Coach supported the shift to the Common Core. One teacher said, “[The most helpful thing is her] being a resource to be able to go to with questions….We’ll go to her and she might not have the answer right away, but she’ll do her research and come back to us with the information that we need. Always.” AdminA concurred that one of the main roles of the coach was to support teachers in creating their unit plans. She said the coach “gives them the kind of guidance and resources and tools to do that.” During the collaborative conversations that were happening the Literacy Coach saw part of her contribution as getting the teachers to determine if the materials they have will get the students to meet the standard. She said they ask her about text selection to see if the text is appropriate for their class.

**Emotional Support.** The final theme that was carried throughout all three interviews was that the Literacy Coach offered emotional support. This emotional support was referred to in many different ways. It was noted by AdminA that the literacy coach provided encouragement and built confidence in the teachers. When asked if there was something in particular the literacy coach did to provide this type of support, AdminA said, “I think part of it is just her personality…She has a good way of empowering people so that they feel supported, but they also can be productive and can, like, figure out how to then take what she has learned and do it themselves.” The teachers pin-pointed this emotional support being manifested in the Literacy Coach when she is a problem solver and a reliable helper to them. One teacher stated,
“I think she’s just more of a support for us while we’re doing it [the new curriculum], so, you know, what we’re teaching or how we can teach it…She’s kind of just here as our support.”

There was a sense of the Literacy Coach being a person that was “on their side” to make things easier for them. In fact, the Literacy Coach appeared to feel she created the atmosphere that fostered emotional support. She said, “I definitely think I try to provide a trusting relationship and encouragement, even if I don’t have all the answers.” The Literacy Coach sought to create an environment that allowed to teachers to approach her with questions. She was successful in doing this. The teachers said, “She’s a resource that you can turn to at any point.”

**Contradictions within District A**

There were no themes that were in opposition to each other within this district. There were, however, opposing viewpoints to the change process as a whole. AdminA and the Literacy Coach spoke of the carefully planned professional development and implementation of the Common Core. AdminA said, “The implementation of it [the CCSS curriculum] has been very thoughtful and strategic. Teachers were given time last year to begin planning….It’s been pretty much our focus for this year to develop units and kind of roll out the curriculum.” The Literacy Coach agreed with this citing the time she and AdminA planned together, rolling out the new curriculum. One of the two teachers interviewed also agreed and spoke about being prepared for the change. She said,

I think for me it [the change] was a little bit slow because last year it was kind of pushed, starting us in that direction and then by the end of last year they gave us the heads up, like, this is where we are going. So we had some time to think about it…They gave us some time to build up to it.
However, the other teacher had an alternate view. She said, “I think it’s been a quick change.” She said she focused on one thing at a time so she did not get overwhelmed. That seemed to help her. She said she “takes it slow, but it was still a lot.” Her comments reference the quick pace of the change and feeling lost in the midst of the new demands on her time. This was in opposition to the view that the change had been developing slowly in the school.

**Commonalities within District B**

There were two common themes that were consistent across the personnel in District B. All interview participants discussed the Literacy Coach’s contribution to negotiating the ELA curriculum change to include the collaborative planning and writing of the new curriculum and sharing information.

**Collaborative Planning and Writing of the New Curriculum.** Collaboration in District B occurred as the Literacy Coach worked with teachers to align their current curriculum with the ELA CCSS and with administrators to make certain district and state requisites were met in the new curriculum. All personnel talked about the grade level meetings facilitated by the Literacy Coach. At these meetings, teachers helped re-write their curriculum and created a new report card that reflected the new Common Core standards. She said there was “a lot of investment from a lot of people.” LitCoachB worked shoulder to shoulder with the stakeholders in this effort. Grade level meetings provided some time for teachers to discuss what the standards might look like in the classroom. Much of the time, the Literacy Coach was working on curriculum with the teachers in these grade level meetings. They looked at the literature they were using and determined if it fit the new higher-level lexile levels demanded by the CCSS. The Literacy Coach would have teachers set goals for their students based on student work. Collaboratively, they would score and analyze the student work and then see how instruction
could be planned for the future. The Literacy Coach felt teachers were still not secure in really knowing what they should expect from their students. Working together on the planning and writing of curriculum, the teachers could ask “What do you think?” of each other and feel affirmed that they were all on the same page. TeacherB felt the thing that had been most helpful in helping her negotiate the curriculum change was working with her coworker. Having grade level time together allowed them time to plan what they would do in their classrooms to address the CCSS.

**Sharing Information.** In District B, AdminB, LitCoachB, and TeacherB all referenced the coach as spreading important information that was crucial to the curriculum change. With a new initiative, especially a national initiative, there was a lot of information to be shared at many different levels. AdminB and LitCoachB both worked to share their knowledge. AdminB stated, “We were doing all that stuff [distributing information]…the Common Core, and all these wonderful things from the Department of Education, and it seemed like every faculty meeting was another initiative.” It was a lot for the teachers to take in, and she said it took constant communication and sharing of expectations through the change. The Literacy Coach was identified as the one who kept both the administration and teachers current as to educational research and demands. AdminB said the Literacy Coach “interpreted what’s coming down,” frequently attending meetings and bringing back information to the administrators. LitCoachB said,

[I] went to the workshops provided by the Department of Ed. I attended every single one of those workshops, all of the ELA, all of the math. And then what I did was I brought it back to the district, and then I facilitated all of that information back to the district…The district, all of the grade level teachers.
She described herself as a “liason” between upper administration and the department of education and the principals. LitCoachB said, “I see that as a real important part of my role, that communication.” TeacherB also saw a main role of the Literacy Coach to be the sharing of new initiatives and information from higher levels of administration. She felt the teachers were often being told what to do and that the Literacy Coach was passing on the administration’s agenda. The teacher affirmed that the Literacy Coach disseminated information and shared expectations so that the new Common Core standards were addressed in the classrooms. She did not feel all teachers bought into the change. They were changing, but because they didn’t feel they had a choice. She said, “You have to value what you’re doing and it has to have a purpose. A lot of what we do, we don’t value and don’t have purpose. It’s…We’re doing it because we’re told to do it....” TeacherB agreed the Literacy Coach moved the ELA curriculum change forward by sharing information, but did not view the change in a favorable light. She talked about the Coach supporting the teachers in whatever “the flavor of the month” was…meaning whatever administration is currently focusing upon.

