

Copyright

by

Alfred M. James

December 2014

THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING ON BUILDING CAPACITY IN  
READING TEACHERS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Alfred M. James  
December 2014

THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING ON BUILDING CAPACITY IN  
READING TEACHERS

A Dissertation for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by

Alfred M. James

Approved by Dissertation Committee:

---

Dr. Angus MacNeil, Chairperson

---

Dr. Steven Busch, Committee Member

---

Dr. M. Wayne Emerson, Committee Member

---

Dr. Robin McGlohn, Committee Member

---

Dr. Robert Borneman, Committee Member

---

Dr. Robert H. McPherson, Dean  
College of Education

December 2014

## Acknowledgments

This rewarding experience was a blessing made possible by the love, support, and guidance of my family and friends. Thank you to Karen for your assistance and support. Thank you, Nikki, for your support and inspiration. I want to thank my parents for always supporting and encouraging me in all that I do. You have taught me to pray, work hard, and pursue my dreams. To my brothers, thank you for the prayers and encouragement. To my wife, Tiffanie, for being an encourager when I felt discouraged. Thank you for your patience, support and giving 100% to me and our children when I could not. This would not have been possible without you.

I want to thank Dr. Angus MacNeil for his expertise, time and guidance throughout this journey to my doctorate. Thank you for sharing personal and professional experiences to encourage and motivate me. I am grateful for you challenging, and supporting me. Thank you to committee members, Dr. Steven Busch, Dr. M. Wayne Emerson, Dr. Robin McGlohn, and Dr. Robert Borneman for guidance and feedback prior to and during the defense. To my UH cohort family, Christina, Gladys, Maria Garcia and Maria Galindo, this would not have been the same without your friendship, and encouragement and our teamwork.

I am grateful for the methodological and statistical consultation provided by Dr. Catherine Barber. Thank you to Dr. Kathleen Broussard for your attention to detail. Your expertise and wisdom have helped me achieve my goal.

THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING ON BUILDING CAPACITY IN  
READING TEACHERS

An Abstract  
of a Doctoral Thesis Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Alfred M. James  
December 2014

James, A.M. "The Impact of Instructional Coaching on Building Capacity in Reading Teachers." Unpublished Doctor of Education Doctoral Thesis, University of Houston, November, 2014.

### Abstract

This study examined if instructional coaching was beneficial to building capacity in literacy teachers. Many students come to intermediate school with significant deficits in reading. Students are often two to three grades below level (Reardon, Valentino & Shores, 2012). Many teachers are often not equipped to deal with beginning stages of reading instruction; therefore, teachers need specific training to acquire the appropriate skills to address the deficits. One technique that has proven to be helpful is instructional coaching, which is a research-based approach to providing teachers with individualized professional development (Knight, 2009). This study examined if instructional coaching influenced a literacy teacher's instructional practices. The study also examined the effectiveness of a partnership between a nonprofit organization and an urban intermediate school in Houston, Texas by evaluating the results of the group of students whose teacher received coaching. Students who received instruction from a teacher who received regular coaching cycles were compared to students whose teacher had not received coaching. Approximately 130 students were chosen to participate in this study. Statistical analyses were used to determine if there were differences in gains in achievement from the previous year among students whose teacher received coaching versus students whose teacher did not receive coaching. School and district leaders may use this information to gain insight into coaching models and instructional practices. Also, educational leaders may use this study to gain insight on sustaining effective instructional practices in literacy.

## Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I Introduction .....	1
Background to the Problem .....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study .....	8
The Significance of this Study .....	10
Research Questions .....	10
Hypothesis.....	12
Research Design.....	12
Limitations .....	13
Definitions of Terms .....	14
Summary .....	15
II Literature Review .....	16
Background .....	16
Education reform .....	18
Literacy .....	28
The Role of the Principal .....	37
Shaping School Culture .....	39
The Role of the Instructional Coach .....	40
Coaching models.....	44
The Role of Teachers .....	55
Adult Learning .....	58
Sustainability.....	68
III Methods.....	74
Purpose.....	74
Research Design.....	76
Research Questions .....	77
Setting .....	77
Subjects .....	78

Procedures.....	81
Instruments.....	82
Limitations .....	84
Summary.....	84
IV Results.....	86
Introduction.....	86
Research Questions.....	86
Hypothesis.....	87
Data Analysis Procedures .....	88
Assumptions.....	89
Analysis of Research Question #1: Is There a Significant Difference in Achievement Among Students Whose Teacher Received Coaching?.....	90
Analysis of Research Question #2: Is There a Significant Difference in Achievement Among Boys Whose Teacher Received Coaching? .....	92
Analysis of Research Question #3: Is There a Significant Difference in Achievement Among Girls Whose Teacher Received Coaching?.....	94
Analysis of Research Question #4: Is There a Significant Difference in Achievement Among Hispanic Students Whose Teacher Received Coaching?.....	96
Summary.....	97
V Conclusion .....	99
Introduction.....	99
Research Design.....	101
Research Questions.....	101
Discussion of Results.....	102
Limitations .....	104
Implications for School Leaders .....	105
Implications for Further Research .....	106
Conclusion .....	108
References.....	110

## List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Demographic Composition of All Students-Treatment and Control Groups .....	79
2. Means and Standard Deviations for All Students - Treatment (n = 62), Control (n = 59) and Overall (n = 121) Groups - at Pretest and Posttest.....	90
3. Means and Standard Deviations for Boys - Treatment (n = 31), Control (n = 31) and Overall (n = 62) Groups - at Pretest and Posttest.....	93
4. Means and Standard Deviations for Girls - Treatment (n = 31), Control (n = 28) and Overall (n = 59) Groups - at Pretest and Posttest.....	94
5. Means and Standard Deviations for Hispanic Students - Treatment (n = 28), Control (n = 26) and Overall (n = 54) Groups - at Pretest and Posttest.....	96

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Across the United States, many schools face the challenge of working with students with reading deficits. One may wonder why this challenge is so predominant and indeed, why so many students have these deficits. Scholars have devoted much research to the development of literacy from kindergarten through third grade. Ann Browne (1998), a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of East Anglia, cited numerous components in the reading process that impact students and assist them in becoming stronger readers. Reading skills, reading development, reading methods, reading habits, reading standards and the uses of literacy are essential components of this process. According to Browne, in order to teach effectively, teachers should know what they are teaching and why. She asserts that an awareness of some of the frequently raised issues about reading can enhance teaching practices. In addition, Browne stated that our own personal definition and experiences with reading can influence our thoughts and actions regarding the importance of literacy. She maintained that the realization of the curriculum and pupils perceptions will be affected by the combination of teachers' personal understanding and professional expertise. This comprehension will be manifested through teachers' knowledge about how children learn, skills necessary to become readers, and the conditions and environments best support learning to read (Browne, 1998).

Despite teacher understanding of literacy development, novice teachers and experienced teachers alike face challenges in effectively teaching students to read. There are a number of strategies to address and solve reading difficulties and several methods

and programs have been utilized to improve reading skills. This study examined if one Houston-based organization was instrumental in addressing the deficits in reading by impacting instruction through the use of instructional coaching. This organization was not only aimed at improving reading skills but also having an effect across the curriculum.

### **Background to the Problem**

#### **Causes of reading difficulty.**

Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999) identify six reasons why students have reading difficulties. These six causes are identified and explained below.

#### **Low achieving schools.**

Burns et al. (1999) contend that low achieving schools are a reason that students are not reading on grade level. Educators have the responsibility of ensuring students receive quality reading instruction. If students are not receiving quality reading instruction in school or home support for their reading, many of them will continue to struggle with reading as they move from one grade to the next. Burns et al. (1999) suggest student reading difficulties can be addressed through effective teaching practices and a sound reading program. One of the challenges low achieving schools experience is serving students who are products of negative factors beyond their control.

#### **Limited English proficiency.**

Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999) cite limited English proficiency as an additional cause of student reading deficits. According to their findings, Hispanic students are twice as likely as non-Hispanic students to read below grade-level. Burns et al. (1999) assert students with this challenge should be taught in their first language, Spanish, while they

gain oral proficiency in English so that they are taught literacy skills in Spanish prior to receiving formal reading instruction in English. In an effort to ensure this proficiency, teachers should provide a rich and well-adapted oral language environment.

#### **Home-school mismatch.**

Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999) also discuss children who experience difficulties with spoken language and their challenges they experience while receiving reading instruction. Often a mismatch exists between the language taught at school and the language the children live at home. As a result, children unfamiliar with the English language experience challenges learning to read. To accommodate this challenge, teachers can provide them with lessons that are consistent with the phonology, syntax, and vocabulary of the students' languages.

#### **Poverty.**

Burns et al. (1999) explain that poverty is another factor that contributes to students having reading deficits. They elaborate on other factors related to students living in poverty, including having uneducated parents, lacking adequate nutrition, living in poor communities, and attending low achieving schools. According to Burns et al. (1999), all of these factors are detrimental to reading. Although coming from a low-income family does not necessarily indicate that a child will be at risk of having difficulties learning to read, schools might provide these at-risk students with a smaller student-teacher ratio and high-quality books and supplemental materials. Furthermore, the authors reveal a challenge that is usually detected in preschool and elementary school.

#### **Students with cognitive, hearing, and language impairment.**

Students with cognitive, hearing, and language impairment may experience reading difficulties. IQ and cognitive deficits are linked with future reading ability and achievement. In addition, students with hearing and language impairment are also at risk in acquiring literacy (Burns et al., 1999). If a child's language is delayed, this signal can be the first warning of developmental or neurological problems. On the other hand, there is a positive correlation between a child's language development during preschool years and their later reading abilities. Identifying such physical impairments can often reduce later reading challenges for these students.

#### **Family history.**

Children whose parents had a history of reading difficulty are more likely to experience deficits in reading themselves. Although a child's ability to read is not directly related to his/her parents' reading difficulty, Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999) suggest that parents who are enthusiastic about reading may pay attention to warning signs that their child is struggling with reading.

#### **Addressing the challenges.**

Houston A+ Challenge was founded in 1997 by the Annenberg Foundation in an effort to reform public schools in America. This nonprofit organization receives funding from local foundations, business leaders, and other philanthropist to collaborate with teachers, administrators, and district leaders in an effort to improve teaching and learning (Houston A+, 2011). Houston A+ collaborates with schools that participate in programs to implement a learner-centered focus by concentrating on the issues of class size, teacher learning, and the issue of teaching in isolation. This nonprofit organization has been a significant factor in providing training for principals and other leaders. Additional

training has been provided for the development of teachers, innovative ideas and opportunities for districts, as well as grants.

In 2009, the Houston A+ Challenge Network initiated its partnership with five local school districts and other community entities to implement a middle school intervention program. The goal of this initiative was not only to prepare students for success during school but also to ensure success beyond high school. Educators and principals in six schools embarked upon a journey to reach specific goals. The nonprofit organization collaborated with schools to achieve the following goals:

- Improve teacher practice and build capacity
- Increase achievement and college readiness
- Increase student achievement for all students in the cohort
- Sustain growth in reading at the campus level after the first two years of intense engagement (Houston A+, 2011).

To achieve the goals and increase student achievement, the participating schools included several components: analyze data to formulate custom campus plans, utilize campus-based performance coaching to drive targeted professional development and improvement, focus on the assessment for learning process using interim assessments, and data reviews to drive differentiated instruction, incorporate additional instructional time and support for students to meet higher standards, foster parent empowerment and engagement, increase collaboration across teams, schools, and districts. While many of the schools in the network focused on numeracy, a few focused on increasing literacy skills across the curriculum. In an effort to increase standardized test scores and double commended percentages on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness

(STAAR) within two years, a coaching model was used to facilitate the process. The specific model that used was instructional coaching. In this model, the coach focuses on supporting teachers as newly acquired strategies were implemented in the classroom. An important element of instructional coaching is modeling. In other studies, teachers have gained confidence as a result of observing a coach (Knight, 2009). The coach who was provided by the nonprofit organization participated in extensive screening and training prior to working with teachers. Once a partnership was developed between the teacher and coach, coaching cycles were initiated to establish instructional goals.

One of the schools selected was located in Northwest Houston, Texas in an urban school district. This school's decision to focus on literacy was driven by the significant number of students who were reading below grade level and displaying comprehension difficulties. The student population of fifth and sixth grade students was approximately 860. Of those, 57% was Hispanic 39% African-American, 2% Asian, 1% Anglo, and 1% Multi-ethnic. Eighty-nine percent of the students were classified as having a low socioeconomic status. The population was comprised of 52% male students and 48% female students. In addition, the school served 189 English Language Learners and 62 students were served through special education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Practitioners discuss that a number of students arrive at intermediate school with significant reading deficits and in many cases, are two to three grades below level (Reardon, Valentino & Shores, 2012). Although this challenge has been identified, many teachers at the intermediate school that was selected to participate in this study were unprepared to intervene when their beginning readers experience difficulties in learning

to read. For this reason, teachers needed specific training to acquire the appropriate skills to address the deficits.

Instructional coaching is a research-based approach to providing teachers with individualized professional development. This individualized training, if implemented in the classroom with fidelity, can have a lasting impact on student growth (Knight, 2009). A gap in the knowledge of sustaining the recommended instructional practices in the absence of a coach was the basis of this study.

Teachers are often aware of the reading difficulties their students experience; however, many lack the skills to address these challenges. This teacher limitation has a sizable impact on several levels. First, the student's ability to read on-grade level affects his/her achievement across the curriculum, so that if reading is difficult for a particular student, s/he will struggle in other core subjects as well. Secondly, school leaders were presented with the task of ensuring that teachers are equipped to teach all students. Prior to identifying strategies for intervention, the students' academic history must be assessed. Looking back at the student's elementary learning patterns can provide much-needed insight. Standardized assessment results, running records, writing samples and portfolios are vital data sources that are used to identify struggling readers. School leaders and teachers can then begin to formulate a comprehensive plan for intervention. More importantly, educational leaders have to ascertain teachers' ability to instruct all students, including those learners with academic, behavioral and socio-economic challenges.

Building capacity in teachers, some scholars argue, is the first step in combating the literacy deficit. To address this challenge, teachers are often provided staff development opportunities to allow them to increase their knowledge on teaching reading

and cognitive development. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010), if students do not become strong readers by third grade, it may have an effect on students' success in secondary and post-secondary reading classes. Ultimately, students who are not strong readers will have a negative impact on the drop out and completion rate.

These findings spoke to the need to address students in the intermediate grades (fifth and sixth). If teachers were exposed to the essential skills to improve reading ability, the problem of students not reading on grade level may be diminished. The implications of building literacy skills and developing stronger readers may have a lasting impact on the probability of a student's secondary and post-secondary school success.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examined if instructional coaching is beneficial in building capacity in literacy teachers. Statistical analyses were used to determine if there were differences in gains in achievement between students whose teacher received instructional coaching and students whose teacher did not. Houston A+ Challenge, a nonprofit organization and the school also evaluated the effectiveness of its partnership by examining the results of the treatment group. This organization collaborated with several schools with the goal of increasing students' standardized test scores using several components: analysis of student data, collaboration among teachers and students, performance coaching to improve teaching and learning, assessment for learning, family engagement, and additional time and support to meet higher standards.

One of the schools focused on the component of performance coaching to improve teaching and learning. Students whose teacher received regular coaching cycles were compared to students whose teacher did not receive instructional coaching to

determine if students whose teacher was coached experienced larger gains in achievement on state testing results. Approximately 130 students were chosen to participate in this study. Houston A+ Challenge provided a coach as the primary means of professional development in order to individualize staff development for the selected teacher rather than relying on traditional methods.

Casey (2006) identified the following seven functions of an effective coach:

1. Literacy coaches learn how to be effective teachers of adults.
2. Literacy coaches strive to build teaching and leadership capacity.
3. Literacy coaches embrace resistance.
4. Literacy coaches are effective communicators.
5. Literacy coaches communicate their beliefs and provide a rationale.
6. Literacy coaches are evaluators of literacy needs.
7. Literacy coaches inspire and lead (pp.22-34).

In his work entitled *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction*, Knight (2007) highlights the failure of traditional staff development in that, “teachers are unanimously critical of one-shot programs that fail to address practical concerns. Teachers criticize training that lacks follow-up and that fails to recognize their expertise” (p. 2). As an alternative to often ineffective traditional methods, Knight (2007) advocates instructional coaching as an effective professional development strategy. With this model in mind, the relationship between teachers and coaches is forged.

### **The Significance of this Study**

The significance of this study was an endeavor in promoting the development of teachers in the performance and improvement of reading instruction. School and district leaders may use this study to gain insight into coaching models and instructional practices. Also school leaders may use this study to collaborate and discuss best practices as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy instruction. In an effort to transform classroom instructional practices, regular coaching cycles assisted teachers in establishing effective practices in the planning and delivery of instruction. Additionally, this study may provide recommendations to improving lesson design and instructional delivery.

### **Research Questions**

This study answered several pertinent questions relating to the differences between instructional coaching, building capacity in teachers and increased student achievement:

1. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among students whose teacher received coaching versus students whose teacher did not?
2. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among boys whose teacher received coaching versus boys whose teacher did not?
3. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among girls whose teacher received coaching versus girls whose teacher did not?
4. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among Hispanic students whose teacher received coaching versus Hispanic students whose teacher did not?

Students arrive in classrooms at various levels of competency. Teachers may implement instructional strategies to meet the needs of each student. Instructional coaches can serve schools in a number of ways, including providing relevant professional development. Also, they can serve as a catalyst for changing teachers' attitudes towards teaching and learning (Houston A+, 2011). The instructional coach encouraged the teacher to provide more opportunities to read in order to build students' fluency and stamina. Additionally, the teacher conferred with students to check comprehension and utilized other assessment for learning strategies.

