THE ESSENCE OF THE DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE OF A HIGH SCHOOL LITERACY COACHING TEAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Nancy Spaniak

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THE ESSENCE OF THE DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE OF A HIGH SCHOOL LITERACY COACHING TEAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Educational Leadership Chicago CHO36 Cohort

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of the requirements of
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National College of Education
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THE ESSENCE OF THE DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE OF A HIGH SCHOOL LITERACY COACHING TEAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This is a phenomenological study of a high school literacy coaching team’s experience during the 2010-2011 school year, the first year of its existence. As a distributed leadership organizational routine, the practice of literacy coaching was adopted by a large suburban high school to promote its initiative to infuse literacy strategies into every teacher’s classroom instruction. The purpose of the study was to uncover the essence of the literacy coaching team’s distributed leadership experience in order to elucidate the effect of distributed leadership on developing the literacy coaching initiative in general, and the literacy coaching team members as leaders in particular. The study’s participants included the school’s Reading Department Chair; six reading specialists who also served as literacy coaches; four content area teachers who served as content coaches; and the author of the study who is the administrator in charge of supervising the school’s literacy coaching initiative.

The findings revealed six major facets within the kaleidoscopic pattern of events, attitudes, and learnings that merged into the essence of the distributed leadership experience of the high school literacy coaching team: (a) an understanding of the federal government’s role in the development of the school-wide literacy program; (b) a wide acknowledgement of the need for literacy coaching; (c) the match of some elements of the literacy coaching model’s ostensive structure to its performative aspects; (d) the mismatch of several of the literacy coaching initiative’s performative aspects to its ostensive plan; (e) the act of literacy coaching being both challenging and rewarding; and (f) leadership practices and understandings that evidence the team members’ leadership development.
Acknowledgements

As Peter Senge (2007) asserts, “Through learning we re-create ourselves” (p. 13).

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Chapter One

Introduction

Who Am I? A Leadership Self-Exploration

My doctoral coursework and dissertation process have propelled me on a journey of self-exploration to trace my development as an educational leader. The research and self-reflection that I have engaged in since I joined National-Louis University’s Educational Leadership Chicago Cohort in April of 2009 has made me realize that I have always been trying to get somewhere—to graduate high school so I could go to college, to finish college so I could start a career, to go back to school so I could become a teacher, to earn master’s degrees so I could advance my teaching career and become an administrator, and now to complete a doctorate so I can become an educational leader who effectively assists others in their leadership development as I continue to expand my own leadership skills and knowledge. At this point, I realize that Ralph Waldo Emerson was correct when he stated, “Life is a journey, not a destination” (Goodreads, ¶1). Yes, I hope to use my doctorate to help me reach my goal of becoming a school superintendent, but that “destination” is not the sole purpose of this current educational pursuit. I am working on my doctoral degree because my life’s journey has been about learning to become an effective leader, and I believe that continual learning is the key to honing my leadership abilities.

Although I have been on a leadership journey for over half a century, until entering this program, I rarely paused to trace my path. Doing so through my doctoral work, however, has made me more familiar with my “mindscapes,” defined by
Sergiovanni (2007) as “frames of reference that, though rarely thought about, are powerful forces that drive one’s practice” (p. 144). Mindscapes are similar to what Senge (2007) refers to as “mental models”: “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (p. 8). As Senge suggests, my doctoral work has been a process of “turning the mirror inward” (p. 8) as I have reflected on my personal and professional leadership journey, my work to improve teaching and learning at my school, and my stance as a researcher.

**My Personal and Professional Leadership Journey**

As a middle class, White, baby boomer female, I took on my earliest leadership position at the age of two when I became a big sister. I took to the role right away, holding, scolding, and treating my little brother as my baby doll (as much as he would let me). “Leadership,” as defined by Gardner (2007), “is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers” (p. 17). As the big sister and one of the older children on my block, I was a persuasive leader who organized games and led neighborhood bike trips. I did not have any formal leadership position, though, until the 6th grade when I was called to be a bus safety patrol cadet. As quoted by Phillips (1999), Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, “When people nominate you for the lead, accept it. When you are asked to serve, you can’t say no” (p. 51). I proudly accepted the honor of wearing the bright yellow safety patrol belt, yet I vividly remember being reticent to report any misbehavior on the bus because I did not want my peers to think I
was a snitch. I had not yet developed the resiliency of an “authentic leader” whose integrity provides her with the capacity to effectively deal with difficult or uncomfortable situations (Evans, 2007).

Throughout school, I never actively sought out leadership positions; nevertheless, on several occasions beyond my safety patrol role, I was nominated for them. For example, in high school, I was persuaded to run for student council and, to my surprise, won. Later, as a college undergrad, I was voted into the presidency of Kappa Omicron Nu, the Family and Consumer Sciences Honors Society. I believe I was thrust into leadership positions because I was a good student who was fairly out-going and relatively well-respected by both students and teachers. Nevertheless, as stated by Kouzes and Posner (2007), “[l]eadership is not all about personality; it’s about practice” (p. 63). While I did have some leadership positions during my school days, I found as a young woman that I did not have the practice or the training to successfully carry out a leadership position in the business world. I had minored in marketing when I was enrolled at Northern Illinois University in the 1970s; however, I do not recall having any training in leadership, only in management. When I went to work for The Gap as a management trainee after graduation, the only further training I received from my store manager involved management skills, such as preparing a schedule and checking in merchandise. She probably could not have given me much more because, I am fairly certain, she had received no leadership training herself. While I possessed the integrity of an authentic leader, defined by Evans (2007) as “the fundamental consistency between one’s values, goals, and actions” (p. 137), because of my inexperience, I did not have the savvy of an authentic leader, “a practical, problem-solving wisdom that enables leaders to
make things happen” (p. 141). I also did not have what Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963/1981) called “the toughness of the serpent” (pp. 13-14) when it came to dealing with personnel issues. Sergiovanni (2007) writes, “It is the leader’s responsibility to be outraged when empowerment is abused and when purposes are ignored” (p. 83), and I did get outraged when an employee punched in late or ignored customers; however, I felt uncomfortable about confronting employees who were mostly my age or even older. Gardner (2007) writes, “Leadership requires major expenditures of effort and energy—more than most people care to make” (p. 19). At that point in my life, I had the energy and wanted to make the effort, but I didn’t have the confidence or the skills to lead successfully: I resigned from The Gap after six months on the job.

Over the next dozen years following my resignation from retail, I worked in public relations as a personal assistant and as an entertainer, jobs that afforded me many rich experiences but few leadership opportunities. In my thirties, I began adult literacy tutoring and realized that I enjoyed teaching and had a knack for it, so I returned to school to become an educator. Senge (2007) states, “Through learning, we re-create ourselves” (p. 13). I certainly recreated myself in the early 1990s as I transformed from a lounge singer to a high school English teacher. During my first year in the classroom, my department chair put me in a leadership position as head of the freshmen English teacher team. Because of my rookie status, I felt nervous about being given this responsibility, but I did my best to work with my DC and my team to set agendas, to meet regularly, and to accomplish objectives. I remember one of the team members commenting that she was amazed I was able to get everybody to attend our weekly 7:30 a.m. meetings. This comment surprised me because I did not know that not meeting was an option. Our
meetings were largely pleasant and productive because I believe that my teammates soon realized that I was not interested in what Sergiovanni (2007) calls “power over” people (p. 86). I was, and still am, much more interested in facilitating “power to” get tasks accomplished and objectives fulfilled. By the end of that year, we freshmen English teachers had revamped most of the 9th grade curriculum. We also had formed a fairly strong team, perhaps because our group was made up of mostly women who, according to Sergiovanni, tend to “exhibit a more democratic, participatory style that encourages inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness in schools” (p. 89). I feel that I was able to help facilitate good communication between team members because I have the ability “to see a situation from someone else’s point of view,” and I have a talent for “[g]etting along well with other people,” top leadership qualities as identified through a study by Public Allies, an AmeriCorps organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 71).

I remained in the same school for 12 years. During that time, I continued my education, earning a master’s degree in English and becoming a reading specialist. Additionally, I continued to take on a variety of leadership responsibilities, particularly as a staff trainer. In the spring of 2004, my former principal, who had moved to become principal of my current school, which I will call Birchfield High School, called me to interview for a new position at Birchfield: Reading Coordinator. Within one week of receiving that out-of-the-blue phone call, I had a new job at Birchfield—a suburban, single-school high school district of nearly 3,000 students—and had taken on a larger leadership role than I had ever imagined myself possessing. That summer, I worked with three current Birchfield teachers and two other newly hired reading specialists to write curriculum for five new reading courses. Needless to say, this was an enormous task, but
we accomplished it and began to form a fairly cohesive team largely because I instinctively realized what Kouzes and Posner (2007) assert: “Leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue” (p. 66). Although I had the most experience in teaching reading and in curriculum writing, I was careful not to revert to my bossy 6-year-old self. Instead, I practiced what one of my National-Louis University instructors, Richard Best, refers to as “intentional listening,” which means “listening to understand, not to respond” (Educational Leadership Chicago CHO36 Cohort, Spring, 2009). As a result, that summer was the beginning of our team’s building of relational trust, which Evans (2007) says is “the essential link between leader and led, vital to people’s job satisfaction and loyalty, vital to followership” (p. 135). Within a year, I was promoted to the position of Reading Department Chair, back in school to earn my master’s degree in educational leadership, and charged with the demanding leadership role of creating a cohesive department. I have to “look out the window” (Collins, 2007, p. 44) to give credit to our reading teacher team for each person’s role in our collaborative effort to join together to meet the literacy needs of Birchfield students. Our team building process reached a high point when our newly formed Reading Department was awarded the Illinois State Board of Education’s Those Who Excel Award of Excellence in October, 2006.

Early in my tenure at Birchfield, a consultant I was working with told me that I would make a great curriculum director. I recall laughing off the suggestion. I certainly did not feel ready for a district-level leadership position. After earning my administrative certification and gaining a few years of experience as a DC, however, I knew I could take on a larger leadership role; therefore, when my predecessor resigned in early 2008, I applied for and was awarded the position of Birchfield High School District’s Director of
Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development. Like Mary Giella, an Assistant Superintendent of Instruction in Florida, I see myself as a “facilitator” who listens to staff members’ needs, plans with them, and coordinates plans “until those participating [can] independently conduct their own plans” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 9). I am striving to be a change agent who, according to Marzano and Waters (2009) “challenges the status quo . . . when necessary” (p. 96), thus fulfilling what Evans (2007) lists as four key roles of effective change agents: serving as a “resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, [and] a visible presence” (p. 149).

My Leadership Work at Birchfield High School

Our Birchfield leadership team realizes that our school must function as a learning organization that “is continually expanding to create its future” (Senge, 2007, p. 13). Planning for that future must encompass planning for the success of every student; therefore, a major aspect of our work has been to pave the way for expanding literacy instruction throughout the content areas. Our reading classes are making a positive difference in student achievement; nevertheless, Birchfield’s African American and White students are divided by a marked achievement gap, as evidenced by our Prairie State Achievement Exam results. According to this federally mandated exam under the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), in 2010, 78.8% of our White students were meeting or exceeding standards in reading, while only 57.5% of our African American students were meeting or exceeding standards. In the introduction to The Black and White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped, Nettles (2010) explains, “There is widespread awareness that there is a very substantial gap between the educational
achievement of the White and the Black population in our nation, and that the gap is as old as the nation itself” (p. 2). I certainly do not accept this gap as the status quo and neither does our Birchfield leadership team; therefore, we are attempting to implement deep-seated, second order change, the kind of transformation that “[r]equires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills” (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 105) to enhance teachers’ literacy instruction and, thus, improve students’ reading achievement.

Over the years, Birchfield has attempted to expand literacy instruction into the content areas, but the results have been mixed at best because we never had a concentrated, coordinated, school-wide effort to impact every teacher’s instructional practices. With our traditionally closed-door culture of individual teachers working in isolation, it has been impossible to transform the instructional practices of more than a handful of teachers. As the governmental sanctions of NCLB increased, however, our school improvement (SIP) committee, which the principal and I head, set a school improvement goal to increase student reading achievement. As a result, we began researching best practices for meeting that goal. We first looked to Marzano, Pickering, and Pollack (2001) who cite a study of more than 100,000 students, which documented “that the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher” (p. 3). Marzano et al. (2001) emphasize, “[M]ore can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than any other single factor” (p. 3). When the Birchfield SIP committee paired these findings with the Illinois State Board of Education’s Response to Intervention (RtI) requirement of all students being guaranteed research-based instruction in all classes, we realized the need to expand school-wide professional development to increase teacher effectiveness in all Birchfield classrooms. Teachers need strong, on-
going professional development, according to Guiney (2001), because “when teachers don’t improve their teaching to reach every student, students don’t learn enough to reach standards” (p. 743). Certainly, Birchfield teachers are very competent, with over 60% holding advanced degrees; nevertheless, the teachers obviously needed more professional development to embed literacy strategy instruction into their content instruction at least two times per week—a requirement of Birchfield’s 2010 school improvement plan. Thus, the next step for the Birchfield SIP committee was to answer the question, “What is effective professional development?”

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC Education Advocacy Toolkit, 2008) provides these guidelines for an effective professional development program:

- Engages teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff in ongoing professional development; occurs multiple times per week during the regular work day; is aligned to district and school improvement goals; and engages established professional learning teams of educators in a continuous cycle of improvement. (p. 7)

Brettschneider (2009) asserts, “[T]he most effective forms of teacher professional learning are long-term, job-embedded, curriculum-focused, and collaborative” (p. 2). According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), “[t]he most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (p. xi). Although all Birchfield departments created collaborative professional learning community (PLC) teams during the 2007-2008 school year, the PLC teams were not supported with regular time within the school day to meet. As a result, only a handful of Birchfield’s departments were holding regular PLC team meetings. Although the staff indicated that it was largely in favor of PLCs when surveyed in the fall of 2008, a wide-spread complaint was not having time within
the school day to meet. In response to a teacher’s suggestion that came from the staff survey, I worked with a SIP sub-committee to create a revised schedule that allows for one hour of PLC meeting time every other week during 1st period. I then facilitated teacher trainings in the PLC process during the fall of 2009, and Birchfield put the PLC schedule into place in January, 2010.

Even with regularly scheduled PLC team meeting times, however, the Birchfield SIP committee realized that teachers needed more direct, concentrated training in literacy instruction because, as Blankstein (2009) asserts, “sustained and intensive professional development is related to student achievement gains” (¶ 3). In response to this need, therefore, the Birchfield SIP committee endorsed the development and institution of a school-wide literacy coaching model. As Brettschneider (2009) explains, literacy coaching can expand teachers’ knowledge of effective secondary literacy instruction; help them develop expertise in infusing literacy strategies into their lessons; “and become more experimental, reflective, and collaborative practitioners so that they can continue to learn, grow, and share research” (p. 2). The long-term goal of literacy-coaching, according to Brettschneider, is “to help schools build an interdisciplinary team of literacy leaders whose work can catalyze wider-scale school changes in teaching practices and improvements in student achievement” (p. 2). “[L]iteracy coaches,” writes Toll (2009b), “provide job-embedded professional development that helps teachers build their capacity to make informed instructional decisions” (p. 25).

The literacy coaching model that the Birchfield Reading Department Chair and I developed involves teachers training and supporting other teachers, using the PLC structure as a framework for introducing and discussing strategies and ideas. The timeline
for implementation of the literacy coaching model began in the winter of 2010, when our six reading specialists, along with our Reading Department Chair and I, were trained in the Gretchen Courtney Literacy Strategy Framework (Gretchen Courtney & Associates, Ltd., n.d.). Our six reading specialists served as Birchfield’s literacy coaches in the 2010-2011 school year. Additionally, we named as content coaches four teachers from our freshmen core courses of Algebra 1, Biology, English 1, and Health (see Figure 1).

![Birchfield Coaching Structure Diagram]

**Figure 1.** Birchfield High School’s 2010-2011 literacy coaching structure.

The Birchfield literacy coaching structure called for content coaches to collaborate with the literacy coaches to support all teachers of the freshmen core as well as the other teachers in their respective departments. The job of the two literacy coaches not assigned to work directly with a content coach was to support the departments outside of the core: Applied Academics, Fine Arts, Social Science, and World Language. Of course, coaches were not restricted to working with one group of teachers, and staff members were free to solicit the help of any literacy or content coach.
**Topic Explanation**

While developing and implementing the literacy coaching professional development plan was a collaborative process, I led the charge towards instituting this major change initiative; thus, I have had a large personal investment in our literacy coaching plan. As I began exploring dissertation topics, I knew that I wanted to investigate the role of administrators in effectively developing, implementing, and sustaining second order change. In particular, I wondered how my leadership was evolving as I attempted to develop teacher leadership through the implementation of the Birchfield literacy coaching model. I, therefore, also wondered how the coaches themselves were evolving as leaders through their coaching experience. I realized that I needed to find out more about both literacy coaching and the field of distributed leadership, which, as Firestone and Martinez (2009) note, “moves away from individual- and role-based views of leadership to those that focus on the organization and on leadership tasks” (p. 62). As I describe later in greater detail, the distributed leadership perspective expands the bounds of traditional leadership beyond the formal leader to include multiple individuals in the work of leading change initiatives within schools (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003; Firestone & Martinez; Halverson, 2006; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009; Mangin, 2005; Mayrowitz, Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2009; Sheppard, Hurley, & Dibbon, 2010; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007a; Spillane & Diamond, 2007b; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

After much research, I determined that literacy coaching is a distributed leadership organizational routine. Through my investigation into the qualitative research
technique of phenomenology, I discovered that phenomenological research attempts to discern the core of an individual’s or group’s shared experience (Cresswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; van Manen, 1990). I, therefore, decided to conduct a phenomenological research study to answer this question: What is the essence of the distributed leadership experience of the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School literacy coaching team? I employ the term “essence” as is it used by van Manen to denote “the internal meaning structures of lived experience” (p. 10), for a phenomenological study attempts to discover and come to understand the essence of a group of people’s shared experience (Cresswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Saldaña, 2009; Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 1990). I also utilize the term “distributed leadership” to indicate the practice of providing leadership opportunities for people outside of an organization’s formal administrative structure in order to effectively institute organizational and personal transformation (Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007b; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). An “organizational routine” describes a situational aspect of distributed leadership that involves a particular group’s repeated, interdependent actions designed to accomplish a particular task or purpose (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Spillane, 2006). “Literacy coaching” is defined as the act of teachers helping teachers to effectively infuse reading and writing strategies into their classroom instruction through such acts as explicating strategies, sharing materials, co-planning lessons, modeling lessons, and co-teaching (Toll, 2005). In particular, through my study, I aimed to discover how practicing distributed leadership to design and implement a high school literacy coaching organizational routine developed my leadership capacity as well as the leadership of the coaches with whom I worked. Ultimately, I hoped to discover the
essence of the distributed leadership experience within Birchfield High School’s
organizational routine of literacy coaching.

Briggs and Coleman (2007) ask in the introduction to *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*, “Do you need to find out how staff could be better led, or how they could improve their own management of learning?” (p. 5). The answer to both parts of that question, for me, was “yes.” As an organization, Birchfield High School has spent much time, effort, and money on our literacy coaching endeavor. Additionally, as stated above, I have had a large personal investment in this venture, for in my current administrative position, I am directly responsible for providing the resources and training necessary for teachers to meet the literacy needs of Birchfield students. I, therefore, felt a need to examine my effectiveness in leading staff to enhance the efficacy of the coaches, as well as to expand the willingness of content teachers to be coached. Three interests listed by Briggs and Coleman aligned with my topic: inspecting how staff members develop professionally and relate to their work, determining how work is formally structured within the organization, and exploring the functions and informal structures of school culture to find out how they work and acknowledge their impact. By attempting to answer these questions through my research, I felt I could discover how to be a better leader of teachers who are “improve[ing] their own management of learning” (Briggs & Coleman, 2007, p. 5).

**My Research Paradigms**

Three research paradigms were suited to my phenomenological study, through which I aimed to “grasp the very nature” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177) of my distributed
leadership experience and that of the Birchfield literacy coaches. First, I realized that interpretivism, where “researchers insert themselves into this continual process of meaning construction in order to understand it,” would be a necessary research lens because I was studying my experience as well as that of the coaches (Morrison, 2007, p. 23). In contrast to the positivist approach, as an interpretivist, I was determined to “conduct educational research with people” rather than about them (Morrison, 2007, p. 24). Morrison explains that according to interpretivism, “all educational research needs to be grounded in people’s experience” (p. 24). My topic was firmly grounded in my personal experience as well as in the experiences of the literacy coaches I was leading. Therefore, I accepted interpretivism’s understanding of reality as “not ‘out there’ as an amalgam of external phenomena waiting to be uncovered as ‘facts,’ but as a construct in which people understand reality in different ways” (Morrison, p. 24). A major focus of my research, I believed, would be attempting to uncover my own constructs, as well as those of the literacy coaches, in order to draw reasonable conclusions. Through this process, as an interpretivist researcher, I knew that I would be “part of, rather than separate from,” my research (Morrison, p. 24).

Working as an interpretivist researcher, I employed a qualitative paradigm as I attempted to create a “‘rich’ and ‘deep’ description” of the literacy coaching team members’ experiences. I used semi-structured interviews in order to develop “the holistic picture in which [my] research topic is embedded” (Morrison, 2007, p. 27). In addition to incorporating the qualitative paradigm, the reflexivity paradigm appealed to me as well because my research required me to be very reflective about myself in relation to my topic. Morrison explains, “Reflexivity is the process by which researchers come to
understand how they are positioned in relation to the knowledge they are producing” (p. 32). My position as an administrator who evaluates teachers certainly impacted my position as a researcher; thus, I had to take into account the reflexive paradigm in addition to the qualitative and interpretivist paradigms.

My Research Stance

Grogan and Simmons (2007) explain that the postmodernist stance emphasizes the importance of “understanding that the product of research is the construction of a reality, not a representation of it” (p. 42). I believe, therefore, that the postmodernist stance fits my research topic because the aim of my research was to construct a new personal reality by learning to become a better leader of second order change, the type of large-scale change that is fundamental to organizational transformation (Levy, 1986). My new reality is reflected in a new reality for the coaches, who are learning to become effective leaders, as well, through their coaching roles. Thus, through my research, I reflected on my experience and that of the coaches to draw out themes that could inform all of us as leaders. While I make no claims to the universalism of the themes I discerned, I hope to provide information regarding distributed leadership in general and the distributed leadership organizational routine of literacy coaching in particular that will be useful to other practitioners beyond the Birchfield High School literacy coaching team.

The description of current and future realities, however, involves both objective facts and some subjectivity as well. “Central to postmodern theories is an interest in language, subjectivity and meaning,” write Grogan and Simmons (2007, p. 39). This statement applies to my research because I am telling the story of the literacy coaching
team which, of course, has been filtered through my personal lens as the researcher and interpreter of our experience. As a qualitative researcher, therefore, I have embraced subjectivity rather than search in vain for absolute “truth and objectivity in [my] research” (Grogan & Simmons, 2007, p. 39). Richardson (2001) explains, “The old idea of a strict bifurcation between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’—between the ‘head’ and the ‘heart’—does not map onto the actual practices through production of knowledge, or knowledge about how knowledge is produced” (p. 34). This is certainly the case of my research, for I attempted to make meaning from the connections I discerned between my experience and the data I collected relating to the coaches’ experiences. Each shapes the other.

**Cultural and Political Aspects**

My topic is intertwined with the cultural and political aspects of Birchfield High School. Our teachers have been functioning largely within the “closed-door” culture of a traditional high school. We began opening those doors in the winter of 2010 when we provided regularly scheduled 1st period time for teachers to collaborate in PLC teams. In order for literacy coaching to work, however, teachers must open their doors even wider to allow coaches access to the inner sanctum of their classrooms. This has been difficult most likely because of trust issues that arose between teachers and administration during the last contract negotiations. As the administrator who has headed the coaching initiative, some teachers, according to the president of our teachers’ union, have viewed literacy coaching as “Nancy’s program,” saying, “We’re just doing this for Nancy’s dissertation”—a claim that was made when we instituted PLC teams. Thus, as an insider
researcher, I have made an effort to not be “‘blind’ to many aspects of [my] own culture” (Dimmock, 2007, p. 62). Instead, I have been aware of the cultural and political climate of my school and recognize that my understandings invariably differ from others based on our varied roles, perspectives, and past experiences. I also made an effort to build positive relationships and trust with staff members, realizing that without both, I would experience the “difficulties of access” described by Dimmock (p. 60).

Overall, these two cultural dimensions influenced my research: “power-concentrated/power-dispersed” and “self-oriented/group-oriented” (Dimmock, 2007, p. 59). Although my administrative role could take on the power-centered and self-oriented stances of autocratic, top-down leadership, I have been aware that in order to lead transformation, I must be more group-oriented than self-oriented, and I must disperse rather than hoard leadership powers. According to James Burns, who coined the term “transformational leadership” in the late 1970s, leaders who effectively invoke change disperse power to others (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Therefore, while within the structure of our literacy coaching model I am the administrative leader, I have considered myself part of the coaching team, and I have included the coaches in various leadership tasks. Ultimately, my research has been influenced by how the coaches perceive me as a leader, as well as how they see themselves in relation to me and to the literacy coaching group as a whole. I believe that my dispersion of power and group orientation has positively influenced my research with the coaching team, for all members not only granted me an interview but shared openly with me during their interview session.
Writing as a Method of Inquiry

I agree with Richardson (2001) who states, “Writing as a method of inquiry is a way of nurturing our own individuality and giving us authority over understanding our own lives” (p. 35). I believe that studying and writing about the literacy coaching team has helped us all become more effective in our leadership roles. Richardson, again, supports my claim: “What you write about and how you write it shapes your life, shapes who you become” (p. 36). The goal of my study was to generate data to assess the coaches’ leadership growth and my own – to trace our development as leaders and, therefore, bolster our leadership capacity and sense of self-efficacy, described by Bettesworth, Alonzo, and Duesbury (2009) as “how confident people are about performing specific tasks” (p. 291). I hope, as well, that my research will assist other practitioners in their quests to build the literacy leadership capacity and self-efficacy of themselves and others in their organizations.
Chapter Two
The Review of the Literature

Introduction

In order to frame my phenomenological study, which aims to discern the essence of the distributed leadership experience of the members of Birchfield High School’s literacy coaching team, I immersed myself in the research of two rapidly emerging fields: distributed leadership and literacy coaching. My premise is this: distributed leadership improves an organization’s effort to institute change, and literacy coaching—a distributed leadership organizational routine—propels effective change by providing job-embedded professional development to assist teachers improve their literacy instruction. Ultimately, when teachers improve their literacy instruction, students, in turn, improve their learning (see Figure 2). Thus, throughout this chapter, I attempt to define, describe, and explicate both distributed leadership and the organizational routine of literacy coaching by citing a variety of experts and researchers from both fields. My chief aim is to demonstrate how literacy coaching, as a distributed leadership organizational routine, can improve teaching and, thus, student learning.
**The Distributed Leadership Lens**

Leadership guides organizations within all fields. While the terms “leadership” and “management” have been used synonymously (Kaiser, 1996), as Copland (2003) points out, Sergiovanni was instrumental in shifting the focus of educational leadership from “a set of management skills” to “a set of norms, beliefs, and principles” for affecting organizational change (p. 377). Thus, educational leadership, as defined by Elmore (2000), moves beyond the mere management of a school to the larger charge of providing “guidance and direction for instructional improvement” (p. 13). Reeves (2002) states that “leaders are the architects of improved individual and organizational performance” (p. 12). As Reeves (2002) points out, change is inevitable; therefore, leaders face the choice of either purposefully guiding change or letting it occur haphazardly. Thus, according to Lambert (2007), effective leaders practice “reciprocal,
purposeful learning in community” (p. 422). Spillane (2006) refers to educational leadership as “activities tied to the core work of the organization that are designed by organizational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, or practices of other organizational members” (p. 11). Of note in Spillane’s definition is his assertion that the organization’s core activities are developed by “organizational members,” rather than by a single leader, or even a set of designated formal leaders. As a lead researcher in the field of distributed leadership, Spillane, along with his colleagues, attests that effective educational leadership is the work of both formal and informal leaders throughout an organization (Spillane & Camburn, 2006; Spillane, Camburn, & Lewis, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007a; Spillane & Diamond, 2007b; Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003; Spillane et al., 2001). Spillane and Diamond (2007b), for example, assert that “[a] distributed perspective acknowledges that the work of leading and managing schools involves multiple individuals” (p. 7). According to Spillane and Diamond (2007b), distributed leadership is a “perspective on leadership” that can be employed “as a conceptual or analytical lens for investigating school leadership” (p. 1). Bennett et al. (2003) agree, stating that “distributed leadership is an important analytical tool for thinking about leadership and re-orienting thinking about its nature” (p. 7). Beyond the superintendent, principal, or assistant principal, distributed leadership “suggests openness of the boundaries of leadership” (Bennett et al., p. 7). This makes sense because, as Marzano et al. (2005) assert, substantive change requires “a great deal of effort” (p. 14)—more effort than a single leader, or even a leadership team, can effectively exert. In fact, Darling-Hammond (1997) contends that “[t]op-down decision making retards change” (p. 67). Thus, according to Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009), there is a “growing
appreciation for the contributions of the informal dimensions of organizations, the untapped and often unrecognized leadership capacities found among those not in a position of formal authority” (pp. 1-2). As Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis, and Smylie (2009) contend, the practice of distributed leadership can be viewed “as a tangible reform that could lead to school improvement” (p. 178). Distributed leadership, therefore, provides me, as a researcher, with a theoretical lens through which to inspect the leadership experiences of the Birchfield High School literacy coaching team members, including myself. In order to do so, however, I first must delve further into its theory base and practice.

The Theory Base of Distributed Leadership

Through my research, I have discovered that distributed leadership is rooted in several theoretical constructs. One construct, distributed cognition and activity theory, combines insights from psychology and sociology, emphasizing both “the social and cultural context of cognition” (Halverson, 2002, p. 243). Spillane et al. (2001) explain the contention of distributed cognition and activity theory: “Cognition is distributed through the environment’s material and cultural artifacts and through other people in collaborative efforts to complete tasks” (p. 23). In other words, the thinking and learning that occurs within an organization is greatly influenced by the interactions of its people within the organization’s social framework and cultural environment. A second theoretical foundation of distributed leadership, according to Leithwood Mascall, and Strauss (2009) is organizational learning theory, which asserts that “[a]n organization can be more intelligent than any one of its individual members” (p. 4). Distributed leadership,
as it relates to organizational learning theory, promotes the idea that the sharing of leadership roles leads to “improved organizational capacity” (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009, p. 4). To explain, organizational learning theory endorses collaborative leadership efforts to expand an organization’s effectiveness and continued growth. A third theoretical basis of distributed leadership, according to Sheerer (2007), is contingency theory, which asserts that “organizational features vary depending on the degree to which the task environment is defined” (p. 108). On one hand, the “control model” of contingency theory views teaching as “a well-defined non-variable activity,” while on the other hand, the “commitment model” encourages “teacher participation in decision making, network structures of professional control, collegiality among teachers, and development of community within schools” (Sherer, 2007, p. 108). Thus, the distribution of leadership beyond administrators into the ranks of teachers embodies the commitment model of contingency theory. Such distribution of leadership similarly enhances organizational capacity, as organizational learning theory contends, and it influences the thinking and learning of administrators and teachers alike though the expansion of organizational cognition, a construct of distributed cognition and activity theory. Thus, distributed leadership can expand organizational cognition and capacity to advance school organizations towards effective change and continued growth.

**Distributed Leadership as Shared Responsibility for Change**

In this era of accountability, more than ever before, the standards movement is holding educational leaders responsible for changes in teaching and learning to improve student achievement (Elmore, 2000; Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). Thus, as Fullan
(2008) asserts, for educational leaders, “[n]othing is more important in the twenty-first century than learning to manage change” (p. ix). Allington and Cunningham (2007) succinctly state, however, that “change is hard” (p. 14). Rather than buffering teachers from outside interference as has been the norm, administrators are now enlisting teachers’ help to meet the ever increasing governmental demands for student achievement (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Spillane et al., 2011). Therefore, accountability for improved student learning has become the shared responsibility of administrators and teachers alike (Meier, 2002; Reeves, 2004). The effective management of change, particularly in regards to transforming teaching practices, involves the sharing of leadership. Elmore and Burney (1999) state: “Shared expertise is the driver of instructional change” (p. 268). Organizations that adopt and apply a distributed leadership perspective can foster the sharing of expertise that promotes real change through shared responsibility. According to Elmore, distributed leadership, at its core, involves “distributed expertise, mutual dependence, reciprocity of accountability and capacity, and the centrality of instructional practice” (p. 24). Thus, as Halverson (2007) asserts, “A distributed perspective defines instructional leadership as the establishment and maintenance of the conditions for improving teaching and learning in schools” (p. 51). In fact, Timperley (2009) reports that “greater distribution” of leadership leads to “comprehensive school reform” (p. 198). Therefore, in this way, distributed leadership can provide the means for meeting the standards movement’s demands for greater student achievement.

Two leadership models share elements of the distributed leadership perspective. First, democratic leadership, like distributed leadership, is founded on principles of
cooperation, collaboration, and community. Darling-Hammond (1997) endorses the “[d]emocratic participation” of all teachers in organizational decision making “to make more than incremental changes” in schools (p. 163). In fact, Darling-Hammond claims that “such democratic decisions are critical to lasting change” (p. 163). Bennett et al. (2003) assert that distributed leadership shares with democratic leadership “cooperation and the alignment of others to the values and vision of the leader and the building of community” (p. 20). Distributed leadership, according to Spillane et al. (2001), also “supports a transformational perspective on leadership” (p. 24). By empowering staff members without formal leadership positions, the practice of distributed leadership promotes the change of both individuals and the organization. Bennett et al. explain that the transformational aspect of distributed leadership allows for formal leaders and followers to encourage and stimulate one another’s growth and, in turn, promote the growth of the organization.

The conditions for instructional change, through a distributed leadership perspective, involve a sense of shared responsibility by all members of the organization to achieve school-wide goals for bolstering student learning. Since different people possess varying skills and different types of knowledge, their collaborative leadership effort can bring about more effective and lasting school-wide change than can a single administrator, or even an administrative team. “Research on extraordinarily successful schools,” according to Darling-Hammond (1997), “has found that . . . these schools have a forged sense of mission, a shared ethos, and common norms of instruction and civility” (pp. 132-133). Copland (2003) states, “Leadership built from expertise broadly exercised in service of consensual goals offers, at least in theory, a more promising change for
instructional innovation to take in schools than does a ‘chain of command’ approach to implementing change” (p. 379). In contrast to traditional leadership’s focus on one school administrator, the distributed leadership perspective integrates the roles and tasks of formal and informal leaders as they work together towards meeting student achievement goals. The distributed leadership perspective, according to Firestone and Martinez (2009), “moves away from individual and role-based views of leadership to those that focus on the organization and leadership tasks” (p. 62). Sheppard et al. (2010) define distributed leadership as “a shared leadership responsibility of both formal leaders (school administrators) and teacher leaders” (p. 9). Teacher leadership involves teachers working collaboratively in non-supervisory roles to build teachers’ capacity to meet student achievement goals through the improvement of instruction (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Manno & Firestone, 2008). This work entails, on the part of teachers and administrators alike, a continual evaluation of the school’s efforts to meet its goals. Copland, therefore, espouses the distributed leadership practice of “continual inquiry into the work of the school, inquiry focused on student learning, high standards, equity, and best practices” (p. 376).

Including a variety of staff members in leadership roles is necessary for organizational growth because, as Hallett (2007) points out, “leadership is not inherent in organizational positions” (p. 103). In fact, leadership is more of a social rather than an organizational construction (Bennett et al., 2003; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). Copland (2003) asserts that a traditional leadership hierarchy bringing about substantial, lasting school reform is simply a myth. Hallett’s case study of Costen Elementary School, for example, demonstrates that a leader’s formal authority does not necessarily make her
a credible leader in the eyes of the faculty. Consequently, Spillane, told interviewer von Frank (2011), “[t]he practice of leading is not just what the principal or team leader does; it is also how others react” (p. 1). Therefore, an abiding principle of distributed leadership is that leadership practices must be investigated from the organization as lived—its performance aspects—rather than the organization as designed—its ostensive aspects (Bennett, et al., 2003; Diamond, 2007; Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Camburn, 2006; Spillane et al., 2006; Spillane et al., 2011). Principal Bonnie Whitmore, who “catalyzed an impressive array of changes at Hancock Elementary School,” according to Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010, p. 6), understands this principle of distributed leadership well. Bryk et al. quote Whitmore:

I can’t be the leader of everything, and there are leaders within the school, people with strengths and talents. As overall leader, I have to allow these other leaders to emerge. (p. 6)

The practice of distributed leadership, therefore, flattens the organizational hierarchy, referred to by Gronn (2008) as “heterarchy,” by integrating the informal leadership that naturally forms within any organization (the performative organization) into the formal leadership hierarchy (the ostensive organization) to create a dynamic school-wide leadership network moving in concert towards school improvement goals. As Donaldson (2006) asserts, effective leaders facilitate connections between people within the organization. Distributed leadership effectively redesigns the work of both the administrators and the teachers, propelling them to interact with one another in new ways due to their reconfigured roles and responsibilities (Mayrowetz et al., 2009; Spillane, personal communication, October 3, 2011). The resulting leadership network may then be analyzed for effectiveness “in terms of interactions rather than actions” (Spillane, 2006,
This is more easily accomplished when interactions between formal and informal leaders are frequent, collegial, and collaborative in nature. Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, and Yashkina (2009) state, “Distributed leadership is greatly encouraged . . . by flatter organizational structures . . . that provide opportunities for collaboration among colleagues—such as common planning time—and norms which sustain collegial relationships among school staff” (p. 235). Similarly, Sheppard et al. (2010) assert that distributed leadership is synonymous with collaborative leadership: the process of formal and informal leaders interacting with one another, their constituents, and circumstances. “If teachers feel a sense of influence on decisions affecting their work,” according to Bryk et al. (2010), “the necessary ‘buy-in’ for change is more readily established” (p. 64).

Thus, through the development of shared goals, a sense of collective responsibility, and the enactment of shared decision making, teachers can work as collaborative partners rather than subordinate followers of their school’s formal leaders within the lived organization. In this way, schools that embody the perspective of distributed leadership share the responsibility of change through a leadership network that can capably meet the 21st century demands of accountability for improved student learning.

**Building School-wide Capacity Through Distributed Leadership**

Schools that adopt the practice of distributed leadership expand their ability to promote the transformation of teachers’ instructional practices, thereby enhancing student learning. Timperley (2009) asserts that distributed leadership “has the potential to build capacity within a school through the development of the intellectual and professional capacity of teachers” (p. 198). That professional capacity includes leadership capacity,
which Lambert (2007) defines as “broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership” (p. 422). Although there is no clear evidence that distributed leadership directly impacts student achievement (Bennett et al., 2003; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009), administrators who share leadership do have an indirect impact on student learning (Sheppard et al., 2010) because they are increasing leadership capacity beyond the front office (Taylor, 2008). Taylor claims that the practice of distributed leadership promises improvement in instruction, resulting in improved student learning. Timperley cites the connection between distributing leadership and transforming schools: “Surveys of school personnel indicate that greater distribution is typically associated with comprehensive school reform” (p. 198). In fact, “[b]roadscale organizational transformation demands that leaders nurture individual agency and build collective capacity to support fundamental change,” according to Bryk et al. (2010, p. 63). For example, Lambert indicates that the majority of the 15 schools she studied transformed from low-performing to high-performing by distributing leadership throughout their organizations. Such transformation occurs because, as Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss explain, distributed leadership results in the development of “rich networks of relationships,” creating “more innovative responses to organizations’ challenges than would be the case with no such distribution” (p. 7).