**Contradictions within District B**

All personnel agreed that in order to move the adoption and implementation of an ELA Common Core curriculum forward the Literacy Coach actively collaborated around that curriculum and sharing information about the new initiative. Overall, however, the teacher’s perception of this change did not mesh with the perceptions of the principal and literacy coach. Throughout their interviews, the principal and Literacy Coach spoke positively of the change and both cited numerous other important ways the coach was moving the change process forward. According to them, other roles of the coach included: co-teaching, modeling, insuring implementation, relaying common needs, discovering big picture information via data meetings,
and moving the teachers toward improved instructional methods. The teacher felt the change was top-down in execution and that she did not see the Literacy Coach frequently; that the coach’s time focused on carrying out the directives of the upper administration. She said the change came very quickly and “without a lot of time to absorb it.”

Commonalities within District C

There were two common themes that were consistent across the personnel in District C. All interview participants discussed the Literacy Coach’s contribution to negotiating the ELA curriculum change to include planning for classroom instruction and modeling lessons.

Planning for Classroom Instruction. AdminC began her interview discussing how the Literacy Coach helped teachers understand what the Common Core standards looked like at the three tiers of classroom instruction: Tier 1, whole class instruction for all students, Tier 2, small group work for students that were not mastering the standard, and Tier 3, intensive small group/individual work with additional supports. An example she gave was the standard that has students understand key ideas and details in informational and literary texts. The Literacy Coach planned with teachers how students should read and be able to show this understanding of the text. The Literacy Coach helped the teacher plan lessons using the A.C.E.S. strategy. This was a writing strategy where the students: Answer the question, Cite evidence from the text, Explain how that evidence supports their answer, and Summarize their claim. Some of this was done during grade-level data meetings where the coach and teachers looked at determined the students’ needs. They then discussed and planned how to teach to those specific needs. The Literacy Coach also would meet with teachers before or after school or during their prep period to plan with them. She described this process using the following example:
We looked at the class list and the standards that the students were really weak in, and we then broke them into groups and built instruction according to the standards the kids needed…The teacher used that information for the students and herself to set goals for themselves for the next few weeks of instruction. So they [the teachers] had a classroom goal and then the students each had their individual goals based on that information.

The teachers said the most important job the Literacy Coach had was to sit down with them and map out their instruction together. This insured that they addressed all the standards they needed to in a methodic manner. They called this “making sense of everything” and described that process as determining what to teach in the short term (day to day) and the long term (what needed to be covered over the entire quarter). The Literacy Coach had a sense of instruction at the district level. The teachers said did not have this big-picture view and were really tied to their individual classrooms. The coach helped bring the big picture of instruction to them.

**Modeling Lessons.** The administrator, Literacy Coach, and teachers all identified the modeling of lessons as integral for the success of a new Common Core Curriculum. AdminC identified what she felt was the most effective way the literacy coach supported the implementation of the CCSS as this modeling of instruction. She said,

I think [it’s] bringing standards to life using model lessons so teachers can really see the rigor that’s required, the text complexity that’s required, the questioning that’s required. I don’t often think people have a good image of what the shift to the new standards looks like so I would say modeling [is most effective].

She talked about how the Literacy Coach has the unique position of having a deep knowledge of the new curriculum and a schedule that allows for the modeling of lessons. At the district level,
AdminC said she knew this modeling of lessons was effective because she saw the transfer to student work. When the district writing tasks were scored, the students were using the A.C.E.S. strategy the coach had modeled for teachers. This visible evidence not only told her this was one of the Literacy Coach’s roles, but that it was an effective role in supporting the implementation of the ELA curriculum. The Literacy Coach further talked about how her demonstration (model) lessons were all tied to the Common Core. The majority of her model lessons focused on the Reading Foundational Skills strand of the Common Core because that part of the curriculum was brand new to most teachers. When asked what role she held that most impacted moving instruction to support the ELA CCSS, the Literacy Coach immediately responded, “the modeling of lessons.” She added,

I think teachers want to see it in action…I think sitting with them [the teachers] and talking to them and providing them with materials isn’t enough. I think the best solution is to model for teachers…to be right in there with them and model with them.

The teachers contributed to their interview by naming model lessons as one of the key roles of the Literacy Coach. They also cited a specific example of a demonstration lesson they particularly found helpful, the A.C.E.S. lesson based on the book When the Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant.

**Contradictions within District C**

The most glaring contradiction in District C were the different perceptions held by AdminC and LitCoachC regarding the Literacy Coach’s place spreading Common Core knowledge in the district. The Literacy Coach said she supported Common Core through her data meetings, model lessons, and planning. However, she said she was really focused on one of the five strands of the ELA CCSS, the Reading Foundational Skills. She serviced many schools
and she felt could not address all elements of the new curriculum. AdminC, however, cited the Literacy Coach as the person who handled all dissemination of knowledge regarding the Common Core. AdminC was asked how she, personally, had shared information regarding the Common Core with those in her district. She responded, “My Literacy Coach has done that for me.” There appeared to be a disconnect regarding who was actually responsible for spreading information in this area.

