WHAT LIES BENEATH THE COACHING PROCESS: COACHING EXPERIENCES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

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Abstract

This dissertation is a narrative inquiry that explores the lived phenomenon of early childhood educators who experienced on-site educational coaching. Ten early childhood educators working in a variety of early education and care programs throughout Massachusetts participated in the study. Framed by sociocultural learning theory, the study explored the life history of the participants, details of their coaching experience, and the meaning the participants attributed to their coaching experience. Data collection for this study was based on Seidman’s (2006) structure of in-depth interviewing. Two semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant. The data collected was analyzed using Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the van Kaam method. Five conclusions emerged from this study. First, coaching is more meaningful to participants if the coach considers input from the educators on their needs for improving their practice. Second, educators’ observations of coaches’ modeling support changes in practice. Third, concrete feedback based on videotaped observations of educators was meaningful to educators’ understanding of their practice. Fourth, coaches guide educators through meaningful questions to self-reflect on practice during feedback sessions. Finally, the coaching experience can support sustainable changes in educator practice. Implications for practice were recognized which included such considerations as identifying the prerequisite skills individuals should possess before taking on the role of coach as well as determining the focus of professional development for coaches. Implications for theory and future research were also discussed, as well as a summary of the research and reflections on the research process.
Dedication

On January 12, 2011 I sat at my kitchen table praying about the idea of starting a doctoral program. I asked God to give me a sign that what I was about to undertake would be pleasing to Him and that He would guide me through the process. As I looked at a small pile of mail to my left, the envelope on top was from The Apostolate of Divine Mercy and Healing with the following quote from the Director, Father Ralph DiOrio, on the envelope, “The gift of learning is God’s grace to expand the vast area of one’s intellectual consciousness.” There in front of me, was my sign. I dedicate this and every bit of work I do to my beloved God, who guides me gently (and sometimes not so gently) each and every day.

I want to also dedicate this thesis to my mother, Carmen. She taught me how to be the wife, mother, student, and woman I am today. She will always be my inspiration.
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To my beloved daughters, Emerson and Abigail, you are the reason that I work as hard as I do every day of my life. I thank you for your patience as I had to ask you to wait over and over again until I finished my next big project. I thank you for your inspiration as I saw you both work so hard at your school work. It was not unusual to have no room at the kitchen table to eat because of our piles of books! I hope that my work to complete this doctoral program helps you to see the value of education and the strength you have as women in this world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In spring 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 89% of children under the age of five with working mothers were in at least one child care arrangement, spending an average of 35 hours per week in child care (Laughlin, 2010). With the need for child care so prevalent, early education and care programs must be closely examined to assure they are providing the quality of care necessary for young children to grow and thrive. The care that young children receive in these early education and care programs varies greatly, with children from socioeconomically challenged communities often receiving the lowest quality of care from the least qualified caregivers (French, 2010). High quality early education and care programs are the soil from which improvements in academic achievement, reduction in rates of crime and delinquency, and ultimately increased international competitiveness (Lowenstein, 2011) can grow.

Conroy et al. (2014) noted that a critical challenge in the United States is “young children who enter early childhood programs unprepared for the learning opportunities they encounter in school” (p. 81). This unpreparedness is often based on vague and constantly changing educational outcomes for children as well as the lack of definable quality care for young children often impeded by socio-political and economic factors (Shannon, Snyder, & McLaughlin, 2015). The knowledge, skills and practices of early childhood educators are important factors in determining how much young children learn and how prepared they will be for school readiness in the future (LeMoine, 2008; Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). The field of early education and care has fought a long, tumultuous battle to improve the quality of education provided for children and the training available for educators. With national organizations such as The Alliance for Early Success, Race to the Top education reform initiatives, and state level catalysts like Strategies for Children supporting the Early Education for All campaign, the time
is right to look closely at defining quality for both the care of young children and the professional development of educators.

In 2011, Massachusetts fully implemented a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) in an effort to build a framework of quality for early education and care. This framework supports family, community, and policymaker decisions regarding what constitutes quality in early education and care (Schilder, Young, Anastasopoulos, Kimura, & Rivera, 2011). These clearly defined standards for quality are the building blocks for continued professionalization of the early education and care field. The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC) is committed to supporting educators as they build their skills, knowledge, and abilities to provide quality care for young children (Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, 2013). This commitment is demonstrated through a variety of initiatives, including providing state and federal funding to design and implement the Peer Assistance and Coaching (PAC) project. This project highlights the significance of coaching as part of professional development. DEEC Commissioner Tom Webber identified the goals of the PAC project as increasing the application of learning to practice; sustaining the cyclical support offered between educational leaders, coaches, and educators; and addressing the needs of a diverse educator population (Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, 2013). It is through statewide commitments like this that the lens of best practice for educators becomes more focused, leading to the strongest educational opportunities for all children.

To ensure that the knowledge and skills of early childhood educators translate into high quality practice and reflect current trends in educational research, professional development coupled with on-site coaching of these educators must take place (Hsieh, Hemmeter, McCollum, & Ostrovsky, 2009; Jablon, Dombro, & Johnsen, 2016; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Zaslow,
Tout, Halle, Whittaker, & Lavelle, 2010; Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, 2013). While this combination is clearly recognized by state and federal policymakers as providing an opportunity to increase the quality of practice, no regulations articulate specific formulas to be used during the coaching process. As a result of this lack of regulation, the coaching format varies greatly. It is important that this variation be addressed through continued research on the methods used during the coaching process. In particular, this research must consider the perspectives of the educators who are receiving the coaching support. Therefore, this study will examine more closely the experiences educators have during the coaching process to provide a valuable contribution towards a deeper understanding of which coaching components educators believe increase the quality of their practice.

This chapter examines the problem of practice and the purpose of the study conducted for this doctoral thesis. The research question, theoretical framework, and overview of the research plan will be presented, along with a discussion of the significance of this study. The chapter will conclude by describing limitations of the study.

**Problem of Practice**

This section provides an overview of the problem of practice, identifying what practice, theory and research will be addressed through this study. An explanation of current practices will be shared and needed enhancements will be addressed. From the federal to the local level, children’s academic progress is being increasingly monitored to ensure students graduate from schools ready for college or work, with the ability to be productive citizens who will ensure a competitive edge for the United States (United States Department of Education, 2014). Increased attention has been placed on the ability of early education and care programs to provide children with high quality learning experiences that will support school readiness as they enter their years
of formal education (NAEYC, 2009; Sheridan et al., 2009). Policymakers are using these school readiness skills to determine quality of care (Sabol, Soliday Hong, Pianta, & Burchinal, 2013). In November 2015 the Alliance for Early Success revised its State Policy Framework to reflect the most current research available that supports young children’s education. Within this Framework, attention was paid to the needs of a competent early childhood workforce, including the use of coaching as part of the educator training process (Alliance for Early Success, 2015).

To ensure this workforce is providing high quality opportunities for children, research must focus on what training is effective for these educators (Schater, 2015). One key element to this research is giving the educators who are participating in training the opportunity to share their experiences and analyze what those experiences say about the quality of training they receive. While coaching is considered a successful tool for enhancing the effectiveness of professional development, more needs to be known about what constitutes effectiveness (Hemmeter, Snyder, Kinder, & Artman, 2011; Schachter, 2015).

As professional development for educators is explored, the process of its delivery must be examined. Professional development must reflect not only pedagogy, which encompasses the methods of teaching, but also andragogy, which explores how learning actually happens among adults (Brown, 2006). Employing coaching in professional development provides an opportunity to bring the pedagogical perspective discussed in lecture formats during professional development to a new level of understanding. This allows the learner to actively incorporate past experiences with new knowledge, thereby making a change in practice more attainable and meaningful. This study used sociocultural learning theory as a framework for the acquisition and meaning making of new knowledge, and its application to practice. The researcher explored the
role of cultural contexts, including personal, educational, and professional experiences, in the learning process of early childhood educators who are being coached.

While a bevy of research has been conducted related to the use of coaching in the early childhood field, the majority of this research is positioned from a leadership approach (Hemmeter et al., 2011; Hsieh et al., 2009; Isner et al., 2011; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009) or is focused primarily on the experiences of coaches (Ackerman, 2008; Gibson, 2011; Smith, Schneider, & Kreader, 2010; Smith, Robbins, Schneider, Kreader, & Ong, 2012). The focus of this study allowed the coaching experiences of early childhood educators to be shared. Careful consideration was given to the cultural contexts of individual educators’ personal experiences, views of the early education and care field, and views of the coaching program they experienced. As noted by Meirnik, Meijer, and Verloop (2007), very few studies have been dedicated to considering the learning processes that educators experience. By adding the unexamined perspectives of educators to the body of research currently available, additional insight will be gained on the impact and effectiveness of the coaching process as it relates to the change of educator practice in early education and care settings.

**Purpose Statement**

Initiatives to improve the quality of early education and care, such as the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), have become priorities for policymakers and educators throughout the country (Isner et al., 2011). This prioritization has spurred a revitalization of research on coaching. Ackerman (2008) studied the use of coaching as part of a pilot Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) initiative. The results of the study demonstrated how significant components such as coach and educator relationships, minimal staff credentials, high turnover rates, and lack of administrative support can impact the success of the coaching process.
Gibson (2011) also offers insight into the coaching process through her study of the effectiveness of using instructional scaffolding as part of coaching conversations. Results from the study indicated that instructional scaffolding demonstrated a more analytical, evidence based approach to problem solving.

Much of the current research is focused on using the coaching process to improve literacy acquisition in early education and care classrooms. Hsieh et al. (2009) studied the coaching process in terms of a clinical supervision model, “which uses a cycle of pre-observation, discussion, observation, and post-observation discussion… [and] emphasizes the collaborative analyses of observation data by teachers and coach” (p. 230). As a result of this coaching intervention, educators found that their teaching strategies for these literacy skills improved and changes in children’s early literacy skills were observed (Hsieh et al., 2009). Neuman and Cunningham (2009) conducted a larger, mixed methods study that examined 304 early education and care programs based in centers and homes throughout Detroit, Michigan. The study found that the combination of coaching and college coursework made no difference in educator knowledge; however, educator practice related to language and literacy was improved more significantly in the group receiving both college coursework and coaching. Shidler’s (2009) longitudinal study examined the impact that college coursework and coaching had on young children’s emergent literacy through the transfer of theory to practice for educators. The study found that college coursework and coaching that took place in the first year improved children’s letter recognition, but such training over the next two and three years led to no statistical changes in children’s learning outcomes.

Hemmeter led another study which examined the effectiveness of integrating technology with coaching (Hemmeter et al., 2011). In this study, participants received 30 minutes of one-on-
one professional development via email and video exemplars related to the use of descriptive praise in the early education and care setting. The study indicated that professional development coupled with email feedback did increase educators’ use of descriptive praise in their classrooms.

A recent report completed by Isner et al. (2011) and submitted to the Children’s Service Council of Palm Beach highlights recommendations for policymakers related to improving the effectiveness of QRIS in conjunction with improving the quality of care provided for young children across the country. It recommended to provide incentives to early childhood educators through formal recognition of their involvement in the coaching process. As noted, the formal collection of these perspectives from early childhood educators is missing from the professional discourse. One incentive for them to contribute their experiences could be professional recognition of the value that their experiences with the coaching process can have in shaping the field of early care and education. Isner et al. (2011) recommend that investments should be made in data collection “that determine which coaching practices are most effective in supporting quality improvement” (p. 35). Formally collecting and synthesizing the personal, educational, and professional experiences of early childhood educators who were involved in the coaching process will offer data that has not been provided in the past. Quality improvements in early education and care settings often rest on the actions of educators in classrooms. With so many children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds entering school ill-prepared for kindergarten and the early education and care field receiving national and statewide attention, it behooves researchers and policymakers to carefully consider educators’ perspectives when assessing the coaching practices that most effectively support quality improvement. The focus of the research taken in this thesis will contribute to closing this gap in current research.
Relating the Discussion to Audiences

By providing a voice for early childhood educators who have experienced the coaching process, researchers and policy makers will be able to gain a clearer understanding of how the coaching process can most effectively be implemented. This study will also empower early childhood educators to voice their needs for high quality coaching in a more articulate and well defined manner. The ultimate goal for all professional development in early education and care is providing higher quality care for young children. With this additional dimension of understanding related to the coaching process, professional development opportunities will be established that best meet the needs of educators and that will be more likely to positively impact the quality of these educators’ practice within early education and care classrooms.

Central Research Question

The research question for this study was: How do early childhood educators teaching in mixed age preschool classrooms in Massachusetts experience the on-site coaching process? The focus of this study was to gather data related to participants’ lived experiences, including the cultural context of their personal lives, their education, and their participation in the coaching process.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of a study considers the concepts, theories, and assumptions that guide the focus of the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As the phenomenon of early childhood educators experiencing the on-site coaching process was examined, it was important to consider what experiences those educators entered into the coaching process with and how learning unfolds for adults. To gain this understanding, the conceptual framework for this study centered on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1986, 1987) and the sociocultural learning theory.
This framework was also enhanced through the examination of literature related to adult learning theory, adult development theory, and career development theory which will be more closely unpacked in chapter two.

The following figure (see Figure 1) illustrates the conceptual framework that supports this study. The key elements are presented within the circle of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural learning theory which includes the consideration of personal experiences, professional experiences, individuals’ education and culture in the establishment of roles, priorities, and tools of importance to individuals’ cultures. The Venn diagram within the circle illustrates the interconnectedness between the adult learning theory, adult development theory and career development theory, with the focal point of the interconnected components centering on the coaching experiences of early childhood educators. Each of these influences shapes who the educators are and how they experience the coaching process. By considering key components within each of these theories, a clearer understanding of the coaching process can be gained.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

![Figure 1: Conceptual Framework](image-url)
This conceptual framework was relevant to the focus of the study because it supported the notion that both coaches and coachees may come to the learning process from very different perspectives, which can influence the coaching experience. While the majority of literature available on the coaching process focuses on the perspectives of coaches, very little attention has been given to the experiences of the educators receiving the coaching. By exploring the experiences of educators using this framework, clarity may be provided in understanding the spectrum of perspectives that educators may hold related to their experiences with the coaching process.

**Vygotsky and Sociocultural Learning Theory**

Lev Vygotsky (1978) is a major contributor to the sociocultural learning theory. Sociocultural learning theory is a branch of general learning theory which emphasizes the social elements of learning as well as the cultural origins and experiences that shape learners’ thinking (Marion, 2007). It is closely linked to Bandura’s social learning theory, with more of an emphasis on the significant influence of learners’ “everyday social contexts and learning that involves changes in participation in activities, settings, or communities” (Gallucci, 2008, p. 547). Sociocultural learning theorists believe that learning takes place as a result of social interactions within a cultural context (Bredekamp, 2011). The relevance of learning is determined by how specific activities and actions are valued by key people in individuals’ social network and culture, and by how much control individuals feel they have over external factors in their cultures (Grusec, 1992; Marion, 2007).

Vygotsky believed that learning happened within two planes, the social plane (interpsychological), related to interactions with others, and the individual plane (intrapsychological), related to the integration of knowledge into an individual’s mental structure
The social plane is mediated by tools, also known as abstract symbols, which are created and given value by the social and cultural influences of the actively involved individual. As the individual is submerged in cultural contexts, these planes are interacting, negotiating, and collaborating to shape the learning, thinking, and knowing that is produced by the learner (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986, 1987) (see Figure 2).

Another of Vygotsky’s significant contributions to sociocultural learning theory was the belief that social and cultural contexts give meaning to the content of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wang, 2007). Two important components of this contribution were the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding, both of which emphasize the important role that social connections have in learning. ZPD is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level (of individuals) and the level of potential development they could achieve with guidance or through interactions with others” (Bredekamp, 2011, p. 113). Scaffolding is the assistance, direction, or guidance others offer a learner that allows the learner to achieve another level of
thinking (Bredekamp, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). It is through the social and cultural construction of knowledge that individuals are able to solve problems and construct understanding (Vygotsky, 1978; Wang, 2007).

Another key element of this theory is the role that modeling plays in applying new knowledge to gain a deeper understanding of the content. Bandura (1986), a leader in social learning theory, identified four levels of learning that take place as an individual is involved with modeling. The first level requires the learner to closely observe the actions being modeled. The second level challenges the learner to retain the information that was observed. In the third level, the learner’s memory of the action modeled must be converted into action that is similar to what was modeled. In the final step, the learner must be adequately motivated to perform the modeled action. The performance of the modeled action demonstrates a change in action and knowledge that connects, possibly in a new way, with the context of their culture (Marion, 2007). For modeling to be effective and built in authentic ways, individuals’ cognition and learning must be viewed within the context of their social relationships, their communities, and their culture (Wang, 2007).

Gallucci, DeVoogt, Lare, Yoon, and Boatright (2010) employed this theoretical perspective as they analyzed the professional development of coaches. They state that sociocultural theory “describes learning and change as the internalization and transformation of cultural tools that occur as individuals participate in social practice” (p. 925). In this study, the findings supported the “unevenness of development” that adult learners experience. The findings also highlight “how individual actions and organizational structures in both public and private spheres interact to facilitate professional learning” (p. 948). By connecting with the perspectives of early childhood educators related to their public and private thoughts and experiences with the
coaching process and investigating the theoretical perspectives of adult learning, adult
development and career development, a more thorough understanding of the transformation of
learning can be gained.

**Overview of Research Plan**

The focus of this research was to explore how early childhood educators teaching in
mixed age preschool classrooms in Massachusetts experience the on-site coaching process. To
effectively explore this research focus, the narrative approach was employed. This qualitative
approach was best suited for this study because it allowed the shared lived experiences of a
group of people to be more closely examined.

Ten participants were interviewed twice using semi-structured interview questions
designed to consider the cultural context of participants’ life experiences, their views of the early
education and care field, their experiences with the coaching process, as well as their reflections
on the meaning of the coaching experience (Seidman, 2006). Open coding of interview
transcripts was completed using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software
(CAQDAS) program MAXQDA 10. In vivo and descriptive coding was used and an inductive
process was employed for data analysis. Member checks were conducted to verify the meaning
assigned to the coding. Ultimately, five conclusions were derived from the educators’ shared
perspectives. Chapter Three describes this process in more detail.

**Significance of Study**

Children’s learning opportunities are closely linked to their families’ socioeconomic
status, level of education, culture or race, home language, and the neighborhoods and
communities in which they are raised (Hanson et al., 2011). Children from families living in
disadvantaged socioeconomic environments frequently struggle with school readiness, often
entering elementary school with a learning gap that will place them as much as six months behind their more advantaged peers (Magnuson & Shager, 2010). Educators in early education and care programs providing care for these young children hold the key to narrowing this gap, so quality professional development is imperative. This study is significant because it brings to light the perspectives of educators experiencing the coaching process and helps add another dimension of effectiveness to this method of professional development.

As child poverty rates increase (Magnuson & Shager, 2010), it is imperative that early childhood educators receive the most effective professional development opportunities through appropriate coursework in early childhood education, including on-site coaching that reflects the highest, most relevant level of learning possible. Neuman and Cunningham (2009) acknowledge that there is “importance [in] connecting content and context to professional development” (p. 537). The knowledge educators’ gain and the context in which they use this knowledge is an important key to providing high quality early education and care programs for young children and building the foundations for children’s success in learning throughout their lives. Snyder et al. (2012) note that “if practice with individualized feedback mediates change in practice, then we need to understand more about how these active ingredients were implemented, with whom, and under what circumstances” (p. 190). By exploring the experiences of early childhood educators receiving on-site coaching, policymakers will be able to more fully understand how coaching can be implemented more effectively.

**Limitations**

This study focused on the lived experiences of ten early childhood educators from Massachusetts who worked in mixed age preschool classrooms and experienced on-site educational coaching. Limitations that must be considered with this participant sample include
the narrow scope of criteria that was used to gather participants as well as the small sample size. This narrow scope and limited number of participants may not reflect the varied coaching experiences of educators.

Often the coaching process will involve designing specific supports that assist educators as they make changes to their classroom environments and/or curriculum to meet the state regulations governing the early education and care field. This study focused on center-based early education and care programs in Massachusetts. Thus, the study findings do not include family childcare providers and may not be generalizable to early education and care programs outside Massachusetts.

As a qualitative study which focused on the participants’ shared stories of their lived experiences with coaching, several issues created limitations. First, the comfort level between the participants and the researcher may have impacted the willingness of the participants to share detailed personal information about their experiences. Also, the foundation of this study was based only on participants’ responses to interview questions and not on evidence based documents. This may limit the validity of the findings. Finally, by its very nature, a qualitative study provides the opportunity for interpretation by both participants and the researcher; other interpretations may be possible.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the focus and purpose of this study. An introduction to the topic, the problem of practice, and a purpose statement were presented. The central research question was identified and an overview of the research plan, theoretical framework, and significance of the study were presented, followed by the study limitations. The
next chapter reviews the scholarly literature that represents the most relevant research on the topics of coaching, adult learning, adult development and career development.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study focused on the shared experiences that early childhood educators had with educational coaching. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of key literature that has shaped the educational coaching field. The chapter begins with an introduction and overview of the concept of educational coaching in current research, followed by a review of research related to adult learning, adult development, and career development. This chapter will also consider the gaps in literature related to educational coaching practice and provide a summary of key points.

The primary conceptual framework used for the investigation and interpretation of findings for this study was directly connected to the work of Vygotsky (1978) as related to the sociocultural learning theory. This framework emphasizes the social elements of learning, while considering the cultural origins and experiences that shape individuals’ learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The effectiveness of learning is determined by how specific activities and actions are valued by key people in the social network and culture of individuals and how much control they feel they have over external factors in their culture (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986; 1987). By considering specific elements of the adult learning, adult development, and career development theory, light was shed on these cultural contexts.

The review of literature for this study focused on four components: coaching, adult learning, adult development, and career development. These four components together encapsulate the complete context of this study which is to understand the perspectives of early childhood educators who have experienced the on-site coaching process. To gain this perspective, it was imperative to recognize how those educators were positioned in terms of the
coaching process, the adult learning and development perspective, as well as within their careers. By understanding these varied perspectives, a clearer sense of their experiences was gained.

The primary component for this review of literature is the coaching process. To fully understand this study, the coaching process had to be thoroughly examined. This examination considered the definition of coaching as well as the types of coaching available to educators. This literature review also explored the differences between the concepts of coaching and mentoring, which are often considered interchangeable. The design of the coaching process, specifically as it pertained to the early education and care field, was also examined and linked to current research in the field.

To gain a deeper understanding of how adults experience life events, it is crucial to examine adult learning theory, adult development theory and career development theory. These theoretical underpinnings assisted with the structure of the narrative study and helped connect it to sociocultural learning theory, which is a branch of adult learning theory. Figure 3 presents an outline of the sequence of this literature review.
Figure 3: Sequence of literature review.

Coaching

The first step in this study of the coaching process as a phenomenon was to examine the background and variety of forms of coaching available for professional development methodologies. Literature was reviewed from a variety of sources including recently published empirical studies and professional development literature focused on the early childhood field. Attention was also paid to literature that synthesized definitions for coaching, and detailed the differences between coaching and mentoring, to clarify the focus of this study. Finally, the design of the coaching process was explored by synthesizing current research related to the coaching process. Though the coaching process may have a variety of variables, such as the skills of the coach, the needs of the educator, or the focus of the coaching initiative, there are some standard frameworks that emerged from the literature on which comprehensive coaching programs can be designed.
Defining Coaching

Until recently, there was no field-wide accepted definition of coaching (Artman-Meeker, Fettig, Barton, Penney, & Zeng, 2015). Much of the research described coaching in ways that were vague and somewhat confusing, with many suggestions on practice but little definitive direction (Blachowicz, Fogelberg, & Obrochta, 2005; Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutler, 2003; Gibson, 2011; Smith, 2006; Tung, Ouimette, & Feldman, 2004; Zaslow et al., 2010). Two organizations in the early childhood field collaborated to clearly define the coaching process. The first organization, The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), is considered the leading professional organization for the field of early education and care. The second organization, the National Association of Childcare Resources and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), is the leading advocacy organization representing the early childhood field. Together the organizations produced a definition for coaching that they felt defined “the current best practice and ideals for training and technical assistance...developed for those who provide professional development, state policy makers, early education advocates, and program administrators” (NAEYC & NACCRRA, 2011, p. 3). This formal definition is as follows:

Coaching is a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal-setting and achievement for an individual or group. (NAEYC & NACCRRA, 2011, p. 11)

The coaching process is an opportunity to empower educators to integrate new knowledge into practice to improve the quality of care they provide to young children and their families.
(Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Thomas & Smith, 2009). Beginning with a rich, well-researched definition can set the course for successful coaching initiatives.

Coaching can be presented with variation in focus, duration and setting (Aikens & Akers, 2011; Segers, Vloeberghs, Hendrickx, & Inceoglu, 2011). In their research on coaching design, Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, and Autio (2007) identified five different categories of educational coaching, each having a specific focus. Data-oriented coaching focuses coaching efforts on synthesizing data and assessment and supporting educators to make connections between this data and their instruction. Student-oriented coaching focuses the coaches’ work primarily on student interactions rather than teacher needs. Managerial coaching focuses on managing systems within schools, such as facilitating meetings and completing paperwork. Teacher-oriented coaching focuses solely on supporting professional development for educators, either individually or in small groups. Directive coaching requires the coach to “play the role of an expert, identifying a teacher’s specific area of weakness or helping teachers implement a program with specific practices” (Deussen et al., 2007, p. 5).

Instructional coaching is another widely researched form of coaching. This method of coaching supports educators’ ability to “assess what they can do to support children’s learning, …plan meaningful curriculum, and build their capacity to use child and classroom data” (Skiffington, Washburn, & Elliot, 2011, p. 12). Research has shown that a key component of instructional coaching is that coaches take on non-supervisory roles, ensuring that the coaching experience is not influenced by supervisory power, but instead is based on relationships and shared expertise. (Gallucci et al., 2010; Skiffington et al., 2011; Taylor, 2008).

Two types of coaching were identified in research conducted by Killion, Harrison, Bryan, and Clifton (2012). Consultative coaching provides educators with technical assistance regarding
instructional strategies, curriculum procedures, or implementation of standards. Collaborative coaching, at times used interchangeably with reflective or cognitive coaching (Batt, 2010), requires the coach and educator to work together to consider practice from the lens of self-reflection combined with data specific to outcomes. A study conducted by Fox, Hemmeter, Snyder, Binder, and Clarke (2011) described performance based coaching as focusing on feedback to educators based on data collected during observation related to a specific practice.

