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## The Essence of Instructional Coaching with Elementary Teacher Candidates: Reflections of Practice

Abigail J. Burke  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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THE ESSENCE OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

WITH ELEMENTARY TEACHER CANDIDATES:

REFLECTIONS OF PRACTICE

By

Abigail J Burke

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Jeanne L. Surface

Omaha, Nebraska

May, 2015

Supervisory Committee:

Jeanne L. Surface, Ed.D., Chair

Kay A. Keiser, Ed.D.

Peter J. Smith, Ed.D.

Nealy F. Grandgenett, Ph.D.

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Abstract

THE ESSENCE OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING  
WITH ELEMENTARY TEACHER CANDIDATES:  
REFLECTIONS OF PRACTICE

Abigail J Burke, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: Dr. Jeanne L. Surface

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the essence of instructional coaching between teacher candidates and an instructional coach as it relates to reflection of practice. Reflection has increasingly been recognized as a central element of professional growth during teacher preparation (Barnett, 2009; Cochran, et al, 2009; Hiebert, Morris, Berk, & Jansen, 2007; Parkinson, 2009). There is limited understanding of the process of learning with the support of an instructional coach within the context of field experience during teacher preparation. The limited research regarding the reflective practices alongside an instructional coach, during field experience led me to analyze the interactions that take place between the instructional coach and teacher candidates during the teacher preparation program. The participants in this study were 14 teacher candidates and an instructional coach at a metropolitan university in the Midwest.

Six central existential themes emerged from the study; contextualizing the experience, launching the conversation, refocusing the big blur, fostering the mindset,

noticing the unnoticed and naming what is noticed. The themes from this study indicate that by participating in coaching conversations with an instructional coach, teacher candidates were able to engage in reflective practices that may not have been achieved alone. With the support and guidance of an instructional coach, the teacher candidates were able to identifying noteworthy events, analyze these events in order to gain new understandings about teaching and learning, and set goals based on the newly acquired knowledge.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to pay special thanks, warmth and appreciation to the following people who made my research successful and assisted me in achieving my goal.

I want to begin by thanking the group that made this study possible. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work and learn from a smart, amazing, and gifted instructional coach. Thank you, Amanda. Thank you to the teacher candidates who participated in this study. I appreciate you allowing me a glimpse into your coaching experience. And thank you, Jennifer Lemke for providing me an opportunity to learn from your students.

Thank you Dr. Sarah Edwards, for initially planting the idea of earning this degree at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

It is a pleasure to thank many people in the College of Education. Dr. Jeanne Surface, my chair, for her help in making sense of my qualitative study. Dr. Kay Keiser, my wise academic advisor, for her continuous professional guidance. Dr. Smith and Dr.

Grandgenett, thank you for being member of my dissertation committee.

I appreciate the encouragement from my suitemates Dr. Welsh, Dr. Danielson, Dr. Kuhlman, Dr. Rodriguez-Arroyo, Dr. Pascoe and Dr. Lentfer.

Thank you to my colleagues from Clark County School District, Linda Gregg, Lori Fulton and Thelma Davis and many others from CCSD who taught me how to work toward maintaining an inquiry stance in order to act as a positive change agent for our educational system.

Drs. Copich, Lowenstein, and Kratt, I got 'er done! I will fondly remember the positive (and fun) role you played in the process of earning this degree. You hold a very special place in my heart.

My Parents- Thank you, Mom for providing me a variety of support to ensure that I earned this degree. Thank you, Dad and Marcia- not everyone can be as fortunate as me to have editors at my dispense. And in memory of my stepdad, Michael who taught me through his modeling how to be a lifelong student.

And last but not least, thank you to my dear husband Todd and children, Zoë and Hayden for your love, patience and understanding of my need to pursue this degree. Zoë and Hayden I wish for you a passion for learning. I love you!

Without all of you this book would not have been possible.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgments .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	1
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Theoretical Framework .....	2
Problem Statement .....	3
Research Questions .....	4
Definition of Terms .....	5
Assumptions .....	6
Limitations and Delimitations .....	6
Significance of the Study .....	7
Outline of the Study .....	7
Chapter 2 Review of Literature .....	8
Sociocultural Theory .....	8
Field Experience .....	9
Noticing .....	11
Coaching .....	12
Instructional Coaching .....	13
Chapter 3 Methodology .....	15
Research Question .....	15
Research Design .....	15
Role of the Researcher .....	16



Participants and Setting .....	17
Data Collection .....	18
Research Tools .....	18
Participant Observations .....	19
Semi-Structured Interviews .....	19
Data Analysis .....	20
Trustworthiness .....	22
Credibility .....	22
Generalizability .....	23
Dependability .....	23
Confirmability .....	23
Chapter 4 Results .....	25
Research Question .....	25
Contextualizing the Experience .....	25
Launching the Conversation .....	28
Refocusing the Big Blur .....	30
Fostering the Mindset .....	32
Noticing the Unnoticed .....	34
Naming What is Noticed .....	38
Chapter 5 Conclusions and Discussion .....	42
Statement of the Problem .....	42
Research Problem .....	43
Refocusing the Big Blur .....	43

Fostering the Mindset .....	44
Noticing the Unnoticed .....	45
Implications and Recommendations .....	46
Time and Space .....	46
A More Knowledgeable Other .....	46
Coursework .....	47
Institutional Resources .....	48
Scaffolding Experiences .....	48
References .....	50
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide .....	58
Appendix B: Coaching Feedback .....	59

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Teacher education programs are poised to provide future teachers or teacher candidates explicit and scaffolded experiences throughout their teacher preparation program in pursuance of an inquiry stance. The National Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (NCATE, 2002) makes it clear that advancement of reflective practice is an essential component of teacher preparations. This College of Education Conceptual Framework (2007) where this study takes place states;

As reflective scholars, our candidates learn to appreciate the continuity between theory and application and develop the ability to critique, conduct, and use research to generate and incorporate sustainable best practice.

Candidates use a diverse array of inquiry methods to develop and determine their place within their evolving disciplines and changing communities. Our candidates use inquiry and reflection to make informed decisions and to recognize and articulate the ethical ramifications of research, inquiry, and practice. (p. 15)

The college of education's purpose is to prepare graduates who are dedicated practitioners, reflective scholars and responsible citizens. Preparing reflective scholars using inquiry is one of three central principles of this college of education's conceptual framework where this study took place.

This university utilizes instructional coaching as one method of preparing teacher candidates for the complex work ahead of them. Employing instructional

coaches to work with teacher candidates during field experience was a recent addition, implemented during the fall of 2013, to the teacher preparation program.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Inquiry is a systematic, intentional, cyclical evidence-based process of making sense of our lives, the world and our place in it (Bruner, 1986; Cockran-Smith and Lytle, 2009; Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1987). The notion of inquiry as a conduit for knowledge and understanding is not new. In the 1930's, educational reformer John Dewey wrote about the possibilities of developing knowledge through inquiry and reflection. More recently, Donald Schon (1987) extended Dewey's work by approaching inquiry as a reflective practitioner. Raising critical questions and seeking solutions has strong potential for transforming teacher practice and student growth. Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage (2005) contend that teachers who maintain an inquiry stance toward teaching make "diagnostic and strategic judgment to address the needs of those whom they serve" (p. 9).

Inquiry as a habit of mind or stance moves beyond formal research and involves "consistent positioning or way of seeing, rather than a single point in time or a single activity" (Barnatt, Cochran-Smith, Friedman, Pine, & Baroz, 2009, p. 28). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) suggest that "an inquiry stance accurately situates itself in a worldview, a critical habit of mind, a dynamic and fluid way of knowing and being in the world of educational practice that carries across professional careers and educational settings" (p. 209). Positioning one's self to take an inquiry stance allows one to challenge current assumptions regarding teaching and learning. Inquiry has the potential to be transformational. This is a paradigm shift

from a banking concept of education toward a facilitator of learning (Freire, 1970; Souto-Manning, 2010). Paulo Freire used the term banking system as a metaphor to describe traditional education where by the teacher makes deposits and the student receives information. Paulo Freire (1970) conceives that transformation can occur through a means of praxis or reflection and action.