Along the same lines, the Literacy Coach and teachers talked about how they would like more time for planning and model lessons, implying they did not have enough of this now. The teachers said they wished they had a literacy coach at each school. AdminC did not seem concerned that the Literacy Coach might not be able to reach all teachers. She talked about the data meetings that were held with all teachers five times per year and appeared confident that teachers’ needs were met by the coach and that the Common Core message was relayed to everyone.

Comparison of Themes across Districts

The Administrators

The three administrators did not agree on which role of the Literacy Coach was most important in supporting the ELA CCSS curriculum. AdminA and AdminB identified some type of collaborative planning and discussion around the new curriculum as most important. AdminA said it was the having the Literacy Coach work and plan with teachers. Admin B said it was the Literacy Coach guiding and advising the teachers regarding the curriculum and information about the Common Core. In District C, AdminC said the most important role of the coach for supporting the Common Core curriculum was the modeling of Common Core lessons in the classrooms.
When the number of times a theme was mentioned in the course of each interview was tallied, all three administrators mentioned “communication” of some form at least twice as frequently as any other theme. This communication ranged from the Literacy Coach communicating new information to the teachers and administrators, to communicating through collaborative discussion around the new curriculum, to serving as a liaison between administration and teachers, to communicating between buildings, and to being a confidant to which people can bring questions and concerns. This really placed the Literacy Coach as a hub in the Burke-Litwin Model of change theory. The many interactions that swirled around the Literacy Coach and required the Literacy Coach to communicate with others appeared to be a large part of the change process as seen at the administrative level of these districts.

**The Literacy Coaches**

There was no single theme that was more prevalent in the interviews with the Literacy Coaches. Each Literacy Coach had an extensive list of roles they held within the district. Giving PD, collaborating with teachers, providing resources, communicating around the new curriculum, co-teaching and giving demonstration lessons, and analyzing data were all discussed extensively. Each coach had a different role they felt was most effective in their district. LitCoachA felt the most effective use of her time was in the PD she gave. LitCoachB felt she supported Common Core change most effectively in the grade level meetings she facilitated. LitCoachC was positive the model lessons she gave were the way in which she support a change to the new ELA curriculum the best. Each coach did feel they were effective in supporting this change process.
The Teachers

The teachers recognized that the Literacy Coach held PD, relayed information, and brought initiatives to the teachers. They really emphasized the personalized support the Literacy Coach gave them. Two of the districts’ teachers selected demonstration lessons as the most important support that is offered to them. TeacherB said, “The Common Core is just the standards we want… Show us what it looks like in a good, well-run classroom.” That idea of seeing Common Core instruction as it is directly applicable to their own classrooms. The third district’s teachers said their Literacy Coach best supported them by helping them plan instruction for their classroom: organizing their materials and determining exactly what they needed to do in their own rooms. The interviews with the teachers consistently focused on the practical application of the new curriculum within individual classrooms.

Each teacher interviewed also expressed feelings of being overwhelmed. They were concerned about balancing the day to day instruction and meeting the needs of their students. TeacherB talked about how it was not just about the standards. It was equally about the nine-year-old kids in her room. She said, “It’s not just aligning curriculum to a Common Core. We have to align curriculum to a nine-year-old.” This sentiment was echoed by a teacher in District C. She said, “I’m still trying to learn things and trying to make sure that I’m getting across to the children what needs to get across to them.” The demonstration lessons appeared to link the theoretical knowledge of the new ELA CCSS to the lived reality of the classroom.
Chapter 5: Analysis and Application

Interpretation of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate what activities and roles used by literacy coaches contributed to successful implementation of ELA Common Core curriculum. The perspectives of teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators were considered in this research. This enabled the work of the literacy coach to be viewed from multiples levels within the school districts while keeping with the theory of organizational change, which emphasizes how the many levels and facets of change are in interplay at all times.

There were two questions that drove this research:

1. How do the roles and actions of a literacy coach support the adoption and implementation of new curricula based on the Common Core States Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 4 and 5 as perceived by teachers, administrators, and the literacy coaches themselves?

2. How do teachers, administrators, and literacy coaches themselves feel the literacy coach fits in the cycle of change initiated by a new Common Core curriculum?

Revisiting the Problem

According to the International Reading Association (2004), the goal of literacy coaching is to build and support effective teaching in classrooms. The newness of the Common Core standards means there is not an established body of tried and true practices that the literacy coach can follow to ensure their work is effective in regards to how to best implement and support the Common Core curriculum. Subsequently much of the new curriculum implementation process has become trial and error. Teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators are negotiating the
change in instruction by trying to set student goals that reflect the new standards and are teaching to gain the mastery of the new set of skills.

The first research question: How do the roles and actions of a literacy coach support the adoption and implementation of new curricula based on the Common Core States Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 4 and 5 as perceived by teachers, administrators, and the literacy coaches themselves? was answered by tracking the themes that emerged from the interviews. This delineated some of the practices of the literacy coach that school personnel were finding useful in the context of the Common Core change process. Additionally, roles and practices not mentioned by personnel may be thought to not have as much of an effect on positive Common Core implementation.

The fact that communication, collaboration, and modeling were recurring themes in the interviews tells us that these literacy coach practices used to address Common Core needs were successful in these school districts. Where research around Common Core implementation is still developing, this study provides a starting place for school personnel to deal with this problem of practice. Literacy coaches can begin by communicating about the change and working with the teachers and administrators to create and plan lessons and look at students’ work. They may directly show others what Common Core instruction looks like in a practical manner by teaching actual lessons in the classroom setting.