It is critical to recognize that regardless of the form that coaching takes, there must be clearly designed methods for its implementation. Coaching is always practitioner based, with some form of on-site support available for practitioners to use (Skiffington et al., 2011; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina, 2010). Many studies have identified defining elements of coaching and have provided detailed narratives on the forms that coaching can take. Table 1 provides summaries and insights from the key literature regarding these various forms of coaching.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Insights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aikens and Akers (2011)</td>
<td>Literature review synthesizing studies that link coaching and specific coaching models with outcomes for classrooms, educators, and children.</td>
<td>Coaching models vary with respect to focus, duration, and setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artman-Meeker et al. (2015)</td>
<td>A study of literature to identify commonalities within coaching strategies and what supports coaches need to implement these strategies.</td>
<td>Coaching enhances the fidelity and on-going implementation of evidence-based practices. Noted the lack of a consensus on definition of coaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batt (2010)</td>
<td>The focus of the research was to monitor the effectiveness of specified training and assess the value of cognitive</td>
<td>Workshop style of professional development is less effective without the implementation of a coaching phase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deussen et al. (2007)</td>
<td>A multi state study that differentiated five categories of coaching and examined how coaches work within those categories.</td>
<td>Clear coaching practices must be identified and closely matched to the desired outcomes when establishing a coaching initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Examines the relationship between training and coaching and the implementation of new practices.</td>
<td>Dosage of instructional coaching varies depending on the complexity of the framework of the coaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killion et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Identifies tools in used to support coaching initiatives.</td>
<td>When deciding on a coaching model, consider the intent of the coaching, the desired results expected, who sets the criteria for the results, and who is responsible for which of the coaching tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAEYC and NACCRA, (2011)</td>
<td>Training and technical assistance glossary compiled by the two leading early childhood professional organizations.</td>
<td>Clearly defines the coaching process and supports the definition with characteristics of coaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segers et al.(2011)</td>
<td>Provides an overview of the dimensions of coaching: characteristics of coaches, types of coaching, and coaching agendas.</td>
<td>Differentiates between three different coaching models, with supportive current research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiffington et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Provides concise insight into practices that can strengthen coaching initiatives.</td>
<td>Shares experiences from coaches and educators who took part in Early Reading First project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walpole et al. (2010)</td>
<td>Research targeted at establishing observation protocols for teaching and coaching.</td>
<td>Three coaching commonalities were determined: collaborations with teachers, coaching supported differentiation in educator practice, and leadership support had to be in place.</td>
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</table>
Coaching versus Mentoring

At times the coaching process and the mentoring experience are mistakenly used interchangeably (Isner et al., 2011; Stowers & Barker, 2010). Key differences between coaching and mentoring are the qualifications and the professional positions held by the individuals in either the coaching or the mentoring roles. Coaches are considered experts in the field in which they are coaching, often possessing a bachelor’s or master’s degree in early childhood education or a related field (Ackerman, 2008; Isner et al., 2011; NAEYC & NACCRRA, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Tout, Isner, & Zaslow, 2011). Coaches also do not typically hold the same professional role as the individuals they are coaching. In a different vein, mentoring is defined as:

A relationship based process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more experienced individual with adult learning knowledge and skills, the mentor, providing guidance and example to the less experienced protégé or mentee. Mentoring is intended to increase an individual’s personal or professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness. (NAEYC & NACCRRA, 2011, p. 10)

In the mentoring experience, mentors typically are chosen by their protégés within their shared professional roles. The mentoring experience is viewed as more collegial, with mentors making the “less experienced teachers feel safe to make mistakes, study themselves, and share learning with each other to create excellence in their delivery” (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008, p. 21). Stowers and Barker (2010) note that “where the focus of the coaching relationship is on the professional needs of the less experienced person, the focusing of the mentoring relationship traditionally has been the information and advice that a more experienced (educator) can impart to a lesser experienced person” (p. 365).
The Design of the Coaching Process

While many studies noted the lack of regulations and consistency in the implementation of the coaching process (Blachowicz et al., 2005; Gibson, 2011; Smith, 2006; Tung et al., 2004; Zaslow et al., 2010), the majority of research reviewed for this study presented similarities in both the characteristics needed for quality coaches as well as the process for effective coaching. The following review of literature uses the coaching framework created by White, Howell Smith, Kunz, and Nugent (2015) to outline the characteristics of quality coaching as well as to outline the process for coaching that is most commonly employed throughout a variety of coaching studies. An overview of this framework along with supporting research is offered in Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching Characteristic</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Stages of the Coaching Process</th>
<th>Research</th>
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<td>McGatha, (2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>Reference(s)</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual respect</td>
<td>Bransfield, Holt, and Nastasi (2007)</td>
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Research suggests that there are characteristics that individuals taking on the coaching role should possess. It has been noted in several studies (Rivera et al., 2004; Sailors & Price, 2014; Tout et al., 2011) that the credibility of the coach plays a significant role in how confident educators are in the coaching process, even before it begins. Research completed by Tout et al. (2011) and Sailors and Price (2014) articulate the notion that educators are specifically looking to their coaches to be highly qualified, with a higher level of education than those receiving the coaching. While credibility is vital, it is recognized that coaches do not have to have expertise in all areas that they will be coaching. They must, however, have the necessary knowledge of the resources needed to support the coaching process (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Feger, Woleck, & Hickman, 2004).

Coaches must enter into the coaching role with the credibility of lived experiences in the field of education (Campbell & Malkus, 2011; Gibson, 2011). With the primary role of coaches being to support the professional growth of educators, leading to improved practice and stronger child outcome (Obara, 2010), coaches must understand the nuances of the role of the educator including knowledge of pedagogical practices, curriculum development, classroom management,
and child growth and development (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Ferger et al., 2004; Gibson, 2011).

Coaching has resulted in more success when it is viewed as a partnership between the educator and the coach that allows for the educator’s needs to be met (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Rivera et al., 2004; Schachter, 2015; Sugar, 2005; West & Staub, 2003). This partnership often develops as a result of coaches’ rapport with the educators they are working with. This rapport is built on strong interpersonal and communication skills (Borman & Feger, 2006; Ferger et al., 2004; Killion & Harrison, 2005; Schachter, 2015). Relationship building and effective communication in the coaching practice relies on several key components: positive feedback, building rapport, mutual respect, and reciprocal trust (White et al., 2015). Positive feedback involves sharing thoughts on observed actions in a manner that is focused on the strengths of the individual, while also providing information on how to continue to improve practice. It was noted (Sailors & Price, 2010; Schatcher, 2015) that individualized feedback received during the coaching process has the potential to be more meaningful in changing practice than any other method of professional development. Rapport within the coaching process can be sabotaged if there is not clarity regarding roles within the coaching relationship (Borman & Feger, 2003; Ertmer et al., 2003). This lack of clarity can especially impact the relationships between experienced educators and coaches, causing loss of credibility, lack of trust, and possibly loss of respect for the coach and the coaching process.

Trust and respect are also key characteristics in successful coaching relationships. Bransfield, Holt, and Nastasi (2007) identify the relationship between the coach and educator as that of being “critical friends” (p. 50). The respect and trust within the relationship should be reciprocal, paying close attention to potential contributions made by both the coach and the
educator, feelings about competency between coach and educator, as well as trust in the coaching process (Obara, 2010; Sailors & Price, 2014). Coaches and educators should work collaboratively to establish goals. This will allow a shared alliance to be formed and a true partnership to blossom (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Neuman & Cunningham, 2011; Rivera et al., 2004). To ensure trust and respect within the relationship, coaching should be a non-evaluative role (Ertmer et al., 2004; Gallucci et al., 2010; Skiffington et al., 2011; Taylor & Moxley, 2008). These characteristics will allow the strongest coaching experience to take place, with positive change of practice and improved child outcomes the ultimate goal.

**Stages of the Coaching Process**

The components of effective coaching have been developed as a result of findings from a variety of key studies (Ackerman, 2008; Aikens & Akers, 2011; Isner et al., 2011; Sheridan et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2012; White et al., 2015). This cyclical process of coaching has many stages that are identified throughout the coaching literature. While not every stage is employed in each coaching initiative, the following compilation reflects the stages that are most often referred to in research.

As the coaching process is initiated, the coach and the educator must take time to jointly establish the coaching plan. This coaching plan should include the focused establishment of goals and joint planning for the direction of future coaching sessions (Hsieh et al., 2009; McGatha, 2008; Powell et al., 2010). Research synthesized by Tout et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of having coaches and educators come together to set joint goals that are clearly linked to quality improvements in practice. The intentionality of the joint planning time must be considered by both the coach and the educator.
Action and practice must be considered as the next steps in the coaching process. During this stage, research shows the importance of modeling and observation to the improvement of educators’ practice (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Collet, 2012; Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Driscoll, 2008; Feighan & Heeren, 2010; Nidus & Sadder, 2009). Observations are conducted by coaches while educators are implementing new skills or sets of practices that have been mutually determined in advance. Repeatedly, research identified observation as a component that must be required in all coaching initiatives (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Collet, 2012; Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Driscoll, 2008; Feighan & Heeren, 2010; Fox et al., 2011; Nidus & Sadder, 2011. Artman-Meeker et al. (2015) speak to the modeling process and underscore the importance of having the coach model specific skills during the coaching session. When modeling or observation is not able to occur face to face between the coach and the educator, they can take place remotely using technology resources (Allen et al., 2011; Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Powell et al., 2010; Schachter, 2015; Rose, 2010). Artman-Meeker et al. (2015) support this assertion, noting that their findings found “effective coaching can occur live in the educator’s classroom, via the internet” (p. 187). As modeling and observations come to a close, time must be provided for both the coach and the educator to reflect, individually, (Roelofs, Raemaekers, & Veenman, 1991), so that the experience can be processed.

Feedback is the final stage in coaching before the process is repeated. In the feedback session, reflective discussions and joint planning take place. Feedback on performance plays a key role in improved practice (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Conroy et al., 2014; Hsieh et al., 2009). While feedback to educators typically centers around the skills or practice the coach observed the educator implementing, Gibson (2011) challenges that feedback should be based on
a review of the “student responses to instruction rather than arising from the coach’s admonitions or evaluative statements” (p. 18).

Feedback should be provided during a determined period of reflective discussion. During this prearranged session a back and forth critique of practice should take place between the coach and the educator that includes reflection on practice as well as problem solving when challenges emerge (Hsieh et al., 2009; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Intentional and well thought out questions initiated by the coach during this feedback session have been shown to have the ability to transform educators’ thinking and practice (Archon, 2008; McGatha, 2008; Feger et al., 2004; Rock et al., 2009; Tout et al., 2015). As feedback continues, consideration should be given to how data is shared and a review of the coaching plan should take place (Hsieh et al., 2009; Fox et al., 2011). The joint planning session allows this to occur. As information from the coaching session is reviewed, the coach and educator work collaboratively to decide the future of the coaching process, which may include cycling back to the action and practice stage or mutually agreeing that goals were achieved and the coaching process will come to an end (Hsieh et al., 2009). The complete cycle for the coaching process is offered in Figure 4.
Figure 4: Cycle of coaching process (Hsieh et al., 2009).

Jablon, Dombro, and Johnsen (2016) provide a guide for coaching specific to the field of early education and care. They examined the nuances of the coaching process that they consider to be best practices, including five principles of coaching with powerful interactions. The first principle examines the importance of strength based coaching that highlights the competencies that educators possess. The second principle recognizes the power of coaches sharing observations with educators. Observations should be shared in a manner that promotes the use of new information in intentional ways. The third principle speaks to the importance of individualizing supports provided to educators so that “respectful, trusting relationships needed for learning” (Jablon et al., 2016, p. vi) take place. Principle four considers the importance of a learning partnership between coaches and educators that promotes shared responsibility and
accountability. The final principle identifies the importance of modeling to successful coaching initiatives. These principles lay an important foundation for quality coaching practices.

This section of the literature review focused on the nuances of the coaching process. A detailed description was offered, coaching and mentoring were distinguished, and the stages of the coaching process were outlined. This review will now move forward to examine the context of adult learning. When designing coaching initiatives, close attention must be paid to the specific needs adults have as they acquire new information and put that information into practice.

**Adult Learning and Development**

Extensive research has been conducted regarding the impact that professional development opportunities can have on the quality of practice in early childhood classrooms (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Piasta et al., 2012; Sheridan et al., 2009). This section considers the theoretical underpinnings that ensure that adult learning needs are met in meaningful and impactful ways when professional development opportunities, specifically coaching initiatives, are designed for early childhood educators.

Adult learning theories and adult development theories are interrelated in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this study each of the theories will be addressed independently. Two constructivist perspectives of adult learning theory will be highlighted within this literature review, focusing specifically on andragogy and experiential adult learning theory. With the ultimate goal of the coaching process being the improvement of practice for educators, adult development theory will help guide what must happen during the coaching process to ensure educators remain productive members of the early childhood field throughout their careers.
Adult Learning

Adult learning theories provide the insight needed to ensure that professional development opportunities truly meet the needs of participating educators. It is important to recognize that no one theory meets the needs of all adult learners. What is known is that adult learners do need to engage in a variety of experiences that “lead to changes in thinking, values, and behaviors” (Brown, 2006, p. 706). For the purpose of this study, literature related to Knowles’ (1975) adult learning theory, specifically with a focus on the concept of andragogy, and Kolb’s (1984) experiential adult learning theory will be reviewed.

Andragogy. The concept of coaching in the field of education lends itself to the tenets of andragogy. The very nature of coaching encourages the individuals being coached to unlock their potential and “maximize their own performance…helping them to learn rather than teaching them” (Whitmore, 2003, p. 8). Joyce and Showers (2002) further support this ideology, noting that “effective training systems develop a ‘learning to learn’ aptitude” (p. 77). Andragogy is perfectly suited to provide the theoretical support needed to strengthen the field of coaching, with Knowles (1975) recognizing the need to support individuals as they come to recognize the competencies needed for their own professional growth.

The term andragogy is defined as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). Knowles (1990) distinguished andragogy from pedagogy, which is defined as “the art and science of teaching children” (p. 28). He viewed pedagogy as being adult centered, with the teacher directing the learning for the children. Andragogy allows the power of learning to be held by the adult learners, with the educators acting as guides in their learning (Knowles, 1979). This delineation helped to highlight the uniqueness of adult learners and was key to gaining insight into the notion of coaching.
Andragogy has six underlying assumptions that describe adult learners: (a) learning must be related to meaningful problems in the learner’s world; (b) self-concept is independent, with the direction of learning being led by the learner; (c) lived experiences provide a vast resource for learning; (d) social roles guide learning; (e) learning is problem centered, with a focus on immediate application of new knowledge; (f) learning is internally driven based on the given circumstances (Knowles, 1970, 1984; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). It is of value for coaches to consider these assumptions prior to working with educators so that the design of the coaching process can be respectful of their interests and problems, and meaningful to their current circumstances.

While there are supporters of andragogy (Davenport & Davenport, 1985; Merriam, 2001) who recognize the positive impact it has had on adult learning, some research questions the validity of the concept of andragogy due to the elusiveness of its operational definition (Cross, 1981; Davenport & Davenport, 1985; Houle, 1996; Pratt, 1993; Rachal, 2002). Three significant concerns have emerged from the elusiveness of the definition (Merriam, 2001; Rachal, 2002). The first concern is that “the art of andragogy may dominate over the science” of the concept (Rachal, 2002, p. 212). Debate about this issue has taken on a wider, global audience (Henschke, 1998; Savicevic, 1998) with education leaders throughout the world asking the question of whether andragogy is an “application of psychological and sociological knowledge or a science of adult education” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6).

The second concern with andragogy addresses the relationship between the assumptions of andragogy and the needs and interests of the learners. Debate has emerged over the direction of learning and the ownership of the goals to be shared in learning (Brookfield, 1986; Houle, 1996). Brookfield (1986) noted that some knowledge must be imparted from the teacher. Some
also argue that this method of shared learning is not uniquely found in adult education, but may also apply to work with children (Rachal, 2002).

Finally, the third concern relates to the “paradigm devolution” (Rachal, 2002, p. 212). Critics note that individuals facilitating learning may not fulfill all of the assumptions of andragogy, falling short of the idealized view (Brookfield, 1986). For example, Rachal’s (2002) research examines empirical studies’ use of the assumptions of andragogy and concluded that many of the studies fell short of the fidelity of implementation, thus validating the aforementioned concerns.

Though somewhat controversial, the concept of andragogy has maintained its longevity as a valid concept in the world of adult learning. As Knowles, Holton, and Elwood (2015) continue to unapologetically refine andragogy, the validity of the assumptions will continue to shape adult education. The focus of literature related to adult learning will now shift to Kolb’s experiential adult learning theory.

**Experiential adult learning theory.** Kolb’s experiential adult learning theory is built on the foundation of research by Dewey and Lewin (Taylor & Wozniak, 1996). Dewey’s (1997) research supported the importance of experiential learning in higher education, recognizing the importance of connecting academic learning to application in practice. Dewey’s model of learning was used as the framework for Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). Kolb’s (1984) model of learning involved a cyclical process that incorporates the use of impulse, observation, knowledge, and judgment repeatedly until all new information is embedded as knowledge for the learner.

Lewin (1946) was best known for his work in field theory, which is defined as the “possibility to understand, predict, and provide the basis for changing the behavior of individuals
and groups ‘life space’ comprising the psychological forces influencing their behavior at any given time” (as cited in Burnes & Cooke, 2013, p. 409). Lewin (1946) believed that behavior of individuals was a response to their environment, noting that the tension caused by this reaction supported efforts towards goal achievement (Wheeler, 2008). Lewin (1946) developed a model of action research which included four stages: concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and testing implications of concepts in new situations. This model relied heavily on concrete experiences and feedback, which are important components of Kolb’s experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb (1984) held strong to the idea that there were two factors to learning: acquiring an experience, which is on one end of the transformative spectrum, and transforming that experience into knowledge (Kolb, 1984; Schellhase, 2006). Within his theory, Kolb identified four separate learning styles based on a four-stage learning cycle (see Figure 5). Each of these components supported the idea that all individuals have their own unique style in which they experience learning and the best learning incorporates all four stages, regardless of where in the learning cycle individuals begin (Kolb, 1984).
Figure 5: Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle and learning stages.

The learning cycle articulated in Kolb’s experiential learning theory closely relates to the experiences individuals have as they participate in the coaching process. The following provides an overview of Kolb’s learning cycle and describes how each of the stages of the cycle is supported during the coaching process.

- Concrete experience. Intentional experiences designed to support learning specific information (Kolb, 1984). Coaching supports this type of learning in several ways. First coaches and educators establish goals, which focus on gaining new skills or implementing new practice. Opportunities for educators to implement these new skills or practices are provided as the coaches observe the educators in their classrooms.
- Reflective observation. Information is processed as the individual takes in the new information and thinks about it (Kolb, 1984). Educators have the opportunity to observe new skills or practices being modeled by coaches or other qualified individuals, and then are provided with the time to reflect on what they observed both independently and together with coaches.

- Abstract conceptualization. New ideas or theories are created to explain what individuals observed (Kolb, 1984). During the reflective feedback session of the coaching process, coaches and educators make meaning of what was observed. This is a joint process that requires careful, intentional questioning on the part of coaches and reflective thinking on the part of educators.

- Active experimentation. The new theories or ideas that were created are put to use to solve problems (Kolb, 1984). As the cycle of coaching continues, educators have the opportunity to be implementing new skills or practices that have been learned as a result of the reflective feedback and action planning sessions. The goal of this implementation is to see problems solved and increased effectiveness in teaching practices.

Kolb’s experiential learning cycle espouses that learners move through all four modes of learning which include concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). All modes of the learning cycle must be completed for new knowledge to be most effective. The cycle is built on the premise that knowledge is constantly being built upon by new experiences and new thinking (Kolb, 1984). Learners can enter into the learning cycle in any of the modes.
While it is important to consider the learning cycle itself, how individuals experience this cycle is of equal value. The learning styles that Kolb (1984) identifies are keys to understanding the individuality of adult learners. Kolb (1984, 1999) identifies four learning styles: diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating. Diverging learners are able to take many points of view or consider many perspectives as they learn new information. Assimilating learners are logical thinkers and can synthesize information into clear, concise points. Converging learners are able to put new, relevant ideas to work in their practice with relative ease. Finally, accommodating learners require hands on experiences to make meaning of new information and can appreciate a new and exciting challenge. It is critical that as coaching is considered, accommodations are made for the style of learning that educators bring to the coaching process so the experience can hold the highest level of value for educators.

Much research has been done to expand experiential learning theory since its inception (Hickcox, 1991; Holman, Pavlica, & Thorpe, 1997; Hopkins, 1993; Kayes, 2002; Vince, 1998). As a result of the interdisciplinary transferability of the theory, research conducted by Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis (2001) noted the variety of fields researching this theory, including education, management, psychology, nursing, and medicine. A strong focus for research related to the theory is in the area of assessing learning styles. Kolb designed the learning style inventory (LSI) to assist individuals in assessing their own learning based on the four learning styles (Kolb, 1984, 1999). Research conducted by Hunt (1987) challenges the notion that only four learning styles exist. Hunt identified four additional learning styles he identifies as Northerner, Easterner, Southerner, and Westerner. He also makes a claim for the importance of “linking educational experiences to the learner’s interests to kindle intrinsic motivation and increase learning effectiveness” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 209). Additional research has been
conducted by Mainemelis, Boyatzis, and Kolb (2002) to strengthen the learning styles by recognizing the need to look at how individuals balance the learning styles. According to their study, this balancing of learning represents flexibility and adaptive thinking, which supports ease with learning.

The experiential learning theory and andragogy both support a deeper understanding of the coaching process by considering the needs and cycle of learning for adult learners. By considering the mode of delivery and the individuals receiving the training, the effectiveness of professional development opportunities such as coaching can be strengthened. The theory of experiential learning and the concept of andragogy place value on the prior knowledge, experiences, and needs of learners, strengthening the field of adult learning theory. This literature review will now consider the perspective of adult development theories, carefully considering how stage of life and role within that stage can impact the way individuals perceive themselves within their families, communities, occupations, and ultimately as a member of society as a whole.

**Adult Development**

Adult development theory is defined as “the development that occurs over the course of a person’s lifetime with greater focus on the adult years” (Rice, 2015, p. 13). Adult development theories can be sorted into two categories: stage/structural theories founded in the work of Piaget and life-cycle theories based on work by Erikson. Piaget’s research relied more heavily on cognitive maturation as the basis for development. Though Piaget’s work focuses more on birth through late adolescence, Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1958) identified four stages of cognitive development that individuals must acquire as they pass from childhood into adulthood. Erikson identified stages of life that are clearly defined by age and passed through in a linear manner.
Theories based on Erikson’s research are influenced by biological, psychological, and social changes (Erikson, 1950, 1959, 1968; Lerner, 2002).

The Piagetian model of adult development holds true to the cognitive perspectives. One influential researcher from this school is Loevinger (1976), whose theory of ego development identifies maturation as changes in the ability to control impulses, developing interpersonal relationships, and being preoccupied with more advanced consciousness or thoughts (McAdams, 2006). For development to take place, each advancement towards maturation must be mastered before individuals can move ahead. Mastery takes place as individuals live life, experiencing new circumstances and facing new challenges (Loevinger, 1976).

Understanding the Eriksonian model of adult development requires a shift from the cognitive perspective espoused by Piaget and his followers to the psychosocial perspective. Significant research on life-cycle adult development theory has taken place to expand Erikson’s initial theories and to place specific focus on the adult years of development (Goffman, 1959; Levinson, 1986a; Nuegarten, 1976; Sheehy, 1978; Valliant, 1993). Research conducted by Neugarten (1976) led to the development of the social clock theory. This theory posits that each culture is guided by an unspoken social clock that determines the timeframe for life events. When this timeframe is not followed, individuals experience stress that can be self-induced or brought on by environmental factors such as family, society, or culture.

Sheehy (1978) identified four periods of crisis, identified as passages, throughout adulthood: pulling up roots, the trying twenties, passage to the thirties and the deadline decade. In later research, Sheehy (1995) realigned the periods of crisis in adulthood she had originally coined. These updates include changes to the time periods and names, referring now to
provisional adulthood from eighteen to thirty, first adulthood from thirty to forty-five, second adulthood forty-five to seventy-five, and third adulthood from seventy-five on.

Levinson (1986a), a leader in adult development theory, stated that “life structure is a pattern of relationships between the self and the world” (p. 12). This belief in the interconnectedness between self and the world is at the crux of his theoretical perspective. Noted for his studies on the life cycle of men (Levinson, 1986b) and the life cycle of women (Levinson et al., 1996), Levinson (1986a) focused much attention on the concepts of life course and life cycle, individual life structure, and the conception of adult development. Life course considers the complexities of life -- internal thoughts and aspirations, relationships with others, role in the environment -- as it progresses from birth to death (Levinson, 1986a). Life cycle, as defined by Levinson (1986a), refers to the order that all individuals experience as they progress through life, often referred to as the seasons of life. The stages of life are not considered in a hierarchical manner; each stage is its own individual period of time linked together by “complexity, order, and chaos” (Levinson, 1986a, p. 10). Finally, individual life structure examines personality and the impact of the environment and is noted to be different for all individuals.

Aspects of adult development theory, specifically the work of Levinson, are consistent with both the narrative research method and the sociocultural theoretical framework used in this study as the consideration personal experiences of the individuals taking part in the coaching process are measured against their experiences with the coaching process. It is also in alignment with the purpose of this study, which is to gain a deeper understanding of how coaching impacts early childhood educators. Coaches would benefit from considering the stage in life that educators are in and the environmental pressures that may be weighing heavily on them. They
may also want to consider supporting the reflective process for educators, encouraging them to identify their views, understanding, and place within their own development.

As educators reflect on their learning and life development with coaches during the coaching process, it is vital to consider the thoughts and feelings they have about their occupational position. The next section of the literature review examines career development theory. This body of research will add to the understanding that educators and coaches have about the career choices made. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of what influences career choices.