According to Browne (1998) girls learn to read more quickly and with greater ease than boys. In the early years, boys lag behind girls in reading and the achievement gap widens as they get older. Research suggests that boys and girls learn differently and specific instructional strategies have been proven to be more effective with girls rather than boys. Particularly regarding literacy, studies have shown that girls in the early years read more than boys (Browne, 1998). Teachers may identify student needs and set academic goals early. Coaches can recommend effective strategies for addressing the achievement gap.

Lastly teachers may investigate and discover what strategies work best to meet the needs of all students; especially students who fall behind their peers of other ethnic groups. There are numerous recommendations to tackle this dilemma but schools are still working to bridge the achievement gap (Murphy 2009). Again, teachers could collaborate with coaches regarding the best practices for working with diverse ethnic groups.

These observations led the researcher to ask if there is a significant difference in gains in achievement among students whose teacher was coached versus students whose teacher was not coached. In addition to comparing the overall sample of students, the results of boys, girls, and Hispanic students were also disaggregated. Since Hispanic students have historically scored lower on the reading state assessments in this school, other ethnic groups were not included in this study.

### **Hypothesis**

As this was a study to examine the impact of coaching on building capacity in reading teachers, null hypotheses were used to predict outcomes. Significant results were not expected so the null hypotheses for the research questions are as follows:

- Students whose teacher received coaching cycles will not show larger gains on state testing results than students whose teacher did not receive coaching.
- Boys whose teacher received coaching cycles will not show larger gains on state testing results than students whose teacher did not receive coaching.
- Girls whose teacher received coaching cycles will not show larger gains on state testing results than students whose teacher did not receive coaching.
- Hispanic students whose teacher received coaching cycles will not show larger gains on state testing results than students whose teacher did not receive coaching.

### **Research Design**

For this study, quantitative data were analyzed using a non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design. This design was chosen because the students who participated in the study were not randomly assigned. Instead, the two groups were intact and referred to as control and treatment groups. The students whose teacher was coached

were the treatment group and students whose teacher did not receive coaching were the control group. Paired sample of  $t$  tests were used to compare the mean scores of the State of Texas Assessments and Academic Readiness (STAAR) Reading test for the chosen students before and after the impact of coaching to determine if any significant gains occurred. The 2011-2012 4<sup>th</sup> grade STAAR reading results were compared to the 2012-2013 5<sup>th</sup> grade test results. The data were retrieved from two systems currently used by the school district, ePortal or Eduphoria.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study may be the sample size. There was a comparison between two teachers and involved approximately 130 students. Two teachers were selected due to Houston A+ Challenge's program design which allowed for one teacher to receive coaching and the other comparable teacher would not receive coaching. Many students had to be removed from the sample because there were no data from the previous year to use a basis for comparison. Although the sample size was large enough to conduct the statistical analyses, the sample was too small to generalize findings to the entire population. Another limitation to consider was the internal validity threat of selection. Since the research design involved a control and treatment group, prior differences between the groups may have affected the outcome. Also, there was an inability to control certain variables such as the amount of training teachers received outside of the instructional coaching and school setting. Some of this training may have accounted for improved practices in classrooms directly impacted by instructional coaches and those that were not. An additional limitation may be the relationship

between the students and the teacher. Students may respond to instructional practices based on the relationship and their true attitudes and opinions about the teacher.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Terms used in this thesis are defined below.

*Instructional coach-* An instructional coach is one whose chief professional responsibility was to provide research-based practices into classrooms by collaborating with teachers and other school leaders (Knight, 2009).

*Coaching-* Coaching is an established professional practice whereby a coach provides one-on-one staff development and feedback for one teacher (Knight, 2009).

*Coaching cycles-* Coaching cycles refers to a way in which instructional coaches creates a structure for their time with teachers in a way that focused on impacting student learning (Houston A+, 2011).

*PLCs- Professional Learning Community-* A conceptual model for transforming schools that focuses on the following principles: A Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals; Collaborative Teams; Collective Inquiry; Action Orientations and Experimentations, Continuous Improvement, and Results Orientation (Houston, A+, 2011).

*Literacy-* Literacy is the ability to read and write for knowledge and interest, write clearly, and think critically (American Heritage Dictionary, 2011).

*Capacity building-* Building capacity is strengthening the skills, competencies and abilities of people and communities (Houston A+, 2011).

*Low-achieving-* Low-achieving refers to students who perform below grade level academically (Burns, Griffin & Snow, 1999).

*On-grade level-* On-grade level indicates that children are performing proficiently in their appropriate grade (Burns et al., 1999).

*Formal reading instruction-* This type of instruction examines phonemic awareness and understands that words are not only made up of sounds, but also have meaning (Browne, 1998).

*Instructional practices-* These practices refer to strategies teachers use in the classroom to make the most of teaching and learning (Houston A +, 2011).

*Intermediate school-* In this study, intermediate refers to grades fifth and sixth.

*Assessment for learning-* Assessment for learning is the process of assessing a student's knowledge during the learning as opposed to after the learning has taken place (Stiggins, Chappuis & Chappuis, 2006).

*Effective teacher-* An effective teacher is one who demonstrates competency in curriculum, instruction, management, and motivation skills (Saphier, Haley-Speca & Gower, 2008).

## **Summary**

Schools across the nation face the challenge of helping students overcome extensive reading deficits. Houston A+ Challenge partnered with urban and suburban districts in north and south Houston, Texas to provide support and training for teachers to better serve students with reading deficits. Instructional coaches from this nonprofit organization aimed to build capacity in a reading teacher to promote the best practices for teaching and learning. If students were taught by a teacher who had received regular coaching cycles, statistical results determined if there were improvements on standardized testing results.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Background**

To prepare students for college or careers after high school, teachers need to build their capacity, specifically in literacy and numeracy. Across the state and nation, schools are not meeting this challenge. Especially in urban schools, the achievement gap is larger than in suburban schools. Successful teaching in a low-income urban school is different from successful teaching in a suburban setting as students are not as homogenous, stable, and there is minimal parental support (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996). Teachers in an urban school setting experience a plethora of challenges that range from language barriers, drugs, gangs, violence, cultural diversity, lack of family structure or stability, and high school drop-out rates. In dissecting some of the realities, one should examine the challenges with cultural diversity, language barriers, and high school drop-out rate (Curwin, 2010). Embattled conversations over the impact of these challenges on student performance continue to engage scholars. Often when cultural diversity is mentioned, race is primarily the focus. For the purpose of this study, the phrase cultural diversity referred to having different cultures respect each other's differences. Curwin described how race can be a barrier and how past experiences can shape a person's assumptions and perceptions. The author suggests asking how to best meet the need of the other person and finding a common ground (2010). Finding a common ground may be difficult if a language barrier exists.

Language barriers can present challenges in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom. The author mentioned there is an overabundance of multilingual

populations in urban schools but there is also a lack of funds and support systems to meet the needs of the students. Curwin recommends specific strategies to alleviate this challenge: First, utilize paraprofessionals with multilingual skills to assist with translations in the classroom. Second, partner with retired or elderly community members and use them as translators as well. Finally, empower students who are more fluent in English to bridge the communication between the teacher and students who are less fluent (Curwin, 2010). As students transition through the grades, it is suggested that teachers address their needs in fluency and comprehension. If students are unable to master those skills, other content areas may be affected and students could become discouraged and possibly disregard or abandon school.

Many schools across the United States are plagued by a drop out problem. There are a variety of factors that may influence a student's decision to leave school. Sterns (2006) classifies leaving school into three categories: Push-out, pull-out, and dropout. The primary reasons for student drop out include academic, behavioral, social, and attendance issues. Family or employment responsibilities may be a factor that pulls a student away from school. In respect to ethnicities, African Americans are more likely than any other ethnicity to drop out because of removals such as suspension, expulsions, or incarcerations. This statistic is important to consider as teachers work with students to increase their literacy skills. Educators may provide the inspiration and hope to students as they may have significant influence on a student's decision to remain in school.

To encourage this feeling of hope, teachers could possibly alter the students' beliefs and behaviors through motivation. In this particular text, Curwin uses the term motivation to refer to "wanting" to learn contrasted with "having" to learn. He makes the

point that students are not motivated to learn when they work under the threat of a displeasing consequence (Curwin, 2010, p.6). Also, he argues that a student's behavior may be altered positively or negatively as a result of threats. In addition, he discusses that students can develop a psychological "immune system" when they are constantly threatened. Therefore, teachers and other educators alike may facilitate motivational activities that promote hope. In contrast, it is suggested that educators discontinue any methods or techniques that incorporate bribery or punishment to increase motivation (Curwin, 2010). If teachers are unable or unwilling to motivate students then the abovementioned challenges will continue to increase and create undesirable working conditions for novice and experienced teachers alike.

Consequently, urban schools are losing a significant amount of its staff each year. This high attrition rate minimizes the possibility of sustaining a culture that promotes and fosters student learning. As a result, novice teachers may not have the necessary training needed to address the reading deficits that exists (Taylor and Collins, 2003).

In this literature review, instructional coaching was examined and its impact on building capacity in a reading teacher. This aspect was the foundation of this study and was examined at one of the fifth and sixth grade intermediate schools in Houston, Texas. In addition, the following topics were explored in relation to instructional coaching: educational reform, literacy, the role of principals, instructional coaches, and teachers, coaching models, adult learning, and sustainability.

### **Education reform**

The task of transforming schools in the United States continues to be the topic of discourse among scholars and non-academics alike. There are varying perspectives on

how to approach the overabundance of issues in today's education system. Payne (2008) highlighted the "persistence, the rootedness, of failure in urban schools and urban school systems" (p.1). He asserts that while some schools make improvements, the state of urban schools is far from the level of quality and effectiveness needed to educate today's children. On the contrary, supporters of the urban school say that reform, "it can begin now, and it is manageable" (Gunzelmann, 2012, p. 72). When considering student success, there are a number of societal, academic and intellectual factors to consider.

Analyzing complex social dilemmas is only the beginning of this intricate process. Gunzelmann contends that "societal issues are complex and difficult to separate out from interrelated facets such as family, schools, community, government and economic issues" (Gunzelmann, 2012). Poverty, violence and a lack of parental involvement are a few of the main struggles that students face. Teachers in urban schools have the unique challenge of educating children with deficits in all three areas. A thorough examination of social influences must be considered when identifying why students in urban schools perform poorly. According to Jenson, addressing generational poverty is the first step in transforming schools and ultimately communities (Jenson, 2009).

Research has determined that in order for a struggling school to be turned around, the social stronghold of poverty must be addressed. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in its 1996 publication of *Urban Schools: The Challenge of Poverty and Location*, reported findings on the relationship of poverty to its effect on student achievement. It also pointed to research that charges poor student performance to "home

and school environments that do not foster educational and economic success” (NCES, 1996).

Another reality that impacts school reform is violence. Researchers have linked it to poverty. In most instances, the two exist simultaneously and have a bearing on the children in certain communities. The US Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder reports that over three-fourths of youth between the ages of 10-16 directly experience community violence (Jensen, 2009). Those acts of violence include but are not limited to physical and/or sexual assault. To this end, the school setting that is meant to be safe and conducive to learning then becomes at risk of being infiltrated by the overflow of criminal activity from the community. This dilemma raises a number of questions:

1. How are school administrators and teachers to maintain a high academic standard when safety becomes a concern?

2. What can be done in the way of addressing social ills which have a negative bearing on educational success?

3. What can be done to help educators deal with students from communities that report higher levels of criminal activity?

In order for these schools to see the desired improvement, practitioners suggest that there is collaboration between the school and community to discuss and attempt to come up with solutions to the abovementioned questions (Jenson, 2009).

Some researchers believe that a school’s proximity to impoverished and crime-ridden neighborhoods directly impacts the culture of student achievement. Couple these

findings with minimal to no parental involvement, school administrators and teachers are faced with the challenge of trying to direct students toward academic success.

The success or failure of today's learners is dependent on the relationship between home and school. In order to build an unyielding case for education, a strong, supportive partnership between school, home and community must be established and sustained. Epstein (2009) stated, "there are many reasons for developing school, family and community partnerships...the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life"( p.9). The success or failure of students is determined by a number of factors.

The academic component of school reform is equally as complicated as the social component. Standardized assessments, teacher selection and development as well as funding and administrative support are factors to be examined independently and collectively in process of transforming schools. Is school reform a problem solely for the academic community? Others assign blame to the lack of quality teachers in the classrooms. Research repeatedly suggests that good teachers are one of education's most important components (Gunzelmann 2012). The fact that many children are illiterate should be evaluated. Several factors need to be addressed to assist students who do not perform well. It must be determined if teachers are prepared to assist student who have social and academic deficits. School reform is not a problem solely for the academic community.

Further still is the challenge of retaining quality teachers to educate children from impoverished communities. In a 2004 joint report prepared by the Center for American Progress and the Institute for America's Future, researchers determined that an urban

school typically performs poorly primarily due to the “revolving door” or other staffing issues. Consequently, schools are losing over one-fifth of their faculty each year (Ingersoll, 2004). This high attrition rate places schools at a disadvantage in terms of making consistent strides in student achievement. Teachers surveyed for this same study cited poor compensation and a lack of job satisfaction as reasons for pursuing other professional opportunities. While compensation is among the top areas of contention even for teachers in non-urban locations, teachers in urban schools desire a higher rate of pay by virtue of the fact that the urban environment presents an immensely different set of challenges than schools in other locations (Ingersoll, 2004).

Although individuals at the federal, state, and local levels recognize the need for this change, there is not a proven recipe to accomplish this. Some reform efforts suggest a common set of standards for all U.S. schools, an effective teacher in every classroom and increased expectations for student performance. In order to maximize the possibility of positive change, it is necessary to further examine the abovementioned (Kendall, 2011).

In 2010, common core standards for English language arts and literacy, history, technical subjects, and math were released as a result of the 2009 Common Core State Standards Initiative. The purpose of these standards was to articulate the knowledge and skills that students need to be successful in college, career and the global economy. In essence, students in every state across the United States would be held to the same level of expectation as students in the world’s top-performing countries (Kendall, 2011). These standards may be considered as teachers work with students to promote literacy. Teachers are not only producing students who are literate and are able to be successful in

class or on a state assessment; but also, they are preparing students to be successful and competitive on a national and global level. This kind of preparation can only be produced by an effective teacher (Kendall, 2011).

In the *Skillful Teacher*, the authors discuss skills that every teacher should possess. These set of skills influences the probability of intended learning. An effective teacher is one who demonstrates competency in curriculum, instruction, management, and motivation skills (Saphier, Haley-Speca, Gower, 2008). For the purpose of this study, effective teachers of literacy were examined. Wray, Medwell, Fox, and Poulson (2000), reported that effective teachers of literacy maximize opportunities for students to learn. The authors are not suggesting that learning can be judged by the amount of time allocated; however, they highlight that when calculated time is spent on complex procedures, this type of engagement is linked to student achievement (Wray et al., 2000).

In addition, the authors suggest that effective teachers organize their classrooms in such a way as to maximize student learning. In evaluating teachers deemed as effective, there was a reoccurring practice in student arrangements. They used a combination of instructional patterns such as whole class, small group and individual instruction based on the needs of the students. Also, it is stated that the level of success is linked to the type of task the students are given. To ensure that students are engaged in learning, teachers should not only focus on the type of task but also on the content of the task. As a result, effective teachers match tasks with student abilities resulting in authentic engagement (Wray et al., 2000). An additional characteristic of an effective teacher is one who maximizes instruction by teaching students and monitoring their work. In the same manner, modeling strategies and demonstrating their passion for

reading and writing were at the forefront of their instructional practices. Furthermore, an effective teacher recognizes the value of sufficient interaction between the teacher and the student and ensures high levels of engagement by conferring with the students, monitoring their work, and utilizing the appropriate pacing and feedback. When teachers facilitate their classes in this manner, then students will more likely take ownership of their learning (Wray et al., 2000).

To facilitate the change that is necessary to foster student ownership and growth, studies suggest when there is an increased expectation for student performance then change is likely to occur. Studies also reveal that teacher expectations play a significant role in the determining how students perform. In 1993, Raffini's study showed that students internalize the beliefs teachers have about their ability; consequently, students perform at the level of expectation of their teacher. In another study conducted in 1991, Gonder revealed that when teachers viewed students as lacking ability or motivation, the students adopted the perception of themselves. In a similar study in 1996, Omotani and Omotani emphasized that effective teachers maintain high expectations for all students regardless of their race, experiences, or stability. Likewise, in all of the studies previously mentioned, the perceptions and beliefs that teachers held for their students were manifested in the performance of the student.

When evaluating the conditions of schools nationwide, the need for reform may be evident. Many schools have developed plans that are producing promising results. In many of the schools that have implemented reform projects, there has been an increase in attendance, decrease in disciplinary issues, decreased drop-out rates, and higher academic achievement. Lunenburg discussed a coalition that has had an impact on improving

reform efforts. This coalition was developed with the belief that if the following principles are implemented, then schools will see better results:

- Personalized instruction
- Student as the worker, teacher as coach
- A “thinking” school
- Less is more
- Generalist first, specialist second
- Diploma by exhibition
- Intellectual education for all
- Tone of expectation, trust, and decency
- Budgets that support these principles
- Democracy and equity

Multiple schools, especially in urban settings, have utilized these principles and have seen positive results (Lunenburg, 2013). As data suggest, there is no one single idea or program that will bring about school improvement.

