“Going the Extra Mile”: Perspectives and Experiences of Coaches Supporting Primary School Teachers in Sierra Leone

Ashley Clayton Hertz

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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“Going the Extra Mile”: Perspectives and Experiences of Coaches Supporting Primary School Teachers in Sierra Leone

A Dissertation Presented

by

ASHLEY CLAYTON HERTZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 2017

College of Education
Educational Policy, Research and Administration (EPRA)
International Education
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Approved as to style and content by:

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Cristine Smith, Chair

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Daniel Gerber, Member

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Cynthia Gerstl-Pepin, Dean
College of Education
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ABSTRACT

“GOING THE EXTRA MILE”: PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF COACHES SUPPORTING PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN SIERRA LEONE SEPTEMBER 2017

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B.Ed., UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

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Directed by: Professor Cristine Smith

Limited research exists that explores instructional coaching as a component of teacher professional development in low-income, developing countries. In response to this gap in the literature, I used an intrinsic case study design to explore the experiences and learning of a cohort of coaches supporting primary school teachers in a whole school development/ early grade reading initiative in Sierra Leone. Using an adaptation of Valsiner’s (1997) Zone Theory as a conceptual framework and analytical lens, I explored coaches’ perspectives of their knowledge and beliefs; coaching actions and experiences; constraints within their context; and professional learning and support needs. By examining these aspects, I hoped to identify possibilities for improving their preparation and support to maximize coaches’ learning and ability to enact their roles more effectively.
Findings of this study suggest that newly hired coaches in Sierra Leone required a significant amount of responsive and focused on-going professional development to enable conceptual shifts in their beliefs and understanding of child-centered pedagogy, foundational skills and strategies for literacy instruction, and working with adults as learners. Coaches learned through a combination of 1) formal professional learning opportunities provided by the program on an on-going basis, and 2) informal on-the-job learning with support from others. Important positive influences on their learning included: competency-driven content; routine training; opportunities for peer collaboration both in training and on-the-job; tools, models and frameworks; resources and materials; and feedback from their manager.

Though coaches perceived shifts in their learning and increasingly became confident in their abilities over time, findings of this study exposed the various systemic constraints coaches confront in their work, which minimized coaches’ sustained contact time with teachers. Irregular attendance and movement of unsalaried teachers were most significant, thus limiting any potential for coaching to have an impact on teacher change.

Overall findings from this intrinsic case study provide insight into the professional experiences, growth and needs of a specific cohort of coaches. I conclude the study with recommendations for strengthening programming to better prepare and support newly hired coaches working in similar initiatives in this context.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

Over the last 17 years, countries around the world strived to meet ambitious global education goals as outlined in the "Education for All" 2000-2015 agenda. Though only a third of countries reached all of the Education for All (EFA), the majority of countries made tremendous improvements against all goals, including improving access to school for primary age children around the world (UNESCO, 2015a). Because of global discussions and debates concerning the post-2015 agenda for education, the global education community shifted their focus and discourse for primary education from educational access towards educational quality. This change in focus stems from increased recognition of a "global learning crisis" illustrated by results from numerous national learning assessments across the world that revealed that though children are in school, many children cannot read, write, or demonstrate basic numeracy skills (Wagner, Murphy, & De Karen, 2012). In response, many global partners, such as Global Campaign for Education, UNESCO, Save the Children, and Brookings Institute advocated for increased emphasis on improving learning outcomes as a key indicator of educational quality which was recently included as a key target of the Quality Education Goal 4 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2013; United Nations, 2015).

Research in schools around the world suggests that teachers are critical for improving student achievement and learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Dembele & Lefoka, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 2002, McKinsey & Company,
Teacher professional development plays a critical role in preparing and developing effective teachers that facilitates change (Desimone et al. 2002; Guskey, 2002). In low-income and developing countries, teachers, who often are not appropriately trained nor qualified, confront many demands, issues, and challenges that make working to improve student achievement extremely difficult (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Mulkeen, 2010). Typical forms of teacher professional development evident in low-income and developing contexts, such as one-off training workshops or cascade training models, fail to effectively meet the vast professional development needs of teachers, resulting in little impact on teacher change or student achievement (Burns & Lawrie, 2015). Burns and Lawrie (2015) highlight other issues concerning teacher professional development in poorly resourced countries:

In many parts of the globe-particularly in the world's poorest and most fragile contexts where the need for quality teaching is greatest, the frequency of professional development is episodic, its quality variable, its duration limited and support or follow-up for teachers is almost non-existent (p. 7).

In efforts to address the issue of poor quality education and to improve learning outcomes for children in low-income and developing countries, many global education actors (i.e., Brookings Institute, Global Partnership for Education, Hewlett Foundation, Parham) and government donors (i.e. World Bank, USAID, DFID) increasingly target their attention toward improving reading outcomes for children, particularly in Grades 1-3 (Shawar & Shiffman, 2016). Gove and Cvelich (2010) provide insight into this rationale:

Reading is a fundamental ability for higher learning. The best opportunity to teach children the skills of reading is in the early grades (1–3), or earlier if possible. If this window is missed, then children who have not begun to read and understand what they read will continue to fall behind unless swift action is taken. In low-
income countries, entire education systems are failing to give reading the attention it is due (p. ii).

Such efforts often result in large-scale educational reform initiatives that introduce drastic changes in reading assessments, curriculum, teacher methodologies, leadership, and thus, require the provision of rigorous and comprehensive teacher education and professional development (Bartlett, Dowd, & Jonason, 2015; USAID, 2014).

Research on effective professional development and literacy instruction in Western contexts informs these recent initiatives, recommending that, in addition to training in literacy acquisition and instruction, teachers need and benefit more from additional on-going, school-based support (Bean, 2014). Evidence suggests that students learn best when they have competent teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 2002) and that teachers learn more when they participate in additional embedded and sustained forms of support rather than simply participating in a training (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Therefore, several of the teacher professional development models emerging in developing contexts combine face-to-face training with other components of on-going teacher support such as coaching or mentoring to individual teachers and/or teacher collaboration through communities of practice such as teacher learning circles (Bean, 2014; Burns & Lawrie, 2015, Davidson & Hobbs, 2013; Hardman, 2012; Hussain & Ali, 2010; Frisoli, 2012; Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015).

This dissertation study focuses specifically on coaching as one strategy for "providing onsite, job-embedded, sustained professional development for teachers" (Bean, 2014, p.4) in Sierra Leone, a low-income, poorly resourced country in Sub-Saharan Africa.
Statement of the Problem

Within the global education community, school-based instructional coaching as a component of teacher professional development is touted as a promising strategy for facilitating change in teacher practice in low-income contexts, particularly in early grade reading reform initiatives (Bean, 2014; USAID, 2014). While within the field of education, there exists a tremendous amount of knowledge about the potential of instructional coaching and how coaching works from previous research in well-resourced contexts, such as in the United States, Australia and Canada, we know little about coaching in the context of low-income and/or Sub-Saharan Africa contexts (Bean, 2014). For example, who are the coaches? What are their roles? How do coaches support teachers? What aspects of their professional work environment constrain or support their coaching? What knowledge and skills do they need to learn be effective in a low-income context? How can programs prepare and support coaches to affect teacher change (Bean, 2014)?