All districts in this study had personnel that felt the literacy coach did influence the adoption of the new CCSS curriculum and much of that influence came from the feeling they were supported and helped through the stressful change process. A large part of the problem of practice that inspired this study was the fact that teachers often feel high levels of anxiety when classroom practices undergo a significant change; especially a significant change in a short time
period. The universal feeling that emerged in the interviews was that the literacy coach’s job was to help personnel, making the change process slightly less stressful. There was a feeling that they [the literacy coach and the teachers and the literacy coach and the administrators] were in this together.

**The Findings in Relation to Organizational Change Theory**

The answer to the second research question: How do teachers, administrators, and literacy coaches themselves feel the literacy coach fits in the cycle of change initiated by a new Common Core curriculum? exemplified the complexity of organizational change theory. Returning to the Burke-Litwin Model of Change, change agents are numerous and all interconnected. Each person in the district influences others and is influenced by others. Each tier in the hierarchy of administration, each teacher, each literacy coach, and every student with whom they come in contact have a transactional impact on how change occurs. The interviews showed the layered impact school personnel have on one another. The literacy coach’s interactions with others were numerous. The communication and collaborative themes wove an intricate web of the literacy coach relaying information to administrators and teachers from the state, getting information from the administrators to give to the teachers, and bringing feedback and needs back to the administrators from the teachers. The literacy coaches collaborated with the administrators, then went and collaborated with the teachers. The network of relationships was deep, at times superseding the professional relationship to that of a trusted colleague and mentor.

The literacy coach became a central hub in the change process. This occurred because they were in contact with so many people and had so many opportunities for these overlapping interactions. The teachers agreed in their interviews that the literacy coach had the big picture of
the district, that the coach saw more than a single classroom. It was the nature of the literacy coach’s job that enabled them to have time to foster this interconnectedness within their districts. Organizational change theory made for a powerful way to view the work of the literacy coach and set the stage to show the literacy coaches as key players in the change process.

Organizational change theory includes the internal and external forces that influence change. Any change in any of these numerous factors influences how the change is perceived and how that change is implemented. In light of this theory, it makes sense that the role of the coach varied from district to district. In each district, there was a unique dynamic between the many agents involved in the change process. The interviews highlighted the coach as a central change agent, but in one district that meant the coach was primarily supporting teachers by providing materials and in another supporting through grade level meetings.

Organizational change theory also recognizes the emotional dimension of change. Since “change and emotion are inseparable” (Hargreaves, 2004, p.287) the interviews conducted reflected how the personnel felt about the change on an emotional level. While the Burke-Litwin model of change shows the transactions between the many players and elements of the change, also in that transaction is the emotional response by the stakeholders. The complexity of the change to the new Common Core standards was especially evident from the varied responses that were recorded in the interviews. Some of these responses echoed the internal emotional response stakeholders had toward the change. For example, TeachersA and TeacherC talked about how overwhelmed they felt by the change and their struggle to keep up with the day to day lesson planning. These emotional factors influenced the implementation process alongside the more concrete factors of time and materials. The fact that the findings are multi-layered and varied fit the beliefs underlying organizational change theory. With the three levels of
organizational change: individual, group, and the large system (Burke, 2011) the findings of how the coach fit into the change show the literacy coach to be present at all three levels. They worked individually with teachers in specific classrooms. They supported the change one on one and also worked at grade level meetings, collaborating with small groups of teachers to look at data and the implementation of the skills specific for that grade. They consistently worked within the large system, having the vision of the district and attending professional development training at the state level.

The Findings in Relation to the Literature Review

The findings of this research study pinpointed communication and collaboration as two of the most significant roles of the literacy coach in Common Core implementation. This confirms what prior literature on literacy coaching has shown. Effective coaches have good communication (Blamey et al., 2009; Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Ferguson & Lynch, 2010; Gill et al., 2010; Helmer et al., 2011; L’Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010). The findings showed that communication occurred at multiple levels and on a consistent basis. Within these three districts the literacy coaches maintained an on-going dialogue about the Common Core standards and their place in the classroom. This was shown in the grade level data meetings they held, in the conversations they held with administrators when they brought back needs and concerns to the central office, and in the one-to-one conversations held with teachers as they collaborated around individualized lessons and planned instruction. In District B, the teacher and coach gave the example of looking at student writing samples together. They discussed how the conversation addressed whether there was proof of student mastery of specific standards. Such conversation kept the Common Core initiative at the center of focus for all personnel involved.
The literature consistently asserted that collaboration was key to the implementation of new initiatives. The findings of this research confirmed the important role of collaboration in this change process. In particular this was shown when the personnel interviewed talked about asking and finding answers to their questions around the Common Core. That cycle of inquiry pulled teachers and literacy coaches together to figure out what standards asked of them and how the standards could be addressed in their classrooms. Nelson, LeBard, and Waters (2010) emphasized the importance of implementing and then analyzing the change within classrooms using the inquiry process. In each of the districts, this took place. It showed in the collaborative data analysis, meetings, and co-teaching.

The other themes that emerged from the interviews also coincided with the literature. Emotional support and encouragement, providing professional development, sharing knowledge, and providing resources and materials were all roles literacy coaches held prior to the Common Core standards. The districts continued to use the literacy coach in these roles, but their focus became this new topic of understanding: The Common Core standards.