The success of students in schools can be facilitated by first conducting an assessment of social context. As previously mentioned, it is difficult to separate social issues from school, government and other entities in society. Addressing social dilemmas of poverty, reoccurring violence, and a lack of parental involvement is essential prior to devising a plan to strive for improvement and meet the needs of the students. According to many scholars, the first step to transforming schools and ultimately communities is addressing generational poverty. The family and community play a vital role in supporting student achievement. In order to build a stronger case for education, a strong

partnership between the school and community must be forged and sustained. Research suggests and supports the premise that there are significant social and academic ills that children contend with in their out-of-school lives. These factors ultimately have a bearing on the child's academic performance. To better understand the social challenges that children face and its impact of academics, the following will be briefly examined: violence, poverty, and parental involvement (Jenson, 2009).

Violence is a factor that impacts the academic performance of students. Children in urban areas are exposed to violence in their communities at high levels. Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, and Fick (1993) found that over 90% of 9- to 12-year olds in New Orleans had witnessed some form of community violence. In this study, parents reported that 71% of the children had seen weapons used, 40% had seen a dead body, and 26% had witnessed a shooting. Similar findings were reported for pre- and early adolescents in Chicago: 23% had seen someone shot or killed, more than 30% had a family member who had been robbed or attacked, 11% had personally been the victim of a violent crime, and almost 9% had lost a close friend to violence. In many cases, this exposure to violence not only affects children's academic but it also affects their behavior and their social interactions (Bell & Jenkins, 1993).

The word poverty is a considerable factor that school leaders must understand and a concept that school leaders must be prepared to address. In the United States, poverty is identified by set criteria through the Office of Management and Budget. Jensen (2009) defines poverty as a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors and affects the mind, body and soul. No matter how poverty is defined, the effects and risk factors that impoverished families face may be damaging to

the social, emotional, and intellectual well-being of students and their parents. Often, poor children live in chaotic, unstable households and are more likely to come from single-guardian homes where their parents or caregivers tend to be less emotionally responsive (Evans, Gonnella, Marcynyszyn, Gentile, and Salpekar, 2005). Contrast these children with their peers living in stable two parent families, who have more access to financial resources and parental time, receive more supervision, participate in more extracurricular activities, and do better in school (Evans, 2004). Underprivileged children are more inclined than well-off children to attend poorly maintained schools with less qualified teachers. If daycare facilities are available, they are likely to be less adequate than those located in wealthy communities (Jensen 2009).

Families and teachers alike seek solutions to building better working relationships that will increase the chances that adolescents will reach their academic and social potential (Hill & Chao, 2009). Although families and school personnel share a desire for students to succeed, they often are perplexed about how to effectively collaborate and support achievement, especially as students move into middle and high school (Hill & Chao, 2009). In addition, students have many teachers, making it harder for parents to connect and give information (2009). During adolescence, it is important for parents to be involved in their children's education so that they can help prepare them for high school and college. This involvement has huge benefits for their self-esteem, achievement and emotional development. In order for parents to gain information and resources for their children, they must develop two- way relationships with their children's teacher. Such relationships will allow them to be informed regarding their children's academic, behavioral, and social development (Hill & Chao, 2009).

School reform will continue to be a topic of interest in education because it encompasses a variety of components and strategies in an effort to transform schools. With the continuous changes in education, it is likely to be beneficial if school and district leaders remain on the cutting edge of reform efforts. Additional funding should be allocated to the training of teachers and leaders to improve instructional practices, especially in literacy. Several factors could be addressed to assist students who do not perform well. Determining if teachers are prepared to assist students who have social and academic deficits is likely to impact student performance. Moreover, the issues associated with school reform extend beyond the academic community.

In addressing the issue of literacy, clarifying the role of the principals, instructional coaches and teachers is likely to support this effort. Each will bring a varied expertise to the collective task of promoting literacy. How these individuals work together is vital to the process of building successful learners. Moskal and Keneman (2011) argue that the relationship between these individuals is the basis for “communities of literacy leaders.” The authors further contend that since reading is not an easy task, literacy leaders should work together to create an educational culture that promotes and ensures effective reading practices (Moskal and Keneman, 2011).

## **Literacy**

### **Historical background.**

Literacy is a concept and term that has evolved over the last century. In times past, it meant the ability to write one’s own name but the term has evolved to the point where some currently use the term to refer to the level of interaction with text that enables one to be a fluid, functioning, contributing member of society (Gordan &

Gordan, 2003). Despite the variety of definitions for literacy, no fixed standard exists. These standards are constantly being shaped by the demands of a particular time. In the past 100 years in the United States the definition has changed from the ability to sign one's own name to needing a high school education (2003). Based on this trend, the definition of literacy is likely to continue to evolve.

Historically, literacy has been the catalyst for upper mobility of individuals in society. Families were instrumental in literacy-education process, as the home was the primary place of employment. As time progressed, the one- room schools became the primary promoter of literacy. As literacy began to be an important element in transforming society, the task of educating children transferred from the family to school ( Gordan & Gordan, 2003).

As states began to pass education laws, public education was mandatory which influenced literacy education. Enforcement of these laws prompted higher requirements and better final results. By the 1980s, national as well as international studies indicated that the number one issue for United States citizens was fluency instead of illiteracy. Although there has been a shift in defining literacy and providing sound literacy education, it continues to be a vehicle of onward and upward mobility in society (Gordan &Gordan, 2003).

### **Contemporary context.**

It may be important to understand that while reading and writing are fundamental, there are specific best practices that can increase the fluency for readers whether they struggle or are on grade level. According to Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2012) the following practices should be increased in order to increase student literacy growth:

- Time for independent reading
- Children's choice of their own reading materials
- Balance of simple and difficult books
- Teaching reading as a process
- Writing before and after reading

Distributing low-level worksheets, lengthy lectures, and all students reading the exact same novel no longer serve as the blueprint for reading instruction. Students are encouraged to read texts that interest them and can access classroom libraries that are tailored toward their interests. Beginning readers can be provided with multiple opportunities to interact with a variety of printed materials. When students have not had rich experiences with reading, it is important that teachers provide varied material that they are interested in and can experience. In addition, the author suggests that children read both simple and challenging texts. Studies show that young readers need to develop fluent reading by reading many more books that are simple, predictable, enjoyable, and can be read quickly and comprehended easily (Allington 2002).

Although these strategies are recommended to increase literacy, many teachers feel that there is not enough time to incorporate them into instruction to ensure that every child has what he/she needs to become a stronger reader. According to Browne (1998), studies revealed the following:

- A great deal of time that could be used for teaching is spent on managerial tasks.
- Many of the teacher's interactions with children were unrelated to work.
- On average teachers spent less than 10% of their time on reading (Browne, 1998).

The author went on to discuss other revelations from similar studies. In many reading classrooms, the majority of time is spent on rehearsing familiar concepts and routines rather than acquiring new knowledge. In addition, most of the tasks assigned by the teacher did not match the student's abilities. Browne suggests several strategies to use time effectively:

- Establish orderly student behavior to keep managerial interactions to a minimum.
- Have clear teaching intentions which focus interactions and children's learning.
- Establish routines that enable children to work independently.
- Match activities to students' learning needs.
- Use teaching procedures that are most appropriate to what is to be taught.
- Have a manageable number of activities some of which require minimal supervision.
- Carefully plan how teaching time is to be used.
- Give children realistic deadlines for the completion of work.
- Consider the balance of exploration, practice and extension work children are given.
- Exploit all learning opportunities by planning for reading across all curriculum areas (Browne, 1998).

Although time constraints are a hindrance for many teachers, data has shown that the quality of the lesson is more important than the quantity of instructional time. Teachers may experiment and discover strategies to maximize the learning experience for each child.

Reading is a cognitive process: an active, constructive, creative, higher-order thinking activity that involves distinctive thinking strategies before during, and after reading (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2012). Students need to learn how skillful, experienced readers actually manage these processes (Zemelman et al., 2012). It may be important to evaluate how students learn in order to be able to determine outcomes and content that will need to be spiraled back to and content that has been mastered. Therefore, the best type of assessment that teachers can use to assess reading is formative assessment because it allows teachers to observe and interact with students as they read through varied texts. The implications for instructional practices in reading and writing suggest that teachers are invited to step into a new role as a model and a coach for what good readers do (Zemelman et al., 2012)

An existing model that is research-based and has proven to be successful is Readers/Writers Workshop. Teachers who utilize Readers/Writers Workshop are able to model their own reading processes, diversify students' reading materials, offer more choice and responsibility, and rebalance time allocations so that the most powerful experiences get the time they need (Zemelman, Daniels & and Hyde 2012). This model can be used across disciplines to promote literacy in all content areas. An effective way to ensure that student literacy is for teachers to assist them to become good readers early in their school years.

Students may become good readers early in the early grades from their exposure to a balanced literacy program that provides a variety of reading and writing experiences. Although all children have the capability to become literate, many need to be shown how to develop literacy and then receive support as they learn to read. This process is known

as guided reading and is considered the core of a balanced literacy program. Guided Reading is a critical component to the Reading Workshop model of literacy instruction. Guided Reading sessions involve a teacher and a small group of children. Each session has a set of objectives to be covered in a lesson of approximately 20 minutes. While the teacher is working with one group of students, the remaining children are engaged in independent or group literacy tasks. The goal is to allow the teacher to focus on the small group without interruption. Fountas and Pinnell discuss several benefits of guided reading:

- It gives children the opportunity to develop as individual readers while participating in a socially supported activity.
- It gives teachers the opportunity to observe students as they process new texts.
- It gives readers the opportunity to develop reading strategies so that they can read increasingly difficult texts independently.
- It gives students enjoyable, successful experiences in reading for meaning.
- It develops the abilities needed for independent reading.
- It helps students learn how to introduce texts to themselves.

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) go on to describe guided reading as a context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of effective strategies for processing texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). Ultimately, students will learn how to use reading strategies successfully, process and make decisions about both basic and complex texts independently.

Illiteracy has been a major topic of discussion in education for decades. This term is much like the evolution of the word literacy. Regardless of how it is defined,

widespread, illiteracy not only leads to lower education rates, but also lower employment rates. Illiteracy is also suggested as a root cause of increased crime and high economic costs. The impact of illiteracy is significant not only to schools but also to society in general. In fact, when illiteracy rates are high, it is extremely difficult for the country to continue to grow and develop because some people lack the skills needed to be productive (e.g. function in the workplace, pay bills, and understand legal and financial documents).

Studies also reveal that the most significant effect of illiteracy on society is that it works as an inhibitor. Again, the more illiterate people there are in a country, the more difficult it will be for the country to develop. “Literacy is Freedom” was a slogan launched in 2003 by the United Nations under the belief that literacy is a human right. The goals of the initiative were to improve literacy efforts, increase global literacy levels, and reduce poverty. According to the United Nations Literacy Decade, one in five adults world-wide cannot read or write. Sixty-one percent of adults are literate in low-income areas while 99% of adults are literate in high-income areas. Compared to other countries, the U.S. is doing better because according to the latest International Adult Literacy Survey, between 19% and 23% of adults performed at the top level of the three literacy scales. On the other hand, 21%-24% performed at the lowest level of the three scales. Another area that illiteracy affects is the economy. On average adults with low literacy levels earn approximately \$230-\$245 weekly and work 18-19 weeks annually. In addition they are three times more likely to receive food stamps and ten times more likely to live below the poverty line. The statistics are far worse for individuals who are

incarcerated. These statistics show how illiteracy impacts society and articulate the importance increasing literacy levels in the classroom (Education Portal, 2011).

Illiteracy has generational implications. The children of illiterate people are more likely to be illiterate than those who are not. Although parents may not desire their children to be illiterate, the children become self-fulfilling prophecies when they observe their parents' behavior and adopt the mental conception that illiteracy is acceptable and normal. Since people develop most of their character during childhood, they choose illiteracy and continue the cycle from generation to generation. Consequently, the need exists to develop stronger reading teachers in order to give students the opportunity to grow and be successful.

In the United States, how well a student reads is under constant examination. In the article, *Pattern of Literacy among U.S. Students*, Reardon, Valentino, and Shores (2012) rely on studies from national and international literacy assessments to address this concern. In part, according to the authors, the answer depends on the specific literacy skills assessed. If reading is defined as proficiency in basic procedural word-reading skills, then the authors show that almost all U.S. students can "read" by third grade (Reardon, Valentino, & Shores, 2012). Reading for comprehension is integrating background knowledge and contextual information to make sense of a text. This level of reading requires a set of knowledge-based competencies in addition to word-reading skills. By the standards used in various large-scale literacy assessments, only one third of U.S. students in middle school possess the knowledge-based competencies to "read" in this more comprehensive sense. This low level of literacy proficiency does not appear to be a result of declining performance over time.

Over the past 40 years, literacy skills of nine-year-olds in the United States have increased modestly, although the skills of thirteen- and seventeen-year-olds have remained relatively flat. This variation is patterned in part by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. Black and Hispanic students enter high school with average literacy skills that are three years behind those of white and Asian students. In addition, students from low-income families enter high school with average literacy skills five years behind those of high-income students. It is unlikely that these gaps, regardless of the amount of remedial instruction in high school, will be eliminated. Although the socioeconomic disparities in literacy skills are growing, the racial and ethnic disparities are smaller than they were 40 to 50 years ago. American students perform above average when compared with students in other developed countries. Literacy skills in the United States are lower than needed to meet the demands of modern society, as is true in most other developed countries (Reardon, Valentino, Kenneth, 2012). The need to develop stronger reading teachers to diminish illiteracy rates still exists. To accomplish this goal, it will require collaboration between teachers, coaches and school leaders alike. In addition, it will require that all members of the school community who are involved in this effort to increase his or her knowledge on the effective practices in reading. The collaboration needed to facilitate change may be guided by the principal and other leadership members on the campus (Reardon et al., 2012).

Also, it may be important to further discuss the roles and responsibilities of principals, teachers, and coaches. These individuals share the common goal of ensuring that students acquire the appropriate literacy skills to increase their academic achievement. Individually, however, each person has a specific set of responsibilities

during this process. Principals use relevant data sources to assist with identifying those students who require additional academic support. They also monitor teachers' professional development and effectiveness for serving challenged readers. Instructional coaches serve schools in a number of ways. They are a catalyst for influencing teachers' attitudes about teaching. They share their knowledge and expertise to assist teachers with creating a rigorous instructional environment. Also, they serve to improve and implement certain instructional practices. By communicating with teachers, coaches work to build trusting relationships where information is shared. Coaches may also assist with identifying which sources of data will be analyzed to determine success. Evaluating data sources is likely to assist in the process of devising a plan that is inclusive of students who require interventions (Houston A+, 2011). It also gives school leaders insight on teachers who may require additional support in order to more effectively serve their students.

### **The Role of the Principal**

The principal's role in supporting literacy may be multi-faceted. The classroom environment may be considered to evaluate instructional practices for effectiveness. The relationship to the teacher must be supportive while clearly stating goals and expectations for student achievement. Also, the principal can develop a relationship with the instructional coach. Using assessment data and other resources aides in collaborating to create and implement a plan for teacher development and intervention when necessary. The principal-coach relationship can be one of mutual respect for the other's expertise and knowledge of instruction. Furthermore, the principal serves to provide the teacher

with the necessary resources to assist in making the teacher's classroom conducive to teaching and learning (Houston A+, 2011).

According to research, the role of the principal varies from campus to campus. Taylor and Collins (2003) discuss the value of a collaborative literacy team that includes teachers across content levels and administrators who use their knowledge and expertise to determine how they are serving students in this area, how they can serve better, and use data to make decisions to enhance instruction and teaching strategies. The fail safe literacy leader is equipped to create a curriculum system of aligned curriculum, instruction through literacy, learning tools, and assessment where it matters most-in the classroom (Taylor and Collins, 2003).

A one-shot approach to developing a culture of literacy on a campus will not increase student growth or achievement. Implementing new practices and instructional strategies in the classroom represents a change in the daily practice. In order to improve literacy practices in a school, principals and other leaders can be informed of the most effective practices and can implement these literacy practices as well. The following is a list of recommended best practices to influence literacy instruction:

- Teachers can use running records to assess their students' reading level at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year.
- Teachers and department heads s can be informed of the reading levels and progress made throughout the year.
- Model the "how to" of the reading skills they are expected to develop as readers.

- Teachers can begin with a short mini-lesson before students proceed to independent reading and writing. The focused reading and writing skills are taught in chunks.
- Eliminate workbooks and worksheets and replace them with a variety of authentic texts.
- Discontinue centralized homework assignments and replace with them extensions of what students learned in the classroom.
- Confer with students during independent reading and writing to promote individualized instruction based on the needs.
- Discourage teachers from using the same book as a class but allowing students to choose from a variety of novels based on their interest and reading levels.
- Utilize Reader's and Writer's notebooks.
- Arrange classroom libraries according to student's interest and readability.
- Ensure that teachers are contributing/collaborating and utilizing materials and resources during collaborative planning meetings.
- Utilize KILGO's questions stems to create their own assessments using authentic texts (Houston A+, 2011).

### **Shaping School Culture**

It is recommended that leaders be willing to support teachers as well as coach them through challenges in order to build trust and create opportunities for them to be willing to take a risk with new practices. This trust can be built and nurtured by understanding the culture of the school as well as the teacher's classroom. School culture can be described as the values, beliefs, and traditions of a school community. According

to Deal and Peterson, culture is everything that occurs in the school, from the manner in which staff members speak and dress, to how they deal with challenges. In essence, culture shapes how people think, feel, and behave (Deal & Peterson, 1998). When the leader has this background knowledge, he/she is able to impact the school climate positively. A positive culture and climate is essential to sustain effective practices in literacy as well as other content areas. Deal and Peterson (1998) suggest the following to principals in shaping school culture:

- Communicate core values in words and actions
- Honor and recognize those who work to serve the students and purpose of the school
- Observe rituals and traditions to support the school's heart and soul
- Recognize exemplars and the work that they accomplish
- Speak of the deeper mission of the school
- Celebrate the accomplishments of the staff, students, and community
- Preserve the focus on students by recounting stories of success and achievement.