Inquiry has the potential to “raise teachers voices in discussions of educational reform, and ultimately, transform assumptions about the teaching profession itself” (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). Maintaining an inquiry stance frees educators from the unrealistic and unjust expectation that they are transmitters of knowledge or the keeper of all knowledge regarding teaching and learning. Rather, challenging assumptions about teaching through an inquiry stance opens one up to new opportunities and new possibilities. “Inquiry as stance is neither a top-down nor a bottom-up theory of action, but an organic and democratic one that positions practitioners’ knowledge, practitioners, and their interactions with students and other stakeholders at the center of educational transformation” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). With this stance, teachers are well positioned to come to the table alongside students, colleagues, university faculty, researchers, community members, and policy makers as agents of positive change for our educational system.

### **Problem Statement**

Reflection has increasingly been recognized as a central element of professional growth during teacher preparation (Barnett, 2009; Cochran, et al., 2009; Hiebert, Morris, Berk, & Jansen, 2007; Parkinson, 2009). In addition, a growing body of research is related to the development of reflection during teacher preparation

programs. Instructional coaching for reflection has traditionally not been part of teacher preparation. There is limited understanding of the process of learning with the support of a coach within the context of field experience during teacher preparation. The limited research regarding the reflective practices alongside a more knowledgeable other, the instructional coach, during field experience led me to analyze the interactions that take place between the instructional coach and teacher candidates during the teacher preparation program.

Teacher educators would benefit by knowing more about the learning that occurs within the directed conversations between the instructional coach and teacher candidate. It would be valuable to identify the structure, context and content of the reflective conversation, in order to better understand factors that facilitate learning that leads to more reflective practice.

The goal of the research is to examine the phenomena during coaching conversations. This clarification and understanding can build a foundation for enhanced coaching during teacher preparation. Through a fine-grained analysis of the interactions between instructional coaches and teacher candidates, this study will help to articulate and clarify the structure, content, and context of the coaching conversation. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the essence of instructional coaching between teacher candidates and an instructional coach as it relates to reflection of practice by answering the following research question: How does the structure, content and context of the conversation build reflective thinking in the teacher candidate?

### **Research Question**

What were the meanings, structures and essence of the lived experiences of instructional coaching conversations between teacher candidates and an instructional coach during field experience?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Coaching Cycle*- Coaching cycle refers to the process undertaken by a teacher candidate and the instructional coach. The cycle consists of the teacher candidate planning and implementing a lesson during a field experience. The instructional coach observes the lesson that is implemented by the teacher candidate. Following this lesson, the teacher candidate and the instructional coach engage in a reflective conversation about the lesson. This coaching cycle continues throughout the field experience.

*Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)*- CAEP is a newly accrediting body for schools, colleges, and departments of education. This council is authorized by the U.S. Department of Education. On July 1, 2013 National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) consolidated and became known as CAEP.

*Instructional Coaching*- Instructional coaching is an approach to supporting teacher candidates during their teacher preparation program. The approach used at this university is based on the construct that the instructional coach is the more knowledgeable other.

*Teacher Candidate*- Teacher candidate refers to a student of teaching who is enrolled in a teacher preparation program working toward a degree in elementary education.

*Teacher Preparation Program-* Teacher preparation program refers to the university program of study for students of education that are working toward a degree in education.

### **Assumptions**

The instructional coaching model used at this university is based on the construct that the instructional coach is the more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). The instructional coach maintains a stance as the expert, as they have professional experiences that bolsters their ability to effectively coach future teachers. In addition, they possess deep pedagogical content knowledge regarding how children as well as adults learn. They are also proficient at navigating their role as an instructional coach in the rather unique teaching context that takes place during a teacher preparation program. Teaching during field experience is unique. Coaching in this field experience context requires a specific kind of understanding about teacher preparation and teacher candidates.

I worked to establish an environment which ensured confidentiality of the information gathered. Included in the oral narrative was a statement informing the participants that their participation in the study was in no way connected to their grade in the course. All information would be confidential. I have to assume under these conditions that participants will provide truthful and honest responses.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study was delimited to elementary teacher candidates from a metropolitan university in the Midwest during the Fall 2014. Additionally, this study



was delimited to undergraduate teacher candidates who are earning a Bachelor of Science with a major in elementary education.

One instructional coach participated in the study, which will limit generalizability. This instructional coach was a participant in the reflective conversation with each teacher candidate that observed.

### **Significance of the Study**

The benefits of this study are that there will be a better understanding of the learning process, structure and content of reflective coaching conversations during teacher preparation. This study may provide insight into key elements to foster improvements in future coaching experiences. This study explores one specific teacher preparation program; however, the findings and suggestions are relevant to other programs and other state education programs. These findings may be of interest to colleges and universities who are currently using or considering the implementation of instructional coaching as an approach to support teacher candidates' professional growth during their teacher preparation. These findings may also be informative to school districts as they consider effective means for coaching new teachers.

### **Outline of the Study**

Chapter 2 is a presentation of literature relevant to this study involving coaching in educational settings. The research design, procedures and methodology are described in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reports the findings, and Chapter 5 provides an analysis, interpretation, and implication.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

#### **Sociocultural Theory**

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory is well suited for this study as it posits that learning is a cognitive process that occurs in the context of significant relationships and experiences. Optimal learning is promoted through social interactions in which learners work alongside a more knowledgeable other, sometimes referred to as the MKO. The MKO refers to one who has a greater understanding than the learner. The context of the relationship between the MKO and the learner is a mechanism for learning. The MKO facilitates learning by building on and extending mastery of current understandings. This facilitation is individualized and responsive to the learner resulting in potential for increased cognitive understanding as it relates to the task or process at hand.

A sociocultural perspective views speech and reflection as important tools in the learning process. "Speech functions as a means by which people construct and reconstruct views of the world about them, often jointly, when the speech is a means of communicating with other people" (Barnes & Todd, 1977, p.1). Speech plays an essential role in the organization of higher psychological functions (Vygotsky, 1987). Speech, thought, and action are inextricably intertwined. Language is a tool used to reflect on, as well as, direct behavior. Speech has great potential for generating ideas, problem solving, and sense making. While working alongside an MKO, teacher candidates are engaged in dialogue that allows them opportunities to formulate ideas, new understanding, and meaning making of this shared

experience. Therefore, context is critical. Schon (1987) identifies three essential features of dialogue: it is contextualized, it involves action as well as words as a means of constructing meaning, and it is influenced by reciprocal reflection-in-action (p. 101).

Opportunities for reflection must be systematically embedded in all aspects of teacher preparation programs (Hiebert et al., 2007; Moore, 2003; Ostorga, 2006). Throughout teacher preparation, teacher candidates can work toward developing the ability and skills necessary to reflect on practices leading to sound decisions.

Reflective thinking is a difficult task for teacher candidates and can often be superficial (Galvez-Martin & Bowman, 1998; Shulman, 1986; Zeichner, 2010). Rather than analyzing and interpreting what the events mean, teacher candidates may reflect by simply retelling the events of the teaching episode (Galvez-Martin & Bowman, 1998). Tharp and Gallimore (1988) recommend teacher preparation that includes opportunities for teachers to think, choose, and reflect on instructional practices. Scholars have found that in order for teacher candidates to engage in highly effective field experience the field experience needs to be carefully planned and purposeful. Under these premises, teacher candidates learn from their teaching during field experience. Additionally, teacher candidates need guided support as they are working in the field (Zeichner, 2010).