**Career Development**

The psychology of career development is significant to the understanding of the research that informs this study. Through careful examination of the research and literature presented on the topic of career development and its theories, more insight can be gained into the experiences early childhood educators have shared. It is the hope of the researcher that understanding occupational choice in light of self-efficacy, personality, environment, and life-cycle will provide a clearer understanding of those lived experiences. Several key developmental theories will be examined: social cognitive career theory, which is strongly rooted in Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, Krumboltz’s (1996) social learning theory, and Super’s (1990) self-concept theory of career development. The framework of sociocultural learning theory guided this research because of the close connection that environment, including the cultures of home, school, and work, has to personality, learning, and occupational choices. This naturally suits the selection of the career development theories explored for this review.
Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) has strong roots in Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory, with self-efficacy a significant component of both theories. Bandura (1997) focused on the notion that individuals are not solely controlled by their environments and what happens within those environments, and they also do not have complete free will. Rather, there is interplay between the impact people have on their environment and the impact their environment has on them. This symbiotic relationship is in constant flux. Bandura’s work was extended through the career development research of Lent, Brown, and Hacket (1994). This research, the basis for SCCT theory, is based on the idea that individuals, their environments, and their behaviors interact and influence career decisions. Kelly (2009) noted that the SCCT model “demonstrates a feedback loop in which performance attainment acts as a source of self-efficacy and outcome expectations” (p. 5). Figure 6 represents the SCCT model

Social Cognitive Career Theory

*Figure 6*: Social cognitive career theory model (Hackett, 2013).
Self-efficacy is central to SCCT. Self-efficacy has been defined as “personal beliefs about one’s capability to perform particular behaviors necessary to achieve valued school or work goals or to perform tasks requisite to success in one’s work or school context” (Lent & Brown, 2006, p. 239). The expectations of self-efficacy are shaped by four learning sources: prior performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological and affective reactions, with prior performance accomplishments having the greatest impact on self-efficacy (Lent, 2005). There is also significant evidence that self-efficacy is shaped by cognitive ability (Chen, Casper, & Cortina, 2001; Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, & Langley, 2004; Schmidt & Hunter, 2004). It must also be recognized that self-efficacy should be linked to a determined learning domain to have meaning (Betz & Hackett, 2006). A strong sense of self-efficacy can also be linked to higher job performance (Locke & Latham, 2002; Robbins et al., 2004).

Of importance to this research is the concept of vicarious learning, which is defined as learning that takes place through observing events as they happen (Stegmann, Pilz, Siebeck, & Fischer, 2012). Vicarious learning makes strong connections between learning experiences, self-efficacy, observation, and modeling with performance feedback (Stegmann et al., 2012; Tokar, Thompson, Plaufcan, & Williams, 2007). Modeling, observation, and performance feedback all play a significant role in the coaching process. Lent and Brown (2006) note that “particular environmental features, such as encouragement, provision of modeling, and performance feedback also help to inform self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which in turn facilitate goal pursuit” (p. 241). A consideration that must be made with modeling is the degree to which the individual perceives that the modeler is proficient at enacting the modeled skill (Tramayne, Fan, & Brown, 2008). This further emphasizes the importance of the credibility of coaches as they work with educators. Interactions focusing on the relationship between cognitive processes and
the environment have the potential to solidify new knowledge and empower individuals’ beliefs in their goal making capacity (Thompson & Dahling, 2012).

Hacket (2013) explicitly outlines the four processes it takes for modeled events to become matched patterns during observational (vicarious) learning in the SCCT model. The attentional process considers modeled events and the attributes of the observer. The modeled events must have value to the observer and offer complexity with ideas and materials the observer has access to. The observer must have the cognitive and perceptual capabilities to make meaning of the observed events. In the retention process, the observer must be able to make symbolic meaning of what was observed and have an opportunity to practice the observed skill. The production process allows the observed skill to be performed by the observer and corrected or adjusted as needed by the more skilled individual -- in the case of the coaching process, the coach. It is important that the observer have the capabilities and skills to perform the skill. Finally, in the motivational process the observer must recognize the reward for implementing the new skill. This reward can be intrinsic or extrinsic, based on the goal set for the observation. Having set and reached a goal for improved practice, the observer’s self-efficacy can be strengthened. This has close ties to the coaching process and can offer insight into the benefits of having educators observe coaches modeling new skills or practice.

**Social Learning Theory of Career Development**

The foundation for this theory is once again Bandura’s research, specifically his reinforcement theory and observational learning. Within this theoretical approach, Bandura (1977) espouses that individuals’ personalities result from their learning experiences. Krumboltz (1996) furthers Bandura’s theory by considering the impact that behavior, action, and cognition have as they are combined to shape decision making, including occupational decisions.
Krumboltz, Mitchell, and Jones (1976) identified four factors that combine to allow individuals to move along their career path: genetic endowment, environmental conditions, learning experiences, and task approach skills. Table 3 illustrates the factors and their accompanying definitions.

Table 3

_Krumboltz’s Factors for Career Development_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genetic endowment</td>
<td>Inherited or instinctive characteristics of individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental conditions or events</td>
<td>Factors that are beyond the control of individuals such as their culture, socioeconomic background, civil unrest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Learning experiences               | Instrumental Learning Experiences:  
- Antecedents: a learning condition responded to with behavior  
- Behaviors  
- Consequences  

Associative Learning Experiences:  
- Pairing a situation that was previously neutral with a situation that is positive or negative |
| Task approach skills               | Skills developed by individuals in response to a task (i.e. problem-solving, work habits, emotional/cognitive response)  
These skills can be modified as a result of positive or negative experiences. |

Modeling and reflection play a significant role in social learning theory. For learning experiences to have meaning there must be interactions with the environment (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1994). Instrumental learning results from direct observation, as the individual has the opportunity to observe an action taking place, view the behavior that results from that action, and then recognize the consequence of the behavior, whether positive or negative (Zunker, 2015). Associative learning allows reflection to take place as the observer reflects on previously neutral
circumstances that receive reactions that were either positive or negative (Krumboltz, 1996; Zunker, 2015). As this theoretical approach is considered within the realm of coaching, observation, modeling, and reflective feedback are components that closely align. Zunker (2015) states that “if an individual has been positively reinforced while engaging in the activities of a course of study or occupation, the individual is more likely to express a preference for that course of study or occupation” (p. 35). This further supports the positive impact that coaching can have not only on the educator, but on the early childhood field as a whole.

**Self-concept Theory of Career Development**

The self-concept theory of career development (SCTCD), based on the research of Super (1990), creates a life stage developmental framework, asserting that occupational decisions develop over a lifetime. Three major concepts have emerged from Super’s theory: self-concept, life span, and life space. Table 4 highlights the major considerations of Super’s (1990) concepts.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts of Super’s Self-concept Theory of Career Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-concept</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One’s individual beliefs in oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do we see ourselves?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do we want to be seen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do others view us?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Son/daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Spouse/partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Leasurite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Citizen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A key element of the SCTCD is an individual’s development of self-concept. Self-concept is defined as “how individuals see themselves and their situations” (Sterner, 2012, p.
The perspective of self-concept is drawn from many aspects of life, including physical and mental growth, personal experiences, and environmental characteristics and stimulation (Super, 1990). Current research also includes self-awareness as an element of self-concept (Maglio, Butterfield, & Borgen, 2005). As self-awareness expands, individuals are believed to be able to embrace life more fully, taking advantage of opportunities to grow personally and professionally (Corey, 2009). Professional development opportunities that are rich in opportunities for self-reflection and positive feedback, such as coaching, will provide a conduit for occupational satisfaction as well as growth of self-concept.

Within the narrative research method employed for this study, self-concept was a crucial term to have defined. Participants in this study had to focus on their self-concept as they shared their experiences from a sociocultural perspective, including family history, experience with the coaching process, as well as making meaning of the coaching process. Life span also had to be considered as participants were telling their stories. As the result of additional research on the SCTCD, Super (1980, 1990) revised his theory to encompass a stronger link between the roles that individuals play in their lives and their life stages. Super (1990) recognized that multiple roles may be taken through each stage of life and within the contexts of home, community, and workplace. By carrying out these differing roles in a variety of contexts, the hypothesis was made that individuals may experience conflict or confusion about roles and expected outcomes (Super, Sverko, & Super, 1995). As life experiences are viewed through the sociocultural lens, it can be anticipated that these dilemmas will present themselves.

Self-concepts, life stages and work as viewed through the lens of SCTCD are cyclical processes that are influenced by circumstances in the environment (Super, 1990). Savickas (2005 pushed Super’s theory a bit farther when the assertion was made that there should be a stronger
emphasis placed on the impact of social contexts and the reciprocal influences between individuals and their environmental stimuli. When considering the breadth of the careers of early childhood educators, the leap can be made that the environment, consisting of the children, families, coworkers, and enforced program mandates, has the potential to stimulate growth and change for educators. Career patterns for individuals are shaped and formed by a variety of life experiences such as family, culture and personality. To encourage satisfaction in the education career, educators’ self-concept can be supported by coaching initiatives. Through individualized work with coaches, educators will be able to continue to sculpt their notions of who they are and how they see themselves within the early childhood field.

**Gaps in Literature**

This review of literature was shaped by three specific perspectives that were considered from the sociocultural learning theory lens: the coaching perspective, the adult learning and adult development perspective, and the career development perspective. To recognize the gaps in literature, each perspective will be considered.

**The Coaching Perspective**

A review of the coaching literature revealed that there were some concerns about the lack of structure and guidance around professional development in the early care and education field, specifically around the topic of coaching (Blachowicz et al., 2005; Coggins et al., 2003; Gibson, 2011; Smith, 2006; Tung et al., 2004 Zaslow et al., 2010). Furthermore, the research that is available tends to focus on the coaches’ perspectives (Ackerman, 2008; Gibson, 2011; Smith et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2012) or takes on the perspectives of the administrators or leaders who are designing the coaching initiatives (Hemmeter et al., 2011; Hsieh et al., 2009; Isner et al., 2011; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). The voices of the educators who are experiencing the coaching
process are clearly missing from the literature. This gap in literature was directly acknowledged by Meirnik et al. (2007), as they determined from their research that few studies had been dedicated to examining the learning process of educators as they experienced professional development opportunities.

Isner et al. (2011) reported that there is not enough data available to determine specifically which elements of the coaching process were the most influential on improving the quality of teaching practices. Data is the driving force behind decisions related to fiscal allocations at both the federal and state level. This lack of data could impact how policy makers and politicians provide funding to the early education and care field. Providing insight directly from the educators experiencing the coaching process on how each of its components influenced their practice will help close the gap in available data and add to the credibility of coaching programs.

The Adult Learning and Adult Development Perspective

Brown (2006) expresses the notion that for adult learners to change their thinking, values, and behaviors, they need to be engaged in a variety of experiences that hold meaning or value to them. To understand fully which experiences hold meaning and value to educators, their voices must be heard. This study provides that insight. The findings have the potential to strengthen the focus on the needs of adult learners.

Within adult learning theory, andragogy supports the notion that learners hold the power to direct their learning needs, with teachers acting as guides in the learning process (Knowles, 1979). Andragogy describes the needs of adult learners, which are to have

- learning that is meaningful to their problems;
- the ability to direct the learning they experience;
• recognition of the value of their past experiences;
• consideration of their role within their varied environments;
• the opportunity to apply their new knowledge directly to a problem that needs to be solved;
• the opportunity to reflect on their needs in the circumstance that they are in.

There is a lack of literature that provides specific insight into how the coaching process impacts educators’ needs. This study added that needed insight by sharing the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of the educators that took part in the study.

While Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning ties in neatly to the coaching process, very little literature was found that connected coaching to the theory of experiential learning. The cycle of experiential learning provides support for the coaching process, and will be unpacked through this study. Kolb acknowledges that the learning cycle is built on new experiences and new thinking.

A common theme in the research on adult development theories was the impact that individuals’ environments had on their identity and self-efficacy (Lent & Brown, 2006; Levinson, 1986a; Neugarten, 1976; Sheehy, 1995). Lent and Brown (2006) defined self-efficacy as “personal beliefs about one’s capability to perform particular behaviors necessary to achieve valued school or work goals or to perform tasks requisite to success in one’s work or school context” (p. 239). Within this study, participants shared specific details about their experiences in multiple environments, as well as their personal beliefs regarding their capabilities both as educators in their classroom as well as learners. These personal stories will help to fill some of the gaps in literature that was found related to the coaching experience.
The Career Development Perspective

Zunker (2015) provided a compelling case for extending the literature base for career development theories when he stated that “if an individual has been positively reinforced while engaging in the activities of a course of study or occupation, the individual is more likely to express a preference for that course of study or occupation (p. 35). The more data that can be collected and analyzed, the stronger the support for that set of theories will be. The findings from this study will add to the body of research.

Self-efficacy and self-concept take center stage with career development theories. Super (1990) identifies self-concept as a major concept of his self-concept theory of career development. Super asks individuals to consider the following questions:

- How do we see ourselves in the context of our environments?
- How do we want to be seen by others?
- How do others view us?

Self-concept is determined from how the answers to the above questions impact individuals’ beliefs in themselves. Sterner (2012) elaborated on this premise of self-concept, recognizing that self-concept is also impacted by “how individuals see… their situations” (p. 154). Participants shared these perspectives in great detail during the interview process. This data will again offer a lived perspective to the existing body of literature.

A report submitted to the Children’s Service Council of Palm Beach (Isner et al., 2011) suggested that incentives be provided to educators for their work with coaches to improve their practice. Often, financial incentives are out of reach for early education and care programs because of lack of funding and limited budgets. By providing educators with a voice in the professional literature within the field, they may find the intrinsic incentive, as discussed in
social cognitive career theory, which is needed to feel the value of their professional expertise. Participants in this study were able to experience this intrinsic reward as their perspectives are added to the gap in the career development literature from the early education and care field.

**Summary**

This review of literature provided an understanding of the definition of coaching as well as identifying types of coaching and the framework for the coaching process. Literature related to adult learning theories and adult development theories were examined closely and connected to the opportunities present in the coaching process, where the needs of educators could be met with proper consideration. Literature connected to career development theories was also explored, so that depth of understanding could be gained as perspectives from work related experiences were shared. Gaps in the literature were noted, with the recognition of the ultimate goal of this study being to provide a voice that is missing from the literature. That voice belongs to that of the early childhood educator. To understand the perspectives of early childhood educators, it is imperative to recognize how those educators are positioned in terms of the coaching process, the adult learning and development perspective, as well as within their careers.

It is now time to move forward to bring these connections together through the exploration of early childhood educators’ lived experiences with the coaching process. Chapter 3 will provide insight into the research methodology implemented in this study. To gain this perspective, two interviews will be conducted with each of the participants so their stories can be told in a complete and detailed manner. As the experiences of these educators are told, their experiences will be analyzed to produce findings that will offer an authentic representation of educator perspectives on the coaching process.
Chapter 3: Qualitative Methodology

The focus of this qualitative study was to explore how early childhood educators teaching in mixed age preschool classrooms in Massachusetts experienced the on-site coaching process. This chapter outlines the methodology employed for this study. It begins with the research question, followed by the research design and research tradition. Next, the participants, recruitment process, data collection, and analysis are described. The chapter closes with a discussion of trustworthiness and positionality.

Research Question

The research question for this study was “How do early childhood educators teaching in mixed age preschool classrooms in Massachusetts experience the on-site coaching process?” This study focused on collecting data pertaining to the cultural context of educators’ personal lives, the educational experiences of the educators, and their individual experiences with the coaching process. To effectively explore this research question, the narrative approach was employed.

Research Design

This choice of the qualitative approach for this study emerged from the interpretive nature of the research question. This interpretive nature is rooted in the social constructivist paradigm, which makes the assumption that individuals construct their own interpretations of their life experiences (Creswell, 2009, Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This paradigm supports the broad and general design of the research project by giving participants the opportunity to construct their own meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The goal of employing this research paradigm was to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation…to make sense of the meaning others have about the world” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 21).
Two major characteristics of qualitative research were significant in the decision to use this design. The first characteristic was naturalistic inquiry. Qualitative research provides a conduit for “studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally; nonmanipulative, unobtrusive, and noncontrolling; (providing the) openness to whatever emerges (without) predetermined constraints on outcomes” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p. 428). The findings from this study were focused not on predetermined outcomes, but rather on unfolding the experiences that educators had as they participated in the real-world coaching process.

A second characteristic of qualitative research that supported the essence of this study was inductive analysis. Inductive analysis allows open-ended interview questions to be explored and analyzed both individually and comparatively. The data that emerges from the analysis of the transcribed interviews is used to define the themes and categories that emerged. This process allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 2013).

**Research Tradition**

The narrative research approach was employed for this study. Narrative research is defined as a “qualitative procedure in which researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individual’s lives, and write narratives about their experiences” (Creswell, 2012, p. 22). This choice of methodology was based on the desire of the researcher to understand how early childhood educators teaching in mixed age preschool classrooms in Massachusetts experienced the on-site coaching process. To gain this understanding, a study of the lived experiences of the participants took place.

Narrative research has a rich and deep history that dates back to man’s earliest storytelling traditions (Hendry, 2010). Those storytelling traditions sought to “address questions
of meaning and knowing” which is the crux of narrative research. (Hendry, 2010, p. 72).

Narrative research can be traced to the work of Aristotle and Augustine and is associated with many sacred religious texts such as the Koran, the Bible, and the Talmud (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004). When considering narrative research as the opportunity to use words or language to make meaning, it is clear that this type of research has played a key role in inquiry throughout all of time (Hendry, 2010). In more recent times, narrative research has taken more of a center stage position, specifically in the realm of educational research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). John Dewey’s work in the 1960’s related to the concept that experience is a critical aspect of learning has become the modern era foundation for narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2009). Thus, narrative research has become a resource for “understanding the meaning of human experience” (Merriam, 2016, p. 32).

Creswell (2012) noted three factors that have influenced the development of narrative research. The first factor is the current increase in educator reflection on practice. The second factor considers the knowledge of educators as being influential to understand their professional development needs and their decision making process in the classroom. The final factor seeks to “bring [educators’] voices to the forefront by empowering [educators] to talk about their experiences” (Cresswell, 2012, p. 503). It is this final factor that resonated with the focus of this study. The voices of educators were heard as they shared their experiences with the coaching process.

The goal of this research was to tell the story of the lived experiences of early childhood educators who had taken part in the coaching process. This shared phenomenon of coaching was examined by including the perspectives of the individuals participating in the phenomenon, exploration of who was part of the phenomenon, and consideration of the location and time that
the events occurred. By combining these elements, a clearer understanding of the experiences of the individuals emerged.

Merriam (2009) described narrative research as the opportunity to recognize “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). This view aligned seamlessly with the conceptual framework for this study. This alignment supported Vygotsky’s (1978) claim that learning, thinking, and knowing happens when the social plane, individual plane, and cultural contexts combine.

Within this study, the researcher designed the interview questions based on Seidman’s (2006) in-depth interviewing approach. This provided the participants with the opportunity to discuss their experiences with the coaching process before they reflect or make meaning of their experience during the interview. These responses to the interview questions from the participants formed the “narrative text of this research approach” (Merriam, 2009, p. 286) which was their lived experience of the coaching process.

**Description of Participants**

Several criteria were identified by Moustakas (1994) as key to selecting appropriate participants for a narrative study. The research participants must have experienced the phenomenon. They needed to be interested in understanding the nature and meanings of the phenomenon. They had to be willing to participate in the interview process. Finally participants had to grant the investigator the right to tape record and possibly videotape the interview, and publish the data in a dissertation or other publication.

With these criteria in mind, the selection process for participating in this research study was designed using purposeful sampling. With purposeful sampling, “researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p.
The sampling for this study included the identification of the sites that would be targeted for participant recruitment, which were center-based early education and care programs within the state of Massachusetts. These programs were targeted because of the state wide coaching initiatives that had been implemented which focused only on center-based programs. While this did open up a wide pool from which to select candidates for the study, this criterion did cause some limitations, specifically negating the involvement of family childcare providers who make up over 13,000 licensed individuals in the state of Massachusetts. The criteria for participation in this study were designed so that participants selected would have characteristics that reflected the homogeneous sampling strategy (Creswell, 2012). Participants taking part in this study were required to have received on-site educational coaching within the past three years. The coaching that they received was required to have been conducted by an educational coach who was not from the school in which the participants worked. Each of these criteria for participation allowed defining characteristics to emerge.

It is recommended that for narrative studies the number of participants selected should range between 5 and 25 (Creswell, 2013). A key consideration in narrative research is the quality of data collected rather than the quantity (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). With these considerations in place, ten individuals were selected for the study.

As of 2015, there were 2,617 center based early education and care programs operating in Massachusetts (Child Care in America, 2015). All of the participants for this study were employed by center based early education and care programs. Six of the participants were employed by a federally funded non-profit program. Three participants were employed by other non-profit programs. One participant was employed by a for-profit program.
Table 5 summarizes the statewide demographic data for educators working in early care and education programs in Massachusetts, and the demographic data of the participants selected for this study. The statewide information was gathered from data collected in the 2012 Massachusetts Early Childhood Educator Survey (Applied Policy Analytics, 2012).

Table 5

*Participant/Population Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Study participants N=10</th>
<th>Total population of early childhood educators in Massachusetts N=1,898</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>100% female (10)/0% male (0)</td>
<td>93% female/7% male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>10% (1)</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>10% (1)</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>40% (4)</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>20% (2)</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51+</td>
<td>20% (2)</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>80% Caucasian (8)/20% Hispanic (2)/ 0% other (0)</td>
<td>59% Caucasian/11% Hispanic/30% other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or GED</td>
<td>20% (2)</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college courses, but no degree</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-year college degree</td>
<td>10% (1)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year college degree</td>
<td>50% (5)</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate school, but no degree</td>
<td>10% (1)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>10% (1)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the data indicated that in the field of early education and care 93% of the educators are female and 7% male. The largest age cohort of educators was 36 to 45 years old; 59% are Caucasian and 11% Hispanic. Most educators have completed some college coursework, but have not obtained degrees, with 9% of them having completed a graduate
degree. The participants for this study were representative of the averages in most areas other than educational achievement, with 50% of participants having completed four-year college degrees.

The design of the participant sample sought out variation in the participants according to the type of program participants worked in (funding source, non-profit, for-profit), educational background of participants, and demographics. Variation was achieved in program type, ethnic diversity, and education. Gender variation is challenging to achieve in the early education and care field, and was not achieved through the participant sample available.

Data was collected from ten participants who took part in on-site coaching with a coach who worked outside their programs. The ten participants came from four early education and care programs from throughout Massachusetts. All of the participants had concluded their coaching initiatives within the past three years.

Each of the ten participants had been assigned a coach to work with. Eight of the participants first had met the assigned coach during meetings that occurred prior to the first coaching session. The other two participants had met their coach during their first coaching session, with one participant noting that she had worked with her coach on a previous project in the community. Two of the ten participants had shared the same coach during their entire coaching process. The remaining eight participants had each worked with individual coaches.

Six of the participants had taken part in a three year literacy based coaching initiative that incorporated college coursework and coaching support. During the first year, participants had attended classes weekly and received coaching support once a week during the school year. The second and third years had consisted of class sessions twice a month, with weekly coaching sessions during the school year. Four participants had been involved with the literacy initiative
for three years. One participant within that group did have a change of coach after completing the first year of the initiative, but remained with the same coach for the following two years. Of the remaining two participants in the literacy initiative, one had participated for one year and the other for two years.

Two participants had taken part in a coaching initiative that was part of a national credentialing program. The participants had attended meetings each week for 30 weeks to prepare to apply for the credential. A total of four coaching visits were supposed to have taken place at their worksites. Due to conflicts in the participants’ schedules and the coach’s schedule, each of the participants had only received two coaching visits during the 30 week program.

Two participants had received coaching as part of a statewide coaching initiative. The purpose of this coaching initiative was to help educators improve their practice using the QRIS Standards, which are linked to educator competencies and practices. Both participants had received coaching support once a week for one year.

**Recruitment and Access**

Prior to the participant recruitment process, the researcher completed a study proposal defense for the research committee and submitted the proposed study for approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), as required by Northeastern University’s College of Professional Studies. Upon receipt of study approval from the Northeastern University IRB, the researcher began the recruitment process for this study.

The researcher emailed the Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC), which is the governing board for all licensed early education and care programs in Massachusetts. The Peer Assistance and Coaching (PAC) project, regional coaching initiatives that support coaching programs for early childhood educators, had been implemented by DEEC in 2012 (U.S.)
Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). As a result of contacting the DEEC, the researcher received names and contact information for the regional managers of the Educator and Provider Support Grantees at each of the PAC initiatives. Those regional managers were contacted and a flyer (Appendix A) created by the researcher was sent out via email. Regional managers then distributed those flyers electronically to all center based early education and care programs and individual early childhood educators who could potentially meet the sampling criteria for this study. The flyer outlined the focus of the research study, the commitment needed to participate, the incentives for participation, and the researcher’s contact information. As a result of this recruitment, 17 educators contacted the researcher with interest in participating in the study. Ten of those individuals met the criteria for participation and took part in the study.

Data Collection

This section begins with an overview of the data collection process, which was conducted in four phases, as summarized in Table 6. The paragraphs following describe the four phases of data collection: participant selection, the interview process, coding data, and the participant verification process.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: Participant selection</td>
<td>All participant selection completed within three months</td>
<td>Researcher responded to email and phone responses from interested participants. Short interviews were completed by phone to determine eligibility. Ten participants were formally selected to participate. Date, time, and location were established for interview sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: Individual participant interview process</td>
<td>Interviews lasted approximately one hour, including reviewing the consent form and establishing demographic information. Interview questions focused on the cultural context of participants’ life experiences and the cultural context of their views of the early education and care field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview 1</strong>: all participant interviews completed within three months of recruitment to the study</td>
<td>Interviews lasted approximately 35 minutes and included questions related to the experience the participants had during the coaching process as well as their reflections on the meaning of the coaching experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview 2</strong>: all participant interviews completed within three to seven days of first interview session</td>
<td>At the completion of all interviews, the digital recordings of interviews were sent to the transcriptionist to be transcribed. Coding process:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One month for interview transcription service</td>
<td>• Each interview transcript was read through and notes were taken.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three months for coding processes to be completed</td>
<td>• Transcripts were read through again while researcher documented the meaning of each interview.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transcripts were entered into MAXQDA 10 program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Text from transcripts was segmented using in vivo coding and descriptive coding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Codes for each transcript were grouped and reduced.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Themes were created from the reduction of the codes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase IV: Member validation

Two weeks for participants to email validation of meaning applied to interview responses

Participants were contacted by email to validate the codes and themes assigned to their responses to the interview questions.

Participants were asked to respond to the researcher via email with confirmation of accuracy of the codes and themes or any changes that needed to be made.

Phase I: Participant Selection

Through the recruitment process, the researcher received 17 inquiries of interest from potential participants. These individuals were called by the researcher and asked a series of established questions (Appendix B) that determined if they met the qualifications needed for participation in the study. Of the 17 inquiries, three individuals were disqualified because they had received coaching support from individuals who worked within their own early education and care program. Two candidates were disqualified because they had received coaching support more than three years ago. One candidate withdrew her interest after discussing the time commitment needed for the interviews, and one candidate was disqualified because she had not yet completed the coaching process. After completing the questionnaire with the remaining candidates, a total of ten candidates were qualified to participate in the study.