The creation of collaborative opportunities is one of the ways leaders can best support organizational change (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008, Dufour & Marzano, 2011, Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamintina, 2010). The interviews in this research show that this can occur at all levels of the change process. The administrators interviewed provided formal times through district and building grade level meetings where teachers and literacy coaches could come together. The literacy coach provided times where they could work with the teachers co-planning and co-teaching. The teachers themselves all brought up how important it was to work with their grade level colleagues, bouncing daily ideas off of each other. This planning incorporated student data. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) said, “It’s not just the evidence, but
what you do with it, how you evaluate it here and now, and how you connect it to other evidence of your own collective experience, that matters” (p.54). In this way, the Common Core initiatives were supported through collaboration in a way that was bigger than just the literacy coach; it was really the entire system of personnel that provided these supportive opportunities. The collective experience connected the many strands of curriculum change and implementation.

In the literature, the formal professional development offerings given by the literacy coach surfaced consistently as one of the roles of an effective coach. This role was apparent in each of the interviews in this study, but no one cited it at the most important to them. It could be that the initial training necessary to begin the change or to share new information was past and personnel were now just more focused on the actual implementation process.

Finally, there was a feeling that there was never enough time for the literacy coach to do all she wanted. Each coach mentioned this. They cited the many roles they played and talked about how they “do the best they can.” Teachers talked about the time with coach as valuable, but each worked in that they would like more time with the literacy coach or that the literacy coach was pulled in many directions. Fullan (2012) says,

Coaching in the context of mandated reform can often fall short of its ideals, therefore, leading to hurried, anxious, and one-sided interactions, in required time periods that draw teachers away from compelling classroom concerns in a system where even basic job security can no longer be counted on. (p.121)

The teacher in District B appeared to believe the literacy coach was being used to support the “flavor of the month” educational initiative. The other districts seemed aware that the literacy coach was making an effort not to fall prey to this problem. This finding supported the prior
literature that warned how easily the literacy coaching position can unintentionally change in
texture, moving from a role of “supporter” to the role of “rule-enforcer.”

The Findings in Relation to the Research Design

A qualitative study, this research used the general inductive method for the data analysis
of collective case study interviews. According to Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008),

Research in the qualitative tradition is characterized by an emphasis on contextually
situated meaning. The researcher must delve into the world of their participants with the
aim of developing a shared understanding of how existence in this social arena is
influenced by the phenomena under study. (p. 68-69)

This meant two things: the participants were able to share their personal experiences and that the
researcher let the words of the participants evolve into the coded themes of the findings.
The interview protocol that was created probed the participants to delve into what literacy
coaching and the new ELA Common Core curriculum looked like in actual day to day life. The
result was interviews that appeared to be honest. Teachers commented on their personal feelings
of being overwhelmed by the quick change and new initiatives. “The case-study investigator can
do what the statistician cannot do, namely, concentrate on an intensive, detailed, free-flowing
analysis of the configuration of the limited number of traits which he thinks is important”
(Stouffer, 1941, p.354). The research design allowed a refined number of literacy coaching
characteristics to be revealed and detailed extensively. Personal experience drove the interviews.
Coaches and Curriculum Directors mentioned the pressure to keep up with state mandates and
ensure that teachers were prepared for the change. This element of practical application surfaced
because the participants had the opportunity to speak about their lives and share their
perspectives.
The collective case study allowed the various perspectives of the multiple levels of school personnel to be recorded and analyzed. This analysis was done at individual, district, and cross-district levels. The individual analysis let each voice be heard. Stake (2006) emphasized that this individual analysis had to come first. As Stake recommended, the individual responses were analyzed first for their unique contribution to how one can better understand the literacy coach and Common Core implementation. What was important to the Teachers in District A was recognized and related in the narrative even if it was not important to any other participant.

The collective case study then let the researcher look at those common themes in each separate district. Each district had a unique way of operating. One significant difference between districts was the number of schools the literacy coach served. In District A the coach worked only at one school. In District B, she worked at two schools. In District C, the literacy coach was responsible for five schools. While all three literacy coaches had many of the same roles, logistically, the coach in District C who served five schools had less time with individual teachers. The literacy coaches serving one or two schools had a fewer number of teachers with whom they worked and, therefore, could dedicate more time to each individual. To compensate for time constraints, the literacy coach in District C appeared to view the district data meetings as key to her communication with teachers. Looking within each district for common themes, allowed the data to reflect what was working in each of these separate situations. Participants’ voices were heard and recognized for their experiences in each system. Finally, as Stake (2006) recommended, the combined themes were explored. By comparing the themes between the three districts, the collective case study pulled together commonalities that appeared to be consistent even though the systems were different. The theme of communication ran throughout all
districts. It emerged in multiple accounts of the literacy coach’s work: in their meetings and planning and discussions.

It is important to note that the collective case study framework used in this research enabled the personalized views of the literacy coach’s work to emerge.

Between these two focuses on political and professional dimensions lies a third purpose that, for many action research practitioners, is central: the personal. This emphasis denies neither the importance of political activity nor the generation of professional knowledge, but it views the main benefits of engaging in action research as lying in areas such as greater self-knowledge and fulfillment in one's work, a deeper understanding of one's own practice, and the development of personal relationships through researching together. (Noffke, 1997, p.306)

This methodology allowed the personal dimension of the literacy coach’s work to be explained and shared at the three levels of school personnel. The personal element of this research, actually speaking with educators in different settings, helped the researcher understand her own job better. In particular, the interviews illuminated how important the individualized support and conversations are between the literacy coach and all other change agents. This was a reminder that when this researcher feels pulled in many directions or tempted to resort to a mass email that informs personnel of a new change, she has to arrange time to connect at a more individual level with the change agents. Hopefully, this knowledge also will help others gain a deeper understanding of the change process and the literacy coach.