Large-scale early grade reform initiatives that include coaching as a form of teacher professional development in low-resourced contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa place high expectations on newly trained coaches to successfully influence teacher change that results in improved student learning outcomes. Perhaps for some scholars and practitioners, this appears to be a feasible trajectory or theory of change, but in low-income and developing contexts, this may require coaches to revolutionize how teachers normally think about teaching and learning often demanding teachers to create personal paradigmatic shifts in their own beliefs and practices. Depending on the context and the actual backgrounds of coaches, this may actually require newly hired coaches to make
similar tremendous shifts in their own beliefs, learning, and practices about teaching and learning before they themselves can begin to make an impact on teacher change. Of the limited research available on coaching in this context, no formal inquiry focuses on the experiences and learning of coaches or their preparation and support needs to be more effective in their work. We know very little of what coaches need to be more prepared and effective to facilitate change in a complex, low-resourced context and what supports can help influence their learning and development.

Thus, understanding the professional experiences, growth and needs of coaches in such contexts is pertinent and merits further investigation if coaches are expected to facilitate positive and sustainable teacher change that improves student learning. To address this gap, I conducted a qualitative case study to explore coaches’ perspectives about their own experiences and learning supporting teachers in an early grade reading initiative in a low-income context to better understand how programs can better prepare and support coaches to more feasibly impact teacher change.

**Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this intrinsic qualitative case study was to explore the experiences and learning of a cohort of coaches supporting primary school teachers as part of a whole school development/early grade reading initiative in the context of Sierra Leone, a low-income nation impacted by failed post-war construction efforts and more recently burdened by a complex health epidemic (Ebola). Specifically, I explored coaches’ perspectives concerning their 1) knowledge and beliefs, 2) coaching actions and experiences, 3) constraints within their professional context, and 4) professional learning and support needs.
Significance of the Research

This intrinsic qualitative case study addresses significant gaps in the literature regarding coaches’ professional learning and support needs in a poorly resourced and developing context. Research that captures the perspectives of coaches themselves is even rarer. The qualitative case study method of research chosen was particularly important because it provides "thick, rich description" of coaches’ perspectives about their experiences becoming a coach and supporting teachers within a unique context that is unexplored (Patton, 2014). Findings from this qualitative case study provide insight into the professional experiences, growth and needs of a cohort of coaches and suggest possibilities on how programs can better prepare and support coaches to be effective in the specific context of Sierra Leone.

Research Questions

This research explores perspectives of RaISES Learning Coaches in Sierra Leone, who supported teachers in a large-scale whole school initiative, about their experiences and professional learning. The goal is to understand what support Learning Coaches need and how they could be better prepared and supported to be more effective in this specific context. The research question driving this research is: What do the self-reported beliefs and experiences of a cohort of RaISES Learning Coaches supporting primary school teachers in Sierra Leone reveal about their professional learning and growth and what implications does this have for improving preparation and support for coaches? Using a re-interpretation of Valsiner's (1997) zone theory as the conceptual

1 A DFID-funded education initiative formerly named “Improving Schooling in Sierra Leone” (ISIS) and renamed in 2015 to “Rebuilding and Improving Schools in Sierra Leone after Ebola” (RaISES).
framework and analytical lens for this study, I developed the following sub-questions to guide the study:

1. What coaching actions did the RaISES program promote, and how did the program prepare and support Learning Coaches to apply those actions?
2. How do Learning Coaches describe their knowledge, skills and beliefs about teaching, learning, and coaching?
3. How do Learning Coaches perceive aspects of their professional context that constrain their abilities to enact their roles?
4. How do Learning Coaches describe what actions they were able to promote in the face of constraints and what supports in the professional context allowed this to happen?
5. How do Learning Coaches perceive their professional learning and growth as they moved through the zones?

**Overview of Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five remaining chapters. In Chapter 2, I provide a chapter on the regional, country, and programmatic context. In Chapter 3, I review the literature on coaching as a strategy for teacher professional development followed by a description of the conceptual framework that guides this study. In Chapter 4, I discuss the research design and methodology I used to conduct this study. In Chapter 5, I report my findings from each of the sub-research questions. In Chapter 6, I examine Learning Coaches’ self-reported actions and growth to see opportunities for strengthening
programming. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation with a discussion of findings and recommendations for practice, future research, and policy.
CHAPTER 2
CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

Sierra Leone is the context for this study. Sierra Leone is a small Anglophone country in Sub-Saharan Africa with a growing population of around seven million people according to the provisional results of the latest 2015 Population and Housing Census (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2016). From 1991 to 2002, Sierra Leone struggled through an 11-year brutal civil war that took the lives of approximately 70,000 people and displaced nearly 2.6 million people (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006, p.6). In 2002, the war officially ended leaving the country's physical infrastructure destroyed, basic services severely absent or weakened, and an entire country traumatized and scarred by a tragic, gruesome past (World Bank, 2007). In the aftermath of the war, the Sierra Leone government and the people with support from the international community worked together to restore and sustain peace and rebuild the country. According to some viewpoints, progress has been made in terms of restoring peace and rebuilding infrastructure; Sierra Leone has actually changed its status and is no longer officially referred to as a "fragile" and/or "conflict-affected" state (Diop, 2014). Some would argue, however, that Sierra Leone is an example of "failed reconstruction" and that sufficient progress in critical areas such as governance, education, health systems, job creation for unemployed youth, and physical infrastructure still have not been improved leaving the peace of the country threatened and Sierra Leone vulnerable to another civil war (Freeman, 2008).

Recently, Sierra Leone's efforts at making any progress were disrupted due to the 2014-2016 West Africa Ebola outbreak that infected approximately 12,900 Sierra
Leoneans and claimed 3,955 lives in Sierra Leone alone (Kastellic, Testaverde, Turay, & Turay, 2015). The widespread epidemic forced nationwide bans of public gatherings resulting in the closing down of borders, businesses, market activities, schools, and limited basic health services for at least nine months from June 2014- April 2015. Government priorities focused primarily on containing the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) and ending transmission. On November 7, 2015, Sierra Leone was declared "Ebola-Free" and currently maintains this status. Though life in Sierra Leone seemingly returned to “normal”, the Ebola outbreak combined with the simultaneous collapse of the iron ore mining industry in Sierra Leone, a significant contributor to the economic growth of the country the last few years, created massive socio-economic setbacks for Sierra Leone in terms of any recognizable post-war reconstruction progress (i.e. Kastellic et al. 2015).