Effective leaders are likely to understand the importance of offering suggestions and development in areas that teachers feel they need to grow in by being hands on through observations and feedback. In addition, leaders can lend support by recommending relevant professional developments opportunities and/or providing a coach to work with the teacher on an individualized level (Deal & Peterson, 1998).

### **The Role of the Instructional Coach**

Across the United States, students are often transitioning from grade to grade with literacy deficits. Many teachers are not equipped to address the needs of these students

adequately. In order to improve literacy skills, the quality of reading instruction need to be improved. One way to improve the quality of teaching and learning is through the use of an instructional coach. Twenty years ago, coaches were responsible for working directly with students who were having difficulties. In recent years, however, the literature reveals that the instructional coach's focus has shifted from impacting students directly to impacting teaching practices (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2010).

According to the International Reading Association (2006), the role of a literacy instructional coach is “a reading specialist who focuses on providing professional development for teachers by giving them the additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practices. They provide essential leadership for a school's entire literacy program by helping create and supervise long-term staff development processes that support both the development and implementation of literacy programs over months and years” (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2010).

For the purpose of this study, an instructional coach was one whose chief professional responsibility was to implement research-based practices in classrooms by collaborating with teachers and other school leaders. Since this study involved the practices of literacy teachers, the term instructional coach will be used interchangeably with literacy and reading coaches. Often the roles of literacy instructional coaches are confused with the roles of reading specialists. Reading specialists' roles are predominantly geared toward students as they typically work with students by providing resources and instructional strategies. In contrast, literacy instructional coaches' focus is geared towards teaches as they work with teachers by suggesting resources and demonstrating lessons (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2010). Similarly reading specialists and

instructional coaches advise teachers, provide resources, offer professional development, and interpret assessment data (2010). Coaches collaborate with teachers and share research-based practices relating to lesson design, lesson delivery, and assessment for learning. Effective designed lessons and instructional delivery are important although assessment for learning is the key to evaluating students' understanding and will be further explained.

Assessments are used in the classroom for various reasons. Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis and Chappuis (2006) classify assessments into two categories: Assessment for learning and assessment of learning. Assessment for learning describes the process that teachers use to determine the comprehension level of students after the learning has occurred. On the other hand, assessment of learning involves evaluating what students know and are able to do while the learning is taking place (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis & Chappuis, 2006).

According to Houston A+ Challenge, the primary role of the instructional coach (often referred to as performance coach), is to partner with teachers in the classrooms to share and implement best practices relating to lessons, assessments, and interventions. The instructional coach is expected to collaborate with teachers and give additional support throughout the instructional day. In addition, the coach was expected to build capacity in a teacher's skills and assist with the development of rigorous lessons (Houston A+, 2011).

Instructional coaches are used in many capacities but are primarily used as a means to "support teachers in their efforts to provide high quality teaching in academic areas including reading, math, and science" (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009, p. 151).

Although several studies have investigated best practices of instructional coaches for assisting teachers in becoming successful, there is minimal research to support the effectiveness of the coach relating to sustaining effective instructional practices. The role of instructional coaches varies between campuses and districts alike, thereby making the effort to find the most effective ways to assist teachers difficult.

This position of instructional coaching has gained popularity in recent years. Federal initiatives such as The Reading First Initiative (RF) that was a part of the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation provided funds to assist teachers in improving their skills in effective reading instructional strategies. The (RF) program was established under NCLB to influence instructional techniques and student performance in low-performing schools. The program was to be used specifically to improve the quality of reading instruction. In turn, schools were mandated to collaborate with literacy instructional coaches.

In a study conducted by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, the roles of the literacy instructional coaches in RF schools in 203 different schools were explored (Deussen et al., 2007). Literacy coaching is a way suggested by RF legislation to provide effective professional development to assist in sustaining effective reading instruction (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2007). These literacy instructional coaches are typically master skilled teachers who utilize their strengths to aide novice and experience teachers. Many coaches collaborate with teachers by modeling, observing, planning lessons and providing feedback (Deussen et al., 2007). In addition, they can support teachers by using assessment data to group students, provide interventions, conduct staff developments to introduce new strategies, and help with classroom management to

impact student performance (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2007). Across the nation schools are striving to meet the requirements of NCLB, and as a result, the use of instructional coaching has increased as a means to enhance teaching and learning (Deussen et al., 2007). There are various approaches of coaching to consider and each school leader will have to determine which model best meets the needs of the students. The most common models of coaching will now be examined.

### **Coaching models**

In the literature, four models of coaching are frequently mentioned: peer coaching, cognitive coaching, literacy coaching, and instructional coaching. The models are listed in order from oldest to the most recent and will be examined accordingly (Knight, 2009). An examination of each model will reveal common findings and will have implications for each. Regardless of what model is selected, the goal is to improve teaching practices to improve student performance.

#### **Peer coaching.**

Peer coaching originated from a five-year study focusing on staff development in California. The idea behind this particular model was to examine whether teachers' implementation of new skills was increased as a result of peer coaching. The study revealed that when coaches only provided a description of a new instructional strategy, only there was a 10% implementation. When additional components of peer coaching such as modeling, practice, and feedback were added to the training process, the teachers' implementation of the teaching skill increased 2%-3% each time a new component was added (Knight, 2009). In other words, when description, modeling, practice, and feedback were utilized, there was a 16%-19% transfer of skill to classroom use.

However, 95% of teachers implemented the new teaching skills in their classrooms when coaching was added to staff development. The study also revealed that non-coached teachers were less likely to implement new skills from training in their classrooms as compared to one who received coaching. In brief, the majority of teachers who received peer coaching support the theory of knowledge transfer (Knight, 2009). Teachers who received peer coaching implemented newly acquired skills from individualized staff development with fidelity; therefore, students benefited from new teaching practices and produced higher achievement. As a result, other studies were initiated and additional models of coaching began to be researched and developed.

### **Cognitive Coaching.**

Cognitive coaching has been the topic of many studies since its development in the 1980s. The intended goal of cognitive coaching was to give rise to self-directed people with the thinking capacity for high performance, individually and as members of a community (Knight, 2009). In one research study, nine outcomes were identified that can be expected from this type of coaching:

1. Increase in student test data and additional benefits to students.
2. Growth in teacher efficacy.
3. Increase in reflective and intricate thinking among staff.
4. Increase in teacher satisfaction relating to career and position.
5. Increase in professional school climate.
6. Increase in collaboration.
7. Increase in assistance to teachers professionally.
8. Increase in personal benefits to teachers.

9. Benefit to people in careers outside of education (Knight, 2009). For purposes of this study, several outcomes will be further examined.

In discussing the impact of cognitive coaching on student achievement and outcomes, Knight divided the research into two categories: the impact on teacher-student communication, and effects on student achievement. In several studies that were conducted comparing teachers who received cognitive coaching and those who did not, the findings were similar. The findings revealed that the growth of the students whose teachers were coached was greater than those students whose teachers were not. However, coaching did not produce a significant statistical difference. In one of the studies, teachers were surveyed about perceptions of being coached. Several positive outcomes were revealed: There was a change in focus from procedural to instructional, an increase in communication of teachers toward specific goals, and positive reaction to cognitive coaching as a form of professional development (Knight, 2009). When teachers apply the recommended practices from coaches with fidelity, results report that students benefit academically. As previously mentioned, cognitive coaching benefits both students and teachers. Also, Knight (2009) discussed studies that reveal that cognitive coaching improves teacher efficacy and reflection. Efficacy and reflection are behaviors that can be promoted and supported by coaches.

### **Literacy coaching.**

In 2004, the International Reading Association adopted a definition of a literacy coach as anyone who “supports teachers in their daily work” (Knight, 2009, p. 203). Therefore, the coaches can assist with a variety of activities including but not limited to modeling, book studies, and disaggregating data. Above all, this individual supports the

efforts of teachers to improve literacy. As with other models, studies were done to gauge the impact that this style of coaching has on student achievement. According to the Knight (2009) additional studies need to be conducted to determine the effectiveness of literacy coaching on teaching practices and student achievement.

### **Instructional coaching.**

The model of instructional coaching was developed at the University of Kansas in order to support teachers as they implement practices in the classroom. The following activities were derived from this type of coaching: the development and study of the theoretical framework for this approach, a teacher survey on modeling, teacher interviews, a study of teacher implementation, and, the repetitive development of the instructional coaching model over seven years (Knight, 2009). The author reports that when the partnership approach was used to train teachers, there was higher level of engagement, enjoyment of sessions, and remembering and planning the implementation of the content. An important element of instructional coaching is modeling. In one study conducted in 2003-2004, results revealed that teachers benefited from observing an instructional coach. One teacher expressed she gained insight on how interactions with students should look. She also believed that she was instilled with confidence as a result of observing the coach (Knight, 2009). In a summer study described by Knight in Kansas in 2004, 82 teachers received coaching and were exposed to new teaching practices. Findings revealed that 70 of those teachers implemented newly acquired teaching practices into classroom instruction, which means that 85% of the coached teachers were implementing the new instructional practices. These results were significant when comparing findings from Shower's 1983 study of the rate of implementation following

professional development without coaching (Knight 2009). Again, this was significant because it represents a 70% increase in implementation. According to the author, research is still being conducted to determine the impact of coaching on student achievement. In brief, based on past students' results, it is evident that coaching impacts the attitudes, practices and efficacy of teachers.

Deussen et al. (2007) examined the way coaches in five states focus their time and efforts. They discovered that coaches could be classified as data-oriented, student-oriented, managerial, or teacher oriented instructional coaches. In this study, the data-oriented coaches spent an average of 18 percent of their work week working directly with teachers while 45 percent was spent on data and assessments. This same study revealed that 14 percent of time was spent providing one-on-one coaching to teachers. Many of the instructional coaches felt that data was a great way to highlight weaknesses, while serving as a catalyst for change.

The student-oriented coaches were categorized as those that spent more time working directly with students and a considerably small amount of time working with teachers. These coaches would place the student in the center when defining their roles on a campus. According to the study, a third of the coaches' time was designated to assessing students, using the results to organize interventions and to providing the interventions themselves. These coaches devote time to deliver instruction directly to students, provide support for tutorials, and substitute for other teachers. Above all, this model of coaching focuses primarily on the student as opposed to supporting the teacher.

Twenty five percent of the time in this study, managerial coaches were found to be working with teachers. Although this was revealed, 35% of their time was spent on

managing systems, keeping up with paperwork, and facilitating meetings. In this case, these coaches served as a resource to teachers instead of working with them directly (Duessen et al., 2007). Also, they assisted teachers with finding appropriate curriculum and classroom materials as well as relevant research. Since they were given additional duties and responsibilities, many of the coaches did not feel as effective in assisting teachers.

When compared to other coaches, the teacher-oriented coaches spent less time on data-based tasks, paperwork, or activities that were unrelated to working with teachers. In addition, there was very little time spent on planning or intervening with students. Instead, they focus on teacher professional development through classroom observations, modeling quality instruction, and providing in-service training and other professional development. Moreover, these coaches facilitate teacher meetings and assist teachers in disaggregating data to make instructional decisions for the purpose of improvement (Duessen et al., 2007). The style may be beneficial to sustaining effective practices as should have benefited from the modeling and in-service training provided by the coach.

Individual teacher coaches reported that 48% of their time was spent working with individual teachers and spent little time collaborating with groups of teachers. The authors reveal that these coaches were found to spend less time with assessment data than any other category of coach (Duessen et al., 2007). Coaches in the group teacher-oriented category reported that 25% of their time was spent working with individual teachers and 10% of their time working with groups of teachers. In contrast to the individual teacher-oriented coaches, these coaches spent more time working with data and were the most common type (Duessen et al., 2007). Regardless of which model of

coaching is being used, the goal should be to build capacity in teachers and improve instructional practices.

The differences in styles and methods of instructional coaches have raised concerns regarding the insufficient training being provided to these coaches (Duessen et al., 2007; Denton & Hasbrouck, 2007). When developing training for coaches, “these professionals need to be equipped with content-specific knowledge, as well as skills related to establishing, maintaining, and working within professional relationships with teachers and other school personnel” ( p. 169). Nevertheless, the authors argue that without a well-defined model of coaching, instructors may give confusing or contradictory information to the coaches. Also, if coaches receive training from multiple sources, conflicting information may cause them to be perplexed about the purpose of their role (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2007). It may be advantageous to ensure that coaches receive the adequate training prior to engaging with teachers. If the appropriate training is not received, coaches may lose credibility when collaborating with teachers.

There are many studies on how to improve schools and how instructional coaches can be successful in schools. For purposes of this study, a literacy coach was examined.

L’Allier, Elish-Piper, and Bean (2010) studied literacy coaches in elementary schools.

From their investigation, they identified seven guiding principles for literacy coaches to use to focus their work on improvement teaching and learning in literacy. These principles focused on elementary literacy coaches but can be utilized by any coach at all grade levels. According to the International Reading Association, the role and qualifications of the reading or literacy coach in the United States have been newly defined. “Reading coaches frequently act as reading specialists when they provide

leadership for school-, district-, and state level reading programs. In the leadership role, they design, monitor, and assess reading achievement progress; they provide professional development and coaching for teachers and building personnel” (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2010). Again, L’Allier, Elish-Piper, and Bean (2010) suggested seven research-based principles to impact literacy coaching.

The first guiding principle promoted by the authors for instructional coaching is that the coaches should have specialized knowledge to be successful. Since coaches assist teachers with planning, presentations, facilitating team meetings, and working with small study groups, it is imperative that the coaches receive the appropriate training. In order to be effective, the coaches should be well-versed in content, assessment, and instruction. Furthermore, they need to have knowledge of adult learning concepts so they can be effective in providing professional development to teachers. Also, they need to have successful teaching experience to form a foundational base. In addition, an advanced degree is advantageous as it enhances the coaches’ knowledge and understanding and positions them to be successful in their coaching (L’Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010). Obtaining this knowledge will assist instructional coaches in working with teacher.

The second guiding principle suggested by the L’Allier et al., is that the focus of coaching should be time working with teachers. Therefore, administrative tasks such as supervising students, covering classes and other duties that may distract the instructional coaches’ purpose should be minimized. Research reveals that schools where instructional coaches spent more time working directly with teachers had a higher percentage of

student achievement than coaches who spent their time on other tasks (L'Allier et al, 2010), which demonstrates the importance of the teachers and coaches working together.

Next, collaboration is the third principle L'Allier et al., (2010) gives as an important element in coaching. The authors affirmed that in order to build an authentic collaborative relationship, more than a common goal of student success is needed. "Coaches must build on that foundation by establishing trust, maintaining confidentiality, and communicating effectively with teachers" (L'Allier et al., 2010, p. 547). Trust is established by openly respecting a teacher's expertise and following through with commitments made to them (2010). To maintain confidentiality, coaches should not discuss observations of teachers with administrators or other teachers (2010). To promote effective communication with teachers, dialogue should not focus on the teacher's classroom performance but should be centered on the student's performance (2010). As a result, this communication will assist in establishing an effective relationship between the coaches and teachers.

The fourth principle the authors discussed is that coaching that supports reading student achievement focuses on a set of core activities. The activities include administering and discussing student assessments, providing feedback to teachers, and conducting conferences with the teachers about student achievement. These teacher-centered activities focus on the instructional coach assisting teachers in building student success. These activities can be accomplished if a systematic approach is used (L'Allier et al., 2010).

The fifth principle is coaching must be both opportunity-driven and intentional. In order to be successful, a coach must be intentional in the interactions with teachers.

The authors give an example of a coach's approach towards inexperienced teachers. The coach may be more forward with modeling a lesson, co-teaching, observing and providing feedback. On the contrary, an experienced teacher, especially if he or she is hesitant about the coaching, may need conversations during team meetings or observing a particular aspect of the lesson cycle (L'Allier et al., 2010). The authors suggest that the coach uses road maps to guide their work and be flexible by adjusting when necessary. The authors described effective coaches as ones who take advantage of every opportunity by making themselves available and accessible. Interaction came become intentional when coaches build relationships through brief and frequent conversations (2010).

Being a literacy leader in the school is the sixth principle for instructional coaches. The authors highlight three practices that coaches should be involved in to be successful as leader: Setting goals for the schools, developing people, and redesigning the organization (2010).

To accomplish the first recommendation, coaches can utilize collaborative planning with teachers to set goals and the direction of a department or a school. Next, the coach can develop teachers by supporting their professional growth and helping them achieve personal and campus goals. To accomplish the third suggestion of redesigning the organization, coaches can work with school leaders by sharing local and national initiatives and implement a framework that would promote learning even if the coach's or teacher's schedule needed to be restructured. These suggested practices are essential to facilitate the accomplishment of goals (L'Allier et al., 2010). When coaches collaborate with teachers and implement the suggested practices then opportunities for success are created.

The sixth principle that L'Allier et al., (2010) describes is that the role of coaching evolves over time. The authors compare the experiences of coaches by explaining that many coaches come with content knowledge but not the experience of working with adults. On the other hand, some coaches exhibit a strong background in working with adults but lack the teaching experience to provide direction to other teachers. In both cases, instructional coaches should realize that gaining knowledge and expertise comes with experience. They should continue to foster positive relationships with teachers and make the necessary modifications to their craft as they evolve into effective instructional coaches (L'Allier et al., 2010).

Instructional coaches can be an effective resource to assist campuses in meeting goals. They can assist with analyzing data, goal setting, coaching teachers, and working with groups of students. In addition, coaches can work with parents and provide them with resources to support their children at home. Also, they can work with the principal and other leaders to ensure that vision and mission of the school is articulated throughout various departments and throughout the school. Ultimately the coach may be used to build capacity in teachers to improve instructional practices and impact student achievement. The coach can communicate frequently with the principal to ensure that campus goals regarding student achievement and literacy instruction are being achieved. The relationship between the teacher and the coach is equally as important as the relationship between the principal and the coach. Building relationships is important as the coach and teacher work together to accomplish instructional goals (Houston A+, 2011).