Rich networks of relationships develop and are sustained by the collaborative school cultures that distributed leadership fosters. These collaborative school cultures enhance efforts to transform instructional practices and improve student achievement. For example, Warren Little (1999) discovered in her 1982 study that “school-wide ‘norms of collegiality and experimentation’ were a characteristic of schools that had achieved
greater success and demonstrated greater accountability” (p. 254). Allington and Cunningham (2007) assert that schools with the most substantial advances towards improving student achievement promote collaborative cultures where teachers engage in “professional conversations about specific instructional practices” (p. 15). Burch’s (2007) case study of Baxter School shows how leadership practices can influence collaborative norms within a single school. According to Burch, the leadership of Baxter’s math committee was held solely by the committee chair, resulting in little sharing of ideas or information by the committee members. In fact, Burch reports that there existed during math committee meetings “an undercurrent of nervousness and fear” (p. 134). In contrast, rather than being led by a single committee chair, Baxter’s literacy committee stretched leadership over both formal and informal leaders, resulting in committee members’ active and enthusiastic participation in meetings that were filled with positive energy, humor, and camaraderie (Burch). In another example of the positive power of distributed leadership, Copland (2003) describes the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), which “distributed leadership amongst administrators, teachers, and other professionals and community members both internal and external to the school” (p. 376). From his longitudinal study of BASRC, Copland concludes that “the distribution and sharing of leadership, built through shared inquiry into improving student learning, provides a policy direction for moving beyond narrow, role-base structures that have defined school leadership for decades” (p. 394). In a third example of distributed leadership’s transformative power, Drago-Severson (2009) asserts that the sharing of leadership responsibilities with people outside of the formal leadership structure allows people to expand their leadership capacity. Through her studies of principals, Drago-
Severson has found that principals’ wider distribution of leadership “supports their own ‘self discovery’” (p. 127). To illustrate, Delisio (2010), who serves as a principal, agrees with Drago-Severson, asserting that sharing leadership with teachers helps him make better decisions.

In addition to building formal leaders’ capacity, distributed leadership builds teachers’ leadership and instructional capacity as well. Angelle’s (2010) qualitative case study found that distributed leadership enhances teachers’ instruction by building levels of trust, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction; a commitment to shared goals; and, ultimately, a feeling of personal responsibility for student achievement. McGuiness (2009) found similar results in her study of a low income school in Northern Ireland. There, teachers were generally receptive to large-scale change because the distribution of leadership allowed them to build trust, feel supported, and develop a culture of risk-taking that encouraged the transformation of instructional practices. Similarly, the path analysis study of Sheppard et al. (2010) highlighted teachers’ increased morale, enthusiasm, and involvement in school improvement efforts when they were included in the leadership of the school. Regarding commitment to pursuing school-wide goals, Hulpia, Devos, and VanKeer (2010), from their study of Belgium secondary schools, concluded that when teachers feel that they have a meaningful voice in instructional decision making, they are more committed to their schools’ improvement efforts. In general, therefore, as Drago-Severson (2009) states, distributed leadership “[b]uilds the capacity of the school” (p. 127) to transform teaching practices and, ultimately, student achievement.

The Role of the Formal Leader Within a Distributed Leadership Network
As stated earlier, the myth of leadership resting solely at the top of an organization chart has been exploded. Leadership exists at all levels of the performative organization and must be cultivated in order to develop schools as “learning organizations, organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire,” according to Senge (2007, p. 3). Gronn (2009) points out that as far back as 1945, F. A. Hayek “claimed that the idea of an omniscient mind was a fallacy” (p. 35). As one of Gronn’s (2009) study subjects stated in an interview, “No one has a monopoly on wisdom” (p. 36). Therefore, one leader cannot effectively lead alone (Angelle, 2010; Drago-Severson, 2009; Elmore, 2000; Mangin, 2005; Spillane et al., 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007a; Taylor, 2008; von Frank, 2011). Because large-scale change is complex, it requires the expertise and labor of many (Elmore). Effective leaders, understanding this, embrace a collaborative culture and delegate both responsibility and authority (Bennett et al., 2003; Copland, 2003). In particular, they understand that the classical top-down leadership model does not fit schools because of the intrinsic individualism and autonomy of teachers’ work (Donaldson, 2006). They realize, instead, that they must develop the leadership of those below them on the organization chart by giving them opportunities to learn and grow through the process of leading. In this way, savvy school administrators connect individuals with organizational purpose, an essential element of Donaldson’s Three Stream Model of Leadership. Referring to Michael Fullan, Bean (2010) states that an administrator’s worth is ultimately judged by his or her ability to develop the leadership of others. Fullan (2008) strongly endorses formal leaders providing staff members with continuous opportunities to learn, to collaborate, and to develop their own leadership capacities. However,
according to Piercey (2010/2011), “[t]he biggest obstacle [to authentic collaboration between teachers] is [administrators] getting used to the idea that there is not just one chief and relinquishing some of the power one has to empower others” (p. 4). As Elmore explains, though, “the job of administrative leaders is primarily enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization” (p. 15). Specifically, Marzano and Waters (2009) assert that a major responsibility of district leadership is providing for “the continuous improvement of pedagogical skills among teachers in the district” (p. 56).

Even without a push from formal leaders, leadership activities flourish naturally among teachers. For example, Supovitz (2008), who studied instructional leadership practices in 14 high schools across the United States, found that the acts of supporting, advising, and providing assistance to teachers are more often conducted by teachers’ colleagues than by their supervisors. Successful administrators, therefore, develop teachers’ innate leadership talents as they “move beyond a hierarchical and authoritarian structure of leadership” (Ellison & Hayes, 2009, p. 79). Employing a distributed leadership perspective, these administrators identify the natural leaders within their schools, organizing people according to their skills, roles, and knowledge to work towards a common goal to improve teaching and learning (Elmore, 2000). Identifying and explicating a common goal for all to reach is essential for the teaching profession, which traditionally has been immersed in the practice of “loose coupling”: teachers working primarily as independent contractors buffered from outside interference by administrators who have allowed them to practice in the relative isolation of their individual classrooms (Elmore; Halverson, 2006; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Taylor, 2008). Formal leaders who affect real change—like New York City’s District 2
Superintendent Anthony Alvarado, whose district made tremendous student achievement advances in the 1990s—develop a shared purpose among teachers as they communicate clearly defined expectations, then disperse their power through the distribution of leadership (Elmore & Burney, 1999). Marzano and Waters (2009) call this “defined autonomy” as district leaders give principals and other administrators the freedom “to lead [and further distribute leadership] within the boundaries defined by district goals” (p. 8).

In general, those in formal leadership positions who effectively develop the leadership capacity of others are open, trustworthy, and positive, according to Donaldson (2006). Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009) add that they are emotionally stable, gregarious, courteous, cooperative, conscientious, open-minded, optimistic, and self-efficacious as well. In addition to creating organizational structures which promote teacher collaboration and sharing (Bennett et al., 2003; Halverson, 2007; von Frank, 2011) these leaders develop their own collaborative skills (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Once they have developed a network of distributed leadership, effective formal leaders put in accountability systems and regularly monitor the change being instituted (Camburn, Kimball, & Lowenhaupt, 2008; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). They take responsibility for keeping everyone’s focus on the task at hand in order to affect instructional change (Elmore, 2000). Additionally, when necessary, these formal leaders take “a quite active form of intervention to move the agenda forward if stalled” (Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, et al., 2009, p. 239). Therefore, even though distributed leadership consists of a network of leadership collaborators, it still requires at least one person at the helm, steering the organization in a forward motion to prevent
teachers from “going in circles” (Leithwood, Mascall & Strauss, Sacks, et al., 2009, p. 240).

Setting goals, constructing a distributed leadership network, and infusing systems to monitor progress towards meeting goals will all be for naught, however, unless an administrator understands that leadership is “a relational, not an individual phenomenon” (Donaldson, 2006, p. 9). According to Donaldson’s Three Stream Model of Leadership, cultivating trusting relationships is as the center of leadership. In fact, leadership is “an influence of relationships,” state Spillane and Diamond (2007b, p. 9). In other words, while leaders influence the actions of followers, followers also influence the leaders’ actions as they choose whether or not to follow the leader (Spillane & Diamond, 2007b). School leaders, therefore, must take to heart Marshall’s (2009) assertion that trust is “the lubricant of effective schools” (p. 61). In order to develop climates of trust, collaboration, innovation, and shared responsibility that will support distributed leadership and promote and sustain school-wide change, effective administrators must open lines of communication between themselves and teachers, as well as between the teachers themselves (Angelle, 2010; Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Armstrong, 2011; Bennett et al., 2003; Elmore, 2000; Halverson, 2006; MacBeath, 2009; Reeves, 2004; Sherer, 2007; Taylor, 2008). Ultimately, as Marzano et al. (2005) point out, school leaders who affect positive change are responsible for “inspiring faculty and staff to operate at the edge of their competence” (p. 118). Thus, just as leaders are responsible for shaping the organizational structures of change, they are also responsible for developing organizational climates and cultures (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005). As they distribute leadership, effective leaders monitor leadership activities and their impact on
supporting teachers’ efforts to improve classroom instruction and student learning, striking a balance between the necessity to steer the organization towards its goals for improved student achievement and the imperative to facilitate the leadership of others within a climate of cooperation and collaboration.

**Putting the Distributed Leadership Perspective Into Focus**

As I have discussed, distributed leadership provides a framework for building capacity for effective school-wide change efforts to improve teaching practices and, thereby, improve student learning. Three types of distributed leadership are described by Spillane (2006); Spillane et al. (2009); and Spillane and Diamond (2007b). First, “collaborated distribution” names the co-performance of a leadership routine by two or more individuals at the same time in the same place. Spillane also refers to collaborated distribution as “reciprocal interdependency” (p. 61). The second type of distributed leadership described by Spillane, Spillane et al. (2009), and Spillane and Diamond (2007b) is “collective distribution”: various individuals engaging in the same leadership task. Finally, “coordinated distribution,” the third type of distributed leadership named by Spillane, Spillane et al. (2009), and Spillane & Diamond (2007b) involves the performance of leadership responsibilities by two or more individuals in a particular sequence.

Beyond these three types of distributed leadership, MacBeath (2009) enumerates six facets of distributed leadership. The first facet, “distribution formally,” refers to a person’s formal role within the organization, which dictates his leadership responsibilities. Although distribution formally makes boundaries clear and encourages ownership, it constrains practice, according to MacBeath. “Distribution pragmatically”
describes the short-term acceptance of a leadership role, usually as “a reaction to external events” (MacBeath, p. 47). The third aspect of distributed leadership, “distribution sporadically,” occurs as necessary, usually in teamwork fashion, to meet specific school improvement goals (MacBeath). According to MacBeath, this type of distributed leadership “celebrates individual differences” while “foster[ing] collective strengths” (p. 49). “Distribution incrementally,” the fourth feature of distributed leadership, allows the nurturing of talent by giving people leadership opportunities as a means of encouraging their willingness “to assume more” (MacBeath, p. 49). “Distribution opportunistically” stems from a person’s natural tendency to lead, as “it is taken rather than given” (MacBeath, p. 50). Finally, “distribution culturally” refers to a fundamental shift in leadership, from emphasizing the importance of the individual to recognizing the “collective intelligence and collective energy” that is produced when “a community of people [is] working together to a common end” (MacBeath, p. 52).

Ultimately, many varieties of distributed leadership simultaneously exist. Gronn (2009) calls the varied aspects of distributed leadership “hybridity.” According to Gronn (2009), hybridity provides a way “for schools, particularly the people in charge of them, to maximize their means of acquiring knowledge” (p. 35) as they rely on different individuals to play leadership roles in accordance with their varying personal knowledge, talents, and skill sets. Hybridity fuels the power of “concertive action”: a term coined by Gronn (2009) and described by others as the phenomenon of the product of a group’s actions being greater than the sum of its parts (Bennett et al., 2003; Copland, 2003; Donaldson, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009; Spillane & Diamond, 2007b; Spillane et al., 2001). The term “product” in this case has a
mathematical connotation, indicating the production of a multiplicity of results – more
than a single individual could manufacture alone. Bennett et al. (2003) explain that
“concertive action is about the additional dynamic which is the product of conjoint
activity” (p. 7). As an element of his Three Stream Model of Leadership, Donaldson
(2006) employs the term “action in common” to describe this concept of a group
accomplishing more than a single individual. Thus, the notion of concertive action, or
action in common, is much like the “leader-plus” concept of distributed leadership, which
recognizes both the necessity and the power of more than one individual leading a school
(Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2006; Spillane et al., 2009). Rejecting what Spillane calls
“the myth of individualism,” Spillane and other experts in the field of distributed
leadership explain that the “the leader-plus aspect” entails the interrelations of leaders,
followers, and their situation (Diamond, 2007; Hallett, 2007; Sherer, 2007; Spillane;
Spillane et al., 2009; Spillane & Diamond, 2007b; Spillane et al., 2001). Using the term
“configurational leadership,” Taylor (2008) similarly describes leadership as being
“constituted in the interactions of leaders, followers, and their situational context” (p. 21).
In this way, “leadership is situated in practice,” according to Spillane et al. (2003, p. 54;
see Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Distributed leadership: Leadership situated in practice as affected by the interactions between leaders, followers, and their situations.](image-url)
As I have discussed, communication and collaboration between all school personnel are essential elements of the distributed leadership framework. The study results of Spillane et al. (2009), for instance, show that the act of leading and managing schools necessitates the interactions of formal leaders, informal leaders, and followers. Through their research, Spillane et al. (2003) have found that distributed leadership commonly extends beyond leaders independently paralleling one another’s work or even dividing up the work. Instead, in schools, work “stretche[es] over the practice of two or more leaders” (Spillane et al., 2003, p. 538). The notion of leadership “stretching over” administrators and teachers alike is a key concept of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007b; Spillane et al., 2001). The term accurately describes the ultimate flexibility of distributed leadership, which can extend fluidly to varied individuals as dictated by different situations or events, rather than being rigidly hoarded by a single person or cabal within an organization. Another key concept of distributed leadership is the idea that leadership is more than the actions of separate people. Rather, leadership encompasses a network of interactions between leaders, followers, and their situations (Hallett, 2007; Spillane; Spillane & Diamond, 2007b; von Frank, 2011). Spillane writes, “It is only when we analyze the collective leadership practices that we can see how the practice takes shape in the interactions as distinct from the actions of individuals” (p. 56). As Copland (2003) explains, an organization that embraces distributed leadership delegates that leadership according to circumstances. “[W]ho leads and who follows,” writes Copland, “are dictated by the task or problem situation, not necessarily where one sits in the hierarchy” (p. 378). Thus, distributed leadership involves “collective leading,” an interdependence that Spillane et al. (2003) explain is the
result of “a reciprocal relationship between the practice of [the] leaders, each requiring input from others” (p. 539).

To put the distributed leadership perspective fully into focus, beyond understanding the roles and relationships of formal leaders, informal leaders, and followers, one must inspect the situational aspect of distributed leadership. Spillane and Diamond (2007b) explain, “Situation is both the medium for practice and the outcome of practice” (p. 10). Spillane and Diamond (2007b) continue, “[T]he practice of leading and managing is, to varying degrees, stretched over facets of the situation including tools and routines” (p. 10). Spillane (2006) defines an organizational routine as “a repeated and recognizable pattern of interdependent actions that involves two or more people” (p. 56). Examples of organizational routines include various types of meetings, from informal chats between individuals to more formal committee and team meetings. Coldren (2007) utilizes the term “boundary practice” to describe distributed leadership organizational routines, such as a school improvement committee or faculty meetings. “A boundary practice is an organizational routine that sustains connections between communities of practice or different constituencies [within an organization] and provides an ongoing forum for mutual engagement,” according to Coldren (p. 17). In addition to organizational routines, the situational facet of distributed leadership includes tools and artifacts. Spillane et al. (2001) define tools and artifacts as “externalized representations of ideas and intentions used by practitioners in their practice” (p. 26). Examples of tools include “observation protocols, student work, student test scores, data, and various organizational structures” (Spillane, p. 18). Artifacts, according to Halverson (2006) are
“the programs, procedures, [and] policies leaders use to design and influence the practice of others” (p. 3).

Using the terms “artifact” and “tool” synonymously, Halverson (2007) claims that artifacts are “the primary tools school leaders use to shape new practices” (p. 37). Halverson (2006) categorizes artifacts into three types: catalytic, compounding, and coherence. Catalytic artifacts provide a means for change to occur. In his study of Adams School, for example, Halverson (2006) cites the principal-organized Breakfast Club as a catalytic artifact because it provided normally isolated teachers with a regular meeting venue for conversation and collaboration. Eventually, the Adams Breakfast Club established itself as a boundary practice routine that united a diverse teacher group, developed leadership capacity beyond the principal and, ultimately, led to teachers’ improved instruction of reading. The second type of tools delineated by Halverson (2006), compounding artifacts, provide momentum and direction for change. Back at Adams School, Halverson (2006) cites new reading methodology and assessments as being the compounding artifacts that propelled change in teachers’ reading instruction. Finally, according to Halverson (2006) coherence artifacts provide the structure necessary for organizing and tracking change. Halverson (2006) cites Adams’ school improvement plan, meeting schedules, and regular data collection as examples of the coherence artifacts that kept teachers progressing towards their collective goal to improve reading instruction. Thus, as exemplified above, organizational routines, artifacts and tools can be used to distribute leadership into the teaching ranks and influence large-scale instructional transformation (Coldren, 2007; Halverson, 2006; Sherer, 2007). About the situational aspect of distributed leadership, Sherer asserts that “the tools leaders use are a
critical component of leadership practice, framing and focusing interactions among teachers and leaders” (p. 116). Within its various types and facets, therefore, the three basic elements of the distributed leadership perspective—leaders, followers, and the situation—provide a triangular lens through when one can inspect its practice.

**Literacy Coaching as a Distributed Leadership Organizational Routine**

Through my research into the perspective of distributed leadership and the practice of literacy coaching, I have ascertained that literacy coaching is a distributed leadership organizational routine. Spillane views literacy coaching as “another organizational routine that’s designed to transform classroom practice” (personal communication, October 3, 2011; see Figure 4).

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**Figure 4.** Literacy coaching: An organizational routine set into motion by the distribution of leadership to transform classroom instruction.
As discussed earlier, distributed leadership empowers teachers. According to Mangin (2005), “[T]he distributed leadership perspective imbues teachers with leadership capacity” (p. 2) as they are given the opportunity to interact and lead one another in efforts to improve their instruction. Bryk et al. (2010) assert that providing teachers with “new leadership roles will enlarge the collective capacity to support more productive and continuously improving schools” (p. 64). This occurs, in part, because as Mayrowetz et al. (2009) point out, through the practice of distributed leadership teachers can gain a broader perspective of school operations and, thus, collaborate with administrators and with one another in school improvement efforts. Joyce and Showers (1995), pioneers in the field of peer coaching, advocate formal leaders sanctioning teacher leadership and collaboration, providing teachers with opportunities “to work supportively together, help one another reflect on teaching, and help one another make sensible changes” to improve instruction (pp. 164-165). As Mangin and Stoelinga (2010) point out, the ultimate aim of teacher leadership is “collective improvement through the mentoring of colleagues” (p. 191). Citing Lee and Smith’s 1996 study, Warren Little (1999) reports that when teachers embrace a collective responsibility for student learning, student achievement rises in turn. Similarly, Allington and Cunningham (2007) assert that teachers’ shared sense of responsibility for the academic success of all students is a primary element in the process of school improvement. Darling-Hammond (1997), describing a South Carolina elementary school that “produces extraordinary levels of academic success” (p. 100), credits the principal who has “engaged teachers in decision making” (p. 100) and provided the means for staff members to “plan collectively and conduct peer observations, helping one another learn new practices” (p. 101). Datnow and Castellano
(2001), who studied the Success for All program that employed teacher coaches to support reform efforts, state that “a principal cannot manage reform alone and that the best support for teachers is a fellow teacher” (p. 226). In fact, according to Mangin and Stoelinga (2010), “[t]he development of instructional teacher leader roles has been a core component of recent education reform initiatives” (p. 1). Taylor and Collins (2003) assert that teacher leaders are essential to the success of literacy reform efforts. In particular, such teacher leadership positions as peer coaching jobs “are intended to build collective instructional capacity by providing teachers with effective professional development” (Mangin, 2008, p. 77).

Literacy coaching, through the distributed leadership perspective, can be described as a situational artifact, a catalytic and compounding boundary routine, that can both spark and propel a school-wide initiative to infuse literacy instruction throughout the content areas, ultimately, to improve student achievement. Taylor (2008) states that “coaching needs to be considered within the full distribution of leadership” (p. 26). In fact, “multiple leaders may generate an enhanced coaching effect through reinforcement and complementary leadership,” according to Taylor (p. 26). As a “new organizational routine,” literacy coaching has what Spillane describes as “the power to connect the work of leading and managing [change] with what’s going on the classroom” (von Frank, 2011, p. 4), and the classroom is where any system-wide improvement needs to begin, according to Allington and Cunningham (2007). Spillane asserts that at the high school level, literacy coaching connects teachers who “more than likely would not be connected before . . . in a very particular way around literacy” (personal communication, October 3, 2011). Thus, beyond a single classroom, Toll (2009a) believes that coaching can help in
“changing the manner in which schools are organized and managed by enacting leadership roles beyond those of the principal and supporting collaboration among educators” (p. 64). As a result, literacy coaches can serve as part of a school’s leadership team by pushing forward “reform initiatives” as they “assist teachers in fully implementing reform behaviors” (Killion, 2009, pp. 12-13). This can occur because the work of coaching, according to Taylor, “is intended to tighten the traditionally loose coupling between leaders and the core technical work of the school organization”: teaching (p. 15). As Marzano and Waters (2009) point out, tightly coupled organizations—with their focused goals and coordinated methods of disseminating information and improving skills are effective “regarding achievement and instruction at the district level” (p. 18). As an “interdependent component” of a tightly coupled organization (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 13), coaching “aims to distribute responsibility for school leadership across a broader set of individuals, thereby augmenting the overall capacity for instructional improvement” (Taylor, p. 15). Sturtevant (2003) agrees, asserting that literacy coaches “provide essential leadership for the school’s entire literacy program” (p. 11). Thehnling, Phillips, Lyon, and McDonald (2010) reporting on their study of Literacy Partnership coaches, have found that the coaches, as part of the school leadership team, are integral to “developing, implementing, and monitoring whole school literacy plans” (p. 41). Therefore, literacy coaching can be construed as a distributed leadership organizational routine that can expand leadership beyond the formal administrative structure. As leadership is stretched beyond administrators and over teachers, administrators and teachers alike can stretch up and grow into more confident, effective leaders.
Literacy Coaching as Instructional Coaching for Transformation

Literacy coaching is an incarnation of instructional coaching. Although there is no single coaching model (Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, & Supovitz, 2003), in general, instructional coaching is a collaborative process (Alber, 2008; Casey, 2006; Poglinco et al., 2003) that provides a means for organizational change (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Reiss, 2009; Rubin, Sutterby, & Sailors, 2010; Steckel, 2009; Toll, 2005). Knight (2006) defines instructional coaching as “a non-evaluative learning relationship between a professional developer and a teacher, both of whom share the expressed goal of learning together, thereby improving instruction and student achievement” (¶ 6). Instructional coaching was developed in the 1980s as an alternative to traditional professional development models (Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garnier, 2009). As described by Taylor (2008), instructional coaching engages teachers in improving their teaching in order to meet established instructional goals. Bloom et al. (2005) explain that instructional coaching is a method of “[u]npacking the knowledge and skills required to accomplish a task or goal” (p. 70).

Peer coaching, a type of instructional coaching first promoted in the 1980s by researchers Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, is a reciprocal process of two teachers teaming together to try new instructional methods and provide feedback for one another to hone their practice and better meet students’ needs (Poglinco et al., 2003). Also known as collegial coaching, peer coaching fosters teacher collaboration and self reflection (Poglinco et al., 2003). As collaborators, the coach and teacher work side-by-side to meet a specific objective for improving student achievement by implementing new knowledge or skills (Bloom et al., 2005). In this way, peer coaching takes the form of technical
coaching, which helps teachers apply new strategies, use them more appropriately, and teach them more effectively to their students (Cassidy, Garrett, Maxfield, & Patchett, 2010). Cognitive coaching, another form of peer coaching, helps teachers improve their current practices (Showers & Joyce, 1996). The co-developers of cognitive coaching, Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston, describe the process as “a way of thinking and a way of working that invites self and others to shape and reshape their thinking and problem solving capacities” (Center for Cognitive Coaching, n.d., ¶2). Bloom et al. call this type of coaching facilitative, as it helps teachers internalize what they have learned.

Literacy coaching encompasses the peer, collegial, technical, cognitive, and facilitative aspects of instructional coaching (Toll 2009a; see Figure 5.) Literacy coaches are a type of instructional coach in that they “partner with teachers to help them incorporate research-based instructional practices into their teaching so that students will learn more effectively” (Knight, 2009a, p. 18). Literacy coaches also act as cognitive coaches as they “engage in dialogical conversations with teachers . . . , observe them while working, and then use powerful questions, rapport building, and communication skills to empower those they coach to reflect deeply on their practices” (Knight, 2009a, p. 18). Literacy coaching, when performed effectively, can become transformational coaching, defined by Bloom et al. (2005) as “triple loop coaching” that “moves people beyond improved performance (single-loop learning), to developing new ways of thinking (double-loop learning), and ultimately to changing their ways of being (triple-loop learning)” (p. 85). Such transformation, described by Crane (2010) as “huge, sweeping change,” is possible when coaches develop “egalitarian, mutually supportive partnerships” with those they coach (p. 32). In general, therefore, a literacy coach works
with teachers to transform their literacy instruction and, in turn, increase student learning (Cassidy et al., 2010; Knight, 2009a). “A literacy coach,” states Toll (2005), “is one who helps teachers to recognize what they know and can do, assists teachers as they strengthen their ability to make more effective use of what they know and do, and supports teachers as they learn more and do more” (p. 4). Ultimately, according to Crane, “[c]oaching is absolutely critical to the change process” (p. 227).

![Figure 5.](image)

Figure 5. Literacy coaching: A type of instructional coaching that encompasses peer, collegial, technical, cognitive, and facilitative aspects of coaching, ultimately leading to transformational coaching.
**Literacy Coaching’s Theory Base**

Literacy coaching, as a form of instructional coaching, is founded on several theories. Camburn et al. (2008) assert that coaching derives from Bandura’s social learning theory of the mid-1970s, as well as from Putnam and Borko’s situated learning theory. Both social and situated learning theories, according to Camburn et al., “argue that learning is an inherently social act and that learning through social interaction can result in the acquisition of abstract knowledge and knowledge of how to engage in discourse and practice within a particular community” (p. 124). Taylor (2008) states that Bandura’s social learning theory “provides several insights into why coaching may shape teachers’ thinking about instructional reform” (p. 24). First, literacy coaching provides the opportunity for teachers to learn through direct experience, which Taylor calls “enactive attainment” (p. 24). Literacy coaching also gives teachers “vicarious experiences,” learning by observing the modeling of a lesson, and “verbal persuasion,” learning through coaching conversations (Taylor, p. 24). Literacy coaching stems, as well, from a “constructivist approach,” according to (Steckel, 2009, p. 14). “In particular,” writes Steckel, “teachers need to practice skills while receiving feedback to reflect and collaborate with other colleagues working to improve student learning” (p. 14). Finally, literacy coaching is based in change theory, which recognizes the complexity of educational transformation and the necessity of involving everyone in the organization in the change process, including “change facilitators”: coaches who work with teachers to affect transformation (Rubin et al., 2010, p. 96).
The Need for Secondary Literacy Instruction and for Secondary Literacy Coaching

Before discussing the particulars of the literacy coaching process, a case must be made for literacy instruction at the secondary level, as well as for high school literacy coaching. Evidence is clear that secondary students need literacy instruction and that content area teachers need help with infusing literacy instruction into their practice. Keene and Zimmerman (2007) assert that students need reading strategy instruction in order to learn from the wide variety, complexity, and sheer volume of texts they encounter in high school and, later, in college. Many high school teachers, though, have assumed that the need for reading instruction ceases in elementary school. The International Reading Association (2006) points out, however, that “children who are reading at grade level in the primary grades do not automatically become proficient readers in later grades” (p. 1). According to Conley (2005), “Many students read in a mechanical manner—just following the words on the page—instead of using active reading strategies” (p. 175). Keene and Zimmerman state, “Today, there is a wide body of research supporting the effectiveness of explicit comprehension strategy instruction and the need for students to become metacognitive” (p. 26). In fact, according to Hayes (2010), “[w]ithout consistent content area literacy support, many [older] students lose ground because of limited background knowledge and a lack of reading strategies to comprehend concepts introduced in textbooks” (p. 4). Traditionally, though, high school teachers have not instructed students in textbook reading, which Hawley and Valli (1999) state is “reasonable when one does not expect all, or even most, students to achieve at relatively high levels” (p. 131). Of course, as West (2009) points out, today’s governmental standards movement now requires educators to embrace the premise that
“all students can learn to high standards” (p. 121). This has occurred because, as Hayes writes, “[p]ost secondary success depends on the ability of [high school] graduates to understand and evaluate complex written material in technical and academic areas” (p. 3). According to Conley (2010), for college success, students “need to be able to read a textbook and possess the skills necessary to decode the text, but also to employ the strategies necessary to identify key concepts and terms and retain them” (p. 36). In fact, improving students’ reading skills directly ties to improving their economic futures. As Ferguson (2008) points out, students’ reading skills predict their later earnings: the better their ability to read, the more money they will earn on the job. Thompson and Zeuli (1999), therefore, assert that teachers must move students from “thinking to learn” to “learning to think” (p. 350), which includes assisting them to comprehend complex texts through literacy strategy instruction.

Gregory and Kuzmich (2005) point out that “[e]very teacher in every classroom in every school is a literacy teacher” (p. 95) because each content area has its unique vocabulary, reading, and writing demands. Consequently, Gregory and Kuzmich stress that effective content area instruction necessarily entails instruction in the literacy of that particular content. In fact, as Taylor and Collins (2003) explain, students’ academic achievement improves when they are explicitly taught literacy strategies in their content area classes. Yet, since the 1983 publishing of A Nation at Risk, reports Hayes (2010), “limited progress has been made in improving the literacy achievement of middle and high school students” (p. 1). In the early 1980s, Pearson and Gallagher (1983), along with many other educators, called for the teaching of comprehension strategies. Sturtevant (2003) reports, “By the mid-1980s most states required that beginning, middle, and high
school teachers take a course in content area reading for certification” (p. 6). Teachers were receiving little support in this area beyond a required certification course, however, because administrators often felt that they did not have the resources to support teachers’ improvement of literacy instructional practices (Sturtevant). Pearson and Gallagher were lamenting the dearth of literacy instruction at the secondary level in 1983, just as Sturtevant lamented it 20 years later when she wrote: “Currently, the majority of secondary schools and teachers do not implement curricula that adequately support adolescent students’ literacy development” (p. 6).

In general, secondary teachers need literacy training and support because most still do not have the expertise or confidence to help students improve their own literacy skills (Campbell & Sweiss, 2010; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). In fact, Rubin et al. (2010) report on a 2008 case study, which “found that reading strategies that differed from [teachers’] current practices and beliefs were the most difficult [classroom innovations] to implement” (p. 98). Additionally, Sturtevant (2003) states that “traditional secondary school instruction is extremely resistant to change” (p. 8). Sturtevant asserts, therefore, that “teachers must be guided and supported in a continuous learning process about effective ways to combine their teaching of literacy and content in the secondary school environment” (p. 1). As the International Reading Association (2006) claims, “Faculty members need to become teachers of reading and writing appropriate to their disciplines” (p. 2). Ultimately, when content area teachers provide instruction in the literacy of their subjects, students learn the content more thoroughly, and they develop their literacy skills as well (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2005).
Although research about literacy coaching at the secondary level is somewhat limited (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008/2009; Campbell & Sweiss, 2010), there is significant evidence that it is an effective means for promoting “learning enriched schools [that] support teacher learning” (Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 130). Toll (2005) explains that “literacy coaching supports significant change because it provides a foundation for teacher reflection, action research, collaboration, and informed decision making, all of which can lead to significant educational changes” (p. 6). Spillane asserts that at the high school level, literacy coaching “promotes conversations across disciplines” (personal communication, October 3, 2011). According to Rubin et al. (2010), therefore, coaches can act as “change agents” (p. 96) who help teachers from across the content areas adopt the new instructional methods they learn in workshops. Thus, literacy coaching is a means for building middle and high school teachers’ “capacity and confidence” to effectively infuse literacy instruction into their content area teaching (International Reading Association, 2006, p. 2).

**The Evolution of Literacy Coaching**

The process of instituting school improvement is directly linked to professional development (Hawley & Valli, 1999) and, according to Killion (2009), “coaching is professional development” (p. 12), providing teachers with the opportunity to work with other teachers to determine how to best meet the needs of their students (Casey, 2006; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010). Toll (2009a) reports that as long ago as the 1920s, teachers served as instructional coaches. In particular, according to Sturtevant (2003), these coaches were utilized to assist teachers improve their students’ understanding of content
texts. At the time, however, instructional coaching did not become common practice. The 1950s, with the launch of Sputnik, brought a new emphasis on improving student achievement, but whatever teacher professional development occurred mainly consisted of one-shot workshops (Joyce & Showers, 1995). von Frank (2011) quotes Spillane’s description of these traditional professional development venues “as taking a person, giving them new knowledge, dropping them back into school, and expecting them to transform their practice” (p. 4). Allington and Cunningham (2007) state that “little evidence supports continuing the traditional ‘one-shot’ in-service workshop” (p. 189). Nevertheless, Showers and Joyce (1996) write, “Educators [have] assumed that teachers could learn new strategies, return to school, and implement their learning smoothly and appropriately” (¶ 9). As result, as Driscoll (2008) points out, teachers’ professional development has usually “stopped short of actual practice of those strategies in the classroom” (p. 40).

In order to effectively improve instruction, professional development must be collaborative, job-embedded, and sustained—all characteristics of instructional coaching (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Mangin, 2008; Taylor, 2008). As reported by Campbell & Sweiss (2010), Joyce and Showers endorsed instructional coaching back in the 1980s as the most effective kind of professional development for classroom teachers. It provides extended, individualized learning opportunities that are in line with the complexity of teaching and learning (West, 2009). Cassidy et al. (2010) call Joyce and Showers “the gurus of peer coaching” who have touted the model as an effective way for one teacher to help another “overcome the hurdle of [learning to implement] a difficult new teaching process” (p. 17). Through a series of studies in the early 1980s, Showers and Joyce
(1996) consistently found that teachers’ strategy implementation “rose dramatically” when they received coaching as follow up to workshop instruction (¶ 4). The frequency and fidelity with which they applied new strategies was much greater for teachers who received coaching than it was for teachers who did not (Joyce & Showers, 1995). Additionally, the coached teachers also “exhibited greater long-term retention of new strategies and more appropriate use of the teaching models over time” (Showers & Joyce, ¶ 14). Knight (2009a) reports similar findings from R. N. Bush’s 1984 professional development study. Bush found that after a workshop, the rate of knowledge transfer into classroom practice was only 10%. Teachers who received follow-up instruction through modeling posted a 12-13% transfer rate. Those who experienced the workshop followed by modeling and practice had a 14-15% transfer rate, and those who experienced modeling, practice, and feedback after the workshop showed a 16-19% transfer rate. Teachers, however, whose follow-up activities to the workshop included modeling, practice, feedback, and peer coaching experienced an astounding 95% transfer rate. Citing a 1979 Training and Development Journal article, Crane (2010) states that without coaching following professional development workshops, “old behaviors quickly resurface and sustained performance improvements never materialize” (p. 22).

Despite such convincing findings regarding the effectiveness of instructional coaching, in the 1990s it was still relatively rare (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999). In 1993, according to Hawley & Valli (1999), Warren Little and McLaughlin called for an end to expecting teachers to adapt new teaching practices on their own and, instead, to provide them with the assistance of peer coaches. Thompson and Zeuli (1999) report that in 1993, Huberman expressed the need to stop teachers from the practice of
“bricolage”: working like “independent artisans, always picking up a new technique here, a new activity there, and a new piece of curricular material somewhere else” (p. 35). In 1998, the National Research Council called on reading specialists to “give guidance to classroom teachers” (Quatroche & Wepner, 2008, p. 100). The standards movement, which expects excellence for all students, has led to new standards for reading specialists to serve in leadership roles, according to Quatroche and Wepner. Specifically, Sturtevant (2003) refers to the International Reading Association’s 1998 Standards for Reading Professionals, which calls for reading specialists to “provide ‘leadership in literacy instruction and in professional development opportunities’” (p. 19).

The U.S. Department of Education’s 2002 Reading First report asserts that professional development should be the type of continuous, job-embedded learning that coaching can provide (Toll, 2009a). Although the practice of coaching is becoming more common, many teachers are still left to their own devices regarding the implementation of the new learning they have received in professional development workshops, a practice that Hawley and Valli (1999) bluntly call “ineffective and wasteful” (p. 128). For example, as recently as 2009, Rose (2010) reports on a study which found that “fewer than 25% of teachers indicated that the professional development activities in which they had participated during the previous three years had impacted their teaching” (p. 184). Thus, as Driscoll (2008) states, “the relationship between coaching and group professional development should not be thought of in ‘either-or’ terms, but rather in ‘both-and’ terms” (p. 40) because, as Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran point out, “[c]oaching facilitates learning that sticks” (2010, p. 4). It takes time to implement and to show results (Gross, 2010; Knight, 2009b; Toll, 2005); nevertheless, instructional
coaching “leads to the transformation of people and, in turn, the organizations they serve,” asserts Reiss (2009). In particular, literacy coaching provides teachers with targeted, content specific, job-embedded, individualized, and on-going learning (L’Allier, Elish-Piper, Bean, 2010; Casey, 2006; Cassidy et al., 2010) that “supports teacher professional development in a manner in which adults learn best” (Toll, 2005, p. 8). The result is the building of teachers’ general efficacy: their belief in their ability to improve student learning through improved literacy instruction (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008).

Although evidence is limited, literacy coaching has been linked to improved student achievement. The linkage begins with teacher quality, which has been proven to have a strong impact on student achievement (Cornett & Knight, 2009; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Sailors, 2010; Thelning et al., 2010). In particular, Cornett and Knight report on research that connects teacher quality to student achievement: a 1996 Sanders and Rivers study of two Tennessee school districts, which concluded that “the single most dominating factor affecting student academic achievement is teacher effect” (p. 196). Cornett and Knight further link professional development to teacher quality, citing a 2000 study by Wenglinsky of 15,000 middle school students, which “uncovered that professional development is an important factor in predicting higher student achievement” (p. 195). Bryk et al. (2010) report that “high-quality professional development in the context of a supportive professional community and where teachers [are] oriented toward improvement appears powerfully related to gains in student achievement” (p. 113). Thus, as teachers engage in effective professional development, they can improve their skills and, in turn, improve student outcomes. As Marzano and Waters state, “fostering high levels of pedagogical knowledge . . . can dramatically
enhance the quality of teaching in a district‖ (p. 55). The International Reading Association (2006) asserts that “literacy coaching—a form of highly targeted professional development—is a particularly potent vehicle for improving [students’] reading skills” (p. 3). Therefore, as an effective professional development support for teachers, literacy coaching ultimately supports student learning (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Casey, 2006; Poglinco et al., 2003), and it improves students’ literacy achievement as well (Toll, 2005).