### **Field Experience**

Field experiences have been considered the most important and powerful component of teacher education programs (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996). The

National Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation, the accrediting body for teacher preparation programs provides standards for teacher education institutions. These standards include field experience as a component of teacher preparation. Field experiences assist candidates in developing and demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn (NCATE, 2008). The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (the newly accrediting body for schools, colleges and departments of education, following the consolidation of National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council) provides standards for teacher education institutions. These standards include field experience as a component of teacher preparation. Field experiences assist candidates in developing and demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn (NCATE, 2008). In addition, NCATE (2008) asserts that advancement of reflective thinking and practices are essential to teacher preparation.

Quality field experiences are tied to coursework and include university supervision (Zeichner, 2010), but that model is not always utilized in teacher preparation programs, as faculty teaching the coursework are often not able to supervise students in practicum placements (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). This is often an issue of practicality, as teacher candidates may be spread across a variety of classrooms or even districts for their practicum placements. Identifying and implementing a structure or system that provides a clear and direct link between teacher education programs and the work that occurs in the school is another challenge. From an extensive review of literature, McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996)

concluded that field experiences that increase practice without reflection and analysis does not lead to professional growth. Ross' (2010) finding support the idea that field experience need to include teaching candidates how to analyze their work by developing the ability to notice critical aspects that will help them to make meaning of learning situations. Ross goes on to suggest a need for a new conceptual framework for effective literacy instruction emphasizing expert noticing, in addition to knowledge of literacy processes, specific instructional frameworks, and pedagogical theory (2010).

### **Noticing**

The ability to notice is an essential element of inquiry. Decisions hinge on what teachers pay attention to and notice. Some researchers argue that improving teachers' ability to notice should be an explicit focus of teacher education by providing appropriate opportunities and a deliberative framework for participants to develop their ability to notice and further develop their professional skills (Jacobs, Lamb, & Philipp; 2010; Santagata, Zannoni, & Stigler, 2007; Sherin & van Es, 2005, 2009; Star & Strickland, 2008). Research also suggests that teachers need learning experiences specifically engineered to develop their ability to recognize meaningful patterns of information (Simon, 1980; Bransford et al., 1989) and to perceive the immediate responses of their students in accurate, thorough fluent, and meaningful ways in order to respond appropriately.

One study uses the term 'professional noticing' to describe teachers' ability to attend to as well as reason and respond to children's mathematical thinking. This study examined teachers' ability to notice children's mathematical thinking and found

that the number of years that teachers had been engaged in sustained professional development correlated with growth in their ability to notice, suggesting that the ability to notice can be learned. (Jacobs, Lamb, Philipp, Schappelle, & Burke, 2007).

### **Coaching**

Despite the prevalence of coaching as a form of professional development in education institutions across the country, there is no universally accepted definition or practice. Additionally, the philosophy of coaching varies. One coaching approach, peer coaching, is a non-hierarchical structure that is grounded in the idea that learning is a social practice built on non-threatening collegial relationships occurring in a supportive environment with the goal of teacher growth and development (Costa & Garmston, 1986; Joyce & Showers, 1982; Robbins, 1991). In peer coaching, both participant assume equal responsibility for the learning.

In the education field, Joyce and Showers (1982) laid groundwork for research on peer coaching. In their research, teachers participated in training where they were taught new teaching practices. Following this training, teachers worked together to incorporate these new practices into their teaching. This research determined that training on specific teaching practices that was followed up with peer coaching led to an increase in the transfer of these specific practices to teaching.

Philips and Glickman (1991) studied a peer coaching program from the perspective of cognitive development. Their findings revealed an increase in conceptual levels, as well as other positive results, including an increase in discourse and teacher interactions. Teacher preparation programs have also found peer

coaching to be effective (Kurtts & Levin, 2000; Morgan, Gustafson, Hudson, & Salzberg, 1992).

Another type of coaching, cognitive coaching, involves reciprocal teaching between a cognitive coach and teacher. This model uses specific strategies and structure. The goal of this coaching model is to foster the teacher's ability to problem solve through reflection. According to Costa and Garmston (2002), who coined the term cognitive coaching, cognitive coaches use tools for nurturing reflective questioning, pausing, and probing for specificity that focuses on teacher's thinking, perceptions, beliefs and assumptions in order to promote reflective thinking.

### **Instructional Coaching**

This university employs instructional coaches. The instructional coach's role is to support teacher candidates' professional growth during their teacher preparation program. Instructional coaches work with teacher candidates during their field experiences. The approach used at this university is based on the construct that the instructional coach is the more knowledgeable other.

The teacher preparation program utilizes a scope and sequence for elementary field experience. Each stage of the field experience builds in complexity. Instructional coaching occurs during the three semesters of methods coursework prior to the clinical practice or student teaching stage. The stages of the field experience include beginning practicum, intermediate practicum, advanced practicum, final practicum, and finally, the clinical experience. This study examined the coaching conversation that took place during an elementary methods course. The course

Teaching and Assessing Reading in Elementary School was part of the advanced practicum field experience.

In a field test during the Spring of 2014, while observing a coaching reflective conversation between the instructional coach and teacher candidate, the teacher candidate noted that the child did not appear interested during a written response to the reading. The teacher candidate went on to say that perhaps the student was not engaged because the student was not comfortable with him. The instructional coach followed up by asking him what his role might be in helping the child feel more comfortable with him. The teacher candidate believed that it was the responsibility of the student to figure out a way to warm up to him. Based on this interaction and a follow up conversation I had with the instructional coach it was evident that the teacher candidate had not made the shift from being a student himself to the role of teacher. He had not identified himself as the teacher, responsible for nurturing the teacher-student relationship. He is making a shifting from the “academic grind through school and university to a practical course involving relationships with children” (Lacey, 1977). Based on what he identified as noteworthy and his discussion with the instructional coach, they determined that a goal for the teacher candidate would be to increase his own enthusiasm and empathetic understanding as works with the students when building a student/teacher relationship. The instructional coach was coaching the teacher candidate that he is responsible for building relationships with students and creating a safe learning environment.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

This chapter includes a description of the methodology that guide the data collection and analysis of this study. Components of the research methodology include the research design, participants and setting, data collection and procedures, data analysis, and a summary.

The focus of this phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate the human experience of teacher candidates and an instructional coach during coaching reflective conversations. The purpose of the study was to understand the structure and content of the reflective conversation between the instructional coach and teacher candidate, as well as to expand understandings of the factors that facilitate learning that leads to more reflective practice. This study explored the lived experience of the participants in order to understand the structure of the phenomena in question- instructional coaching.

#### **Research Question**

This study aimed to answer the following research question:

What are the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experiences of instructional coaching conversations between teacher candidates and an instructional coach during field experience?

#### **Research Design**

The construct of the research study was that of phenomenology qualitative design as defined by Creswell (2009). “Phenomenology is a research strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a

phenomenon as described by participants” (p.13). The process involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (p. 4). Phenomenology also employs the use of bracketing. Bracketing enables the researcher to set aside his or her knowledge of and experiences related to the subject in order to “see things as they appear, free from prejudgments and preconceptions” (Moustakas, 1994, p.90).