In this chapter, I situate the study by first providing a brief overview of education and teachers within the wider Sub-Saharan African context. I follow this with a brief introduction to the educational context of Sierra Leone, the actual context for this study. This chapter includes the following key sections: 1) general overview of primary education and teachers in low-income, Sub-Saharan Africa; 2) introduction to Sierra Leone and general overview of educational context in Sierra Leone prior to the Ebola outbreak; 3) onset of Ebola and impacts on broader economic, social, and educational context in Sierra Leone; and 4) education in post-Ebola recovery. I conclude this chapter with a brief overview of the RaISES initiative that started implementation prior to the outbreak. Information from these sections will help situate the general overall educational and programmatic context of the research.
Primary Education in Low-Income Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

The Sub-Saharan African region, consisting of 48 African countries south of the Sahara Desert, contains the largest number of countries categorized by the World Bank as "low-income" developing countries. According to the World Bank, low-income countries are those countries "with a GNI per capita, calculated using the World Bank Atlas method of $1025 or less in 2015" ("World Bank Data", n.d). High-income countries are those countries with a GNI per capita above $12, 476. Out of the 31 countries that the World Bank has categorized as "low-income", 26 of those countries are in the Sub-Saharan African region ("World Bank Data", n.d.).

Severely challenged by extreme poverty, population growth, disasters, and conflicts throughout the region, the entire Sub-Saharan Africa region failed to meet any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) before 2015 but made more significant progress than any other region (UNDPI, 2015). The region demonstrated the most significant improvement worldwide in MDG 2 aimed at improving children's access to education and enrolment in schools:

Sub-Saharan Africa has shown the best record of improvement in primary education of any region since the MDGs were established. The region achieved a 20 percentage-point increase in the net enrolment rate between 2000 and 2015, compared to a gain of eight percentage points between 1990 and 2000. The region’s enrolment rate grew from 52 per cent in 1990 to 80 per cent in 2015. More girls are now in school; 93 girls are enrolled in primary school for every 100 boys, compared with only 85 girls for 100 boys in 2000 (UNDPI, 2015).

However, according to the most recent statistics, Sub-Saharan Africa continues to have approximately 31 million children not enrolled in primary education, still the largest amount of out-of-school children than any other region in the world (UNDPI, 2015; UNESCO, 2016, p. 182).
In addition to continued efforts to improve children's access to education, low-income countries struggle, like many other countries around the world, to ensure a quality education that improves learning outcomes for children. Poor-quality instruction places students who do enroll at risk of either dropping out of school before completion or completing school without the foundational skills needed to be proficient in reading, writing, and mathematics. Most recent statistics from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) suggest that the Primary Completion Rate (PCR) in Sub-Saharan Africa region remains quite low at only 69% (as cited in World Bank, n.d). Furthermore, recent national assessments conducted throughout the region have found that the learning performance of students in the majority of Sub-Saharan Africa is "desperately low" (UNESCO, 2011, p.6). Results from a World Bank comparative analysis of 33 low-income countries in Sub-Saharan Africa suggest that "primary school students in low-income Sub-Saharan Africa countries, have on average learned less than half of what is expected of them" (Majgaard & Mingat, 2012, p.6). The *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (EFA GMR) 2015 reported that recent national assessments reveal "many children spend two or three years in school without learning to read a single word" (UNESCO, 2015a, p.193). The *Sub-Saharan Regional Review of the EFA GMR* (2015) brings attention of results specific to Sub-Saharan African countries:

In Ghana, 80% of Grade 2 students were unable to respond correctly to questions about a passage read aloud to them in English. In Malawi, 94% of second-graders could not respond correctly to a single question about a story they read in Chichewa, the national language spoken at home by most pupils. In the United Republic of Tanzania, 40% of second graders could not read a word of Kiswahili (UNESCO, 2015b, p.7-8).
According to World Bank standards, Malawi and Tanzania are low-income countries by World Bank standards but Ghana is lower middle income ("World Bank Data", n.d.).

**Teachers in Primary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Research continues to demonstrate that teachers are critical to ensuring a quality education that improves student achievement (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2000; Dembele & Lefoka, 2007; Gauthier & Dembele, 2004; Joyce & Showers, 2002, McKinsey & Company, 2007; OECD, 2011). Yet, until recently, important global education policies that aimed to improve the quality of education, such as the Education for All (EFA) Global campaign, have not prioritized the needs of teachers and have largely ignored their importance (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Lauwerier & Akkari, 2015). To illustrate,

Discussions about EFA and improving the quality of education have generally failed to recognise the pivotal role of teachers. In particular, the key issues of teacher motivation and pay are skimmed over and, at times, ignored altogether. For example, the World Bank’s website on ‘effective schools and teachers’ identifies eight improvement domains, but none of these relate centrally to teacher job satisfaction and motivation. Similarly, the World Bank’s Action Plan to Accelerate Progress towards Education for All does not address the very low levels of teacher motivation in most countries (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007, p.7)

In the remainder of this section, I review the literature on key issues related to teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa including the teacher shortage, teacher quality, teacher motivation, and teachers in crisis-affected contexts.
**Teacher Shortages**

One of the biggest threats to quality education in Sub-Saharan Africa is the global teacher shortage crisis (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2016; UNESCO, 2015b). Countries around the world continue to struggle to attract, prepare, recruit, deploy and retain sufficient numbers of effective teachers. The challenges are numerous, complex, interrelated and not easily addressed, particularly in low-income Sub-Saharan African countries faced with limited to no funding and resources (Lauwerier & Akkari, 2015). With the rapid increase in enrollment rates of students in schools due to EFA, the demand for teachers also increased at a rate that countries could not sufficiently meet (Lauwerier & Akkari, 2015; UNESCO, 2015b). According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2016):

Countries must recruit 68.8 million teachers to provide every child with primary and secondary education: 24.4 million primary school teachers and 44.4 million secondary school teachers (p.1).

Amongst these projected numbers, the Sub-Saharan Africa region requires more teachers than any other region, needing 17 million teachers by 2030, 6.3 million at the primary level (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2016, p.2)

A limited supply of teachers requires available teachers to take on additional students in their classrooms, resulting in overcrowded and often multi-age/multi-grade classrooms (Dembele & Ndoye, 2005). Sub-Saharan Africa had the most countries with average teacher/pupil ratios, well above the 40:1 average suggested as the maximum number of students in classroom per teacher (UNESCO, 2015a, p.196).

The pupil/teacher ratio measures the number of teachers in relation to the number of pupils. As of 2012, 29 of the 161 countries with data had pupil/teacher ratios in primary education exceeding 40:1. Of these, 24 were in Sub-Saharan Africa,
where the highest ratio is that of the Central African Republic, 80:1 (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 196).

A reduced teacher-pupil ratio (less than 40:1) is an important indicator of quality education, though it is not the only determining factor. Increasing teacher supply to reduce the teacher/pupil ratio does not necessarily guarantee effective teaching and learning in the classroom (UNESCO, 2016, p.329). There are several other factors to consider, particularly the qualifications, knowledge, and skills of teachers.

**Teacher Quality**

Even if Sub-Saharan African countries are able to address their acute teacher shortage, teachers still must be knowledgeable and skilled in instructional practices that improve student achievement, and able to provide students with opportunities to learn. Currently, schools in Sub-Saharan Africa consist largely of teachers who are not qualified and have never received formal teacher training (Akyeampong, Pryor, Lussier & Westbrook, 2013; UNESCO, 2016). This is a direct result of massive teacher shortages and the need to fill vacant posts quickly and cost-efficiently. In such situations, countries commonly recruit community or contract teachers that are untrained or unqualified to fill the gap (World Bank, 2010; UNESCO, 2014, p.242). According to the World Bank (2010), contract teachers are those teachers who are:

Employed by the government or other organizations that are not part of the regular public service payroll of a country, who may or may not be trained according to country requirements, and who are offered short-term contracts usually no longer than a year (p.10).