The Roles and Duties of a Literacy Coach

Literacy coaches take on a variety of roles and duties (Bean, 2010; Feighan & Heeren, 2010). The literacy coach case study conducted by Camburn et al. (2008) found that coaching jobs fall into three broad categories: improving instructional capacity, goal setting, and administrative tasks. Bean divides coaching duties into three levels of support, beginning with serving as a resource for teachers; followed by analyzing student data and co-planning lessons; and finally, by engaging in more intensive and directed activities such as modeling lessons and observing teachers. Literacy coaches’ main duty should be supporting teachers’ efforts to improve their literacy instruction (Bean, 2010; L’Allier et al., 2010; Taylor & Collins, 2003). The guidelines of the International Reading Association’s 2004 position statement on reading coach roles and qualifications “make clear that the primary activity for coaches should be collaborative work with teachers focused on instruction” (Camburn et al., 2008, p. 123). They should work with teachers across the content areas to help them apply the instructional strategies and activities that the teachers have learned in workshops, with the ultimate aim of improving student learning (International Reading Association, 2006; Sturtevant, 2003).
Specifically, the act of literacy coaching can involve many different activities, such as leading study groups (Casey, 2006; Shanklin, 2010; Toll 2009a); co-planning (Blamey et al., 2008/2009); co-teaching (Casey); modeling lessons for teachers (Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Casey, 2006; Rose, 2010; Shanklin, 2010; Toll, 2009a); gathering, analyzing, and reporting on data (Bean, 2010; Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Gill, Kostiw, & Stone, 2010; Heineke, 2010; Ippolito, 2010; Shanklin, 2010); and observing teachers implement new instructional practices (Casey, 2006; Toll, 2005; Blamey et al., 2008/2009). Regarding coach modeling, Warren Little (1999) says that teachers are more likely to adopt new practices when they can see them in action. Rose agrees, stating that demonstration lessons are most effective for helping teachers learn new instructional strategies and methods. Perkins (1998), along with Thelning et al. (2010) and Bloom et al. (2005), endorse the “coaching cycle,” which involves a process of the coach holding a pre-conference with a teacher; working with the teacher in the classroom to model, co-teach, or observe a lesson; and, finally, post-conferencing with the teacher after the lesson. This cycle allows the coach to:

- discuss the purpose and focus of the teaching activity, the student learning outcomes to be achieved, the explicit instruction that will underpin the learning, the assessment criteria, the resources to be used, the connections to prior knowledge, and the ‘next steps’ in the learning. (Thelning et al., 2010, pp. 41-42)

Marzano and Waters (2009) state that “nothing will put instruction in the spotlight as well as teachers observing other teachers” (p. 63). Toll (2009a), however, cautions that coaches should act as observers only by teacher invitation. Showers and Joyce (1996) advocate teachers observing one another, but they do not recommend that coaches give verbal feedback to teachers because feedback can give the appearance of being evaluative. “When teachers try to give one another feedback, collaborative activity tends
to disintegrate,” state Showers & Joyce (¶ 20). Through their peer coaching studies, Showers and Joyce found that as teachers collaborate, even without feedback, strategy implementation and improved student learning occur. In contrast to Showers and Joyce, Cantrell and Hughes’ advocate coach feedback. Their study of the effects of professional development on teacher efficacy found that peer coaches’ supportive feedback improved teachers’ confidence in their literacy instruction. According to Marshall (2009), coach feedback is usually less intimidating to teachers than administrative feedback if the coach is not perceived by teachers to be an evaluator. Nevertheless, Campbell and Sweiss’ (2010) nation-wide survey of coaches discovered that while the majority of coaches were highly involved in collaborative and instructional roles, few actually conducted classroom observations of the teachers with whom they worked. In general, if coaches give observational feedback, it should be both non-evaluative and confidential, according to Blamey et al. Although some literacy coaches monitor and even evaluate teachers (Heineke), they should not serve in supervisory roles (Casey). Campbell and Sweiss’ coaches’ survey found that most respondents had little to no experience with evaluative roles. Heineke writes that her study of four coach/teacher dyads “serves to support coaching literature, which suggests that coaches should not be put in positions where they are expected to monitor or evaluate teachers’ practices” (p. 120).

Beyond engaging in coaching activities, many literacy coaches perform other roles, such as working with administrators to plan and conduct professional development (Bean, 2010; Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Casey, 2006; Ippolito, 2010; Shanklin, 2010), disseminating literacy research to both administrators and teachers (Taylor & Collins, 2003), providing instructional materials for teachers (Bean, 2010; Heineke, 2010;
Shanklin, 2010; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008), coordinating student services (Bean, 2010), working with struggling readers (Heineke, 2010), and applying for and directing grants (Heineke, 2010). Thus, while literacy coaches should focus solely on assisting teachers to improve instruction, they often are responsible for other duties as well.

**Traits and Skills of Effective Literacy Coaches**

In order to be effective, literacy coaches must possess “strong leadership skills” (Snow, Ippolito, & Schwartz, 2006, p. 37) because leadership in an integral function of coaching (Taylor, 2008; Knight, 2007b). According to Bean (2010), although literacy coaches do not possess administrative authority, “[t]hey are leaders by influence” (p. 142). “In that sense,” Bean continues, “coaches must be able to nudge, persuade, and inspire teachers to make changes in their classroom practices” (p. 142). The possession of strong content knowledge is particularly important for secondary literacy coaches, as they need to be able to assist teachers in a variety of content areas (Bean, 2010; Bloom et al., 2005; Firestone & Martinez, 2009; Frost & Bean, 2006; Killion, 2009; Knight, 2006; Knight, 2007b; Mangin, 2008; Manno & Firestone, 2008). Mangin’s (2008) study of teacher leaders in five districts found that a teacher leader’s “lack of content expertise made teachers less likely to use the teacher leader as a resource” (p. 93). Therefore, as Manno and Firestone assert, coaches must be able “to deliver the goods” (p. 52) by providing teachers with literacy instruction that is meaningful in their particular subject areas.

Content knowledge in and of itself, however, does “not prove to be a magic bullet” to make teacher leaders “effective change agents” (Manno & Firestone, 2008,
Thus, in addition to content knowledge, effective literacy coaches must possess an arsenal of literacy strategies and best practices (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Bloom et al., 2005; Casey, 2006; Frost & Bean, 2006; Knight, 2006; Knight, 2007b; L’Allier et al., 2010; Snow et al., 2006; Sturtevant, 2003; Supovitz, 2008; Toll, 2005). According to Bean (2010), the “gold standard” for a qualified literacy coach is to be an outstanding classroom teacher with “a strong literacy background” (p. 136). “A coach must have a strong knowledge base in literacy and instructional reading strategies to serve as a model and facilitator of teacher knowledge and practice,” states Sailors (2010, p. 7). The International Reading Association (2006) advocates literacy coaches having a master’s degree in reading or, at least, a reading endorsement. The survey of 147 middle and high school literacy coaches conducted by Blamey et al. (2008/2009) found that 48% held reading specialist certification, and 40% had earned master’s degrees in literacy. Knight (2006) states, “If instructional coaches are going to make a difference in the way teachers teach, they need to have scientifically proven research practices to share” (¶ 2). The study by L’Allier et al. (2010) of student achievement in a Reading First grant district found this:

[T]he highest average reading gains occurred in classrooms supported by a literacy coach who held a reading teacher endorsement (24 credit hours of coursework in reading); conversely, the lowest average student gains occurred in classrooms supported by a literacy coach who held neither an advanced degree in reading nor a reading teacher endorsement. (pp. 545-546)

Effective coaches need more than knowledge of content area pedagogy and literacy best practices to be successful (Knight, 2006). Beyond content and literacy knowledge, effective literacy coaches understand assessment and data analysis (Knight, 2006; Stoelinga & Mangin, 2008). “Effective [coaching] feedback is grounded in data,”
state Bloom et al. (2005, p. 46). Analyzing data with teachers helps the teachers determine what their students need and how the coach can help. Effective coaches are also experienced presenters, observers of teachers, and demonstrators (Frost & Bean, 2006; Ippolito, 2010; Poglinco et al., 2003). Thus, in order to successfully assist teachers improve their instruction, literacy coaches must possess a variety of knowledge and skill sets.

Toll (2005) writes, “I find that knowledge is to coaching like a car is to driving. It’s what propels the activity forward, but it won’t happen successfully unless the person behind the wheel is skillful at steering it” (p. 53). In other words, the literacy coaches’ personal traits and qualities play a large role in coach effectiveness. Knight (2007b) asserts that effective coaches possess self-discipline, an array of instructional and pedagogical skills, and outgoing personalities. Using these skills, Bean (2010) states that “coaches have a responsibility to develop interpersonal, communication, and leadership skills that establish them as colleagues who are in schools to support teachers in their efforts to provide effective and meaningful instruction for students” (p. 140). Thelning et al. (2010) report that the professional development of South Australia Department of Education and Children’s Services’ Literacy Partnership Coaches puts “a continuing emphasis on the personal skills and attributes that the coaches must develop to enable them to work effectively with a diverse range of teachers” (p. 42).

Successful literacy coaches are readily available to teachers. Mangin’s (2005) study of 12 teacher leaders in five districts found that the most successful coaches were visible. They “actively sought opportunities to introduce themselves to the teachers and offer assistance” through grade level meetings, memos, conversations in the teachers’
lounge, and getting involved in school activities (Mangin, 2005, p. 10). Effective coaches are also relationship builders (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Bennett et al., 2003; Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Bloom et al., 2005; Casey, 2006; Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Gross, 2010; Matsumura et al., 2009; Poglinco et al. 2003; Reiss, 2009; Supovitz, 2008). “I believe the best coaching takes place in a supportive relationship,” states Toll (2005, p. 2). Gill et al. (2010) cite “professional relationships” founded on mutual respect, trust, and accountability as being central to effective coaching (p. 51).

A vital trait to building strong relationships with teachers is the coach’s trustworthiness (Alber, 2008; Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Mangin, 2008; Manno & Firestone, 2008). In fact, trust is as important to coaching in particular as it is to promoting school change in general (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Heineke, 2010; Knight, 2006; Toll, 2005). Power and Boutilier (2009) write that “trust is paramount in developing successful coaching relationships” (p. 1). Megan Tschannen-Moran “defines trust as the ‘willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent’” (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 35). According to Bryk and Schneider, “trust constitutes a calculation whereby an individual decides whether or not to engage in an action with another individual that incorporates some degree of risk” (p. 14). Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran state that “high-trust connections” (p. 13) with coaches allow teachers to let down their guard and put aside their fears of vulnerability. “Trust promotes open, complete, and credible communication that facilitates problem solving,” states Taylor (2008, pp. 27-28). In agreement, Allington and Cunningham write, “For public conversations to occur, the school has to be a place where trust is high”
In fact, as Meier (2002) points out, trust “is at the heart of all learning” (p. 14). Meier writes, “There is no way around it: the willingness to take risks, ask questions, and make mistakes is a requirement for the development of expertise” (p. 14). Thus, allowing oneself to expose such vulnerabilities requires relationships of trust. According to Bloom et al. (2005), trusting relationships between coaches and teachers result when the coaches demonstrate sincerity, reliability, and competence. Alber, herself a coach, states that “it takes a considerable amount of time to build trust” (p. 23). It also takes a conscious effort, according to Casey (2006). “Go slow to go fast” writes von Frank (2010), quoting Megan Tschannen-Moran who advises coaches to show respect by communicating well with teachers and trusting them to make decisions (p. 3). Alber reports spending the first four months of her coaching experience trying to gain a resistant teacher’s trust by making “regular drop-bys to his class with resources (and sometimes with chocolate), several non-school related conversations, a lunch together, a joke or two, and sharing my own teaching foibles” (p. 23). Donaldson (2006) asserts that informal, on-the-fly conversations provide rich opportunities for forming trusting relationships.

“Accordingly,” state Stoelinga & Mangin (2008), “knowing how to facilitate collaboration, dialogue, and trust may be directly related to teacher leaders’ success” (p. 188).

Along with being trustworthy, effective literacy coaches are also respectful. Bryk and Schneider (2002) assert that respect is fundamental to the development of relational trust. “Without a solid foundation of trust and respect,” according to Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010), no coaching alliance can generate a productive and fulfilling change process” (p. 35). Coaches’ respectfulness of teachers’ expertise helps
them to establish trustful relationships (L’Allier et al., 2010). According to Firestone and Martinez (2009), teacher leaders are more influential when they are perceived as “respecting the autonomy and knowledge of the individual teacher, indicating that the teacher leader respects the value of the person in his or her interactions with that person” (p. 80). Steckel’s (2009) case study of 17 coaches found that coaches who exhibited respect for teachers and who “made people feel comfortable” were successful in getting teachers to collaborate with the coaches as well as with one another in peer coaching situations” (p. 19).

Just as effective literacy coaches are respectful, they are well-respected (Bloom et al., 2005). Being seen as experts in their field builds teacher respect for coaches (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson, & Slavit, 2011; Matsumura et al., 2009). “Authority in a community is based on trust, believing that the leader is someone worthy of being followed, not just a name and a title,” states Wood (2005, p. 58). Additionally, effective coaches command respect when they are readily available, open, friendly, and respectful of teachers’ privacy. They set boundaries of confidentiality, says Casey (2006), by avoiding “gossiping, divulging personal or personnel information, [and] venting about people” (p. 38). Manno and Firestone (2008) discuss one of their case study subjects, a middle school science teacher named Helen, who embodies the consummate, well-respected teacher leader:

Helen had developed nonthreatening, collegial relationships that promoted productive, positive discussion about curriculum and instruction. The other teachers viewed her as an experienced, knowledgeable teacher who was always willing and able to help them. Her colleagues respected her work with children and her expertise with science content and pedagogy. (p. 48)
Coaches like Helen develop strong professional relationships with colleagues because, as Bryk and Schneider point out, “interpersonal trust deepens as individuals perceive that others care about them and are willing to extend themselves beyond what their role might formally require in a given situation” (p. 25). Another common trait of effective coaches is that they are outgoing people who possess excellent communication skills (Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Matsumura et al., 2009). In fact, Crane (2010) defines coaching as “a communication process that focuses on connecting people to performance” (p. 34). In agreement with Crane, Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) describe coaching as “a conversational process” (p. 5). Beyond the exchange of information, deep conversations allow coaches to build “high trust connections” with teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 13). As Gill et al. (2010) assert, when coaches are proficient at holding “substantive conversations” with teachers, they utilize questioning, active listening, and reflective practice to target and work towards meeting instructional goals based on student needs (p. 51). Drago-Severson (2009) calls this process of engaging in meaningful, shared dialog “collegial inquiry” (p. 26). Heineke (2010) explains that coaches plan their coaching sessions to develop “strategic questions” that will help teachers explore their practices and discuss possible ways to improve those practices (p. 124). Bloom et al. assert that questioning is a key coaching skill for two major reasons. First, it enables the coach to determine the teacher’s needs. Secondly, through the questioning process, the teacher can “clarify his own thinking, develop interpretations, and discover new possibilities” (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 41).

Certainly, in addition to being a good questioner, an effective coach must be a good listener as well (Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Bloom et al., 2005; Ippolito, 2010; Reiss,
Toll (2005) asserts, “Listening is at the heart of all literacy coaching” (p. 64). Bloom et al. explain that “communication is filtered through our listening” (p. 34). “It is shaped by our biases, experiences, intentions, and interpretations,” state Bloom et al. (p. 34). Therefore, coaches must pay close attention to the act of listening. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) advocate “evocative coaching,” which calls for “listening more than talking, asking more than telling, and reflecting more than commenting” (p. 5). “By listening mindfully, quietly and reflectively as teachers tell their stories, coaches disarm resistance and evoke openness to change,” explain Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (p. 84). According to Bryk and Schneider (2002), exhibiting “a genuine sense of listening” (p. 23) conveys a respectful attitude that can build trust between individuals. Toll (2005) agrees that coaches should use silence, rather than quick responses, to both give the coach time to gather her thoughts and the teacher time to think through and elaborate on what she has said. When coaches do respond, they paraphrase, ask probing questions, and make positive presuppositions to guide teachers to further self-reflection and the discovery of possible solutions to their problems (L’Allier et al., 2010; Perkins, 1998; Toll, 2005). Listening empathetically “means that [coaches] demonstrate a respectful understanding of teachers’ experience. When teachers feel heard in this way, trust is built and readiness to change is facilitated” (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 119). Heineke’s (2010) study of coaches found that effective coaches did not dominate conversations with teachers. “Teachers need time to verbally ‘try out’ new concepts and suggestions,” writes Heineke (p. 122). Heineke continues, “If coaches dominate the talk during coaching discourse, opportunities for teachers to question, reflect, clarify, compare, and formulate an opinion are decreased” (p. 122).
Literacy coach Alber (2008) states, “[S]ometimes the job is simply about being a good listener” (p. 23). When coaches do respond, they are diplomatic but truthful (Bloom et al., 2005; Poglinco et al., 2003). Effective coaches are honest and fair, according to Toll (2005). They consider others’ perspectives and are careful not to contradict themselves. Coaches who have strong relationships with the teachers they coach can be rather bold in their feedback, but they must always look for opportune times, ask for permission, and provide truthful but tactful comments. Bloom et al. state, “Feedback is more likely to be received positively when it is delivered through acknowledgement of a coachee’s area of strength” (p. 48). Thus, through thoughtful questioning, listening, and responding, coaches provide teachers with a “feedback loop” that allows the teachers to openly share their experiences and work collaboratively toward further improving instruction (Sherer, 2007, p. 113).

Just as being an excellent communicator is a key trait of effective coaches, so is being a skilled collaborator (Casey, 2006; Blamey et al., 2008/2009; International Reading Association, 2006). Drago-Severson (2009) writes, “Teaming creates an opportunity for adults to share their diverse perspectives and learn about one another’s ideas, perspectives, and assumptions, as well as to challenge each other to consider alternative perspectives and to revise assumptions towards growth” (p. 25). According to Cassidy et al. (2010), Joyce and Showers designed peer coaching to be “supportive rather than evaluative, egalitarian rather than hierarchical, and collaborative rather than supervisory” (p. 18). Camburn et al. (2008) point out that IRA guidelines call for literacy coaching to involve peer-to-peer, non-evaluative collaboration. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) state, “When coaches are not in the position to ‘make’ teachers
do things, let alone to terminate their employment, [their] presence as learning partners can flower fully” (p. 48). Showers and Joyce’s (1996) studies of peer coaching found that teachers learned from one another as they planned instruction, developed support materials, and observed one another. L’Allier et al. (2010) advise coaches to “clearly communicate their intention to be a collaborator with teachers, not an evaluator” (p. 517). Coaches should let teachers know they have information, activities, and ideas to share, but that they honor the teachers’ expertise and want to work reciprocally to help each other grow (Toll, 2005). Mangin’s (2005) study of 12 teacher leaders in five districts found that the teacher leaders established credibility by showing themselves to be “open to discussion and recommendations” (p. 12). Coaches are more influential when they interact with other teachers “without positioning themselves as authorities, either in the sense of formal authority or more knowledgeable authority” (Firestone & Martinez, 2009, p. 79).

Ultimately, effective coaches are optimistic people who enjoy interacting with others (Blamey et al., 2008/2009). Because they must work closely with teachers who have a variety of personalities, perspectives, and needs, coaches must be flexible, patient, and resilient (Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Poglinco et al., 2003). According to Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010), effective coaches understand that “[w]hat works for one person in one place at one time may not work for another” (p. 24). Effective coaches are also compassionate and non-judgmental (Reiss, 2009; Ellison & Hayes, 2009). Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran explain that effective coaches express a “no-fault understanding and appreciation of [teachers’] experience” (p. 21). According to
Sturtevant (2003), successful coaches demonstrate an understanding of teachers’ aspirations and their frustrations as well.

Coaches attempt to help teachers meet their aspirations and find solutions to their frustrations through the coaching process, but in order to do so, as cited above, coaches must possess an enormous amount of content, literacy, and pedagogical knowledge and skills. Literacy coaches, therefore, must be continual learners themselves, committed to their own professional development (Bennett et al., 2003; Gill et al., 2010; Reiss, 2009). Shanklin (2010) asserts, “Coaches benefit from ongoing professional learning to increase their abilities to do their jobs well” (p. 39). In particular, coaches need training in content literacy as well as in adult learning theory (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Firestone & Martinez, 2009; L’Allier et al., 2010). Additionally, coaches’ professional development should help them grow as leaders (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). Thelning et al. (2010) report that coach teaming provides a powerful source of professional development as coaching groups “share their insights and successful practices” (p. 42) and “delve into particular aspects of literacy pedagogical and content knowledge” (p. 43). The Florida middle school reading coach study conducted by Marsh, McCombs, Lockwood, Martorell, Gershwin, Naftel, et al. (2008) reports that the coaches found the following professional development topics most helpful: reading instructional activities, methods for working with teachers, ways to effectively utilize student data, and navigating the roles and responsibilities of coaching. The coach survey conducted by Blamey et al. (2008/2009) found that coaches felt they most needed instruction in adult learning techniques. Marsh et al. report that the Florida middle school reading coaches supremely valued the professional development they received from “collaborating with other
Coaches and receiving mentoring from another coach” (p. 187). Holliman (2010) says about the effects of coach collaboration on the literacy leadership team of a northern Louisiana district: “The enthusiasm and synergy created by this group of passionate and dedicated professionals cannot be overstated” (p. 154). Overall, according to Knight (2007a) “[s]uccessful coaches embody a paradoxical mixture of ambition and humility” (p. 29). They are caring and compassionate people dedicated to the expansion of teachers’ expertise, the improvement of students’ achievement, and their own quest for continual learning to serve as effective literacy leaders.

Coaching as it Affects Teacher Change

As literacy leaders, literacy coaches have the opportunity to affect organizational transformation. Sturtevant (2003) states, “Key players in the change process are literacy coaches” (p. 1). As change leaders, literacy coaches are “possibility thinker[s]” who focus on action and results (Reiss, 2009, p. 180). They are adept at “helping others with change and challenging the status quo,” according to Bennett et al. (2003 p. 36). A major change that literacy coaching can affect is breaking down the isolation in which most teachers work because coaching can instill in teachers a sense of collective responsibility for student achievement and professionalize their practice (Taylor, 2008; Taylor & Collins, 2003). According to Drago-Severson (2009), the teaming of a literacy coach with a teacher “opens communication, decreases isolation, builds interdependent relationships, and supports adult development” (p. 71).

Teacher change begins with the literacy coaching process. First, teachers must understand the coach’s role. They must be clear, as Blamey et al. (2008/2009) state, that
“coaches aren’t the ‘fix-it’ people” (p. 320). As Toll (2009b) asserts, literacy coaches cannot “make problems go away” (p. 26). Rather, effective literacy coaches assist “teachers become more flexible problem solvers” (Toll, 2009b, p. 26). Literacy coaches, therefore, must keep their conversations with teachers focused on student needs rather than on the teachers’ perceived instructional strengths or weaknesses (L’Allier et al., 2010). In order to move the coaching process forward, Casey (2006) says that “we should start with what people can do and what is going well rather than what people cannot do and what is not going well” (p. 42). Toll (2005) begins her coaching sessions with what she calls “the question”: “When you think about the type of reading and writing you want your students to do, the kind of literate lives you want students to have, the kind of classroom you want to have, the kind of teaching you want to be able to do, what gets in your way?” (p. 46). Toll (2005) says that beginning with this question “avoids any implication that something is wrong with the teacher” (p. 46). This is a major principle of adult learning, a topic about which literacy coaches must be fluent (Frost & Bean, 2006; Snow et al., 2006; Toll, 2005). Another principle of adult learning which coaches must always keep in mind is that “adults are goal-oriented and want to problem-solve [the specific] issues facing them” (Casey, p. 28). Good coaches, therefore, differentiate their coaching based on teachers’ learning styles, personalities, background knowledge, and classroom needs (Kise, 2009; Gross, 2010).

To advance teacher change, literacy coaches should practice key adult learning principles, which Knight (2007a) refers to as “partnership principles” (p. 27): always giving teachers choice as to what and how they will learn, giving them opportunities to apply their learning to their classroom practice, and encouraging them to process their
learning through authentic dialogue and personal reflection. McGuiness (2009) cites “time for reflection” as necessary for the “deep and profound learning” that fosters continuous improvement (p. 70). Ippolito’s (2010) study found, however, that “coaches who take an entirely responsive stance get nothing done” (p. 60). On the other hand, as adult learners, teachers usually bristle against directives from coaches. “In survey responses,” reports Ippolito, “a majority of coaches indicated their belief that assuming a balance of responsive and directive stances [towards teachers] might be more effective in influencing teacher practices than operating from a predominately responsive or directive stance alone” (p. 58).

Through their coaching partnership, literacy coaches should aim to gradually release the responsibility of implementing new classroom practices to teachers. Steckel (2009) asserts that “empowering teachers is the ultimate goal of coaching” (p. 20). Thus, change will be embedded and sustained when the responsibility for implementing new knowledge shifts gradually from the coach to the teacher (Gill et al., 2010). According to Bloom et al. (2005), effective coaches help teachers “define and evaluate problems and solutions” (p. 61). The coach and teacher then work collaboratively to plan a set of action steps to attain their agreed upon goal (Toll, 2005; Thelning et al., 2010). Having a clear plan provides teachers with “a renewed sense of empowerment” (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 61). Pearson and Gallagher (1983) advocate coaches assisting teachers to move towards independently applying literacy strategies with the ultimate goal being the teachers eventually infusing the strategies seamlessly into their instructional repertoire. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) agree, explaining that effective coaches brainstorm, problem solve, and co-plan with teachers, scaffolding their assistance through
a gradual release of responsibility model. The coaches begin by providing one-on-one coaching tailored to the individual teacher’s needs (Kise, 2009). Through the coaching process, they help teachers identify what they would like to learn or improve, and “conduct no-fault learning experiments in the service of mutually agreed upon goals” (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 15). Effective coaches then assist teachers to actively access their previous knowledge and understandings to help themselves gauge “what is happening in the moment, what needs are being stimulated, and what strategies or approaches are working better than others” (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 12). Steckel’s (2009) coach case studies found that rather than trying to solve teachers’ problems for them, successful coaches empower teachers by assisting them to apply what they have learned to improve their instruction and better meet student needs. Steckel writes, “The coaches [in the study] believed that they should fade back as teachers become more adept at matching instruction and instructional materials to the diverse needs of their students” (Steckel, 2009, p. 22). Thus, literacy coaches serve the purpose of “providing another perspective and guiding analysis,” according to Driscoll (2008, p. 43). Through coaching guidance, teachers can experience transformation, becoming “reflective practitioners and independent problem solvers able to make the decisions required to meet new challenges and sustain positive change over time,” states Steckel (p. 20).

Literacy coaching does propel teacher transformation, but one coach cannot work with every teacher at the same time; therefore, the coach must determine which teachers her services will most positively affect. “Coaching works best when teachers are collaborating with a coach because they want to, not because they are forced to,”
according to Knight (2009a, p. 19). Casey (2006) states, “I am adamant that coaches begin by working with teachers who express interest in being coached and who are eager to be coached” (p. 46). Joyce and Showers (1995) call this the “lateral diffusion strategy” of commencing with “volunteer participation and rely[ing] on the success of initial efforts to spread the innovation” (p. 42). In the language of Schlechty’s (1997) five teacher types—from the most adventurous “trail blazers” who willingly venture into unknown pedagogical territory, to the “resistors” who stay stubbornly at home with their well-known teaching methods, and the “saboteurs” who actively attempt to destroy all initiatives—literacy coaches are initially most effective with the trailblazers. They also can get initial traction with the “pioneers,” described by Schlechty as those teachers who are almost as adventurous as the trailblazers, but need a little more assurance that the new learning is worth their efforts. Eventually, the trailblazers and pioneers will influence the “settlers,” those teachers, according to Schlechty, who need more time and specific direction to make pedagogical changes. Mangin’s (2005) study of 12 coaches in five districts found that the coaches sought out trailblazer- and pioneer-type “teachers who were receptive to their work and avoided teachers who were resistant” (p. 14). Power and Boutilier (2009), a principal and coach respectively, report that “coaches are most effective with teachers who are ‘almost there’” (p. 2). Thus, literacy coaching works best with teachers who feel “comfortable with the role of ‘learner’” (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 72), are at least proficient educators, and are receptive to working with a coach—in other words, teachers who are ready and willing to make changes to their instructional practices.
Barriers to Coaches’ Effectiveness

Numerous barriers block the effectiveness of literacy coaches. One is trying to support teachers in grade levels with which the coaches have no prior experience (Killion, 2009). Another is trying to support teachers in content areas which the coaches have never taught (Killion, 2009). Both of these constraints speak to the need for literacy coaches to have extensive knowledge of both pedagogy and content. A third barrier to coach effectiveness is “ambiguity of purpose,” according to Firestone and Martinez (2009, p. 81). Without a precise job description or clear goals, a literacy coach will most likely flounder in her work. Another major barrier for many coaches is having too many duties and not enough time to fulfill them all (Knight, 2006; Mangin, 2008; Marsh et al., 2008). Knight (2009a) asserts, “The single most powerful way to increase the effectiveness of coaches is to ensure that they have sufficient time for coaching” (p. 19). Unfortunately, however, as Knight (2009a) reports, his studies of coaches “indicate that less than 25% of their time is spent in coaching tasks” (p. 19). As discussed earlier, many literacy coaches are burdened with administrative and teaching tasks that leave them with little time for working with teachers. The constraint of time also relates to many schools having very high teacher-to-coach ratios (Marsh et al., 2008). Being burdened with too many teachers and too many responsibilities, ultimately, downgrades coaches’ effectiveness (Firestone & Martinez, 2009; Killion, 2009). Heineke’s (2010) study of four elementary coach/teacher dyads reports that the coaches who had the largest amount of responsibilities beyond the coaching of teachers “facilitated the least teacher learning” (p. 119). Therefore, as Poglinco et al. (2003) assert, coaches need time to coach. They should not be wearing “multiple hats and struggling under the weight of . . . numerous
responsibilities” (Poglinco et al., 2003, p. 41). The case study of literacy coaches conducted by Camburn et al. (2008) highlights “Sandra” whose “primary frustration was the unrealistic time demands of the position” (p. 136). Sandra stated firmly about coaching, “It’s definitely a burnout role” (Camburn et al., 2008, p. 136).

Just as lack of time can be a major impediment to coaching effectiveness, so can be teacher reluctance to work with coaches (Marsh et al., 2008). The reluctance of some teachers to be instructed by their peers is deeply engrained in traditional school culture, as pointed out by Mangin (2005) who states, “[T]eacher leadership runs contrary to the culture of schools and the norms of teaching” (p. 3). Her study of 12 teacher leaders in five different districts found that most of the coaches struggled with gaining access to classrooms. In fact, “gaining access to classrooms was the foremost challenge [the teacher leaders] faced in performing their job responsibilities,” reports Mangin (2005, p. 8). According to Mayrowetz et al. (2009), any efforts to distribute leadership are usually difficult because of teacher autonomy norms. “[T]he prevailing ‘egg carton’ organization of schools,” writes Spillane et al. (2001), “isolates teachers in classrooms” (p. 26). Teachers, for the most part, are used to and comfortable with what Hallett (2007) calls an “autonomy-based order” (p. 89). In agreement, West (2009) states, “One of the prevailing cultural aspects of too many schools is the culture of isolation” (p. 118). An isolationist culture, as Marshall (2009) points out, however, can only result, at best, in sporadic “pockets of excellence” (p. 8). Joyce and Showers (1995), therefore, assert that teachers need to abandon their traditional way of doing business, which involves “work[ing] alone, relying on themselves, unentangled for the most part by group decisions or the necessity to coordinate activities with others” (p. 38). “Traditional
arrangements of ‘cellular classrooms,’ individualized teaching assignments, and occupational norms of personal autonomy tend to obscure both the commonalities and the differences among teachers and to place both structural and cultural constraints on teacher communication,” states Warren Little (1999, pp. 238-239). Bryk and Schneider (2002) concur, pointing out that “few opportunities exist for teachers to work out personal differences and develop common understandings” (p. 30) due to the prevalence of teachers working alone in their classrooms. Thus, the standard egg-carton culture of teacher autonomy serves as a major barrier to the efforts of literacy coaches.

Still more blocks to literacy coaching effectiveness exist. An additional constraint can be teachers, particularly at the secondary level, not accepting the idea that they are responsible for teaching content area literacy. The “deeply ingrained schema” of teachers as strictly disseminators of information, as Thompson and Zeuli (1999) point out, “do not go easily” (p. 349). Additionally, as Joyce and Showers (1995) observe, teachers often “believe that adding a teaching skill to their repertoire is a lot harder than it actually is” (p. 167). Another major challenge for coaches can be the “us versus them” culture of teachers pitted against administrators, which is particularly prevalent in many high schools. According to Taylor (2008), “Increased teacher leadership may violate the egalitarian ethic of the teacher workplace and result in reduced teacher collegiality” (p. 20). Because teachers are used to autonomy, they may “resist encroachment” into their classrooms (Datnow & Castellano, 2001, p. 222). Still another obstacle can be teachers’ view of the coach as an “insider”—the teacher down the hall who some may envy due to her new position and others may not consider an expert. Conversely, teachers often avoid the “outsider” coach as well—a new staff member who, as a stranger, has
built no credibility with the other teachers (Mangin, 2005). Knight (2007b) points out that the leadership position that a coach inevitably must assume can force a distance between herself and her fellow teachers. Yet another reason for some teachers’ reluctance to work with coaches is resistance toward being told what to do. “Teachers do not resist making changes; they resist people who make them try to change,” state Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010, p. 6). As a result, Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran continue, “[a]dults who are forced to learn may comply, but they seldom master the learning or apply it for long” (p. 9). As cited earlier, teachers may also avoid coaching because they perceive the coaches as being evaluators (Knight, 2009a). Firestone and Martinez (2009) note that tension may exist during the observation process if teachers perceive the coach as monitoring or evaluating their behaviors. Thus, Bloom et al. (2005) state that coaches should not act in supervisory roles because “[i]t is almost impossible for a subordinate to establish a totally open, vulnerable relationship with a supervisor in this context” (p.112).

In short, literacy coaches inevitably face at least some teacher resistance due to a variety of reasons. The literacy coach case study conducted by Camburn et al. (2008) found that many coaches felt frustrated by waiting for teachers to invite them into their classrooms. They were also wary of informing administrators when teachers did not incorporate the coaches’ suggested changes because they did not want to be seen as “being evaluative” (Camburn et al., 2008, p. 128). Datnow and Castellano (2001) report that facilitators of the Success for All (SFA) reading program noted the progress of the teachers they coached, but they did not act as evaluators. Even though most coaches do not have formal evaluative positions, many have experiences similar to “Beth,” a coach
in a large urban district who often feels the strain of “walking the line between teachers and administrators” (Camburn et al., 2008, p. 139). “She explained,” to Camburn et al., “that as a coach ‘you don’t fit anywhere. You’re kind of out there by yourself’” (p. 139). Thus, coaches often have to deal with changing relationships with their colleagues as their credibility or trustworthiness may be challenged because of perceived affiliations with administrative roles (Casey, 2006). Toll (2005) advises coaches, however, to “make no judgments about the character of those who resist” (p. 120). For example, as Camburn et al. point out, some teachers simply feel that they already know what the coach is offering to teach them. Casey advises coaches against assuming that teachers who do not jump on the coaching bandwagon right away are simply resistant. Casey suggests that coaches ask themselves this question:

[A]re they resistant or just thoughtful, inquisitive educators who need more information, research, examples, experiences or support, who are reflecting the limitation of our professional development sessions, and who are trying to make meaning of the implication of our work with others? (p. 120)

Effective coaches will keep such queries in mind as they consider how to best make inroads with resistant teachers.

**Administrative Support of Literacy Coaches and the Literacy Coaching Effort**

Serving as literacy leaders, literacy coaches create “an essential link” between teachers and administration (Sturtevant, 2003, p. 11). Employing teachers in the role of literacy coaches makes sense, according to Mangin and Stoelinga (2010) because they have “a situated perspective on the core technologies of teaching” (p. 2). As a result, Mangin and Stoelinga (2010) continue, they are “the logical leaders in promoting and supporting change in teaching practice” (p. 2). To do so effectively, as Power and
Boutilier (2009) assert, coaches “need to work collaboratively with the school’s administration in supporting classroom teachers” (p. 1). Hearkening to a basic principle of distributed leadership, L’Allier et al. (2010) state that “administrators cannot do the job alone” (p. 551). “[T]hey need the contributions of others, including literacy coaches,” continue L’Allier et al., “to help them conceptualize, implement, and evaluate their literacy program” (p. 551). Knight (2007b) explains that while a coach should not supplant her principal as their school’s instructional leader, she “should be the right-hand person of the principal when it comes to instructional leadership” (p. 190). Thus, according to Holliman (2010), schools can build “leadership capacity” by fostering the growth of a coaching team (p. 154). Whether working with a team of coaches or as a single literacy coach, administrators must share the leadership of creating and sustaining a literacy program.

While literacy coaches are integral to leading and supporting a literacy program, they “need a good deal of support” themselves from administrative leadership (Toll, 2009a, p. 26). Camburn et al. (2008) report “that the effectiveness of teacher leaders in [their] study depended on the support of school principals” (p. 141). Similarly, Datnow and Castellano’s (2001) study of the Success for All (SFA) reading program facilitators determined that “the leadership of the principal figured strongly” in the facilitators’ coaching effectiveness (p. 242). Snow et al. (2006) state that “districts where coaching has taken hold as a primary channel for the delivery of professional development have been characterized by district leaders’ public commitment to the coaching model and by the provision of resources so that schools could hire well-prepared coaches” (p. 44). These administrators are effective organizational managers who distribute instructional
leadership indirectly by creating climates where teacher collaboration is the norm (Horng & Loeb, 2010). They practice what Drago-Severson (2009) calls “learning-oriented leadership” (p. 24). These “agents of change” (Spillane, 2006, p. 10) are “[p]erceptive leaders [who] seek, recognize, and use teachers’ expertise” (Kennedy et al., 2011, p. 21). They understand that the improvement of instruction is their main function and that instructional transformation is a long, involved process (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Elmore & Burney, 1999). Such leaders, according to Knight (2007b), share with their coaches an “understanding and vision of what coaching can accomplish” (p. 32).

Donaldson (2006) asserts that effective educational leaders facilitate change by providing time and structure for collaborative work. To illustrate, Drago-Severson’s study of 25 principals determined that learning-oriented leaders practice “teaming, providing adults with leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring” (p. xi). Learning-oriented administrators also “[o]rganize time, teaching responsibilities, and other aspects of teachers’ work in ways that demonstrably enhance opportunities for teacher learning,” according to Warren Little (1999, p. 235). Marsh et al. (2008) report that according to their study of Florida middle school reading coaches, “school administrators play a pivotal role in enabling coaches to work effectively with schools” (p. 191). Marsh et al. explain that “most case study coaches noted that they could not succeed in their work without the support of their principals and assistant principals” (p. 182). Matsumura et al. (2009), in their study of an elementary-level coaching program, found that principals’ high level of support for coaching efforts strongly correlated with grade level teams of teachers meeting with coaches, as well as with individual teachers being observed by coaches. Leader (2008) reports that when Principal Kathleen Flannery’s elementary
school piloted Collaborative Coaching and Learning, “[t]eachers were required to be in each other’s classrooms, observing, suggesting, critiquing, praising” (p. 179). The result, according to Leader, was teachers reconfiguring their relationships and opening themselves to one another. Ultimately, teachers learned new strategies and methodologies that “took teaching to the next level” (Leader, p. 179). Mangin’s (2010) study of 12 teacher leaders in five districts found that coaches were perceived as “less of a threat and more of a resource” when administrators made clear their expectations that teachers would improve their instruction (p. 17). Mangin (2005) states about an earlier study that “teacher leaders reported that the level of support they received from administrators directly impacted their ability to access classrooms and implement the teacher leadership position as intended” (p. 15). Thus, many studies underscore the necessity for administrative support of coaching programs in order for them to take root and flower.