I chose this phenomenological design in order to explore the lived experiences of teacher candidates and instructional coaches as they engage in reflective practices during coaching reflective conversations. Creswell asserts “in qualitative inquiry, the intent is to develop an in-depth exploration of the central phenomenon” (2005, p. 203). I will investigate the structure of the coaching experience.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In a qualitative study, the researcher acts as the instrument through which data are collected, categorized, and analyzed. Qualitative researchers need to be concerned with the effect their subjectivity will have on their data (Le Compte, 1987). As the researcher, I acknowledge that I am professionally and emotionally invested in this study, as I teach methods courses that are required for teacher candidates where this study takes place. “Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher” (Denzin, 1989, p.12). I recognize my role and potential bias as it relates to this research study. Rosaldo (1993) has this to say about the role of the observer engaged in qualitative research- “The observer is neither innocent nor omniscient... it is a mistake to urge social analysts to strive for a position of

innocence designated by such adjectives as detached, neutral, or impartial” (p. 69). I am particularly interested in understanding the potential learning that may occur as teacher candidates are working with the instructional coach. I am also keenly aware that my prior knowledge may influence my professional work. For these reasons, I acknowledge the challenges of maintaining a passive presence. In an effort to detach myself from the research process, I used journaling to record thoughts, feelings, and ideas. This reflective journaling process positioned me to focus more objectively on the tasks at hand; observing and interviewing.

### **Participants and Setting**

This study consisted of 14 teacher candidates and an instructional coach at a metropolitan university in the Midwest. Teacher candidates were undergraduate students who were earning a Bachelor of Science with a major in elementary education. The participants in this study were enrolled in a course titled, Teaching and Assessing Reading in Elementary School. An instructional coach partners with faculty during the three semesters of methods coursework prior to the clinical practice or student teaching semester. This course includes a field experience where the teacher candidates are immersed in an urban school setting. Teacher candidates meet twice a week at an identified elementary school over a period of seven weeks resulting in a total of 30 hours of field experience. The teacher candidates and the instructional coach participated in this study voluntarily and could end their participation at any time without risk or harm.

An instructional coach partners with faculty who teach methods courses that include field experience. For this study, the instructional coach that was partnered with the reading methods courses was also a participant in this study.

### **Data Collection**

In a phenomenological study two principle criteria exist for eligibility: to have experienced the phenomenon, and willingness to talk about that experience to an interviewer (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The maximum accrual for this study was 25 teacher candidates. Creswell (2012) recommends that researchers interview from 5-25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenological qualitative study.

The researcher secured permission from the chair of the Teacher Education Department and the instructor of the course to recruit participants during a regularly scheduled class time. At the onset of data collection, a written narrative was orally conveyed to the potential participants. Opportunity was provided for potential participants to ask questions of the researcher. Participation in the study had no impact on the participant's grade in the course. By agreeing to be observed and interviewed, participants provided informed consent.

In addition to 14 teacher candidates being participants, one instructional coach also participated in the study. The instructional coach was purposefully selected based on the following criteria. The instructional coach worked with teacher candidates enrolled in a methods course that met during the mornings of the fall semester 2014. The instructional coach voluntarily agreed to be a participant in the study.

### **Research Tools**

The research tools I used in this study included both observations and a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A). Each of these tools is described below.

### *Participant Observations*

For this research each teacher candidate participated in one coaching conversation with the instructional coach. The researcher observed this conversation. Observation is a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). The observation tool is central to the study, as it provided me the opportunity to more clearly identify how the instructional coach and teacher candidate interact and communicate as well as interpret nonverbal expressions of feelings (Schmuck, 2006). Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p.79). The observations enabled me to gather large amounts of data over a short period of time. The data was gathered in an authentic setting allowing me to contextualize the interactions between the instructional coach and teacher candidates. Each conversation was audio recorded as well as observed by the researcher. These audio recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions were saved as a Word document with personally identifiable information removed. In order to provide contextual data, field notes were taken as the researcher observed each coaching conversation.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

This semi-structure interview constituted another source of data for this study in order to increase the validity of the study. Interviews provide social encounters where respondents are able to collaborate accounts of their past actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts (Rapley, 2004). The researcher administered a semi-structured

interview with each teacher candidate immediately after they have been observed in a coaching conversation. A set of prepared questions acted as a guide for the interview. My goal for the interview was less about collecting more data. Rather, my goal was an opportunity to guide the analysis of the coaching reflective conversation.

Each semi-structured interview was digitally recorded. Each digital recording was transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were saved as a Word document with personally identifiable information removed. The interview questions were developed so that the interview questions could address the phenomenological lived experiences. These teacher candidate interviews were meant to enhance the depth of understanding of the reflective conversation. The teacher candidate interviews were a valuable tool for shedding light on their interpretation of the reflective conversation. Semi-structured interviews were also an opportunity to clarify any ambiguity regarding the reflective conversation. In addition, field notes were taken during the interview. This data from the interviews was saved as a Word document with personally identifiable information removed.

### **Data Analysis**

Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research method designed to explore and understand people's everyday lived experiences. The Husserlian approach aims to identify the structure of experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Husserlian phenomenology was best suited for this study because of its descriptive orientation. This study explored the lived experience of the teacher candidates in order to understand the essence of instructional coaching. According to Polkinghorne (1989), phenomenological research provides a deeper and clearer understanding of

what it is like for someone to experience something. The implementation of this process is critical, as this will enable me to explain the findings of the research study.

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data (Creswell, 2012).

For this study, the text included data collected from the participant observations, interviews and field notes.

Peer observations were my first opportunity for data gathering. It was during this initial stage that I began to extract meaning. During the peer observations and interviews I began to identify statements and phrases that were potentially pertinent to providing a description of the lived experience of the teacher candidates. Polkinghorne (1989) states that the very process of gathering data provides opportunities for the researcher to learn about the experience and to form understandings about the structure of the lived experience. I continued to extract statements and phrases pertaining to the phenomena as I transcribed the data from the peer observations and interviews. Next, statements and phrases pertaining to the phenomena were extracted from each transcript and interview. Categories were formulated based on the significant statements.

The next step in the data analysis process involved a group interpretation of the data by four instructional coaches who were employed by the university. A colleague also participated in this group interpretation. In her role, she transcribed the conversation.

The four instructional coaches from this university were provided transcripts from two coaching sessions. Each set of transcripts included a peer observation and an

interview. First, coaches independently identified statements and phrases that were significant to the coaching phenomena. Then statements and phrases, as well as, interpretations of these phrases were scrutinized until there was consensus on the essence of the coaching as revealed by data from these two coaching experiences. This group interpretation provided a means of validation and rigor of the investigative process.

I created themes categories until saturation occurred, which is the point where all the data is accounted for and it does not yield any new understanding related to the categories (Creswell, 2012). After coding the data, I created and named categories based on the information from the observation transcripts, interview transcripts, and field notes. Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data (Creswell, 2012). The implementation of this process was critical, as this enabled the researcher to explain the findings of the research study.

### *Trustworthiness*

Establishing trustworthiness is foundational to qualitative research. It enables one to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are worth considering (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness was established through the validation mechanisms. I provided evidence that the procedures employed were appropriate for the study based on four criteria: credibility, generalizability, dependability, and confirmability.

### *Credibility*



Credibility is the degree of confidence in the truth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was established through peer reflective conversations. Peer reflective conversations occurred throughout the study in order to provide valuable feedback and encouragement. Peer reflective conversations helped the researcher to make modifications to the study by eliminating personal biases and preferences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### *Generalizability*

Generalizability is the ability to show the findings have applicability in other contexts. Generalizability was established through the utilization of thick description as recommended by Merriam (1998). The detailed descriptions enable others to make judgments about the applicability of this study into similar context and setting.

#### *Dependability*

Dependability shows that the findings are consistent and may be replicated. In order to maintain consistency, a guide was used for the semi-structured interviews with the teacher candidates. In addition, I used identical processes each time I did observations. I also utilized an audit trail. This audit trail provided documentation and a running account of the inquiry process. I conducted a data audit to examine the data-collection and analyses procedures. This process enabled me to make judgments about the potential for bias or distortion. A code-recoding strategy was also employed during the data analysis to ensure dependability.