In some cases, communities themselves recruit their own teachers and provide them with small stipends or other incentives (World Bank, 2010). In addition to not being trained, many communities hire teachers with "less than a lower secondary education"
The recruitment of high numbers of community and contract teachers is more common in remote rural areas and/or areas affected by conflict, so that "rural-urban differences in the qualification profiles of teachers are usually very large" (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007, p. 18). Bennell & Akyeampong (2007) further illustrate:

For example, in Namibia, 40 per cent of teachers in rural schools in the north are qualified compared to 92 per cent in the capital Windhoek and neighbouring areas. In Uganda, two-thirds of primary school teachers in urban schools are qualified, but only half in rural schools. The qualification divide is particularly acute in conflict and post-conflict situations. In Sierra Leone, for example, 96 per cent of teachers in the capital in Freetown are qualified, but less than 25 per cent in the remoter, war-torn northern districts (see Bennell et al. 2004) (p. 18).

Even if teachers are trained and qualified, often they are not adequately prepared or supported due to insufficient and limited pre- or in-service teacher education programs (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Dembele & Lefoka, 2007). In most developed contexts, to become a trained and certified teacher requires participation in an accredited pre-service teacher education program, usually affiliated with a university that includes coursework and a teaching practicum. However, pre-service education teacher programs in the Sub-Saharan African region are not standardized, resulting in extreme variation among countries in the admission requirements, content, structure, duration, and quality of programs. Even within countries, there may be more than one type of pre-service education program (Majgaard & Mingat, 2012, p.138; UNESCO, 2016). The most recent EFA Global Monitoring Report argues that it is difficult to compare quality of pre-service teacher training across the regions due to these extreme variations (UNESCO, 2016). However, researchers find limited evidence that pre-service education programs within Sub-Saharan Africa make any impact at all on teacher change and student achievement(Akyeampong & Lewin, 2002: Lauwier & Akkarai, 2015; Mulkeen, 2010;

Apart from small-scale projects, the literature provides little evidence of teacher education functioning as an effective agent for educational change in Sub-Saharan Africa (p. 27).

The ineffectiveness of pre-service teacher education can be due to a number of factors. To compensate for national teacher shortages, some country governments provide "alternative routes to teaching" that are reduced in scope and serve as a short-term and rapid pathway to train teachers quickly, often at the risk of reducing quality (UNESCO, 2016, p 336). Additionally, such programs often lower their requirements for admission, resulting in teacher trainees coming in with limited content knowledge and skills, even sometimes limited skills in basic reading and math. Recent research in Liberia found that many of the teachers working on an early grade reading initiative struggled with poor early reading skills themselves and could not read beyond a primary education level (Davidson & Hobbs, 2013).

In addition, pre-service education programs often focus more on theories than practice, and thus, rarely provide teachers with hands-on, practical skills (Akyeampong, Pryor, Westbrook, & Lussier, 2011; Akyeampong et al. 2013; Westbrook, Durani, Brown, Orr, Pryor, Boddy, & Salvi, 2013; Pryor et al., 2012). The teacher educators themselves often do not model effective instructional practices and resort to lecture-style teaching. Results from research conducted by Pryor et al. (2012) in six African countries found that "tutors" or teacher educators who train future teachers in early grade reading and math rarely modeled instructional approaches and instead used more "didactic" approaches such as lecturing and questioning (p.457). Teacher trainees then arrive in the
classroom with little understanding of what certain instructional practices should look like. As a result, new teachers often mirror the same traditional methods used by the teacher educators when they trained to become teachers. Additionally, if in-service education or continuous professional development is offered to teachers, it is usually in the form of a cascade training model approach that involved a training of trainers responsible for training teachers. In such approach, even if master trainers at the highest level of the cascade model instructional techniques and deliver content effectively, the quality of the training usually declines by the time it cascades down to the teachers. The content and strategies of the original training become severely “diluted” (Suzuki, 2008).

Limited teacher competence, combined with national examination-driven teaching that encourages rote learning and memorization (Somerset, 2011), results in teachers using pedagogical approaches viewed by many as “ineffective” for improving learning outcomes (Westbrook et al., 2013, p.24). Typically, teachers resort to traditional teacher-centered instruction where teachers transmit knowledge to students directly and students have to recall and memorize information. Dembele and Lefoka (2007) summarize the style of teaching often discussed in studies concerning Sub-Saharan African classrooms as follows:

This kind of teaching is generally labeled “‘traditional’”. It can be described in a nutshell as being rigid, chalk-and-talk, teacher-centered/dominated, lecture-driven. It is reported to place students in a passive role and to limit their activity in class to memorizing facts and reciting them back to the teacher (Chabane et al. 1989; Maclure 1997; ERNESA 2003; ERNWACA 2003). It is also reflected in classroom assessment practices (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2003) (p.535).

Dembele and Lefoka (2007) state that such teaching, "confines students to a passive role and only fosters lower order skills", thus limiting their opportunities to learn (p.531).
Teacher Motivation

Another problem concerning teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa is poor motivation (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Guajardo, 2011; Richardson, 2014; UNESCO, 2012; VSO, 2002). Poor teacher motivation is associated with frequent absences (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007), lack of preparation for class, and inattention to children who are struggling in the classroom (Guajardo, 2011). Such negative behaviors can adversely affect student achievement in the classroom and must be addressed if quality education is to become a reality.

Though the methods for measuring teacher motivation levels are limited, results from recent studies conducted in low-income contexts suggest that teacher motivation levels in schools are discouragingly low. Several researchers have provided lists of factors that contribute to teacher motivation (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Guajardo, 2011), including poor remuneration and incentives, lack of accountability, heavy workload, poor working and living conditions, deteriorating teacher status and recognition, inefficient policy environment, etc. Richardson (2014), in a comprehensive review of available research and discussions with experts in the field, also identified numerous factors contributing to teacher motivation that vary across contexts, even within a country (p. 22). Richardson separates these factors into three levels: (1) policy, (2) school, and (3) teacher. Policy-level factors include policies related to deployment, retention, remuneration, promotion, and assessment of teachers. School-level factors include type of school and level (private/government; primary/secondary; multi-grade/single-grade), location, school conditions, working environment, and leadership and supervision. Teacher-related factors include reasons for entry into the profession,
experience, recognition and prestige, social accountability, and opportunities for growth (p. 22). Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) suggest that poor motivation results in negative behavior and performance of teachers, another big challenge when working with teachers (p. x). Richardson (2014) proposes that to improve teacher motivation requires a holistic approach that targets the needs of teachers and ensures that basic needs are met, professional development and support is provided, teachers have a voice, and recognition and incentives are offered (p.33).