**Significance of the Findings**

Three items of significance provided insights to the problem of practice. First, the findings showed that communication, collaboration, and modeling were important roles of the
literacy coach across the multiple settings and types of school personnel. Second, the job of the literacy coach differed from district to district even though each district had the similar goal of providing support for the new ELA Common Core Curriculum. Finally, the implementation of the ELA CCSS showed itself to be complicated and multi-layered. The findings of this study were not surprising, but they are significant to practitioners.

The themes of communication, collaboration, and modeling are consistent with the literature review. Confirmation that the literacy coach is supportive in this manner in relation to the Common Core is a logical extrapolation from what has been researched already and from this research. Stating that these three roles are significant can be claimed with assurance. To extend this finding further, it could be asserted that in whatever change initiative or new curriculum being implemented, school personnel should consider focusing on these roles. Practitioners can recognize that in the midst of the numerous roles of the literacy coach, significant time donated towards these three areas (collaborative discussion, the provision of materials and resources, and emotional support) may result in better curriculum implementation. The collaborative discussions that took place in all three districts helped link the change agents together by allowing them to share the vision of the ELA CCSS curriculum. It makes sense that engaging in discussion around any initiative supports a deeper understanding of “big-picture” goals and links those involved in the change process together. The personnel interviewed for this study mentioned how the collaborative discussions kept everyone on the “same page.” Collaborative discussions allow for misconceptions to surface and be addressed. Time for collaboration also allows for each individual be feel included in the initiative. Any new curricula or initiative would be more effective with the inclusion of collaborative discussions. We know that when a new practice in an organization is adopted that the change agents need to feel they can actually
manage the necessary transitions. Providing materials and resources allows personnel to feel they have the tools they need to negotiate the change. The teachers in District A identified this as the most helpful role of the coach. They cited how helpful it was to them at a personal level to have “what they need” for the curriculum at their fingertips.

The significance of school personnel needing emotional support needs separate consideration. Perhaps this emotional support should not be limited to literacy coaches and principals. School psychologists and guidance counselors might be able to aid in this area as well. This finding reminds us of the human element of any change. Change is driven by the unique individuals within the system. By supporting these individuals at the emotional level, the implementation of a new curriculum can become a smooth and successful transitional period.

The teachers in District C talked about how having the literacy coach encourage them made them feel that they could better handle the many tasks with which they were charged.

The role of providing professional development was talked about by all stakeholders that were interviewed. Yet, it did not seem to be considered as vital in supporting the implementation of the CCSS as other themes. It was as if the stakeholders acknowledged that it was important to have that initial training in a new initiative, but that it was really what happened following the training that supported implementation. This assertion could be suggested tentatively, as numerous variables could contribute to the lack of emphasis on professional development. Perhaps it was only that the districts had moved away from that initial professional development training and the other roles were more a part of their lives currently.

Practitioners also should consider the uniqueness of the literacy coach’s job. Each district was attempting to implement an ELA curriculum based on the same set of standards, the same requirements for student mastery. Yet, the make-up of the each district resulted in
differing approaches to how the coach supported the curriculum. A major difference was that
two of the districts were on the smaller side in a more rural community. One district was quite
large and had an urban ring community. This one external variable required the coaches to
operate differently by servicing different numbers of teachers and schools. While the common
themes were significant, they translated in different manners in each district. Communication in
District A, where the coach worked in one school, could be done at faculty meetings and
informal meetings, sometimes over lunch. In District C, where the coach traveled between 5
schools, communication appeared to be planned in advanced with formal meetings and
conferences between the coach and the teachers. This coach frequently used emails to
communicate when necessary as she had to reach so many teachers. The literacy coach in
District A worked in one school and had time to meet with small groups of students. The
coaches that worked in multiple schools did not meet with students except when teaching a
demonstration lesson.

The implementation of the ELA CCSS was complicated and multi-layered. This was
exemplified by how many different aspects of the literacy coach’s job were mentioned in the
interviews. While the literacy coach had many different ways to support the change, these
methods frequently overlapped each other. A teacher would mention that the literacy coach was
helpful in finding resources for her. Then, she would add that having the literacy coach show her
how to use the resources was necessary also. Or the literacy coach would say one of her main
jobs was finding good materials for the teachers. Then, she would continue to say those
materials were a main part of the lesson planning in which they engaged. At these times, the
roles of the literacy coach wove together to create combinations of support that were valued.
The interplay between the administration, literacy coach, and teachers served as a reminder of how all parts of an organization influence each other during the change process. This finding is significant to all practitioners as a reminder that each change agent has a valuable place in the implantation of a new curriculum. Personnel cannot be excluded from the change process, from the communication and training needed in that process, because all are important in how ELA Common Core standards are implemented in the classroom.

**Transferring the Findings**

This research illuminates one aspect of Common Core implementation, the personal perception held by personnel regarding the place of the literacy coach in this change. “Qualitative research is best for understanding the processes that go on in a situation and the beliefs and perceptions of those in it” (Firestone, 1993, p.22). This research allowed the careful examination of such processes. The researcher was able to better understand how support offered by the literacy coach is interpreted by teachers and administrators. She was also able to see what it was that administrators and teachers needed from her in this job. Many times, the needs expressed pointed toward the desire for a partner that would be a team player who would help them figure out the new initiative, as opposed to a person who could recite copious amounts of data that supported the change.