One crucial administrative support for coaching is communicating the clear expectation that teachers will adopt and implement new teaching practices. As Knight (2007a) points out, when this occurs, teacher participation in literacy coaching increases. To prevent coaching from being perceived as a top-down initiative, however, Knight (2007a) advises administrators to not require teachers to work with coaches. Power and Boutilier (2009) explain that “principals need to maintain a high expectation for best practices while remaining cognizant of each individual staff member’s situation” (p. 2). “Our role [as principals],” write Power and Boutilier, “is to maintain momentum, to remain positive, to show compassion, and to cheer people on” (p. 2). Hawley and Valli (1999) state, “School leaders must create organizational cultures in which everyone feels good about needing to learn” (p. 140). They must build a collaborative culture of strong
relational trust to reduce teachers’ feelings of vulnerability and expand their willingness to embark on “the difficult work of school reform” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 140), for school-wide change, as Allington and Cunningham (2007) point out, is driven by individual change. Administrators, therefore, need to crack open the egg carton culture of teacher isolation. Joyce and Showers (1995) write, “The relatively solitary norms of teaching need to be replaced with a sense of obligation for collective action” (p. 41). “In good schools,” asserts Hallett (2007), “instruction is not a private classroom affair but a public practice that is accessible and open to all” (p. 87). Administrators, therefore, can have a positive impact on teacher participation in literacy coaching by creating a collaborative learning culture and a shared urgency for improving instruction in order to improve student achievement.

An integral aspect of establishing a school-wide culture of learning is administrators establishing themselves as lead learners. School leaders must have a deep understanding of the innovations they attempt to implement (Knight, 2007b; Marzano et al., 2005). Thus, they should be trained in literacy strategies along with the teachers, according to Taylor and Collins (2003), so they can “be knowledgeable advocates to the entire faculty” (p. 89). Joyce and Showers (1995) advocate administrators becoming “active consumers” of professional development in order to promote the success of school-wide initiatives (p. 186). Knight (2009a) says, “Coaches and administrators should ‘walk the talk’ when it comes to professional learning by continuously improving their own professional practice” (p. 20). Knight (2009a) writes,

> Principals need to support their coaches by attending workshops, . . . speaking frequently about the importance of professional learning and coaching, learning what the coach shares with teachers, and meeting frequently with coaches to ensure that their coaches share their vision of professional learning. (p. 19)
Datnow and Castellano (2001) report that principals of Success for All (SFA) schools who took part in trainings and meetings led by SFA teacher facilitators had more authority in the eyes of the staff than those who did not participate. As one SFA facilitator said, the principal’s presence made the facilitators’ roles “more official” (Datnow & Castellano, p. 241). Ultimately, as Crane (2010) asserts, “[c]hange is more effective—and only will be sustained—when leaders are its champions” (p. 223).

As alluded to earlier, providing coaches with resources should be added to the list of administrative supports for literacy coaching (Sturtevant, 2003; Supovitz, 2008; Thelning et al., 2010). Taylor (2008) states that “coaching is most likely to be effective when coaches are supported by a series of key resources: time, logistics, training, and expertise” (p. 28). For example, administrators should construct schedules that allow time for coaching to take place (Killion, 2009). Regarding the importance of administrators’ allocation of time, Joyce and Showers (1995) assert, “[i]f we build in [coaching] time for interaction with studying and thinking about practice, moving from norms of autonomy that were generated by the isolating culture into norms of collaborative activity is not difficult” (p. 174). Administrative support goes beyond organizing and facilitating coaching; administrators are also responsible for “maintaining the focus and purpose” of a coaching program (Joyce & Showers, 1995, p. 140). Therefore, administrators need to clearly delineate literacy coach responsibilities (Sturtevant, 2003). The middle and high school literacy coach survey conducted by Blamey et al. (2008/2009) found that 74% of the respondents reported their roles as undefined. Sailors (2010) warns administrators, “Coaches who do not have clear descriptions of their duties are not able to support teachers in ways that are helpful” (pp. 6-7). Administrators should also work closely with
coaches to develop goals and create work plans (Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Killion, 2009; Poglinco et al., 2003). According to Gill et al. (2010), the coach’s work must be part of a wider, whole school effort to advance student achievement goals. Casey (2006) agrees that “a plan with a unifying focus is essential” (p. 48). Toll (2005) explains that leadership needs to be clear as to what the organization’s goals are—what they are specifically trying to change—and communicate these goals to the coaches as well as to the entire staff. Administrators should also introduce a new coach to the faculty and explain the role of the coach to teachers (Killion, 2009; Knight, 2007a; Power & Boutilier, 2009; Shanklin, 2010). Without the staff clearly understanding the role of the coach, according to Mangin’s (2005) study, “teachers frequently misinterpreted the teacher leader’s role as a supervisory position that would include monitoring and evaluations” (p. 9). When teachers understand the coach’s role, however, they are less likely to resist working with the coach (Mangin, 2005).

A final aspect of coaching program support is administrators’ careful evaluation of the coaches and the literacy program itself (Killion, 2009). In addition to “[b]eing the driving force behind the innovation,” according to Marzano et al. (2005), effective school leaders are “[c]ontinuously monitoring the impact of that innovation” (p. 72). Toll (2009a) lists ways in which coaching programs can be evaluated:

- the number of teachers engaged in coaching and the extent of their engagement,
- the breakdown of coaches’ duties and percent of time spent in actual coaching,
- signs of increased reflection and informed decision making in teachers’ discussions of their work, increased collaboration among teachers, and signs that student success has increased. (p. 67)

As stated earlier, however, teachers should not be forced into coaching. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) state, “Teachers cannot be coached against their
will” (p. 132). According to the study conducted by Matsumura et al. (2009), the principal actions that most supported teacher participation in coaching activities proved to be the following: stating that teachers will benefit from the support of literacy coaches, trusting coaches to manage their time, meeting with coaches to set goals for teacher learning, attending training sessions led by coaches, and including coaches in school-wide leadership activities. Overall, in order for coaching to become a viable means of professional development within a school organization, administrators should provide a “coherent focus on literacy improvement” through the coaching process (Thelning et al., 2010, p. 42). As Holliman (2010) asserts, any literacy program needs strong administrative support for its full implementation to be realized.

**Literacy Coaching as it Applies to the Five Principles of Distributed Leadership**

Returning to the introduction of this chapter, literacy coaching can propel effective school-wide change by providing on-going, job-embedded professional development to help teachers improve their literacy instruction. As an organizational routine, literacy coaching fully embodies the five principles of distributed leadership, as delineated by Elmore (2000). The first principle of distributed leadership states, “The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instruction, regardless of role” (Elmore, p. 20). Literacy coaches, in their roles as teacher leaders, work in tandem with administrative leaders to develop teachers’ ability to effectively infuse literacy instruction into their lessons. Distributed leadership principle two asserts, “Instructional improvement requires continuous learning” (Elmore, 2000, p. 20). As a job-embedded practice, literacy coaching provides opportunities for professional development that
continue long after a workshop is over. The third principle of distributed leadership states, “Learning requires modeling” (Elmore, 2000, p. 20). Certainly, modeling new strategies and practices is a key literacy coaching function. Distributed leadership principle four reads, “The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution,” (Elmore, 2000, p. 21). As discussed earlier, literacy coaches share their expertise with teachers and administrators alike to improve both teacher instruction and student learning. Finally, the fifth principle of distributed leadership states, “The exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity” (Elmore, 2000, p. 21). In other words, everyone in the school organization is responsible for assisting one another to continually learn and build capacity for large-scale school improvement: literacy coaching provides a means for this to occur. While everyone is not a leader, as Spillane points out, the organizational routine of literacy coaching “engage[es] others [beyond administrators] in the work of leading and managing instruction” (personal communication, October 3, 2011). My study, therefore, inspects the work experience of the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School literacy coaching team members through the distributed leadership lens. The following chapter further discusses the purpose of my study and its methodology.
Chapter Three

The Methodology

The Purpose of the Study

Within the context of phenomenology, the purpose of my study is to uncover the essence of the distributed leadership experience of the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School literacy coaching team members. This team consisted of the school’s Reading Department Chair; six reading specialists who served as literacy coaches; four content area teachers who served as content coaches; and me, a high school administrator and researcher. The study’s definitive aim is to discover and describe “the essence of the experience” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 94) of distributed leadership as it was lived by the Birchfield High School literacy coaching team practicing the organizational routine of literacy coaching. “Distributed leadership” refers to the stretching of leadership and management tasks over multiple members of an organization and the resulting interaction that ensues between the leaders, the followers, and the situation (Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007a; Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2009). “Organizational routine” is a situational aspect of distributed leadership that involves a series of repeated interactions carried out in recognized patterns by a group of people. (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Spillane, 2006). “Literacy coaching” is defined as the act of teachers helping teachers to effectively infuse reading and writing strategies into their classroom instruction through such acts as explicating strategies, sharing materials, co-planning lessons, modeling lessons, and co-teaching (Toll, 2005).
By investigating and exploring the experiences of the literacy coaching team within Birchfield’s literacy coaching organizational routine, I have attempted to elucidate the effect of distributed leadership on our literacy coaching initiative in order to help us develop as leaders and develop our literacy coaching initiative as well. Before discussing the particulars of my study, I will provide an overview of the study’s methodology: phenomenology.

**An Overview of the Study’s Methodology: Phenomenology**

The “essence” of phenomenology: Its historical and theoretical underpinnings. My study is a phenomenology, defined by Smith et al. (2009) as “a philosophical approach to the study of experience” (p. 11). Meaning “to show” or “to appear” in Greek, a *phenomenon* encompasses any experience, from the mundane to the extraordinary (Smith et al., 2009). Moustakas (1994) explains, “The very appearance of something makes it a phenomenon” (p. 49). Therefore, anything one can perceive is a phenomenon. “Phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge,” claims Moustakas (p. 26). Moustakas continues, “Any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for an investigation” (p. 26).

First conceived of by early 20th century German-Czech philosopher Edmund Husserl, phenomenology is rooted in the belief of his philosophic predecessors Kant and Descartes that “knowledge based on intuition and essence precedes empirical knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Husserl advocated that the “lifeworld,” defined by Smith et al. (2009) as “the taken-for-granted everyday life that we lead” (p. 15), contains essential knowledge. Moustakas expands the definition of lifeworld to “the way a person lives,
creates, and relates to the world” (p. 48). Husserl, according to Moustakas, advocated the practice of “ideation,” studying one’s lifeworld—or the lifeworld of others—to turn “individual or empirical experience into essential insights” (p. 27). Husserl believed that one could accomplish this through “eidetic reduction,” the process of identifying “the invariant properties” of an experience in order to discern its “essence,” which is the ultimate aim of phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009, p. 14). As Moustakas reports, Husserl defined “essence” as “that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is” (p. 100). Smith et al. explain, “Husserl reasoned that [the] essential features of an experience would transcend the particular circumstances of their appearance, and might then illuminate a given experience for others, too” (p. 12).

Eidetic reduction requires the phenomenological researcher to pull apart discrete elements of an experience and inspect them without forcing them into a “pre-existing categorization system” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). In order to reflexively consider “every particular thing in its own right” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12), Husserl advocated the bracketing of previously held “understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories” (van Manen, 1990, p. 47). Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, coined the term “intersubjectivity” to describe “the shared, overlapping, and relational nature of our engagement in the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 17). Thus, Heidegger would caution the phenomenological researcher to be cognizant of the intersubjectivity of her relationship with the phenomenon she is studying and attempt “to ‘bracket,’ or put to one side, the taken-for-granted world in order to concentrate on [her] perception of that world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13).
Along with intersubjectivity, the phenomenological researcher should take into consideration hermeneutics, a “theory of interpretation” developed by early 19th century German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher. According to Smith et al. (2009), Schleiermacher believed that the hermeneutic “interpretation [of experience] is not a matter of following mechanical rules. Rather it is a craft or art, involving the combination of a range of skills, including intuition” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 22). In fact, as Smith et al. point out, the phenomenological researcher is part of a double hermeneutic, which involves “trying to make sense of the participant[s] trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (p. 3). In addition to hermeneutics, phenomenology is rooted in social constructivism, which posits the theory that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 20). Thus, as van Manen (1990) asserts, “[I]lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research” (p. 36). Another theoretical foundation of phenomenology, according to van Manen, is rationality, “a faith that we can share this world, that we can make things understandable to each other, that experience can be made intelligible” (p. 16). Therefore, “being phenomenological,” Smith et al. explain, “involves taking a quality which occurs in everyday life, honing it, stretching it, and employing it with a particular degree of determination and rigour” (p. 189). Through phenomenological study, the researcher aims “to reduce individual experience with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 58). Thus, on a macro level, “[p]henomenological research is a search for what it means to be human” (van Manen, 1990, p. 12).
“Being phenomenological”: The recursive nature of the phenomenological process. Although there is no one precise way to conduct a phenomenological study, Cresswell’s (2007) general outline provides a helpful roadmap: “start with an issue or problem, examine the literature in some way related to the problem, pose questions, gather data and then analyze them, and write up [the] report” (pp. 41-42). The issue or problem one inspects exists within a phenomenon, which Patton (2002) explains, “may be a program, an organization, or a culture” (p. 105). Studying the literature relating to the phenomenon, posing questions, and gathering data to answer those questions does not usually occur in a linear fashion, however. The phenomenological researcher, therefore, must understand that her research, data gathering, and data analysis will most likely transpire in an “iterative and inductive cycle” of heuristic inquiry (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). Derived from the Greek work “heuriskein,” meaning, “to discover or find,” a heuristic inquiry “refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of the experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 107). Throughout the heuristic search, the researcher “develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 107).

Data collection through interviews. While phenomenological researchers collect data through observations and documents, the interview serves as researchers’ primary source of information. Moustakas (1994) explains, “Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first person reports of life experience” (p. 84). Thus, through the interview process, the researcher discerns participants’ experience within the phenomenon—“how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). During “semi-
structured, one-to-one interviews”—the mode of interviewing suggested by Smith et al. (2009, p. 57)—study participants elucidate the phenomenon as they recall their experience. According to van Manen (1990), “[t]he interviewee becomes the co-investigator of the study” (p. 98). van Manen envisions the interview as a conversational triad between the interviewer, the interviewee, and the experience itself. Moustakas writes that through the interview process, for both the interviewee and the interviewer, “shadings are clarified; details are added; refinements bring new sounds, voices, and visions” (p. 72). In all, writes van Manen, “intense conversational interviews may lead to new levels of self-awareness, possible changes in lifestyle, and shifting priorities of living” for both the participants and for the researcher herself (p. 163).

**Data analysis.** Phenomenology is inductive analysis, described by van Manen (1990) as “[t]he interpretive examination of lived experience [which] has this methodical feature of relating the particular to the universal, part to whole, episode to totality” (p. 36). According to Smith et al. (2009), “There is no clear right or wrong way of conducting [a phenomenological] analysis” (p. 80). Nevertheless, the novice researcher must understand that a carefully constructed analysis is central to the development of a sound phenomenological study. Since most—if not all—phenomenological data is collected through the interview process, the researcher must also be cognizant of the impact perceptions play in analysis of that data—both those of the participants and those of the researcher. Moustakas (1994) states, “In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (p. 52). Moustakas further explains, “All experience holds within it essential meaning” (p. 69). The role of the researcher, then, is to analyze the data she has collected to uncover their essential
meanings: their essence. This requires the researcher to attribute to data two aspects of meaning: the noema and the noesis. “The noema” according to Moustakas, “ascribes meaning to what one sees, touches, thinks, or feels” (p. 69). In turn, “[t]he noesis refers to the act of perceiving, feeling, remembering, and judging” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69). Through the process of intentionality, which Patton (2002) describes as the recognition “that self and world are inseparable components of meaning” (p. 484), the phenomenological researcher analyzes data through both noema and noesis. Specifically, she considers the noema of her participants’ interview accounts, while simultaneously paying attention to the noesis of her reactions to the information her participants have revealed. The phenomenological researcher must understand that considering others’ perceptions of a shared experience reduces solipsism—the theory that one can be aware of nothing but one’s own experiences and states of being (Moustakas). According to Cresswell (2007), “[t]he researcher’s interpretations cannot be separated from [her] own background, history, context, and prior understandings” (p. 39). Nevertheless, as advised by van Manen, the phenomenological researcher needs to bracket out her “causal explanations, generalizations, or abstract interpretations” (p. 64) in order to conduct a valid analysis of the data.

Smith et al. (2009) advise phenomenological researchers to analyze one set of data, usually a single interview at a time. As a preliminary step in data analysis, the act of bracketing out one’s own experiences, feelings, and constructs is explained by Moustakas (1994) as being “in the Epoche,” an act which allows the researcher to look at the data with fresh eyes. Moustakas explains, “In the Epoche, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomenon are revisited, freshly, naively,
and in a wide open sense” (p. 33). Thus, the phenomenological researcher must practice self-reflexivity “to become aware of personal bias, to eliminate personal involvement with the subject material, that is, eliminate or at least gain clarity about preconceptions” (Patton, 2002, p. 485). Next, the researcher engages in phenomenological reduction by considering each participant’s experience “in its singularity and for itself” (Moustakas, p. 34). She does this through “the horizontalization of perceptions,” explained by Moustakas as considering that “every perception counts; every perception adds something to the experience” (p. 53). In other words, as Patton states, through horizontalization “all aspects of the data are treated with equal value” (p. 486). Once she has separated herself as much as possible from the data through horizontalization, according to Moustakas, the researcher can then begin the process of imaginative variation which allows her “to grasp the structural essences of the experience” (p. 35). The researcher accomplishes this through the act of data coding, referred to by Moustakas as “a method for understanding the objects that appear before us” (p. 47).

**Analytical data coding.** Just as analysis is central to the development of a sound phenomenological study, coding is central to sound phenomenological analysis. Defined by Saldaña (2009), “[a] code in qualitative theory is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Saldaña explains that coding is a search for patterns such as similarities; predictable differences; frequencies; sequences; causations; and relationships between events, activities, or people. Cresswell (2007) explains that through the inductive process of analytic coding, researchers search for patterns, which they form into categories that they develop into themes. Eventually,
the researchers extrapolate these themes into the essence of a phenomenon. Cresswell terms this a “bottoms up” process of “organizing data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (p. 38). Saldaña advises phenomenological researchers to consider the following aspects of experiential data for coding: routine practices, activities, and tasks; unusual or unique episodes; significant encounters; and people’s roles, relationships, and affiliations. Within these elements of experience, Saldaña tells researchers to inspect such “cognitive aspects” as “ideologies, rules, self-concepts, identities; emotional aspects or feelings; and hierarchical aspects such as ranking and social groups” (p. 14). In addition to interviews, researchers also may code “tangible documents and artifacts” as elements of the studied experience (Saldaña, p. 15).

Phenomenological coding is a reflective, reflexive process, which has no precise beginning or ending point. Once the researcher has coded one set of data, she begins with the next, but often returns to the first to revise and refine her initial impressions and findings. Saldaña (2009) explains, “[T]he reverberative nature of coding—comparing data to data, data to code, code to code, code to category, category to category, category back to data, etc.—suggests that the qualitative analytic process is cyclical rather than linear” (p. 45). “The challenge of this process of looking, reflecting, looking, and reflecting again,” states Moustakas (1994), “is to obtain true, accurate, and complete descriptions, both in the preliminary phases of viewing something, of letting it linger before one, and in the noetic phases of reflecting on the experience to discover its hidden meanings” (p. 70). Smith et al. (2009) explain, “Successful analyses require the systematic application of ideas and methodological rigour; but they also require imagination, playfulness, and a combination of reflective, critical, and conceptual
thinking” (p. 40). Ultimately, as Moustakas assures the researcher, “[t]hrough a process of continuing perceiving of and reflecting on [phenomenological] acts, we come to know their meaning” (p. 52).

**Report writing.** In a phenomenological study, the analytic process does not cease with the act of coding. Instead, while writing her report, the phenomenological researcher continues her analysis of the phenomenon as she creates a “synthesis of texture and structure” (Patton, 2002, p. 486). Cresswell (2007) explains that the textural description includes participants’ thoughts, feelings, and ideas about their experiences, while the structural description involves the context of the participants’ experiences. “From the structural and textural descriptions,” explains Cresswell, “the researcher then writes a composite description that presents the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon” (p. 62). van Manen (1990) asserts, “Creating the phenomenological text is the object of the research process” (p. 112). “Writing exercises and makes empirically demonstrable our ability to ‘see’” (van Manen, 1990, p. 130). However, phenomenological report writing is not usually a straightforward process. “[W]riting,” according to van Manen, “may turn into a complex process of rewriting (re-thinking, re-reflecting, and re-cognizing)” (p. 131). In fact, during the writing process, new themes may emerge while others fade away (Smith et al., 2009). Through this inevitably messy composition process, explains van Manen, the researcher clarifies her analysis as she “fixes thought on paper” (p. 125). The final text, according to Smith et al., should be “a full narrative account, which is comprehensible, systematic and persuasive to that reader who is coming to [the] study for the first time” (p. 109). Smith et al. encourage researchers to include a “large portion” of “transcript extracts” along with their “detailed analytic interpretations of the text” (p. 109). van Manen asserts, “If the
description is phenomenologically powerful, then it acquires a certain transparency, so to speak; it permits us [the readers] to ‘see’ the deeper significance, or meaning structures, of the lived experience” (p. 122). In short, a powerful phenomenological report clearly relates to its readers the essence of the phenomenon.

The Study’s Research Questions

The central research question. “Phenomenological questions are meaning questions,” according to van Manen (1990, p. 23). They seek to discover “the nature of lived experience” (van Manen, p. 42). My aim is to discern the essential nature of the distributed leadership experience of the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School literacy coaching team; therefore, this study’s central research question asks, “What is the essence of the distributed leadership experience of the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School literacy coaching team?”

Patton (2002) explains that all phenomenological questions are concerned with the perspectives of the various participants in an experience; thus, the phenomenological researcher must seek to uncover “the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of [a particular] phenomenon—for [a] person or [a] group of people” (p. 132). I developed the following sub-questions to explore how members of the literacy coaching team made “sense of experience and transform[ed] experience into consciousness both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

Issue sub-questions.

- What are the leadership experiences of the members of the literacy coach team?
- What statements describe these experiences?
• What themes emerge from the experiences?

• What is the overall essence of the literacy coaching team’s shared distributed leadership experience?

**Procedural sub-questions.**

• What understanding does each member of the literacy coaching team have of the school’s literacy coaching structure and its purpose?

• How does each individual perceive his or her role within the literacy coaching structure?

• What has been the experience of each individual as part of the literacy coaching team?

• What leadership lessons has each individual learned from his or her experience as part of the literacy coaching team?

**The Study’s Participants**

Phenomenological studies require purposive as opposed to random sampling. Smith et al. (2009) explain that a purposive sample “can offer a research project insight into a particular experience” (p. 48). As for the size of the sample, no particular number is “right”; however, Smith et al. recommend from four to 10 participants for doctoral studies. For my study, I sampled my school’s entire literacy coaching team because each member has a unique experience with—and insight into—the phenomenon of my study. In addition to me, our 2010-2011 literacy coaching team was comprised of 11 other individuals: the Reading Department Chair, six literacy coaches, and four content coaches. Although I did not directly supervise any of these individuals, I do hold administrative status as a director who answers to the superintendent. I, therefore, have noted Cresswell’s (2007) cautionary statement: “To study one’s own workplace . . . raises questions about whether good data can be collected when the act of data collection may

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introduce a power imbalance between the researcher and the individuals being studied” (p. 122). I am pleased that my professional and personal relationships with every member of the literacy coaching team were trusting enough that all consented to take part in my study—even a team member who left Birchfield after her teaching contract was not renewed for the 2011-2012 school year.

According to Cresswell (2007), phenomenological researchers should “try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied” (p. 18). This was relatively easy for me since I work with all members of the literacy coaching team. I understand, however, that because of the intimacy of the phenomenological interview and the possible sensitivity of the information divulged through the interview process, researchers must treat participants with great care and consideration. Moustakas (1994) tells researchers to give “full disclosure of the nature, purpose, and requirements of the research project” and to procure participants’ “informed consent” (pp. 109-110). I explained my study to all participants in person and in writing, and each of them gave me their written consent (see Appendix A: Explanatory Letter to Study Participants). Smith et al. (2009), along with Cresswell, assert the importance of sharing each participant’s data with him or her to give the participant the opportunity to interpret and react to the findings. Each of my participants received a copy of his or her interview transcript. Keeping individuals’ data anonymous within the published report is also essential, according to Cresswell and to Smith et al.; therefore, I have referred to all of my participants, other Birchfield High School staff members mentioned in this study, the high school itself, and other local school organizations by pseudonyms. Additionally, Smith et al. advise giving participants the right to withdraw from the study within a reasonable timeframe, usually three to four
weeks after their interview. The explanatory letter that all participants received gave them the opportunity to withdraw from the study within a month of giving their interview; however, none did so. Ultimately, explains Moustakas, “[t]he interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively” (p. 114). In an effort to provide a comfortable interview atmosphere, with one exception, I met with each literacy and content coach in his or her classroom, and I met with the Reading Department Chair in her office. I have had a good working relationship with all of the participants and know most of them very well; therefore, all interviews sessions were cordial and casual.

The Study’s Data Collection and Analysis Process

I utilized the following process, created by phenomenologist Amadio Giorgi (as cited in Moustakas, 1994), as a guideline for my data collection and analysis:

1. Interview the subject, using open-ended questions, about his or her experience.

2. Read each interview transcription several times, the first time to get a general sense of the whole description, subsequent times to discover more precise elements of meaning.

3. Pare away redundant information, elucidate constituent meanings, trace connections between the meaning units and relate them to the whole.

4. Determine “the essence” of the experience by carefully inspecting each meaning unit as it contributes to the whole.

5. “Synthesize and integrate the insights achieved into a consistent description” of the experience (p. 14).

I digitally recorded each interview and transcribed all of them myself. After each transcription, I wrote a page or so of notes of initial thoughts, impressions, and connections to both my own experience and to the distributed leadership and literacy
coaching literature that I had researched. I then read each interview over and over, marking the pages for patterns of experience that interviewees both shared and did not share, and for insights and anecdotes that they articulated and did not articulate. Types of coding that I used include the following suggestions from Saldaña (2009):

- **Magnitude Coding**: “A way of ‘quantitizing’ and/or ‘qualitizing’ a phenomenon’s intensity, frequency, direction, presence, or evaluative content” (p. 60).

- **Descriptive Coding**: Suggested for inventorying field notes, documents and artifacts, it “summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often a noun—the basic topic [rather than the content] of one passage of qualitative data (p. 70).

- **In Vivo Coding**: “A word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (p. 74) that can include “impacting nouns, action-oriented verbs, evocative word choices, clever or ironic phrases, similes, metaphors, etc.” (p. 75).

These coding methods helped me to identify salient quotes from the interviews, which I recorded on note cards. From there, I elucidated major themes regarding the interviewees’ ostensive understandings of literacy coaching at Birchfield High School as well as the performative aspects of their various literacy coaching experiences. As I engaged in the cyclical act of coding and categorizing data, I extrapolated themes, defined by Saldaña (2009) as “a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about or what it means” (p. 139). In this way, according to Saldaña, a theme “functions as a way to categorize a set of data” into such “ideas as descriptions of behavior within a culture, explanations for why something happens, iconic statements, and morals from participant stories” (p. 139). My ultimate aim was to develop “an ‘overarching theme’ from the data corpus or an ‘integrative theme’ that weaves various themes together into a coherent narrative” (Saldaña, pp. 139-140). I then followed a theme-by-theme descriptive structure for my narrative (Smith et al., 2009).
Thus, throughout the process of gathering, analyzing, and writing about the data, I practiced phenomenological reflection, the purpose of which is, according to van Manen (1990), “to try to grasp the essential meaning of something” (p. 77). Continued reflection from the original transcription phase and throughout the coding process helped me develop and maintain the integrity of my study, which ultimately will validate its credibility. Cresswell (2007) refers to Whittemore, Chase, and Mandel who have developed a set of questions with which to judge the validity of a qualitative study:

- “Are the [cited] results an accurate representation of the participants’ meaning?”
- “Are different voices heard?”
- “Is there a critical appraisal of all aspects of the research?”
- “Are the investigators self-critical?” (p. 206)

Additionally, throughout my research process, I attempted to exhibit the following traits listed by Saldaña (2009) of an effective and ethical researcher who is “organized, flexible and able to deal with ambiguity, creative, and tenacious” (pp. 28-29). Additionally, continues Saldaña, she is “rigorously ethical,” meaning that she is honest with and respectful of both the participants and the data (p. 29). The ethical researcher, according to Saldaña, does “not ignore or delete seemingly problematic passages of text,” and she “maintain[s] a sense of scholarly integrity, [while] working hard toward the final outcomes” (p. 29). van Manen (1990) reminds the researcher that “[p]henomenological engagement is always personal engagement: it is an appeal to teach each one of us how we understand things, how we stand in life, [and] how we understand ourselves as educators” (p. 156). My fundamental goal as a phenomenological researcher was to capture as closely as possible the lived experience of the literacy coaching team members
to discern the essence of the team’s distributed leadership experience during the 2010-2011 school year. I hope the results of my research will help each member of our team become a more effective leader, strengthen and sustain Birchfield’s literacy coaching initiative, and assist other educators in their leadership journeys as well.
Chapter Four

Findings

Ostensive and Performative Aspects of the Birchfield High School Literacy Coaching Structure

Through the analysis of interview data, this chapter uncovers patterns of experience within the organizational routine of literacy coaching, as enacted by the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School literacy coaching team. These patterns express the essential nature of distributed leadership as it was experienced by the team members. As described earlier, in response to the 2001 federal No Child Left Behind law that requires increasingly larger percentages of students to meet or exceed benchmarked reading standards, Birchfield High School developed a school improvement plan that calls for all teachers to infuse literacy strategy instruction into their lessons at least two times per week. This inclusion of all Birchfield teachers in the plan aligns with Elmore (2000) who asserts that “[i]mprovement occurs through organized social learning, not through the idiosyncratic experimentation and discovery of variously talented individuals” (p. 25). Additionally, it reflects Joyce and Showers’ (1995) assertion that “‘whole-school’ and ‘whole-district’ programs often achieve higher rates of transfer than do programs that involve small groups of volunteer teachers from schools” (p. 13). From research that Birchfield’s Reading Department Chair, Lana, and I conducted, we also knew that effectively instituting literacy strategy instruction across the content areas promised to improve students’ learning in all subjects (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2005; Hayes, 2010; International Reading Association, 2006; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Pearson &
Gallagher, 1983; Sturtevant, 2003; Taylor & Collins, 2003). Additionally, we realized that in order to effectively change teachers’ instructional practices, beyond initial literacy strategy training, we needed to provide all teachers with the support of on-going professional development (Campbell & Sweiss, 2010; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Gregory & Kuzmich, 2005; Hawley & Valley, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Knight, 2009a; Taylor & Collins, 2003; Toll, 2005; Toll, 2009b). Working as “co-performers,” defined by Spillane (2006) as “two or more leaders performing a leadership function or routine in a collaborative fashion” (p. 39), Lana and I, therefore, formulated a literacy coaching structure, which was endorsed by the Birchfield school improvement committee. We then proceeded to embed this new organizational routine into the formal structure of Birchfield High School during the 2010-2011 school year (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Birchfield High School’s 2010-2011 literacy coaching structure with names.
Like any organizational routine, the Birchfield literacy coaching structure provides the means for a group of people to engage in interactive, repetitive actions to accomplish a particular purpose (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Spillane, 2006). Birchfield’s literacy coaching structure calls for literacy and content coaches to perform such coaching tasks as explicating strategies, sharing materials, co-planning lessons, modeling lessons, and co-teaching (Toll, 2005) in order to encourage and support all teachers’ efforts to embed strategy instruction into their lessons. In essence, Birchfield’s organizational routine of literacy coaching was designed to act as a coupling mechanism to directly link governmental pressure to improve students’ reading achievement with the school’s effort to change classroom instruction (Spillane et al., 2011).

As discussed earlier, Feldman and Pentland (2003) point out that organizational routines have both an ostensive aspect—the routine as it has been designed to be enacted—and a performative aspect—the routine as it is actually carried out by various participants. The ostensive aspect of an organizational routine, according to Feldman and Pentland, can guide its enactment, account for how and why the routine is accomplished, and provide a common understanding of its varied characteristics and actions. As illustrated in Figure 6, from its ostensive aspect, the Birchfield literacy coaching structure distributes leadership horizontally from administrator and department chair, to literacy and content coaches, and to classroom teachers as well. Of course, on Birchfield’s vertically-aligned organizational chart, as Curriculum Director, I hold a higher position than Reading Department Chair Lana, and she holds a higher position than any of the literacy coaches, content coaches, or other teachers. However, returning to Gronn’s (2008) assertion that the practice of distributed leadership flattens the organizational
hierarchy, I designed this horizontally-aligned literacy coaching structural chart to illustrate the distribution of leadership that Lana and I consciously implemented in the attempt to develop a leadership network of a literacy coaching team moving in “coordinated action” (Spillane et al., 2011, p. 591) towards meeting our school improvement goal of bolstering Birchfield students’ reading achievement. I, therefore, placed myself in the same column with Lana on the Birchfield literacy coaching structural chart because we initially designed the structure together, and we worked in tandem during 2010-2011 to lead all of the coaches. Even though we initiated the design and implementation of literacy coaching at Birchfield, I did not place the literacy or content coaches below Lana or me on the structural chart because Lana and I made a conscious effort to distribute leadership to all of the coaches by providing them with training in both literacy coaching and the Gretchen Courtney literacy strategies (Gretchen Courtney & Associates, Ltd., n.d.) so that they, in turn, could train and support the rest of Birchfield’s classroom teachers in implementing the strategies (see Appendix B: Fall 2009-Spring 2011 Courtney Strategy & Literacy Coaching Training Schedule). Lana, the 2010-2011 literacy coaches, and I are all reading specialists who underwent more extensive training in the Courtney literacy strategies than the content coaches. Although the content coaches are not reading specialists, I did not situate them below any of the literacy coaches on the structural chart because, from an ostensive aspect, the content coach position was designed to partner with the literacy coach position in three ways: first, to determine how to best infuse literacy instruction into various content areas; second, to bring a sense of legitimacy to the idea of embedding literacy instruction into subject areas that have traditionally had little or nothing to do with reading strategies; and
third, to expand the number of coaches to better service Birchfield’s large staff of over two hundred teachers.

As explained earlier, Lana and I designed content coach positions for teachers of Algebra 1, Biology, Health, and English 1 because our school improvement plan asks all teachers of these freshmen core courses to be “direct instructors” of the Courtney strategies: explicitly teaching freshmen all the steps of the various strategies through modeling, guided practice, and independent practice (see Figure 7). Teachers outside of the freshmen core, called “strategy appliciers,” are responsible for providing bi-weekly literacy strategy application opportunities for their students. Lana and I chose the research-based Courtney strategies because they are both concise and inclusive, qualities necessary for school-wide implementation (Knight, 2009a). Additionally, they provide a common language of literacy, an essential element of a successful literacy program (Sherer, 2007; Holliman, 2010). Lana and I knew that the most effective literacy coaches have deep content knowledge (Casey, 2006; Manno & Firestone, 2008; Taylor & Collins, 2003; West, 2009); therefore, from its ostensive scheme, the Birchfield literacy coaching structure is designed so that each content coach—a subject area expert—partners with a literacy coach—a literacy expert. As a team, the content coach and literacy coach support both director instructors and strategy appliciers to provide effective literacy strategy instruction to students.
Thus, as Figure 6 illustrates, the ostensive Birchfield literacy coaching plan for 2010-2011 called for literacy coach Kate to partner with Algebra 1 content coach Jack, literacy coach Tara to partner with Health content coach Whitney, literacy coach Caitlin to partner with Biology content coach Geri, and literacy coach Kurt to partner with English 1 content coach Larissa. Each of these pairs, according to the ostensive plan, was to support teachers from the content coaches’ respective departments of Math, Health/PE/Drivers Ed, Science, and English. Literacy coaches-at-large, Melinda and Amelia, ostensively supported teachers from Birchfield departments that do not include freshman core courses: Applied Academics, Fine Arts, Social Science, and World Language. Finally, the classroom teachers are situated beside the coaches on the literacy coach structural chart, rather than beneath them, because we encouraged all teachers to
partner with literacy and/or content coaches to develop effective ways to infuse literacy instruction into their lessons and, thereby, to take ownership of the Courtney strategies.

As an organizational routine, therefore, Birchfield’s literacy coaching initiative was ostensibly structured to distribute leadership from administration, to coaches, to classroom teachers. While the ostensive aspect of the 2010-2011 Birchfield literacy coaching structure is, as Feldman and Pentland (2003) describe, “the idea” (p. 102) of how the routine would be carried out, its performative aspect involves the actual “enactment” (p. 102) of the routine in the day-to-day life of Birchfield High School. Feldman and Pentland contend that the ostensive structure of a routine provides a means to observe the “patterns of activity” within the performative aspect of the routine (p.115). Thus, Birchfield’s literacy coaching structure ostensibly enabled me to phenomenologically uncover the literacy coaching team members’ patterns of experience as they enacted the new organizational routine. The routine’s performative aspect is the focus of this phenomenological study because, as Spillane et al. (2011) assert, “the formal organization is rarely a mirror image of the informal or lived organization” (p. 605). In fact, according to Feldman and Pentland, the performative aspects of a routine can bring about internal organizational change “simply as a result of engaging in the routine” (p. 112). Additionally, no two people involved in an organizational routine, explain Feldman and Pentland, perform the routine in exactly the same way, in part, because the ostensive aspect of a routine necessarily involves the participants’ varied understandings of that routine, which inevitably affect how the routine is enacted throughout the organization. From a performative aspect, therefore, “routines display a great deal of
variety” (Feldman & Pentland, p. 110). Additionally, as Spillane et al. (2011) assert, the routines themselves can change the practices of both administrators and staff. In order to investigate those changes, Spillane et al. (2011) advise not only observing the practices but talking to the practitioners themselves. The following phenomenological analysis of the interviews I conducted with members of the 2010-2011 Birchfield literacy coaching team, therefore, uncovers the team members’ ostensive understandings of and their performative experiences within the organizational routine of literacy coaching at Birchfield High School.

Patterns of Experience

An introduction to Birchfield High School’s literacy coaching team members.

As stated previously, I interviewed Birchfield High School’s entire literacy coaching team: the Reading Department Chair, the six literacy coaches, and the four content coaches. Except for my interview of Reading Department Chair Lana, which I conducted on February 9, 2011, I interviewed all other members of Birchfield’s literacy coaching team between May 24 and June 2, 2011. To heighten the participants’ comfort level with the interview process, I conducted the interviews in the team members’ own spaces—Lana’s in her office, and the coaches’ in their classrooms. The only exception to this was Whitney’s interview, which we held in my office as a convenience to her. Each of these semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. In addition to asking the six main questions that I had prepared ahead of time (see Appendix A: Explanatory Letter to Study Participants), I peppered in follow-up questions and a few of my own comments in order to glean more information from the interviewees, as well as to make the interview
process more conversational and, therefore, more comfortable for both of us. Only Geri expressed any reticence about the interview process, but I found out as we began the interview that she was only nervous about being tape recorded. Once we got started, and the recorder was out of sight, Geri seemed to be at ease, as was everyone else whom I interviewed.