From that pool of candidates, the researcher was able to establish variation among participants, reflecting diversity in ethnicity, education, and years working in the early childhood education (ECE) field, as well as the length of time since experiencing the coaching process. The participant profile is summarized in Table 7.
Table 7

Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Highest level of education</th>
<th>Duration of years working in ECE field</th>
<th>Length of time since receiving coaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.S. Psychology</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angi</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>M.Ed. ECE</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.S. ECE</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.S. ECE</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>A.A. ECE</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.S. ECE</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.S. ECE</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>B.S.ECE</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>7 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After these qualifications were established, the researcher established a date, time, and location to meet with each participant individually to review and sign the participant release agreement (Appendix C) and conduct the first interview session.

Prior to the start of the first interview session, the researcher reviewed the participant release agreement with each participant. The participant release agreement specifically outlined the research topic, methodology, and what would be required of the individual participating in the study. The form also informed participants that participation in the study was voluntary and granted permission for the data to be used in the completion of a doctoral degree, including a dissertation and any possible future publications. It outlined the steps that would be taken to maintain the confidentiality of all participants, including using a pseudonym and removing all other identifying information from all aspects of the study. The form explained in easy to comprehend terms all aspects involved in completing the study, including the participants’ right
to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, the release allowed the researcher to digitally record the interviews, explained the financial incentives related to participation in the study, and established a timetable for all contact between the participant and the researcher. Both copies of the participant release agreement were signed by the participant and researcher. One copy was returned to the researcher, and the other copy was to be retained by participants for their records. The researcher kept all participant release agreements in a locked file cabinet in her home.

**Phase II: Individual Participant Interview Process**

The sources of data collected for this study were interviews of participants describing their lived experiences, including the cultural context of their personal lives, educational experiences, and their experiences with the coaching process. The framework for data collection for this study was based on Seidman’s (2006) structure of in-depth interviewing. This framework consists of conducting a series of individual interviews with each participant within a span of three to seven days.

Participants in this study were required to meet with the researcher in person at a location of their choice for two interview sessions. Each interview session lasted no more than one hour. Participants agreed to have each of the interview sessions digitally recorded for transcription. The first interview session took place within three months of the participant completing the recruitment process. The first series of interview questions (Appendix D) focused on gathering demographic information and unpacking the cultural context of participants’ life experiences and the cultural context of their views of the early education and care field. In order to use the sociocultural lens to frame the analysis of the data collected, it was critical that the cultural context of the participants’ personal lives and views of the early education and care field be
revealed. This allowed behavior to “become meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them” (Seidman, 2006, p. 17).

Participants took part in a second interview session that was scheduled for three to seven days after the completion of their first interview. The second interview focused on the details of the experience the participants had during the coaching process as well as their reflections on the meaning of the coaching experience (Appendix E). Meaning is defined by Seidman (2009) as the “intellectual and emotional connections between the participant’s work and life” (p. 18).

Participants were asked to consider how their past and present experiences have impacted how they experience the coaching process. The second interview would only be successful if the strong foundation established in the first interview session has allowed participants to reflect on their past and present experiences with the coaching process (Seidman, 2009).

To guide the interview process, interview protocols (Appendices D & E) were developed for each of the interview sessions. The interview questions developed for the protocol consisted of both structured and semistructured questions. Structured questions were used to begin the first interview session so that demographic information could be gathered for each of the participants. The remaining questions developed in the interview protocol were semistructured. Semistructured interviews are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored but allow questions to be asked that are open-ended and flexibly worded so that the researcher is able to ask questions that are relevant to the person being interviewed (Merriam, 2009). The semistructured interview questions were designed to gain a sense of the experiences each of the participants had related to their culture and their coaching experience.

A guiding factor in the development of the interview questions was the lens of sociocultural learning theory. Vygotsky argued that culturally constructed artifacts shape the
organization of social and mental activity (Lantolf, 2004). These artifacts consist of the tools, signs, and “labor activity, which allows [us] to change the world, and with it the circumstances under which we live in the world…and to mediate and regulate our relationships with others as well as ourselves and thus change the nature of these relationships” (Lantoff, 2004, p. 1). To understand the artifacts that shape how participants view the world and their relationships, interview questions were developed to explore the cultural context of their personal lives, educational experiences, and professional understanding. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants’ perspectives on their coaching experiences.

A neo-positivist conception was also used to guide the writing of the interview questions. Through this conception, the researcher assumed that the participant has “an inner or authentic self, not necessarily publicly visible, which may be revealed through careful questioning by an attentive and sensitive interviewer” (Roulston, 2010, p. 204).

Finally, a review of the literature relating to adult learners, adult development, and career development was considered as the questions were being developed. A common theme through all of the literature reviewed was the need for adults to reflect on their lived experiences, viewing those experiences as shaping who they are, how they feel about themselves and others, and where they are going in the future (Bandura, 1997; Knowles et al., 2011; Krumboltz et al., 1976; Levinson, 1986a; Lewin, 1946; Super, 1990). Questions were developed that encouraged participants to consider their own self-efficacy through thoughtful discussions related to what they valued throughout their lives. They examined their different roles as children, parents, students, and educators, and were encouraged to reflect on how the stages of their lives impacted who they had become. With the development of the interview questions guided in such intentional ways, participants were offered the opportunity to reveal their inner or authentic self.
Phase III: Coding Data

After all participants completed the two interview sessions, the researcher sent the digital recordings of the interviews to a transcriptionist. The transcriptionist transcribed the interview sessions and saved those transcriptions as individual Microsoft Word documents. Those documents were electronically sent to the researcher who downloaded the documents onto a password encrypted computer.

Each transcript was read through several times. As the transcripts were read through, the researcher began a journal of reflective fieldnotes to record themes, insights or ideas that emerged during the analysis process. General notes were also placed in the documents using the highlighting and “new comment” features of the word processing program. These notes in the fieldnotes journal and in the document were just initial thoughts and ideas that emerged as the text was being read. Next, the researcher read through each of the transcripts more thoroughly to begin to make meaning from the text. More detailed notes were placed in the fieldnotes using a different color pen. Additional comments were placed in the documents using a different colored font. These transcripts were printed so that a hard copy of the initial notes on the documents could be secured. These documents along with the journal of fieldnotes were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home.

After completion of the initial coding process, transcripts were uploaded to the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program MAXQDA 10. The researcher used this program to segment text from the annotated documents using a combination of in vivo coding and descriptive coding. In vivo coding refers to assigning a word or phrase from the text to make meaning of a segment of the text within a document (Creswell, 2013). Descriptive coding describes the use of a phrase or word summary determined by the researcher to capture
the essence of a segment of text within a document (Saldana, 2013). This process was repeated several times for each transcript. As codes became redundant, some were eliminated while others were grouped together. A further reduction of codes took place and themes emerged within the documents. All of these changes were also documented in the researcher’s fieldnotes.

**Phase IV: Member Validation**

A requirement that participants agreed to when taking part in the study was to correspond with the researcher via email to complete the member checking validation process. The member checking validation process involved participants checking over the data, analysis, and interpretations to establish credibility in the analysis completed by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). To complete this verification process, the researcher created participant interview summary documents (Appendix F) for all of the participants that served as an overview of the information contained within their interviews. Excel spreadsheets were exported from the MAXQDA 10 system that outlined the analyzed data that emerged from their transcript. This analysis included the codes, themes, and text from the interview transcripts that supported the analysis.

The interview summaries and Excel spreadsheets were sent to each of the participants as attachments in an email from the researcher. In the email, the researcher asked participants to review the attached information to determine if there were any discrepancies between what they shared during the interview process and the codes and themes that the researcher had assigned. Participants were asked to respond by email within one week to inform the researcher if the information was an accurate representation, or if changes needed to be made to resolve any discrepancies. The member validation process was the conclusion of the participants’ participation in the study. As an incentive for taking part in the study, participants received a
monetary reward of $10.00 in the form of an Amazon.com gift card. This incentive was provided to participants who completed all required components of the research process. The monetary incentive was distributed to all ten participants within twenty-four hours of the completion of the member validation process.

**Data Storage**

Managing and storing interview data was imperative to maintaining the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Each of the interviews conducted for this study were recorded using a digital recorder and then downloaded as MP3 files onto the hard drive of the researcher’s computer. Backup copies of the interviews were also placed on a new flash drive used only for the purposes of the study. The MP3 audio recordings were then uploaded at the request of the transcriptionist to a secure Dropbox application. The Dropbox application was username and password protected. The researcher shared the Dropbox link with the transcriptionist who used the username and password to access the MP3 files. Those files were downloaded to the transcriptionist’s hard drive on her password protected computer. During the transcription process, all identifying information about participants, coaches, and early education and care programs was removed from the transcribed interviews. At the conclusion of the transcription process, all files related to this study were deleted from the transcriptionist’s hard drive.

When the interview transcripts were received by the researcher, they were saved to the hard drive of the researcher’s password protected computer. The MAXQDA 10 system that the transcripts were uploaded to was also password protected. The documents were uploaded to a flash drive to minimize the threat of losing the data. This study flash drive was stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home. The researcher’s fieldnotes journal and the printed transcript documents with initial codes were also stored within the same locked file cabinet.
All information was regularly saved and backed up to both the researcher’s hard drive and the study flash drive. To maintain confidentiality as well as to protect data, the researcher’s computer was password protected. The study flash drive was kept at the home of the researcher in a locked file cabinet. The only person who had access to the data related to the study was the researcher. At the completion of this study, all paper documents and files containing the original MP3 recordings and interview transcripts on the hard drive of the researcher’s computer and on the study flash drive will be destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

The following section describes the data analysis process. An overview of the data analysis process and an examination of the cycles of analysis will be provided. The chapter will close with a discussion of trustworthiness and the researcher’s positionality statement.

Data for this study was analyzed using the sociocultural lens, specifically Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the van Kaam method. Employing this method of data analysis allowed the essence of the phenomenon and the description of the meaning of the phenomenon to reflect the entirety of the group being studied (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas outlined an eight step process for data analysis (see Figure 7). This process of data analysis will be discussed in the following subsections.
Figure 7: Moustakas’ modification of the van Kaam method.

**Listing and Grouping**

Semi-structured interviews were the source of data for this study. The initial process for data analysis consisted of listing and grouping relevant segments of the transcripts. The researcher completed this first cycle of coding by reading through each of the interview transcripts three times. The first reading helped the researcher become reacquainted with experiences that the participant had shared. The researcher started a journal of reflective fieldnotes to document themes, ideas, or insights that emerged. During the second and third readings, the researcher formally instituted in vivo and descriptive coding. The coding was implemented through the use of the highlighting and “new comments” features of the word processing program. As the researcher was reading through each transcript, any information that was relevant to the evaluation of the participants’ experience was highlighted and coded using either in vivo coding, coding with a word or phrase directly from the transcript, or descriptive coding, which is coding with a descriptive word or phrase chosen by the researcher to represent
the idea of what was being coded. The coded transcripts were then printed by the researcher to refer back to if needed.

With the completion of the initial coding, the transcripts were then uploaded into the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program MAXQDA 10. The initial codes that had been established were inputted into the system. Each transcript was read through again to identify all quotes that were relevant to the participants’ experiences.

**Reduction and Elimination**

Continuing with the analysis, the researcher next reduced and eliminated overlapping meaning units that were identified within each transcript. This reduction happened by considering two questions that Moustakas (1994) highlights:

- Does the coded text contain relevant information pertaining to the lived experience of the participant?
- Can the text be labeled? If it can, is it truly relevant to the experience?

The codes that did not fall under the umbrella of those questions were evaluated to determine if they should be eliminated or expanded on; perhaps not enough of the text had been captured by the code. When overlapping codes were discovered, they were combined. With additional reviews of the transcripts, it was also determined that some of the codes were not explicitly relevant to the phenomenon, so they were eliminated altogether. This process established more clearly defined units of meaning.

**Clustering and Thematizing**

The codes for each transcript were synthesized to discover if any relevant themes emerged. Cross-case analysis was used to determine the codes that were prominent in each of the transcripts. In cross-case-analysis, the researcher compares the similarities and differences in the
events and activities that encompass a case (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). To complete this synthesis, the researcher used large chart paper to write down codes that had been established. Any codes that appeared to have a connection were grouped together on the chart paper. Descriptive text from the transcripts was then written down next to the grouped codes on the chart paper. By identifying each of the statements in the descriptive text in relationship to the phenomenon, horizontalization was enacted. This process allowed themes to emerge. The themes were transcribed by the researcher into the MAXQDA 10 system. These relevant themes are the core of the phenomenon being investigated. As themes were being created, the researcher sought out terms that were already used in the literature to help determine the most accurate themes that would represent the participants’ experiences with the phenomenon.

**Member Validation**

With the transcripts deeply analyzed and themes created, meaning was being applied to the participants’ experiences. The member validation process was started. The researcher created participant interview summary forms (see Figure 8) for each participant. These forms included basic demographics, an overview of interview information in line with Seidman’s (2006) framework for data collection, and significant statements or relevant quotes connected to their interview information (Appendix F). Using the MAXQDA 10 system, the researcher transferred the themes and codes, along with the corresponding text from the transcripts, into an Excel spreadsheet.
The validation process is a key element in a narrative study. Participants must consider such issues as the influence of the researcher on the documentation of the interview, the accuracy of the transcription, conclusions made by the researcher during the analysis, and the ability to generalize the findings (Polkinghorne, 1989). It is through this careful process of validation that the clearest findings can be made regarding the lived experience.

During the validation process, the researcher sent emails to each of the participants with their individual participant summary sheet and the Excel spreadsheet. Participants were asked to confirm the validity of the participant interview summaries. They were also asked to review the meaning units and themes displayed in the Excel spreadsheets to ensure that the themes established by the researcher accurately represented their experiences. All ten participants
responded within one week to the researcher indicating that no changes needed to be made in the analysis of their data. Upon the receipt of this validation, the researcher continued the iterative data analysis process.

**Individual Textural**

Hays & Singh (2012) state that “textural description always strives to understand the meaning and depth of the essence of the experience” while structural description focuses on identifying the “multiple possible meanings within the textural description” (p. 355). The researcher focused attention on uncovering what the participants experienced during the phenomenon, using direct quotes to support the development of the lived experience. This helped to build the structure of the phenomenon for each participant. As details of the experience were established, the researcher sought to provide a connection with the literature that spoke to the coaching process. Supporting evidence from the literature was analyzed with the descriptive language used by the participants to explain their experience. This analysis provided the basis for organization the categories and themes within the data to determine the structure of the phenomenon. As a result, the individual textural categories and themes table was created. Direct quotes from participants were used within the table to highlight the nuances of their experiences.

**Individual Structural**

The process of imaginative variation must be enacted during individual structural analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This process allows the meaning of the lived experience to be recognized by viewing the phenomenon from different perspectives. For this to take place the meaning embedded in the transcripts must be pulled out. The researcher again referred to the categories and themes as a basis for seeking out how the phenomenon was experienced by the participants. It was important for the researcher to consider the cultural components shared by
the participants in this process. Literature from adult learning and development theories played a crucial role in the meaning making process. The researcher used this lens to consider the life experiences of the participants as well as their multiple roles within their environment. This provided the varied perspectives needed to view the phenomenon the participants experienced. A table was created which represented the individual structural categories and themes with specific excerpts from the transcripts that illustrated how the phenomenon was experienced.

**Individual Textural Structural**

The final individual component of the analysis process was combining the how and why of the participants’ experiences with the phenomenon, the textural structural union. To complete this process the researcher carefully analyzed the individual textural and individual structural tables to determine if any of the themes adequately represent the how and why of the phenomenon. A table was created for each participant that had the textural-structural themes that emerged.

**Composite Description of the Phenomenon**

A final cross-case analysis yielded a composite description of the phenomenon. To facilitate this process, the researcher used a variety of sources of data displays and went back to the original sources of data, the transcripts. The researcher read through each transcript for all participants and noted in the fieldnotes the commonalities between experiences. The researcher then reviewed all of the tables created for the individual textural, individual structural, and textural structural analyses. The researcher used chart paper to list the direct quotes and excerpts from each participant. These were analyzed for commonalities and compared against the research question, with the final categories emerging that represented a full sense of the phenomenon that the participants shared. Individual variations among the participants were
acknowledged within the composite description through the use of specific quotes and examples from the interview transcriptions. A table with the composite categories, textural themes, and structural themes was created (Appendix G).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was established within this study through the use of several key validation strategies. The first strategy employed was prolonged engagement with participants (Creswell, 2013; Shenton, 2004). As a result of using Seidman’s (2006) structure of in-depth interviewing, the researcher conducted two interviews with each of the participants. The participants and the researcher had the opportunity to develop a rapport during multiple interviews through the discussion of participants’ life history, experiences with the coaching process, and establishing meaning for the process. Creswell (2013) notes the importance of “building trust with participants” (p. 250), which will result from the extensive interview process.

Additional validation strategies that were employed included rich, thick description as well as member checking (Creswell, 2013; Shenton, 2004). A rich, detailed description of the data analyzed was assembled, which reflected the authentic experiences of the participants. Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the van Kaam method was used in the analysis process, which included contacting participants to confirm the validity of the meaning units and themes that were derived from the data in the rich, thick description. This helped to validate that the information presented accurately represented the participants’ perspectives and experiences.

Finally, an additional level of validation was implemented by performing a code consistency check. Copies of the original transcripts, along with the list of themes, were sent by the researcher to a peer for review. Upon review, most of the themes were aligned between
researcher and the peer. Any discrepancies involved the amount of data that was connected to a theme. After some discussion and adjustments, the validation of the criteria match was suitable.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

When conducting research, researchers must comply with ethical guidelines related to the protection of human subjects. To assure that these ethical guidelines are complied with, the researcher requested permission to conduct the research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northeastern University. The researcher adhered to the IRB protocol. The participants in the study received two copies of a consent form that they signed describing the purpose and procedures of the study, risks and benefits to participants, and their rights as research participants. The participants kept one signed copy of the consent form and the researcher kept the other copy for her records.

It is imperative that researchers work to assure all participants that their confidentiality will be protected. The steps to ensure this confidentiality include “properly disposing of data sheets and other paper records, limiting access to identified data, storing research records in locked cabinets or secured databases, and coding and anonymizing data” (National Institute of Health, 2011, p. 77). These steps were employed by the researcher. The digital recording, MP3 recording, transcribed interview transcript files, and the study flash drive were stored in either a password protected computer or a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher. In compliance with the National Institute of Health, names were coded with pseudonyms to preserve anonymity to protect the rights of all participants. All documents with participants’ real names, pseudonyms, and any other identifying information are secured in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home. At the culmination of the study, all stored materials will be destroyed. These steps ensure that confidentiality will be maintained within the study.
**Positionality Statement**

In my doctoral thesis, I address how early childhood educators experience the educational coaching process. I have chosen to focus on the experiences of educators because I believe there is tremendous value in hearing the perspectives of these educators on their own experiences. I hope to examine the cultural elements in educators’ personal, educational, and professional experiences and the development of relationships that impact their coaching experiences. I have had the opportunity to work with many individuals who have coached me along my professional path. I have also had the privilege of coaching many early childhood educators and students over the past fifteen years. In some of my most successful coaching experiences, I have felt supported and valued as I tried new experiences and experimented with my own teaching practice in early childhood classrooms as well as in college classrooms. I have also experienced coaching that felt artificial and contrived, leaving me questioning my abilities. As a coach, I have always worked to make a sincere connection with the people I am coaching. This involved connecting with those I was coaching on a personal and professional level. Without this connection, the coaching experience can lack depth and may not be as successful. Recognizing the power of successful coaching from my own experiences has driven me towards this topic.

By giving early childhood educators a voice to express their personal experiences with the coaching process, I hope to strengthen its effectiveness. When coaching in the early childhood field is successful, young children and their families directly benefit from stronger, more effective educators who provide higher quality care. My research will allow the voices of educators who have received on-site coaching to be heard, and a deeper understanding of what coaching practices have been successful for these educators will be gained. This is a golden
opportunity for achieving stronger early childhood practice, which will impact the foundation of early learning experiences for young children.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the methodology employed for this qualitative study. The research question, research design, and research tradition was explored. A description of participants, recruitment process, data collection, and analysis was provided. The chapter closed with a discussion of trustworthiness and researcher positionality. Chapter four describes the study’s findings.
Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

This chapter presents the findings of this narrative study. It begins by restating the purpose of the study and an overview of the phases of data analysis. Each of these phases will be described: summary of the participants, category and description findings, thematic analysis, and research question analysis. The following findings will be presented: overarching categories that emerged from the data, themes that supported the categories, and a composite description of the lived experience of coaching by the collective group.

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this narrative study was to examine the experiences early childhood educators had with the onsite coaching process. This qualitative study considered the individual experiences of 10 early childhood educators who took part in on-site coaching at their center-based early education and care programs. These individual experiences will come together to form one unified description of the shared phenomenon of the coaching process.

Phases of Data Findings

The following section is a summary of the procedure used for reporting data, which included data collection and analysis. For clarity, this summary has been reduced to four phases. Table 8 reports on the phases implemented, along with a connection to the data analysis process and the outcomes resulting from the data analysis.
Table 8

Report on Phases of Data Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of Reporting Data</th>
<th>Moustakas’ Modification of the van Kaam Method (1994) 8 Step Process for Data Analysis</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phase I: Summary of Participants | 1. Listing and Grouping  
2. Reduction and Elimination  
3. Clustering and Thematizing  
4. Member Validation | • Manual coding of transcripts for preliminary units of meaning  
• Upload transcripts to MAXQDA 10  
• Consider the following from eliminating and reducing meaning units:  
  ➢ Does the coded text contain relevant information pertaining to the lived experience of the participant?  
  ➢ Can the text be labeled? If it can, is it truly relevant to the experience?  
• Transcripts were viewed first individually and then a cross-case analysis was used to determine overarching themes with thematic tables created  
• A participant interview summary form was created for each transcript which included supporting quotes from participants  
• Summaries and spreadsheets with meaning units and themes were sent to participants for validation and returned to researcher |
| Phase II: Category Descriptions and Findings | 5. Individual Textural  
6. Individual Structural  
7. Individual Textural-Structural | • Cross-case analysis comparing codes  
• Creation of categories and themes tables |
| Phase III: Thematic Analysis | 8. Composite Description of the Phenomenon | • Revisiting the categories and themes table along with further review of transcripts  
• Final cross-case analysis, considering the individual and collective experiences. |
| Phase IV: Research Question Analysis | 8. Composite Description of the Phenomenon | • Participants’ experiences were described as a collective and compared against the research question for analysis |
Summary of Participants

The ten participants in the study shared their experiences with the coaching process during two interview sessions. The theoretical framework for this study was sociocultural learning theory, which argues that learning happens within two planes, the social plane (interpsychological), related to interactions with others, and the individual plane (intrapsychological), related to the integration of knowledge into an individual’s mental structure (DeVries, 2000; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). As the individual is submerged in cultural contexts, these planes are interacting, negotiating, and collaborating to shape the learning, thinking, and knowing that is produced by the learner (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Lantoff, 2004). To ensure that cultural contexts were accounted for, the experiences of the 10 participants included information about their youth, their education, their work experience, and their experiences with the coaching process. This thorough consideration of the participants’ experiences will allow the strongest understanding of the phenomenon of their experience with coaching to emerge. Below are summaries of the participants’ stories.

Jean. Jean is an early childhood educator who has been working in the early childhood field for the past five years, but has had contact with young children for most of her life, as her mother ran a family childcare program from her home while she was growing up. Jean enjoyed having family childcare in her home as a young child, but grew to resent it when she was older, noting that, “a lot of the daycare took up a good portion of my home, and so then I had to separate my mom and my feelings from her business and her children. So I had a little bit of difficulty with that.”

Jean’s mom and dad believed education was very important. Her mother left school young because of a challenging childhood, but worked to complete her GED and bachelor’s
degree while Jean was in high school. Jean was provided with a tutor when she experienced some illness as a child and continued to feel the importance of education when, upon graduation, she was immediately enrolled in college courses by her parents, having to miss the second night of class to attend her high school graduation. Jean dropped out of college for financial reasons after several challenging semesters, but, after giving birth to her son, decided to go back to school and finish her bachelor’s degree in early childhood education in two years with the support of her family and her boyfriend.

Jean has worked in her current place of employment, a non-profit early education and care program, since she was 16 years old, moving through a variety of roles to the lead teacher position she currently holds. She participated in a coaching program that was started at her place of employment and lasted one year. The coaching program was a pilot program offered through a statewide initiative. As part of the initiative, the coach visited Jean’s classroom once a week from 8:00 a.m. through 1:00 p.m. Jean was eager, yet a bit apprehensive, to start the coaching process, stating “Initially, I thought it was going to be a little daunting, that I was just going to have another person over my shoulder, watching me like a hawk. I was a little nerve wracked by it, but I am always open to constructive criticism. That’s exactly what I was looking for. I felt pretty optimistic about it, that she’d be able to offer me some ways to move forward and better myself in the classroom.” Jean had not completed any type of student teaching during her educational career and hoped to gain this experience while working with the educational coach.

Jean’s coaching experience primarily involved the coach working directly with the children in her classroom. During this time, Jean or her co-teacher were able to step out of the room to complete other tasks. After lunchtime, the coach left the room for 30 to 40 minutes and returned to the classroom while children were resting to discuss with Jean and her co-teacher
what she saw while she was in the classroom. Jean explained this meeting time in the following way:

She likes to talk about children, what they did, what she heard, and what she’s seen. So it’s basically just an overview of what she did for the day. Then there’s a period of time where she asks about goals, what we plan on doing for the next week, what our curriculum is for the next week, and then asks what she can do to help.

Jean had some preconceived notions about the particular coach she was working with due to the fact that her co-worker had a negative experience working with the coach in a previous setting. This tainted the relationship at the start of the coaching process. Jean stated that

I was fighting that, because every Thursday she would come in and just, ‘Ugh, she’s here again,’ week after week, and it just started to put that negative stigma in the back of my mind, even though I knew she was here for the greater good. And then, when that person left, there was a little less tension because it’s not that, ‘Ugh, we have to deal with [coach].’ It was, ‘[Coach] is coming, so we have that extra support in the room. What else can we get done today that we need to get done?’ or, ‘What else could we ask [Coach] that she might be able to help us with?’ It was easier at the end than it was in the beginning, I can say.

The coach who Jean worked with allowed Jean to set her own goals for coaching at the start of the process. The goals included helping Jean to communicate more effectively with co-workers and to develop a higher quality weekly curriculum. As the coaching process came to a close, the coach no longer asked Jean about her goals and focused more of her attention on providing supplemental materials to support the curriculum.
Anna. Anna is an early childhood educator who has been working in a preschool classroom for over 20 years. She grew up in Massachusetts in a “working class family;” her dad was a carpenter and her mom was a stay-at-home mom. She had one sibling, a younger brother who was multiply handicapped, and described herself as “being his second mom…which led (her) into the caretaker field.”