#### *Confirmability*

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest

(Lincoln & Gruba, 1985). Confirmability was established through the use of triangulated data. Triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources in a study to produce a more accurate and valid account of the data results. This qualitative research included data from multiple sources including; observations, semi-structured interviews, and field notes. In addition, an audit trail was employed to determine if the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations could be traced to the source as well as supported by the research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

Preparing reflective scholars using inquiry is one of three central principles of this college of education's conceptual framework. Coaching teacher candidates during field experience is one particular area where teacher candidates are provided opportunities to learn how to reflect on their practice in order to develop as practitioners.

The focus of this study was to investigate the lived experience of teacher candidates and an instructional coach during coaching reflective conversations. The purpose of the study was to understand the structure and content of the reflective conversation between the instructional coach and teacher candidate, as well as to expand understandings of instructional coaching in the context of one course during teacher preparation program.

#### **Research Question**

What were the meanings, structures and essence of the lived experiences of instructional coaching conversations between teacher candidates and an instructional coach during field experience?

#### **Contextualizing the Experience**

The 14 elementary teacher candidates who participated in this study attended a metropolitan university in the Midwest. One instructional coach was also a participant in the study. The instructional coach was employed by the university and working in the teacher preparation program.

The teacher candidates in this study were working toward earning a Bachelor of Science with a major in elementary education. They were enrolled in a six-credit semester-long reading methods course during the Fall 2014. The first six weeks of the course were spent at the university campus where they received instruction related to the course content. Following the instruction, the teacher candidates participated in five weeks of field experience at a prearranged elementary school in the metropolitan area. Each teacher candidates was assigned to work with a cooperating teacher in one K-5 classroom during their field experience. The teacher candidates were required to be at this field experience at the same time as their designated class time. This meant they attended the field experience two days a week from 9:00 A.M. - 11:45 AM. Teacher candidates were required to plan and implement ten lessons over the course of the designated field experience. The instructor of the course and the instructional coach were in attendance at the school site for the duration of the field experience.

Each morning teacher candidates were required to check in and provide information regarding the type of lesson (whole group, small group, etc.) they planned to teach that day, as well as the time the lesson would be taught. Teacher candidates were required to submit the lesson plan to a shared Google Docs, 24 hours before the lesson was to be taught. The coach had this to say about the lesson planning process:

We require that all of our teacher candidates submit the lesson plan to Google Docs at least twenty-four hours before they teach. This gives the instructor, me or both of us an opportunity to look over lesson plans and provide necessary feedback before the lesson is actually implemented. It is also a way to ensure that

the teacher candidates are planning the lesson well ahead of time. We know that planning is an important part of the teaching process.

Google Docs is a web-based office suite and data storage service offered by Google. In this case, it was used for sharing files, which could be edited by all parties that had access to the shared files. Using Google Docs, the instructor, the coach or both reviewed and provided written feedback of lessons before they were taught.

After the teacher candidates signed in for the day, the course instructor and the instructional coach worked together to identify which candidates they would each observe teaching that day. It was not feasible for the course instructor and instructional coach to observe every lesson taught. Both the course instructor and the instructional coach debriefed with the teacher candidate after the lesson they observed was implemented. For the purpose of this study, I was researching only the instructional coach-teacher candidate paradigm.

The intent was for the instructional coach to hold a coaching conversation following the observation. However, scheduling the conversation had its challenges as the coach had to work within the parameters of the course schedule as well as teacher candidates' teaching schedules. Occasionally, the coaching conversations were not held on the day that the lesson was taught. Instead, conversations were during the following class session. On several occasions, the instructional coach voiced concern to me about the delay in holding the coaching conversation. However, I did not find this time delay to have an adverse effect on these coaching conversations.

Coaching conversations took place at the elementary school site. The precise location of each of these meetings was determined at the moment and was based on

convenience and available privacy. On more than one occasion, for example, the library was available for meetings. Some conversations took place in the hallway outside of classrooms where there was a table and two chairs available.

As the instructional coach observed each teacher candidate teaching, she recorded notes using a laptop computer. Throughout the coaching conversation, she referred to these notes. In addition, she recorded notes during the coaching conversation on a document titled, Coaching Feedback (Appendix, B). Following the coaching conversation, she would add additional information to the document. The coaching feedback form served as a synopsis and record of their meeting. The expectation was that this document would then be emailed within twenty-four hours to the teacher candidate. During interviews with teacher candidates, several teacher candidates mentioned the value of the coaching document. In fact, Teacher Candidate Amber shared during her interview with me that she had saved coaching notes from a previous semester when she had an instructional coach. She told me, "I would check these forms to see where I was last semester. If I was an eight was I still doing these things or if I was I five what did I need to build on." She described how these notes were a means of reflecting on her professional growth from one semester to the next. She shared with me that during her current field experience she had looked at these notes and found that the information from the notes to be applicable to her current and future work.

### **Launching the Conversation**

The instructional coach initiated the coaching conversation by posing the following question, "On a scale of 1-10, how closely would you rate your lesson in terms of what you planned and what was implemented?" The response to this first question

provided an initial glimpse into the teacher candidate's perception of the lesson that was just taught. In addition, it established a foundation for the conversation by emphasizing the responsibility of the teacher in terms of planning and implementations. This is significant, as this is an area where teacher candidates often struggle. Throughout the conversation the coach addressed the teacher candidates role in planning and implementation. Eleven of the fourteen teacher candidates provided a numerical description of their lesson and then, without prompting from the coach, qualified or elaborated on their answer. This teacher candidate response was indicative that the coaching framework was conversational, rather than a pose and respond script.

When I met with instructional coaches during data analysis they described the critical nature of this initial question. Coach Farrah shared that this initial question "will tell me how they feel about the lesson." The other three coaches responded in agreement. Through anecdotal stories, all four instructional coaches shared examples about the powerful nature this first question has been to them in order to proceed with the coaching conversation to enable them to coach teacher candidates in an individualized responsive manner. One instructional coach then shared a story:

I once had a teacher candidate give herself a two. The she started to cry. We had to get her from a two to a ten. I had to decide at that moment how to build her up by really focusing on her strengths before discussing opportunities for growth.

Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) described this necessity for gaining an understanding of the teacher candidates' feelings. They maintain that the reflective process requires that negative feelings be removed in order to return to the experience

and instead be replaced with helpful feelings. Without these helpful feelings teacher candidates will be inhibited to gain maximum understanding from the experience.

### **Refocusing the Big Blur**

Each conversation systematically examined teacher candidates' own teaching practice alongside the instructional coach. Through the conversation, the teacher candidates and the instructional coach recreated the teaching experience in which they had participated. This was an important part of the conversation as this is a difficult task for the teacher candidates to do alone. The teacher candidate, with the support of the coach, returned to the teaching experience through the prompting and encouragement of the instructional coach. This aided the teacher candidate in recalling significant aspects of the teaching episode. Teaching candidate Brandi epitomized the difficulty in recalling the events from teaching when she described it as- *a big blur*. In the following comments, Brandi described how her coach began to help her clarify events from her teaching experience.

Teacher Candidate Brandi:

She asked those questions that are very specific and it helps me to think back to specific parts of my lesson, different aspects. It makes it easier to focus on one thing. Instead of it being kind of like **a big blur** because that's what it is after you are done teaching.

This reconstruction was a means for recalling, interpreting and making sense of this shared experience. In addition, interviews revealed that the teacher candidates recognized the importance of this shared experience and the process of negotiating a



shared meaning of the teaching. Cierra articulated the constructive approach that was used to make sense of the teaching experience:

Teacher Candidate Cierra:

She just sat in the classroom with me and right after said okay, let's break it down. She wasn't always exactly telling you what to do. She was, just like, working through it.