I first asked the interviewees to tell me about their backgrounds as educators and their leadership experiences outside of our literacy coaching initiative (see Appendix C: Overview of Birchfield Literacy Coaching Team Members’ Backgrounds as Educators). The following background summaries consist of each team member’s own words combined with my narrative. I begin with Lana. Next, I share in alphabetical order by first name the literacy coaches’ background summaries, and finish with the content coaches’ background summaries, also in alphabetical order by first name.

**Lana, Reading Department Chair.** In 2010-2011, Birchfield’s Reading Department Chair, Lana, served as the direct supervisor of all six literacy coaches, who were all members of the Reading Department. Lana, who has master’s degrees in reading and educational administration, also co-led with me the entire literacy coaching team. At the time of our interview, Lana was in her 11th year in education and her third year at Birchfield where, in addition to carrying out her department chair duties, she taught two reading classes. Lana had previously taught reading and served as reading specialist at nearby Rush High School for 3 years. Prior to her Rush tenure, she taught first and second grades for 5 years in a local elementary district.

In comparison with the other members of the literacy coaching team, Lana was not senior in her years as an educator; however, she did have more experience with
leading a reading initiative than any of the coaches. Lana’s leadership experience began when she was teaching at the elementary level. Just as she had finished her master’s degree in reading, Lana’s elementary district brought in Gretchen Courtney to provide literacy strategy training for all of the teachers. Lana told me, “I truly felt I knew everything. I had just finished my master’s in reading, and [I wondered], ‘What could this lady possibly tell me that I didn’t already know?’” To Lana’s surprise, however, she “learned a whole lot” from Gretchen Courtney. Lana reported, “I truly learned not to rely so heavily on my basil and the content of the basil. [Instead,] I went to relying heavily on the strategies and using the basil to teach those strategies.” Lana continued, “I kind of led that initiative with a couple of my team members and saw a great deal of success in doing so.” At first, Lana and her colleagues were infusing strategy instruction into shared and guided reading, but that soon expanded to incorporating strategy instruction into other content areas, such as science and social studies. Lana then worked with her school’s reading specialist in a coaching relationship, team teaching strategy lessons. Lana gained more experience with both teaming, as well as with developing curriculum, as she worked with other second grade teachers to match the literacy strategies they had learned to texts that would most effectively facilitate the instruction of those strategies. Ignoring her school’s resistant teachers, whom Lana referred to as “naysayers,” she and her second grade team members “really embraced it [literacy strategy instruction].” “We even had fun with it!” Lana told me. In fact, I noted that Lana enthusiastically used the term “fun” three times during our interview as she described the collaborative work she and her colleagues engaged in through what Lana described as “team teaching, co-planning, and really infusing literacy into all classes.” “We really did as much as we could,” said Lana.
As she noted, becoming confident with literacy strategy instruction was “not an easy task” because such instruction was not part of either Lana’s teacher training or her reading training. Nevertheless, Lana said, “I chose to embrace them [the strategies] and see the value when teaching my kids, and that came from a lot of reading and researching on my own.” When I asked Lana, “Would you consider that a leadership experience?” she answered affirmatively: “I was definitely leading a reading initiative.” As a result of her efforts, Lana reported experiencing a high level of job satisfaction: “I think I earned a lot of respect from administrators and colleagues, and was kind of viewed as more of an expert with the strategies, so it was good.”

Lana left her elementary district because she wanted to pursue an administrative position. She explained that “there wasn’t a position that was going to take me any higher, so I knew I was going to have to leave if I wanted to move up at all, and I did.” Lana’s move led her to Rush High School and the position that I had recently vacated as the school’s reading specialist who also taught reading classes. Lana said, “I was very interested in reading,” and she was excited about the prospect of working at the high school level in a district that she thought was already infusing literacy instruction into all content areas. Lana reported, however, that she was disappointed to find only “isolated reading classes” and the “true belief of the staff that reading happened in reading, and nobody else was responsible for it.” Rather than resigning herself to acceptance of the Rush content teachers’ negative attitudes towards literacy instruction, however, Lana said, “I worked really hard to try and change that whole belief and perception.” Although her reading specialist duties did not include literacy coaching, Lana took on that role unofficially in what she called an “if you want” manner. Lana related, “There was no
pressure from anyone. I just kept a log of who I met with and submitted that to the building principal every couple of months or so, so he was informed.” Regarding her unofficial coaching role, Lana said she co-planned with and modeled lessons for interested teachers. “We started small,” stated Lana, by helping teachers develop lessons that incorporated strategies for tackling ACT reading passages. At Rush, Lana also worked with her fellow reading teachers: “We revamped the reading curriculum to make it more strategy based.” Overall, Lana felt she made a positive impact on expanding reading instruction in both Rush’s reading classes and its content areas by coaching interested teachers and conducting staff trainings in literacy strategy instruction.

Although Lana called the entire process both “challenging” and “a struggle”—a term Lana used three times in this portion of our interview—she reported feeling satisfied in her work to lead and support the Rush reading team, as well to increase teachers’ awareness of the need for literacy strategy instruction and the ability of some to deliver that instruction.

Looking to further expand her leadership role, Lana once again followed me into a position when she took the job of Birchfield High School’s Reading Department Chair in 2008. Lana described her first year like this:

When I came in, as far as leadership goes, I stepped into a position that had really already been established. I had particular roles to fulfill. I worked with teachers [in my department] on revamping final exams and understanding the curriculum, and we had a lot of managerial tasks that I participated in my first year. I was just kind of learning the ropes and learning the people.

Over the next 3 years, Lana led the Birchfield Reading Department in completely overhauling the reading curriculum to focus on literacy strategy instruction. She also led many other Birchfield initiatives, including the institution of PLC teams in the Reading
Department, revising and teaching Birchfield’s standardized test prep program, assisting her fellow department chairs in aligning their curriculum to ACT College Readiness Standards, and co-teaching a Biology/Reading course for low-performing freshmen. Thus, throughout Lana’s 11 years in education, she reported willingly taking on and, later, actively seeking out leadership positions in an effort to improve literacy instruction at both the elementary and high school levels.

**Amelia, literacy coach-at-large, East Building.** Of the 2010-2011 literacy coaches, Amelia had the longest tenure at Birchfield High School. Hired as a reading specialist, Amelia came to Birchfield in 2004, along with another reading specialist and me, Birchfield’s new Reading Coordinator. The three of us teamed with three other Birchfield teachers that summer to write the curriculum for a series of reading courses mandated by a new Birchfield Board of Education policy. In addition to the 7 years that Amelia taught reading at Birchfield, she also taught English and Psychology for four and a half years at nearby Bard High School. Additionally, Amelia taught fifth grade for one semester in another district, so at the time of our interview, her total years in education added up to 12. In addition to her master’s degree in reading, Amelia also earned a master’s degree in educational administration while at Birchfield.

Like Lana, Amelia had a collaborative teaching experience at the elementary level. She told me that she and the other fifth grade teacher divided teaching duties. Amelia related, “I taught science and social studies; she taught English and language arts.” As a result, Amelia and her colleague often co-planned. For example, Amelia explained, “[I]f they [the students] were learning about the US presidents [in social studies], we would read a book about the US presidents in language arts.” The two
teachers also regularly brought their classes together to co-teach lessons. In contrast, as Bard High School’s sole Psychology teacher, Amelia worked in isolation. “[I]t was a lot of kind of doing it on your own,” Amelia explained. Although she did not collaborate much with her English teacher colleagues either, Amelia did team with several other teachers to revise Bard’s freshman English curriculum. Amelia related, “Four or five of us [English teachers] decided to redo some of the curriculum . . . , so we went to our department chair and said, ‘This is not working, especially for the Title [I] classes.’” When you have repeaters,” Amelia continued, “you can’t keep giving them Romeo and Juliet. Some of these kids were in here for the fourth time. They could teach it!” In addition to the English curriculum work she did at Bard, Amelia told me that she also “created a lot of the Psychology curriculum to align it to the College Board Standards.” In addition, while at Bard, Amelia was appointed to the role of coordinating publicity and technology for a multi-year grant-funded program. While serving as Bard’s head freshman softball coach, Amelia and her assistant coach also developed a conditioning program for the team. Amelia shared with me several leadership positions that she took on at Birchfield in addition to literacy coaching, including coaching softball and tennis, serving as a member of Birchfield’s technology committee, and mentoring three new reading teachers.

Outside of school, Amelia reported holding leadership positions in her sorority, both as a college student and after she had graduated. At the time of our interview, Amelia was serving as a province officer, which entailed working with two universities’ chapters to train sorority officers in leadership. Amelia described the training as “how to be part of a team—how to be part of . . . a group of officers to lead a group of women” in
such areas as budgeting, conflict resolution, motivating people, dealing with risky situations, time management, fund raising and event planning. When in college, in addition to being active in her sorority, Amelia wrote for her school’s newspaper, served on student government, and was a Eucharistic minister at her church. As an adult, Amelia volunteered for an area homeless shelter and the ASPCEA as well. In general, Amelia reported holding a variety of leadership positions both in and out of her career in education. On a leadership scale of one to four, with one being a novice and four being an expert, Amelia rated herself as a three: “I’m not an expert on leadership,” she said, “but I think I have had and [have] been asked to serve in a variety of leadership roles, so maybe [I rate as a] three with plenty of room to learn and grow.”

_Caitlin, literacy coach, science._ At the time of our interview, Caitlin was finishing her fifth year of teaching. Armed with an undergrad degree in English secondary education, Caitlin started her teaching career at nearby Lockview High School where she had completed her student teaching experience. During her first year at Lockview, Caitlin related that she taught a “reading strategies/study hall program,” which involved “a lot of ACT prep.” Caitlin also co-taught a freshman-level reading class that year. Over the next 2 years, while she worked on her master’s degree in reading, Caitlin taught English. After 3 years at Lockview, now a certified reading specialist, Caitlin joined Birchfield’s reading department where she taught both reading and a study skills course.

When I asked Caitlin, “Did you have any type of leadership roles when you were at Lockview?” Caitlin answered, “No.” In regards to leadership roles she had experienced prior to coming to Lockview, Caitlin shared that she had co-chaired an English and
literacy conference sponsored by her university. “I don’t know how much of a leadership position that was, but [pause] it kind of was, I guess,” recalled Caitlin. At Birchfield, outside of being a literacy coach, Caitlin served as a PLC team leader for the Reading Department during 2009-2010. I asked Caitlin about that experience: “As a leader [of your PLC team], what challenges did you face, or what worked, what didn’t work?” Caitlin responded, “I really didn’t encounter any challenges. I thought it was more kind of laid back, and everyone was very receptive to the things we were discussing.” Caitlin then went on to explain that she did need to assert some leadership to keep the group on task: “[S]ometimes it was me trying to get people to talk about the situation at hand, but it really wasn’t an issue.” One other Birchfield leadership role that Caitlin reported holding was being a member of the principal’s advisory committee during 2009-2010. Summarizing Caitlin’s leadership background, I stated, “[Y]ou have not had a lot of experience, but you’ve had a taste of leadership.” In agreement, Caitlin affirmed, “Yes.”

**Kate, literacy coach, Math.** Prior to joining the Birchfield Reading Department in 2007, Kate taught high school-level English for 2 years in a full-time capacity and community college-level reading for 6 years in a part-time capacity. Thus, like Amelia, Kate had spent a total of 12 years in education. In addition to holding a master’s degree in reading, in 2010, Kate also earned a master’s degree in library science.

The first leadership position that Kate mentioned related to her position in her family: “Leadership?” she asked as she thought about my query. “I mean, mother. I mean that’s a leadership role, absolutely.” Outside of her work at school, Kate mentioned coaching her daughter’s cheerleading team and community softball team. At Birchfield, Kate related that she was a member of the school improvement committee for 2 years,
and she mentored two new reading teachers. Additionally, Kate told me that she worked closely with Lana to revise the reading curriculum to incorporate the Courtney literacy strategies. She then volunteered to pilot the new curriculum in the 2009-2010 school year. Kate invested quite a bit of time and effort into the curriculum revision and, therefore, wanted it to thrive. “[I]f I wanted it to succeed,” Kate told me, “I had to do a very good job at it.” Kate, therefore, put as much effort into learning to teach the new curriculum as she did into writing it. “I just kind of took it and ran with it,” said Kate. As a result, Kate felt that she became the first in her department, besides Lana, to become an expert with the strategies, saying “I really grasped that [how to teach them].” She went on to say, “I liked it.” Her piloting, she said, “makes me stronger in the strategies.”

According to Kate, her experiences with the Courtney strategies contrasted with some of the other reading teachers’ experiences. She told me, “I don’t know if they’re [some of the reading teachers are] hesitant, or they just struggled with it. I just kind of made sure that I learned the material.” When I asked Kate where she would rate herself as leader on a scale of one to four, with one being a novice, and four being an expert, Kate answered, “Probably a three.” She continued, “I don’t think I’d give myself a four because some of the leadership things that you’re supposed to do kind of freak me out, like speaking in public.” “It’s not your thing,” I responded. “Yeah, it’s not my thing,” Kate agreed. Kate also said that as a leader, she had trouble sharing responsibilities: “[M]y husband says I have a problem with delegating, which I have to get over. I like to do everything myself because if I do it myself, I know it’s done well,” Kate laughed. “That Type A personality,” I stated. “That’s it,” Kate agreed. In general, however, Kate asserted, “I consider myself a leader in the Reading Department here.”
Kurt, literacy coach, English. Kurt, who was in his sixth year in education, began his career at Birchfield High School as a paraprofessional for the Special Ed. Department. After his one-year stint in that position, Kurt moved to a private high school where he taught English for 2 years. In the meantime, Kurt earned his master’s degree in reading and returned to Birchfield as a full-time reading teacher in 2008. “I enjoy doing reading,” Kurt told me. “I like it better than English,” he continued. “I don’t really know why; I just find it more appealing, I guess.”

Regarding Kurt’s leadership experience outside of literacy coaching, he related that he coached varsity soccer at Birchfield and served on the gifted committee. Kurt also told me that as a lifelong, avid soccer player, he experienced “leadership through sports teams,” including serving as a team captain. As an undergrad, Kurt gained leadership experience, as well, through his participation in a two-year team building program sponsored by his university. The program entailed Kurt being mentored his first year by a senior, and then Kurt mentoring a junior student his second year. When I asked Kurt what he had learned from that experience, Kurt answered, “As a leader, you . . . are perceived differently sometimes . . . not how you always want to be perceived, and you just kind of have to rise above it and do your job because you know what’s right for the next group that’s coming through.” Overall, Kurt valued his leadership experiences and felt that they had prepared him for his literacy coaching work. When I asked him how he would rate himself as a leader on a scale of one to four—“one being, ‘I’m a novice leader,’ to four being, ‘I’m an expert leader,’” Kurt answered, “Right now, I’d probably say a three because I’m confident in leading other people, especially now that I’ve had a little bit of
experience. You know,” Kurt continued, “if you asked me last year, I might have said, ‘A
one.’”

**Melinda, literacy coach-at-large, West Building.** Like Lana and Amelia, Melinda
has an elementary teaching background. Out of her 8 years in education, Melinda spent 3
years teaching first grade in another state, 1 year teaching first grade in an in-state
district, and 2 more years teaching second grade in another in-state district. At the time of
our interview, Melinda was finishing her second year at Birchfield High School and was
preparing to move on to a new teaching position at the junior high level in another
district. In addition to her bachelor’s degree in elementary education, Melinda had earned
a master’s degree in reading as well.

Similar to Amelia’s fifth grade teaching experience, Melinda had teamed with the
other first grade teacher of her out-of-state school. She referred to herself a “team leader”
whose responsibilities included “facilitating meetings” and “bringing information to the
team”; however, Melinda explained, “[t]here were only two of us, so it didn’t take much
of anything to be a team leader at that school. It was a small school [with] two teachers
per grade level, so [being a team leader was] no big deal.” Outside of her teaching career,
Melinda had served for 4 years as a co-leader, along with two other adults, of the junior
high group at her church. She added, “I’m in charge of games and activities.” Overall,
Melinda felt that she was still in the novice stage of leadership development, and that
literacy coaching at Birchfield was “an early leadership experience” for her.

**Tara, literacy coach, Health.** Second in Reading Department seniority behind
Amelia, Tara was finishing her sixth year at Birchfield when we sat down for our
interview. For two of those years, Tara also taught a reading class at a local community
college. In addition, Tara previously taught English for 3 years at a nearby junior high school. Along with a master’s degree in reading, like Amelia and Lana, Tara had completed a master’s degree in educational administration as well.

When I asked Tara about her leadership experiences, she gave me several examples, including leading the language arts articulation team at her former junior high school and coaching Birchfield’s ACT-SO (Academic, Cultural, Technological, and Scientific Olympics team, which is sponsored by the NAACP). Tara spoke with pride of her ACT-SO students’ achievements. In fact, she had one student advance to the 2011 National Competition in Los Angeles. She felt her leadership made this possible, as she set up, in addition to the students’ regular after school meetings, Saturday morning workshops to help them prepare for their regional competition. Tara stated, “That’s something that I felt was kind of necessary because then it gets them [the students] really motivated and involved. So that’s one aspect [of leadership] that I put in there.”

Outside of these experiences, Tara’s largest leadership role involved her church work. “I carry some really major positions in the church right now,” Tara related. “I’m director over the entire Sunday school department, so I have about 10 teachers under me, and I put together my own curriculum.” Transferring Birchfield’s practice of providing a common language of literacy through the school-wide adoption of the Gretchen Courtney literacy strategies, Tara explained that she made a similar move with her Sunday school curriculum: “I did away with the books because . . . they’re recycled from year to year—the same lessons.” Rather than re-teaching those same lessons, Tara developed a curriculum that centered on “everyday things that they [people] deal with in life.” Tara continued, “I wanted everyone on the same page, so I have all the way from the preschool
to the adults—everybody is speaking the same language, so they have the same lesson.

So, when I’m walking through the Sunday school and listening,” continued Tara, “if we’re talking about the ‘Parable of the Sword,’ I hear it throughout the Sunday school. Everybody’s teaching it.” In addition to her work with the Sunday school, Tara took on many other leadership roles in her church, including starting a women’s support group and a morning prayer line. Overall, Tara considered her leadership work with her church “a huge position.”

**Geri, content coach, Biology.** With 17 years as a teacher, Geri had more experience than Lana or the other literacy or content coaches. During the first 6 years of her career, Geri taught science at a private junior high school. She then taught at a private high school for 2 years, at public Brave High School for 1 year and, finally, at Birchfield, where she had taught Biology and Advanced Placement® Environmental Science for 8 years. After earning a bachelor’s degree in psychology, Geri earned two master’s degrees—one in education and the other in environmental biology. At the time of our interview, she had finished her coursework towards earning a Ph.D. in science education.

Geri did not recount to me any leadership experiences prior to becoming a teacher. “I really didn’t have all that many things in high school,” Geri said. “Even in college,” she continued, “just being a commuter student to [my university], I didn’t do much.” Geri further explained, “It’s sort of as things come in, and I think they’re important, then I get involved, and I think I’ve just gotten more involved.” In addition to writing curriculum when she was at Brave High School, Geri was in charge of ordering supplies for its Science Department and supervising its budget. At Birchfield, Geri teamed with another Biology teacher to develop the curriculum for the school’s
Zoology/Botany course, and she also wrote the school’s AP® Environmental Science curriculum. Additionally, Geri sponsored the Environmental Science Club, served as the Biology PLC team leader, and she authored many grants. In fact, Geri related, “usually every year I get some kind of grant,” which has allowed her to “take students out and do a lot of field work.” Outside of Birchfield, Geri was in her second year serving as an ambassador for a major local museum. She explained her role as helping teachers use the museum as a resource to expand and reinforce lessons not only in science, but in other disciplines as well. At the time of our interview, Geri had just accepted a summer position as a curriculum specialist for the museum’s Systems Biology program. Thus, although Geri did not consider herself much of a leader prior coming to Birchfield, she eventually became involved in a variety of leadership activities, particularly in the area of curriculum, which she called, “one of my big interests.”

**Jack, content coach, Algebra 1.** When we sat down for our interview, Jack was just finishing his fourth year in education, all of which he had spent teaching math at Birchfield High School. “I’m still young,” Jack stated. “I got hired right out of college.” Unlike all the other members of Birchfield’s literacy coaching team, Jack had not yet earned a master’s degree. The only leadership experience that Jack talked about prior to becoming a teacher was, like Kurt, being the captain of a sport team. Jack told me, “I’ve always been kind of outspoken a little bit, and I will take a leadership role, but I haven’t had any formal [leadership] things [besides being team captain]. You know.” Jack continued, “I wasn’t in student government or anything like that.” Regarding taking on leadership roles at Birchfield, Jack said, “I subbed in the dean’s office a couple of times, and I coached [two sports], but as far as leadership in my department or in the school, I
haven’t done anything before this one [serving as a content coach].” Jack added, “I think that when I speak, I usually command attention, but I don’t do it all the time because sometimes I’m not as comfortable as other times doing it.” In sum, Jack revealed, “this [coaching] is a new experience for me, to say the least.”

_Larissa, content coach, English 1._ Like Tara, Larissa taught English at the junior high level for 2 years before coming to Birchfield High School in 2005. Larissa made the move because, like Lana, she was earning a master’s degree in educational administration and looking for leadership advancement opportunities. Regarding her former school district, Larissa said, “There was a lack of development [opportunities] there.” She doubted that any leadership positions would open up “for another 10 years, probably.” Larissa related that she saw teaching as a stepping stone to school leadership. She asked herself, “[H]ow can you lead if you’d never done it [taught] before?” Larissa explained, “I looked at it [my career] more backwards, not ‘Hey, I’m teaching, and I want to get into administration.’ It’s more, ‘I want to get into administration, so let me understand teaching.’”

Relating her first educational leadership experience, Larissa told me that she had worked with the superintendent of her former district to start a hot lunch program. “[I]t’s kind of where I got my idea that I just enjoyed leadership, and that I liked affecting things—just little things” Larissa explained. “I like to add little stuff that hasn’t been done before, just little improvements,” she continued modestly. Once at Birchfield, Larissa took on several leadership roles. For example, she began coaching speech. She also sponsored the school’s multicultural club, and she worked with her English 1 team to revise the course’s curriculum. During her educational administration practicum, Larissa
gained leadership experience working in the dean’s office as well. In contrast to her former district, where Larissa claimed students who failed more than half their classes still graduated 8th grade, Larissa found Birchfield’s culture refreshing. She stated, “I liked how everyone believed that people can learn, that students were challenged, and that excellence was just normal.” Overall, Larissa felt that Birchfield provided her with opportunities to “improve more and grow more” as a leader.

**Whitney, content coach, Health.** When we met for her interview, Whitney was finishing up a decade as a teacher and a decade at Birchfield High School. In regards to her experience as a Birchfield Health and Drivers Ed teacher, Whitney said, “[O]utside of a couple of days of subbing other places, this is all I know.” Like Lana, Amelia, Tara, and Larissa, Whitney reported that she had completed a master’s degree in educational administration.

Whitney did not discuss leadership experiences prior to teaching, but in regards to her time at Birchfield, Whitney said that “leadership probably has been a lot of what I would consider informal or quasi-administrative types of things, mostly within the [PE/Health/Drivers Ed] department.” Whitney related that she worked closely with her department chair to plan and implement department initiatives. “I feel like she [the department chair] uses me in the aspect of trying to look at things from all three of those [PE, Health, and Drivers Ed] perspectives,” said Whitney, “and it’s easier for her to look at it from a PE perspective, but then I’m always there to say, ‘Well, what about Health? What about Drivers Ed?’” Whitney also mentored teachers new to her department on several occasions, and she served as the Health PLC team leader and curriculum team leader. In addition to her department leadership roles, Whitney served on several school-
wide committees, most recently Birchfield’s school improvement committee. Whitney held her largest Birchfield leadership role as the summer school Drivers Ed Coordinator. In that capacity for six seasons, Whitney supervised 14 to 16 teachers who taught over 200 students per summer. Of the leadership roles that Whitney held, however, she appeared to get the most satisfaction from mentoring new teachers. “[T]hat relationship [between mentor and mentee] stays,” stated Whitney. “[T]he more you serve in that role,” Whitney continued, “the more younger teachers come to you, and you certainly continue that even though it’s [the mentor role is] not official anymore.” As an example, Whitney related, “I’m still mentoring [a Health teacher] who’s in year four because I was his model teacher, and you don’t just end that. . . . [H]e still comes to me with questions, [which] makes me feel good.”

Although my interviews revealed some commonalities between the literacy coaching team members, overall, the amounts, types, and intensities of their educational and leadership experiences varied widely. Their responses to my next two requests—to tell about their understandings as to why Birchfield adopted literacy coaching and to describe the literacy coaching structure—helped me to find commonalities and differences between their ostensive understandings of literacy coaching at Birchfield High School.

**The literacy coaching team members’ ostensive understandings.**

*The purpose of literacy strategy instruction and literacy coaching* When I asked the interviewees to explain why they thought Birchfield had adopted literacy coaching, many first discussed the overall need to improve students’ reading achievement due to governmental pressure from the No Child Left Behind law. For example, Amelia stated,
“There’s the ‘we have to’ in the sense that reading is being tested.” She continued, “It’s No Child Left Behind; it’s legal.” Larissa, Caitlin, and Melinda all mentioned the importance of raising our standardized test scores, as well as Kate who stated that “our test scores weren’t very good. We weren’t making AYP [Annual Yearly Progress].” In agreement, Kurt said, “Birchfield needs to meet these [AYP] standards. [W]e’ve looked at research,” Kurt continued, “and what are these kids missing? What can we do to make ourselves better? And reading is one of those paths that’s really big to improve your students and help them get to the next level.” Reading strategy instruction at Birchfield then, according to Tara, was designed “to catch the children that are—so to speak—falling a little low [in relation to the standards] . . . to bring them up higher.” According to Amelia, students need literacy strategy instruction simply because “kids can’t read.” Geri, agreed, stating that “students are doing so poorly in their understanding of what they’re reading.” Kate explained that “if we incorporate all these reading strategies in all the classes, then hopefully that will increase our test scores.” Melinda mentioned the common language of literacy that the Courtney strategies provide. That common strategy language, asserted Melinda, would help the literacy coaches bring “the same thing to all departments” and, thus, provide a “common understanding for students.”

Several of the team members elaborated on the need for literacy strategy instruction across the content areas. Amelia stated,

[W]e get so content focused on the curriculum and not skills focused. [W]e spend a lot of time teaching them [students] the curriculum and the content, and then we get mad when they don’t get the content, but they may not understand how to get the content.

While math teacher Jack did not indicate that he got mad, he did say, “I get frustrated when my students can’t read for content.” Amelia continued, “It’s not that they don’t
know it [the content]. They don’t know how to find it.” Amelia gave this example: “[Students have] never been in Chemistry or World History, and they may not have the skills to get the curriculum, [but] they would if we just took the 5 minutes to do it [provide strategy instruction].” Lana pointed out, though, that most high school teachers “go into their field because they love it. They learned it [the content] easily,” Lana added, “and I have found they have a hard time breaking it down for kids because to them it’s natural. They’re natural learners in that area.” Although Birchfield has a full array of reading courses available for students in grades 9 through 12, as Kate pointed out, “We’re not hitting everybody [through enrollment in reading classes].” Lana said that she thought all teachers needed to ask, “Are we really making kids aware of what to do when they struggle [with reading]?” Lana continued that teachers should be asking students,

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\text{[W]hen you stumble over something, what are you going to do? So you may be a good reader, and you may be able to skate through the majority of the time, but what happens when you can’t? Do you really know what strategies you can employ at that point?}
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Jack had never thought that way until his initial training in the Courtney literacy strategies. He told me, “When I got excited to do this [become a content coach], was when I first met [our Courtney strategies trainer]. I bought into the fact that reading can help everything [in regards to learning].” Jack continued,

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\text{[W]e’re doing it [strategy instruction] so we can benefit the kids in all classes, not just one [class], but really it [reading] applies to everything, and that’s the goal—to get them [the students] better in all classes, not just [in] a couple.}
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According to Caitlin and Tara, however, most content area teachers do not think like Jack. “[A] lot of content teachers,” stated Tara, “feel as if ‘Well, we’re not reading teachers, so we don’t have to teach reading.’” In agreement, Caitlin pointed out that “obviously, this initiative [literacy coaching] is important because people need to
understand that it’s not just the reading teacher’s job to incorporate literacy in the classroom; it’s everybody’s job.” Literacy coaching, therefore, according to Tara, is meant “to help them [the content area teachers] realize that whether it’s science, or math, or whatever, it’s still reading, and if students are to be taught these strategies in the classroom—not just in reading [class]—then they will excel better in every area—in all content areas.” Tara continued, “I think the biggest thing is that it [literacy coaching] opens the content area teachers’ eyes to say, ‘Oh, okay. We really . . . need this [literacy strategy training]. The kids really, really need this [literacy strategy instruction].’”

Whitney said about literacy coaching,

I have the idea that it’s the up and coming thing, and that it’s something that a lot of schools are starting to look into: more of teachers leading or informally teaching other teachers, rather than everything coming top down, because a lot of times it’s better received . . . and more effective than just more traditional [professional development].

Caitlin agreed, stating, “I think it’s always easier for teachers to learn from other teachers. . . . I think it makes it less daunting, and I think people are more receptive to the idea of learning from a peer rather than learning from a visiting professor.” Larissa succinctly stated, “If the teachers are developed, then they can develop their students.”

“[T]he bottom line,” said Kurt regarding literacy coaching to help all teachers infuse strategy instruction into their lessons, “is it’s just what’s best for students—what’s best for kids, and I think—I believe that Birchfield . . . has bought into that.” In short, according to Lana, “we created a [literacy coaching] model to support the teachers who were teaching these strategies.” “I think coaching,” stated Amelia, “provides that in-house [professional development] that allows us to reach more students.”
The structure of Birchfield’s literacy coaching model. When I prompted the interviewees to explain their understanding of Birchfield’s literacy coaching structure, Lana offered the most complete description, beginning with a detailed account of the inception of literacy coaching at Birchfield. Lana recalled that it all began in the spring of 2009 when she, Kate, and Tara attended the National Literacy Coaching Summit sponsored by Texas A & M University. It was there that Lana became sold on the idea of literacy coaching as a way for Birchfield to support all content teachers’ efforts to infuse strategy instruction into their lessons. Lana reported, “I signed up, and went, and learned a lot, and came back and said to you [Nancy], ‘I really think that this is the next step for us. It’s cutting edge, and it makes a lot of sense to me.’” Bringing literacy coaching to Birchfield High School made a lot of sense to me as well. As a result, Lana recounted that she and I designed a literacy coaching structure for Birchfield; developed a literacy coaching training plan for the coaches; constructed a literacy strategy training plan for both the coaches and the teachers; and presented the entire plan to Birchfield’s administrative team, department chair group, and school improvement committee for endorsement. During the process of developing the model, I recalled, “We were a couple of cooks in a kitchen trying to whip something up,” a statement to which Lana agreed.

When I asked Lana, “What does our coaching model look like?” she provided a very thorough answer (see Appendix D: Overview of the Literacy Coaching Team Members’ Understanding of the Birchfield Literacy Coaching Structure). “[F]or starters,” Lana began,

all teachers have to infuse literacy strategies twice a week in their classrooms. Then we have determined that we were going to have a group called our “direct instructors,” and those would be . . . our teachers who are directly teaching the strategies that we’ve adopted from Gretchen Courtney. And we determined it
would be best if we hit our freshmen. We have identified our freshman English teachers, our freshman Algebra teachers, our freshman Health teachers, and our freshman Biology teachers as direct instructors.

Lana continued to explain that the English teachers would focus on the strategies as they apply to narrative text, while the other teachers would apply the strategies to non-narrative text. Lana then talked about the role of the reading classes as a second tier Response to Intervention (RtI) support for the teachers in all other classes. She next described Birchfield’s literacy coaching structure as a hierarchy:

[A]t the top, we have our reading specialists who are literacy coaches, and we have content coaches for English, for Algebra, Health, and for Biology. And then we’ve assigned a reading specialist to each of those. And then we have two reading specialists doing the overflow [literacy coaches-at-large who help] the people who are “appliers,” as we call them, who are supposed to be infusing two literacy strategies into their instruction every week, and then also [taking] any of the overlap that the [content] coach for that department can’t get to.

Besides Lana, Kate was the only other member of the literacy coaching team who described the literacy coaching structure as a hierarchy. She explained,

[I]f I had to do a tier thing, I would probably put Lana on top because she’s done this [literacy coaching] before, and then underneath that would be the reading teachers—the reading specialists—the six of us, and then we work with a content coach—well four of us—work with one teacher [from] either Algebra 1, English 1, Biology, or Health.

In contrast to Kate and Lana, Larissa said that the literacy coaching structure “is not top down.” Instead, Larissa viewed it as “a relationship-based model.” She explained, “I would look at it more as a circle. I would look at it as, you train a group first, and then they train others, and it just gets bigger and bigger.” Returning to a more linear explanation, Whitney visualized the coaching structure as “two umbrellas”:

[T]he first one would be all of our reading specialists serving as literacy coaches and assigned to different departments, different buildings, however it’s broken down, as their go-to person [referring to the content coach] so everybody has a different person to go to. And then the second umbrella is the content coaches
which is for, specifically, the four areas for freshmen where we’re direct instructing [in the reading strategies], and that’s the content coaches, again, that person that everybody [in a department] can go to for help.

Whitney continued, “So I kind of see it [the coaching structure] as this branch and this branch, but everybody has two individuals that they can go to if they need to.”

Although Kurt did not specify the structure that he visualized when describing the Birchfield literacy coaching model, of both the literacy and content coaches, his explanation was one of the most complete. Kurt began,

We have six literacy coaches; they’re all reading specialists. Each of them is assigned to a specific area, and we try to focus on the core areas: Math, Health, English, and Science—the core freshman areas. And each of those disciplines has a content coach, and the literacy coach is assigned to work with the content coach.

Caitlin described the job of the literacy coaches-at-large, held by Melinda and Amelia, as “other literacy coaches that work directly with apply and assigners, and those are individuals that do not teach the freshman level classes, say like Physics or Art, and our literacy coaches [-at-large] work specifically with them in helping them incorporate the Gretchen Courtney reading strategies.” Amelia said this about the literacy coach-at-large role: “[W]e work with any of the other teachers in the building [outside of the core content areas] to help them incorporate the different strategies.” Amelia continued, “[W]e’re there to provide any resources they need, any assistance they need from planning a lesson to just giving them materials or ideas.” Although Kurt did not mention the role of literacy coach-at-large, he did describe the roles of teachers as being either direct instructors or strategy appliers: “[T]he freshman core teachers who implement reading strategies into their lessons, as much as possible . . . two times a week—those are the direct instructors.” Kurt continued, “Then there’s [sic] the appliers who are the sophomore teachers, the senior teachers, the junior teachers, and they’re encouraged to
take the strategies and apply them, again, as much as possible, but we’re mainly trying to focus with the freshmen.” Tara further explicated the direct instructors’ role: “The direct instructors are those that . . . teach the 9th graders . . . , and they’re giving direct instruction . . . at least two times a week or more. They’re teaching the strategies that we’re [the reading teachers are] teaching [in the reading classes].”

Regarding the literacy coach and content coach partnership, Kurt explained that the two coaches “try to work with the teachers in [their assigned] department, mainly the freshman core teachers.” Kate expressed this understanding of the literacy coach and content coach relationship:

[The literacy coaches] really just work with that one person [the content coach] who kind of then sends it [whatever the coaching pair has produced] to their team—their Algebra 1 team [or] English 1 team—to get them [the teachers] to infuse the strategies in their work.

Lana described the literacy/content coach partnership in this way: “The original intent was that the reading specialist and the content coach would be working together, and the reading specialist would support that content coach, [who] would then take that information back to their department.” Lana continued,

We thought it [the strategy instruction requirement] would be better received if there was a coach from that department who worked directly with a reading specialist, so you have the content expert, and you have the literacy expert working together and figuring out what’s right for that particular curricular area.

Similar to Lana, Larissa described the content coach role as being “the link between the reading [literacy] coach and then all the direct instructors and appliers [within a department].” Melinda said that the literacy coaches work with the content coaches to help teachers infuse “the same Gretchen Courtney strategies at least twice a week in their classes, along with the support of the reading classes.” Caitlin stated, “We’re [the literacy
coaches are] the experts in literacy, and those direct instructors [including the content coaches] are the experts in their specific content area, so . . . we work together to merge our understanding.” Jack explained the content coach’s role as acting as “a bridge” between the literacy coach and the content coach’s department, helping to translate the reading strategy “jargon” into language that the content area teachers can understand. Conversely, Geri mentioned the content coach helping the literacy coach understand specific terms from a discipline “because maybe the literacy coach might not know what certain terms mean, or concepts.” Geri did not have the same understanding as Jack in regards to the content coach being the conduit between the literacy coach and the coach’s department. Instead, regarding the Science Department, Geri said, “I thought it was going to more of [the content coach] being the expert in science, giving them [the literacy coach] some help with understanding the science part, and then they [the literacy coach] would incorporate the reading into this.” Geri further understood “that the reading specialist would be able to spend more time with the science people since she was the reading person.” Geri expounded, “They [the literacy coaches] were the ones that were the experts in reading because they’ve been degreed in it, and they were supposed to help everybody in the Science Department, including the content coach.”

Overall, from an ostensive aspect, my interviews revealed both similarities and differences in the literacy coaching team members’ explanations as to why Birchfield adopted literacy coaching and, as illustrated in Appendix D, some disparities in the team member’s understandings of the literacy coaching structure itself. The next interview analysis section reveals the literacy coaching team members’ performative experiences in
regards to literacy and content coach partnerships and to literacy coaching activities as well.

**The literacy coaching team members’ performative experiences.**

*Literacy coach and content coach partnerships.* When I asked the interviewees about their experiences with literacy coaching, many discussed their literacy and content coach partnerships. Lana told me that she had very little direct contact with the content coaches. Instead, Lana reported that the content coaches “tend to go directly to the literacy coaches [for help].” Lana continued, “[T]he literacy coaches are the ones who tend to come to me if they have questions or need the support.” Of the four coaching pairs—Kate and Jack, Algebra 1; Geri and Caitlin, Biology; Kurt and Larissa, English 1; and Tara and Whitney, Health—Kurt and Larissa reported having the best working relationship. In praise of Larissa, Kurt related, “I’m paired up with Larissa who is absolutely phenomenal. I couldn’t ask for anybody better.” In turn, Larissa expressed satisfaction with Kurt: “I developed a really good relationship with Kurt. I consider him a friend.” Kurt explained how Larissa and he worked in tandem:

I would kind of train her [in the strategies] in addition to what [our Courtney trainer] did. We would work on lessons that she could implement in her class, and then we would work on lessons that [other English teachers] could use and present it to the teachers.

Larissa revealed,

[O]ur conversation usually came this way, where I would say [to Kurt], “Okay. This is the problem that I’m seeing in English, and then I think where they’re [the teachers are] struggling is they want to know this.” And then he would give me the answer, or we would debate, or I would say, “Ah, I don’t think that works so well. How about that?” And he would give another idea.

Not only did Larissa report learning from Kurt; Larissa taught Kurt as well. “You know,” Kurt told me, “I learn stuff from Larissa every day, and I bring it in here [my
classroom].” Summing up her partnership with Kurt, Larissa stated, “We understand how each other thinks, and we work well together.”