## **The Role of Teachers**

The teacher's role encompasses several key components that are central to student success. Building relationships with students through observation, assessing student progress, and setting expectations are three crucial responsibilities for a classroom leader. Since learners in each classroom possess specific academic needs, a teacher is likely to have more success if s/he is well-prepared to address those needs. This preparation may be acquired by observing various approaches to literacy instruction. Ultimately, the teacher can utilize whatever ideas, resources, and approaches necessary to reach his/her students. Unfortunately, many students face a number of challenges that make learning difficult. Specific to literacy deficits, a framework for teaching struggling readers is necessary when "trying to understand how best to support the children for whom reading doesn't come easily" (Johnson, 2006). Literacy deficits can be described as a lack of proficiency in the basic elements of reading and writing such as phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension. When students struggle with the aforementioned difficulties, they often fall behind their peers when evaluating their capabilities in literacy. Based on her experiences as a teacher and literacy coach, Johnson maintains that teachers are solely responsible for teaching children to read and therefore desire more knowledge on how to address those who struggle (2006). The framework includes the following four steps to observing, analyzing, planning and taking action:

- Here's what - investigation
- So what - reflection
- Now what - strategy

- Then what – observation

Bartalo (2012) suggests that thorough information about students does not come merely from assessment data but rather from observing their work and conferring with them. By using data to support interaction and observation, a teacher receives a well-rounded view of students' successes and struggles. Furthermore, in moving from data-driven decision making to being *data-informed*, "teachers pinpoint students' needs and solve complex instructional problems" (Bartalo, 2012, p.15). Data-informed teachers utilize the knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses in order to tailor instruction to address individual needs and provide specific feedback to students.

Assessment is also another component of teacher responsibility. He or she must align instruction to students' needs in order to prepare them for reading success throughout the grades. By tracking or assessing student progress, the teacher can identify which students need more individualized instructional support. Supporters of this method believe in a classroom that uses assessment to support learning. When assessments are designed to guide instruction, the divide between instruction and assessments are minimized (Leah, Lyon, Thompson, and William 2005).

Scholars have also found that teachers have the responsibility of setting expectations for success. By establishing instructional expectations, students' are given a clear goal to strive for. Gunzelmann argues: "Low expectations form a danger in undermining all students' unrealized abilities—abilities that may remain concealed in such an environment" (Gunzelmann, 2012, p.39). Gaskin'2005 research-based tips for motivating students to read in order to reach the teacher's expectations provide further support for setting expectations:

1. Guide students to set meaningful and achievable goals.
2. Provide choices within limits.
3. Explain how what students are expected to learn will be helpful to them.
4. Provide learning tasks and materials at appropriate level of difficulty.
5. Plan curriculum that moves quickly beyond the lower levels of knowing to major concepts and essential understandings.
6. For each task, explain explicitly how to put into practice strategies that facilitate an effective use of effort, and scaffold success when needed.
7. Present information, tasks, and activities in ways that are inherently interesting and personally meaningful.
8. Develop a caring community of learners in which collaboration is valued and encouraged.
9. Provide feedback to students, as compared to themselves, about their gains in knowledge and general academic progress.
10. Explain how motivation works and its impact on present and future learning (Gaskins, 2005, p. 118).

It is likely that the abovementioned roles of the teacher cannot be accomplished without adequate planning and reflection. As previously mentioned, particularly in urban schools, students are faced with and distracted by many non-academic related issues. If teachers are not aware that these issues exist and have not planned accordingly to keep students focused on academics, then instructional plans may go awry to deal with these issues. Reflection is a great tool to discover which strategies or approaches to learning are working. This can be done using a self-reflection tool or having another adult

observe and give feedback. An instructional coach can provide support, advice, and materials throughout the instructional day to build a teacher's confidence and ultimately sustain the best practices in literacy instruction. Although the coach may assist the teacher with lesson development and improving instructional practices, the goal is to build capacity in teachers to sustain effective practices (Houston A+, 2011).

### **Adult Learning**

In order for coaches to have this impact on teachers, it is important that they understand the principles of adult learning. Malcolm Knowles (1998), one of the trailblazers of the adult learning model andragogy, provides insight and guidance on the following when working with adults:

- The need to know.
- Self-concept or learner-self-directed.
- Prior experiences of the learner-uses experiences as a resource for self and others.
- Readiness to learn-is developed from life experience.
- Orientation to learning-is task or problem centered.
- Motivation to learn-is based on internal/external incentives and curiosity.

(Knowles, M., Holton, E., & Swanson, R., 2011).

Andragogy is contrasted to pedagogy in that there is a focus on how adults learn rather than how students learn. Adults desire to know why it is important to learn something before delving into it. Hence, an essential task for facilitators or others who work with adults is to make adult learners aware of why they need to know something. Also, adults have a self-concept of taking responsibility for their lives. When this is accomplished, they develop the need to be seen as competent and capable to direct

themselves as opposed to someone dictating what and how they should do it (Knowles et al., 2011). A facilitator can build confidence and create interest by considering the adult's prior experiences. These experiences can assist the learners with group discussions, simulation activities, and problem solving (Knowles et al., 2011).

Another point to make regarding working with adults is that they have a readiness to learn things that related to real-life. Having knowledge of this concept may be beneficial in facilitating a productive training. Similarly, adults' orientation to learning is life-centered, and they are motivated to learn what they perceive the learning will assist them with dealing with life situations. Lastly, many adults are motivated to learn by external factors such as better jobs, higher salaries, and promotions. Interestingly, more adults are driven to learn for internal factors such as increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, and the overall quality of life (Knowles et al., 2011).

Before moving forward, it is necessary to not only define but to clarify what adult learning is. It does not only refer to those who are over the age 21 but especially those who are employed. Hence, adult learning makes reference to the type of learning that focuses on how people learn in a workplace setting. According to Rothwell (2008), this type of learning is based on the theory and practice from the specialized study of adults (Rothwell, 2008).

If facilitators or coaches are aware of what motivates adults to learn, the information can be used to enrich the staff development or training. These ideas may be used improve the quality of professional development and other trainings when working with adults. According to Rothwell, the author of *Adult Learning Basics*, learning is foundational to the success of employees, therefore, coaches need to be well equipped in

effective ways to learn (Rothwell, 2008). The author describes how learning can impact the culture and the performance of individuals as well as the entire organization. Before discussing how learning impacts the organization, it is essential to define and describe learning. The American Heritage Dictionary (2011) defines learning as the act or process of gaining knowledge or skill through schooling, study, or experience. It can also mean the behavior modification that occurs as a result of conditioning. To delve more deeply into the process of learning, Rothwell (2008) briefly defines knowledge, skill, and attitude. When one gains facts, information or concepts, it is understood as knowledge. The practical awareness of how to do something is known as skill. The positive or negative feelings about something that are aligned to beliefs and opinions describes attitude. Training is usually geared toward altering what people know, can do, or how they feel (Rothwell, 2008). In addition, learning is described as a process that individuals engage in on their own. To be successful, learners “pull” knowledge, skills, and attitudes from others. In contrast, training is something done to others. It “pushes” knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are essential to successful work performance (Rothwell, 2008 p.3). Since learning is embedded in what workers do to achieve results, it may be beneficial for supervisors to have a clear understanding about how adults learn.

Again, insight into adult learning can assist supervisors and coaches in making sound decisions regarding training and other forms of staff development. In reference to training, coaches should be knowledgeable of the assumptions that exist regarding the way in which adults learn (Rothwell, 2008).

There are several points that Rothwell (2008) suggests to consider prior to planning and providing training. One point is that most adults are self-directed and will initiate

their own learning when there is a need to do so. A common misconception is that adults prefer to learn in isolation since they are self-directed. Instead, many adults prefer to learn in a setting where group interactions are prevalent. An important piece of information to consider is if there is a conflict with the values, beliefs, or previous experiences of adult learners, then it is difficult for them to learn (Rothwell, 2008).

Another point to consider is that adults are motivated to learn for various reasons. The author categorizes and briefly discussed motivators for adult learning: Build social networks, meet expectations, advance in their careers, be stimulated, help others, or learn for its own sake. Therefore, it is essential to ask adults their purpose for learning to ensure that their expectations are met. An additional point to consider is that planning instruction for adults needs to be strategic. Unlike younger learners, adults may require additional time to acquire a new skills or knowledge and they are unlikely to experiment without thorough planning. It is important to recognize that adults experience various challenges mentally, physically, and emotionally (Rothwell, 2008).

Because adults do not like to appear incompetent or made to seem foolish, coaches can ensure that the learning environment is supportive and provides reassurance. Furthermore, the author highlights the importance of coaches or trainers ability to facilitate when working with adults. Through sound facilitation and effective open-ended questioning, learners may be afforded the opportunity to participate in discussion and interact with peers. In order to engage adults, facilitators may ask them to analyze case studies or participate in role plays (Rothwell, 2008).

Although Rothwell discusses several ways to engage adults, it is important to mention that instructional coaches and trainers should be aware of types of intelligences

that exist. The author describes seven multiple intelligences introduced by Howard Gardner (1983) and how these intelligences can be used to appeal to adults' ability to learn: verbal/linguistic intelligence, musical intelligence, logical or mathematical intelligence, spatial and visual intelligence, bodily and kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence (Rothwell, 2008). If coaches have a good understanding of these multiple intelligences, they can assist adults in being involved in their own learning and design learning experiences that are meaningful.

According to Deb Peterson (2013), there are five principles that must be considered when teaching adult learners:

- Make Sure Your Adult Students Understand “Why.”
- Respect that Your Students Have Different Learning Styles.
- Allow Your Students to Experience What They’re Learning.
- When the Student Is Ready, the Teacher Appears.
- Encourage Your Adult Students.

Peterson states that these five principles should be present when working with adults as well as students (Peterson, 2013).

When comparing younger learners and older learners, several differences exist. The principles of adult learning should be taken into consideration when making this comparison. The author discussed a few differences that adult learners possess: A different self-image, more life experiences, the fear of failure, a greater expectation to immediately use learning, a diminished speed and retention of learning, and some basic physical differences that can impact their abilities to learn (Kennedy, 2003).

According to Kennedy (2003), adults' self-image is different than the younger learners. Since adults enter learning activities and see themselves as self-directing, responsible, mature, and independent learners, they generally become resistant when they are not treated like responsible adults. According to Kennedy (2003), a key component in the adult education philosophy is to include learners in the planning and implementation of their learning experiences. Although this article focuses on law enforcement managers, many of the principles can transcend many careers and disciplines. It is suggested that surveys be given to solicit suggestions and feedback about the learning activities and other needs. When training teachers, presenters must remember that teachers should be aware of what is expected of them, what they will be learning, and how their performance will be evaluated. As a result, presenters will have information to guide the learning process and will be able to design clearly defined goals for the training program. Coaches and facilitators may create a learning environment during staff development where there is a sense of mutual respect, as teachers should ensure the classroom environment mirrors this. Naturally, coaches should lead learning activities with teachers, at the same time, incorporate the adult education philosophy that everyone has something to teach and learn (Kennedy, 2003).

Another thing that coaches may consider is that adults can relate to new learning based on the amount of life experiences they bring. Therefore, coaches and facilitators can recognize what teachers already know and utilize those life experiences and perspectives to enhance learning. The author recommended that facilitators base new learning on the prior knowledge and experience of the learner, as a result, learning can be facilitated faster and more effectively (Kennedy, 2003). Again, coaches and/or

facilitators may use techniques, such as group discussions, debates, role-plays, and group projects, as learners will have an opportunity to draw upon their previous experiences and to share them cooperatively. On the other hand, shifting mindsets regarding important issues may be a difficult task that coaches experience. In this case, prior experiences may be a handicap in obtaining new learning. In spite of this, coaches need to have a plan to take time to show the learner why an old ineffective behavior is inappropriate while building a new pattern of behavior that has been proven to be effective (Kennedy, 2003).

Awareness that adults like younger learners have a fear of failure can assist facilitators and coaches when working with adult learners. The difference is that if adults have experienced an abundance of criticism, failure, and discouragement in their youth then they are likely to lack self-confidence. As a result, in a new setting, adults often experience anxiety, fear, and dread rejection by their peers. To minimize these apprehensions, coaches should praise and encourage the adult learners by recognizing their accomplishments and demonstrating to them that success is attainable (Kennedy, 2003). Conversely, coaches or facilitators need to ensure that the learning activities are challenging and nurturing to the interest of the adult. According to the author, individuals are best challenged when pushed beyond their present level of ability. However, if challenged too far beyond, people have a tendency to give up. If not challenged enough, they become bored and learn little (Kennedy, 2003).

In addition, adults' expectation for learning differs from that of a young learner. Kennedy believes the reason for that is that adults view situations with a different intention. Contrary to young learners, adults typically desire to make the learning applicable immediately. Therefore, it may be important for the coach to facilitate the

perception that an activity has an immediate application. Coaches must believe that the content of the learning activity is relevant and can serve as a catalyst for obtaining needed job skills. Also, the author states that facilitators should use problem-centered techniques as an instructional method. This technique will promote learning and give adults personal meaning (Kennedy, 2003).

According to the Kennedy, the learning performance rate begins a slow decline of approximately 1% a year at 20 years of age (Kennedy, 2003). Although adults lose speed at which learning occurs, the power to learn is still retained, and no difference in the ability of the adult to learn occurs if time is not a factor. The implications for coaches and facilitators are that when introducing complex subjects and activities, fewer goals and objectives should be established. Moreover, facilitators and coaches may simply complex ideas into sequential learning segments, and progressing from the simple to the difficult or complex and introducing the next operation or idea only after students have mastered the previous one. In brief, coaches may evaluate their instructional level and pacing to minimize exceeding the adult's mental capacities and increase the possibility for success (Kennedy, 2003).

As previously mentioned, the rate at which adults learn begins to decline beginning at the age of twenty. Not only does the rate of learning begin to decline, but also the ability to retain knowledge is a factor. "Recall shortly after learning reduces the amount of forgetting, and spaced or distributed practice further facilitates retention" (Kennedy, 2003, p. 1). To put it differently, when learning is not used, individuals will lose the knowledge. Therefore, coaches can create opportunities for individuals to implement strategies or instructional practices shortly after learning them.

In general, as young learners get older there are many physiological changes that are associated with age. The implications for coaches and facilitators are that they may need to adjust their training and instructional style to meet the needs of the learner. Kennedy states that learning for adults can be improved when presentations do not exceed their physical limits. Hence, adults may need the flexibility to move around and stretch through scheduled and unscheduled breaks. To keep learners from becoming fatigued, presenters could create a sense of liveliness by using humor, varying instructional methods, and adjusting the pace of activities if necessary (Kennedy, 2003).

Kennedy offers additional information and suggestions when working with adults. This information may be useful for coaches as they develop strategies to assist teachers and other adult learners. Having knowledge of adults' visual clarity and auditory acuity may assist coaches with planning and presentations

#### **Visual clarity.**

Visual clarity refers to how well a person sees and is the physiological change most associated with the aging process. It peaks somewhere in the late teens or early 20s and then declines steadily until about age 40. After 40, a sharp decrease is noted to around age 55, and then a gradual decrease continues throughout the remainder of adult life. With this decline in vision, adult learners require proper lighting in any classroom. Common problems include inaccurate or improper lighting and glare and professionals can provide advice on what might be best in each particular classroom setting. Additional ways of assisting adult learners combat visual difficulties include walls painted in soft shades that are restful to the eyes and non-reflective, thus minimizing glare, and windows equipped with blinds or curtains (Kennedy, 2003).

Instructors may keep visual aids, such as overhead transparencies and computer presentations, short, simple, large, and legible (e.g., no more than six lines and no more than six words per line). In addition, strong colors can accent and add richness to visual material. When using a chalkboard, teachers may write in large letters on only the top two-thirds of the board, use yellow "sight saver" chalk, and clean the board frequently. Teachers may also allow adequate time for students taking notes from a board of any type (Kennedy, 2003).

### **Auditory acuity.**

Auditory acuity, how well a person hears, also undergoes great physiological change with age. Auditory acuity normally reaches peak performance somewhere between 10 and 15 years of age, after which a gradual but consistent decline occurs to about age 65. Kennedy (2003) states that instructors should keep the teaching environment free from outside noise distractions because an inability to hear may profoundly affect a person's ability to learn. Teachers should consider using a fixed or portable (wireless) sound system, depending upon the learning activity and the classroom environment. Seats in rows should give way to nontraditional classroom arrangements where learners can see one another face-to-face, which make verbal communication more effective. Other techniques that instructors can use to reduce the impact on hearing loss include:

- Speaking clearly, distinctly, and loudly enough to be heard anywhere in a classroom;
- Writing unusual words, new names, and strange expressions on the board to assist the spoken word;

- Refraining from turning their backs to classes while talking, as facial expressions and gestures improve verbal communications;
- Changing the pitch of their voices often;
- Repeating questions asked back to the entire class before answering; and
- Encouraging those who cannot hear to speak out (Kennedy, 2003).

New theories have evolved regarding the discipline of adult learning as being distinct from the principles advanced for the effective teaching of youths. Adult learning principles are based on the fact that adults differ from young people in terms of physical, psychological, and social characteristics and that these differences are relevant to creating the most effective learning environments for adults. The challenge to instructors and administrators is to become proactive and reexamine current practices and find ways to incorporate adult learning principles, strategies, and methodologies in their training programs. Doing so is the key to more effective training programs that, in turn, enhance the law enforcement profession and its goal of improving service to the public (Kennedy, 2003).