**Teachers in Crisis-affected Contexts**

Challenges with providing all children with access to a well-trained and effective teacher are even greater in the Sub-Saharan African countries affected by fragility, conflict or crisis. For example, 35% of the region’s out-of-school children live in countries affected by crisis or conflict (UNESCO, 2015b, p.3). The existing teaching forces prior to the crisis may have dramatically reduced due to either loss of life, displacement, or relocation, creating an even greater demand for teachers (Burns & Lawrie, 2015, p.17). Where this is an immediate need for large numbers of teachers simultaneously, options for finding qualified or competent teachers are limited, requiring countries to recruit candidates with limited skills. Additionally, teacher compensation in these situations is often insufficient or delayed (INEE, 2009).

Low-income countries continuously affected by conflict or crisis may inherit these challenges, as well as a set of additional unique challenges that further strain their abilities to achieve quality education. First, funding for education as part of humanitarian aid is considerably lower than funding for development aid. For example, "humanitarian funding for education in conflict-affected countries in 2012 was $105 million, much less
than the US $1.1 billion in development aid funding for education” (UNESCO, 2015a, p.276). Depending on the emergency, more funding and resources go towards school reconstruction, school feeding, or the provision of teaching and learning materials, rather than providing much needed support to teachers (UNESCO, 2015c, p.7). Teachers commonly serve as “front-line responders” to the emergency and left to do this “with little support through training and psychosocial support” (UNESCO, 2015c, p.8).

Teachers must shoulder a variety of different roles that require multiple skills and responsibilities outside of just teaching and learning (Shriberg, 2007), such as conducting psychosocial monitoring and referral of students, monitoring and health check-ups, learning and implementing a new curriculum, working longer hours, managing overcrowded classrooms, or alleviating stigmatism (i.e. child soldiers returning to the classroom), etc. These additional roles and responsibilities, combined with the typical challenges evident in low-income Sub-Saharan African contexts, may affect teachers’ motivation and their own well-being (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Shriberg, 2007; Shriberg, 2008, USAID, 2014). Additionally, teachers may be dealing with trauma themselves and need more direct support.

In crisis-affected contexts, teachers need extra support and training to support the needs of children (Burns & Lawrie, 2015; Shriberg, 2007; Shriberg, 2008; Winthrop & Kirk, 2005). However, supporting the needs of teachers is not always the first priority to be addressed. Priorities often focus more on providing psychosocial support to children, making schools safe for learning, and getting children back in school.
Sierra Leone Educational Context

Similar to other low-income Sub-Saharan African nations, Sierra Leone fell short of achieving the Millennium Development Goal targets by 2015. Soon after the MDGs were established in 1990, Sierra Leone, began its 11 year civil war (1991-2002), setting the country’s potential for progress a decade behind (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006). Despite a delayed start and an extremely fragile and vulnerable beginning, Sierra Leone made tremendous strides in improvement towards meeting the MDGs (GoSL, 2015a) particularly in regards to reducing poverty, reducing numbers of underweight children, improving primary completion rates, reducing gender parity, reducing HIV/AIDS and increasing access to drinking water.

Although we had a weak start in the implementation of the MDGs following the end of Sierra Leone’s civil war in 2002, significant progress was made in reducing absolute poverty from 70 percent in 2003 to 52.9 percent in 2013, and prevalence of underweight children from 20 percent in 2004 to 12.9 percent in 2014. The school completion rate increased to 76 percent in 2013, while the ratio of girls to boys in primary school now stands at 1:1 nationally and above one in three of the four regions of Sierra Leone. HIV/AIDS prevalence decreased from 1.5 percent in 2005 to 1.1 percent in 2013, while access to safe drinking water increased from 36.7 percent in 1990 to 62.6 percent in 2015 (President Koroma as cited in GoSL, 2015a).

As, the MDGs target period of 2015 came to a close, Sierra Leone’s progress was stalled yet again due to the West Africa Ebola outbreak, another nationwide crisis that further reduced opportunities for the country to move forward and set the country back even further.

Unfortunately, while the government was staying the course of pursuing the MDGs towards the end of programme implementation, in May 2014 the nation was struck by yet another crisis: the Ebola Virus Disease and the coincidental collapse of iron ore prices, a key source of fiscal revenue and foreign exchange. The disease killed more than 3,500 people out of more than 8,000 infection cases. It caused unprecedented damage to the socio-economic fabric of Sierra Leone
before the country was officially declared Ebola-free on 7 November 2015. Ebola adversely affected progress made towards the achievement of the MDG targets (President Koroma as cited in GoSL, 2015).

For this next section, I highlight the educational context in Sierra Leone and briefly address significant points regarding the 1) post-construction period after the war and prior to Ebola, and the 2) onset of Ebola and its’ impacts on the broader economic, social and educational context in Sierra Leone. I conclude with the current education context in Sierra Leone amidst the post-Ebola recovery.

**Education in Post-War Reconstruction (2002-2014)**

Sierra Leone, once commonly referred to as the “Athens of West Africa” because of its strong educational sector, fell victim to a decade long civil war beginning in 1991, which resulted in a significant number of civilians brutally killed and over half of the population displaced by the end of the war in 2002:

There are no accurate statistics of the casualties, but conservative estimates suggest that 70,000 people were killed and roughly 2.6 million people, more than half the population, were displaced from their homes (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006, p. 6).

In addition to the incredibly high numbers of civilian deaths and displaced persons, the war “destroyed most of the country’s social, economic, and physical infrastructure” (World Bank, 2007, p. 15). In the education sector alone, high numbers of schools were physically destroyed, and children and teachers displaced and no longer present in schools. Here, World Bank summarizes some of the significant “scars” felt by the education sector:

It left a multitude of scars in the education sector: devastated school infrastructure, severe shortages of teaching materials, overcrowding in many
classrooms in safer areas, displacement of teachers and delay in paying their salaries, frequent disruptions of schooling, disorientation and psychological trauma among children, poor learning outcomes, weakened institutional capacity to manage the system, and a serious lack of information and data to plan service provision. (World Bank, 2007, p.15)

Though statistics from that time are all approximations, statistics from the *Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy paper* (GoSL, 2001) suggest that an estimated 1,270 primary schools and 820 secondary, tertiary and vocational schools were physically damaged or destroyed during the war (GoSL, 2001, p.18). Additionally, national primary school enrollment rates had decreased by 13% with more significant drops in enrollment rates in provinces more directly impacted by the war, specifically the provinces in the North and the East (p.19). According to statistics, approximately 67% of children were out of school and students that had re-enrolled in schools were in “overcrowded schools with inadequate facilities” (GoSL, 2001, p 18-19). These statistics provide only a small glimpse of the impacts the war had on the education sector in Sierra Leone.