Returning to the teaching experience with the coach is a means to ground and establish the conversation in actual events in order to learn from them. It enables the learner to process the experience. Boud and Walker (1990) acknowledge that returning to the experience is a precursor to reflection. It is important to note that it is possible to reflect on a past event or experience alone. However, the data from this study revealed that the coach extended the teacher candidates ability to reflect. This shared context created a space for teacher candidates to be reflective about their own practice. These statements from teacher candidates reaffirm the significance of part of the reflection process:

Teacher Candidate Darby:

It is good because you have somebody that can dialogue with you back and forth because you can have all these ideas rolling around in your head. I kind of equate it to teacher therapy almost because like you can sit down and talk about what actually happened back and forth with the ideas kind of like what's that game where the ball bounces, pong.

Teacher Candidate Emilie:

I like just that you get more one-on-one with the teacher so that the information is more individualized to your needs. Not just like in the classroom setting, where they give you more broad ideas of what you should be doing. This is what I individually need to work on.

The discussion that took place after the teaching episode provided an opportunity for objectivity and distance that can be necessary for reflecting on the implementation of the lesson. The conversation provided an opportunity for clarity of the experience which led to new knowledge.

### **Fostering the Mindset**

The spirit and tone of the instructional coach's follow up questions were the same each time- positive and conversational. Though the questions were worded slightly different each time, the resulting essence was the same. It appeared that her choice in wording was situational. The unscripted nature of the line of questioning was a means of maintaining a safe and relaxed learning environment. The conversation naturally flowed in the direction of the identification of lesson strengths and areas for growth rather than the coach explicitly asking the teacher candidates to identify them. This strengthens the case that this dialogue between coach and teacher candidate is a natural and necessary conversation. Again, when the coach prompted them the line of questioning was conversational. Following are three examples of ways that the instructional coach might pose the initial question:

So, on a scale of one to ten you gave yourself a six. Tell me about why you gave yourself a six.

So let's talk about the good things. What do you think were the good things?

What were some strengths of your teaching today?

The line of questioning and the focus fostered a growth mindset. Growth mindset individuals operate in ways that encourages them to keep learning and improving (Dweck, 2010). People with a growth mindset believe traits and qualities can be developed and improved with effort and practice. Dweck (2010) describes how learning actually is more likely when there is a bit of struggle involved and an individual persists in their practice and improvement. Maintaining this type of inquiry stance allows one to challenge current assumptions regarding teaching and learning. Therefore, identifying lesson strengths upfront was significant in reinforcing the importance of the idea of capitalizing on strengths.

When teacher candidates were participating in field experience they were teachers in practice. Interviews revealed evidence that teaching candidates were often operating from a fixed mindset as they examined their own learning process. Teacher candidates' comments indicated that they expected to feel bad about "something" when they received feedback from the instructional coaches. People with a fixed mindset believe an individual's traits and qualities cannot be changed (Dweck, 2010).

The first question I asked each teacher candidate during the interview was, "how would you describe a coaching conversation to one of your classmates that has not had one yet?" The pervasive fixed mindset that ran through the data was an unanticipated discovery. Here are several examples of this stance that the teacher candidates took toward their learning experience:

Teacher Candidate Fran:

They are not trying to break you down. It is not a negative thing necessarily.

Teacher Candidate Grace:

They are not trying to tear you down. They are not trying to tell you everything that you did wrong or terrible or anything. It is definitely positive. They want you to become a better teacher and everything like that. They are just so nice about it. Like you come in and you are like I know my lesson didn't go very well and they help you find the strengths and everything.

Teacher Candidate Halley:

I expected to be disappointed and disappointed with myself.

This clear evidence of the teacher candidates' own fixed mindset is beyond troubling more importantly it is terribly problematic. If left unexamined and unchallenged, everyday deficit based teacher talk can operate behind the scenes to undermine teacher educators' best efforts to help beginning teachers develop a genuine multicultural teaching practice—one that recognizes, honors, and builds upon students' individual and cultural assets (Pollack, 2012). This is also an indication of a fixed mindset that views opportunities for improvement as a negative rather than a positive experience from which to learn from (Dweck, 2010).

### **Noticing the Unnoticed**

The data revealed that one of the important roles of the instructional coach was to increase the ability of the teacher candidates to notice critical aspects that are relevant to future decision-making. This construct of professional noticing refers to ways expert teachers view and make sense of complex teaching situations.

Often the instructional coach would guide the students to attend to relevant details that, without the support of the instructional coach, may have gone unnoticed. Teacher

candidates benefitted from having someone facilitate this professional noticing. The following is an example of one way that the coach assisted Teacher Candidate Grace in noticing or becoming aware of a critical aspect of the lesson. Her coach said to her, “So tell me about when the students were on the floor and they all had their books. Is that something that the teacher normally does?” The coach drew attention to an aspect of the lesson. The conversation continued between the coach and teacher candidate. Throughout the conversation, the two collaboratively interpreted a particular event from the teaching episode. Drawing attention to the seating arrangement led to a conversation about student engagement and the role that planning plays in engagement. This shifted her toward reconsidering what it means for students to be actively engaged which naturally led to the need for reconsidering the planning process.

Coaching conversations assisted candidates in attending to or noticing significant aspects of the teaching episode. Through this scaffolded inquiry process teacher candidates examined their current assumptions and beliefs based on what was identified as noteworthy. This led them to toward worthy changes in future behaviors and teaching practices. Teacher Candidate Idalia articulated the nature of this coaching conversation and the role of the coach in facilitating this inquiry into her teaching practice during an interview.

Researcher:

So what surprised you about the conversation that you had with the coach?

Teacher Candidate Idalia:

The conversation and the questions really led me to it. Because I came into it thinking that my intro was good. Then as I analyzed it in my head from her

questions I kind of realized that I did need to add more to it and she kind of helped to reiterate that point. So that made my goal come from what I thought I needed work on and what she thought I needed work on. It kind of matched up. So that is where I set my goals from.

Teacher Candidate Brandi described the process of the noticing the unnoticed and the outcome of this conversation. She clearly recognized the significant role that the coach played in facilitating her learning.

Researcher:

So what surprised you about the conversation that you had with the coach?

Teacher Candidate Brandi

I guess the interactive piece of it how she suggested I need to be more interactive with it and I did. She is right. I didn't even, I don't even really think I thought it like that and then the way that she had described it was like oh like a no-brainer. You know what I mean? So it was surprising in that way. I guess.

One of my favorite examples of helping the teacher candidate to notice the unknown came from a question generated by Teacher Candidate Lacy after her coach told her that she did a really nice job of managing the class. Lacy asked her if she could give her examples of how she had effectively managed the class. She needed the coach to help her to notice what was unknown to her. In a sense she was letting her coach know that she needed a coach to tell her what is was that she was doing well to manage the students, as she may not have been able to see it herself. This was reaffirmed during our follow up interview when Lacy told me that her coach helped her to see things that she

might 'not catch'. Interview after interview with teacher candidates reaffirmed this theme of noticing the unnoticed.

Teacher Candidate Idalia:

They help you see things that you can't see from your end.

Teacher Candidate Amber:

I don't even realize some of the things like she said you did. Sometimes people do things that you don't realize you are doing so it is really helpful.

Teacher Candidate Grace:

Like when she said that I had sped up in my lesson and it's one of those where I probably felt it at the time but I didn't notice it while I was teaching.

Teacher Candidate Darby:

While she is taking those notes she is noticing thing that in the moment I am not thinking about.

Teacher Candidate Brandi:

You can always reflect on it (the lesson) yourself. But they will catch something that you missed sometimes. No, like all the time.

Teacher Candidate Johanna:

She (the coach) noticed that I needed to engage the students more.