### **Sustainability**

As previously mentioned, instructional coaches have a responsibility to build capacity in teachers to improve teaching practices that promote student learning. This process will be essential in sustaining effective practices and having an impact on campus culture. In order to transform the culture, coaches must not only work with teachers, but they must also engage other stakeholders such as students, families, and administrators. This task may require experienced coaches to recognize the need to foster relationships (Dozier, 2006).

To gauge the effectiveness or quality of coaching, it is recommended principals and other school leaders are knowledgeable about the characteristics of effective instructional coaches. In 2004, the International Reading Association identified five criteria that literacy coaches must meet to achieve his/ her potential. First, the coach must be excelling as a classroom teacher of reading. Second, they must have the skill set to observe, model and provide appropriate and relevant feedback to teachers. Third, they must be proficient in reading processes, acquisition, assessment, and instructional practices. Next, they must have the experience collaborating with teachers to improve instructional strategies. Lastly, coaches must be excellent presenters and be equipped to lead groups of teachers to facilitate change and reflection (Dozier, 2006). In addition, instructional coaches should be able to present research-based strategies.

In order to share research-based strategies, coaches should present information that is scientifically proven. The Center for Research on Learning highlights “The Big Four” that coaches should learn how to address: Behavior, content knowledge, instruction, and formative assessments (Knight, 2009). The author states that coaches, principals, and other school leaders can have a shared understanding of excellent instruction to address the four areas previously mentioned. In addition, the coach may use tools such as *The Big Four: A Framework for Instructional Excellence* by Jim Knight or Charlotte Danielson’s *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* to develop and share proficiencies in those practices (2009).

Furthermore, effective practices will be embedded in the culture when the positive instructional relationships are built. Knight states that coaches should be extremely skilled in building those relationships. He argues that if teachers like the coach then they

will be willing to try his/her recommendations. On the other hand, if they dislike the coach, they are likely to be resistant regardless of the effectiveness of the teaching practices (Knight, 2009).

Guth & Pratt-Fartro (2010) discusses several elements coaches should consider when building relationships. First, it is recommended that coaches evaluate job-embedded needs. Since teachers possess various levels of needs and competence, coaches should not assume that everyone will benefit from the same kind of professional development. Secondly, the coach should provide this staff development during the day as often as possible. The rationale is that when a respect for a teacher's time is shown, they will be more attentive during the staff development session. In relationship to time, another recommendation is that consideration of teachers' time be taken by getting to the point quickly and efficiently during the meetings. In addition, the authors recommend that the coach informs teachers of meetings and stick to the schedule. Next, it is suggested that the coaches be reliable to build trust. It is crucial to follow through on commitments made. Also, to build trust, Guth & Pratt-Fartro (2010) suggest that coaches maintain confidentiality. If this confidentiality is not kept, then the coach's credibility can be diminished. Lastly, it is suggested that coaches think about the consequences of a decision. Proper planning can minimize the potential pitfalls (Guth & Pratt-Fartro, 2010). As coaches and school leaders work together through these suggestions, the probability of success increases.

In order for this change to be sustainable, it is suggested that leaders promote a shift in school culture. For a coach to partner effectively with teachers and support them in developing their practice, the school culture shifts toward growth and improvement.

Teachers, as well as administrators, could become learners in order to promote on-going professional growth for themselves. In order to assess a school's culture, administrators could be visible during the school day and in meetings, listening for the overall tone of how challenges are approached. Administrators could recognize a dominant message that the staff feels that the problems are within their realm of influence, and that they have the ability to solve them. If challenges such as behavior, language barriers, lack of family engagement are seen as insurmountable, this toxic culture will not be a place where coaching can easily take root. Shifting a toxic culture will take a team led by a strong leader (Deal & Peterson, 1998).

For coaching to be effective, schools could establish time and structures for teachers to be able to collaborate. Coaches usually work with teachers individually as well as with teams of teachers, and the research suggests that when coaches work with teams there is a higher impact on teacher practice. Teachers may be interested in and willing to work together in order for the process to be effective. Coaching will not be effective in isolation and it should include collaboration with the principal, other school leaders, teachers, and students. These collaborative teams or professional learning communities should be guided by goals for the coaching program (Knight, 2009).

Again, in order for coaching to be effective, it is imperative that a coach develops a partnership with the principal. The principal may see the coach as someone to collaborate with and provide a clear vision of what a coach actually does. As a coach, it is important to ask the principal about his/her vision for coaching. What are the expectations for the year? What are the roles and responsibilities of the coach and how will the work be focused and held accountable? Will there be support and understanding

that teaching practice does not change overnight? Who will determine the teacher(s) of focus? These questions support Knight's partnership philosophy (Knight, 2009).

It would be advantageous for the principal to be knowledgeable and understands what coaching is and how it should be utilized. It is critical to remember that coaching cannot be mandated if the outcome is genuine collaboration. In order to help coaches focus on their daily work with teachers, principals should consider creating structures that allocates time for teachers and the coach to interact. Also, teachers should meet frequently with coaches to review work plans and impact of the work. Another recommendation is being visible and monitoring curriculum implementation in the classroom. In addition, the principal should protect the coach's time by minimizing interruptions that distract them from their work with the teachers. It is recommended that principals interact with teacher regarding the importance of coaching in order to support improvement (Knight, 2009).

According to Knight (2009) the most critical condition for coaching to have sustainable effects is that an organization sees itself as a place where everyone is a learner. Professional development may be necessary to become effective, as it will allow one to be in a place where he/she can be a learner and colleagues with whom another can discuss the challenges that are present. As mentioned earlier Knight (2009) recommends that the coach focuses on four components with the teacher to facilitate learning:

- Classroom management
- Content
- Instruction
- Formative assessment

Each of these components can be utilized with guiding questions to facilitate discussion and reflection. These components can also provide the right conditions to facilitate sustainable improvement. For classroom management, the coach may ask the teacher if all students are on task in class. A content question could be centered on the teacher's development of essential questions for all units. The coach may ask an instructional question cooperative learning and other activities that keep students engaged. A formative assessment question could be can a teacher look out into the classroom and know with accuracy how well each student is doing (Knight, 2009).

Although these conditions may not be entirely present in a school, it is likely to be beneficial if they exist to some degree. If one of these conditions is completely missing, coaching can be very challenging. As principals work to sustain effective instructional practices, it is suggested that they encourage coaches to be humble and respectful to teachers. Nevertheless, it is recommended that the coach continues on until significant improvements in teaching and learning are evident (Knight, 2009). Ultimately, these improvements may have an impact on helping students overcome deficits in reading.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methods**

The challenge of helping students overcome extensive reading deficits is a tremendous task. Houston A+ Challenge partnered with urban and suburban districts in north and south Houston, Texas to provide support and training for teachers to accomplish this task. The goal was to build capacity in reading teachers to promote best practices for teaching and learning. Ultimately students who were taught by a teacher who received regular coaching cycles may not only perform better on standardized test but also may be better prepared for post-secondary success.

#### **Purpose**

This study examined if instructional coaching is beneficial to building capacity in literacy teachers. Statistical analyses were used to determine if there were differences in gains in achievement between students whose teacher received instructional coaching versus students whose teacher did not. Houston A+ Challenge, a nonprofit organization and the school also evaluated the effectiveness of its partnership by examining the results of the treatment group. One teacher who received regular coaching cycles was compared to a teacher who did not receive regular coaching from an instructional coach. Approximately 130 students were included based on the teachers chosen to participate in this study.

This school worked closely with Houston A+ Challenge, a nonprofit organization in order to implement the best practices to reach targeted goals. The success of the partnership was determined by two specific sets of agreements: Agreements on what specific areas that was focused on and expected results. Additionally, agreements were

developed on how the school and this organization collaborated to reach goals and achieve outcomes. This approach was based on research regarding traditional staff development and its inability to address practical concerns. Instead instructional coaching was used in order to provide individual training that provides expertise and follow up to teachers' individual needs (Knight, 2009). An instructional coach collaborated with the school's skills specialist and one teacher to engage in ongoing instructional coaching and capacity building. Together they focused on instructional practices and content in order to improve the effectiveness of planning, lesson design, enactment, and reflection. Ultimately, impacted classrooms consisted of students engaged in rich tasks and texts, of reading and writing with level-appropriate books. Also, students were able to effectively use a "toolkit" that they have personally developed and set individual goals in addition to discussing their personal reading lives. To achieve the aforementioned, teachers planned lessons in response to student needs by doing the work students were expected to do. These focused lessons should only utilize twenty-five percent of the instructional time to teach students to think into the work while the remainder seventy-five percent of the lesson students will be "learning by doing." Concurrently, teachers utilized appropriate tools to assess students' learning and ensure ongoing data was being tracked regarding student learning. Teachers conferred with students in order to articulate individual student's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, the skills specialist conducted effective coaching cycles with targeted teachers and collaborated on goals for areas of improvement. Weekly classroom visits were done in order to collect evidence of student learning and data for next coaching cycle. Most

importantly, the specialist facilitated planning meetings in order to ensure lessons are incorporating best practices that respond to the needs of students.

### **Research Design**

For this study, quantitative data were analyzed using a non-equivalent control group design. This design was chosen because the students who participated in the study were not randomly assigned. Instead, the two groups were intact and referred to as control and treatment groups. The students whose teacher was coached were the treatment group and students whose teacher did not receive coaching were the control group. The independent variable is the teacher (i.e., Control versus Treatment). The dependent variable is the change in students' scores from 2012 to 2013. A mixed analysis of variance was appropriate because it is used to analyze the differences in the means of two different groups at two different time points. Specifically, it was used to determine whether the two groups differed in terms of their gain in achievement from 2012 to 2013. It provided a statistical test to determine if the two means are equal.

Archival data of the 2011-2012 4<sup>th</sup> grade STAAR reading results were used for the pretest data and the 2012-2013 5<sup>th</sup> grade STAAR reading results was used as the posttest data. This data was analyzed for any statistical improvements. In order to categorize this data, measurement scales were used. Specifically for this study, interval scales were used. Interval scales provide information about the order and the exact value between units. However, they do not have a true value of zero so ratios cannot be computed. Nonetheless they also have a range of both descriptive and inferential statistics to be applied. Since means scores were compared, then it is appropriate to use interval scales. This is a typical practice when evaluating standardized test scores.

## **Research Questions**

The goal of the partnership between the school and the nonprofit organization was to achieve outcomes with students who received instruction from a teacher who was coached. The following research questions were based on these goals and expected outcomes. The questions were also used to determine the success of this partnership:

1. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among students whose teacher received coaching versus students whose teacher did not?
2. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among boys whose teacher received coaching versus boys whose teacher did not?
3. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among girls whose teacher received coaching versus girls whose teacher did not?
4. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among Hispanic students whose teacher received coaching versus Hispanic students whose teacher did not?

## **Setting**

This research was conducted at an intermediate school located in Houston, Texas. The total student population of fifth and sixth grade students was about 860. Fifty-seven percent of the student population was Hispanic, 39% was African American, 2% was Asian, 1% of the students were Anglo, 1% was multi-race. Students who were identified as economically disadvantaged comprised 88% of the population and 17% classified as limited English proficient. This school was one of several schools selected for this partnership with the nonprofit organization.

## Subjects

The fifth grade was the targeted since both teachers who participated in the study instructed 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. One group of students was taught by a teacher who received coaching and the other group of students received instruction from a teacher who did not receive coaching. In addition, boys who were instructed by a teacher who received coaching would be compared to boys who were taught by a teacher who did not receive coaching. This same process was done for girls and Hispanic students. These students were tracked and monitored over a one year time span to determine if any significant improvements occurred.

The targeted group of students was comprised of 121 students. Sixty-two students received instruction from a teacher who received coaching and 59 students who were taught by a teacher who did not receive coaching. Houston A+ Challenge's program design allowed for one teacher to receive coaching based on years of experience and previous assessment data. The other teacher was selected to participate in the study because of similar years of experience, staff development hours, and previous assessment data. Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic composition of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade targeted students who were taught by a teacher who received coaching and students who were taught by a teacher that did not. The groups were comprised of 62 boys and 59 girls and 49% African American, 45% Hispanic, and 6% other. Economically disadvantaged students comprised 86% of the group along with 11% Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and 2% Special Education students.

Table 1

*Demographic Composition of All Students-Treatment and Control Groups*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Treatment Group</b>	Boys	31	50
	Girls	31	50
	African American	31	50
	Hispanic	28	45
	Economically Disadvantaged	56	90
	LEP (Limited English Proficiency)	12	19
		0	0
	Special Education		
<b>Control group</b>	Boys	28	47
	Girls	31	53
	African American	32	54
	Hispanic	26	44
	Economically Disadvantaged	52	88
	LEP (Limited English Proficiency)	3	1
		0	0
	Special Education		

The grade level group consisted of all students in the fifth grade at the intermediate school, including the students whose teacher received instructional coaching. The fifth grade group was made of 404 students of mixed ethnicities and gender. The majority of the students represented were identified as economic disadvantage. The purpose of including this information was to provide a description of the composition of the entire fifth grade group and how it was compared to the targeted group of students. The fifth grade group was comprised of 202 boys and 202 girls. It was also made up of 40% African American and 58% Hispanic. Economically disadvantaged students comprised 87% of the group along with 23% LEP and 3% Special Education students. Since Hispanic students generally performed lower in reading compared to other ethnic groups, this study focused on the Hispanic population.

This study examined whether the influence of instructional coaching had an impact on gains in achievement. The treatment group involved students who were taught by a teacher in class where regular coaching cycles were occurring throughout the year. Secondly, the control group was comprised of students in a teacher's classes where regular coaching cycles were not occurring. The null hypothesis was used to predict outcomes that students whose teacher received regular coaching cycles will not show larger gains on state testing results than students whose teacher did not receive coaching

The teacher of the treatment group had eight years of experience and the other teacher who taught the control group had 11 years of experience. These teachers were selected because the treatment group's teacher worked directly with an instructional coach and the control group's teacher attended staff development on a regular basis and implemented best practices in the classroom. Therefore, school leaders may consider the

results from each teacher to examine if coaching was beneficial to reading instruction. This information may be used to determine if coaching is an effective means of providing staff development versus traditional methods.

### **Procedures**

The researcher used archival data of the 2011-2012 school year. Fourth grade STAAR reading results were used for the pretest data and the fifth grade STAAR reading results of the 2012-2013 school year were used as the posttest data. These data points were chosen to compare the students' previous year's results to results after receiving instruction from the teachers selected to be in this study. Permission from the school district was obtained prior to conducting any data analysis or performing any research for this study.

The STAAR data was extracted from Eduphoria, a database that is currently being used by the district. Reports from Eduphoria was formatted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and then imported into the IBM SPSS software so that statistical measures could be easily computed. The researcher looked to obtain a comparison of each student in the targeted group STAAR data for both fourth grade (2011-2012 school year) results and the fifth grade (2012-2013 school year) results. These data were analyzed for any statistical improvements.

Before the 2012-2013 school year, fourth grade STAAR results were disaggregated by the campus administrators. These data were used to determine goals and outcomes as well as the success of the partnership. Approximately 130 students were a part of the study. For the purpose of this study, only two student groups were included for comparison. The groups of students were arranged based on the following: Students

who were instructed by a teacher who received coaching cycles. Next, students who received instruction from a teacher did not receive regular coaching cycles.

Prior to conducting the main analyses, the data was evaluated to see how many students there were of various demographics in each group. Chi-square tests were conducted to determine if there were equal or unequal ratios of boys to girls for each group and if there were equal or unequal ratios of various ethnic groups for each group. It was expected that the chi-square tests would not be significant. There was no significant difference between groups in terms of gender and ethnic distribution. Stated in another way, these tests verify that there was an equal distribution of ethnic groups as well as gender across groups.

Mixed repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to examine the effect of group (treatment vs. control) and the effect of time (2012 vs. 2013), as well as the interaction of these two variables. The interaction was of particular interest, as this was the test of the research question (i.e., whether there was a difference between the two groups in terms of how much they improved on their STAAR reading test between 2012 and 2013). If the interaction was significant, paired samples *t* tests were used to evaluate change within each group.

This process was followed for an analysis of the entire sample, as well as with sub-groups of the sample (i.e., boys, girls, and Hispanic students). In all cases, the significance level was set at  $p \leq .05$ .

### **Instruments**

Following the collection of data using a non-equivalent control group design, a paired sample *t* test was used to conduct an analysis to determine if any statistical

significance occurred between the fourth grade Reading State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test results and the fifth grade Reading STAAR test results. The STAAR tests are state-mandated standardized tests used in Texas public schools to determine students' achievements and knowledge obtained in that grade level (T.E.A., 2013). The information on the test is derived from curriculum taught from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). This type of analysis was conducted with all students that were taught either by a teacher who received coaching or did not. The same type of analysis was conducted with the boys, girls, and Hispanic students who were taught by a teacher who was coached as well as students whose teacher was not coached.

Studies are continued to be conducted regarding the validity and reliability of the STAAR test. Texas Education Agency wants to ensure that assessment accomplishes the goal of measuring students' knowledge and skills. As a result, performance standards of this assessment were being compared with national and international standards. This is essential to allow for students in Texas to be competitive in the global economy.