Her family valued education. Anna remembered that homework had to be done immediately upon arriving home from school and had to pass her parents’ approval before being allowed to play. Anna’s mother was a strong advocate for her son’s education, ensuring that he received the highest quality education possible and attending all Individual Education Plan meetings throughout his education. There was an expectation that Anna would attend college after completing high school, even though her parents did not attend college. Anna felt strongly that all individuals deserved the highest level of education, stating, “I think that all children, regardless of their income, regardless of the family situation, regardless of whether they’re an immigrant or a citizen, should have every opportunity to get as much education as they can.”

Anna went into college after her high school graduation. She received her associate’s degree in early childhood education from a local community college and then went into the early childhood field, working as a preschool teacher in a non-profit early education and care program. Anna continued to work on her schooling, completing her bachelor’s degree and her master’s degree in early childhood education while working in the early childhood field and raising a family.

Anna took part in a coaching initiative that was offered through the early education and care program she worked at. The initiative lasted three years. During that time, Anna took coursework that focused on particular topics such as science, literacy, and English language
learners, and then received coaching support to ensure the coursework was applied to her work in the classroom. The coaching sessions often included videotaping sessions for Anna while she was working with children. The videotape would then be reviewed with her coach shortly after. Anna appreciated the videotaping noting that “videotaping meant a lot and brought a lot more concrete information to my plan.” Anna embraced the coaching experience and felt that it improved her teaching practice by improving the intentionality of her small groupings of children and her ability to self-reflect on her practice. She feels that the coaching experience continues to positively impact her practice, explaining that, “there are a lot of things that I learned during those three years that I still do today.”

**Angi.** Angi works as a bilingual classroom support at a for-profit early education and care program in Massachusetts. Angi was born and raised in Puerto Rico with her mother and father and moved to Massachusetts when she was 13 years old. This move was prompted by Angi’s mother wanting to look for “a better life for us, you know, generally schools and everything.” Her mother valued education, having left school when she was in sixth grade. She wanted her children to have a better education than she did. Angi’s father was less focused on education. As Angi explained, “he was one of those persons that well, ‘if you do it, fine. If you don’t do it, it’s up to you.’” Angi values education, recognizing that if a person has good ideas and wants to help people, an education is the best way to make a difference in the world.

Angi briefly alluded to having a difficult childhood. She explained that children in her family were not valued, with her parents believing that as a child you were to “sit there; don’t talk, only when you’re spoken to.” Angi’s view of childhood now is very different than what she grew up with. She believes that “you teach them, you give them love. That’s what you’re supposed to do with every person, no matter if it is a kid or a grown-up.”
Angi completed high school and is currently completing a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential at a local community college. The coaching experience that Angi participated in was connected to the CDA program. The coach was to make four visits to observe Angi in the classroom working with children and then provide her with feedback to improve her practice. Angi ran into a variety of obstacles in trying to work with her coach, including time limitations and lack of communication with her coach. When the visits did take place, Angi was not able to receive much feedback from the coach. She recognized the value of working with a coach and felt frustrated that she was not able to fully benefit from that experience, noting that “It’s like I didn’t gain that, you know, what I wanted to see or what I wanted her to tell me as an educator. I didn’t have that feedback.”

**Deborah.** Deborah has worked in the field of early education and care for the past 15 years. She grew up in Massachusetts with seven brothers and sisters. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom, having served time as a Marine before marrying. Deborah’s father was in the Navy. Deborah’s parents divorced when she was a sophomore in high school and she went to live with her father and several other siblings.

Deborah’s parents valued education, but they valued work even more because of financial difficulties. Deborah stated that, “we didn’t come from a very money-wise background. We didn’t have a lot of money. So college was kind of like if you want to go, you kind of have to go on your own, but it wasn’t unsupported. But school was important. And I think the big thing for us growing up was like we’ve got to work.” Deborah recognized quickly the value that education had on a career, acknowledging it made the difference between “having a career as opposed to a job.”
Upon graduating from high school Deborah seriously contemplated a military career, but made the decision to marry, have children, work in retail, and pursue a degree in the evening. Her career plans were altered as the needs of her family changed, recognizing that a career in early childhood education would offer her the hours that best fit her family obligations and some financial support as she continued her education. She has worked for her current employer, a non-profit early education and care program, for the past nine years.

A program became available through her employer that allowed her to continue to work on her education at no cost and take part in a coaching initiative. Deborah took advantage of the opportunity, but quickly found that the coaching was not the best fit for her needs. She experienced frustration on multiple levels, explaining that “trying to meet with (coach) on a weekly basis for a while was like, ‘Ugh.’ Other things weren’t getting done that needed to get done. So that was kind of a struggle.” She also noted frustration with the focus of the coaching, which was on the coursework being covered. Deborah felt she was proficient in the coursework and would have liked to focus on other areas during coaching. This left Deborah feeling, “I have to go to this session and it was kind of like a waste of time. And I felt like… I wasn’t being heard.” Deborah continued with the coaching experience for three years, never feeling fully satisfied with the experience, but appreciative of the credit bearing coursework that she was receiving.

Patricia. Patricia has been working in the field of early education and care for 21 years and is currently working in an inner city non-profit early education and care program. Patricia grew up in Massachusetts and was one of nine children raised by her mother and father. As Patricia described her family, she noted that they were “very crazy, but good, we had a very tight family.”
Patricia’s mother and father recognized the importance of education, but did not push their children to go to college. Patricia remembers sharing her school work with her mother, explaining fondly that “you would get home from school and you would just wait in line to show her your papers so she would look at them and comment on them.” Patricia’s mother completed high school, but her father did not, though she made it a point to mention that her father was “a very smart man, read everything all the time.” Her mother worked as a secretary when her youngest child went into first grade. Her father had been in the military, worked a factory job, and, after being laid off from the factory, went to school to become an animal groomer. Patricia maintained good grades and knew that she was expected to attend school every day as a child, regardless of illness.

While Patricia did not attend college immediately after high school, she did feel drawn to it. She made the decision to pursue an associate’s degree in early childhood education when she was spending a considerable amount of time researching the disabilities that her younger daughter had been diagnosed with. She worked for nine years to complete that degree with little support from family. She continued to complete her bachelor’s degree through an accelerated program offered at a local college.

Patricia was not enthusiastic when she was informed that her classroom was chosen by her program director to be part of a new three-year coaching initiative being offered through a statewide initiative. She stated that “We didn’t have a choice. Two of the four classes were being chosen and two classes thought they dodged a bullet, and two of us thought we got hit.” She was apprehensive about the program because she felt she needed true behavioral supports in her challenging classroom and had been told that the coaching program would not support her with that because it was a pilot program that she would have to help design. Once the program began,
she expressed concern that “it seemed like it had been thrown together too quickly, so nobody knew what they were doing.” During the one year time period, Patricia observed the coach gain comfort level in her classroom, but did not feel she gained any knowledge from her. Patricia felt the coach was more of a “sounding board” she could talk with than someone she could receive any coaching support from. Patricia was open about the frustrations she experienced both with the program she works for and with the coaching initiative she was part of. She felt she did not benefit in any way from the coaching experience.

**Samantha.** Samantha has been working in the field of early childhood education for the past 10 years. She was born in Massachusetts and moved from the inner city to a suburb when she was in fifth grade. She grew up with her mother and father and two younger brothers. Samantha’s father was what she described as a “functioning alcoholic” and was able to hold down a job as a truck driver, but was often absent from the home. She witnessed domestic violence between her parents and experienced it as an adult in her own relationships. Samantha described her family as having valued childhood, retelling fond memories of sleepovers at her house growing up, moving furniture for dance parties, and family dinners. These are values she tries to continue with her own family today.

While struggling to get out of abusive relationships, Samantha shared the important role that education had for both herself and her mother. Her mother became pregnant with Samantha at age 16. She left school and was in an abusive relationship for many years until she made the decision to move her family and work on her education. Her mother slowly but persistently worked her way through her education, completing her GED, an associate’s degree, a bachelor’s degree, and then finally a master’s degree, all in early childhood education. With her education in place and a stronger career, Samantha’s mother was able to leave her abusive husband.
Samantha, while following the same path of abuse, recognized the power that education had in her mother’s life, left her abusive husband, and took her four children from Florida back to Massachusetts to pursue her education. Samantha has completed her bachelor’s degree in early childhood education and has begun coursework towards her master’s degree.

Samantha was eager to take part in the literacy coaching program being offered by her place of employment because it was connected with coursework that could be used towards completing her bachelor’s degree. Samantha expressed enthusiasm when she spoke about the coaching experience, describing coaching for her as “you just need someone to be there with a lighter and spark you back up, and you’re like, ‘Oh, yeah!’ You get all excited again.” Though she included many positive impacts that the coaching process had on her and her practice as a teacher, she did share that she would have benefitted even more had the coaching been more focused on her professional needs rather than the topics predetermined by the coursework:

I think I would rather [coaching] be on something that I really needed a little more help in, an area that I felt maybe was a weakness of mine. I think it’s great that we had these activities, and they gave us the materials and this and that, because it did definitely spark different ideas. But I would rather it be something that I needed help with at the time.

Samantha enjoyed the positive feedback she received from her coach. She also said that the reflective process she used while watching videos of her teaching practice with her coach is something she still uses today.

Lisa. Lisa has worked in the field of early childhood education in a variety of capacities for the past 22 years. She was born in Massachusetts, but moved frequently as a child because of her father’s career in the computer industry. She was the oldest of four children and lived with her mother and father. Her mother was a stay-at-home mother until her youngest sibling entered
school. Lisa described her parents as both being “very successful” despite having no formal college education. Lisa spoke fondly of her father’s many achievements in the computer industry, which included authoring books, teaching college courses, and inventing computer software. She also recalled the level of importance both of her parents put on working hard at school while she and her siblings were young. She explained that they had very high expectations, “it was not just working your hardest, it was more if you bring home an A minus, we would be asked, ‘Well, why don’t you have an A plus?’” This impacted Lisa’s expectations of her own children and her adult education experiences, recognizing that there can be a variety of situations that can impact the grade received in coursework. She reflected, “I want to get A’s. But it’s not what drives me. I want to learn something. I want to get something out of it. That’s mostly where I put my energy in.”

Lisa was provided the opportunity to take part in a two-year college coursework and coaching program that was offered at her worksite. When beginning the coaching experience, Lisa was open, but slightly apprehensive. She acknowledged:

It sounded scary at first because they were saying, ‘Well, your coaches are going to be videotaping you,’ and all of this type of thing, and everyone just was appalled by thinking of seeing themselves on tape. And we didn’t really know, and I didn’t really know what to think of it. But I was open to it, but I wasn’t sure what to think of it.

As the process got started, the anxiety dissipated and Lisa spoke fondly about the learning that she experienced while working with her coach. “She kind of got me to open up my head a little bit more about how to do things. I learned a lot from her, but she helped me learn a lot about what I could do.”
The coaching program Lisa participated in was connected to college coursework. The topics for coaching were predetermined by the coursework. This caused some frustration for Lisa during the two years she worked with her coach. Lisa did share many moments of success that she experienced as a result of participating in the coaching, including the positive impact that reflection had on her professional growth:

Coach would stop [the videotape] at certain spots and say, ‘Well, what do you think about that? How do you think that went?’ And then I would respond. And if what I had to say was negative, she’d say, ‘Well, how can you do it differently next time?’ Or if what I had to say was positive, she would say ‘Where else can you use this in your day?’ I saw what questions to the children got the best responses. I saw how I spoke to them and what kept their attention.

**Jenna.** Jenna is an early childhood educator who has been working in the field for 17 years. She was born and raised in Massachusetts with her mother, father, and older brother. Both she and her older brother were adopted. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom for the earlier part of her youth. Her father was a machinist. When Jenna entered into junior high, her mother began working in real estate and put in long hours at the office. Jenna noted it was during these junior high years that her parents essentially “switched roles,” with her mother working long nights and her father taking on more of the caretaker role.

Education played an important role in Jenna’s life. Her parents worked hard to send Jenna and her brother to a private religious school, though Jenna completed high school at a public school that her parents thought offered a stronger education. Jenna understood from her parents that she would go to college after high school, noting that “[they] always talked about college, so I don’t think I had another choice.” As a result of following an early childhood track
of education at her high school, Jenna determined she wanted to attend college to study early childhood education. She completed a two-year degree at a private university and then her bachelor’s degree at a local public college. She was supported by her parents in areas such as paying for portions of loans, covering the cost of car insurance, and providing encouragement, noting that “they did as much as they could do.”

When Jenna began working with the coaching initiative at her worksite, she was selected as one of the first teachers to participate. This initiative started with some professional development and coaching support, but evolved into coursework with coaching supports. She was open and willing to try the experience, but admitted that she knew very little about what she was agreeing to. Upon reflecting on the experience, Jenna realized that the length of time that the program lasted (three years) and the fact that there was so much videotaping involved may have caused her to reconsider her involvement. After the first year of the coaching initiative, the coach Jenna had been working with left and she received a new coach. Jenna explained that she felt a stronger connection with the second coach:

They were great to work with, great ideas. I did work a little bit longer with [coach #2], so I think with [coach #2] you kind of develop a little more of a relationship because it was over a three-year period. And it’s funny; I think she had a nice way of being able to push you. I think with [coach #1], maybe that would have developed as well, but it wasn’t long enough. And [coach #1] was a little more easy going. If we were like, ‘Oh, this work is so hard, and it’s a lot,’ [coach #2] is not going to let you get away with that. She’s like, ‘Yeah, well…’ I mean, she kind of would give us that little bit of a push, but it was always in a gentle way.
Jenna did feel that the program was a benefit for her and the children she worked with. There were several elements she identified in her current practice that were techniques she had learned during her time with her coach, including building an awareness of how dual language learners demonstrate their knowledge in concrete ways that may be missed if one is looking strictly for language exchange.

**Emily.** Emily has been working in the early education and care field for the past nine years. She was born and raised in New York, with frequent and often lengthy trips to the Dominican Republic, where her family is from. Emily is the youngest of eight children. Her mother stayed home to raise the family and her father worked as a chef, working many late nights and weekends. Emily’s father died when she was in eighth grade. Up to that point, Emily had been going to private religious school, but, upon her father’s death, her mother moved her family to the Dominican Republic. They moved back and forth between the United States and the Dominican Republic during Emily’s high school years, making schooling challenging. Emily was not able to read or write in Spanish, but worked hard to pick up the language. She completed her junior and senior year in the Dominican Republic and had to double up on classes to graduate on time.

Education was not valued in Emily’s family. Emily describes her family as being “traditional in the Dominican style” which refers to family being the center of life. Emily was needed to help with sick relatives and take care of family responsibilities. College was not supported by Emily’s mother, but she did pursue a college career while maintaining the responsibilities she had at home. She did not complete her degree while in the Dominican Republic, but did finish both her associate’s degree and her bachelor’s degree in the United States once she was married with children. Although her husband was supportive of her
schooling, he did require that all of her family duties be completed before completing her coursework.

When the coaching opportunity became available at Emily’s worksite, she was enthusiastic about taking part, seeing it as a way to continue to complete her bachelor’s degree with minimal cost to her family. The coaching initiative she participated in was a three-year program that combined college coursework with worksite coaching support. Emily appreciated the time that she received coaching support. She explained that a major area of growth she experienced was gaining confidence in her own self-reflection:

I kind of got into that routine of self-reflecting each activity with [coach] and trying to figure out on my own how I want to improve everything, whether she was videotaping it or not. It just started to kind of become the way I do things. I still do that now.

Emily did not enjoy the videotaping process, stating that when she found out there was videotaping, “that’s when I wanted to back out.” She did, however, come to see the value in the videotaping process, and was able to incorporate the information she gained about her own practice and the strengths of the children she was working with into her work in the classroom. Emily explained that the coaching experience “kind of helped me see some of my strengths, but it also helped me see some of my weaknesses, which is where my coach came into play in helping me.”

Maria. Maria has worked in the early childhood field for three years. Her story is one of overcoming adversity. Maria lived in five different states and Puerto Rico as a child. She spoke of moving often and emphasized that she did not have a stable childhood. She indicated that her mother was not a large presence in her life and that her dad was “her hero,” though she did not elaborate on why she felt this way.
Maria worked hard as a child when she was in school. She shared that a highlight in her school career was when she received high honors in sixth and ninth grade. She discussed her experience with schoolwork, stating

It was something I did by myself. And I’d make sure everything was done for the next day for school, that I knew everything for my test. It was only me all the time, because my brother was smaller than me, and he had trouble with his stuff, so I was basically on my own.

Maria stated that her mother had a tenth grade education and her father had a ninth grade education. Her father often told Maria how proud he was of her hard work and would say to her, “Maria, you have to keep going, because I didn’t do it. I want you to do it.”

When Maria was a child she worked in Puerto Rico as a tutor for children. It was during that time that she realized that she wanted to go into the education field so that she would be able to help children and families that were facing the same struggles she and her family had faced. She has an aunt who completed her CDA credential and is a teacher and Maria finds her to be an inspiration. Because of this inspiration, Maria and her husband moved from Puerto Rico to Massachusetts to pursue her dream of continuing her education. Maria recently has completed her CDA and is enrolled in her first formal college course at a local community college.

Maria’s coaching experience was not an ideal one. As part of the CDA program she was enrolled in, Maria was to receive coaching support four times during the year. These visits were to include observations and feedback sessions to ensure she was ready for the CDA validation visit that she would be having. Maria noted that the focus of the coaching appeared to be supporting individuals who were working in family childcare programs. Working in a center-based program, she felt as though she did not get the support she needed. Maria spoke about the
strong interest she had in working collaboratively with a coach. Unfortunately, her visits included only two coaching sessions and a feedback session held in the classroom with children close by. Maria expressed her desire to have more time and feedback from her coach, noting that

[The coach] did a good job, but if she came more and maybe observed me more… I know I’m not perfect, and I need to improve my being positive guidance, or maybe how to talk to the kids when they’re in arguments. So if she would have come more, instead of only two observations, that would have been really helpful.”

Coding. The participants in this study shared a snapshot of their lives and their individual experiences with coaching. There were commonalities between their stories, though each has come from a unique background, with a rich social culture shaping their beliefs and ideals. By respectfully examining the individual aspects of the shared experience of coaching and acknowledging those commonalities, common codes leading to themes and categories emerged that shed light on the phenomenon of coaching.

Coding of the participants’ transcripts took place using in vivo and descriptive coding. During this process, codes were developed by analyzing the text for statements that were relevant to the phenomenon. Shaped by the sociocultural framework, the researcher was also mindful of coding text for statements relating to the life history of the participants. These relevant statements were grouped together and codes were created. Within the MAXQDA 10 program, codes were color-coded and the fonts from the relevant text within the transcripts were changed to coordinate with the codes (Appendix H). The codes were developed from key words or phrases in the text or by considering terms that emerged from the literature on the coaching process, adult learning and development, or career development. A sample of the coding, coding type, and source for the coding is provided in Table 9.
Table 9

Sample of Coding Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Coding type</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents had struggles</td>
<td>In vivo</td>
<td>Transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood was not the best</td>
<td>In vivo</td>
<td>Transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of career</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Career development literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Coaching, adult learning &amp; development, &amp; career development literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting other classrooms</td>
<td>In vivo</td>
<td>Transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videotaping</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Coaching literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay with same coach</td>
<td>In vivo</td>
<td>Transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach using teacher's ideas</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Adult learning literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework (new activities and materials)</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Coaching literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared learning between coach and teacher</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Adult learning &amp; development, &amp; career development literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on practice through discussion</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Coaching, adult learning &amp; development, &amp; career development literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the analysis process continued, initially-established codes were carefully examined. Each of the codes had to be considered according to its relevance to the coaching experience and the ability to label it from an abstract perspective. As these considerations were made, codes were eliminated, combined or left in their original form. When that cycle of analysis was
completed, a second cycle was initiated. This cycle included cross-case analysis. To begin this process the researcher read through each of the transcripts and noted similarities between the transcripts in the fieldnotes. The researcher then used a sorting feature on the MAXQDA 10 program to organize the codes used within each of the transcripts. A sample of the cross-case analysis is provided in Table 10.

Table 10

*Sample of Coding Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document name</th>
<th>Modeling</th>
<th>Videotaping</th>
<th>Coursework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1 with Angi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1 with Samantha</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1 with Patricia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1 with Maria</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1 with Lisa</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1 with Jenna</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1 with Jean</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1 with Emily</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Horizontalization was implemented during this phase of analysis. Lists of descriptive text segments were identified across the transcripts. This cross-case analysis allowed for further reduction and elimination of codes, as well as for themes to emerge. Codes and text segments were reviewed again to continue to recognize themes that emerged. An example of the process used to reduce codes and create themes is illustrated in Figure 9.
Figure 9: Sample of code reduction.

**Member Validation.** With codes refined and themes created, the researcher began the member validation process. To prepare for validation, the researcher created summaries of the interviews for each participant (Appendix F). The summaries were organized based on Seidman’s (2006) framework for data collection. Interview information was documented for each of the three sections of the framework: focused life history, focused details of the coaching experience, and focused reflection on meaning. A column of relevant quotes was included to support the interview information that was documented. An Excel spreadsheet was created from the MAXQDA 10 program for each of the participant interviews. It included the codes, themes, and supporting text from the transcripts. The researcher contacted all participants by email to inform them that they needed to complete the validation process, which involved reviewing both the accuracy of their participant summaries and the appropriateness of the meaning attached to their experiences. The completed participant summary and Excel spreadsheet were sent to each participant as an email attachment. Participants were required to email the researcher back to confirm the validity of the documents or to share changes that needed to be made. All
participants responded within the one-week parameter and all validated the documents as accurate representations of their experience with coaching and the meaning of that experience.

When member validation was completed, copies of the original transcripts, along with the list of themes, were sent by the researcher to a peer for review to maintain inter-coder reliability. The alignment of themes closely mirrored those of the researcher. The only discrepancy was in the amount of text that the peer highlighted when connecting a theme to the transcript. The peer highlighted only key words while the researcher included the context of the connection to the theme as well as the key word. The peer and researcher discussed this discrepancy and felt that the validation process was completed in a suitable manner.

**Category and Description Findings**

During this phase of analysis, individual textural and individual structural analysis took place. The codes and themes were re-examined to determine which represented what the participants experienced during the coaching process and which represented how each person experienced the coaching phenomenon. The researcher used chart paper to organize the themes into two groups, a textural group and a structural group. Further analysis was done to organize themes in each group into categories. To get through this process, the literature on coaching, adult learning and development, and career development was reviewed. The researcher focused primarily on the coaching literature to help guide the development of the categories for the textural grouping. This literature spoke to the process of coaching and highlighted studies that used a variety of types of coaching. This offered insight into differences among the methods of coaching the participants experienced.

The adult learning and development and career development literature was reviewed for the structural grouping. In the structural grouping the focus was on identifying a variety of
perspectives through which the coaching phenomenon could be experienced. To understand those perspectives, the environment of the participants had to be examined. By considering the participants’ past experiences, expectations that were placed on them, and roles they assumed throughout their lives, insight could be gained about how they approached and went through the process. A challenge the researcher faced during this analysis cycle was narrowing the themes to reflect the focus of the research question while still being mindful of sociocultural learning theory, which was the theoretical framework of the study. The researcher eliminated themes that were outside of the realm of the coaching phenomenon, but acknowledged the relevant background information that spoke to a deeper understanding of the categories. This information is contained in the summary of the categories. Table 11 provides an example of three textural and two structural themes with the corresponding text from the participant Samantha.

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textural themes</th>
<th>Relevant statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role of videotaping on feedback</td>
<td>With the video. I mean, there is nothing like having a video of yourself. It really does. And even just for you, even if it’s set up a video camera in your classroom for a couple hours, and then just go back and watch it. I think we’re our own worst critics sometimes, and sometimes we can, honestly, sometimes I would be over criticize. She’s like, “No, that was great,” and I’m like, “Oh, thank you.” Because we are, we critique ourselves, I think sometimes—looking back at the videos is helpful, because you can sometimes see, “Oh, I didn’t pause enough” or “I was asking them questions.” Like when I first started, I was asking a question and now waiting before I asked another question [13:01]. So instead of scaffolding, I was kind of giving them the answers versus engaging them to give me the answers. So it did, it helped me look back, because you could really see yourself. “Oh, okay. Look it.” we’d go over the videotape, which I thought was the greatest thing. Because when you record yourself, you don’t realize sometimes you answer the child’s question for them. Or I kept asking questions instead of giving them time to answer, so I felt like it helped me reflect on what I needed to work on. And then I’d go back and not fix, but tweak my lesson,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Modeling | I would have rather someone come in and modeled, or shown me, “Look, these are different ideas you can do with the children.”

modeling is I think one of the best. Because as teachers, we do get situations where sometimes someone may be not using the appropriate tone or language. And for us to go over and say it the way you would want to be said, sometimes that makes you think, “Oh, wait. Yeah, maybe I wasn’t saying that right, and this is the way.” It helps people, because nobody’s perfect. We all have those days, too. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback focused on concrete actions</td>
<td>“Hey, look it, there’s so many different ways. You don’t even have to sit down and read a book. You can use these puppets. You can use this felt board.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural themes</td>
<td>Relevant statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators believed the coaching experience was not as meaningful to them because they had no input in the focus of the coaching.</td>
<td>So I would have rather someone come in and modeled, or shown me, “Look, these are different ideas you can do with the children.” So have it be something that I really needed coaching in. That didn’t really happen. I just would have liked it to have been more guided towards what I needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved practice continues despite the end of coaching experience</td>
<td>sometimes I have to think to myself, “Okay, wait a minute. I’m asking too many questions. I have to slow down.” So I think of my coaching experiences. she definitely taught me a lot of all positive things about my style and ways to be more effective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the individual textural and individual structural themes and categories were identified and charted, the textural structural combination had to be considered. The researcher combined all themes and corresponding relevant text segments into one table so a full analysis could be completed. This analysis ensures that the categories, themes, and text segments truly
represented the essence of the coaching experience and captured the structural description of the meaning of the phenomenon of coaching. A total of eight textural themes, six structural themes, and three categories were designated. These themes and categories are presented in Table 12.