Shortly after Sierra Leone’s war, and after the 2004 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was developed for Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) and World Bank conducted a thorough analysis of the education sector in preparation for the development of the *Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan 2007-2015* (MEST, 2007). This report contributed to the ongoing dialogue on how to move the education sector from post-conflict recovery to sustainable development. It also intended to provide MEST with an analytical platform on which to build its sector-wide plan (World Bank, 2007, p.16). The analysis focused mostly on basic education and drew from available data and reports “up to the 2004/05 school year” (p.2). At that time, the
global communities viewed the Sierra Leone education system as making a “remarkable recovery in several key areas” which included the following:

1. Strong government commitment demonstrated by the introduction of the Free Primary Education Policy in 2001 and the Education Act of 2004 which led to the abolishment of schools fees “for all children in primary schools and for girls in JSS in the Northern and Eastern regions”. (p.2)

2. Increased enrollment rates at all levels of school but particularly primary school almost doubling its enrollment since immediately after the war.

3. Increased number of students taking the national primary examinations, passing the exam, and completing school at the primary school level.

4. Introducing a shift towards decentralization of “power and responsibility” to the local governments (World Bank, 2007, p5.).

While recognizing that significant progress had been made in the education sector since the ending of the war, the report also brought attention to significant challenge areas that still needed attention including 1) achieving education for ALL students, 2) expanding focus to include post-basic education, 3) improving the quality of teachers, and 4) managing decentralization (p.8). Regarding teachers specifically, the reports raised two critical issues: 1) a need for improving teacher morale in schools by prioritizing policies around “hiring, training, housing and paying teachers”, and 2) reforming systems for in-service teacher training with priority given to training and promoting massive numbers of teachers in primary and junior secondary schools who were unqualified (World Bank, 2007, p.8).
In 2006, using the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and this analysis as a platform, MEST with support from other line ministries, donors, and development partners developed the Education Sector Plan (2007-2015), a national document that outlined the strategy for the education sector in working towards achieving MDG goals and targets:

The Education Sector Plan of Sierra Leone is a strategic document which is based on the government’s 2006 Country Status Report (the diagnostic and analytical foundation of the situation of education in Sierra Leone) and the 2004 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Together they map out how GOSL will build on the education gains made since the war so that by the year 2015 all children will be going to school and receiving a quality education (MEST, 2007, p.x).

The overall strategy aimed to address a plethora of challenges across all levels of education in the following areas: “access, retention, and completion; functional quality education; governance, planning and management; funding; and monitoring and evaluation” (p.17) with priority given first to basic education (primary and junior secondary schools), followed by vocational skills training, tertiary education, and pre-schooling. The scope of this paper does not allow for a thorough discussion of the sector plan, but I would like to highlight two key issues the plan focused that are most relevant to the context of this research: 1) “achieving Universal Primary Education and completion of quality”, and 2) “meeting the teacher needs of an expanding schooling system”. The ESP Goal for achieving UPE and completion was to:

To provide six years of good quality universal primary education to all children of primary school-going age (6-11 years) and the over-aged who had missed out - including those with special needs for both categories specified) and ensure that they all complete with necessary knowledge and skills (MEST, 2007, p.22)

Key challenges to achieve this goal included reaching high percentage of out-of-school students that were not in school, particularly for girls and children with special
needs; minimizing drop-out rates of children once in school; expanding number of schools to accommodate the increased enrolment rates; improving the poor quality of the learning environments challenged with limited teaching and learning materials, furniture, toilets and clean water; increasing the number of qualified teachers in each school (in rural areas over half of teachers in schools were unqualified); addressing high rates of teacher and student absenteeism; ensuring teachers are paid and paid on-time; and building the capacity of the district and schools structures to support schools through quality monitoring and supervision (MEST, 2007, pp 22-24). The ESP Goal for meeting the needs of teachers in an expanding system was to:

Expand the number of teachers and provide teacher training of quality to meet the needs of an increasing number of pupils enrolled in increasing number of schools (MEST, 2007, p. 69).

Some of the key challenges that had to be addressed to meet the needs of teachers included: training and employing more teachers, particularly females (only 30% of teachers at primary level were female); addressing high rates of attrition; improving the conditions of service for teachers; and providing resources and supports to district to conduct monitoring and supervision of teachers.

In years leading up the end of the MDG goals and thus the remaining period for the ESP 2007-2015, Sierra Leone made significant progress towards its educational goals particularly in improving access and completion of primary education:

There have been improvements in access to primary and junior secondary schooling in under-served areas. Since 2007, for example, the Sababu Education Project and the EFA-FTI Programme funded the construction of more than 150 primary schools and 30 Junior Secondary Schools in key areas. Additionally, there has been an estimated 1 percent decrease in the percentage of 6 to 11-year old children out of school. There’s also been a minor – but still noteworthy – increase in gender parity at all levels of schooling. There were also improvements
in the completion and transition rates for both sexes at primary, junior and senior-secondary levels. The Proxy Completion Rate for primary education rose to 76 percent in 2010/11 academic from 67 percent. The transition rate from Primary to Junior Secondary School increased nearly 20 percent from 2007 to 2010. At the JSS level, most of the targets set in 2010 have been reached as of today, with the exception of a high number of students still repeating grade levels (MEST, 2013, p.14)

Overall, progress was slow and significant improvement was still needed but the sector was moving forward with a positive momentum. In addition to progress on indicators, other achievements had been made that are worth noting. The Teachers Service Commission Act (2010) was endorsed which called for a separate branch to be created (outside of the MEST) that would be responsible for teacher management and welfare. In 2012, The Ministry commissioned a Capacity Development assessment of the Ministry and the sector and the development of a Capacity Development Strategy. MEST with support from UNICEF had developed a new basic education curriculum framework. A new Education Sector Plan 2014-2018 was written in September 2013.

As part of the new ESP, just months before the Ebola outbreak, MEST with support from Montrose and UNICEF conducted an Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) in 130 primary schools. These assessments included not only assessments of Class 2 and Grade 4 students’ reading and math skills but also assessments of teacher practices and Head Teacher practices. Results from the EGRA indicated that the “majority of pupils in Sierra Leone are not learning HOW to read” (Montrose, 2015, p. 17). Other important results included:

- 97.4% of the grade 2 students and 86.5% of the grade 4 students do not know a single letter sound in English;
• 92.6% of the grade 2 students and 68.2% of the grade 4 students cannot read a single invented or ‘non’ words

• P2 and P4 cannot read fluently enough and thus cannot read with comprehension

• 0.0% of the grade 2 students and 0.1% of the grade 4 students was able to answer 80% of the questions of the reading passage correctly

• 1.1% of all pupils speak English at home yet 83.7% are taught English in schools (Montrose, 2015, p.17).

Results from the EGMA suggested most Class 2 and Class 4 pupils were able to identify single, double and triple digit numbers but challenged to conduct simple addition and subtraction. These findings from both EGRA and EGMA illustrate the poor quality of the education system despite the celebratory achievements in access and completion. However, findings provided an important baseline and direction for MEST to continue its focus.

**Impact of Ebola Outbreak (May 2014-Nov 2015)**

In May 2014, Sierra Leone encountered its first known case of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in a remote village in Kailahun District. The disease, which first originated in neighboring country, Guinea, a few months earlier in the year, rapidly spread across Sierra Leone and Liberia and soon became the largest Ebola outbreak recorded in history (“Ebola (Ebola Virus Disease)”, 2017). On June 12, 2014, as the epidemic spread uncontrollably from Kailahun District to other districts in the country, the President of Sierra Leone declared a State of Emergency and enforced nationwide school closures, bans on public gatherings and markets, and border closings between
Guinea and Liberia, neighboring countries also impacted by the Ebola outbreak. The government enforced travel bans within the country to limit virus transmission across districts.