In order to see the distribution of the scores for students who tested, histograms were created to allow one to easily see how most of the students performed on the Reading STAAR test. One histogram was created to show students' fourth grade Reading STAAR results and another was created to reveal fourth grade Reading STAAR results. The results from both the treatment and control group were separated to distinguish any variation in the different groups. In addition, histograms for the amount the students increased or decreased from fourth grade (gain scores) was also created to show how the majority of the students performed.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the sample size. There was a comparison between two teachers and involved approximately 130 students. Many students had to be removed from the sample because there was no data from the previous year to compare them to. Another limitation to consider was the internal validity threat of selection. Since the research design involved a control and treatment group, prior differences between the groups may have affected the outcome. Also, there was an inability to control certain variables such as the amount of training teachers received outside of the instructional coaching and school setting. Some of this training may have accounted for improved practices in classrooms directly impacted by instructional coaches and those that were not. An additional limitation may have been the relationship between the students and the teacher. Students may have responded to instructional practices based on the relationship and their true attitudes and opinions about the teacher.

**Summary**

The nonprofit organization and the school collaborated on what specific areas to focus on and how working together could prove beneficial for reaching goals and outcomes. One of the primary goals was to ensure that students experienced growth in reading as a result of coaching. Despite the deficits in reading, teachers, specifically the one who worked directly with an instructional coach, actively engaged students by creating classroom environments that focused on what students should know and be able to do. Additionally, conditions and teaching points were created to facilitate learning by thinking and doing.

In order to determine if there was a significant improvement in student achievement of a targeted group of students, an analysis of data was essential. A non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design was used to determine statistically if any improvement was made on the Reading STAAR test and to evaluate if students who were taught by a teacher who received coaching experienced larger gains. To measure the growth of those students who were taught by a teacher who did not receive coaching, the same statistical design was used for the other targeted students in the fifth grade. Ultimately, the results of these measurements determined if the instructional coaching had an impact on building capacity in the reading teacher and the success of the partnership between the school and the nonprofit organization.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

This study examined if instructional coaching was beneficial to building capacity in literacy teachers. A quantitative study was used to determine if there were differences in gains in achievement between students whose teacher received instructional coaching versus students whose teacher did not. The results indicated students whose teacher received instructional coach generated slightly larger gains in achievement than students whose teacher did not work with a coach. Although fifth and sixth grade students attended the intermediate school, the focus of this study was on fifth grade reading instruction since both teachers in the study were fifth grade teachers.

#### **Research Questions**

The research questions were based on a combination of the nonprofit organization's and school's goals to improve student achievement; specifically in literacy. These questions were used to drive the examination of coaching and the effectiveness of the partnership:

1. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among students whose teacher received coaching versus students whose teacher did not?
2. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among boys whose teacher received coaching versus boys whose teacher did not?
3. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among girls whose teacher received coaching versus girls whose teacher did not?

4. Is there a significant difference in gains in achievement among Hispanic students whose teacher received coaching versus Hispanic students whose teacher did not?

The school and Houston A + Challenge desired to increase achievement in math and science as well but for the purpose of this study, there was a focus on literacy since data indicated that it was the school's greatest area of need. Again, because of Houston A+ Challenge's program design, the study specifically focused on two fifth grade teachers rather the entire team.

### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis was used to predict the targeted fifth grade students who were taught by a teacher who received instructional coaching would not statistically show larger gains from the Reading STAAR pretest results to the posttest results compared to fifth grade students whose teacher did not receive instructional coaching. The same null hypothesis was applied to the other targeted group to determine if there was a significant difference in their performance from the previous year. Fifth grade boys whose teacher received coaching will not experience larger gains on the Reading STAAR pretest results to the posttest results compared to boys whose teacher did not. Fifth grade girls whose teacher received coaching will not experience larger gains on the Reading STAAR pretest to the posttest results compared to girls whose teacher did not. Fifth grade Hispanic students whose teacher received coaching will not experience larger gains on the Reading STAAR pretest to the posttest compared to Hispanic students whose teacher did not. These hypotheses were tested using a mixed repeated measures analyses of variance evaluating the effects of the teacher (coaching versus no coaching) on change in scores from the 2012 school year to the 2013 school year.

## Data Analysis Procedures

All of the student performance data were analyzed using SPSS, Version 20.0. Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were used to summarize the data. In addition, histograms were constructed for both groups of students in order to illustrate the shape of the distribution of students' pretest scores (fourth grade STAAR results), posttest scores (fifth grade STAAR results), and gain scores (posttest score minus pretest score).

Prior to conducting the main analyses, the data was evaluated to see how many students there were of various demographics in each group. Chi-square tests were conducted to determine if there were equal or unequal ratios of boys to girls for each group and if there were equal or unequal ratios of various ethnic groups for each group. It was expected that the chi-square tests would not be significant. There was no significant difference between groups in terms of gender distribution,  $X^2(1) = 0.08, p = .78$ . Similarly, there was no significant difference between groups in terms of ethnic distribution,  $X^2(5) = 4.02, p = .55$ . Stated in another way, these tests verify that there was an equal distribution of ethnic groups as well as gender across groups.

Mixed repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to examine the effect of group (treatment vs. control) and the effect of time (2012 vs. 2013), as well as the interaction of these two variables. The interaction was of particular interest, as this was the test of the research question (i.e., whether there was a difference between the two groups in terms of how much they improved on their STAAR reading test between 2012 and 2013). If the interaction was significant, paired samples *t* tests were used to evaluate change within each group.

This process was followed for an analysis of the entire sample, as well as with sub-groups of the sample (i.e., boys, girls, and Hispanic students). In all cases, the significance level was set at  $p \leq .05$ .

### **Assumptions**

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) is a collection of statistical models used to analyze the differences in the means of groups. It provides a statistical test to determine if the means are equal. In this study a mixed ANOVA was used because there was a comparison of two groups and two different time points. One variable was the treatment group (teacher who received coaching) versus the control group (teacher who did receive coaching) and the other variable was time, 2012 school year versus the 2013 school year. When conducting these statistical analyses, there are a few assumptions that must be met. One assumption that must be met is independence of observations. Simply stated, the students' scores must be independent of each other. This was the case in this study, as the design that was used involved students in two independent groups. The next assumption that needs to be met is normality. Normality means data are approximately normally distributed for each group at each time point. This was true, based on the histograms created for each group's scores at each time point. Another assumption that must be met is homogeneity of variances. In other words, the variances for each group at each time point must be equal. This is tested with Levene's test; if it is not significant, the assumption is met. In each case, Levene's test was not significant, so the assumption was met. To add to this, the assumption homogeneity of covariance matrices must be met. This is a special assumption of multivariate ANOVA, which in essence mixed ANOVA is because there is more than one independent variable. To state in another

way, it means that the covariance matrix for each group should be equal. This was tested with Box's M; if it is not significant, the covariance matrices are equal. In each case, Box's M was not significant, so the assumption was met.

### **Analysis of Research Question #1: Is There a Significant Difference in Achievement Among Students Whose Teacher Received Coaching?**

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the overall sample of students among the treatment and control groups from 2012 to 2013.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for All Students - Treatment (n = 62), Control (n = 59) and Overall (n = 121) Groups - at Pretest and Posttest*

Variable	Group	Pretest		Posttest	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2012, 2013	Treatment	1438.85	113.81	1488.97	110.24
	Control	1467.95	102.10	1477.66	113.85
	Overall	1453.04	108.79	1483.45	111.69

*Note.* 2012 and 2013, Year state assessment was administered

The first question examined whether or not there was a significant difference in gains in achievement among students whose teacher received instructional coaching versus students whose teacher did not. One way to accomplish this goal is to look at the groups' means. The purpose of examining the means was to collect information about two groups in order to compare them. In this study, a comparison of the means occurred

between the treatment group and the control group. In evaluating the means, the following findings were unveiled.

In order to examine the interaction between teachers (control versus treatment) and time point (2012 versus 2013) and to determine if improvements were made, mixed repeated measures ANOVA was used. The first thing that was evaluated was the interaction analysis that explored whether the two groups improved different amounts from 2012 to 2013. For the first analysis examining the entire sample, the interaction was significant,  $F(1, 119) = 9.06, p = .003$ . It is also important to note that the overall sample means changed from 2012-2013, reported as  $F(1, 119) = 19.87, p < .001$ . However, a significant interaction makes the main effect less relevant.

To follow up the significant interaction, a paired sample  $t$  test was done for each group, comparing 2012 and 2013 school year for the control group and 2012 and 2013 school year for the treatment group. These tests were used to determine whether the group means significantly improved due to the instructional coaching from this study. Since this study examined the improvements over a one-year period, paired samples  $t$  tests were the appropriate statistical design to compare the fourth grade STAAR results to the fifth grade STAAR results. The control group did not improve significantly,  $t(58) = -1.07, p = .29$ , whereas the treatment group did improve significantly,  $t(61) = -5.09, p < .001$ . Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected that the treatment group would not show larger gains than the control group on state testing results. When interpreting the data, students whose teacher received coaching showed larger gains in achievement than students whose teacher did not work with a coach.

Observation of the means suggested that the treatment group may have had greater room for improvement, as the pretest means of the treatment and control groups appeared different; to test this, an independent samples *t* test was conducted. This was done to rule out the possibility of a ceiling effect (i.e., the control group not changing because they started higher). Interestingly, despite the literal difference in the 2012 means, the two were not significantly different,  $t(119) = 1.48, p = .14$ . Similarly, the 2013 means were not significantly different,  $t(119) = -.56, p = .58$ . This is a paradox. The two groups started and ended statistically at the same place, but only one group changed significantly. Nonetheless, a ceiling effect did not seem to be driving the results, which makes it more likely that one group increased more than the other due to some difference in pedagogical approach rather than just because they started off lower.

**Analysis of Research Question #2: Is There a Significant Difference in Achievement Among Boys Whose Teacher Received Coaching?**

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of boys from the treatment group and control group from 2012 to 2013.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Boys - Treatment (n = 31), Control (n = 31) and Overall (n = 62) Groups - at Pretest and Posttest*

Variable	Group	Pretest		Posttest	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2012, 2013	Treatment	1455.55	109.71	1501.35	116.78
	Control	1483.16	113.26	1501.81	126.79
	Overall	1469.35	111.46	1483.45	111.69

*Note.* 2012 and 2013, Year state assessment was administered

The second question addressed whether or not there was a significant difference in gains in achievement among boys whose teacher received instructional coaching versus boys whose teacher did not receive coaching. Again, a mixed repeated measures ANOVA was used to determine the interaction between the control group versus the treatment group and time 2012 versus 2013. The interaction analysis explored whether the two groups improved different amounts from 2012 to 2013. For the second analysis examining the sample of boys, the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 60) = 2.03, p = .160$ .

In contrast from all students, there was not a significant difference in achievement among boys whose teacher received instructional coaching. Since there was not a significant difference in the change, paired sample *t* tests were not conducted. In comparing the sample of boys, the results were not significant. Therefore the null hypothesis was accepted that boys who received instruction from a teacher who was

coached would not statistically show more growth than students whose teacher was not coached. As with all students, the males who received instruction from the teacher who received instructional coaching experienced more growth from the 2012 to 2013 school year than students whose teacher did not. However, this difference was not significant.

**Analysis of Research Question #3: Is There a Significant Difference in Achievement Among Girls Whose Teacher Received Coaching?**

Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations for girls in the treatment and control group from 2012 to 2013.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations for Girls - Treatment (n = 31), Control (n = 28) and Overall (n = 59) Groups - at Pretest and Posttest*

Variable	Group	Pretest		Posttest	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2012, 2013	Treatment	1422.16	117.14	1476.58	103.72
	Control	1451.11	87.06	1450.93	92.57
	Overall	1435.90	104.11	1464.41	98.59

*Note.* 2012 and 2013, Year state assessment was administered

This research question investigated whether or not there was a significant difference in gains in achievement among girls whose teacher received instructional coaching versus girls whose teacher did not. As with the other subgroups, a comparison

was done to evaluate the differences between the means of the variables (control versus treatment) and time points 2012-2013.

Again, a mixed repeated measures ANOVA was used to determine the interaction between the control group versus the treatment group and time 2012 versus 2013. The interaction analysis explored whether the two groups improved different amounts from the 2012 school year to 2013 school year. For the third analysis examining the sample of girls, the interaction was significant,  $F(1, 57) = 8.26, p = .006$ .

To follow up the significant interaction, paired sample  $t$  tests were conducted, comparing 2012 and 2013 for the control group and 2012 and 2013 for the treatment group. These tests were used to determine whether the group means significantly improved due to the instructional coaching from this study. The control group did not improve significantly,  $t(27) = .016, p = .99$ , whereas the treatment group did improve significantly,  $t(30) = -3.68, p = .001$ . Since this was the case, the null hypothesis was rejected that the treatment group would not statistically show more growth than the control group on the state assessment.

Again, when comparing the data of females who were taught by the teacher who received instructional coaching versus students who were taught by a teacher who was not coached, the results revealed that the treatment group improved and the control group showed no improvement at all. Similar to students overall, there was a significant difference in gains in achievement among girls whose teacher received coaching.

**Analysis of Research Question #4: Is There a Significant Difference in Achievement Among Hispanic Students Whose Teacher Received Coaching?**

Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations for Hispanics in the treatment and control groups from 2012 to 2013.

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations for Hispanic Students - Treatment (n = 28), Control (n = 26) and Overall (n = 54) Groups - at Pretest and Posttest*

Variable	Group	Pretest		Posttest	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2012, 2013	Treatment	1448.43	117.88	1478.29	112.46
	Control	1500.12	95.02	1510.65	118.22
	Overall	1473.31	109.62	1493.87	115.33

*Note.* 2012 and 2013, Year state assessment was administered

The final research question examined whether or not there was a significant difference in gains in achievement among Hispanic students whose teacher received instructional coaching versus Hispanic students whose teacher did not. Again, a comparison was done to evaluate the differences between the means of the variables (control versus treatment) across time points (2012-2013).

As before, a mixed repeated measures ANOVA was used to determine the interaction between the control group versus the treatment group and time points 2012 versus 2013. The interaction analysis explored whether the two groups improved

different amounts from 2012 to 2013. For the fourth analysis examining the sample of Hispanic students, the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 52) = .99, p = .324$ .

Since the difference was not significant, it was not necessary to follow up with paired  $t$  tests. In other words, all Hispanic students, on average, improved approximately the same rate, regardless of the teacher. In this case, the null hypothesis was accepted. Although there was not a significant difference in achievement between the control and treatment groups, the data showed that the students who were taught by the teacher who received coaching experience larger gains in achievement than the students whose teacher did not.

### **Summary**

The null hypothesis was that students whose teacher received regular coaching cycles would not show larger gains on state testing results than students whose teacher did not receive instructional coaching. The following research questions were examined to determine the differences in student achievement: Is there a significant difference in gains in student achievement among students whose teacher received instructional coaching versus students whose teacher did not receive coaching? Is there a significant difference in gains in student achievement among boys whose teacher received instructional coaching versus boys whose teacher who did not receive coaching? Is there a significant difference in gains in student achievement among females whose teacher received instructional coaching versus females whose teacher did not receive coaching? Is there a significant difference in student gains in student achievement among Hispanic students whose teacher received instructional coaching versus Hispanic students whose teacher did not receive coaching? The results revealed that each group that was taught by a

teacher who received coaching showed larger gains in every case than the other group that was instructed by a teacher who did not receive coaching; however, this difference was significant only for all students and the girl students. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted for two of the groups (Boys and Hispanic students) and rejected for the other two groups (All students and girls). The girls in the treatment group experience larger gains than girls in the control group, which suggests that the effects of coaching might have been particularly pronounced among girls for this sample. Although the control group showed some improvement from one year to the next (in some cases), gains within the treatment group were greater than gains within the control group.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

This study examined if instructional coaching is beneficial to building capacity in literacy teachers. A quantitative study was used to determine if there were differences in gains in achievement between students whose teacher received instructional coaching versus students whose teacher did not. Houston A+ Challenge, a nonprofit organization and the school also evaluated the effectiveness of its partnership by examining the results of the treatment group. One teacher who received regular coaching cycles was compared to a teacher who did not receive regular coaching from an instructional coach. This organization collaborated with several schools with the goal of increasing students' standardized test scores by using several techniques: analysis of student data, collaboration among teachers and students, performance coaching to improve teaching and learning, assessment for learning, family engagement, and additional time and support to meet higher standards. Although all of these components are considered effective practices, this study focused on the component of performance coaching to determine if it impacted a teacher's ability to improve learning. Approximately 130 students were chosen to participate in this study. Houston A+ Challenge provided a coach as the primary means of professional development in order to individualize staff development for the selected teacher rather than relying on traditional methods.

This school worked closely with Houston A+ Challenge in order to implement best practices to reach specific goals. The success of the partnership was determined by two specific sets of agreements: Agreements on specific areas of focus and agreement on

expected results. Additionally, agreements were developed regarding the ways in which the school and this organization would collaborate to reach goals and achieve outcomes.

The specific area of focus for this campus was literacy. A teacher was selected to work with a coach in order to receive specific training and feedback to improve instructional practices. This approach was based on research regarding traditional staff development and its inability to address practical concerns (Knight, 2009). Instructional coaching was the strategy used for individual training that provided expertise to a teacher and follow up to meet the teacher's individual needs. An instructional coach collaborated with the school's skills specialist and one teacher to engage in ongoing instructional coaching and capacity-building. Together they focused on instructional practices and content in order to improve the effectiveness of planning, lesson design, enactment, and reflection. Ultimately, impacted classrooms consisted of students engaged in rich tasks and texts, of reading and writing with level-appropriate books. Also, students were able to use a "toolkit" effectively that they had personally developed to set individual goals in addition to discussing their personal reading lives. To achieve the goals, teachers planned lessons in response to student needs by modeling the tasks that students were expected to perform. These focused lessons utilized 25% of the instructional time to teach students to think into the work while the remaining 75% of the lesson students "learned by doing." Concurrently, teachers utilized appropriate tools to assess students' learning and ensure ongoing data was being tracked regarding student learning. Teachers conferred with students in order to discuss individual strengths and weaknesses. In addition, the skills specialist conducted effective coaching cycles with targeted teachers and collaborated on goals for areas of improvement. Weekly classroom visits were

conducted to collect evidence of student learning and data for the next coaching cycle. Most importantly, the specialist facilitated planning meetings in order to ensure lessons were incorporating the best practices that responded to the needs of students.