As a former English teacher, Kurt made no mention of having difficulties with Larissa’s English content, but Kate, whose background was also English, did find applying the Courtney strategies to Jack’s Algebra 1 content challenging. Kate told me that she had been “very hesitant at first” to partner with Jack because she was “a little uncomfortable with math.” In fact, Kate stated frankly, “I don’t know that content.” Jack found some value, however, in working with a coach who did not have a strong foundation in his content, stating, “I think it’s good that they [the literacy coaches] don’t know everything [about the content] because they can think through it [the strategy instruction]. They can do something like a student would . . . much closer than I can.” In contrast, however, Kate stated, “I think in order for me to do really well at that [serving as the literacy coach for Algebra 1], I have to know the content.” Kate did not feel that she received enough support from Jack. She lamented, “I didn’t have somebody that was willing to teach me that content.” Jack did feel, however, that he received support from Kate: “[S]he’s helping me with reading strategies and reading things.” Like Kate who felt out of her element with math, Jack felt out of his element with reading. He directly stated, “I don’t know how to teach reading.” As a result, Jack said that he would like to work “more hand-in-hand” with Kate. He said he would like Kate “to think of things that will be applicable to a math setting,” and that he would appreciate:

a better relationship, knowing what we need from each other as a literacy coach and a content coach because I don’t need any help with math and [she] doesn’t need any help with reading, but we definitely need to help each other with these things.
Caitlin did not mention her content coach partner, Geri, until after describing her coaching experiences with the Science Department teachers in general, and with several individuals in particular. Regarding her content coach, Caitlin only related that she met “with Geri on a fairly regular basis to go through stuff.” When I asked Caitlin to elaborate on what kind of work she had done with Geri, Caitlin told me that she had gathered and copied for Geri reading materials—activities and organizers—which Caitlin “thought would work with Biology.” “I think she [Geri] scanned them,” said Caitlin, “and sent them out [to Biology teachers]. I don’t know if anybody used them.” That was all that Caitlin related about her work with Geri. Geri felt that she and Caitlin did not have the same understanding of their partnership. Geri revealed, “[A]t the beginning . . . we weren’t on the same page as to exactly what our roles would be and what we would be having [sic] to do.” Geri thought that as content coach, she would “work on the science part of it [a lesson] and then take it back to Caitlin and say, ‘Well, this is what we came up with.’” Caitlin’s job then, according to Geri, would be to infuse the strategy instruction into the lesson. “Now, whether that happened,” said Geri, “I don’t really think so.” Like Jack, Geri stated, “I don’t know anything about how to teach reading.” Geri related, therefore, that she did not feel comfortable with Caitlin working through her to reach the other Biology teachers. She did not like “Caitlin telling [her] about the stuff and then [Geri] telling them [the Biology teachers] because . . . there might be something lost in translation there.”

In regards to the final literacy coach/content coach pair, Tara and Whitney, Tara related, “Well, the content coach—she and I don’t work together as much. In the beginning, we did, but after a while, it kind of started, you know—not as much.” Tara did
believe, however, that “Whitney [had] a very good grasp on things.” Whitney, in turn, made no mention at all of working with Tara. In general, regarding the performative aspect of Birchfield’s literacy and content coach partnerships, Lana said,

I think there’s some of that [partnering] going on, but I think there is also the reading specialist going directly to that department because they [the teachers] have been seeking that kind of support out. So in an effort not to be too pushy, we’ve been letting them [the teachers] come to us, more or less, to ask for that kind of help.

**Literacy coaching activities.** The members of Birchfield’s literacy coaching team reported engaging in a variety of literacy coaching activities (see Appendix E: Overview of 2010-2011 Birchfield High School Literacy Coaching Activities). As co-leader of the literacy coaching team, Lana helped me plan strategy trainings and coaching trainings for the literacy and content coaches. She also worked with me to help the coaches plan Institute Day strategy trainings for teachers, and she conducted Institute Day trainings herself (see Appendix B: Fall, 2009-Spring, 2011 Courtney Strategy Coaching Training Schedule). All of the literacy coaches presented literacy strategy trainings for teachers at the August 2010 and November 2010 Institute Days, and they were joined by the content coaches in leading these trainings during the March 2011 Institute Day. Besides Lana, none of the team members was an experienced presenter, and many of the coaches expressed some form of insecurity or nervousness about being in the spotlight. For example, Caitlin confided,

[Y]ou get the butterflies, especially at the beginning of the year, because we knew this was a big thing, and there was a lot riding on it, and we wanted to make sure that the first couple of [training] sessions went off without a hitch.

Kate said about presenting to the math teachers, “It’s hard. . . . I think it would have been easier with people I don’t know. With colleagues . . . I get to see these people every day.
They’re going to make judgments.” This was a sentiment echoed by Kurt. He recalled sitting in the auditorium on an Institute Day during the all school meeting “and listening to people complain about having to listen to [a presenter later on] and [thinking], ‘I’m sitting right here. You’re talking about me.’” Jack related that he was somewhat nervous about presenting but recalled,

I was actually pretty calm with that, and I knew they [the math teachers] were going to respond to me. I would have been worse off if I had been one of the reading teachers because I know how they [the math teachers] are.

Melinda recalled making an error during her March workshop with the Fine Arts teachers: “So, of course, you know I messed up,” she told me, “but the world didn’t end.” In fact, Melinda said, “I did like that experience of presenting because it took me to a different level.”

In addition to presenting workshops on Institute Days, many of the coaches mentioned presenting information to teachers at department and PLC team meetings. Whitney, for example, said regarding these meetings, “That is where I usually introduced whatever I had come up with.” Geri also recounted bringing information to the Biology PLC team, and Kurt visited both English department meetings and PLC team meetings with Larissa to present information on several occasions. Amelia mentioned attending PE department meetings and Special Ed department meetings to clarify information. She also worked directly with the Family and Consumer Science PLC team to help the teachers develop word walls, and she worked with the Social Science department on methods for teaching vocabulary. Melinda said that she attended Fine Arts department meetings on at least two occasions. In particular, she worked with them to create ACT-style questions for their common assessments and integrate strategy instruction for various reading
passages. Jack called his department and PLC presentations “more informal.” For instance, he recalled “[W]hen our PLCs [meet]-it’s just like, ‘Hey. An update: this is what we’re doing. This is what we should be doing.’” In general, when working with department groups and PLC teams, both literacy and content coaches mentioned the casual aspect of their work.

A majority of coaches also reported having unplanned, casual coaching conversations with individual teachers. Jack told me, “[M]ost of the talking is just going to so-and-so’s room and [saying], ‘Hey, this is what I’m using.’” Larissa described English teachers coming to her:

[I]t would just be more informal, like a knock on the door: “Hey I’m teaching summarizing. Does it mean this?” And then I’d to over it, “Okay, it means this,” or “I’m doing this. What are you doing in your class?” So I’d give a handout, or I’d even say to Kurt, “I think we need another example of connecting.”

Geri reported having “more conversations with [the Biology teacher in the classroom next to hers].” She explained that it was natural to talk casually because of their proximity: “You know, [we were] just kind of running things by each other, and not only him to me, but actually me to him, asking him what he would think about this idea.” The copy room provided proximity for unplanned coaching conversations as well. Caitlin mentioned this, as did Amelia who related this incident: “[I]n the copy room the other day, two of the [social studies teachers] came up to me, and . . . they’re both looking at something . . . and they’re like, ‘Is this summarizing ‘cause we’re still not sure.’”

Reporting on other casual coaching conversations she had experienced, Amelia recounted teachers asking her, “What are some tips?” “Some of them,” stated Amelia, “just have questions and say, ‘Is this what you mean by questioning?’ or ‘Is this activity going to help the kids predict better?’” Amelia also reported checking in with teachers: “I stop by
and [ask] like, ‘How are things going? Do you guys need anything?’” Amelia continued, “I’m sort of like the relief pitcher in baseball. I’m here when you need me.”

Members of the Birchfield’s literacy coaching team reported that casual conversations, at times, led to co-planning. For example, Amelia recalled one of the Health teachers saying to her, “I have no idea what I’m doing [in regards to literacy strategy instruction], and I’m not doing it!” Amelia used this teacher’s complaint as an entrée to coaching. After some conversation, she found out that the teacher was really just afraid of implementing the strategy instruction incorrectly. The teacher told her, “[W]e’d rather not do it than do it wrong, and then the kids are like, ‘That’s not what you’re supposed to do.’” After clarifying the strategy in question, Amelia reported that the teacher said, “Oh! Now I get it—now we can do it.” Tara also related a typical co-planning experience with Health teachers: “[W]e sit down, and we look at their textbook. I’m looking at their textbook, seeing what I can do to help them put together lessons and strategies.” Melinda reported that teachers asked for co-planning assistance “usually when they’re in a crunch for something.” She recalled helping a PE teacher plan a questioning strategy lesson that the teacher’s department chair would soon observe. Larissa also related assisting a teacher plan for another department chair-observed lesson:

I remember looking at the whole lesson. I said, “I don’t think that’s summarizing.” She [the teacher] then had to revamp the whole thing, but she was glad . . . that before an observation she got a better understanding of what [the summarizing strategy] was.

Jack described how he co-planned with teachers, “I didn’t tell them how to do it. I just kind of showed them, ‘This is what I did. You can do this. Here’s one example of a thing I did. Maybe you can use it, adapt it, whatever.’”
In addition to co-planning, most of the coaches mentioned creating materials for teachers, particularly strategy organizers. Amelia and Kate, for instance, teamed together to create a strategy resource binder. Amelia, who jokingly referred to herself as “your little techy dork,” reported that she enjoyed developing strategy organizers. Whitney also felt that “developing materials has gone very well and been very easy.” She explained, “I would develop something, post it, share it, maybe answer a few questions, and give a little feedback, and the rest of the teachers [in my department] were pretty receptive, I think, to doing those things and trying it.” Caitlin, on the other hand, did not have as much success creating materials for Biology teachers. She “put together these Biology word walls,” but she related, “people just don’t have room for them. They don’t want to do them. They didn’t see the point of it.”

Five of the coaches reported participating in coaching observations. Kate and Jack observed one another. Kate found the activity beneficial. “I wanted to learn the content,” Kate told me, “to see how I could infuse my strategies into math class.” In turn, Kate related, that she “showed Jack a good reading day” in her class of “read aloud, direct instruction, guided group and small group instruction.” Whitney reported that she had a student teacher, which gave her time to briefly observe some teachers in her department. “I was in there [in the teachers’ classrooms] for 5 or 10 minutes,” explained Whitney. Tara also related that a Health teacher had invited her into his class to observe him implementing the questioning strategy. Tara said that the lesson went very well, and afterwards, she had the chance to “talk to him about what he thought went well, and what else [she] could do to help him through that process.” Similarly, Melinda reported observing a science class. “Science is my favorite,” Melinda said, “so of course I was
really geeked about that one.” Afterwards, Melinda reported that she talked to the teacher about how the teacher could incorporate literacy strategies into her lesson. Unfortunately, however, Melinda’s coaching of that teacher did not progress because, as she described, “[W]e were just in the beginning stages, like building the relationship” when the end of the school year came around, which forced a halt to the work.

Besides Kate reporting that she co-taught, and Caitlin and Kurt saying that they had modeled strategy instruction, none of the other coaches reported engaging in these activities. From her vantage point, Lana felt that the coaches were having more casual coaching conversations with teachers than they were initiating co-planning, modeling lessons, or co-teaching. When I asked her why, Lana said, “I don’t think we’re quite there yet,” meaning that teachers, in general, were not comfortable with the idea of literacy coaching. Likewise, Amelia said, “I think they’re [the teachers are] just getting their feet wet [with the strategies]”; therefore, she inferred that they were not yet very receptive to literacy coaching. In agreement, Whitney stated, “[T]he comfort level [on the part of the teachers] is just not there.” She continued, “And that, I think, is just because we’re not used to it [learning directly from one another]. Nobody’s used to it. You know, once you get inside our classrooms, it’s like, ‘This is ours.’” Whitney elaborated, “I wouldn’t say we have a real open door policy amongst teachers. . . . So it feels different to people. It feels kind of strange.”

I noted that while all literacy coaches worked with their assigned departments, some also branched out to work with other departments as well. For example, Tara, who served as the literacy coach for Health/PE/and Drivers Ed, reported teaming with Amelia
to work with the Family & Consumer Science teachers, while literacy coaches-at-large Amelia and Melinda worked with PE teachers, and Melinda coached a Science teacher.

**Frustrations and challenges.** Lana explained her leadership of the literacy coaching team in this way: “I look at my role as a supporter and cheerleader [of the coaches].” In particular, Lana said, “I’ve offered them [the coaches] resources and any type of conversation that they need or support they need from me.” Nevertheless, Lana, as well as the literacy and content coaches, all reported dealing with challenges and frustrations. One challenge that Lana recounted was the coaches’ varying expertise in the strategies. “I think one thing that hinders us,” Lana stated, “is that not everyone is as great an expert in the strategies as somebody else.” Additionally, referring to Amelia and Tara who were housed in the East Building of Birchfield’s two-building campus, Lana—whose office was in the West Building—stated, “Unfortunately it’s difficult for me to get in touch with them.” She preferred face-to-face conversations to emails and couldn’t telephone them during the school day. Lana explained,

> We’ll talk in the evening. I’m always available by cell phone, and I’ve tried to support them as much as I can, get over there [to East Building] as much as I can, let them run ideas by me—you know whatever it takes. It’s been a little challenging.

Another challenge that Kurt, Jack, Melinda, and Geri all mentioned was having enough time to coach. Kurt said, “You know, time is a huge issue.” Jack reported not having adequate time during the school day to figure out literacy strategy applications for math and create strategy organizers, particularly since he coaches sports after school. Similarly, Geri explained her busy school day: “Oh gosh, I have five classes and three different preps.” She continued, “[I]t’s hard to do anything effectively if you just don’t have enough time.” Melinda made the point that the coaches’ tight schedules often prevented
them from meeting with teachers. Geri made another point about teachers feeling pressed for time when it came to implementing the strategies in their classrooms because of content coverage pressures. She revealed that she heard many science teachers lamenting, “We don’t have enough time to do this, and students aren’t getting it.” As a result, Geri concluded, “It was just a lot of frustration.”

Another frustration that Jack and Geri reported was not feeling confident in their understanding of the literacy strategies and how to teach them to their own students. Jack stated, “I know I need coaching myself because I don’t know a lot of reading things, so I need people to help me with reading.” Jack reflected, “[S]ometimes I’ve been really frustrated, like I said, because I don’t know any reading strategies.” Correspondingly, Geri revealed, “I just found myself feeling like I was supposed to be teaching the [Science] department all these wonderful reading things, and I just don’t know enough about how to do that.” She continued, “I still don’t know yet how to teach students how to do these things.” Stressing her lack of literacy strategy expertise, Geri stated, “[M]y content is strictly science.” Although Kate reported being “pretty comfortable with the [literacy] strategies,” as the Algebra 1 literacy coach, she expressed a lack of confidence in her knowledge of math. “I don’t know if I’m good enough to do this,” she confessed. “In order for me to really do well [as the Algebra 1 literacy coach,]” asserted Kate, “I have to know the content.”

Most of the literacy coaching team members also mentioned the challenge of facing teacher resistance. Kurt felt that the resistance came from teachers being “frustrated with what they have to do,” but he continued, “it’s to be expected.” Likewise, Geri said that the Science Department had “a lot of different perspectives, and
personalities, and resistance,” but she added, “I think that’s anything new the first year. You’re going to get that.” Geri felt that some teachers did not get on board with the literacy strategies because of “not wanting to change and do something different.” Caitlin gave an example of Biology teachers resisting change when she told me about the group not being receptive to conducting think alouds in order to model the connecting strategy. Caitlin explained that the teachers felt like, “I shouldn’t have to give them [the students] those connections.” Caitlin further elaborated, “I was aware that there were some people that were not very receptive to this [literacy strategy instruction] and saw this as . . . another initiative that’s going to go by the wayside.” Even Lana noted some resisters in the department chair group. While she reported that some of the department chairs were “actively involved” in the literacy initiative and “want to see this be successful,” there were “others who view it similar to some of the teachers who think it’s the flavor of the month, and it too shall pass.” Caitlin reported that in the principal’s advisory committee meetings she attended, “I’ve just heard ‘initiative fatigue, initiative fatigue.’” Geri also referred to initiative fatigue as contributing to teacher resistance. “I don’t know,” Geri sighed, “just people have had so much else going on, or they just [have had] a lot of frustration, and everybody’s like, ‘I’m just going to do what I’m going to do.’” Jack met with some resistance from math teachers as well. He revealed, “[T]he other teachers that don’t teach Algebra 1 are the hardest. They aren’t the ones seeking things [coaching assistance or strategy applications] out because they aren’t direct appliers [of the literacy strategies].” Jack described math teacher reluctance as sounding like, “Ahhh, [sigh] we’ll do it if we have to.” Caitlin also talked about teacher resistance to the strategies.
themselves: “I feel like people aren’t doing it [strategy instruction], or they’ll just do it for their evaluation [formal observation] so they can be like, ‘I covered the strategies.’”

Caitlin expressed that another reason for teacher resistance could be the fear that literacy coaches might be serving in an evaluative function: “I think people were kind of scared of it [literacy coaching], and as much as we’ve talked about how the coaches are not in any way, shape, or form evaluators, I don’t know if there’s still that type of hesitation.” “You know,” Caitlin added, “I don’t know how many more times I can say, ‘I’m not going to report back to somebody.’” Whitney’s take on teacher resistance was this: “[A] lot of the struggle, I think, comes from just working with many different personalities.” Kurt stated, “You know, some people are more open-minded than others. It really depends on what [lunch] table you’re sitting at.” Echoing Kurt, Whitney added, “Some people are just more receptive than others.” In agreement, Larissa felt that teacher resistance was part of “that whole personality aspect.” Some teachers, according to Larissa, just naturally question initiatives, asking, “How do I accept this model?” “Should I accept this model?” “How do I know this model will work?” Caitlin also believed that sometimes the naysayers overshadowed teachers who were more accepting of the literacy strategies. She felt that there were more teachers in the Science Department who would be receptive to the strategies, “but,” stated Caitlin,

I think that they’re keeping their mouths shut about it for fear because there are some people that are probably more vocal about their dislike of the strategies, so they’re [the accepting teachers are] not stepping up to [openly] liking them [the literacy strategies].

Caitlin continued, “They may be doing them [teaching the literacy strategies] in their classrooms, but they’re not talking about them.”
Overall, both literacy coaching and strategy implementation seemed to ebb and flow over the course of the year. Regarding coaching, Amelia recounted, “[I]t’s been slow. It’s been busy, not busy, busy, not even talking to me because it’s the end of the year.” Lana, who as a teacher of Birchfield’s study skills class saw her freshmen students’ assignments from a variety of teachers in a variety of content areas, related this:

At the beginning of the year, I started to see many more [literacy strategy] organizers from other classes than I’m seeing now. And I guess I have to wonder have we done a good enough job educating our teachers and getting them to the comfort level that they need to be able to directly teach these strategies? Have they truly embraced it?

Whitney blamed herself for not helping the teachers in her department enough. She described this typical coaching conversation that she had conducted with teachers:

“Well, when you did this, did you do this, or did you do this? Was it individual, was it group, or a whole class, or how?” You know, [I would ask] little questions like that,” Whitney explained, “but I don’t know if I can really consider that true coaching as far as really sitting down and going through co-teaching or creating a lesson together.” Whitney wondered, “Did I really help anybody get a whole lot better at this? I don’t know. I helped them implement materials, or I gave them materials, but I guess what I’m thinking of as truly coaching didn’t happen a lot.” Whitney further lamented, “[R]eally looking at truly coaching was minimal, I think.” Rather than blaming the coaches for teachers’ lack of strategy implementation, Lana went back to teacher resistance: “I just don’t feel like the content area teachers yet see how this [strategy implementation] can truly help their instruction. I think many are viewing it as more of a burden.” Lana continued, “I wish they’d view it as changing the way that they’re teaching, not changing what they’re teaching.” Lana sighed, “I mean it’s a tough, it’s a tough group.”
**Successes and satisfactions.** Despite the above mentioned challenges and frustrations, every literacy and content coach reported experiencing some coaching success and/or satisfaction. Beginning with the literacy coaches, Kate, the only member of the literacy coaching team who ever co-taught, expressed how much she enjoyed the experience: “I worked with [a Special Ed math teacher] who let me come into her classroom, and we actually team taught something, which we had a blast doing. So that was great.” Regarding her general feeling about literacy coaching, Kate said, “[O]verall, I think it was good.” Melinda expressed satisfaction about her work developing ACT-style reading passages with two Fine Arts teachers. “It was interesting. It was wonderful,” Melinda enthused. Melinda said about the literacy coaching initiative in general, “I think it’s been good. It’s been slow, but I think it’s been a good experience.” Tara expressed similar feelings about the initiative: “I think it’s been ok. I think it’s been a good start.” Tara found particular success when teaming with Melinda and Amelia to make a presentation to the Health teachers. “[T]hey [the teachers] really enjoyed it,” recounted Tara, “[and] got a lot out of it.”

Amelia also had a positive outlook on her literacy coaching experience. She felt the new relationships she had developed would help her expand her coaching the following year. “I think I could get into one or two social studies classes next year,” Amelia told me. She continued, “I think I’ve developed with some of them [social studies teachers] enough where they’re able to trust that I’m not going to walk in and turn around and tell their department chair, ‘Well so-and-so isn’t doing this.’” Caitlin felt good, as well, about some of the inroads she had made in the Science Department. “I’ve gotten some people to buy into it [literacy strategy instruction],” she told me. In particular,
Caitlin reported, “Physics has embraced literacy.” Caitlin explained that she worked with three of the Physics teachers on a curriculum project to infuse literacy strategy instruction into specific units and lessons. Caitlin reported, “[W]e just had a really good time.”

“Everyone was really receptive,” Caitlin continued. “[I]t was just a great meeting of the minds.” So great, in fact, that the Physics teachers and Caitlin submitted a presentation proposal to the state’s science teachers’ association 2011 conference. Caitlin related, “[I]t was just so nice because that was honestly the first time this year that I’d had someone from the Science Department who’s like, ‘Woo-woo! We’re so happy to be working with you. We really like these reading initiatives.’”

Kurt’s major success was in the relationship he built with Larissa, teaming with her to provide assistance to teachers throughout the English department. Kurt recalled, in particular, the teachers of juniors being receptive to strategy applications that he and Larissa had created for The Great Gatsby. “[A] couple of the teachers bought in and said, ‘Oh, this is really cool. I really like this.’”

“Overall,” Kurt reflected, “it’s [coaching has] definitely been positive. For me, personally,” he continued, “it’s been a great experience. How many people can say they’ve done literacy coaching? And also it’s help for the kids.”

The content coaches also reported positive experiences that helped them deal with the challenges and frustrations they had faced. When I first asked Jack to talk about his experience with coaching he described it as “bittersweet.” Part of the “bitter” was his lack of comfort with teaching the literacy strategies. Over the year, however, Jack found some “sweet” in this area. Jack related,

But there’s [sic] also been times where I’ve made things, or [had] successes in the classroom where I just tried something. Let’s see if this works, and it did, and it’s kind of rewarding, and then [as a coach] you get to tell everybody about it—you know, “This is what I did that’s really cool. The kids enjoyed it.”
Jack also reported enjoying presenting to his colleagues at the March 2011 Institute Day workshop: “[T]he one time we did that, it was great because I actually told them [the math teachers] things we can use and how to use it. You know,” Jack continued, “it was a lot more beneficial for them than if there were just reading teachers up there talking.” Like Jack, Whitney had experienced some “bitter” with the literacy coaching initiative. In fact, when I asked her to discuss her coaching experiences, she immediately answered, “The first word I would say is probably, ‘frustrating.’” Whitney then reversed course, however, saying, “[L]et me start with the positive.” As mentioned earlier, for Whitney the positive was in developing strategy organizers and finding texts for strategy applications. She stated proudly, “That happened, I think, pretty easily, and everybody, again, seemed really receptive.” Even Geri, who seemed to struggle the most with both coaching and applying the strategies in her own classroom, felt positive about collaborating with colleagues more than she had ever done before as the result of coaching. “You know,” Geri related, “I really haven’t worked with a lot of people because I was never in a situation where I had to work with a lot of people [and] a lot of ideas.” Geri continued, “I think it [coaching] has helped me to listen to everybody’s ideas [and to] try to incorporate some of these ideas, [to see] if they can be done.” Of the content coaches, Larissa appeared to feel the most successful regarding her coaching experience. “I’m happy about how it’s [coaching has] gone,” she stated. “You know,” Larissa continued, “I see a lot of errors where I kind of want to improve things that I’m going to focus on, but I do feel inroads have been made.” In fact, Larissa added, “I feel like the [English] teachers are won over.” As an example, Larissa related, “[T]his summer, we’re doing summer curriculum. I’m meeting with two teams [of English
teachers." One of the teams," Larissa continued, "it was their idea. I was going to approach them, but they approached me first so, well, ‘Thank you! You made my job easier. Thank you!’” Like Amelia and Caitlin, Larissa expressed a positive outlook for the following school year: “I feel like it’s just building.”

**Leadership lessons and personal growth.** Towards the end of each interview, when I asked, “What leadership lessons, if any, have you learned from your experience?” everyone had an answer. Lana reflected,

I’ve learned that I definitely need to make sure that I’m available to my coaches that come out of my department and make sure that I encourage them and not let them down because it gets frustrating to work with adults sometimes, especially adults who are teachers.

Lana also related, “I found myself having to back off in some areas, but having to kind of push and be there more in others.” Regarding “backing off,” Lana explained that she learned to turn responsibility over to the coaches and “say, ‘I’m not going to do that for you. You need to do it. You need to take more of a leadership role.’” Lana continued as if speaking to the coaches,

Yeah, I could go into every department, and I could teach them [the teachers], and I could convince them that this is what we need to do—most of them, not all—but that’s your role to do that. So you need to get to the point where you can do it. If you need to come talk with me about that, or you need to do more research, if you need to talk to your colleagues—that’s what you need to do.

Lana then explained how she has pushed the literacy coaches as well: “I’ve had to talk to a couple of them about what it means to be a leader: it doesn’t look like doing.” Just as she learned to do less for the literacy coaches so that they would take on more responsibility, Lana encouraged the literacy coaches to do less for the content coaches and teachers they worked with in order to promote their ownership of the literacy strategies. Lana explained, “You know, I’ve had to say [to the literacy coaches] a couple
of times, just very bluntly actually, ‘You’re doing [all the work] for them. You need to stop and teach them how to do because they’re not going to learn anything by you doing for them.’”

Jack, who on several occasions expressed his initial discomfort with the literacy strategies, expanded both his understanding of the strategies through his coaching experience and, therefore, his self-assurance in explicating them to his fellow math teachers. Jack related with pride, “[W]hen I can show them [the math teachers]—‘This is useful. This is how you can use it,’ then they’ll respond, and they’ll do it.” Whitney also became quite comfortable with the literacy strategies and found a new outlet beyond the classroom. In particular, through coaching, Whitney discovered that she had a talent for easily transferring the abstract concepts of the literacy strategies to practical classroom applications. Literacy coaching expanded Amelia’s professional capacity as well. She reported after 7 years at Birchfield asking, “Okay, now what?” Literacy coaching for Amelia was “something different” that she discovered she “actually really liked.” Amelia also related that her coaching experience gave her a broader perspective of the day-to-day experience of Birchfield students. She stated, “I’ve learned more about what my students are doing as a whole because, I think, in high school you [teachers] have your department, and you’re stuck in your department.” Amelia continued, “I think it [coaching] gives me a global perspective . . . I now understand what they’re doing in these other classes.”

Several of the literacy and content coaches mentioned that they had learned how important it was for the coaches to have a firm understanding of the literacy strategies as well as their assigned subject areas’ curricular content. Larissa related, “[M]y first
thought when I was selected as a content coach was, ‘Okay. I want to know what I’m
talking about.’” Therefore, Larissa explained that she and Kurt,

decided to try to be experts on it [literacy strategy instruction]—even if we
weren’t experts, to try to look like experts to just try to have enough information
and enough materials that if you [a teacher] ever want something, you could come
to us.

Regarding her beginning work with the Social Science Department, Amelia said, “[T]he
first thing I asked [the department chair was], ‘Can I have your curriculum?’” Melinda
found, “As a coach, you get pretty much everything, even if it’s not your [curricular]
area, but that’s okay. That’s how it works.” Through her work with various departments,
Melinda learned that she needed to ask the teachers to share their content knowledge.

“There are times,” stated Melinda, “when I have to seek help from them because there is
no way I can know [everything they know about their content].” Caitlin learned that
teachers are more receptive to the literacy strategies when the strategies were presented to
them using examples from the teachers’ content. “I think,” reflected Caitlin, “it [teacher
buy-in] got better throughout the year when we tailored them [the Institute Day strategy
trainings] more for the specific content areas.” “It was a learning experience,” Caitlin
added. Geri, too, discovered that teachers are not likely to get on board with
implementing new strategies if the examples they are presented with do not apply to the
actual units or sections they are teaching. Likewise, Jack found that when trainings are
specific to teachers’ content, “you get more out of everybody.” He elaborated, “[W]e’re a
pretty open-minded department. . . . [T]here’s [sic] not many people who are going to
complain about things as long as they see the relevance to it.”

Another leadership lesson that Jack learned was to “[b]e persistent” but
“cooperative.” Jack expounded on what he meant by “cooperative”:
I will never be the type of leader, I don’t think, that’s going to say, “You do this. You do this. You do this.” I’d rather them [the teachers] make decisions on their own, and I’d rather show them possibilities and then kind of work it out from there.

Regarding persistence, Jack explained,

[T]he people I did talk to [coached]—I showed them things, you know, “Make your own decision. Do this. I tried this; it worked. Here’s another idea for you,” and just keep giving them ideas, and eventually they’re going to do them, and they’re going to make their own adaptations of that.

Larissa had also learned to be more persistent and outgoing. “I’m naturally more of a kind of calm person,” she revealed, “and I think I’ve learned to be a little more aggressive.” Larissa explained, “I just kind of show up in people’s rooms and say, ‘Hey. I have a lesson. Want to look at it?’” In fact, Larissa jokingly said about pursuing resistant teachers, “I’ll stalk ‘em!”

While Larissa and Jack related that they both had learned to be more persistent, Jack, like many of the other coaches, also resisted being too pushy. His coaching mantra was “[Give] them your ideas and hope they run with it.” Kurt had developed a similar coaching style, saying to teachers, “This is what I had. If you guys want to use it—great; if not, you know, whatever—it’s up to you.” Amelia was also wary of appearing too pushy. “I’d like to do more,” she said, “but I really believe the ‘force model’ is probably the one that’s going to fail you.” Amelia continued, “I think sometimes less is more.” She explained, “I think sometimes it’s just taking a step back and saying, ‘I’m here. This is what my role is.’” Amelia felt that it was not effective to “kind of bulldoze your way through it [literacy coaching] and [say], ‘This is my way or the highway.’” Kate learned that lesson, too. As someone who acknowledges having strong opinions and liking to do things on her own in order to make sure they are done right, Kate revealed that the major
leadership lesson she had learned was this: “My way is not always the right way.” As a result, Kate confessed that she was working on “[b]iting my tongue.” She laughed, “Get that filter turned on maybe.” Kate seriously reported, however, that she was learning to be more “patient and knowing how to say something that’s not going to be so abrasive.” Kate explained, “Instead of saying, ‘Okay, that’s not going to work, saying, ‘Okay, well, here’s an idea.’” Likewise, Whitney said, “A teacher’s going to choose to utilize something or not, and at least in the leadership role that I have, that’s all I can do—is just say, ‘Here it is. Please—please do,’ but that was it, you know. It was their choice beyond that.” Similarly, Geri stated, “I can’t force them [the teachers] to come to me, or for me to come to them.”

The major leadership lesson that Geri cited was the importance of listening. “I think I always did do a good job of listening to what the concerns [of the teachers] are,” Geri reported. “I think I did a lot more listening maybe than anything to what the frustrations are, what the concerns are, maybe just to kind of see, you know, ‘Well, how can we work this out?’” Geri further stated, “I think it [my content coaching experience] just made me better at trying to work out problems. . . . [F]or the people that are just very negative and don’t want to do anything, and [are] just coming up with excuses,” Geri explained, “[I found] just trying to reason with them to say, ‘You know, we have to do this, so this is what we have to get done, and so how can we do this to make it work at least.’” Tara cited the importance of listening as well: “I’ve learned that you have to listen, and then after listening, then trying from there to figure out, ‘Okay. This is what they’re [the teachers are] really saying.’” Amelia learned that listening was central to developing coaching relationships with teachers. She related the importance of the coach “being
willing to learn about who [sic] you are going to lead, and saying, ‘I understand you. I want to learn what’s valuable to you because my role is to help make that better.’” Amelia expressed the necessity of a literacy coach being willing to “acknowledge teachers’ expertise” and “validate what they’re doing.” Similarly, Melinda felt that the coach should view her work with teachers as a “team effort.” “We work together,” stated Melinda. “We’re equals.”

In order to effectively develop partnerships with teachers, many of the coaches cited the importance of developing relationships and trust. Caitlin learned that building trust begins with establishing connections with other teachers. Caitlin stated, “I think the importance of building rapport with people is huge, whether it’s just chatting at the copy machine, it gets people ready to be more open to what you have to say.” Amelia felt that coaches had less difficulty making inroads with teachers they knew well: “[I]t’s easier, I think, that a few of us coaches have been here long enough [to know lots of teachers].” Similarly, Kurt related, “I can go into one of the guys who [sic] I coach [sports] with and do it [literacy coach] in their classrooms—no problem—because I know I’m not going to be judged by that person or vice versa.” Amelia stated that successful coaching “really depends a lot on trust and relationships.” Tara found, however, that building that trust could be difficult. She revealed, “I think being in the leadership role [of a literacy coach] has made me really look at myself. . . . I think there’s a lot of things I can work on [as a leader],” Tara continued,

but I think in this particular position, you can’t get upset. You can’t get discouraged, even if they . . . don’t want you to come into their classroom; you can’t take it personally. You have to look at it as, “Okay. Well, let’s move on and see what else I can do to help.”
“[J]ust reaching out,” Tara advised. “That’s the biggest thing as a leader is reaching out.” Similarly, Caitlin learned from her coaching experience that building trust “takes a while.” Likewise, Whitney discovered that getting teachers to willingly open their classroom doors to outsiders could only be accomplished “gradually and gently.”

Larissa learned that being visible, helpful, and industrious helped her gain teachers’ respect and trust. “They can look at that,” explained Larissa, “and say, ‘She’s on it’ because people look to see what you’re doing.” Similarly, Amelia learned that “showing that you are dedicated to that [coaching] role” by creating materials for teachers and offering other types of assistance, allows the coach “to get more from them [the teachers].” Larissa also recounted the importance of her role as a teacher instructing her own students in the literacy strategies: “[W]hen I’m in the writing lab, [other teachers see that] my students—they all know the different strategies . . . , so then [the other teachers will] teach their students the strategies.” Larissa continued, “So I think if they see you doing it, then they’ll say, ‘Okay. [The coaches are] living it.’” Kurt learned, however, that “you’re not going to please everyone all the time.” He continued, “[Y]ou just have to be confident and know what you’re doing, and . . . if you’re confident—even if you do make a mistake—people will still be more apt to listen to you.”

Several team members indicated that coaching helped them develop self-confidence in their leadership abilities. Larissa related that after her coaching experience, she was “even more comfortable in [her] own skin.” Similarly, Kate stated, “I think I have a lot more confidence in myself.” Kurt asserted, “I’m confident in leading, especially now that I’ve had a little bit of experience [with literacy coaching].” Melinda revealed that she had never considered herself a natural leader, but her literacy coaching
experience made her reconsider: “I learned that I actually would like to do more leadership. Before,” she recounted,

I probably would’ve said, “No, never would I want to do leadership, or be admin, or do anything with that role,” but it’s not so bad. So I think I will venture out and try more leadership . . . I think that would be interesting.

Larissa summarized: “I feel like leadership is just having confidence in who you are, and then kind of showing people that, and then hopefully they’ll grab on to it.”

Suggestions for ostensive and performative changes to literacy coaching at Birchfield. My final prompt asked the interviewees for suggestions for moving the literacy coaching initiative forward. Jack, Geri, Kate, Kurt, and Melinda all mentioned the ostensive adjustment of providing more time for the coaches, preferably a release period. Kate and Lana also advocated an ostensive change: opening up the literacy coach positions to teachers who were not necessarily reading specialists. “[T]here are definitely some strong people in other content areas,” suggested Kate, “that would be great at this because of their leadership and their willingness to grasp it [the strategies] and go with it.” From the performative aspect, Tara felt that the literacy coaching team members should make an effort to collaborate more. “[A]s a team,” Tara stated, “I think we need to work closer together. We are a team [as] far as the literacy coaching team, but we’re not [always working as] a team.” Tara continued, “I just feel that sometimes the communication is not there. . . . We just need to tighten up a little bit as far as the communication and making sure that nobody is left out of the loop.” In addition to improving communication within the team, Kurt felt that the coaches all needed to reach out more to the teachers. “I think a key idea is relationships, so continue to build relationships,” Kurt advised. Caitlin also recommended “just continuing to build rapport
with people.” Similarly, Amelia said, “[I]f we cannot develop relationships with these teachers, I don’t think they’re going to trust it [coaching] because in all schools—and it’s not just Birchfield—programs come and go.” Like Amelia, Caitlin warned, “I think we need to be really careful that people still see this as something that is not going to go away.” In agreement, Kurt advocated, “Just keep working at it [literacy coaching], and . . . don’t let it fall by the wayside. You know,” he continued, “it’s kind of like by the time you get to third quarter, people are like, ‘Oh, whatever. I’m not going to do that anymore.’ Try not to let that happen.”

Both Caitlin and Whitney advised Birchfield administration to look for ostensive ways to make teachers more accountable for infusing literacy strategy instruction into their lessons. Whitney stated,

I go back and forth. Sitting on one side [the teachers’], I would like to say I always love administrators to treat us professionally and say, “Here’s what we want you teachers to do,” and assume that everyone’s going to do it, but the reality is we know that’s not the case. So flipping to the leadership side, you’re saying, “There kind of has to be more accountability.”

When I asked Whitney for accountability suggestions, she proposed that department chairs hold a conversation [with teachers] of “What are you doing? What have you tried? What is working? What other help do you need?” Just making sure those conversations are happening so at least the people know, “I’m going to be asked about this, and I need to be able to provide what I’m doing or not doing.”

Another accountability mechanism that Caitlin suggested was “tailoring the Institute Days to allow people to really make use of that time with their set curriculum” and creating a strategy application product as “proof that you [the teacher] worked.” Geri believed that making teacher trainings more content specific and giving teachers “a little bit more freedom to adapt the strategies” would help with teacher buy-in. Larissa also
proposed creating more materials and getting more teachers involved in developing curriculum that incorporates strategy applications.

Melinda and Larissa both suggested providing incentives for teachers to get involved in literacy coaching. Melinda proposed reminding teachers that they could receive continuing education credits towards recertification for being coached, and Larissa suggested recruiting tenured teachers to incorporate literacy coaching into their evaluation-year projects. In addition to incentivizing teachers, Amelia also recommended incentivizing the literacy and content coaches by having them set personal coaching goals to expand their coaching activities and work with greater numbers of teachers. Larissa, Kurt, and Kate all agreed that as more teachers got involved, literacy coaching numbers would expand. Kate stated, “It’s [the coaches] getting into the classrooms and co-planning.” She continued, “People will be more and more receptive: ‘Oh, she [the coach] helped you [the teacher] do that? Oh, maybe she could come into my classroom and help me.’” As Larissa, Kurt, and Kate all explained, more teachers, therefore, would see the value of literacy coaching and, as a result, be more willing to participate. The literacy coaching team members’ suggestions could potentially change both ostensive and performative aspects of literacy coaching at Birchfield High School.