During the height of the outbreak, numbers of cases of persons infected were doubling in numbers each day with average daily deaths rising significantly. The trauma felt by entire communities, friends and relatives directly affected by the horrific disease are still unimaginable. In addition to the trauma experienced of losing friends, relatives, and community members to the disease, the impacts of the Ebola outbreak were felt in many other ways throughout the country. With the imposed travel restrictions and bans on public gatherings, civilians with non-Ebola related illnesses had little to no access to regular healthcare services resulting in increased number of deaths that could have been avoided, such as childbirth or malaria.

In the education sector, the impacts were also immense (GoSL, 2014; MEST, 2015). Results from a Rapid School Needs Assessment conducted in 7,287 schools across the country found that 945 students and 181 teachers had died from Ebola-related deaths; 609 students and 597 teachers became seriously ill from the disease but survived (MEST, 2015). School closures resulted in students out of school for over nine months contributing to loss and delay in student’s opportunities to learn (MEST, 2015). Some teachers left communities in search for other work as well as students moved away with their families resulting in lower student and teacher attendance once schools reopened. Most schools were left abandoned and neglected during school closures with the exception of the 132 schools that were used as Ebola holding centers and quarantines spaces for communities directly affected by the virus (MEST, 2015). In all cases, schools
needed significant cleaning, disinfecting, and repairs upon school re-opening as well as measures in place to ensure schools were safe and Ebola-Free and would remain so when schools re-opened.

**Education Priorities during Ebola**

While schools were closed, MEST along with development partners developed an Education Strategic Response plan focused primarily on 1) establishing a national radio and TV education program to provide students with continued opportunities for learning while schools were closed, 2) preparing for the re-opening of schools to ensure they were safe and secure learning environment. MEST established an Education Task Force, which developed several Technical Working Committees to work on different aspects of the response and recovery. Some of the initial committees included an Operational Planning Committee, Media Campaign Committee, a Continued Learning Committee, and a School Re-opening Committee (MEST, 2014). The Operational Planning Committee was charged with leading the overall educational response including revising the strategic plan and monitoring overall progress. The Media Campaign led all media and communication activities regarding MEST strategic plan throughout all phases of the response and recovery. The Continued Learning Committee was formed to develop and roll out an Emergency Radio Educational Program so that students of all ages could continue to learn despite not being able to be in school throughout the duration of the outbreak. A School Re-opening Committee focused on ensuring schools were safe and protective learning environments for children to return to school. This included the development of standardized school re-opening protocols, which included activities such as the disinfection of schools used as quarantine centers and distribution of hand washing
stations, soap, and thermometers in every school (MEST, 2014). The School Re-opening Committee was also responsible for planning training for teachers in psychosocial support to students and guidance on the Ebola virus. Other committees included a School Feeding Working Group, a WASH in Schools committee and an Accelerated Learning Working Group.

**Post-Ebola Recovery and Transition Priorities for Education (Phase One)**

Once transmission rates began decreasing in early 2015, the President of Sierra Leone established the *Presidential Recovery Priorities*, a recovery plan for the country that prioritized key post-Ebola intervention areas of focus. Focus areas in the first phase included: education, energy, governance, health, private sector, development, social protection, and water (GoSL, 2015b; 2016). Within the education priorities, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) with support from donors and partners would work together to 1) ensure zero cases of Ebola in schools, 2) get children back in school, and 3) accelerate student learning to make up for lost time (GoSL, 2015b).

When transmission rates start to drop in early 2015, MEST and development partners began preparing schools to re-open in March 2015. In preparation, MEST with support from partners, conducted school needs assessments; disinfected previously quarantined schools; trained teachers in psycho-social support and EVD prevention; conducted social mobilization campaigns to raise awareness of school reopening; encouraged parents to return their children to school; and established hand-washing and temperature check stations in each school to help minimize risk of Ebola transmission in schools. In April 2015, the government lifted public bans and schools officially opened in April 2015 for the first term (mid-April to mid-July). During this time, MEST with
support from development partners, formed an Accelerated Learning Working Group to develop an Accelerated Learning syllabus planned for launching in September 2015 and condensed school curriculum and schedule from three terms to two terms to make up for lost time. During the months of August and September 2015, a consortium of NGOs, led by IRC, led the training roll-out for over 18,000 teachers in the accelerated learning syllabus. By November 2015, the transmission of the EVD had significantly reduced and on November 7, the World Health Organization declared Sierra Leone “Ebola-Free”. Schools were back in session on a condensed school schedule planned for two school years using the accelerated learning syllabus. The early recovery phase officially ended March 31, 2016. Results from a recent evaluation suggested the early recovery phase was successful overall but with several areas that still needed improvement (Dalan Development Consultants & Forcier Consulting, 2016, p.51)

**Post-Ebola Recovery and Transition Priorities for Education (Phase Two)**

The education priorities for the second phase of the *Presidential Recovery Priorities* focused on two core areas: 1) learning outcomes, and 2) nationwide school feeding (GoSL, 2016). To improve learning outcomes, some of the initiatives included developing scripted lesson plans in math and science, training 40,000 primary, JSS, and SSS level teachers on scripted lesson plans, cleaning up the payroll and reallocating teachers, constructing 500 new classrooms, and establishing or rehabilitating WASH facilities in 360 schools. The nationwide school feeding program aimed to ensure 1.2 million children in primary schools (GoSL, 2016, p.18). The second phase of the *Presidential Recovery Priorities* ended July 2017.
In the final stages of writing this dissertation, I was not able to access documentation on educational progress in the second phase or plans moving forward. However, I do know that the International Rescue Committee developed the lesson plans in 2016 and conducted the training of teachers in early 2017. Additionally, as part of the next phase, Cambridge Education and McKinsey will lead the next phase which, based on my understanding, intends to scale up coaching at a national level as a form of support to the roll-out and implementation of lesson plans in all the schools. Additionally, a new Education Sector Plan (2018-2020) is currently being drafted which will replace the ESP 2014-2018 that never really moved forward because of the Ebola outbreak.

**Education Consortium RaISES Initiative in Sierra Leone**

**Background**

Prior to Ebola, in 2013, the Department for International Development (DFID), funded the Education Consortium (EdCo), a consortia comprised of five key INGOs who partnered together to support the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) of Sierra Leone to deliver a 7.5 million GBP whole school improvement initiative to improve learning outcomes for over 240,000 marginalized young children in 450 schools. EdCo members, or implementing partners, included Save the Children International, IBIS, Plan International, Concern Worldwide, and International Rescue Committee, the lead agency. This initiative, initially titled *Improving Schooling in Sierra Leone* (ISIS), aimed to improve learning by implementing an evidenced-based whole-school improvement model, which addressed Teacher Professional Development, School Leadership and students’ Opportunity to Learn (OTL).
This project will implement a whole school improvement approach with participating schools, communities and district education officials. The consortium will provide opportunities for professional development for both teachers and Head Teachers. At the same time, the programme will work with education officials and communities to ensure that students have the opportunity to learn (Education Consortium, 2013a, p.18).