The findings can be extrapolated to be relevant to other educational settings, although one must be careful with any generalization. The three districts used in this research were chosen to represent a range of demographic attributes. This could help make the findings more applicable to other districts. Firestone (1993) said, “Cases can be selected to strengthen generalization by making them vary on attributes likely to interact with those studied within cases” (p.20). The multi-case study make the generalization stronger than if only one district had been used. Even
then, far from all scenarios for coaches, teachers, and administration are taken into consideration. “There are likely to be a number of background conditions and unstated assumptions upon which generalization depends. For all the systematicness…it is virtually impossible to assure that all relevant variables are covered in any one study” (Firestone, 1993, p. 21). The reader must glean the truths that surfaced in this study and use them carefully when looking at other situations. That said, the findings can be valuable when looking at other change initiatives in other places. The literature review supports the fact that the roles of the literacy coach have influence in successful curriculum implementation and the description provided by the participants in this study supports that also. “Multicase studies can use the logic of replication and comparison to strengthen conclusions drawn in single sites and provide evidence for both their broader utility and the conditions under which they hold” (Firestone, 1993, p.22). The three districts and three types of personnel used in this study make it reasonable to conclude that the findings can be transferrable.

The findings in this study are important to stakeholders at both the district level and at the national level. At the district level, school administrators may use these findings to support maintaining the position of the literacy coach. When fiscal troubles arise, the literacy coaching position may be seen as extraneous and cut from the budget. These findings provide evidence that the literacy coach position is valuable in curriculum adoption and in the change process at large. Districts also can use this research to help guide them as they determine the job description of the literacy coach within the district. Additional time for the literacy coach to meet with teachers and administrators, as well as time to foster communication and collaboration with peers should be added into the literacy coach’s schedule. At a basic level, this research
should cause other districts to at least consider the use of literacy coaches to support Common Core implementation.

This is a national initiative and, at the national level, those making educational decisions are looking for feedback on the Common Core. Some states have elected to not adopt the Common Core standards or to postpone their adoption. Having a deeper understanding of successful implementation of these standards may help policy makers determine how to best help reluctant states. As policy makers decide how to allocate federal and state funds, research such as this could support putting monies toward literacy coaching positions. Title I and Title II funding has strict guidelines that determine its use. If the funding of coaching positions were encouraged and supported by policy makers, districts might choose to use some of this money towards those positions. Funding such positions is expensive as literacy coaches should be experienced and may be paid a stipend for their additional responsibilities. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) asked, “How are you supposed to improve your literacy practice when cutbacks have reduced the number of literacy coaches to one for every 30 schools?” (p.11). The ability to justify such a cost to school boards, upper administration, and educational decision makers becomes extremely important. This research provides an overview of how literacy coaches can smooth the way during curricular changes and may provide enough evidence to school committees that their districts should consider using instructional coaches as one layer of support for teachers.

Limitations of the Study

There is the possibility that the methodological threat of reflexivity, when the researcher’s perspective unintentionally influences responses, was a limitation to the study. The researcher attempted to be aware of this possibility. However, the participants were aware that
the researcher was herself a literacy coach. It is possible that prejudiced their answers to be more favorable toward coaching.

Mortality was a threat in this study. One administrator dropped out of the study due to conflicts in scheduling. During the recruitment process, it was difficult to obtain initial participants at the teacher level. Feedback from the superintendents of the districts pointed to this difficulty residing with the stringent state-level teacher evaluation being used. Although all participants’ interviews were confidential and the evaluation process was not linked to the teachers’ relationship with the literacy coach in any way, there was a feeling that teachers were afraid information they divulged might get back to their evaluators. Therefore, the superintendents felt the teachers were hesitant to participate in the research. One district initially agreed to participate in the study, but no teacher volunteers could be found.

**Conclusions from the Findings**

The literacy coaches in this study supported Common Core curriculum implementation in a variety of ways. Although the roles of the literacy coach were not uniform, there was overlap between districts in how they helped move the curricular change forward. The themes of good communication, collaboration, and emotional support wove themselves throughout the interviews. These themes, along with the others that were discussed: helping organize materials, data analysis, providing professional development, co-teaching, and modeling were all consistent with the literature review.

The desire to see the new change initiative in action through model lessons was particularly evident in the interviews. This rang true with the literature. The literacy coaches provided personalized support to teachers. By showing teachers exactly how the new curriculum can work in their specific classroom, the literacy coach had the opportunity to bring this large,
amorphous educational change down to a defined, tangible approach to classroom instruction. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) stated,

People are motivated by good ideas tied to action; they are energized even more by pursuing action with others; they are spurred on still further by learning from their mistakes; and they are ultimately propelled by actions that make an impact. (p.7)

When the literacy coaches partnered with others they motivated and energized the cycle of change. The personalized coaching gave time to learn from mistakes and to develop as educators who truly made an impact in the field of education. “Teaching behind the classroom door is about as contagious as a corpse,” yet “with empathy and capacity building as powerful change resources, contagion make rapid change a reality” (Fullan, 2013, p.69). The co-teaching model and the demonstration lessons pulled the teacher out of seclusion to become part of an innovative teaching group.

The numerous factors that intertwined the interviews, the different roles, the different models of coaching, the variation in the size of schools and number of schools being served, and the diverse demographics of the districts tied back to the complex nature of organizational change theory. All aspects of the change were transactional and influenced each other. It really came down to creating positive interactions to support the change. Fullan (2013) described this as “the essence of change management.” He said, “If people are involved in meaningful work, and if they feel capable, and if they are helped to make even small progress, they become more motivated and ready for the next challenges” (p.22). That was and still is the work of the literacy coach.
Recommendations

Literacy coaching is not a panacea. However, the findings and prior literature do support the fact that literacy coaching can support the ELA Common Core curriculum change as it is implemented in the elementary school. Two recommendations are asserted.