**Summary**

My analysis of the interviews of the 11 literacy coaching team members revealed a variety of patterns within the ostensive and performative aspects of the members’ experiences. The following chapter synthesizes these patterns with distributed leadership and literacy coaching literature, as well as with and my own experience, to discern the
essential nature of the 2010-2011 Birchfield literacy coaching team’s distributed leadership experience.
Chapter Five
Discussion

Introduction

By discerning the essential nature of the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School literacy coaching team’s distributed leadership experience, I hope to help each of us to further develop as leaders, as well as to strengthen and sustain Birchfield’s literacy coaching initiative. In addition to these personal motives for conducting this research, I believe my study also contributes to calls for further research into two areas: the implications of distributed leadership on school reform efforts (Copland, 2003; Firestone & Martinez, 2009; Mangin, 2005; Spillane et al., 2003), and employing literacy coaching as a school improvement initiative to expand teacher leadership and affect teachers’ instructional practices (Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Gross, 2010; Snow et al., 2006). In particular, I feel that this study addresses a call from Spillane et al. (2011) for more research into how government mandates can become “embedded in [a] school’s formal structure” through the adoption of organizational routines that “institutionalize a set of practices” performed by staff members over an extended period of time (p. 614).

Patterns of Experience

My place within the Birchfield literacy coaching team. As explained earlier, within the formal organizational structure of Birchfield High School, I hold hierarchical stature over the other members of the literacy coaching team; however, I have placed myself alongside them in the literacy coaching team’s graphical ostensive structure
because I have worked with Reading Department Chair Lana to deliberately create a leadership network of individuals working in tandem to support teachers’ efforts to infuse literacy strategy instruction into their lessons at least twice weekly as called upon by Birchfield High School’s school improvement plan. Although I hold administrative status, my experience interviewing Lana and the literacy and content coaches confirmed that they did not feel threatened that I held “power over” them in a threatening way, but rather provided them with the “power to” develop themselves as leaders through their positions in the literacy coaching team (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 86). As evidenced by each team member’s willingness to be interviewed and the candid remarks they all shared, I believe that I have developed positive, trusting relationships with all of them. In fact, during our interview, I said to Caitlin, “You sitting here talking to me frankly means that you trust me,” to which Caitlin responded, “Definitely.” Such trust allowed me to move inward from the periphery of our organizational routine’s ostensive structure into the midst of the team members’ collective performative literacy coaching experience. While this immersion was necessary for me to understand the team members’ individual experiences, in order to gain a broader, more objective perspective of the team’s experience in its entirety, I took Heifetz and Laurie’s (1997) advice to “view patterns of the environment as if [I] were on a balcony” (p. 125). The following discussion, therefore, alternates between my immersive view on the field of action and my more expansive balcony view of the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School literacy coaching team’s patterns of experience.

Literacy coaching team members’ ostensive understandings.
The purpose of literacy strategy instruction and literacy coaching.

Governmental pressure to improve student reading scores propelled the Birchfield school improvement team to adopt the requirement that every teacher infuse literacy strategy instruction into his or her lessons at least two times a week. Of my 11 interviewees, all six literacy coaches—Amelia, Caitlin, Kate, Kurt, Melinda, and Tara—and one content coach—Larissa—mentioned this reason. Another reason for implementing literacy strategy instruction outside of reading classes—cited by Amelia, Jack, and Geri—was that despite enrollment of many of Birchfield students in reading courses, they often still struggled with subject area reading. In agreement with the assertion that high school content area teachers should be teachers of reading—as advocated by Gregory and Kuzmich (2005), the International Reading Association (2006), and Taylor and Collins (2003)—Amelia, Caitlin, Jack, Lana, and Tara all spoke of the need for teachers outside of Birchfield’s Reading Department to be trained in literacy strategy instruction. As stated earlier, the six Gretchen Courtney literacy strategies (Gretchen Courtney & Associates, Ltd., n.d.) are research-based, precise, and complete, characteristics necessary for effective district-wide professional learning (Knight, 2009a). To further reiterate, they provide teachers in all departments with a common language of literacy instruction as well, advocated by both Sherer (2007) and Holliman (2010). When discussing literacy strategy instruction in their interviews, both Melinda and Caitlin mentioned the positive effect that the Courtney strategies’ common literacy lexicon could provide for all Birchfield teachers. Although Tara did not mention this directly, she did refer to it when she described her adaption of Birchfield’s common language of literacy instruction to her Sunday school’s common language of religious instruction.
As for why Birchfield adopted literacy coaching—like Campbell and Sweiss (2010), Cantrell and Hughes (2008), Rubin et al. (2010), and Sturtevant (2003)—Lana emphasized that content area teachers need support to effectively infuse strategy instruction into their lessons. Both Caitlin and Whitney also mentioned teachers feeling more comfortable when learning from their colleagues as opposed to outside experts. This runs contrary to Mangin’s (2005) assertion that many teachers are reluctant to be instructed by their peers due to deeply ingrained school cultures of teacher autonomy. Yet, when Lana and I proposed that Birchfield adopt literacy coaching, we knew that the most effective professional development occurs when teachers collaborate with their colleagues (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Bloom et al., 2005; Crane, 2010; Hawley and Valli, 1999; Knight, 2009a; Mangin, 2008; Poglinco et al., 2003; Showers & Joyce, 1996; Steckel, 2009; Taylor, 2008; Toll, 2005). Amelia cited this reason as well in her interview. Lana and I originally pushed the concept of literacy coaching because we agree with Killion (2009) that this organizational routine can enhance “reform initiatives” to “assist teachers in fully implementing reform behaviors” (pp. 12-13). From my balcony view, therefore, I perceive the members of the Birchfield literacy coaching team agreeing with Killion as well. In general, the team members expressed what I understand to be the major ostensive reasons for Birchfield promoting literacy instruction throughout the content areas and providing literacy coaching as a teacher support.

*The structure of Birchfield’s literacy coaching model.* My balcony perspective is a “distributed perspective,” defined by Spillane and Diamond (2007b) as a means for involving a number of individuals in the work of leading schools. I concur with Bryk et al. (2010), Holliman (2010), Mangin and Stoelinga (2010), Sturtevant (2003), Taylor
(2008), and Thelning et al. (2010) that as teachers step into leadership roles, schools expand their capacities to continually improve. In particular, I agree with Sturtevant whose study findings “emphasize the important role of building leadership to support [a] literacy program” (p. 14). Thus, Lana and I structured the Birchfield literacy coaching model, in the words of Spillane, “to engag[e] others in the work of leading and managing instruction” (personal communication, October 3, 2011). We wanted our reading teachers to serve as literacy coaches because they all held master’s degrees in reading, as advocated by the International Reading Association (2006), and they also had experience as reading instructors, as advocated by Bean (2010). We added the content coach roles because, as Taylor and Collins (2003) express, a literacy leadership team should represent teachers from various content areas.

As charted in Appendix D: Overview of Birchfield Literacy Coaching Team Members’ Understandings of the Birchfield Literacy Coaching Structure, the literacy coaching team members gave varying descriptions of the team’s ostensive structure. Feldman and Pentland (2003) point out that “people who are looking from the outside of the routine, such as hierarchical superiors or researchers, at times will be more likely to describe the ostensive aspect of a routine” (p. 111). Not surprisingly therefore, as Reading Department Chair and co-designer of Birchfield’s literacy coaching structure, Lana gave the most complete description of the structure, citing all eight of its components: a visual depiction of the structure, the literacy coach role, the content coach role, the literacy/content coach relationship, the literacy-coach-at-large role, the direct instructor role, the strategy applier role, and reading class support. Behind her were Caitlin, Kurt, and Larissa, who mentioned five of the eight aspects, followed by Kate and
Melinda, who noted four of the aspects. Geri, Jack and Whitney described three, while Amelia and Tara discussed only two. These discrepancies align with Feldman and Pentland’s assertion that “people who are actually engaged in [a] routine may be more likely to describe what they do, or the performative aspect” of the routine as opposed to its ostensive aspect (p. 112). Certainly, as Datnow and Castellano (2001) point out, people’s locations within an organization influence their perspectives. Thus, team members’ understandings of Birchfield’s literacy coaching structure varied, as Feldman and Pentland portended, “depend[ing] on his or her point of view” (p. 101). The coaches’ varied understandings of the literacy coaching structure made me realize that Lana and I needed to redefine the literacy and content coach roles for both the coaches and the staff, as well as to more explicitly state which coach was responsible for working with which group of teachers. As a result, Lana made these clarifications to the staff on our first Institute Day of the 2011-2012 school year, and she has worked with the coaches and the department chair group since then to make sure that the ostensive literacy coaching structure is more clearly understood and utilized in the performative aspect of the literacy coaching routine.

**Literacy coaching team members’ performative experiences.**

**Literacy coach and content coach partnerships.** As Spillane et al. (2011) express, the organization as lived is never the precise mirror image of the organization as designed. Certainly, this is the case of Birchfield High School’s organizational routine of literacy coaching, particularly regarding the literacy and content coach partnerships. As stated earlier, Lana and I developed the content coach positions for three reasons. First, adding four content coaches to the six literacy coaches would give us a stable of 10
coaches to better service Birchfield’s staff of over 200 teachers. More importantly, Lana and I knew that high school literacy coaches need to possess strong content knowledge in order to effectively assist teachers from the various departments across the school (Bean, 2010; Bloom et al., 2005; Firestone & Martinez, 2009; Frost & Bean, 2006; Killion, 2009; Knight, 2006; Knight, 2007b; Mangin, 2008; Manno & Firestone, 2008). Health content coach Whitney cited this reason for the creation of the content coach role. The third motive for adding content coaches to the Birchfield literacy coaching structure was to bring a sense of legitimacy to the idea of embedding literacy strategy instruction into all content areas (Mangin, 2008; Manno & Firestone, 2009), a reason cited by Algebra 1 content coach Jack.

Ostensibly, Lana and I envisioned each of the four literacy/content coach partners—Kate and Jack for Algebra 1; Caitlin and Geri for Biology; Kurt and Larissa for English 1; and Tara and Whitney for Health—acting as “co-performers” (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2009; Spillane & Diamond, 2007b) who would enact their coaching roles interdependently and collaboratively. As illustrated in Figure 8, however, only Kurt and Larissa evidenced a co-performing coaching partnership. In contrast, the other coaching pairs all reported practicing some form of “collective distribution”: separately performing the same leadership routine (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2009; Spillane & Diamond, 2007b). As to why Kurt and Larissa developed a co-performing partnership while the others did not, I have three suppositions. First, since Kurt and Larissa both shared the same English content background, Kurt did not experience the same difficulties that other literacy coaches, particularly Kate, had due to not being familiar or comfortable with the content. Secondly, to make herself as familiar with the literacy strategies as Kurt was
familiar with the English content, Larissa related that she had teamed closely with Kurt. As a result, she quickly developed strategy application expertise, as opposed to Jack who reported taking longer to feel comfortable with the strategies, and Geri who confessed to never developing confidence in her strategy implementation. Although Whitney appeared self-assured in her ability to apply the strategies to her content, she apparently developed her understanding independent of Tara, who seemed to see no need to partner since Whitney had, in Tara’s words, “a very good grasp on things.” Finally, I propose that Larissa may have partnered more closely with Kurt than the other content coaches did with their literacy coaches because Larissa actually envisioned the Birchfield literacy coaching structure as “a relationship-based model.” More than any other coaches, therefore, Larissa appears to have understood the necessity of building a strong relationship with her coaching partner in order for the model to work according to its ostensive design.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnership Description</th>
<th>Literacy/Content Coach Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-performing Partnership</td>
<td>Kurt ← Larissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Distribution: Content Coach Reporting Support</td>
<td>Kate ← Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Distribution: Little Reciprocal Support Reported</td>
<td>Caitlin ← Geri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Distribution: No Reciprocal Support Reported</td>
<td>Tara ← Whitney</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figures 8. Birchfield literacy and content coach performative partnerships.

In regards to the other literacy/content coach partnerships, Kate and Jack appeared to have the next most productive relationship. Although Kate reported not feeling
supported by Jack in her efforts to learn the Algebra 1 content, Jack did say that Kate helped him better understand the literacy strategies, which improved his ability to effectively utilize them in his classroom and, thus, share them with his Math Department colleagues. In contrast to Jack, Geri expressed dissatisfaction in her partnership with Caitlin who, she felt, had a different understanding of what their partnership should be. While Caitlin mentioned that she and Geri had met during the year on a fairly regular basis, the pair did not appear to communicate well, as evidenced by Caitlin not knowing if Geri disseminated materials that Caitlin created for the Biology teachers and Geri not knowing if Caitlin ever worked directly with Biology teachers to help them infuse strategy instruction. Beyond meeting “in the beginning,” as Tara reported, she and Whitney gave no evidence of collaborating and, therefore, appeared to have never developed any real partnership.

In addition to variations in the strength of the four literacy/content coach partnerships, literacy coaching team members also diverged in their understandings of the ostensive plan for literacy/content coach team interactions with teachers, as illustrated in Figure 9.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Interaction Plan</th>
<th>Graphical Depictions of the Plan</th>
<th>Holders of the Depictions of the Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **The Ostensive Plan:**  
  Literacy and content coach work with one another; both bring strategy applications to teachers. | ![Diagram](LC → CC → Teachers) | Lana and Larissa |
| **Variation 1:** Literacy coach works with content coach who then brings strategy applications to teachers. | ![Diagram](LC → CC → Teachers) | Kate, Jack, and Melinda |
| **Variation 2:** Content coach supplies content information to literacy coach who then brings strategy applications to teachers. | ![Diagram](CC → LC → Teachers) | Geri |

*Figure 9.* Birchfield literacy/content coach team interactions with teachers.

The original plan, which both Lana and Larissa articulated, was for the literacy and content coaches to partner with one another, as well as with the teachers in the content coach’s department. In contrast, Kate, Jack, and Melinda all described the literacy coach working solely with the content coach who then would bring information to the teachers. Because of Kate’s discomfort with math content, it is understandable that Kate and Jack partnered so that Jack, using his term, acted as a “bridge” to the teachers. Since she acted as a literacy-coach-at-large who had no content coach, I am also not surprised that Melinda held Kate and Jack’s same understanding. In contrast to this first variation to the ostensive plan, Geri thought her content coach role was to provide Caitlin with science information and that Caitlin, in turn, was then charged with developing literacy strategy applications, which she would bring to the teachers. Caitlin, apparently, did not share Geri’s understanding, which made Geri uncomfortable. She did not feel that she knew
enough about the literacy strategies to act as a liaison between Caitlin and the Science Department, fearing “there might be something lost in translation.”

Thus, while distributed leadership fosters “rich networks of relationships” (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009, p. 7) and connects teachers who otherwise would not usually communicate with one another (Spillane, Personal communication, October 3, 2011), the performative aspects of Birchfield’s literacy/content coach partnerships as they developed within the literacy coaching structure did not always mirror the ostensive aspects of this distributed leadership routine. This finding made me realize that neither Lana nor I had adequately explained the literacy/content coach collaboration. As a result, Lana shared that explanation at the first literacy coaching meeting of the 2011-2012 school year.

**Literacy coaching activities.** Just as the literacy/content coach partnerships’ ostensive plan did not match its performative reality, neither did the coaching activities plan, as outlined in the Birchfield literacy and content coach contracts, always match the actual activities in which the coaches engaged. From an ostensive aspect, the literacy coaching activities that Lana and I envisioned for the team members followed Bean’s (2010) three levels of teacher support: serving as a resource for teachers; co-planning with teachers; and engaging in more intensive, directed activities, such as modeling lessons, observing teachers and providing feedback. Bean’s three levels of teacher support can all be found within Birchfield’s literacy coach contract: meeting with content coaches and direct instructors, including the assigned content coach to identify issues and needs, set goals, and problem solve; developing and/or providing materials for/with content coaches and direct instructors; developing curriculum with content coaches and
direct instructors; co-planning lessons; developing and presenting trainings and workshops; visiting classrooms and/or viewing videotaped lessons and providing feedback; modeling lessons; co-teaching lessons; and leading or participating in literacy study groups. The Birchfield content coach contract includes all of the above activities with the exception of developing materials, developing and presenting trainings and workshops, visiting classrooms, and leading literacy study groups.

Of the nine activities mentioned by at least one literacy or content coach (see Appendix E: Overview of 2010-2011 Birchfield High School Literacy Coaching Activities), all were listed in the Birchfield literacy coaching contract, with the exception of leading or participating in a study group and viewing videotapes of teachers. None of the team members, however, reported practicing all nine coaching activities during the 2010-2011 school year. The least performed activities were co-teaching, with Kate reporting the only instance; developing curriculum, which Caitlin and Larissa engaged in; and modeling lessons, which Caitlin and Jack said they had done. The next least frequent activity was observing or being observed (which I categorize in Birchfield contract language as “visiting classrooms”). Three literacy coaches reported participating in observations: Kate, Melinda, and Tara. Additionally, although the activity was not listed in the content coach contract, Jack reported visiting Kate’s classroom, and he allowed Kate to visit his as well.

The most frequently reported coaching activities were co-planning, creating materials, conducting staff trainings, working with groups, and engaging in casual conversations about literacy (the latter two of which I am categorizing in Birchfield contract language as “meeting . . . to identify issues and needs, set goals, and problem
solve”). Eight of the 10 coaches expressed that they had participated in co-planning with teachers: literacy coaches Amelia, Caitlin, Kurt, Melinda, and Tara; and content coaches Geri, Jack, and Larissa. Additionally, eight of the coaching team members reported creating materials: literacy coaches Amelia, Caitlin, Kate, Kurt and Tara; and content coaches Jack, Larissa, and Whitney (although their contract did not call for them to do so). In regards to holding casual coaching conversations, two of the literacy coaches—Amelia and Caitlin—and all of the content coaches—Geri, Jack, Larissa, and Whitney—recalled engaging in that practice. Finally, all members of the coaching team reported working with groups of teachers, usually in PLC teams or during department meetings, and all of the team members developed and presented staff literacy strategy trainings as well. Although this last activity was not specified in the content coach contract, all of the content coaches did so willingly because the team members seemed to realize the value of creating literacy strategy trainings that directly related to the teachers’ content. Additionally, as Jack expressed, the content area teachers were generally more receptive to their department’s own content coach. Overall, within Bean’s (2010) three levels of teacher support, observing, co-teaching, and modeling lessons can all be categorized within the third, most intensive, level of coaching activities. As Campbell and Sweiss (2010) found, coaches are more reticent about engaging in these types of activities because they are more intrusive to the traditional privacy of teachers’ classrooms. Therefore, it stands to reason that the Birchfield literacy coaching team reported engaging more frequently in less intrusive coaching activities, such as co-planning, holding casual coaching conversations, working with groups, and conducting staff trainings.
From my perch on the balcony, I have made two other observations about the literacy coaching team members’ activities. First, the members of the literacy coaching team varied in the number of coaching activities in which they reported participating, with Caitlin and Jack engaging in seven of the nine activities; Larissa in six; Amelia, Kate, and Tara in five; and Geri, Kurt, Melinda, and Whitney in four. I anticipated that the literacy coaches would have participated in a wider variety of activities due to the broader scope of their responsibilities to coach both their content coach and the teachers. Interestingly, however, content coaches Jack and Larissa engaged in more coaching activities than any of the literacy coaches except for Caitlin. My final observation regarding literacy coaching activities is that three of the literacy coaches—Amelia, Melinda, and Tara—all reported working with teachers outside of their assigned departments. I believe that has to do with several factors. First, Amelia and Melinda respectively served as the East Building’s and West Building’s literacy coaches-at-large. As I discovered in my analysis of the coaches’ understanding of the literacy coaching team’s ostensive structure, there was some confusion as to which departments the literacy coaches-at-large were assigned. Also, Whitney appeared to take care of the Health teachers independently of Tara; therefore, although Tara did report working with some Health teachers, she also teamed with Amelia to coach Family and Consumer Science teachers and with Amelia and Melinda, as well, to work with a group of PE teachers. Finally, teachers were free to choose any literacy or content coach they felt comfortable with, as evidenced in Melinda’s report of a science teacher coming to her for assistance, rather than to Science Department literacy coach Caitlin or content coach Geri. Thus, while the literacy coaching team members’ coaching activities were largely in line with
the ostensive plan as outlined in the Birchfield literacy and content coach contracts, there was some performative variance as to which coaching activities the various coaches performed and with whom.

**Frustrations and challenges.** Within the performative aspect of Birchfield’s literacy coaching routine, members of the team experienced a range of frustrations and challenges. Lana expressed two challenges, proximity being the first. Because she was housed in West Building, Lana had a more difficult time communicating on a daily basis with the East Building coaches, Amelia and Tara. Lana realized that in her leadership role, she needed to be available to all members of the coaching team to provide them with a substantial amount of support (Camburn et al., 2008; Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Toll, 2009a). Lana named as a second challenge some of the coaches not possessing the optimum amount of expertise in the literacy strategies which, according to Lana, “hinder[ed]” the team’s overall effectiveness, an opinion legitimized by a number of researchers who stress that successful literacy coaches must be fluent in literacy strategies and best practices (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Bloom et al., 2005; Casey, 2006; Frost & Bean, 2006; Knight, 2006; Knight, 2007b; L’Allier et al., 2010; Snow et al., 2006; Steckel, 2009; Sturtevant, 2003; Supovitz, 2008; Toll, 2005). Jack and Geri both revealed lacking confidence in their fluency with the literacy strategies, which Jack said “frustrated” him. Not having a good grasp of the strategies put Jack and Geri into a situation similar to coaches studied by Datnow and Castellano (2001) who reported feeling like they were “the blind leading the blind” (p. 239). Just as a lack of strategy knowledge frustrated Jack and Geri, a lack of content knowledge frustrated Kate, making her doubt her ability to be an effective coach, a difficulty other coaches have faced as
cited by Campbell and Sweiss (2010) and Killion (2009). Another frustration expressed by Geri, Jack, Kurt, and Melinda was not having enough time to devote to coaching. The Birchfield coaches had to fit coaching into their two planning periods while juggling a full load of classes, a common coaching challenge cited by Camburn (2008), Firestone and Martinez (2009), Heineke (2010), Knight (2006), Mangin (2008), Marsh et al. (2008), and Poglinco et al.(2003).

A final major difficulty expressed by many of the literacy coaching team members was teacher resistance, which Heifetz and Linsky warn can manifest itself “in all kinds of creative and unexpected ways” (as cited in Knight, 2007, p. 30). Content teachers not feeling responsible for teaching reading, as referred to by Joyce and Showers (1995) and Thompson and Zeuli (1999), was named as a challenge by Caitlin, Kurt, Jack, and Tara who directly stated that “a lot of content teachers feel as if ‘Well, we’re not reading teachers, so we don’t have to teach reading.’” Caitlin and Lana both thought that some of the staff members were just trying to wait out the literacy initiative because they felt it was a passing fad, or to use Lana’s and Caitlin’s term, another “flavor of the month” program. Teacher resistance due to not wanting to change practices, as cited by Sturtevant (2003) and Joyce and Showers, was also noted by Caitlin, Geri, Kurt, Lana, Larissa, and Whitney. The culture of teacher autonomy, which Datnow and Castellano, (2001), Hallett (2007), Joyce and Showers, Mangin (2005), Marshall (2009), Mayrowetz et al. (2009), Spillane et al. (2001), and West (2009) have all cited, was also named as a reason for teacher resistance by Caitlin, Geri, and Jack. Finally, Caitlin perceived some teacher resistance stemming from a reason noted by Firestone and Martinez (2009): the fear of being evaluated by the literacy coach. Thus, Lana, all of the content coaches, and
all of the literacy coaches, with the exception of Melinda and Amelia, mentioned teacher resistance as frustrating their coaching efforts. Mangin’s (2005) assertion that distributed leadership can be constrained by teacher leaders’ difficulties with gaining access to teachers’ classrooms, therefore, appears to reflect the experience of many of the Birchfield literacy coaching team members. However, Kurt and Geri both noted that some teacher resistance to change is to be expected, which reflects Sturtevant’s (2003) statement that “traditional secondary school instruction is extremely resistant to change” (p. 8), and Schlechty’s (1997) recognition of the inevitability of teacher “resistors” and “saboteurs.” As Tara expressed, therefore, “[Y]ou can’t take it personally.”

From my balcony viewpoint, I see that the ostensive plan for any school-wide initiative should take into account the performative reality of frustrations and challenges that leaders inevitably face. In the case of literacy coaching to support a new literacy program, it appears that school leaders should prepare for a variety of challenges, in particular, coach preparation, time allocation, and teacher resistance.

**Successes and satisfactions.** Despite their reports of frustration and challenges, members of Birchfield’s literacy coaching team also reported successes and/or satisfactions with their positions. As noted by Bloom (2005), Casey (2006), Joyce and Showers (1995), Knight (2009a), Mangin (2005), and Power and Boutilier (2009), coaches experience more success with teachers who have not been forced into coaching. Likewise, Birchfield’s literacy coaching team members reported having positive experiences with teachers who sought out their assistance. For example, Kate related having “a blast” co-teaching with a math teacher from the Special Ed. Department who had come to her for help. Similarly, both Caitlin and Larissa were delighted to be
approached by teacher teams seeking their guidance with curriculum work. “It was just so
nice,” recalled Caitlin. Melinda also reported successfully working with Fine Arts
teachers to help their team craft ACT-style reading passages, which she recalled as being
“interesting” and “wonderful.” Even Geri, who often struggled in her coaching role—as
evidenced by her use of variations of the term “frustration” nine times during our
interview—reported a positive aspect to her coaching: she developed stronger
collaborative relationships with her Science Department colleagues. Overall, from Kurt
and Larissa’s model literacy/content coach teamwork, to the inroads Amelia felt she had
made with social studies teachers, every member of the Birchfield literacy coaching team
reported successful coaching experiences.

As cited by Angelle (2010) and Mayrowitz (2009), Jack, Whitney, Amelia,
Melinda, and Larissa all experienced increased overall job satisfaction due to coaching as
well. Although Jack struggled at first with figuring out how the literacy strategies could
meld with math, he reported with pride that once he did become more proficient with the
strategies, he enjoyed sharing his applications with colleagues: “[Y]ou get to tell
everybody about it, you know.” Whitney also took pride in the literacy strategy
applications she developed for Health. As she reported, the teachers in Whitney’s
department were “really receptive” to her strategy applications, which gave her a needed
boost after 10 years in the same classroom, in the same school. Similarly, Amelia, who
had been in her Birchfield reading teacher position for 7 years, related that literacy
coaching gave her a new professional outlet, as well as a new school-wide outlook. As
Mayrowitz (2009) notes, through the practice of distributed leadership, teachers can gain
a broader perspective of school operations. This happened for Amelia, who said that her
coaching experience gave her a better understanding of what her students were expected to learn in their other classes. Melinda, who had never actively sought leadership, expressed satisfaction in finding that she could successfully lead others, while Larissa, who had been actively seeking leadership, expressed satisfaction in having the opportunity to gain this experience.

From my view on the balcony, performative frustrations and challenges seemed, at times, to overshadow the Birchfield literacy coaching team members’ self-perceived effectiveness; nevertheless, the successes and satisfactions they reported highlight the fact that the team members did make inroads into improving their knowledge of the literacy strategies and their coaching skills as well. Literacy coaching takes time both to implement and to show results (Gross, 2010; Knight, 2009b; Toll, 2005); therefore, we must all be patient with the process of instituting this new organizational routine, which has the potential to transform both the literacy coaching team members as individuals and the entire organization of Birchfield High School as a whole (Bennett et al., 2003; Reiss, 2009; Sturtevant, 2003; Taylor, 2008; Taylor & Collins, 2003).

**Leadership lessons and personal growth.** Leadership is integral to literacy coaching (Knight, 2007b; Snow et al., 2006). In fact, as a distributed leadership routine, literacy coaching can expand the skills sets of both teacher leaders and administrators (Mayrowitz et al., 2009). This seems to be the case of every Birchfield literacy and content coach, who all evidenced personal growth. One type of individual development cited by Jack, Kate, Larissa, and Whitney was becoming fluent in the literacy strategies. Although they mastered the strategies to different degrees, with Kate and Larissa reporting the most confidence in their expertise, all expressed that they had a firm grasp
on the strategies, a necessity for effective coaching as cited by Allington and Cunningham (2007), Bloom et al. (2005), Casey (2006), Frost and Bean (2006), Knight (2006), Knight (2007b), L’Allier et al. (2010), Snow et al. (2006), Sturtevant (2003), Supovitz (2008), and Toll (2005). Another area of growth reported by Amelia, Caitlin, and Melinda was expanding their knowledge of other content area subjects, which is particularly important for secondary literacy coaches, according to Bean (2010), Bloom et al., Firestone and Martinez (2009), Frost and Bean, Killion (2009), Knight, (2006), Knight (2007b); Mangin (2008), and Manno and Firestone (2008). Caitlin, Jack, Kate, Kurt, and Melinda, who had little to no prior experience with speaking in front of large groups, also evidenced gaining more confidence in their presentation skills, another necessity for effective literacy coaching as expressed by Frost and Bean, Ippolito (2010), and Poglinco et al. (2003). Although they reported feeling nervous, none of them balked at facilitating Institute Day workshops, and Melinda even reported that the experience, “took [her] to a new level.” Another area of growth that all of the literacy and content coaches evidenced was developing relationships with people they likely would have never come to know well otherwise, for example, Caitlin’s partnership with the Physics teachers, Geri’s strengthened relationships with her Science Department colleagues, and Kurt and Larissa’s new friendship. Such relationship building is a direct result of distributed leadership (Spillane, personal communication, October 3, 2011).

In addition to experiencing personal growth, the Birchfield literacy coaching team members all reported learning leadership lessons as well. A lesson that Caitlin, Geri, and Jack all mentioned in relation to conducting staff trainings was to tailor their workshops to the teachers’ specific content. Just as Rose (2010) and Warren Little (1999) suggest,
Jack realized, for instance, that the math teachers were more likely to adopt the literacy strategies when he demonstrated the strategies using math content. Jack also learned to not try to force teachers into coaching, but to be “persistent,” as advocated by Bean (2010). Realizing that coaches are “leaders by influence” (Bean, p. 142), Larissa found that effectively instructing her own students in the literacy strategies was a valuable way to build teacher buy-in to both the strategies and to working with Larissa in a coaching capacity. Kate’s major leadership lesson was to become a more effective communicator, a crucial trait for effective coaches (Bean; Thelning et al., 2010). Realizing that she needed to be less blunt and more diplomatic in her coaching conversations, Kate learned that effective coaches are also relationship builders (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Bennett et al., 2003; Blamey et al., 2008/2009; Bloom et al., 2005; Casey, 2006; Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Gross, 2010; Matsumura et al., 2009; Poglinco et al. 2003; Reiss, 2009; Supovitz, 2008). In agreement, Caitlin expressed “the huge” importance of coaches “developing rapport” with teachers. In fact, Amelia, Jack, Kurt, Larissa, Melinda, and Whitney all indicated the primacy of building rapport to develop coaching relationships both with teachers and, in Jack’s case, with other coaches. Amelia, in accordance with Firestone and Martinez (2009), L’Allier et al. (2010), and Steckel (2009) found that acknowledging teachers’ experience and expertise helped her to develop coaching relationships. Lana also expressed that it was particularly important for her to develop strong relationships with the literacy coaches because, as their direct supervisor, they needed to trust her to be their “supporter” and “cheerleader” rather than fear her evaluative powers. Amelia also learned that as a coach she needed to be viewed as trustworthy by other teachers, an essential coaching trait as deemed by Alber (2008),
Blamey et al., Mangin (2008), and Manno and Firestone (2008), as well as an essential leadership trait, as cited by Bryk and Schneider (2002), Heineke (2010), Knight (2006), Power and Boutilier (2009), Toll (2005), and Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010). A lesson for Kurt and Tara, however, was despite their best efforts, some teachers would be resistant; therefore, Kurt learned to “rise above” others’ negativity, while Tara learned to “move on” without taking teacher push-back personally. Lana learned that the literacy coaches need the full support of their supervisor (Camburn et al., 2008; Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Snow et al., 2006; Toll, 2009a); therefore, she made herself more available to the coaches—especially Amelia and Tara in the East Building—and consciously offered on-going support and encouragement, while still pushing the coaches to lead teachers in developing strategy applications rather than the coaches doing the work for teachers.

Through my own 2010-2011 Birchfield literacy coaching experience, I learned, as Knight (2007b), L’Allier et al. (2010), and Power and Boutilier (2009) assert, that administrators and literacy coaches need to work together to support classroom teachers, for no one can lead alone (Angelle, 2010; Bryk et al., 2010; Drago-Severson, 2009; Elmore, 2000; Mangin, 2005; Marzano et al, 2005; Spillane et al., 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007a; Taylor, 2008; von Frank, 2011). Involved with many tasks and responsibilities outside of the Birchfield literacy initiative, I certainly needed and appreciated Lana’s hands-on leadership of the literacy coaching team. Therefore, as the year went on and I climbed higher up on the balcony to gain a broader view the initiative, I delegated more of the administrative leadership tasks to Lana, such as planning the Institute Day strategy trainings for teachers, facilitating the strategy and literacy coaching
trainings for the coaches, and running literacy coaching team meetings. Knowing that school administrators demonstrate their positions as lead learners (Crane, 2010; Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Knight, 2007b; Knight, 2009a; Marzano et al., 2005; Taylor & Collins, 2003), I continued, however, to participate in all of the coaches’ literacy strategy trainings, as well as all of their coaching trainings, for as Elmore and Burney attest, “[s]hared expertise is the driver of instructional change” (p. 268).

From a performative aspect, several lessons that I learned, or that were reinforced for me over the 2010-2011 school year, have influenced my leadership of Birchfield High School’s literacy coaching initiative in particular, and my leadership style in general. Regarding the particular, I have conveyed to the literacy coaching team the three types of knowledge I have found essential for effective literacy coaching. As I stated to Kate during her interview:

I think there’s [sic] three types of knowledge [that a literacy coach must possess]. You need strategy knowledge—absolutely. There’s the content knowledge which you [Kate] realize is a big piece, and then you’re talking about the big piece of how to work with adult learners.

Lana helped me to understand the importance of the literacy and content coaches being knowledgeable about and comfortable with the literacy strategies. Geri, who expressed much frustration with learning how to implement the strategies, even in her own classroom, further underlined this for me. My research confirmed, therefore, that literacy coaches must be well-versed in the strategies (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Bloom et al., 2005; Casey, 2006; Frost & Bean, 2006; Knight, 2006; Knight, 2007b; L’Allier et al., 2010; Snow et al., 2006; Sturtevant, 2003; Supovitz, 2008; Toll, 2005). As a result, my first job as a leader of the literacy coaching team is to make sure that all of the coaches
have a firm grasp of the literacy strategies. As the year progressed, I learned what I called in Geri’s interview “another big lesson” related to the strategies: “[W]e started calling them [the Gretchen Courtney strategies] ‘reading strategies’ and went to ‘literacy strategies,’ and I’ve been sticking with that, but really they’re ‘thinking strategies.’” I continued to explain to Geri that the Courtney literacy strategies give Birchfield teachers “a common understanding of what it means to connect, or predict”—to think strategically. Thus, another leadership role for me particular to Birchfield’s literacy coaching initiative—confirmed by Hayes (2010), Keene and Zimmerman (2007), Pearson and Gallagher (1983), Taylor and Collins (2003), and Thompson and Zeuli (1999)—is to convey to both the coaches and Birchfield teachers that literacy strategies empower students with strategic thinking tools applicable to all types of learning across the content areas.

As the Birchfield literacy and content coaches began presenting the literacy strategies to teachers as thinking, information processing strategies, they were able to help the teachers adapt the strategies to apply to information conveyances beyond textbooks, such as videos, lectures, and demonstrations. As a team, we all have learned that the strategies need to be adapted not only to the way content is delivered, but to the type of content as well, a finding that has been confirmed by Gregory and Kuzmich (2005) and the International Reading Association (2006). For example, I told Kate that “another big lesson” for me was that “it [literacy strategy instruction] looks so different in math than it does in reading class.” I completely agree with Geri, therefore, who stated that literacy strategy instruction is “not a cookie cutter model.” As a result, the Birchfield literacy coaching team had to adapt the literacy strategies to fit various content area
needs, particularly those of the Math Department. As I said to Geri, however, we all learned that the applications need to be “straightforward.” Echoing Joyce and Showers’ (1995) contention that teachers often think new instructional practices are too difficult and, thus, too much trouble to implement, I stated, “We don’t want to make it too hard. It shouldn’t be too hard [for the teachers to employ].” Geri and Jack, in particular, helped me to learn that a coach’s central job should be helping teachers make adaptations. This is best done by first helping them see the “relevance,” to use Jack’s term, of any application to their content area, an essential action for teacher buy-in according to Donaldson (2006). The coach can then lead teachers’ efforts to make strategy adaptations by respecting their experience and expertise—as Amelia emphasized and Firestone and Martinez (2009), L’Allier et al. (2010), Steckel (2009), and Toll (2005) have confirmed. This can be done by simply beginning a coaching conversation, as Geri suggested, with the question, “What would work?”

In order to help teachers make meaningful adaptations to the strategies, however, the team members and I have realized that literacy coaches must know something about the content areas of the teachers they are coaching, an essential cited by Bean (2010), Bloom et al. (2005), Firestone and Martinez (2009), Frost and Bean (2006), Killion (2009), Knight (2006), Knight (2007b), Mangin (2008), and Manno and Firestone, 2008. I mentioned this finding several times during my interviews. For example, I said to Jack, “[T]he coach really has to have some content expertise.” Similarly, I related to Kate, “[A] huge learning for me [is] that content really matters.” I agree with Jack, though, who pointed out that the literacy coach not being a content expert actually can be advantageous. Specifically, Jack stressed, “I think it’s good that they [the literacy
coaches] don’t know everything [about the content area] because they can think through it. They can do something like a student would [do] much closer than I [the content expert] can.” Therefore, my learning in regards to coaches’ content knowledge, as I related to Kate, is “not that you [the coach] must to be an expert in the content, but you have to have a pretty solid base.” This base, I found, is especially important when planning a large-group strategy training session for teachers. To Jack, I explained:

That’s a lesson I should have learned . . . 10 years ago or more ago when I started [conducting staff literacy] trainings, and the math teachers were always the hardest [to train] because so many times [the strategies and activities are] not really applicable to math—or it takes more to apply [them]. But I still did not really learn that lesson until this year.

Geri and Jack both agreed that teachers learn more in large group trainings when the material is specific to the teachers’ content area. Geri stated, “I think that’s when you get the most out of it.” Similarly, Jack asserted about content-specific strategy trainings, “You get more out of everybody.” Content matters because, as our team learned and Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) confirm, as adult learners, teachers must see the relevance of any training to their actual instruction in order for them to get anything out of the training. I, therefore, realize that we need to provide opportunities for the content and literacy coaches to design trainings specific to teachers’ varying needs. Also, I have learned that in order to effectively implement strategy applications, teachers need support beyond a workshop session, knowledge that is well-supported by Allington and Cunningham (2007), Bush (as cited in Knight, 2009a), Crane (2010), Driscoll (2008), Joyce and Showers (1995), Showers and Joyce (1996), and West (2009). As I expressed to Whitney, “If teachers don’t have some kind of support besides just a workshop, the chances of them utilizing what they’ve learned in a workshop . . . is next to nothing.”
Literacy coaching, therefore, is essential for providing continual professional development support. Consequently, as the administrative leader of Birchfield’s literacy initiative, I must continually provide administrative support for the literacy coaching team to allow them to effectively carry out their jobs.