Teacher Candidate Kate:

Honestly, if I didn't have the coach I don't know how I would reflect as well as I have been able to because we have am not really documenting anything while I am teaching that they are documenting things when I am teaching and then when we have the conversation and I am seeing things that I am doing well and things

that I need to work on when we had that conversation they reiterate those things or it may bring up things that maybe I hadn't considered.

The instructional coach provided the support necessary for noticing and attending to essential aspects of teaching. This step provided an opportunity to reexamine of current practices. Through the coaching conversation new understandings occurred that has potential to impact future decision making.

### **Naming What is Noticed**

As the instructional coaches were reviewing transcription data, one of them noted that throughout the coaching conversations the coach was providing the technical names for events that the teacher candidates were identifying as noteworthy for discussion. While the description of the event is noteworthy in and of itself, naming what they notice is also significant. As the teacher candidate would describe elements of their teaching experience the coach would provide the technical term. *The act of naming what they notice is also a way of learners taking power over a situation in which they may feel that they have little formal control. The act of naming is a way of making familiar, of translating into common language occurrences, which are perceived to have some meaning (Boud & Walker, 1990).*

The following is an example of a teacher candidate describing a teaching strategy that she implemented and the coach following up by naming this strategy.

Teacher Candidate Amber:

I had a group of three girls and they were getting it. So I had the group split up to work independently a little sooner and then I just had Jay to work with.



The coach responded to this description by naming this instructional strategy, when she said, “so that was a good way to **differentiate** for those different needs.”

Naming the unknown was not limited to naming teaching strategies. In this next example the coaches provided the name of a classroom management strategy that the teacher candidate used. The following excerpt illustrates the process for naming the unknown.

Teacher Candidate Kate:

I do have one student in particular that kind of goes off and does her own thing. So there was a lot of making sure that she was in her place and making sure that they had body basics, where they had their legs folded and hands in their laps and they have bubbles in their mouth. And so at the beginning making sure when I'm talking you have to be in body basics and that sort of things. Just making sure that they are able to talk to their partners when I asked them to do a turn and talk then redirecting. Okay, eyes on me back into body basics that sort of thing. to make sure they are ready for the next couple of pages or whatever.

Coach:

And that was one of the big things that I noted you did a really nice job throughout the lesson **stating your expectations**.

A third example of naming the unknown addressed pedagogical content knowledge. When the coach asked the teacher candidate what the objective of the lesson was this was the teacher candidates response.

Teacher Candidate Brandi:

I was trying to, I don't know how to say this, to get what the story is about right through the pictures and stuff like that or how images and pictures and illustrations and whatever is in the book aids in tell the story. It might not tell the whole story but you can maybe pick up some words you don't know just because by looking at the pictures and stuff like that.

Coach:

Good, so **using pictures to connect to the text**.

Teacher Candidate Brandi:

Yes, thank you, I couldn't think of that.

Another example addressed naming content specific topics. The teacher candidate referred to a student learning objective that she was teaching. The coach provided her with the content specific language for the objective as well as expanded on that by naming how learning can occur using additional content specific language:

Teacher Candidate Brandi:

The objective was to understand the steps that the little red hen takes to make the bread.

The instructional coach rephrased by naming the objective with the appropriate content specific language, sequencing. "So if you are working on **sequencing** really highlight what sequencing... using those highlighted words they talked about before in class, **first, next and last**."

The instructional coach and Teacher Candidate Darby also had a similar conversation in which the coach provided the vocabulary related to tools and materials that were specific to the content of the class.

Teacher Candidate Darby:

I always referred back to that poster thing.

Coach:

It's an **anchor chart**.

Teacher Candidate Darby:

The story that we read was really weird it wasn't like a real non-fiction text.

Coach:

Yes, it wasn't a **traditional non-fiction text**.

Naming what was noticed built on teacher candidates' knowledge and strengths.

This has been known to empower and provide learners more control of their learning (Griffin, 1987; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Boud & Walker, 1990). The act of naming what was noticed was not confined to one specific aspect of teacher practice. The coach provided the vocabulary that addressed a variety of aspects related to teacher knowledge; including content, pedagogy, and management.

All of these examples of naming what was noticed are significant in that the teacher candidate identified and described a particular event as meaningful to teaching and learning. This lets us know that they perceive a particular event is important enough to take time describe and make sense of with the coach.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusions and Discussion

#### Statement of the Problem

Teacher preparation programs have long been a place for learning about content and pedagogy related to teaching. In addition to learning content and pedagogy, developing reflective habits is an important task of teacher preparation programs. Preparing reflective scholars using inquiry is one of three central principles of this college of education's conceptual framework where this study took place. The college of education's purpose is to prepare graduates who are dedicated practitioners, reflective scholars and responsible citizens. However, systematically supporting teacher candidates' ability to develop as reflective practitioners tends to be put into practice at a surface level when it is implemented. At this surface level, reflection tends to focus on technical aspects or a recalling of events rather than deep thinking. Fortunately, reflection is increasingly becoming recognized as a central element of professional growth during teacher preparation (Barnett, 2009; Cochran, et al, 2009; Hiebert, Morris, Berk, & Jansen, 2007; Parkinson, 2009). The ability to reflect is a learned behavior that must be cultivated over an extended period of time (Dewey, 1933).

Sociocultural theory was well suited for this study as it conceives that learning is a cognitive process that occurs in the context of significant relationships and experiences. For this study, the significant relationship included a teacher candidate and instructional coach. The experiences involved an elementary classroom lesson delivered by the teacher candidate and observed by the instructional coach as well as a reflective conversation. The reflective conversation followed the lesson. The coaching

conversation took place in the context of a required undergraduate course called, Teaching and Assessing Reading in Elementary School. These teacher candidates were working toward a Bachelor of Science with a major in elementary education.

My goal for this study was to be able to describe in detail this coaching interaction and reflective conversation. Additionally, the elements of this conversation were explored in order to identify essential components and structures that make up this instructional coaching model.

### **Research Problem**

This qualitative study explored the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experiences of instructional coaching conversations between teacher candidates and an instructional coach during field experience. This study indicated that by participating in these coaching conversations with an instructional coach, teacher candidates were able to engage in reflective practices that may not have been achieved alone. With the support and guidance of an instructional coach, the teacher candidates were able to identifying noteworthy events, analyze these events in order to gain new understandings about teaching and learning, and set goals based on the newly acquired knowledge.

### **Refocusing the Big Blur**

Teaching involves a complex series of dynamic events. This was evident in follow up conversations with coaches when teacher candidates indicated the difficulty in recalling events from the lesson. The data revealed that the coaching conversation assisted the teacher candidates in making sense of the teaching episode. These findings support sociocultural theory of learning. The discussion that took place after the teaching

episode provided an opportunity for objectivity and distance that can be necessary for inquiring into one's own teaching and learning (Serafini, 2002). Teacher candidates were learning to understand their actions by thinking about their actions. The instructional coach, the more knowledgeable other (MKO), facilitated this learning by building on and extending mastery of current understandings (Vygotsky, 1978). This facilitation by the instructional coach was individualized and responsive to the teacher candidate resulting in potential for increased cognitive understanding. Through the conversation the teacher candidate and instructional coach were able to collaboratively reconstruct the lesson in order to interpret the lesson. This enabled them to take an analytical approach to thinking about the lesson. The more knowledgeable other refers to one who has a greater understanding than the learner. The context of the relationship between the more knowledgeable other and the learner is a mechanism for learning. Knowledge about teaching and learning was situational and socially constructed. These experiences allow others to explore more deeply why they acted as they did. This is supported by John Dewey's historical work, "We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience." (Dewey, 1933).