Use literacy coaches to build capacity. Look at the strengths within the individual school. Determine tangible learning goals with the teachers that they feel will improve their instruction and use the literacy coach to support that achievement in whatever way is best for that teacher. Capitalize on the flexible schedule of the literacy coach and the range of his/her skills to build capacity in different situations. The freedom to determine the specific roles of the literacy coach in a flexible manner can allow the literacy coach to mentor teachers and bring educators to a higher level of teaching.

There is more human resource support for teachers these days. Teachers are no longer on their own, and when they struggle, there are mentors and coaches to help them. But when programs are mandated inflexibly, coaches can quickly turn into compliance officers, and mentors into tormentors. (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.43)

Hargreaves and Fullan remind us that if the coach is not used with flexibility, the literacy coach will not be the supportive resource needed in the change process. The findings of this research, as well as the literature reviewed, gave some possible places that literacy coaches can begin their support. In specific, literacy coaches can initially focus on hosting collaborative opportunities for discussion and planning. They can provide materials and resources to teachers and they can be present as an emotional support fielding questions and concerns while giving encouragement. In no way should one lock the work of a coach solely into these roles. Human capital, the actual worth of the individual teachers and school personnel, is one of the most important parts of the
education system. The coach needs to be given the opportunity to grow the knowledge and skill sets of school personnel according to what is asked for in a given situation. When talking about capacity building, “People in our industry have learned that it is all about rapid learning cycles, fast feedback, continual reflection, good coaching, and managers who create conditions for learning rather than try to make it happen” (Fullan, 2013, p.47). Literacy coaches foster the conditions that allow change to occur in a positive, growing way.

Engage in the change process as a creative process. One of the main conditions for learning is fostering inquiry (Collinson & Cook, 2007). District A and C teachers found the ability of the literacy coach to answer their questions an extremely effective support in their curriculum implementation. Collinson and Cook (2007) said, “Collective learning, inquiry, and dissemination of learning rely on the free flow of ideas and dialogue in the organization” (p.136). Feeling free to ask questions of the literacy coach and to collaboratively discuss answers allowed for the give and take nature of brainstorming that is necessary to figure out what the Common Core is asking for and how to make that happen in each classroom. As districts figure out what works for them in the change to a new Common Core-based curriculum, the attitude of inquiry will allow new classroom practices to evolve and meet the ever-changing needs of the students.

Change will become more enjoyable when it proffers experiences that are engaging, precise, and specific; high yield (good benefit relative to effort); higher order (stretching humans in creativity, problem solving, and innovation); and collaborative for individual and collective benefit. (Fullan, 2013, p.3)

Inquiry that stretches personnel to be creative problem solvers will draw in the teachers to participate more fully in the new curriculum. The findings of this research showed the teachers and literacy coach interacting by problem solving as they discussed students and lessons.
AdminB said that before the change to Common Core, “Chitchat was chitchat. Now the chitchat is about kids, about goals, about strategies. It’s a little more focused, I think…Now you hear people problem solve, just naturally” (personal communication, November 2014). This creative cycle can be sought out and encouraged by the interaction of the literacy coach with the teachers.

**Further Research**

This research included the perceptions of fourth and fifth grade teachers as well as the administrators and literacy coaches that worked with this age group. Further research would need to be done at other grade levels. First, the experiences of lower elementary school personnel (grades kindergarten- 3) would need to be studied. Then, the lived experiences of personnel at the middle and high school levels would need to be explored. The structure of the day and schedule of classes at the middle and high school level frequently calls for the literacy coach’s roles to differ from the elementary coach. Questions could arise as to whether this means effective roles differ significantly at these levels or if communication, collaboration, and modeling still are important at the higher level. If they are still important to Common Core implementation, are those themes accomplished in a different way in the upper grades? The research also could be repeated with a larger sample size. Participants from other districts could be recruited. This could increase the validity of the findings and, possibly, other themes would emerge from the collected data.

We do not know if combinations of the literacy coaches’ roles were more effective in curriculum implementation. Participants in the study were asked which single role of the coach supported CCSS implementation the most. However, it is possible that communication without the collaboration, or demonstration lessons without the initial professional development training would be less effective. Consideration to how the multiple roles of the literacy coach act
together was not a part of this study. Further research to determine the most effective combinations of roles would be merited.

Research also needs to be done regarding how one could support the ELA Common Core standards and curriculum over an extended period of time. The personnel interviewed were all still at the beginning of the change cycle; the curriculum was newly implemented and teachers were still learning the basics about the Common Core. Therefore, the ways in which the new curriculum was being supported reflect this fact. It is possible the role of literacy coach would change if it were further into the implementation process. Maybe there would be less modeling needed because teachers already would have been through that part of the coaching cycle. Instead, perhaps the literacy coach would be helping teachers disaggregate school data to determine tweaks that needed to be made to their instruction. This further research will develop in the future as educators seek to maintain this set of standards.

Conclusion

Change is constant and change is situated. The literacy coach has a unique position that can greatly influence the context in which curricular change occurs. The literacy coach has the opportunity to support Common Core curriculum implementation. “Educators at all levels need just-in-time, job-embedded assistance as they struggle to adapt new curricula and new instructional practices to their unique classroom contexts” (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). The coach has the goal that the teachers will become independent in their application of the curriculum initiative and will be able to reflect and change their practice to provide the best instruction possible for their students. This research illuminates the perceptions held regarding how literacy coaches can best support significant curricular change in elementary school. These conclusions may help administrators decide how best to support future initiatives, while the data may give
literacy coaches ideas regarding which activities to focus their time upon in order to be most effective. The findings of this study also may guide teachers to ask for specific activities and supports from the literacy coach as they seek to implement new curriculum and inspire all educators to reach the goal of deeper learning through the implementation of a new Common Core curriculum.
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