Table 12
Categories and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Focus of coaching</td>
<td>Textural theme: Educators had input into the focus of the coaching experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structural theme: Coaching was considered more meaningful to educators when their professional needs were considered in the design of the focus of the coaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textural theme: Perspectives of the educators did not always shape the focus of the coaching experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structural theme: Educators often did not share their thoughts on what the focus of coaching should be and felt like the experience was not as meaningful to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textural theme: Modeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structural theme: The need for coaches to demonstrate effective skills in areas of practice that educators were struggling with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Coaches support educators through feedback</td>
<td>Structural theme: Prompted to self-reflect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textural theme: Feedback focused on concrete actions observed by the coach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textural theme: The role of videotaping in feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structural theme: Feelings about the videotaping process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Coaching resulted in change of practice in the classroom for educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textural theme:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication between children and educators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural theme:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching increases feedback loops with children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textural Theme:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionality in teaching practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textural theme:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasting impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural theme:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved practice continues despite the end of coaching experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following subsection summarizes the categories and themes that resulted from the composite textural structural analysis. This summary describes each of the categories along with its supporting textural themes and structural themes, connections to the literature, and relevant text from the participants’ transcripts.

**Category 1: Focus of coaching.** The first category is *focus of coaching*. The focus of coaching is often considered the backbone of the actual coaching process, from which all of the interactions and exchanges related to coaching emerge (Hsieh et al., 2009; Tout et al., 2015). Research indicates that the focus of coaching should result from a joint collaboration between the coach and the educator to set goals and establish a joint plan for the direction of the coaching (Hsieh et al., 2009; McGatha, 2008; Powell et al., 2010). As adult learners, educators need the opportunity to take the lead in their learning, with supportive teachers guiding them along this path of learning (Knowles, 1990). A final consideration in the creation of this theme was the educators’ past experiences. Krumboltz et al. (1976) recognized that learning experiences are closely paired with past experiences, which shape views as negative or positive. Through recognizing those past experiences and using those to shape the focus of coaching, a more meaningful experience will unfold.
The focus of coaching for eight of the 10 participants centered on coursework that they were enrolled in. Two participants were earning their CDA’s and their coaching experience focused on ensuring that the criteria for practice required by the CDA council were met. The coaching focus for the six other participants enrolled in coursework was based on topics they were being taught. These curriculum topics included the properties of water, balls and ramps, and language and literacy.

Participants in the study who received coaching but were not enrolled in coursework were part of a statewide coaching initiative. For these two participants, the intended focus of their coaching was on their own professional needs. They determined their own goals for change of practice and developed action plans to achieve these goals. The coaches were responsible for observing and supporting the educators as they worked towards meeting these goals.

Of the 10 participants who took part in this study, five reported that the coach determined the focus of their coaching experience. Three participants identified the focus of the coaching as being jointly developed, where the coaches sought input on the needs or interests of the participants and blended that input with the goals they were to achieve through the course requirements that were part of the coaching initiative. Two participants shared that they had sole responsibility for creating the focus of their coaching experiences.

The lived experiences of participants related to the category focus of coaching included the experiences participants had during their years of education, reflecting on whether or not they felt they had a voice in their educational process. Samantha noted that when she attended college for her associate’s degree she appreciated that some of her professors valued her, thinking, “I definitely wouldn’t be sitting down talking too much, because that’s just not my style. You’d be up moving, sharing ideas. I think it’s great when you go to them and you’d have small group
sessions and they care about what you think.” Lisa echoed that statement sharing about her experience as an undergraduate “to work alongside somebody, kind of bouncing ideas off of a teacher, that’s my type of learning.” Anna also explained that her deepest learning occurs when there is back-and-forth conversation about a new idea or concept, noting that “I like to contribute to different conversations between people and their teachers, and I might agree or disagree, but I like to just hear a variety of ideas and share my ideas, too. I like when someone listens to my thinking. That’s when I feel valued and learn more.”

Three textural themes and three structural themes that led to the category focus of coaching emerged from the data.

**Textural theme 1: Educators had input into the focus of the coaching experience.** Five participants discussed having input into the focus of the coaching. The three participants who experienced coaching with a jointly developed focus recognized that the coaches did have criteria that must be met through their coaching agendas, but they still incorporated the educators’ needs in the focus of their coaching.

**Structural theme 1: Coaching was more meaningful to educators when their professional needs were considered in the design of the focus of the coaching.** Participants reflected that they appreciated that their coach took the time to acknowledge their needs within the coaching process. Emily explained:

> [The coach] would take my point of view into consideration which was incredibly helpful. She was very open, very easy going. She offered help with other things that we needed. She was very willing to listen to my needs and guide me along.

Anna stated that the focus of her coaching experience changed over the course of the three years she worked with her coach, becoming more meaningful during the process. She said:
I think there was a gradual shift from [coach] to myself as far as the planning for the focus. She would give a lot more input in the beginning; how I should be planning, how I should be engaging the children. That would be the focus. Towards the end of the three years I was doing most of the planning for the sessions and she was doing just listening and putting in a good word or two here and there. So the focus kind of shifted over gradually which really helped me to grow as a teacher.

Jean, who created her own coaching focus based on her professional needs, shared her thoughts about setting her own focus for her coaching experience. She explained:

The coach pretty much left it wide open. It could be a goal towards curriculum, it could be a goal personally, something I’d like to achieve within the next week. It was great. I got to really own the experience.

**Textural theme 2: Perspectives of the educators did not shape the focus of the coaching experience.** Five participants out of 10 received coaching that was focused solely on the agenda of the coach. These participants were not able to contribute in any way to the focus of the coaching experience. For each of these five participants the focus of the coaching was based on coursework that they were participating in.

**Structural theme 2: Educators believed the coaching experience was not as meaningful to them because they had no input in the focus of the coaching.** Participants shared their thoughts about the impact that not sharing in the design of the focus of the coaching process had on their experience. Lisa explained:

[The coaches] were so driven by the coursework, I mean she was supportive of me with some of the challenges in the classroom and I could talk openly about that but I never felt like she really listened. They had their agendas of what they had to do and stuck to that.
She had to do X, Y, and Z and have her teachers do it, you know what I mean. The focus was more driven by her bosses and the curriculum from the course, rather than coming from the classroom and going backwards. It just didn’t feel as helpful as it could have been.

Angi revealed some frustration around the lack of involvement she had in setting the focus of her coaching experience, “It’s like I didn’t gain that, you know, what I wanted to see or what I wanted her to tell me as an educator. I couldn’t share what I wanted to learn.” Deborah echoed Angi’s frustration when she explained that “it was really more like they’re just reinforcing what is happening in the class and disregarding the level that you are at as an educator.”

Patricia expressed strong feelings about her desire for having a shared responsibility for the focus of her coaching. She noted her discomfort with having complete responsibility for the focus:

[The focus] wasn’t done together. I told her what I would be doing and she tried to follow. It felt like too much pressure in a way. I would have liked more of her thoughts on what she thought I needed, too. I wish I could have told her that. We could work together on setting goals. That would have been better.

_textural theme 3: Modeling._ Modeling for this purpose represents the coaches’ ability to demonstrate effective skills in areas of practice educators are struggling with (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015). Modeling is tied into the focus of coaching because what is actually being modeled by the coaches should be a skill or technique that the educator is trying to improve on. All 10 participants identified modeling as being critical to their learning in the coaching process. Four of the participants had coaches who used modeling in the coaching process. For two participants
coaches used videos as a method of modeling. Four participants did not have modeling as part of their coaching experience, but identified interest in having the coach model new practices.

**Structural theme 3: The need for coaches to model effective skills in areas of practice that educators were struggling with.** Participants shared their thoughts on how modeling impacted their practice. Anna said:

> I think modeling is the biggest thing that has helped to shape me. I think that has been a big thing that has shaped the way that I teach. I’ve taken a little bit from everybody that I’ve crossed paths with over the past 34 years, including my coach, and I’ve kind of made myself, from all these little bits and pieces, try things out and see what works for me. Sometimes, things work wonderful for some teachers, and they just fall flat for me. Then other things, I’ve gotten ideas from other people, and I’ve incorporated them successfully into my year.

Patricia also noted the impact that the modeling her coach did in the classroom had on her practice. She explained, “She’s great. You could be frustrated, and she sits down there with the grumpiest of children and can turn them around. In that respect, she is a good model.”

Emily said that the modeling she experienced while working with her coach included watching short segments with her coach of videos that showed educators working with groups of children around topics pertaining to what she was focused on. Emily would then discuss what she observed and her coach would suggest to her, “Do you want to try to incorporate what XXX did in her video of the worms and snails?”

Six of the 10 participants expressed a desire for their coaches to incorporate modeling into their experiences. Jean shared that she had been struggling with managing effective group times with the children in her class and focused on improving her skills in this area during her
coaching experience. She stated, “It would have been great just for her (coach) to demonstrate how she would actually facilitate a group.” Angi, who had hoped to gain some insight into classroom management during her coaching experience, echoed Jean’s sentiments when she said, “…at least just show me scenarios of which, like two children are fighting over a toy, show me the positive actions, this is really critical for us.” As Samantha struggled some with using appropriate tones and language in the classroom, she also commented on her feelings related to her desire for modeling to take place during her coaching experience. Samantha explained that Modeling is the best, because as teachers, we do get situations where sometimes we may not be using the appropriate tone or language. And for the coach to go over and say it the way you would want it to be said, sometimes that makes you think, ‘Oh, wait. Yeah, maybe I wasn’t saying that right, and this is the way.’ It helps people, because nobody is perfect.

**Category 2: Coaches support educators through feedback.** The second category is coaches support educators through feedback. Feedback in coaching is defined by Rush & Shelden (2011) as:

Information provided by the coach that is based on his or her direct observation of the coachee, actions reported by the coachee, or information shared by the coachee and that is designed to expand the coachee’s current level of understanding about a specific practice or to affirm thoughts or actions related to the intended outcomes. (p. 9)

As noted in the research (Sailors & Price, 2014; Schatcher, 2015), feedback is a significant component of the coaching process. Through coaches providing feedback, educators can establish an understanding between the focus of the coaching and the progress being made toward satisfying the goals of the coaching focus.
Feedback must be examined from a wider context. Zunker (2015) states that “if an individual has been positively reinforced while engaging in the activities of a course of study or occupation, the individual is more likely to express a preference for that course of study or occupation” (p. 35). Participants shared their experiences with feedback at different times in their lives, noting its influence on their self-efficacy. Anna noted that “my initial career path was probably special education, because of all the experience I had with my brother who had special needs. All the different internships and volunteer jobs, they loved me and told me I was a natural.” Emily echoed this experience as she recalled, “I got to work as an assistant (teacher) for three years there and I loved it. I felt like they really liked the work I did, they always called me their hardest worker and that I really made a difference. That felt good.” Maria also spoke about the feedback she received from her employer: “Because I love this job, because I can—I’m in the kitchen and on the bus, but I also can go in the classrooms, and help the teachers, and work with the children. They tell me how happy they are when they know I come.”

From this category two textural and two structural themes emerged. These themes will be considered in more detail in the following subsections.

**Structural theme 1: Prompted to self-reflect.** Six of the 10 participants identified self-reflection as a key part of feedback received from coaches. Self-reflection is defined as by Lew & Schmidt (2011) as:

The processes that a learner undergoes to look back on his past learning experiences and what he did to enable learning to occur, and the exploration of connections between the knowledge that was taught and the learner’s own ideas about them. (p. 530)
To establish this “looking back” and “connecting knowledge,” the coaches provided feedback that caused the educators to think more introspectively about what they had experienced in their classrooms.

Lisa articulated this process clearly for herself as she stated, “We would go over the observations, and she didn’t really give me suggestions. She more asked me questions and kind of got me to open up my head a little bit more about how to do things.” Jenna described the technique that her coach used to support her reflective process through his feedback, “It was more of, ‘How did you feel? Were you comfortable with the activity?’ So he was getting our reflections first, our thoughts as a teacher.” Emily acknowledged that her coach was “very good as far as not feeding us the answers.” Emily went on to state that

[Coach] made me think, which is good because that’s something that I still do now. That kind of got built into my practice. I’ll do an activity and I’ll be like, ‘Okay, that didn’t go well. Why didn’t it go well? What am I going to adjust to make it better the next time?’

Samantha described her experience with her coach’s reflective feedback as “gentle and guiding,” explaining that her coach would give her “key points,” but let her realize what she “could have changed” or what “went wrong.” Deborah explained that she felt her coach was “kind of like a counselor. She wouldn’t say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or ‘Oh yeah, great job.’ She was more like ‘Okay, so what could you have done differently?’”

**Textural theme 1: Feedback based on concrete actions observed by the coach.** A significant component of feedback is what supports the information that is being shared during the feedback session. All 10 of the participants identified concrete actions that were observed by the coach as being the basis for the feedback they received. For the purposes of this study,
concrete actions can be defined as actions of the coachee that were observed by the coach and documented through observation notes or videotaping.

Jean shared information about feedback from her coach that was based on concrete actions that the coach had observed:

Me and my co-teacher, we tend to be very loud. It’s just our personalities. Coach saw this and talked with us about tone of voice. She would remind us that you use your tone to help guide your classroom, so if you are really loud, they’re going to be really loud.

Anna expressed appreciation for feedback based on concrete actions when she stated, “Discussing the video meant a lot and brought a lot more concrete information to my planning.”

Samantha also shared her experience with feedback based on concrete actions:

These were specific experiments that we talked about, the ones coach videotaped. I would reflect with her and say, ‘Oh, I could add this,’ or ‘Oh, this activity should have labels so the children know the names and see the names.’

Jenna narrowed her comments about feedback based on observed concrete actions when she discussed a child-specific scenario that the coach helped her to understand more clearly:

At first I was just saying, ‘Oh no, he just wants to go and play, and he doesn’t know how to engage in play, so he becomes aggressive.’ Coach sat with me and told me to watch the tape. She kind of opened it up a little bit to really, really focus and lock in on that child… and then it was like, ‘Oh, he’s doing this. Oh, I know how he got from point A to C, because before I wasn’t seeing the B.’

**Textural theme 2: The role of videotaping in feedback.** Seven of the 10 participants were videotaped during their coaching experience. This videotaping took place during the participants’ instructional time in their classrooms. All participants who were videotaped stated
that they were videotaped by their coach. Two of those participants also stated that they
videotaped themselves implementing activities that the coach wanted to observe, but could not
be present for. These videos were sent electronically to the coaches to view. The videos were
viewed by coaches and participants during the reflective feedback sessions. One participant said
that her coach asked her permission to share one of her videos with an educator she was
coaching who worked in another program. Permission was granted by the participant. All seven
of these participants were able to upload their videos for their own professional use (child
assessments, reference on implementation of new skills, etc.). Videos were erased at the end of
the coaching process.

**Structural theme 2: Feelings about the videotaping process.** All 10 of the participants
discussed their thoughts on videotaping as part of the coaching process. Seven of the participants
noted that the idea of their coaches videotaping their practice in the classroom was very stressful.
Lisa reflected that when she found out she was going to be videotaped she thought, “Oh my God,
it’s going to be, it’s going to be awful.” Jenna shared in some detail the impact that videotaping
had on her practice:

> There is something different with somebody standing there with a video camera, taping. I
would get really nervous. I would start to get tongue tied, so I felt like the lesson
wouldn’t go as good. I’d get blotchy, I’d get red, I’d get hot, and I’d be sweating. And
it’s funny, because the second they have that off, all of a sudden, you can go right in…
you could do that lesson twenty times better than what you just did two minutes ago. I
just didn’t want to use the videotaping for any feedback!

Emily said that when she found out that videotaping was part of the coaching, she almost
resigned from the program.
Though many of the participants expressed feelings of stress over being videotaped, seven of the 10 participants recognized that videotaping played a significant role in the feedback they received during the coaching process. Participants often reflected that watching the videotapes with their coach allowed them to recognize positive areas of their practice, as well as areas of their practice that needed to be improved. Angi expressed that when she sat down with her coach to review the videotapes, the feedback the coach offered her helped her to recognize how slight changes in her reactions or responses to children could have impacted the children’s behavior. One specific example of this type of exchange was when her coach stated, “Instead of you saying what you said at that moment, how could you just rephrase that and direct it in a more positive direction?” Patricia shared that

When I watched myself, the parts I thought were awful, I say, ‘That’s not so bad.’ But you can be surprised, too, at the things that you are doing that really are pretty good, and then you can see pieces that you really need to work on.

Samantha described some specific examples of her ability to reflect on her own practice more deeply:

I found looking back at the videos is helpful, because you can sometimes see, ‘Oh, I didn’t pause enough,’ or ‘I was asking them questions.’ Like when I first started, I was asking a question… I was kind of giving them the answers versus engaging them to give me the answers. So it did, it helped me look back, because you could really see yourself.

As a result of receiving feedback from viewing the videotapes, participants also shared that they gained deeper insight into their students’ abilities. Emily noted, “it was very nice seeing yourself from the backseat, kind of seeing yourself in action, and being able to really appreciate each child individually.” Lisa observed, “I saw what questions to the children got the best
responses. I saw how they responded, what kept their attention.” Anna explained in some detail that she was able to

Watch the video and dissect it and look at each child individually and see what they’re getting out of it. Are they enjoying it? Are they inquisitive? The video meant a lot and brought a lot more concrete information to my plan. I had this extra evidence, so I would have more information to draw from to plan for each child for the next time.

**Category 3: Coaching resulted in change of practice in the classroom for educators.**

The final category is *coaching resulted in change of practice in the classroom for educators.*

This category represents anecdotal reflections of educators on their own practice. Change of practice has not been measured in a scientific manner. As noted in the research, (Sailors & Price, 2014; Schatcher, 2014), individualized feedback received during the coaching process has the potential to be more meaningful to change of practice than any other method of professional development. As adults become involved in learning experiences, there are certain unique characteristics that must be considered if learning is to be impactful on practice (Knowles, 1970, 1984; Knowles et al., 2011). Is the learning meaningful to the individual? Is the learning led by the learner? Are the lived experiences of the learner being considered? What are the responsibilities of the learner outside the learning experience? Is the learner able to apply new knowledge to meaningful problems right away? Super (1990) recognized that adults take on many roles throughout their lives. It is important to consider these roles along with the needs of adult learners to ensure that learning can be meaningful personally and professionally. These considerations were acknowledged as the participants shared perspectives about their lives outside of their role as educator.
Patricia noted that with the birth of her second child, who had some disabilities, she wanted to change the focus of her college coursework from business to education. She stated:

As a mother with a child that has special needs you work to educate yourself on all these things, I said, ‘My Lord.’ And I had started going back to school for business, which was my first experience with college. And I said, ‘Well this is ridiculous. I’m doing all this reading; I might as well switch to education. At least it will help me help my daughter.’

So I did that.

Maria spoke about the balance of being a mother and a student, noting how important it was to model for her daughters the importance of education because that was not something she had from her family growing up. She said that “the older one (daughter) is always pushing me. And what I didn’t have, I want them to have, you know, as the education. Because she is really smart, and I know she can go a lot farther and I can show her how important that is. So I didn’t have that from my mom, so I want her to have it.”

Jean shared how she balanced several roles at the same time, being a young, single mother, a student, and a daughter. She noted the pressure she felt to return to school from her parents, but also appreciated the support they provided when she did make the decision to return to school:

I got a lot of support from my parents with things like babysitting. They made sure my son was taken care of when I couldn’t be there to do it. I didn’t have to worry. And also, just giving me that encouragement, like, ‘You’re almost there. You can taste it.’ So that helped me to handle a lot.
As educators shared their feelings about the impact that the coaching experience had on their practice, they were asked to elaborate on how that impact took place. Three textural and one structural theme led to the creation of this category.

**Textural theme 1: Communication between children and educators.** Four of the 10 participants mentioned that their communication with children in their classrooms was strengthened. Communication was strengthened through the use of open-ended questioning and resulted from their use of more open-ended questions and understanding more clearly how to communicate more effectively with children. Open-ended questions require children to respond with more than one word and encourage more complex thinking. Anna articulated this effectively when she noted that

> I learned to be more reflective with the children. I know the value of asking more open-ended questions: What did you learn? Which ball was faster? What’s your theory? Why do you think so? That really gets the children thinking. I know that the way I talk to them and question them makes a difference in their thinking.

Lisa also shared some insight into her change in communication with children:

> I learned to just be there and when children would say something interesting, that’s when you say, ‘Well, that’s really interesting what you said. What makes you think that?’ or, ‘Why do you think that?’ And then you can just build and build on their knowledge and tease what they know right out.

Emily, whose native language is not English, offered her perspective on working with dual language learners around open-ended questions:

> It’s more thought about… what type of language I use when talking to children. I am really aware of how I question children to really get them to think. Even when I ask
questions to children in Spanish, I am aware of making those questions more open. All children need to have the chance to show what they know.

**Textural theme 2: Intentionality in teaching practices.** Intentionality can be defined as being deliberate or purposeful with your actions. When considering intentionality within teaching practices, emphasis must be placed on the educators’ deliberate planning of activities to meet the specific needs, interests, or abilities of the children in their classrooms. Five of the 10 participants said that they are more intentional about different areas of their practice as a result of taking part in the coaching experience. Anna noted the change in her practice was brought about because of newly acquired knowledge she gained from the course related to intentional groupings for children:

Before it would be whoever is there, that’s who I’ll play with, whereas when I worked with the coach, we would group children by interest and ability and plan different things with different groups. So I might have a group of English language learners. We were all going to meet on this day and we’re going to work on this topic, and everyone is sort of on the same page.

Deborah also observed that as a result of the coaching feedback her “small group activities were a lot more meaningful and a lot more structured.” She also recognized that since the coaching experience, she was much more deliberate in her use of vocabulary words with the children in the classroom. Samantha shared techniques learned during the coaching process that she uses to promote intentionality in her practice around book reading:

I’ll pre-read a book now and prepare more carefully for groups, and I’ll come up with questions in my head. I often use sticky notes to write my questions on and then put those questions in the book to remind myself later. I now think more about the process of book
reading; asking questions, pausing when you read a page, and asking questions for each page. I think about what I’m doing more.

Emily also commented that the intentionality in her practice is “more than what you learn in a textbook. It comes from living through the coaching and really concentrating on what practice works best.”

Textural theme 3: Lasting impact. Six of the 10 participants spoke to the fact that several elements of new practice that they learned during their coaching experience are still being implemented by them in their current classrooms. Two participants felt that no lasting impact resulted from the limited number of coaching sessions they had. One participant felt that the coaching experience did not impact her practice in any way.

Structural theme 1: Improved practice continues despite the end of the coaching experience. Participants were asked by the researcher during the interview sessions to consider how, if at all, the coaching experience impacted their practice after the conclusion of the process. Jenna was quick to note that she still uses a language log to document children’s use of vocabulary in a variety of areas of her classroom. Samantha explained that “even now I have to think to myself, ‘Okay, wait a minute. I’m asking too many questions. I have to slow down.’ So I still think of my coaching experience.” Anna reflected on the fact that during her coaching experience there were only a small number of topics covered, but those topics were covered in great detail. She felt there was value in that practice and said that she still reflects on this when planning topics for her classroom, “I do carry this still to this day. I do have fewer topics and go deeper into those topics, it makes a difference.”

Emily shared that a significant learning experience that has had long lasting impact on her practice was her understanding about working with families of dual language learners
regarding their native language. She noted that after the coursework, she was questioning herself about how she shared her native language with her own children, but through the coaching experience, recognized how important it is to respect families’ native languages. She commented, “Even now, I feel more confident telling parents how important it is for them to value their home language with their children.”

**Thematic Analysis**

During this analysis process, a composite description of the phenomenon was created. This composite description represents the phenomenon of coaching based on the textural and structural composite descriptions of the participants. This is considered the “essence of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a narrative study (Creswell, 2013).

**The core essence of the phenomenon of the coaching process.** The core essence of the phenomenon of this study is how early childhood educators living in Massachusetts experience the coaching process. First, early childhood educators experience the coaching process in a more meaningful way when they have input into the focus of the coaching process. Educators are able to recognize areas of their practice that need to be strengthened. During the experience of coaching, there should be joint communication between coaches and educators to allow the educators the opportunity to share those areas of practice that need to be strengthened and then work with their coaches to incorporate those needs into the focus of the coaching process. When this collaboration does not occur, educators feel less valued in the coaching process and are more likely to find the coaching process less meaningful to their practice. To support the focus of coaching, educators rely on the experience of having the practices they need support with modeled by an individual who can demonstrate competency in that practice. This can be
experienced through modeling of practices by coaches in educators’ classrooms or through the use of video in which the new practice is being demonstrated effectively.

Second, educators feel supported during the coaching process when coaches provide opportunities for reflective feedback. The reflective feedback should be based on concrete observations that occur during observation sessions in the coaching process. These observation sessions can be videotaped so that educators and their coaches are able to closely analyze concrete examples of their practice. It is important to recognize that though educators value the use of videotaping in their classrooms, they do have apprehension about the experience of videotaping. These apprehensions may be for reasons such as the educator’s appearance or voice on the video. The usefulness of the video gathered from videotaping (for child assessment or for a record of new practices being implemented) does make the experience of value for educators. Apprehensions about the videotaping process typically are reduced with more use of videotaping in the classroom. Reflective feedback should also encourage educators to self-reflect on their practice. This self-reflection process is experienced by the educators when coaches ask questions that allow educators to consider their thoughts and opinions about their own process. This allows educators the opportunity to critically evaluate their own practices.

Finally, educators experience a change of practice as a result of participating in the coaching process. Communication between educators and children in their classrooms becomes more effective because educators are more aware of asking open-ended questions that encourage children to think more deeply about their responses. Educators are more responsive to children’s discussions, spending more time listening to what children are saying to them during their play. Educators are more intentional in their teaching practices as a result of experiencing the coaching process. Planning for activities such as book reading and small group activities is more carefully
considered so that children’s needs are met in the most effective manner by the educators. After the conclusion of the coaching process, educators are able to effectively continue to implement the new practices they have learned.

**Research Question Analysis**

To complete this study, the researcher had to cycle back to the focus of the study which was to answer the research question. The research question for this study was: How do early childhood educators teaching in mixed age preschool classrooms in Massachusetts experience the on-site coaching process? To answer this question, the researcher focused on analyzing the lived experiences of 10 individuals who experienced the coaching process. Their experiences were considered individually and then viewed as a whole to explain their experience with the phenomenon of the coaching experience. As the composite description of the phenomenon was drafted, the researcher embedded the research question in the form of a statement in the opening lines of the document. This ensured that as the researcher was writing, the question remained as the focus of the narrative. Ultimately, the composite description did answer, in great detail, what early childhood educators experience during the onsite coaching process.