### **Fostering the Mindset**

Data from the interviews indicated that prior to engaging in the coaching conversation teacher candidates anticipated that coaching would be a negative learning experience. There was a profound misnomer that the role of the instructional coach was to tell the teacher candidate what they did wrong and then tell them how to 'fix it'. This mirrors the construct of Friere's (1970) description of the banking model of learning; a student is a depository and the teacher's role is to deposit information. In this case, it

would mean that the instructional coach's job is to transmit the knowledge or tell the candidate what they did 'wrong' and then tell them how to fix it in order for learning to occur. This is also an indication of a fixed mindset that views opportunities for improvement as a negative rather than a positive experience from which to learn (Dweck, 2010).

In reality, the nature and framework of the conversation worked to foster a view of teaching and learning as a positive construct. This is significant as it speaks to the theoretical underpinning of the coaching conversations. The data supports that this model of instructional coaching is grounded in a constructive, learner-centered methodology. Additionally, this model of coaching appears to be grounded in elements of feminist pedagogy: a warm, safe caring environment for learning (Nodding, 2013). This construct mirrors how teacher candidates will one day be working with their own future students.

### **Noticing the Unnoticed**

Decisions hinge on what is noticed. Adaptive teachers make decisions based first on what they notice and then how they interpret what they notice. This professional noticing can and should be learned through guided practice during teacher preparation. Supporting teacher candidates by enhancing their ability to notice critical aspects of the teaching environment moves teacher candidates toward considering how they may develop new ways of adapting and their role in supporting student learning. It also moves teachers toward a more effective model of instruction. By experiencing this model themselves, teacher candidates come to understand the learner as the center in constructing knowledge rather than the teacher as the deliverer of knowledge.

## **Implications And Recommendations**

### **Time and Space**

Coaching conversations need to be built into the field experience at all levels, as reflective practices take time to develop. Teacher candidates should be aware that there is a responsibility to engage in the coaching conversation with the instructional coach. Teacher candidates must also understand that the coach's role is not evaluative. They should understand the structure of the coaching cycle and what their responsibility is to the conversation as well as what the coaches responsibility is. This would require time on the part of the teacher candidates, the instructional coaches and the faculty who teach these classes.

Cooperating teachers need to not only be aware of but also understand the role of instructional coaching during field experience. For example, there may be an expectation that the teacher candidate will engage in the coaching conversation at a conveniently scheduled time soon after the lesson has been implemented. Therefore, cooperating teachers may be asked to release teacher candidates from the classroom to hold the coaching conversation. This model will take additional time and effort from the school and university partnership in order to effectively align the expectations of the university with the field placement site.

### **A More Knowledgeable Other**

The coach nurtures teacher candidates' ability to develop as reflective practitioners. The coach assists the teacher candidate in moving beyond simply describing the experience toward more analytical practices. Teacher candidates' benefit by reflecting alongside an instructional coach. An instructional coach needs to have a



strong content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, as well as an understanding about working with teacher candidates during their teacher preparation program. Coaches need to be accomplished reflective practitioners themselves. “A good coach can see something special in you that you didn't know was there and help you to make that something special become a living part of you” (Knight, 2007, p. 15).

For instructional coaches the identification of themes and structure may be useful as they reflect on and make sense of their own role in the coaching conversation. Thus, it might be an exploratory means for facilitating discussion about improving coaching conversations. We may better understand how teacher candidates perceive the coaching experience.

Coaches often leave the conversation wondering what the teacher candidate took away from this conversation. By examining the phenomena of coaching there is clear evidence that teacher candidates viewed instructional coaching as a means to engage in reflective practice. The conversation always ended with the teacher candidate identifying learning goals for their professional improvement. Without this structure and guidance from the more knowledgeable other, these goals could easily become too broad to actually assist teacher candidates. Often times the assistance of the coach or course instructor is necessary in order to identify appropriate and attainable goals that can lead to improvement. a goal for themselves.

### **Coursework**

Teacher candidates would benefit by gaining a deeper understanding of a more constructive theory of learning. There was an absence of this constructivist stance noted in many of the coaching conversations with teacher candidates. This was evident as they

described their initial expectations of the coaching conversations. They anticipated that the coaching conversation would apply a banking style of learning focusing on their deficits. Coursework that includes more instruction during teacher preparation that applies a more constructive learner-centered methodology would support this goal. If there is an expectation that teacher candidates will apply constructivist instruction when they become practicing teachers, then the teacher preparation program needs to ensure that they are learning from a constructivist approach as well as learning to teach using this theory of learning.

### **Institutional Resources**

This university applies a scope and sequence for elementary field experience over the course of the teacher preparation program. Each stage of the field experience builds in complexity. Additionally, instructional coaching occurs during each stage of the elementary field experiences. The stages of the field experience include beginning practicum, intermediate practicum, advanced practicum, final practicum, and finally, the clinical experience. This study examined the coaching conversation that took place during a course titled Teaching and Assessing Reading in Elementary School which was part of the advanced practicum field experience.

It would be advantageous to have support structures and professional development opportunities in place at the university for instructional coaches to continue their own professional growth and development.

### **Scaffolding Experiences**

Intentionally scaffolding experiences throughout teacher preparation better prepares teacher candidates for work in the field. Moreover, teacher candidates

participate in a variety of practicum experiences through the teacher preparation program. What this scaffolded support look like at each stage of the teacher preparation field experience needs to be addressed. Future research needs to identify a trajectory for scaffolding for developing teacher candidates' ability to grow as reflective practitioners.

I believe that similar studies on coaching should be conducted at each stage of the practicum experience in order to identify a trajectory of the lived experiences of teacher candidates as they participate in instructional coaching opportunities conversations. This may shed light on the salient aspects of the coaching experience throughout the teacher preparation program.

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## Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Year in school \_\_\_\_ (undergraduate/graduate)

Projected semester for student teaching \_\_\_\_\_

1. How would you describe the conversation to one of your classmates who had not had a coaching conversation?
2. What surprised you about the conversation you had with the instructional coach?
3. Were there parts of the conversation that were more helpful than others? Can you give me examples?
4. Field experience is an opportunity to learn from your teaching. How does your instructional coach help you to reflect and learn from your own teaching?
5. How would you describe the process that led you to identify the goal(s) you set for yourself?
6. Do you think you may do something differently as a result of the conversation? If yes, what may you do differently and why?
7. In your opinion, what is the purpose for having instructional coaches work with teacher candidates?
8. How does the coaching conversation help you to learn how to reflect?

## Appendix B: Coaching Feedback

### Coaching Feedback

Teacher Candidate:		Date:
Coach:		School:
Lesson:		

Indicators: Applicable	(+) Well Done	(Δ) Needs Improvement	(NA) Not
<b>Content Knowledge</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Observed + Δ <input type="checkbox"/> NA	<b>Professionalism</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Observed + Δ <input type="checkbox"/> NA
<b>Objective</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Observed + Δ <input type="checkbox"/> NA	<b>C.R.T.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Observed + Δ <input type="checkbox"/> NA
<b>Engagement</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Observed + Δ <input type="checkbox"/> NA	<b>Instructional Strategies</b>	Strategy: Word Famil <input type="checkbox"/> NA + Δ
<b>Rapport</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Observed + Δ <input type="checkbox"/> NA	<b>Classroom Management</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> + <input type="checkbox"/> Δ NA Clear Directions
<b>Assessment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Observed + Δ <input type="checkbox"/> NA		Clear Expectations Enforces Expectations
<b>Observation notes:</b>			
+			
Δ			

## Coaching Conversation

1. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being your ideal), how close was the lesson to your ideal?

2. What were the strengths of your lesson?

- 

3. What would you have to change or modify to make your lesson a 10?

- 

4. How do you know your students learned?

5. Goal(s) for next time:

- 

6. What have we not talked about that you would like to talk about?

**Other Resources Suggested:**