Administrative support, I have learned, must be present for any new initiative to take root; thus, my job—as Elmore (2000), Fullan (2008), and Marzano and Waters (2009) assert—is to support teachers to expand their knowledge and skills. From a distributed leadership perspective, I have spearheaded with Lana the Birchfield High School literacy coaching initiative to support our teachers who have been charged with sharing the responsibility of improving student learning by infusing strategy instruction into their lessons. As an administrator, therefore, I am ultimately responsible for supporting Lana and the coaches in their efforts to make school-wide literacy strategy instruction a reality. The support that I have attempted to provide reflects my collaborative leadership style which, as Donaldson (2006) and Sheppard et al. (2010) assert, can enhance my effectiveness as a leader as I facilitate connections within the Birchfield literacy coaching team. As I related to Tara, “I feel like it’s important for me to be part of the team, to be supportive from an administrative point of view.” I continued, “I’m very supportive of the team and of teamwork.” I understand that I must clearly communicate my support because, as Tara commented, the attitude of a leader “trickles down.” Therefore, along with Lana, I need to be “a cheerleader” of the coaching team members’ efforts. Like Donaldson (2006) and Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009), I subscribe to publicly recognizing and thanking people genuinely and often for their efforts. For example, during our interview, I congratulated Geri as part of the coaching
team: “You guys have done a tremendous job. I was sincere in my thanks to all of you yesterday in the auditorium [at the all school meeting]. I hope that came through because I know it hasn’t been easy.”

While I aim to be supportive and collaborative rather than, as I expressed to Jack, “a ‘You gotta do this!’ kind of leader,” I do know that to be an effective administrator, I must do more than simply lead cheers for the coaches. I understand from Donaldson (2006) that administrative support also means setting expectations, monitoring progress, and providing feedback to the literacy and content coaches to enhance their growth both as individuals and as a team. As I stated in Amelia’s interview, “[F]ollow-up: that’s the thing.” I also have learned that I must not be blind to negativity. As researchers such as Bryk et al. (2010) and Payne (2008) have documented, teacher push-back to new initiatives is a reality; therefore, I must recognize this, work with the coaches to address it when necessary, and then accentuate the positive. “You’re not going to please everyone all the time,” Kurt stated to me. I responded to Kurt, “That’s been a hard lesson for me to learn,” but I am choosing to take Tara’s advice “to make the best of every situation.” Like Donaldson (2006), I believe that optimism can fuel my ability as a leader to instigate positive change.

Ultimately, I understand that school-wide change is difficult and takes time (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Elmore, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005). In fact, I told Whitney, “[Y]ou can’t change a culture overnight.” To Caitlin, I asserted, “The trajectory we’ve been on is very normal. You’re not going to all of a sudden have people say, ‘Yeah! Come into my classroom and watch me!’” As Amelia and Caitlin both advised, therefore, I believe that we need to “stay the course” with our school-wide literacy
coaching initiative. I also understand that the glue that will keep the team together, and help all of us move forward is clear communication (Angelle, 2010; Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Armstrong, 2011; Bennett et al., 2003; Elmore, 2000; Halverson, 2006; MacBeath, 2009; Reeves, 2004; Sherer, 2007; Taylor, 2008). For example, when Tara related that she felt the coaching team needed to communicate better with one another, I responded, “I’m really listening to that because you know me well enough by now to know that a high priority for me is communication.” I continued, “A team has to communicate because there’s no teamwork otherwise.” Of course, I understand that communication is the foundation of the development of trusting relationships, both with one another and with the teachers we service, and that trust is the wellspring of organizational change (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Heineke, 2010; Knight, 2006; Toll, 2005). “It’s all about trust, isn’t it?” I shared with Caitlin.

In sum, the Birchfield High School literacy coaching initiative has propelled the personal and leadership growth of all of us members of the literacy coaching team. We all have a better understanding of how to apply the literacy strategies to the various content areas, how to tailor trainings to meet teachers’ differing needs, and the necessity of clearly communicating and building trusting relationships both with one another and with the teachers we serve in order for the initiative to take root and flourish. As I said to Tara, “A leader sets the tone”; therefore, as the administrator in charge of the Birchfield literacy coaching initiative, I have learned to keep my tone positive, even in the face of providing feedback on the performative aspects of the initiative that have not all gone as
ostensibly planned, for I understand from Donaldson (2006) that “[c]hange is a [performative] journey, not a[n ostensive] blueprint” (p. 151).

**Ostensive and performative changes to literacy coaching at Birchfield.** When I interviewed Lana in February, 2010, I stated, “[W]e really have to come up with a concrete plan, and soon, for what we’re going to do” in regards to literacy coaching for the 2011-2012 school year. In true distributed leadership form, I realized that Lana and I should consult the literacy and content coaches “as far as what needs people are seeing [as to] where to go from here.” Thus, the information I gleaned from the interviews I conducted with Lana and the rest of the coaching team turned out to be crucial in helping us make some ostensive changes to the Birchfield literacy coaching structure (see Figure 10).

*Figure 10. Birchfield High School’s 2011-2012 literacy coaching structure with first names.*
The first ostensive adjustment we made was taking Kate’s suggestion to recruit a literacy coach from outside the Reading Department to replace Melinda, who left Birchfield in June, 2011. Kate told me, “[T]here are definitely some strong people in other content areas that would be great at this [literacy coaching] because of their leadership and their willingness to grasp them [the strategies] and go with it.” Since Kate was not comfortable with her role as the Math Department’s literacy coach, we recruited a math teacher, Sam, for that job. Sam has teamed well with Jack, and literacy strategy instruction in the Math Department is beginning to take hold, as evidenced by the math coaches, their department chair, and my own observations of math teachers at work.

When I asked Kate which content she would prefer over math, her first response was, “Health—I love Health!” Whitney decided not to reapply for her Health content coach position, so we hired another Health teacher, Sid, with whom Kate, the new Health literacy coach, has formed a strong bond. In fact, as the two of them developed a strategy review training session for the Health teachers in December, 2011, I witnessed them joking around, obviously enjoying one another’s company as they collaborated. A third ostensive change we made to the literacy coaching structure was moving Kurt from the English Department literacy coach to the Science Department literacy coach. We did so for two main reasons. First, Larissa was extremely confident in her ability to support the English teachers, with whom she made great inroads in 2010-2011. Tara, whose background is English, was excited to move into the literacy coach position that Kurt had vacated. Like Kate and Sid, I witnessed Tara and Larissa closely collaborating as they prepared in December 2011, for their upcoming strategy review training with the English teachers. Secondly, Kurt switched to the Science Department because he is teaming with
Geri beyond literacy coaching. The two now share the same group of freshmen to whom Geri is teaching Biology and Kurt is teaching Reading. Caitlin decided that she would enjoy moving to East Building to take over the literacy coach-at-large position that Tara was vacating. The final ostensive change we made to the literacy coaching structure was moving Amelia into the West Building literacy coach-at-large position that Melinda had left. Thus, of the 10 coaching positions, only content coaches Jack, Geri, and Larissa remained in their original 2010-2011 coaching assignments.

Due to budgetary concerns, none of the literacy or content coaches was given more time to coach, an ostensive change that several of the team members recommended. Nevertheless, the above mentioned ostensive adjustments to the Birchfield literacy coaching structure have brought about several performative changes, which is in line with Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) assertion that new variations on an organizational routine can lead to new understandings and meanings for the routine. First, the literacy and content coach collaborations have improved, particularly in the Math, Health, and Science Departments where Sam and Jack, Kate and Sid, and Kurt and Geri are working comfortably and collegially in their respective teams. Secondly, the literacy coaches are all well-matched to their core content areas: Tara, Kate, Sam, and Kurt all feel confident in their respective knowledge of English, Health, Math, and Science. Additionally, Amelia and Tara have returned to West Building, which has improved their communication with Lana. Finally, the literacy and content coaches have all set performance goals and are tracking their progress each semester towards meeting their goals.
In general, literacy strategy instruction is becoming more widespread throughout Birchfield High School classrooms, as witnessed by Birchfield department chairs, other administrators, and myself during our fall of 2011 formal and informal classroom observations. The coaches have told me anecdotally that they are growing more comfortable with coaching, and the teachers seem to be more receptive to being coached. To incentivize teachers, we used Melinda’s suggestion to make sure that the teachers know they can count their coaching hours towards their state professional development requirement. As suggested by Larissa, we also have encouraged tenured teachers to include the coaching experience as part of their evaluation-year projects, which has spurred more interest in coaching as well. Finally, through the formal observation process, Birchfield administrators and department chairs have been suggesting that teachers seek coaching when they are unsure about strategy applications. As a result, literacy coaching at Birchfield High School is on the rise.

The Essence of the Distributed Leadership Experience of the Birchfield High School Literacy Coaching Team

The central question of my study asks, “What is the essence of the distributed leadership experience of the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School literacy coaching team?” To uncover that essence—“the internal meaning structures of the lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10)—I combed and re-combed through my interview data for repetitions, connections, emphases, omissions, and salient quotes, listening in my head to the voices of each member of the literacy coaching team, including my own. The following revelations come from the individual and combined voices of Birchfield High
School department chair Lana; literacy coaches Amelia, Caitlin, Kate, Kurt, Melinda, and Tara; content coaches Geri, Jack, Larissa, and Whitney; and me, curriculum director Nancy. The essence of our shared experience exists within our individual and collective selves, legitimized by our individual and shared realities. As I stated to Tara, I believe that “everybody’s opinion [and] perspective is valid because it’s your opinion. It’s your perspective.” Therefore, like the multiple mirrors of a kaleidoscope, the literacy coaching team members’ interviews have illuminated the multifaceted, patterned essence of our combined experiences and perspectives.

One facet of the essence of the literacy coaching team members’ distributed leadership experience is the understanding that the federal government’s No Child Left Behind law propelled Birchfield High School to develop a school-wide literacy program. Many of the literacy coaching team members referred to Birchfield’s mandated need to raise standardized test scores:

- Amelia: “There’s the ‘we have to’ in the sense that reading is being tested. It’s ACT; it’s No Child Left Behind; it’s legal.”
- Kurt: “[There’s] the outside perspective where . . . Birchfield needs to meet these standards.
- Kate: “[O]ur test scores weren’t very good. We weren’t making AYP [annual yearly progress].
- Larissa: “[W]e want our scores up.”
- Melinda: “[W]e need to] increase the test scores.”
- Tara: “[W]e had to adopt or bring something in that was going to catch the children—the students that were below reading level to help pull them up . . . to where they need to be for meeting AYP.”

Beyond the government mandate, the literacy coaching team members expressed the understanding that Birchfield implemented the school-wide literacy program because
many students need assistance beyond a reading class—a second facet of the essence of the literacy coaching team members’ distributed leadership experience:

- Amelia: “[K]ids can’t read.”
- Kurt: “[There’s] the inside perspective. We’ve looked at the research. . . . [T]he bottom line is just what’s best for students—what’s best for kids.”
- Caitlin: “[I]t’s not just the reading teacher’s job to incorporate literacy in the classroom. It’s everybody’s job.”
- Lana: “We need to infuse literacy into all our classes. We need to put more focus on reading. . . . [R]eading is everywhere.”
- Larissa: “If the teachers are developed, then they can develop their students.”

Lana and I realized, however, that most teachers will not be “developed” after a single workshop, or even two, or three workshops. Larissa expressed that same understanding:

- Larissa: “[H]ow do you digest it and keep it [literacy strategy training] going? . . . [Y]ou have to have time to practice it, time to put it into action.”

I told Lana, therefore, that she and I were like “a couple of cooks in a kitchen trying to whip something up” when it came to developing our ostensive literacy coaching plan because we knew that we needed to provide on-going, job-embedded professional development in order to truly change teachers’ instructional practices. Members of the literacy coaching team shared this knowledge as well:

- Amelia: “[C]oaching provides that in-house [professional development] that allows us to reach more students.”
- Tara: “[Literacy coaching] opens the content teachers’ eyes to say, ‘Oh, okay. We really . . . need this. The kids really . . . need this.’”
- Caitlin: “I think it’s always easier for teachers to learn from other teachers . . . . I think it makes it a little less daunting.”
- Whitney: “[A] lot of times it’s [professional development from one’s own colleagues is] better received.”
A third facet of the essence of the Birchfield literacy coaching team’s distributed leadership experience is the match of some elements of the coaching model’s ostensive structure to its performative aspects. For example, Kurt and Larissa formed the type of literacy/content coach team that Lana and I envisioned, learning from one another as they collaborated to support the teachers of the English Department:

- Larissa: “[I’ve] developed a really good relationship with Kurt. I consider him a friend. We understand how each other think, and we work well together.”

- Kurt: “I couldn’t ask for anyone better. . . . I learn stuff from Larissa every day.”

- Larissa: “I feel like the [English] teachers are won over.”

Just as Lana and I planned, content coach Larissa described herself as acting as “the link between the reading coach and . . . all the direct instructors and appliers [teachers].” Similarly, Jack described his content coach role as being a “translator” of “[reading] jargon,” serving as a “bridge” between the literacy coach and the teachers to help them see how the literacy strategies could have “relevant” math applications. Of course, of the literacy/content coach teams, only Kurt and Larissa’s partnership performed as ostensively planned. The other coaching teams—Kate and Jack, Caitlin and Geri, and Tara and Whitney—worked little with one another, if at all, as evidenced by either their polite complaints about partners, or their failure to say much, if anything, about their coaching counterparts during their interviews. Additionally, while literacy and content coaches worked with their ostensively assigned departments, Kurt was the only literacy coach who worked exclusively with his designated department. Thus, several of the literacy coaching team’s performative aspects did not match the ostensive plan: a fourth facet of the essence of the team’s distributed leadership experience.
Another example of this ostensive/performative mismatch is evidenced in the coaching activities that the team members reported conducting. While they mentioned just about every coaching activity that was outlined in the Birchfield literacy and content coach contracts, none of the coaches performed all of the activities. “What I’m thinking of as coaching [co-planning, modeling, observing],” Whitney told me, “didn’t happen a lot.” In agreement, Lana stated, “I don’t think we’re quite there yet.” She continued, “I think there’s been more conversation than anything.” The coaching that did occur was, for the most part, “more informal,” as Jack, Caitlin, and Larissa articulated it. Larissa described the way teachers often came to her on an informal basis as being “like a knock on the door: ‘Hey, I’m teaching summarizing. Does it mean this?’” I described the coaches’ activities to Whitney as “[j]ust dipping your toe[s] in the water” because—except for Larissa who jokingly said about recruiting teachers to coach, “I’ll stalk em!”—I heard over and over that the coaches worried about scaring off teachers by being too aggressive:

- Geri: “I didn’t want to, you know, be too forceful.” “I can’t force them to come to me or for me to come to them.”

- Whitney: “[Y]ou can’t force it after that.” “[All I could say to the teachers was,] ‘Here it is. Please—please do,’ but that was it, you know. It was their choice beyond that.”

- Jack: “I can’t watch everybody. I can’t check up on them.” “I didn’t tell them what to do. I just kind of showed them, ‘This is what I did.’”

- Caitlin: “I was trying to meet them [the teachers] half way.”

- Amelia: “The ‘force model’ is probably one that’s going to fail you . . . if you kind of bulldoze your way through it and, ‘This is my way or the highway.’”

Kate shared that she learned firsthand that she needed to be more diplomatic in her coaching work: “Bite my tongue. Biting my tongue sometimes and . . . [g]et that filter
turned on maybe. [K]nowing how to say something that’s not going to be so . . . abrasive.” Caitlin agreed: “[Y]ou don’t want to come off as having all of the answers because that really puts people off to what you have to say.” In general, the literacy coaching team’s modus operandi seemed to reflect Amelia’s description of her literacy coaching approach: “I’m sort of like your relief pitcher in baseball. I’m here when you need me.”

A fifth facet of essence of the Birchfield literacy coaching team’s distributed leadership experience is that most of the members found coaching to be, in Jack’s words, “bitter sweet.” Part of the bitter, for content coaches Jack and Geri in particular, was feeling that they were not getting enough support from their literacy coaches. For literacy coach Kate, the bitter came from her frustration with her lack of content knowledge, while Tara was frustrated by what she perceived as a lack of communication between the literacy coaching team members. Not having enough time to work with their coaching counterparts, or to coach in general, was another bitter element mentioned by five of the team members. The largest bitter nugget at the center of just about every coach’s experience, however, seemed to be teacher resistance. Amelia perhaps best described the resistance with this teacher quote: “I have no idea what I’m doing, and I’m not doing it!” Jack explained that while the Algebra 1 teachers were amenable to the strategies because they had been charged with directly instructing them, the other teachers in his department were more reluctant, sighing, “Ahhh, we’ll do it if we have to.” Other team members provided interpretations of reasons for teacher resistance:

- Kurt: “[T]hey’re frustrated.”
• Geri: “I don’t think as a group we [Science Department teachers] ever felt comfortable with [the literacy strategies].”

• Whitney: “[W]e’re [content teachers are] not used to it [literacy strategy instruction].”

• Lana: “I think many [of the teachers] are viewing it [literacy strategy instruction] as more of a burden.”

• Caitlin: “Initiative fatigue! Initiative fatigue!” “[S]ometimes teachers make the worst students.”

As I stated to Kate, “It’s been rough, rough.” Several of the team members mentioned, though, that teacher resistance to any kind of change is to be expected. As Kurt intoned, “[Y]ou’re not gonna please everyone all the time”; therefore, in Tara’s words, “You can’t get discouraged.” Reflecting Geri’s advice to ask in the face of resistance, “Well, how can we work this out?”—Tara expressed the overall optimistic outlook of the team:

“Okay. Well, let’s move on and see what else I can do to help.”

Despite facing challenges, all of the literacy and content coaches found some success and/or benefits to coaching:

• Amelia: “I had a couple of them [the Foods teachers] come to me [after we worked together, saying], “That was awesome!”

• Caitlin: “[The Physics teachers said,] ‘Woo-woo! We’re so happy to be working with you. We really like these reading initiatives.”

• Jack: “[I]t’s kind of rewarding, and then you can tell everybody about it—you know, ‘This is what I did that is really cool. The kids enjoyed it . . .’”

• Whitney: “[D]eveloping materials has gone very well and been very easy.”

• Kate: “I loved . . . work[ing] with [a Special Ed. math teacher] who let me come into her classroom . . . . [W]e had a blast!”

• Geri: “I’m better at trying to work out problems.”

• Larissa: “I feel like the teachers are won over.”
- Melinda: “[Coaching] took me to a new level.”
- Kurt: “I’m more confident now.”
- Kate: “I have more confidence in myself.”
- Larissa: “I’m even more comfortable in my own skin.”

While Lana called the Birchfield literacy coaching experience “a little challenging,” and Caitlin expressed that coaching had “been kind of a struggle,” they both exhibited the fortitude to carry on:

- Lana: “You know, whatever it takes.”
- Caitlin: “I’m plugging through.”

Other team members’ positive comments point to an overall affirmative view of literacy coaching:

- Melinda: “I think it’s been a good experience.”
- Kate: “[O]verall, I thought it was good.”
- Amelia: “I’ve actually really liked it.” “I would love to continue to be a literacy coach.”
- Tara: “I love my job, and I love doing what I do.”
- Kurt: “[I]t’s been an interesting experience.” “[I]t’s been a good experience.” “[O]verall, it’s definitely been positive. For me, personally, you know, it’s a great experience. How many people have that experience? Not many people can say they’ve done literacy coaching, and also, it’s help for the kids.”

The sixth and final facet of the essence of the Birchfield literacy coaching team experience is the evidence of understandings and practices that infers leadership development. First, as a team, we learned that it takes longer than one year of a literacy coaching program to break down the teacher tradition of working in isolation. As Caitlin stated, “It takes a while [for teachers to become comfortable with the practice of literacy
coaching].” “You can’t change a culture overnight,” I related to Whitney. Therefore, as a team of teacher leaders, we must be “patient,” as Kate advised; “persistent,” as Jack recommended; and “[s]tay the course,” as I stated to Amelia. Other team members echoed this advice as well:

- Caitlin: “We need to be really careful that people still see this as something that is not going to go away.”
- Kurt: “[K]eep working at it, and . . . don’t let it fall by the wayside.”
- Amelia: “[I]t wasn’t just a fly-by-night program.” “I think we need to see consistency.”

As a team, we also learned some nuts and bolts lessons about leading the infusion of literacy strategy instruction into the content areas. First, teachers need to understand that the literacy strategies are really thinking strategies that can be applied not only to textbook reading, but to other methods of processing new information as well. Also, we discovered that the literacy strategies need to be adapted to fit particular content areas. A set of literacy strategies cannot be seen, in Geri’s words, as “a cookie cutter model” because different disciplines call for different sorts of literacy applications. In addition, we learned that during both large group strategy trainings and small group coaching sessions, teachers should be presented with examples specific to their disciplines and, whenever possible, specific to what they are currently teaching. As Jack stated, “there’s [sic] not many people who are going to complain about things as long as they see the relevance to it [the training].” Demonstrating their willingness to take on the tough leadership task of holding teachers accountable for applying their new learning, both Whitney and Caitlin advocated making teachers directly responsible for using the literacy strategies in their instruction. Caitlin suggested that the teachers “produce some sort of
end result at the end [of a training]” that they could bring back to their classrooms, while Whitney proposed department chairs having “a conversation” with teachers asking them, “What are you doing? What have you tried? What is working? What other help do you need?” As a team, we also all realized that the literacy coaches need to have confidence in their content knowledge, as evidenced by Kate’s experience. Additionally, content coaches need confidence in their literacy strategy knowledge, as acknowledged by Geri and Jack. Finally, all literacy and content coaches—like all leaders—need to have a firm understanding of adult learning principles.

Another leadership lesson our literacy coaching team learned was to communicate with one another—and with teachers—the roles and responsibilities of literacy and content coaches, the coaches’ assignments to various departments, and the day-to-day operations of coaching. Amelia recommended “clearly communicating” and “making sure [that people are hearing] the same message,” while Tara advocated “keeping in touch with everybody,” so that “everybody [can] know what’s going on.” Amelia also articulated this leadership lesson: “[B]e willing to learn about who you are leading.” The importance of developing trusting relationships with the teachers they coached was mentioned by Amelia, Kurt, Caitlin, Larissa, and Melinda. “[V]alidate what they [the teachers] are doing,” Amelia further advised. As Amelia explained, effective coaches—and, thus, effective leaders—demonstrate “understanding,” are “helpful,” and “follow up,” even with a simple question like, “Hey, did you get it?” The coach’s job, like that of any leader, consists of “just really listening to needs,” according to Tara. Similarly, Larissa understood that effective coaches—and, therefore, effective leaders—model best practices: “They [the teachers] can look at that and say, ‘She’s on it.’” As a result, the
teachers are more likely to follow suit because, as Tara observed, a leader’s “attitude . . . trickles down.”

Thus, the kaleidoscopic pattern of events, attitudes, and learnings that merge into the essence of the distributed leadership experience of the Birchfield High School literacy coaching team consists of six major facets:

1. An understanding of the federal government’s role in the development of Birchfield High School’s school-wide literacy program:
   a. “It’s ACT; it’s No Child Left Behind; it’s legal” (Amelia);

2. An acknowledgement of the need for literacy coaching:
   a. “If the teachers are developed, then they can develop their students” (Larissa);

3. The match of some elements of the literacy coaching model’s ostensive structure to its performative aspects:
   a. “I developed a really good relationship with Kurt (Larissa);
   b. “I couldn’t ask for anyone better. . . . I learn stuff from Larissa every day” (Kurt);

4. The mismatch of several of literacy coaching’s performative aspects to its ostensive plan:
   a. “I was under the understanding that the reading specialist would be able to spend more time with the science people . . . and not let it be Caitlin telling me about the stuff and then me telling them because . . . there might be something lost in translation there” (Geri);
   b. “What I’m thinking of as coaching didn’t happen a lot” (Whitney);

5. The act of literacy coaching being both challenging and rewarding:
   a. “I mean, sometimes I’ve been really frustrated” (Jack);
   b. “I’ve actually really liked it” (Amelia); and

6. Leadership practices and understandings that evidence the team members’ development as leaders:
   a. “I’ve had to push a lot of them . . . , and I’ve had to back off at times” (Lana);
b. “There has to be more accountability” (Whitney);
c. “The importance of building rapport with people is huge” (Caitlin);
d. “I think I will venture out and try more leadership” (Melinda).

Concluding Remarks

“We now have a foundation on which to build,” I told Geri during our spring 2011 interview, and from my perch on the balcony during the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year, I witnessed the continued growth of the Birchfield High School literacy coaching team. The expansion of my own ability to lead is evidenced by my willingness to distribute more leadership to Lana, who has reminded me that leading “doesn’t look like doing.” As a result, Lana has effectively taken over the leadership of the literacy coaching team by providing day-to-day support for the literacy and content coaches, in addition to coordinating the team’s regular meetings and their meetings to prepare for staff literacy strategy review sessions. Lana also facilitated for the team members a series of cognitive coaching trainings the fall of 2011. The addition of Sam from the Math Department and Sid from the Health Department, along with the re-matched literacy/content coach pairings and departmental assignments, have combined to bring about a new vitality to the literacy coaching effort, which seems to be experiencing a synergistic snowball effect described by Larissa in this way: “[Y]ou train a group first, and then they train others, and it just gets bigger and bigger.” Larissa stated, “I just feel like it’s building,” and I believe she’s right—the “it” referring to the expansion of literacy coaching efforts and activities, coaches’ and teachers’ expanded comfort with and usage of the literacy strategies, and the Birchfield High School literacy coaching teams members’ growing leadership capacity.
In many ways, 2010-2011 was, in Caitlin’s words, “a rough, bumpy year” for Birchfield High School’s new organizational routine of literacy coaching; however, as I stated to Whitney, it was “very much a learning year.” Caitlin optimistically predicted, “I think it will get better,” and I believe it has. The entire team is “pushing forward,” as Kurt advised; more “clearly communicating,” as Amelia counseled; and “work[ing] closer as a team,” as Tara suggested. As a result, literacy strategy instruction is beginning to take root in Birchfield High School classrooms through the distributed leadership work of the Birchfield literacy coaching team. “I’m just trying to make this better,” I related to Caitlin. In order to do so, as the administrative leader of this team, it is my responsibility to continually monitor the team members’ activities and collect data regarding teachers’ implementation of literacy strategy instruction. Through my Birchfield High School literacy coaching experience, however, I realize that I cannot effectively lead alone. Consciously distributing leadership, therefore, to Lana and the literacy and content coaches has strengthened us as individuals and as a team which, in turn, is strengthening Birchfield High School’s school-wide literacy initiative.

Certainly, the results of this small phenomenological study cannot necessarily be extrapolated to other contexts; therefore, more research should be conducted on the implications of distributed leadership on school reform efforts, the effects of literacy coaching on school improvement efforts and the expansion of teacher leadership, and the effects of government mandates on the organizational structures of schools. I also recommend more research into the traits of effective literacy coaches and how to effectively address teacher resistance to new initiatives.
Postscript

Celebrating on the Dance Floor. The morning after my dissertation approval meeting, I was sitting at my desk still pinching myself to make sure I really wasn’t dreaming – that I actually was Dr. Spaniak – when Rick, Birchfield’s principal, burst into my office.

“Aren’t you supposed to be in a meeting in the library right now?” he asked brusquely.

“Wow,” I thought. “Not even a ‘Good morning,’ much less a ‘Congratulations’?”

Rick’s behavior confounded me since he had sent me a text message the day before, while I was still in my approval meeting no less, anxiously asking, “Dr.?”

I did have an 8:00 appointment on my calendar, but Rick told me it had been moved up, and we needed to get to the meeting right away. I wondered why Rick, who is usually so pleasant with me, was acting so gruff. Grabbing a notebook and pen, I hustled to follow Rick down the hall, into the library, and up to the closed door of the library classroom. As Rick opened the door, I glimpsed people and balloons. Before I could fully process what I was seeing, however, I heard Rick announce to the packed room, “Ladies and gentlemen, I present Dr. Nancy Spaniak!” Tears immediately stung my eyes as I made out the faces of Birchfield administrators, department chairs, teachers, clerical staff, and the literacy coaching team. Lana had organized this congratulatory reception, where I was overwhelmed by the handshakes, hugs, and cheers of so many well-wishers. The literacy coaching team presented me with two “congratulations” cards crammed with signatures, along with a beautiful Tiffany earring and necklace set picked out for me by Lana and Kate on behalf of my Birchfield friends and colleagues.
The sincere good wishes I received at that reception, and throughout the following days from nearly everyone at Birchfield, have made me realize how the latest leg of my life-long leadership journey has been fueled by the many trusting relationships I have built during my eight years at Birchfield High School. I have recalled Donaldson’s (2006) assertion that cultivating trusting relationships is central to effective leadership, and I realize that I could not successfully distribute leadership to the literacy coaching team members if I did not trust their professionalism and dedication. In turn, they never would have so frankly shared their coaching experiences with me had they not trusted me to support and sustain their efforts. Undoubtedly, I concur with Evans’ (2007) contention that relational trust rests at the core of job satisfaction: I love my job because I love the people I work with and the work we do. As a leader, I must continue to follow Heifetz and Laurie’s (1997) advice to climb up to the balcony of Birchfield High School in order to objectively survey the intricate dance of its inner workings. Just as importantly, however, I must also climb down to the floor to participate in the dance with my colleagues. Yes, the dance is strenuous and never-ending, but our trusting camaraderie sustains us and keeps us stepping closer to our ultimate goal of improving student achievement. I will always cherish the memory of my “Dr. Spaniak Congratulatory Reception.” Thank you to everyone who danced with me in celebration that morning and continue to dance with me at work each day. In particular, I sincerely thank Lana, Amelia, Caitlin, Kate, Kurt, Melinda, Tara, Geri, Jack, Larissa, and Whitney for being such great partners in the inaugural year of the Birchfield literacy coaching team effort. Our dance continues!
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Appendix A

Explanatory Letter to Study Participants

Dear [participant’s name],

Through our literacy coaching initiative this year, our team has lived a shared experience: a phenomenon. The individuals of our team, however, all have different perspectives about this phenomenon because of our own of our varying backgrounds, roles, actions, and interactions within the coaching initiative.

The purpose of this interview, which will last approximately thirty minutes, is to gain an understanding of how you have experienced our literacy coaching initiative. Your first-person account, along with those of the other members of the literacy coaching team and my own as well, is the evidence that I am gathering for my dissertation study to determine the essence of distributed leadership as it is stretched over our literacy coaching initiative. I am interested in learning about your understandings, perceptions, and direct experiences with literacy coaching at our school. Ultimately, I believe this study will clarify and strengthen our roles as leaders and members of a literacy coaching team, which, in turn, will enhance our literacy coaching initiative.

Although the information you provide me will be published in my dissertation, your identity will not be divulged. All participants will be identified only by assumed first names. Our school will be called by a pseudonym as well. The information you provide me will have no impact on your teacher evaluation.

The Questions I Plan To Ask You

1. Tell me about your background as an educator and leadership experiences outside of this literacy coaching initiative.

2. Tell me about your understanding as to why our school has adopted the practice of literacy coaching.
3. Describe your understanding of our literacy coaching model.

4. Tell me about your role and your experience with this model.

5. What leadership lessons, if any, have you learned from your experience?

6. As a team, what should we do to keep our literacy coaching initiative moving forward?

    I will share with you a transcript of our interview and will seek your input regarding my coding of the data I glean from the information you provide. If, for any reason, you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so within one month of our initial interview. Thank you, in advance, for your time and valuable input.

Sincerely yours,

Nancy Spaniak
# Appendix B

## Fall 2009-Spring 2011 Courtney Strategy & Literacy Coaching Training Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Fall, 2009-Spring, 2011 Courtney Strategy &amp; Coaching Training Schedule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/27/09</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for Reading Department: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Predicting</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/7/09</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for Reading Department: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Summarizing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for Reading Department: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Connecting</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/9/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for Reading Department: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Questioning</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/26/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for Reading Department: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Inferring</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/5/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for Reading Department: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Imaging</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/3/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for Health &amp; Biology Direct Instructors: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Predicting &amp; Summarizing (non-narrative)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/6/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for Math Direct Instructors: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Predicting &amp; Summarizing (non-narrative)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/7/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for English Direct Instructors: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Predicting &amp; Summarizing (narrative)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/10/10, 6/11/10</td>
<td>Literacy coaching training with Dr. Nancy Shanklin for Literacy and Content Coaches and other interested teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/21/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for Reading Direct Instructors and other interested teachers: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Vocabulary</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/11/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer works with Literacy Coaches to design August Institute Day Strategy Appliers Trainings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/13/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer provides informational training for DCs and administrators: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Predicting &amp; Summarizing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/16/10</td>
<td>Question &amp; answer for all Direct Instructors with and informational training for all Strategy Appliers, other certified staff, and instructional assistants with Reading Specialists: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework-Predicting &amp; Summarizing (Institute Day)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1/10</td>
<td>Courtney trainer works with Literacy Coaches to design November Institute Day Strategy Appliers Trainings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Fall, 2009-Spring, 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Courtney Strategy &amp; Coaching Training Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/8/10</td>
<td>Informational ½ day sessions for all Direct Instructors &amp; Literacy Coaches: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework</em> - Connecting &amp; Questioning (English 1: 8 AM-11 AM; Health, Biology, and Algebra 1: 12 Noon-3 PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/5/10</td>
<td>Question &amp; answer for all Direct Instructors with Courtney trainer and informational training for all Strategy Appliers, other certified staff, and instructional assistants with Reading Specialists: <em>Connecting &amp; Questioning</em> (Institute Day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/14/11</td>
<td>Informational ½ day sessions for all Direct Instructors &amp; Literacy Coaches: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework</em> - Inferring &amp; Imaging (English 1: 12 Noon-3PM)</td>
</tr>
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<td>2/15/11</td>
<td>Informational ½ day sessions for all Direct Instructors &amp; Literacy Coaches: <em>Courtney Strategy Framework</em> - Inferring &amp; Imaging (Algebra 1: 8 AM-11 AM; Health and Biology: 12 Noon-3 PM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/1/11</td>
<td>Courtney trainer works with Literacy Coaches to design March 8 Institute Day Trainings</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/8/11</td>
<td>All certified staff and instructional assistants trained in <em>Courtney Strategy Framework</em> - Inferring &amp; Imaging (Institute Day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9/11</td>
<td>Courtney trainer works with Curriculum Director, DCs, and Reading Department to develop on-going support for on-going implementation of the <em>Courtney Strategy Framework</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>4/29/11</td>
<td>Literacy coaching training with Drs. Susan L’Allier and Laurie Elish-Piper of Northern Illinois University for Literacy and Content Coaches</td>
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## Appendix C

### Overview of Birchfield Literacy Coaching Team Members’ Backgrounds as Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>LITERACY COACHING TEAM POSITION</th>
<th>POST-GRADUATE DEGREES</th>
<th>YEARS IN EDUCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>• Literacy Coach for East Building teachers in Applied Academics, Social Science, and World Language</td>
<td>• Master’s in Reading&lt;br&gt;• Master’s in Educational Administration</td>
<td>12 years total&lt;br&gt;• .5 teaching 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade&lt;br&gt;• 4.5 teaching English and Psychology at Bard High School&lt;br&gt;• 7 as a reading specialist teaching reading at Birchfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlin</td>
<td>• Literacy coach in West Building for Science</td>
<td>• Master’s in Reading</td>
<td>5 years total&lt;br&gt;• 2 teaching English and reading at Lockview High School&lt;br&gt;• 3 as a reading specialist teaching reading at Birchfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geri</td>
<td>• Biology content coach</td>
<td>• Master’s in Secondary Education&lt;br&gt;• Master’s in Environmental Biology&lt;br&gt;• Working on Ph.D. in Science Education</td>
<td>17 years total&lt;br&gt;• 6 teaching science at an area junior high&lt;br&gt;• 2 teaching science at a private high school&lt;br&gt;• 1 year teaching science at Brave High School&lt;br&gt;• 8 years teaching science at Birchfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>• Algebra 1 content coach</td>
<td>• None</td>
<td>4 years total&lt;br&gt;• All teaching math at Birchfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>• Literacy coach in West Building for Math</td>
<td>• Master’s in Reading&lt;br&gt;• Master’s in Library Science</td>
<td>12 years total&lt;br&gt;• 2 teaching English at Reidy High School&lt;br&gt;• 6 teaching community college English (part-time)&lt;br&gt;• 4 as a reading specialist teaching reading at Birchfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurt</td>
<td>• Literacy coach in West Building for English</td>
<td>• Master’s in Reading</td>
<td>6 years total&lt;br&gt;• 1 as a paraprofessional in Birchfield’s Special Ed department&lt;br&gt;• 2 teaching English at a private high school</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>LITERACY COACHING TEAM POSITION</td>
<td>POST-GRADUATE DEGREES</td>
<td>YEARS IN EDUCATION</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurt</td>
<td>(continued)</td>
<td>• Master’s in Reading&lt;br&gt;• Master’s in Educational Administration</td>
<td>• 3 as a reading specialist teaching reading at Birchfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lana</td>
<td>• Reading Department Chair and Direct Supervisor of literacy coaches&lt;br&gt;• Leader of literacy coaching team</td>
<td></td>
<td>• 11 years total&lt;br&gt;• 5 teaching 1st and 2nd grade in a nearby district&lt;br&gt;• 3 as Rush High School’s reading specialist and reading teacher&lt;br&gt;• 3 has Birchfield Reading Department Chair</td>
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<td>Larissa</td>
<td>• English 1 content coach</td>
<td>• Master’s in Educational Administration</td>
<td>• 8 years total&lt;br&gt;• 2 teaching English at a small area junior high&lt;br&gt;• 6 teaching English at Birchfield</td>
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<td>Melinda</td>
<td>• Literacy coach for West Building teachers in Applied Academics, Fine Arts, and PE</td>
<td>• Master’s in Reading</td>
<td>• 8 years total&lt;br&gt;• 3 teaching 1st grade out-of-state&lt;br&gt;• 1 teaching 1st grade in-state&lt;br&gt;• 2 teaching 2nd grade in-state&lt;br&gt;• 2 as a reading specialist teaching reading at Birchfield</td>
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<td>Tara</td>
<td>• Literacy coach in East Building for PE/Health/Drivers Ed</td>
<td>• Master’s in Reading&lt;br&gt;• Master’s in Educational Administration</td>
<td>• 9 years total&lt;br&gt;• 3 teaching English at a local junior high&lt;br&gt;• 2 teaching community college reading (part-time while teaching at Birchfield)&lt;br&gt;• 6 as a reading specialist teaching reading at Birchfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whitney</td>
<td>• Health content coach</td>
<td>• Master’s in Educational Administration</td>
<td>• 10 years total&lt;br&gt;• All teaching Health and Drivers Ed at Birchfield</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D

**Overview of the Literacy Coaching Team Members’ Understanding of the Birchfield Literacy Coaching Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Understanding</th>
<th>Lana</th>
<th>Amelia</th>
<th>Caitlin</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>Kurt</th>
<th>Melinda</th>
<th>Tara</th>
<th>Geri</th>
<th>Jack</th>
<th>Larissa</th>
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<td>Visual Depiction of Structure</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Coach Role</td>
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<td>Literacy/Content Coach Relationship</td>
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### Appendix E

**Overview of the 2010-2011 Birchfield High School Literacy Coaching Activities**

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