**Summary**

This chapter reported the findings from the data analysis of a qualitative narrative study. The chapter included a restatement of the purpose for the study and a description of the phases of data findings, including the participants, category and description findings, thematic analysis, and research question analysis. Categories and textural and structural themes that emerged from the data were described. Finally, a composite description of the lived experience of coaching for the collective group was shared and analyzed against the research question. In the following
chapter, conclusions based on the interpretations of the analysis completed in this chapter will be presented. That chapter will close with implications for theory, future research and practice.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of early childhood educators teaching in mixed age preschool classrooms in Massachusetts who had experienced on-site coaching. Sociocultural learning theory served as the theoretical framework for this study. Ten early childhood educators working in a variety of early education and care programs throughout Massachusetts were interviewed for this study. These interviews provided rich data regarding their lived experiences with the coaching process. The qualitative narrative approach was best suited for this study because it allowed the shared lived experiences of participants to be more closely examined. There were two major characteristics of qualitative research that were significant in the decision to use this design. The first characteristic was naturalistic inquiry. Qualitative research provides a conduit for “studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally; nonmanipulative, unobtrusive, and noncontrolling; [providing] openness to whatever emerges [without] predetermined constraints on outcomes” (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 428). The findings of this study were not based on predetermined outcomes, but rather came from unfolding the experiences educators had as they participated in the real-world coaching process.

The second characteristic of qualitative research that supported the essence of this study was the process of inductive analysis. Inductive analysis allows open-ended interview questions to be explored and analyzed both individually and comparatively. The data that emerged from the analysis of the transcribed interviews was used to define themes and categories that materialized. This process allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the coaching process as a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Four phases of data analysis yielded three categories and 14 themes (eight textural and six structural), which represented overarching trends in the data.
These categories and themes were used to establish conclusions regarding commonalities among the shared experiences of early childhood educators who participated in the coaching process.

This chapter presents conclusions and implications from the researcher’s interpretation of these findings. Consideration will be given to the implications for practice as well as for future research. Each conclusion reached will be summarized and connected directly to implications for practice. The researcher will also provide a clear connection between each of the conclusions and the theoretical framework used for this study. Implications for theory and for future research as a result of concluding this study will also be suggested. The chapter will close with the researcher summarizing and reflecting upon the study.

**Conclusions and Implications for Practice**

Five conclusions were derived from the educators’ shared perspectives about the coaching process. The first conclusion drawn from this study is that the focus of coaching should consider input from the educators on their needs for improving their practice on specific professional topics. The second conclusion emphasizes that when educators are able to observe coaches modeling the practices that are the focus of the coaching, their understanding will be deeper. The third conclusion supports coaches providing concrete and meaningful feedback to educators through the use of videotaping. The fourth conclusion explains that coaches can guide educators to self-reflect on practice during feedback sessions. The final conclusion asserts that the coaching experience can support sustainable changes in educator practice.

The following subsections provide the researcher’s conclusions after analyzing and interpreting the data. Each conclusion will be situated within the theoretical framework. A connection to relevant literature will also be made. Finally, each conclusion’s implications for practice will be identified.
Conclusion 1: Focus of Coaching and Educator Input

The first conclusion of this study is that coaching must consider input from the educators on their needs for improving their practice. Rush and Shelden (2011) describe the coaching process as a “partnership” and a “reciprocal process” in which the “coach must learn what the coachee knows, understands, and is doing,” and note that coaching cannot be a “hierarchical relationship in which the coachee implements actions due to directives, intimidation, or a need to satisfy the coach” (p. 11). Educators want their needs to be addressed during the coaching process and for a partnership to be formed. Research has demonstrated that this partnership is vital to the success of the coaching process (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Rivera et al., 2004; Schachter, 2015; Sugar, 2005; West & Staub, 2003).

Repeatedly, all 10 participants discussed their interest and desire to have some type of input into the focus of the coaching they received. While many of the participants who took part in this study identified predetermined coursework as the focus of the coaching process, there was still a common thread woven through the data that highlighted the interest of participants in providing input into the direction of the coaching process. Emily, who participated in coaching that was connected to coursework, noted that her coach would take her point of view into consideration and that it was “incredibly helpful” to have her coach do this. She explained that her coach was very open, commenting that “she offered help with other things that we needed.” This strong partnership supported building a successful relationship between Emily and her coach. Anna supported this thinking when she discussed the change in focus of the coaching and the relationship built with the coach over the three years they worked together. She explained that “the focus kind of shifted over gradually [from the coach’s agenda to Anna’s agenda] which really helped me to grow as a teacher.”
A strong connection can be drawn between this conclusion and sociocultural learning theory. A key component of sociocultural learning theory considers the development of the social (interpsychological) plane and the individual (intrapsychological) plane, and how the planes intersect to create individuals’ mental structures. According to Hook (2004), “higher psychological thinking represents relations between people [the social or interpsychological plane]… then these relationships become part of the individual’s inner world [the intrapsychological plane]” (p. 55). This was exemplified when Anna shared the following thoughts, “I felt like she was a peer, but I felt, like I said, kind of a big sister.” Research in adult learning and development literature (Burnes & Cooke, 2013; Knowles, 1975; Kolb, 1984; Shellhase, 2006) identifies the importance of the meaningfulness of learning to individuals. For learning to be meaningful, it must enter into their “inner world” by solving a problem that matters to learners (Hook, 2004; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). If coaching is to be effective as a method of gaining new practice and knowledge for educators, it must match what they care about. For this match to occur, it behooves coaches to tap into educators’ needs. This can be achieved by considering educators’ concerns about their own professional needs in their classrooms and incorporating those needs into the focus of their coaching.

This conclusion is supported further by research that states the importance of how much control individuals feel they have in the external factors in their environments and cultures (Grusec, 1992; Marion, 2007). As individuals are submerged in cultural contexts, the relationships and interactions they have with others are being negotiated and integrated mentally to shape the learning, thinking, and knowing that is produced by the learner (DeVries, 2000; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). This negotiation shapes the learning process in which experiences are given meaning and value (Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1976). Coaches must recognize that
prior experiences and relationships impact how educators approach the coaching process. When coaches elicit information from educators about their past experiences and knowledge and use this information as a platform to discuss the focus of coaching, the shape of their learning will be positively impacted.

Several participants who took part in the coursework that was connected to the coaching shared their frustrations around not having input into the focus of their coaching. Angi expressed that she felt she “couldn’t share what [she] wanted to learn.” Deborah mirrored those sentiments and touched on her frustrated feelings when she explained that “it was really more like they’re just reinforcing what is happening in the class and disregarding the level that you are at as an educator.” These examples of frustration continue to support the unanimous call from participants receiving coaching to have a voice in the focus of their coaching.

Participants who were not involved in coursework related to the coaching process also expressed the importance of collaboration between coach and educator as the focus of coaching was being considered. Patricia explained that her coach did not have any input on the focus of the coaching, and that Patricia herself was solely responsible for determining her own coaching focus. She explained her desire to work collaboratively with her coach on the focus. She stated that “I would have liked more of her thoughts on what she thought I needed, too. We could work together on setting goals.” Jean also shared her frustration with setting a focus for coaching. She explained that she was in control of setting her own goals for coaching, but the coach did not seem to be invested in those goals because she did not require Jean to follow through on any of the goals that were established. She did recognize the value in designing her own goals for coaching but felt that the value was diminished because of that lack of follow-through, stating that “It would have been great, but she never really held me to them, though.”
When considering coaching, the ideas and thoughts of the individuals receiving the coaching support must be teased out. This is important to consider with respect to the effectiveness of the coaching process. Social interactions that educators have had prior to the coaching experience, as well as relationship building with the coach, both impact how educators will internalize the coaching experience and make it more relevant. If coaches understand the interwoven nature of these components, then they will be more able to respectfully recognize the need for soliciting the input of educators and thereby ensure that the focus of coaching meets their needs.

**Implication # 1 for practice.** Coaching initiatives should be designed to include the opportunity for educators to have input into the focus of the coaching, regardless of the design or intent of the initiative. Too often, coaching initiatives are designed around the mission of the organizations funding the initiatives. These organizations, such as higher education or state or federally funded projects, have agendas for the focus of the coaching process, typically in an effort to support higher quality care for children. These agendas can set a narrow focus for coaching, with little consideration for the needs of the educators they will be supporting. With this narrow focus, coaches may be hesitant to branch out of the prescribed focus that has been dictated to consider educators’ perspectives. It has been concluded from this study that a dual focus, considering the needs of educators and the requirements of coaching initiatives, can be beneficial to educators as they are engaged with the coaching process. This dual focus would still allow the funding organizations’ agendas to be met, while coaches also work with educators to understand how that agenda fits into their own thoughts about improving their practice. All coaching initiatives should be designed with this understanding.
**Conclusion 2: Educators Observing Coaches Modeling**

Modeling in education is defined as instruction that is “intentional, direct, and specific…the coachee knows that he or she is observing the coach do something that relates to the intended outcomes of the coaching process” (Rush & Shelden, 2011, p. 61). Modeling is employed as a method to help educators recognize specific actions that need to be put in place to complete an activity or task in the classroom. Coaches may model effective book reading to educators who are struggling with maintaining the attention of the children in their classrooms while they are reading. Those specific techniques used by the coaches will then be discussed, and the educators will work to incorporate some of those techniques into the next book reading opportunity, perhaps under the guidance of the coach, who will then provide additional reflection on practice with the educator. Wang (2007) notes that new learning is understood by learners when they recognize how it is used, who is using it, and in what context it is being used. Modeling supports this line of thinking.

The second conclusion drawn from this study is that change of practice is supported by educators’ ability to observe coaches modeling. This conclusion was derived from the *focus of coaching* category. Research on the coaching process has identified a significant relationship between modeling, observation, and the improvement of practice for educators (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Collet, 2012; Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Driscoll, 2008; Feighan & Heeren, 2010; Nidus & Sadder, 2011. Several participants in this study referred often to the impact that modeling had on their practice. Anna, Patricia, and Emily recognized most strongly that modeling supported their change of practice. Anna explained that “I think modeling is the biggest thing that has helped to change me.” Emily said that the modeling she received was not directly from the coach, but rather from video segments the coach selected to exemplify best
practices in the area that she was struggling with. Emily was able to discuss the practices she observed in the videos with her coach and then try to incorporate these new strategies into her own practice under the guidance of her coach.

The notion of modeling fits neatly into the framework of sociocultural learning theory. Bandura (as cited in Grusec, 1992), a leader in sociocultural learning theory, identified four levels of learning that take place as individuals are involved with modeling: observing the modeling, retaining information observed, converting what was observed into action, and being motivated to perform the modeled action. These levels of learning support the needs identified by the participants and speak to the importance of modeling in the coaching process. When individuals are able to observe something happen in their environment and understand its implications for their practice or behavior, a stronger impact is felt in their true learning.

Conversely, educators can be left struggling with the applications of new practices when they do not understand exactly how to implement those practices. Jean shared her frustration with facilitating group time in the classroom. She mentioned that “it would have been great just for [coach] to demonstrate how she would actually facilitate group.” Angi also shared her frustration with the desire to observe her coach engaged in effective practices to support proper classroom management practices. Samantha echoed those sentiments as she struggled with using the appropriate tones and language with children, wishing that the coach would “go over and say it the way you would want it to be said.” These similar statements made by participants support the second conclusion, that when educators’ observe coaches modeling the practices that are the focus of the coaching, change of practice is supported.

It is clear that there is a direct connection between the use of modeling and the deeper understanding of learning that can impact the improvement of practice for educators. When
educators recognize what steps can be taken to improve practice and are able to implement those steps under the careful guidance of their coaches, they will build their self-concept regarding their own abilities and how others view those abilities (Super, 1990). This further supports the positive impact that coaching can have not only on the educator, but on the early childhood field as a whole.

Implication # 2 for practice. For coaches to employ modeling techniques during the coaching process, they must be well trained in the skills needed for implementing the practice being modeled. Tramayne et al. (2008) mention the importance of educators believing that the coaches they are working with are proficient in the skill they will be modeling. To build this comfort and proficiency, coaches must have the prerequisite skills and experiences needed to undertake modeling. With this in mind, professional qualifications for coaches must be formally established, and selection of coaches must be more closely monitored. As coaching initiatives become part of state and federal programs, such as in Massachusetts through the DEEC’s PAC initiative, it is imperative that regulations be established.

Conclusion 3: Feedback through Videotaping

The third conclusion derived from this study is that concrete feedback provided by coaches to educators through the use of videotaping helps them more meaningfully understand practice. Concrete feedback is described as feedback that is specific, and based on an action or experience that is tangible (Wiggins, 2012). This conclusion was established through the examination of the second category derived from the data analysis, which states that coaches support educators through feedback.

Many of the participants identified videotaping as a valuable method of feedback for the coaching process. Angi noted that
I wouldn’t have taken the time that it takes to watch the videos and dissect it and look at each child individually and see what they are getting out of it. Are they enjoying it? Are they inquisitive? That video meant a lot and brought a lot more concrete information to my plan. I had this extra evidence, so I would have more information to draw from to plan for the next time.

Emily also supported the notion that videotaping had a direct impact on understanding practice more effectively when she explained that

It was very nice seeing yourself in action, and being able to really appreciate each child individually. Because in the moment when you’re going, you’re just so busy with the idea of keeping them busy and keeping them engaged… so to be actually able to pause ([he video] and rewind, and kind of view each child separately in the video, I think that was an excellent piece.

Samantha was able to recognize that her intentions with her teaching practice translated differently when she implemented certain activities. “Instead of scaffolding, I was kind of giving them the answers versus engaging them to give me the answers. [Watching the videos] helped me to look back, because you could really see yourself in action.”

This conclusion must be considered through the lens of sociocultural learning theory. Vygotsky (1978), a major contributor to the sociocultural learning theory, developed the concept of a zone of proximal development (ZPD), which addresses the process of taking on a change of perspective or new learning. An important piece to note regarding this connection to feedback using videotaping is that as educators move to the next level of potential development, they must be supported through effective feedback. This feedback helps them to reflect on where they are
in their development and what changes need to take place to bring their understanding to the next level of thinking.

A key feature of adult learning is the ability to move to the next level of thinking by solving a problem that an individual is experiencing (Knowles, 1979; Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). Videotaping is a tool coaches can use to move educators towards deeper understanding as they closely examine problems they observe when viewing the videos taken of their own practice. As the educators absorb new information from coursework and/or feedback from coaches, they are able to watch themselves in videos to evaluate their practice and examine what role the new information will play in future practice to resolve problems they may have witnessed in their practice or in the actions of the children they are working with. Coaches supported educators through a reflective process as they viewed their videos. This support from an expert in the field coupled with videos that captured the problems that needed to be addressed in practice allowed educators to move effectively to the next level of potential development.

An important element in the successful use of videotaping during the coaching process was to recognize that coachees often find the videotaping process to be stressful, often even initially resisting the idea of videotaping. Lewin (1946), a major contributor to adult learning theory, recognized that the tension that individuals experience as they react to changes in their environment can support efforts in meeting their learning goals. The use of videotaping for educators during the coaching process can be an example of that type of tension. Participants expressed their reservations about starting the videotaping process. They commonly shared their concerns about superficial issues such as how they would look or sound on the videotape, but noted that these concerns quickly slipped away as they began to see the types of information they were able to gain from watching their own practice as it truly happened. Lisa explained that
when she realized that videotaping would be part of the coaching process she thought, “Oh, my God, it’s going to be me on the tapes. What will I look like, my hair, my clothes; it’s going to be awful.” After several videotaping sessions she shared that her thoughts moved away from herself and the focus moved to the work she was doing with the children, stating that “After a while I just didn’t see that stuff about me anymore. I saw the questions I asked to the children that got the best responses. I saw what kept their attention the best. That’s what really mattered.”

Several participants noted concerns about how children in the classroom would be viewed in the videotapes. Patricia noted that she had concerns about the behavior of the children in the classroom as videotaping was taking place, but realized the benefit of the videotaping tool after viewing the videos. She reported that “I knew I was going to get nervous, and especially with the children that we work with, they can be violent. But I think it is a good learning tool, as difficult as it may be to watch sometimes.” Jenna spoke of never really feeling completely comfortable with the videotaping process, but despite those feelings, still was able to see the benefit of videotaping. Jenna shared, “there is something different with somebody standing there with a video camera, taping. I would start to get tongue tied, so I felt the lesson would not go as good. I’d get blotchy, I’d get red, I’d get hot, I’d be sweating. And it’s funny because the second they have that off, you can go right in and… do the lesson twenty times better.” She also recognized that

[The videotape is] a tool. You can look back on it and see what worked and what didn’t work. Maybe you didn’t catch something while you were working with the children, but you can look back at the video and see it. In the end it was helpful, but I couldn’t help but still feel nervous.
The apprehensions regarding videotaping, while stressful, should be overcome to recognize the benefits that it provides. The opportunity for educators to view videotape of themselves engaged in teaching in their classrooms provided a concrete method of feedback on practice for these educators. The notion of concrete feedback addresses the idea that feedback is tangible, substantial, and visible. By incorporating videotaping in the feedback process for coaching, educators are able to view, listen to, and process more deeply their own practice.

**Implication # 3 for practice.** Videotaping educators is a tool that can be used effectively in classrooms, but careful consideration must be given to how the videotape will be used so that educators can feel as comfortable as possible with the process. A level of trust was established by all coaches who videotaped participants during the coaching process. Coaches told the participants exactly how the videos would be used, explaining that if the videos were used for any purpose other than the uses explained (e.g., as exemplars during coursework, shared with other coachees for examples of best practice), the participants would be notified. The coaches also assured the participants that the videos would not be shown to program administrators for their evaluation. This established a level of comfort for coachees as they embarked on the videotaping process.

The power of the videotaping process cannot be underestimated. All participants involved with videotaping during the coaching process felt strongly that it was a crucial part of their growth. As videotaping is used in practice, recognizing the apprehension that educators may experience at the start, coaxing educators to move forward with the videotaping experience despite these apprehensions, and respecting the trust and confidentiality of those involved in the videotaping are key components to developing meaningful and effective videotaping experiences. Again, as professional development opportunities are designed, it is imperative that
theories related to adult development and learning inform key elements of the training. This will increase coaches’ knowledge of the importance of relationship building in the coaching process so that trust and confidence become paramount.

**Conclusion 4: Coaches Guide Educators’ Self-reflection**

The fourth conclusion resulting from this study is that coaches guide educators to self-reflect on practice during the feedback sessions. This conclusion was supported by the second category, *coaches support educators through feedback*. Self-reflection is defined as “the processes that a learner undergoes to look back on his past learning experiences and what he did to enable learning to occur, and the exploration of connections between the knowledge that was taught and the learner’s own ideas about them” (Lew & Schmidt, 2011, p. 530). This “looking back” and “connecting knowledge” was established by the coaches as they provided feedback that caused the educators to think more introspectively about what they had experienced in their classrooms.

Within coaching research, feedback is considered a key element to improved practice (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Conroy et al., 2014; Hsieh et al., 2009). Feedback should be recognized as a reciprocal process that allows the coach and the educator the opportunity to discuss and problem solve when thinking about improving practice (Hsieh et al., 2009; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). For this to be effective, coaches must be non-judgmental in how they convey of their thoughts, and respect the educators’ thoughts and ideas.

Deborah articulated this process clearly when she explained that “it was more like the words she used or how she got me to see things was gentle. She didn’t force her opinions on me. She just explained what she saw and then asked me what my thoughts were. I didn’t feel judged at all, just supported.” Anna also expressed the importance of the nonjudgmental feedback that
she received from her coach. “Instead of telling me what to do, what I did right or wrong, we would discuss what to do together. My opinion mattered, and if I had an idea that I wanted to try, she would go with it, but mostly she left the big decisions up to me. She guided me but didn’t judge me.” Lisa shared the process that she and her coach used to evaluate the videotapes from her classroom. She explained that her coach often said, “What can I do for you?” The coach recognized it was Lisa’s classroom and tried to respectfully ask what Lisa needed, rather than condemning her for not completing a task most effectively. Lisa said that her conversations with her coach were “always very gentle and guiding, and really, really nice.”

An important consideration within sociocultural learning theory is the premise of scaffolding. Scaffolding is defined as “a learner centered strategy whose success is dependent on its adaptability to the learner’s needs… and addresses student learning of concepts, procedures, strategies, and metacognitive skills” (Dennen, 2004, p. 815). The social part of scaffolding is also critical to consider. Scaffolding results from the interactions between individuals as learning occurs. Coaches work to encourage self-reflection among educators and scaffold their thinking and learning through carefully crafted questions and prompts that encourage the internalization of learning which can be connected to the learning cycle that is part of the experiential learning theory.

Many of the participants in this study mentioned the benefits of evaluating their own practice with the supportive questioning that the coaches provided. Anna explained that her coach made her verbalize what she saw in the videos through the questions her coach asked. Her coach’s line of questioning required her to put into words why she made certain choices in her practice, such as explaining what she was thinking while she was implementing an activity, or even why she selected certain children to participate in activities. Anna said that this line of
questioning helped her to “think a little bit harder” about what she was planning. She also shared that this line of questioning was something she continued to implement herself after she finished her time with her coach. Deborah also commented on her conversations with her coach, likening her feedback sessions with her coach to a counseling session. Deborah explained that her coach would never respond with “yes,” “no,” or simple “great job” answers, she was more likely to respond by asking if she had any concerns with how the activity went or if she felt she could have done anything differently. Deborah felt that her reflections on her own practice guided the feedback sessions. Samantha shared how the prompts her coach used continue to impact her practice, explaining that “she didn’t really give me suggestions. She more asked me questions and kind of got me to open up my head a little more about how to do things and I kept that type of thinking with me. It still goes on today.”

Gallucci et al. (2010), in their research about the professional development of coaches, acknowledge that learning and change of practice for educators involved in coaching must be internalized as they come to understand its meaning for their practice. This can happen when coaches guide educators to self-reflect. By providing opportunities for non-judgmental exchanges that prompt educators to evaluate and reflect on their own practice, the strengths of their new learning will be maximized.

**Implication #4 for practice.** This conclusion, that coaches guide educators to self-reflect on practice during the feedback sessions, has a clear impact on practice. Rather than approaching the coaching process from the perspective that the coach provides all of the essential information for change of educator practice, consideration should be given to encouraging educators to process their thoughts about their practice in relation to newly acquired information from professional development opportunities such as coursework or training. By implementing the
three methods of supporting self reflection for educators -- focusing on concrete actions displayed by the educator that were documented by videotape or through observation notes taken by the coach, the use of non-judgmental feedback, and the coach’s ability to prompt educators to evaluate their own practice -- coaches will be able to structure feedback sessions that provide the strongest support to educators to enhance or improve their practice. The key to this type of coaching experience is designing appropriate training for coaches that addresses all of these components.

Coaches must understand the importance of capturing accurate information regarding what is observed during coaching sessions. The surest way to maintain this accuracy is through the use of videotaping, though the equipment used to videotape can impact the usefulness of the video. If there is poor sound or video quality, the process of reflection can be stymied. If videotaping is not used and coaches are relying on observational notes they take during observations, proper training must be provided to ensure that coaches are recording what they are observing in a thorough, detailed, and nonjudgmental manner so that the true intricacies of the activity are captured.

Another significant component of coach training should be helping coaches to separate their own personal beliefs or assumptions from the feedback they provide to educators. Coaches need to recognize biases they may hold from their own experiences, and work to remove them from their communications with individuals they are coaching. The discussions that coaches have with educators should be direct, but not leading. This will ensure that the educators are able to make their own meaning from their reflection on their practice.

One way to support nonjudgmental feedback is to carefully consider prompts used by coaches to encourage educators to evaluate their own practice. Clear, open-ended prompts can be
developed during coaching training sessions to encourage nonjudgmental feedback. It is also important for coaches to share these prompts with individuals who are experiencing the coaching process so that they can use these prompts to continue the reflection process after the coaching experience has concluded.

Conclusion 5: Educators Sustained Change in Practice

The final conclusion is that the coaching experience can support sustainable changes in educator practice. Repeatedly throughout professional development and coaching literature (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Sailors & Price, 2014; Schatcher, 2015), the importance of sustained change of practice is identified. A key element to change of practice is the educator’s ability to apply new knowledge to learning as quickly and as purposefully as possible (Knowles et al., 2011). This immediate application can happen during the coaching process. In this study, participants acknowledged how the experience they had with the coaching process continued to impact their practice after their support had concluded. Emily, a bilingual educator, said that her experience impacted the manner in which she approaches dual language learners and their families. Emily commented, “I feel that my approach with the second language learners changed a lot after working with my coach. I even ended up questioning myself about my language. I feel more confident of telling parents how important it is for them to value their home language with their children.” The coaching experience also continues to shape how she facilitates small group activities, explaining that “it’s more thought about how I run small groups and what type of language I use when talking to children. I try to incorporate a lot of what I learned during those years of coaching into my classroom setting.”

Samantha also had a sustained change of practice, stating, “Sometimes I have to think to myself, ‘Okay, wait a minute. I’m asking too many questions. I have to slow down.’ I think back
to what I learned during my coaching experience.” She also noted that the coaching experience helped her change the type and frequency of questions she used with children, focusing more on open-ended questions to encourage higher level thinking in the children. Several specific examples of the change in practice were highlighted when she said “I’ll pre-read a book and prepare more carefully for groups, and I’ll come up with questions in my head. Sometimes I’ll use sticky notes if I need to. My coach taught me those tricks”

Deborah recognized that participating in the coaching process helped her improve the structure of her small group activities, making them “a little bit more meaningful,” and was more aware of selecting appropriate vocabulary to focus on with the children. Deborah also commented that she still uses the Kindness Pledge that her coach shared with her during her first year of the coaching experience.

A final example of the sustainable changes that are possible in educator practice after experiencing the coaching process was provided by Anna.

There are a lot of things that I learned during those three years of coaching that I still do today. I still re-read the same story three times a week. I print out vocabulary words combined with a picture and then print them out without the picture. When I plan curriculum I do have fewer topics and go deeper into those topics. The other thing I do from coaching is the intentional grouping by interest and ability and plan different things with different groups.

Learning and change of practice do not happen in isolation. Sociocultural learning theory, adult learning theory, such as andragogy and experiential learning theory, adult development theory, considering life cycle and stage/structural theories, and career development theory, including social cognitive career theory, social learning theory, and self concept theory of career
development, are all structured around the interconnection between learners and their environments. As individuals are submerged in cultural contexts, their learning, thinking, and knowing is organized and shaped. It is important, then, to understand that coaching, when implemented effectively through the incorporation of educator shaped goals, modeling, and effective feedback through use of videotaping and educator self-reflection, can result in change of practice for educators that has lasting impact.

**Implication #5 for practice.** If the goal of professional development for educators is to impact practice in a sustainable manner that enhances children’s experiences and draws out best practices within the classroom, coaching is certainly a viable option for successful professional development. To ensure this change of practice is taking place for educators, organizations implementing coaching initiatives should require that educator practice be evaluated prior to the implementation of coaching, at the conclusion of the coaching process, and at regular intervals after the coaching is complete. An evaluation tool that would be suitable for this process would be the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2007). CLASS is an observation tool that measures the quality of practice based on educator and student interactions. It is a federally mandated assessment tool that is used to evaluate all Head Start programs in the country. Extending this requirement to all early education and care programs licensed by the DEEC in Massachusetts would be a sensible next step, as they are implementing PAC programs throughout the state.