### **Research Design**

Quantitative data were analyzed using a non-equivalent control group design. This design was used in order to examine the interaction between teachers (control versus treatment) and time (2012 versus 2013). This design was chosen because the students who participated in the study were not randomly assigned. Again, the two groups were intact and referred to as control and treatment groups. The students whose teacher was coached were the treatment group and students whose teacher did not receive coaching were the control group. A strength of the design is that it includes a control group as well as a treatment group. In order to get a fair comparison of the two groups, selected groups were as similar as possible. In addition, the design involved a pretest before the treatment and posttest afterwards. One of the drawbacks of the design was that students were not randomly assigned to control and treatment groups, so the groups are not equal. The measure used (STAAR test) was deemed reliable and valid.

### **Research Questions**

The goal of the partnership between the school and the nonprofit organization was to achieve greater outcomes with students who received instruction from a teacher who was coached. The research questions were based on these goals and expected outcomes. The questions were also used to determine the success of this partnership. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional coaching, the goal was to determine if there were significant differences in gains in achievement among students whose teacher

received instructional coaching versus students whose teacher did not receive coaching. In addition to comparing the overall sample of students, the results of boys, girls, and Hispanic students were also disaggregated.

### **Discussion of Results**

The first research question focused on all students. The statistical tests revealed that there was a significant difference in gains in achievement among students whose teacher received coaching. The second question involved a comparison of boys. Again, statistical tests were conducted to determine if the change was significant. Unlike the sample of all students, there was not a significant difference in achievement. Although the interaction was not significant, the gains of students whose teacher received instructional coaching were greater than gains from students whose teacher was not coached. The third research question addressed the changes among girls. Similar to the overall sample of students, the data indicated that there was a significant difference in achievement among girls whose teacher received coaching. The final research question compared Hispanic students from the control and treatment groups. An analysis of the data showed that there was not a significant difference in achievement among Hispanic students. Although two subgroups' results were not significant, two groups' interactions were significant. In addition, all groups of students whose teacher was coached showed slightly larger gains in achievement versus students whose teacher was not coached. In summary, the null hypotheses that students whose teacher received instructional coaching would not experience larger gains on the state from previous year than students whose teacher did not receive coaching was rejected for the overall sample of students and girls.

This was not the case for boys and Hispanic students. The null hypotheses for these groups were accepted.

There are a few other possible explanations for the overall improvement in the treatment group. Students in the treatment group may have been more motivated since they were observed by staff members from the nonprofit organization on a regular basis. Also, these students may have had other experiences that contributed to their literacy development during the course of study (e.g., access to additional resources). Another possible explanation is that relationships or how the students felt about the teacher was a factor in how the students, particularly the girls, responded to the teacher's instruction. Nonetheless, these possibilities cannot be ruled out.

Additional research mentions that boys and girls learn differently and specific instructional strategies have been proven to be more effective with girls rather than with boys. Particularly regarding literacy, studies have shown that girls in the early years read more than boys (Browne, 1998). This finding is important to mention because the teacher who received coaching allocated a specific amount of time to daily reading in order to build the students' stamina. This teacher also conferred with students regularly, incorporated "think-pair-share" activities and fostered a culture of collaboration in her classroom. Based on research, these instructional strategies have been more effective with girls; therefore, this pedagogical approach may have been more appealing to girls than boys. This research finding is a possible explanation why girls whose teacher received coaching experienced greater gains in achievement than other subgroups. As mentioned earlier, research shows that girls have been traditionally more successful than boys in all areas; especially in the area of literacy. In this study, girls did not necessarily

perform better; however they did show larger gains than boys. Since this information is available, teachers are suggested to not only identify student needs and set academic goals early, but also use research and implement strategies that support the needs of diverse learners. Additionally, individualized staff development provided by instructional coaches can assist teachers in securing the best practices that support all students regardless of their gender or ethnicity. The findings in this study were consistent with other research findings regarding instructional coaching. Coaching can be beneficial in improving instructional practices (Knight, 2009). It may also serve as an effective and alternative method of providing individualized professional development. If done with fidelity, coaching can aid in building capacity in teachers. Also, the findings in this study may contribute to the emerging literature on instructional coaching by showing that a teacher who is influenced by a coach has the potential to have students who show larger gains in achievement than students whose teacher was not.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the sample size. There was a comparison between two groups (control and treatment) involving approximately 130 students. Many students had to be removed from the sample because there was no comparison data on them from the previous year. Although the sample size was large enough to conduct the statistical analyses, the sample is too small to generalize findings to the entire population. Another limitation to consider was the internal validity threat of selection. Since the research design involved a control and treatment group, prior differences between the groups may have affected the outcome. Because of an inability to control certain variables such as the amount of training teachers received outside of the instructional

coaching and school setting, validity issues may be considered a limitation. Again, some training may have accounted for improved practices in classrooms directly impacted by instructional coaches while other training may not have accounted for improved classroom practices in classrooms directly impacted by instructional coaches. An additional limitation may have been the relationship between the students and the teacher. Students may have responded to instructional practices based on the relationship and their true attitudes and opinions about the teacher.

### **Implications for School Leaders**

The significance of this study was an endeavor in promoting the development of teachers in the performance and improvement of reading instruction. School and district leaders may use this study to gain insight into coaching models and instructional practices. Also, educational leaders can use this study to discuss sustaining effective instructional practices. In order to transform classrooms, instructional coaches may assist in establishing effective practices in planning and the delivery of instruction. Additionally, school leaders may use this study as a model to make recommendations on building capacity in classroom teachers and department heads alike. The purpose of this would be to duplicate recommended and implemented strategies by an instructional coach without necessarily hiring additional coaches.

Lesson design, instructional delivery and reflection are other professional responsibilities that need to be evaluated. Lessons should be designed to ensure that students are being exposed to and taught applicable standards. As teachers deliver a lesson, the amount of time instructors spend talking versus students conversing should be monitored. An important component of professional responsibilities is reflection.

Reflection is useful in determining which methods are effective and which methods are not. Also, teachers can use reflection as a means to review and improve specific instructional strategies (Houston A+, 2011).

The implications of all of these components combined can be a significant factor in improving teaching and learning school and district wide. This study provides an example that instructional coaching may be beneficial to teachers. It is essential that school and district leaders consider allocating sufficient amount of resources (e.g., time and money) to provide teachers as well as coaches adequate training. This training as well as coaching cycles should be on-going to allow time for effective implementation. Also, in order for the impact of coaching to be effective and sustainable, school leaders need to support teachers and coaches to ensure that there is implementation with fidelity.

Finally, upon completion of a partnership between a coach and a school, there should be a plan to sustain the instructional efforts. Teachers may continue using the knowledge they have acquired from coaches and principals as well as other leaders to ensure that a method of tracking progress is utilized. Implementing the best practices in the absence of the instructional coach may be a challenge. The principal can play an essential role in ensuring that the practices continue. When the teachers meet as a professional learning community, the goal to embed effective practices into the campus' culture may be evident.

### **Implications for Further Research**

In this study there was a significant difference in gains from students overall and girls who were taught by a teacher who received instructional coaching. A similar study was conducted by Craig (2012) of an evaluation of an intervention program organized by

Houston A+ Challenge. The study examined if students who participated in this intervention program show achievement gains on the state exam. He found:

The results of this study indicated that the middle school intervention program did not have a significant effect on student performance on the math TAKS test for targeted students and the entire sixth grade group, therefore accepting the null-hypothesis. Also, the entire grade level experienced a significant decrease in test scores from the fifth grade to the sixth grade on the math TAKS test. Both groups had an overall decrease in performance on the 2011 math TAKS test (Craig, 2012, p.75).

Although the findings revealed that there were not statistically significant improvements for students who participated in the intervention program, the researcher noted several factors that affected the implementation: Implementation dip, lack of personnel and school-based administrative support, and teacher effectiveness (pp. 78-82). An in-depth discussion of each factor is not necessary; however, issues with one or more of the factors can have a negative impact on student results.

As this study examined the impact of instructional coaching on building capacity in reading teachers, a replication study while controlling for the variables involving a larger sample of students and teachers should be conducted. The researcher may consider selecting teachers with similar years of experience, as a novice teacher may respond differently to coaching than a veteran teacher. Since the boys or Hispanic subgroup did not respond to the treatment in this study, it is recommended that future research be conducted to examine if boys, Hispanic, or other ethnic groups will show gains in achievement after being instructed by a teacher who received specific strategies from a

coach. The strategies shared by the coach should be tailored to meet the needs of those specific subgroups. Qualitative data should be collected and analyzed to answer that question as well because of the rich description qualitative information will provide.

In addition, future research should be conducted involving the students who were a part of the treatment group's post-secondary readiness. The students' progress should be tracked from fifth grade to twelfth grade to determine the number of the students who continue to show gains in achievement through high school, which would indicate that they are prepared for post-secondary instruction. The skills acquired in fifth grade should have transferred to skills needed in high school and beyond. Results from the this study, including research cited in this study, may aide school and district leaders in making recommendations and decisions about professional development, planning, instruction and staffing,

### **Conclusion**

The process of conducting this study was a valuable experience for several reasons. First of all, preconceived notions about the influence that instructional coaching would have on literacy instruction may have been confirmed. Due to the sample size used in this study, additional investigations are recommended. However, it is possible that the individual receiving the coaching would gain additional strategies in his/her toolkit that would not have been acquired apart from the coaching. Also, building capacity of the literacy teacher was a major goal of the instructional coach. Houston A+ assigned a director of school performance to work closely with the principal and other leadership team members to gauge the implementation of strategies and the program in its entirety. After disaggregating data, the director and principal discussed internal and

external factors that may have been challenges to the effective implementation of coaching (e.g. time, local mandatory assessments, campus and district expectations).

During many of the coaching cycles, the coach assisted the teacher with many of the necessary skills and instructional strategies. The lesson learned was that some teachers have capability but lack the knowledge and confidence. An instructional coach may be instrumental in increasing both. Although the hypothesis was supported in this study, it only involved two teachers which make it difficult to generalize the impact of coaching. Finally, as a result of the study, a new perspective regarding instructional coaching and literacy instruction was developed. Information gained from this perspective may be useful in collaborative efforts to improve professional development as well as sustaining effective instructional practices.

## References

- Allington, R. (2002). What I've Learned about Effective Reading Instruction: From a Decade of Studying Exemplary Elementary Classroom Teachers. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(10), 740-747.
- Bartalo, D. B. (2012). *Closing the teaching gap: Coaching for instructional leaders*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press.
- Bell, C.C., & Jenkins, E. J. (1993). Community Violence and Children on Chicago's Southside. *Psychiatry*, 56(1), 46-54.
- Browne, A. (1998). *A practical guide to teaching reading in the early years*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Burns, M.S, Griffin, P., & Snow, C.E. (1999). *Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Casey, K. (2006). *Literacy coaching: The essentials*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Graig, J. (2012). *A Midcycle Evaluation of an Intervention Program on Middle School Math Scores*. University of Houston.
- Curwin, R. L. (2010). *Meeting students where they live: motivation in urban schools*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Deal, T. & Peterson, K. (1998). How Leaders Influence the Culture of Schools. *Educational Leadership*. 56(1), 28-30.
- Denton, C.A., & Hasbrouck, J. (2007). Student-focused Coaching: A Model for Reading Coaches. *Reading Teacher*, 60(7), 690-693.

- Denton, C.A., & Hasbrouck, J. (2009). A Description of Instructional Coaching and its Relationship to Consultation. *The Journal of Education & Psychological Consultation*, 19(2) 150-175.
- Dozier, C. (2006). *Responsive literacy coaching: Tools for creating and sustaining purposeful change*. Portland, Me: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Duessen, T., Coskie, T., Robinson, L., & Autio, E. (2007). *Coach can mean many things: Five categories of literacy coaches in Reading First*. Regional Education Laboratory at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Institute of Education Science, U.S. Department of Education (05), Washington, DC.
- Epstein, J.L., Coates, L., Salinas, K.C., Sanders, M.G., & Simon, B.S. (1997). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Erskine-Cullen, E., & Sinclair, A. M. (1996). Preparing teachers for urban schools: A view from the field. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 6. Retrieved from <http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/cullensinc.html>
- Evans, GW. (2004). The Environment of Childhood Poverty. *The American Psychologist* 59(2). 77-92.
- Evans GW., Gonnella C., Marcynyszyn LA., Gentile L. & Salpekar N. (2005) The Role of Chaos in Poverty and Children's Socioemotional Adjustment. *Psychology Science*. 16(7). 560-565.
- Fountas, I. C. & Pinnell, G. S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

- Gaskins, I. (2005) *Success with struggling readers: The benchmark school approach*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gonder, P. (1991). *Caught in the middle: How to unleash the potential of average students*. Arlington Virginia: American Association of School Administrators.
- Gordan, E.E., & Gordan E. H. (2003). Literacy A Historical Perspective. *Principal Leadership*. . 17-21.
- Gunzelmann, B. (2012). *Hidden dangers: subtle signs of failing schools*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Guth, N. D., Pratt-Fartro, T. (2010). *Literacy coaching to build adolescent learning: 5 pillars of practice*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin Press.
- Hill, Nancy, Chao, Ruth. (2009). *Families, schools, and the adolescent: Connecting research, policy, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press
- Houston A+ Challenge Network. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.houstonaplus.org/challenge-network/>.
- Illiteracy: The Downfall of American Society. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.education-portal.com/articles/Illiteracy>
- Ingersoll, Richard. (2004). Why Do High Poverty Schools Have Difficulty Staffing Their Classrooms with Qualified Teachers. Center for American Progress Retrieved from <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education>
- Jensen, E. (2009). *Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What being poor does to kids' brains and what schools can do about it*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

- Johnson, P. (2006). *One child at a time: Making the most of your time with struggling readers, K-6*. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Kendall, J. S. (2011). *Understanding common core state standards*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10490879>
- Kennedy, R.C. (2003). *Applying principles of adult learning: The key to more effective training programs*. The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin. April, 2003. Retrieved from findarticles.com database.
- Knight, J. (2007). *Instructional coaching a partnership approach to improving instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: NSDC : Corwin Press.
- Knight, J (2009). *Coaching approaches and perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Knowles, M., Holton, E., & Swanson, R. (2011). *The Adult Learner, (Seventh Ed.)*. New York: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- L'Allier, S.K., Elish-Piper, L., & Bean, R.M. (2010). What Matters for Elementary Literacy Coaching? A Guiding Principles for Instructional Improvement and Student Achievement. *The Reading Teacher, 63(7)*, 544-554.
- Leahy, S., C. Lyon, M. Thompson, and D. William. ( 2005). Classroom Assessment Minute by Minute, Day by Day. *Educational Leadership, 63(3)*, 19-24.
- Lippman, L., Burns, S., McArthur, E. (1996) Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty. *The National Center for Education Statistics*. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC

- Lunenburg, F. (2013). Why School Reform Efforts Have Failed: School Reform Needs To Be Based on a Set of Core Principles. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision*. 31(1), 55-63.
- Payne, C. (2008). *So much reform, So little change. The persistence of failure in urban schools*. Boston, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Peterson, D. (2013) . 5 Principles for the Teacher of Adults.About.com Guide. Retrieved From [http://adulthood.about.com/od/teachers/a/teaching\\_adults\\_2.htm](http://adulthood.about.com/od/teachers/a/teaching_adults_2.htm)
- Moskal, M. K., & Keneman, A. F. (2011). *Literacy leadership to support reading improvement: Intervention programs and balanced instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Omotani, B. J., & Omotani, L. (1996). Expect the Best: How Your Teachers Can Help All Children Learn. *The Executive Educator*. 18(8), 27, 31.
- Osofsky, J.D., Wewers, S., Hann, D.M., & Fick, A.C. (1993). Chronic Community Violence: What is Happening to our Children? *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*. 56 (1), 36-45.
- Raffani, J. (1993). *Winners without losers: Structures and strategies for increasing student motivation to learn*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Reardon, S.F., Valentino, R.A., Shores, K.A. (2012). Patterns of Literacy Among U.S. Students. *The Future of Children*. 22(2), 17-38.
- Rothwell, W. J. (2008). *Adult learning basics*. Alexandria, Va: ASTD Press.

- Sadowski, M. (2010). Putting the "Boy Crisis" in Context. *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed For Quick Review*. 76(3), 10-13.
- Saphier, J., Haley-Speca, M., Gower, R. (2008). *The skillful teacher: Building your teaching skills*. Acton, MA: Research for Better Teaching, Inc.
- Stearns, E. (2006). When and Why Dropouts Leave High School. *Youth & Society*, 38(1), 29–57. doi:10.1177/0044118X05282764
- Stiggins, R., Arter, J., Chappuis, J., & Chappuis, S. (2006). *Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right – using it well*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Taylor, R. & Collins, V.D. (2003). *Literacy leadership for grades 5-12*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD Publications.
- Texas Education Agency (2013). STAAR. Retrieved from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/staar/>.
- The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th ed. (2011). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2002). Reading First Program. Retrieved from <http://www.2ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>
- Whitehead, J. M. (2006). Starting School--Why Girls Are Already Ahead of Boys. *Teacher Development*, 10(2), 249-270.
- Wray, D., Medwell, J., Fox, R., & Poulson, L. (2000). The Teaching Practices of Effective Teachers of Literacy. *Educational Review*, 52(1), 75-84.
- Zelmeman, S. Daniels, H., Hyde, A. (2012). *Best practice: Today's standards for teaching and learning in America's schools*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.