The focus of this research was intended to contribute to the body of knowledge that exists pertaining to the coaching process, specifically revealing the perspectives of early childhood educators in regards to their own experiences with the coaching process. By sharing the manner in which coaching has had lasting impact on their teaching practices, educators’ voices have now
been heard. A combination of techniques and support that educators received during the coaching experience has impacted the sustainability of their changes in practice. These coaching experiences encouraged participants to truly internalize their learning and implement that learning in new and effective ways over the course of multiple years. When considering implications for practice, it is vital to recognize that this is a multifaceted coaching process supported by intentional coaching goals, modeling, videotaping, and meaningful feedback.

This section described the conclusions drawn from this study. It also considered implications for practice related to each conclusion. In the following section, the researcher suggests several opportunities for future research resulting from this study.

Implications for Theory

The focus of this study centered on sharing the lived experiences of early childhood educators who participated in on-site educational coaching. The conceptual framework for this study was Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural learning theory. This theory espouses that the relevance of learning is determined by how specific activities and actions are valued by key people in individuals’ social network and culture, and by how much control individuals feel they have over external factors in their cultures (Grusec, 1992; Marion, 2007). This conceptual framework was enhanced by the literature examined, which included adult learning theory, adult development theory, and career development theory.

Although the researcher did use inductive analysis as part of this study, it was not a grounded theory study. It was not the intent of the researcher to develop a new theory or modify those that were used to support this study. It is also important to recognize that there are a large number of theories situated under the umbrella of adult learning theory, adult development theory and adult career theory. What the research did contribute to these theories is stretching
them to include research related the coaching process in the early education and care field. Avalos (2011) examined ten years worth of research, from 2000 through 2010, that considered teacher professional development through a sociocultural lens, but this research did not represent the perspectives of the early education and care field. There are few studies that specifically view this topic through the lens of these theories, as this one does.

As a result of this study, empirical research has been provided to corroborate the important impact that social context has on the learning of new information and putting that new information to use in meaningful ways as is done through the coaching process. Sociocultural learning theory, adult learning theory, the adult development theory, and the career development theory considers the extended environments of adults as significant to the change process. The data examined within this study provides conformation that the environment plays a clear role in how learning and change takes place. Repeatedly, all ten of the participants shared the importance of making coaching relevant to their experiences and the struggles in their careers. They shared examples of how prior experiences and relationships impacted how they approached their coaching experience. For learning to be meaningful, there had to be strong connections to their experiences and their environments.

Another commonality between each of these theories is the social aspect of change for adults. Within the sociocultural learning theory, the concept of scaffolding acknowledges the connection between individuals working collaboratively and the acquisition of new knowledge. Participants recognized the learning that occurred for them through modes of feedback such as discussion related to viewing videotaped observations or the self-reflection process supported by coaches. This confirms the importance of the social components of successful learning for adults that are represented in the sociocultural learning theory as well as within experiential learning
theory, life cycle theory, stage/structural theories, social cognitive career theory, social learning theory, and self-concept theory of career development.

A final confirmation offered from this study to the theoretical framework is the relationship between modeling and learning. Bandura (1997) acknowledges the importance of modeling by identifying four levels of learning that take place during modeling: observing the model, retaining information that was observed, converting what was observed into action, and being motivated to perform the modeled action. Each of these levels was demonstrated through the data collected from participants involved in modeling during the coaching process. From a social learning perspective, modeling is one mode that delivers this timely application of knowledge. The data from this study not only supports this claim, but also makes a case for the long-term effects that this application of new knowledge has on change of practice.

It is critical to note that the cultural aspect of the sociocultural learning theory did not have a significant impact on shaping the analysis and findings for this study. Instead, the cultural contexts of the participants helped the researcher to understand their backgrounds and helped to clarify the relationship building processes that were examined. The cultural component of the sociocultural learning theory did not inform how the conclusions were developed.

This section described how the data and conclusions from this research supported the theories which were the backbone of the study. The researcher suggests that data collected from the participants confirms the importance of environments, reflective feedback, and modeling on learning for adults which are key concepts in the sociocultural learning theory, experiential learning theory, life cycle theory, stage/structural theories, social cognitive career theory, social learning theory, and self-concept theory of career development. The next section examines the implications for future research that resulted from this study.
Implications for Future Research

The conclusions of this study involve a focus on educator input, modeling, feedback through videotaping, guided reflection, and sustained change of practice. These conclusions resulted from a small narrative study focused on the lived experiences of 10 early childhood educators who took part in on-site coaching in preschool programs throughout Massachusetts. Considering the study size and focus, it is important to recognize that additional research is needed to make these conclusions more generalizable. As this study concludes, doors open to provide entryways into future research. This section describes implications for future research beyond the limitations of this study. While the breadth of possible research is very wide, specific ideas are suggested in this section.

The participants selected for this study worked in early care and education programs in Massachusetts. This ensured commonality of regulatory requirements and credentialing. By replicating this study using educators from across the country, participants will bring a wider range of experiences to the research. This extension would also allow future research to consider the impact of differing state regulations on the expectations of the coaching process.

Increasing the number of participants and considering extending the participation criteria to include individuals working as family childcare providers would address another limitation of the current study and offer additional perspectives on the coaching process. Participants in this study were all working with children in mixed age preschool settings which provide care for children ranging in ages between two years nine months old and five years old. That range of age for children in care could be extended to include educators providing care for children from birth through grade three. Often the perspectives of infant and toddler educators, as well as educators who provide family childcare or after school care for children in elementary school, are missing
from research. Expanding the number of educators in a future study, and expanding the age parameters of the children the educators are working with will increase the range of perspectives shared and empower underrepresented groups of educators.

Another consideration for future research would be to interview the coaches as well as the educators receiving the coaching so a more complete representation of the coaching experience can be developed. Some participants did not understand the formal development of the coaching program they participated in. If insight from the coaches could have been obtained, an even deeper understanding of the coaching process could have been gained, including such information as the training the coaches received, the method used for pairing coaches with educators, and the goals that the funding agencies had for the coaching initiatives.

Future research could also employ different methods to study the coaching process. A mixed-method study would be effective by considering not only the perspectives of educators as they experience the coaching process, but also measurable child outcomes and educator change throughout the coaching process as well as after it ends. Another effective research method would be a longitudinal study that considers the impact of change of practice for educators over several years. These methods would provide opportunities for to collect the additional empirical data desperately needed to improve the quality of the coaching process.

Finally, future research may consider another theoretical perspective as the foundation of the research. While sociocultural learning theory was an effective framework for this study, considering other adult learning or adult development theories would offer a different focus for the study. Many theories exist that could support the understanding of the coaching process. By investigating these options in a systematic manner while considering the goal of the study, these options would broaden the perspectives offered.
The researcher has suggested considerations for areas of future study stemming from the research conducted for this study. These suggestions include geographic extension of the participant pool, increasing the number of participants, and considering different research methods. The final section will summarize and conclude this study.

**Summary and Reflections**

The focus for this study was to examine the perspectives of early childhood educators working in Massachusetts who have experienced on-site coaching. The analysis of data revealed five conclusions from the study: The focus of coaching should consider input from the educators on their needs for improving practice in specific professional topics; educators’ ability to observe coaches modeling the practices that are the focus of the coaching supports deeper understanding; concrete feedback provided by coaches to educators through the use of videotaping is meaningful to understanding practice; coaches can guide educators to self-reflect on practice during feedback sessions; and educators recognize that the coaching experience can support sustainable changes in their practice. To reach these conclusions, the researcher used the accounts of the 10 individual participants’ experiences with the coaching process. The conceptual framework for this study, sociocultural learning theory, guided the format of interview questions as well as the synthesis of data for this study.

Research continues to emerge on the topic of coaching. A recent release by Jablon et al. (2016) highlights five principles of coaching with powerful interactions which include highlighting strengths, sharing meaningful observations, individualizing the coaching supports provided to educators, sharing the responsibilities of the coaching focus, and modeling effective practice. These principles mirror the findings of the study conducted. The similarities between these two sets of findings supports the trustworthiness of the study.
As a scholar-practitioner, the researcher selected the focus of this study to understand more clearly the intricacies of the coaching process to enable her to implement a coaching initiative in the early childhood education program where she is currently employed. The findings of this research provided the following reflections for her own practice:

- Coaches must consider the needs of the educators when designing the focus of the coaching process. If the focus for the coaching process has been determined by the agency funding the coaching initiative, consideration of the educators’ needs within the predetermined focus should be discussed between the coach and the educator.

- Modeling is a critical component in the coaching process. Educators are able to gain a deeper understanding of change in practice if they observe the coach demonstrating the new practice, preferably in the educator’s classroom and working with the children the educator cares for.

- Videotaping educators in their classrooms as they are implementing new initiatives is an important resource for reflective learning.

- Educators’ comfort level with being videotaped increases as they understand how the video is being used and gain more experience with viewing and self-reflecting on their observed practice.

- Coaches must receive training to understand how to support the educators they are coaching in a nonjudgmental manner.

- Training for coaches must focus on developing their understanding of how to support educators in the process of self-reflection through the use of open-ended
prompts. These prompts can then be shared with educators to support continued self-reflection after the conclusion of the coaching process.

- When implemented in a meaningful way, coaching can impact educators’ practice indefinitely.

The goal of this narrative study was to give a voice to educators who have experienced the coaching process, adding to the available literature on the coaching process. This goal was achieved as the voices of 10 early childhood educators were documented through this study, adding valuable insight into designing effective coaching models. Achieving this goal assists in closing to the gap in research about the perspectives shared on the coaching experience. This study also contributes to strengthening professional development models for early childhood educators. By understanding the training that coaches need to have to effectively support educators’ learning, as well as understanding the needs of the individual educators participating in the coaching process, the coaching process can gain strength and effectiveness.
References


Flyer for Participation in Research Study

Research Study
Northeastern University
Department of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study that examines the experiences early childhood educators have had with on-site educational coaching.

Who is eligible?
- Early childhood educators working with preschool age children (2.9-5 years old) that have received on-site coaching support within the last three years
- The educational coach you worked with was from outside of the school you were working in.

What will you be asked to do?
- Complete 2 interview sessions at your work-site (or a location of your convenience), each lasting approximately one hour
- Review via email the researcher’s interpretations of your interview responses

Compensation
You will receive a $10 Amazon.com gift card at the culmination of the study

If you have any questions, or are interested in participating, please contact

Carlene Sherbourne
(774) 696-4812
sherbourne.c@husky.neu.edu
Appendix B

Study Qualification Questions

1. Have you received on-site educational coaching support in an early education and care setting?

2. Was the on-site coaching completed by a coach who worked outside of the early education and care program you were working in?

3. How long ago did you receive this coaching?

4. Were you working in a preschool classroom with a mixed age group of children ranging in age from two years nine months to five years old when you received this coaching?

5. Was this classroom located in Massachusetts?

6. Would you be willing to take part in two one hour interview sessions that would be held at a location that was convenient for you to get to?

7. Would you be willing to have the interview sessions recorded with the guarantee that the recordings would be used only for the purpose of transcription and would be destroyed at the completion of the study?

8. Do you have an email account that you have access to on a regular basis?

9. Would you be willing to review the interview transcription and interpretation of your interview responses for accuracy if they were sent to you by the researcher via email?

10. Would you be able to respond to the researcher via email in no more than one week about whether or not you believed the transcription and interpretations completed were accurate portraying your responses to the interview questions?

11. Would you be willing to allow the anonymous data collected from your interview to be used to complete a dissertation required for the culmination of a doctoral studies program or possibly to be used in further publications?
Appendix C
Participant Release Agreement

Northeastern University, Department of Education
Name of Investigators: Principal Investigator: Dr. Atira Charles
                      Student Researcher: Carlene Sherbourne
Title of Project: What Lies Beneath the Coaching Process: Early Childhood Educators’
                      Coaching Experiences

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but
the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have.
When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or
not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the
researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to be in this study because you are an early childhood educator that has
received coaching support at your work site within the last three years as you were working in a
preschool classroom with a mixed age range of children ranging from two years nine months
through five years old. The coaching support that you received was done by an educational coach
that was from outside of the school that you were working in.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to learn about the thoughts and experiences of early childhood
educators who have received on-site educational coaching so that educational coaches can have a
better understanding of how coaching impacts the participants.

What will I be asked to do?
If you take part in this study, we will ask you to take part in two interview sessions. During these
sessions, the researcher will ask you a series of questions about your background, your
experience with the coaching that you received, and what that coaching experience meant to you.
During the interviews, the researcher will be using a digital recorder to record the interview so
that your responses can be documented in the exact way that you spoke them. You will also be
contacted by email by the researcher no later than six months after the interviews to look over
what the researcher has written about your responses to the interview questions. You will then be
asked to tell the researcher, via email, whether what has been written accurately reflects what
you meant in your interview responses. If it does not, the researcher will continue to contact you
by email and ask you to review the writing until you feel it does accurately reflect what you
meant to say during the interviews.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will this take?
You will be interviewed at your work place or in a place that is convenient for you, and at a time
that you have selected. Each of the interview sessions will take about one hour. Any further
communication will be done by email. Reviewing the writing of the researcher should take between 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**
There will be no foreseeable risk or discomfort that you will experience as a result of taking part in this study.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**
There will be no direct benefit to you taking part in this study. However, the information learned from this study may help to improve coaching practices in the future, which could lead to improving the quality of care provided to young children.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being part of this project.

To maintain your confidentiality, the digital recordings, transcribed interview transcript files, and the study flash drive will all be stored in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher. In compliance with the National Institute of Health, your name will be replaced with a false name in all written work to preserve your anonymity and protect your rights to confidentiality. All documents connecting your real name to your false name, or any other identifying information will be secured in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home. At the end of the study, all stored materials will be destroyed.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

**How will my anonymous information be used?**
The information gathered in this study will be used for the completion of the student researcher’s doctoral studies in education which includes the completion of a published dissertation. It is also possible that information from this study could be used in future publications.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have [as a student, employee, etc].

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Carlene Sherbourne, the person mainly responsible for the research, by phone at 774-696-4812 or by email at sherbourne.c@husky.neu.edu at any time. You may also contact Dr. Atira Charles, the Principal Investigator, at a.charles@neu.edu with any questions.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
A $10.00 Amazon.com gift card will be mailed to you as soon as you send an email with your final approval of the written document the researcher will ask you to review for accuracy.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
You should not have any costs related to your participation in this study.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

______________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

______________________________
Printed name of person above

______________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the Participant above and obtained consent

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix D

Interview I Questions

Demographics

1. Gender: ________________________________________________________________

2. Age: __________________________________________________________________

3. Race/Ethnicity: __________________________________________________________

4. Native Language: _________________________________________________________

5. Highest level of Education: ______________________________________________

6. Degree received: _________________________________________________________

7. Length of time teaching in the program you are currently working in: ____________

8. Length of time you were engaged in the coaching process: ________________________

9. How long ago you completed the coaching process: _____________________________

Focused Life History of Participants

1. Tell me about yourself, where you grew up, your family history, your values and/or cultural beliefs, etc.

2. What are your own educational experiences
   a. when you were a child?
   b. as an adult?

3. What were your family beliefs about caring for young children?

4. What were your family beliefs about education?

5. Tell me what made you decide to pursue a career in early childhood education.

6. How have you prepared for this career path?

7. Who has supported you as you have been working as an early childhood educator?
a. What type of support has been given?

8. Who has not supported you as you have been working as an early childhood educator?
   a. How has this lack of support affected you?

**Focused Details of the Coaching Experience**

1. How did the coaching process begin for you?
   a. How did you learn about the opportunity to take part in the coaching experience?
   b. How were you asked to participate in the coaching process?
   c. What were your thoughts and feelings before you began the coaching process?
      i. What were your concerns about beginning this process?
      ii. What were you excited about as you thought about beginning this process?

2. Tell me who has been involved in your coaching during the entire duration of the process.
   a. What was the role of each person?

3. Tell me about how were you introduced to the coach you would be working with.

4. Tell me about the coaching experience
   a. in the beginning of the process.
   b. in the middle of the process.
   c. at the end of the process.

5. Has the relationship you had with the coach changed during the process?
   a. If so, please explain how the relationship has changed.
   b. If not, please explain how the relationship has stayed the same.
Appendix E

Interview II Questions

Focused Reflection on Meaning

1. Tell me what it has been like to work with the coach.

2. What do you feel your needs were as you started this coaching process?

3. What assumptions did you have about the coaching process before you began?
   a. Did these assumptions change throughout the process? If so, how? If not, why didn’t they change?

4. How did the coach that you worked with demonstrate that (she) understood your needs?

5. How did the coach that you worked with demonstrate that (she) did not understand your needs?

6. Tell me how, if at all, the coaching experience has impacted your practice in the classroom.

7. Did you learn new information pertaining to your work with young children and their families?
   a. If so, tell me what the new learning you gained from the coaching experience was and explain whether or not it has impacted your work with young children and their families.
      i. Give specific examples of the application of this new knowledge to your work with young children and their families.
   b. If not, tell me what prohibited you from gaining new knowledge and what part of the coaching process you would have wanted to change so that learning could have taken place for you.
6. What has been the most helpful part of the coaching process?
8. What has been the most challenging part of the coaching process?
9. What changes would you make to the coaching process?
Appendix F

Sample of Participant Interview Summary

Participant: Angi
Ethnicity: Puerto Rican/Hispanic
Native language: Spanish
Level of Education: High School Diploma
Length of time teaching: 5 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Information</th>
<th>Relevant Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focused Life History</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Born and raised in PR with father’s family</td>
<td>• (1:181) “My mom wanted to look for a better life for us, you know, generally schools and everything”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mom moved family to US when she was 13 for a better life</td>
<td>• (1:183) “Childhood was a little rocky, but it was good”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Childhood was difficult but good</td>
<td>• (1:265) “(She was in) sixth grade when she stopped going to school. So she did want us to have a better education than she did”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schooling in PR structured, more work, wore uniforms</td>
<td>• (1:284) “He was one of those persons that well, ‘if you do it, you do it. Fine. If you don’t, it’s up to you.’ Even when we were little.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Didn’t know English</td>
<td>• (1:307) “So education is one of the main things a person will have in their life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enrolled in a bilingual program at school</td>
<td>• (1:333) “You sit there. Don’t talk, only when you’re spoken to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wanted to learn English right away</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mom valued education</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dad less value on education</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Angi values education as a way to get the opportunity to have a job that she wants, to help others, to put her ideas into action</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Strict mother. Children were not valued. No supports available to help her. Mother had a difficult childhood</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
and didn’t know any different.

- Current view of childhood is that it is more difficult now but that children are smarter. Children need a strong educational base.

- (1:419) “You know, you teach them, you give them love. That’s what you’re supposed to do with every person, no matter if it is a kid or a grownup. And I see why not make a little difference? “

### Focused Details of the Coaching Experience

1. Coursework (blue)
   - Weekly class for CDA prep

2. Coaches Intro (sky blue)
   - The coach was introduced during coursework by the professor

3. Scheduled Observation Time (purple)
   - Coach allowed Angi to select the most convenient time for her to come to visit
   - Communicated scheduling by phone

4. Coach Reminded Teacher of Visit (green)
   - Reminder by phone

5. Feedback Before Observation (navy)
   - NA

6. Observation (brick red)
   - Observation lasted 25 minutes
   - Only one observation completed
   - Coach observed Angi interacting with children, focused on positive guidance
   - The observation was too short for coach to record many interactions

7. Videotaping (bold black)
   - No videotaping
8. Feedback After Observation (orange)
   - Set aside 5 minutes for discussion after the observation
   - Happened while Angi was in the classroom
   - Discussed how she interacted with the children explained that she didn’t see much but what she saw was good

9. Communication Between Meetings (grey)
   - phone

10. Duration of Coaching (pink)
    - 1 year

11. Coach Controlled the Topic the Teacher was Coached On (sea foam green)
    - Focus of coaching was to prepare Angi for the official CDA observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Reflection on Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Not enough time for quality discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Would make a change for more time with coach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| • (1:629) I mean, I wish I had a little bit more time with her, and then [38:00] she’ll give me--I mean, she’s a really talkative person and she knows what she’s doing. So I know she had a little bit more to say, but it was just time. |
| • “definitely, I wish that I had the time, like I said, and I wish they have come [5:00] more often to spend with us, because I think we’ll gain a lot more information and more, you know…” |

“It’s like I didn’t gain that, you know, what I wanted to see [24:59] or what I wanted her to tell me as an educator. I didn’t have that feedback. But everybody else, like her and Gregg and my teachers here, teachers that I work with, I learn a lot of things through them, too. So it’s not like, okay, I
- Wanted direct feedback about changes needed in her practice
- Coach is important to have
- Would have been satisfied to meet with her over the phone
- Visual learner, likes to see and hear an explanation
- Wants coach to observe her first then model best practice for her.
- Having a coach that is open and receptive is critical.

would have loved having that coach experience more often, but due to my time, it didn’t happen.”

- (1:716) “Watch me say whatever I have to say at that moment, and then come and tell me, “Angi, if I were you, this is what I’d do.” Because I think I learn like that faster. Like, “Okay, this is what you did, and I’m not telling you this is wrong, but if I were you I would have done it this way,” or suggest one.”

- (1:771) “Well, like I said, because of people like her or any other teacher or any other person that is above us, because of them we could do a better job. So that’s really important to have that little involvement [46:00] with someone that really knows how to redirect a child, do things for them.”

- (2:75) “because like I’m saying, these people are trained, and they already know what they’re doing. So by them coming back, or at least me having the time to spend with her, it would be really helpful.”

- (2:265) “then if you see a person’s approachable and happy, and she explains things to you [19:01]. Because
- Warm coach is needed like a warm teacher for children

- Changed perspective in the classroom – responding to children more appropriately
- Would have been helpful to have been videotaped to see what changes needed to be made.

- Wanted more feedback or modeling

- (2:326) “having someone to put them at ease and understand them, and just give them a good smile, or if they want a hug and come and hug you, give them a hug. I think that makes a big difference of how they learn. Because if they’re afraid of you, or if they have any type of fear, and you’re not an approachable person, I think they’ll hold back. “

- I’d probably be nervous about it. I don’t know how would I react at that moment.
- because then I could see myself, and I know once we sit down and watch it together, she could just point out, “Instead of you saying what you said at that moment, you could just rephrase that and direct it as a positive direction.” Yeah, that would be.

- First of all, I would like her to share the information that she knows already about dealing with kids. At least just make it scenarios of which, like two childs are fighting over a toy, giving me the positive (give) actions, which is really critical for us, because it’s really hard to keep the positive direction instead of saying, “You can’t do that.” I learned that you can just go that way. I mean, I would like her to have the time to meet, and for her to just make me more comfortable
### Appendix G

**Categories and Composite Textural and Structural Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Focus of coaching                               | **Textural theme:** Educators had input into the focus of the coaching experience.  
**Structural theme:** Coaching was more meaningful to educators when their professional needs were considered in the design of the focus of the coaching.  
**Textural theme:** Perspectives of the educators did not shape the focus of the coaching experience.  
**Structural theme:** Educators believed the coaching experience was not as meaningful to them because they had no input in the focus of the coaching.  
**Textural theme:** Modeling  
**Structural theme:** the need for coaches to model effective skills in areas of practice that educators were struggling with |
| 2. Coaches support educators through feedback      | **Structural theme:** Prompted to self-reflect  
**Textural theme:** Feedback focused on concrete actions observed by the coach  
**Textural theme:** The role of videotaping in feedback:  
**Structural theme:** Feelings about the videotaping process |
| 3. Coaching resulted in change of practice in the classroom for educators | **Textural theme:** Communication between children and educators  
**Textural theme:** Intentionality in teaching practices  
**Textural theme:** Lasting impact  
**Structural theme:** Improved practice continues despite the end of coaching experience |
## Appendix H

### Sample of In vivo and Descriptive Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Transcript Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>childhood not the best</td>
<td>My dad was an alcoholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>By then my dad had passed away, so my mom decided to go back and see the relatives that summer [20:00]. It was supposed to be a vacation. We ended up staying there. That was a challenge for me. I had to start school there, and I had no clue how to read or write in Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career change</td>
<td>I started volunteering at (employer), and that’s when I realized that it’s not nursing that I wanted to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus of coaching on teacher's identified need</td>
<td>I would want my lowest area which I struggle with, I would want something I’m struggling with to be what I’m being coached on, like literacy. Or maybe even if circle time you were having a problem keeping them engaged in circle, come in and coach me on different ideas. Give me some materials [9:00] or things that I could use to get them more engaged. Maybe I don’t read a book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visiting other classrooms</td>
<td>I think every teacher should have a field trip into other classrooms, because we do, we learn from each other. And I love, like even coming into different classrooms, I’ll be like, “Ah, I’m going to steal your idea!” But that’s how we learn, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>videotaping (for reflection)</td>
<td>we’d go over the videotape, which I thought was the greatest thing. Because when you record yourself, you don’t realize sometimes you answer the child’s question for them. Or I kept asking questions instead of giving them time to answer, so I felt like it helped me reflect on what I needed to work on. And then I’d go back and not fix, but tweak my lesson,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stay with same coach</td>
<td>Interviewer: Did your coach change at all, over time? Participant: No, I was lucky enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coach using teacher's ideas</td>
<td>“I wonder what that is.” And so then, of course, I raised my hand. It’s funny, because I’ll never forget this, because the lady was like, “I’m going to use that from now on.” I said, “Well, the peel is dense. It’s acting like the orange’s life jacket, kind of like if we wear a life jacket and jump off a boat, we’re going to float back up.” And so she was just like, “I was never expecting that answer. I’m going to be using that in all of my lectures, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coursework (new activities and materials)</td>
<td>So that was hard for me, but they gave us a lot of resources, again, and that’s what helped. And then the internet, and so it was the same thing. They gave us a lot of resources, a lot of different activities, approaches to use, so that made it more interesting versus, “Oh, you could read this,” and a lecture on that. It was just a lot more hands-on and role playing. Like we did some scenarios and stuff, which again is hands-on, and I love different scenarios.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared learning between coach and teacher</td>
<td>I think coaching, to me, whether I’m the teacher or I was a coach, I think it’s a wonderful experience because you get to learn. You both get to learn, because the coach can learn from the teacher, and the teacher—oh, it’s just amazing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflection on practice through discussion</td>
<td>Her personality, because she would sit down with me, and we would watch the video together, and she would let me—she would kind of give me little key points, but let me realize what I could have changed, what went wrong.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>