Unfortunately, the ISIS education initiative was disrupted mid-way through implementation due to the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in 2014. Though EdCo continued to support the government in various Ebola outbreak response activities, all formal ISIS activities ceased for about nine months until schools re-opened in mid-April 2015. During the time of the Ebola outbreak and the time of post-Ebola recovery, project activities shifted toward the response and later recovery and DFID renamed the project to Rebuilding and Improving Schools after Ebola (RaISES). In this section, I provide a brief overview of the overall ISIS/RaISES initiative and the teacher and head teacher professional development model components, followed by a focus on the coaching component and role of Learning Coaches. I conclude this section with a brief description concerning the changes in project implementation and priorities due to the Ebola outbreak. The majority of information comes from internal unpublished documents and project training materials such as the DFID Project Inception Report (Education Consortium, 2013a), scope and sequence training frameworks, and resource and training manuals created for Learning Coaches. However, in describing the coaching model, I added details based on my own knowledge from participation in the co-development of the model and materials, lead facilitator of the “Effective Learning Coaches” training, and provision of on-going support to Learning Coaches through field visits. For the sake of maintaining consistency, I will use the term RaISES from this point forward when referring to the EdCo program initiative.
**Project Description**

According to the original *DFID Project Inception Report* (2013a), the overall goal of the RaISES initiative was to “create better schools that provide students with improved opportunities to learn resulting in improved learning outcomes as evidenced by assessment results” (Education Consortium, 2013a, p.7). At project inception in 2013, the EdCo initiative targeted 300 primary schools and 150 Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) across seven districts. The project aims included:

1. Increasing access and attendance in Junior Secondary Schools
2. Improving the quality of teaching in primary schools, specifically in the teaching of reading, and writing
3. Improving the quality of leadership in JSS and primary schools.
4. Improving students' opportunities to learn.

These project aims translated into the following outputs: 1) marginalized children are supported to access and remain in Junior Secondary School, 2) effective teaching for school improvement, 3) effective leadership for school improvement, and 4) students have the opportunity to learn. A significant component of the initiative was the provision of on-going support to the professional development and learning of both teachers and Head Teachers using a comprehensive professional development model that included face-to-face training, coaching, and school or cluster-based communities of practice. Given the specific purposes of this research, in this section, I discuss aspects of the project that are most relevant to this inquiry which includes the whole school improvement model as illustrated in Figure 1 and the work of Learning Coaches in improving the professional learning of teachers and Head Teachers (Outputs 2, 3, and 4).
The components covered in this section do not represent the entire scope of the EdCo initiative.

![Whole School Improvement Model](image)

**Figure 1: Whole School Improvement Model (Education Consortium, 2013a)**

**Teacher Professional Development**

In order to improve the quality of teaching in the schools, the project aimed to help teachers achieve 85% proficiency on a set of eight core teacher professional development competencies. The teacher professional development competencies included:

1. Teacher accurately demonstrates lesson preparation
2. Teacher effectively utilizes a variety of teaching methods and resources
3. Teacher communicates in a manner that enhances learning.
4. Teacher effectively utilizes student assessment techniques
5. Teacher manages the classroom/educational environment in a manner that promotes positive student behavior and a safe and healthy environment
6. Teacher effectively teaches reading and writing as a lesson and across subject areas.

7. Teacher works productively with colleagues, parents/caretakers, and community members.

8. Teacher demonstrates a willingness to examine and implement change, as appropriate.

The project supported teachers’ professional learning and proficiency on these competencies using a three-prong teacher professional development model which included: 1) face-to-face teacher training, 2) ongoing coaching, and 3) monthly model Teacher Learning Circles. After each year of participation in this combination of professional development opportunities, teachers would self-assess themselves as well as be assessed by others each year on their progress towards their proficiency in teacher professional development competencies.

The content of the teacher professional development model centered around the teacher professional development competencies and aimed to support teacher’s professional learning in general teaching methodologies with a particular focus on reading and writing instruction in early primary grades, Classes 1-3. As part of the original design of the project, the teacher professional development model would eventually expand to include a focus on numeracy using a similar approach. Included below is a brief description of each of the three components of the teacher professional development model:
Face-to-Face Training

The plan for the face-to-face training included a total of 15 days of training for teachers- three, 5-day workshops over the course of one year. Content of the training focused primarily on the first six out of eight teacher professional development competencies because they were competencies directly related to teacher content knowledge and skills expected in the classroom. RaISES placed particular emphasis on pedagogical and content knowledge related to the five key literacy foundations including print awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabetic abilities, vocabulary and comprehension. After each set of training workshops, trained Learning Coaches and Lecturers would then roll-out the same training to teachers at the cluster level.

Coaching and Mentoring

In between training workshops, Learning Coaches would provide on-going school-based support to teachers to utilize the knowledge and skills gained through the training. Learning Coaches would tailor their support based on the differentiated needs of the individual teachers and their proficiency levels on the teacher professional development competencies. As part of their monthly visits to each of their teachers, Learning Coaches would follow a coaching cycle consisting of four stages that involved a pre-observation conference, classroom observation, analysis, and post-observation conference where Learning Coaches and teachers could work together to identify areas of improvement and set goals. Co-teaching and co-planning were also important to the coaching process.
Teacher Learning Circles (TLCs)

In the second year of implementation, Learning Coaches would help establish a school-based community of practice through bi-monthly Teacher Learning Circles (TLCs) for teachers to discuss and share their experiences and challenges implementing new methodologies and together develop possible strategies and practice them with each other. Learning Coaches would help establish and facilitate TLC sessions in the beginning using a TLC workbook for teachers, but then teachers would later serve as facilitators for the sessions on a rotational basis. The TLC workbook consisted of thematic modules that aligned with key topics from teacher professional development competencies. The TLC workbook was structured around the adult learning cycle and aligned with the teacher professional development competencies. Each module provided easy to read scripted sessions for teachers to easily facilitate participatory activities with peer teachers. The adult learning cycle informed the inclusion of participatory activities, which prompted teachers to reflect, build on what teachers knew, reinforce concepts recently learned, practice with their peers, and establish goals for future application.

Head Teacher Professional Development

In addition to supporting the professional learning of teachers, the project aimed to support the learning of Head Teachers and expected to roll out a professional development model aimed specifically to support their improvement in leadership practices. Similar to the Teacher Professional Development model, this model was driven by a set of professional development competencies for Head Teachers which included:

1. Head Teacher promotes student learning by building and maintaining a culture that supports student achievement.
2. Head Teacher engages the larger community to meet the diverse needs of the student population.

3. Head Teacher manages the daily operations of the school environment to meet the diverse needs of the student population.

4. The Head Teacher engages in and promotes professional development.

Similar to the professional development for teachers, the Head Teacher professional development model included the same three components: 1) face to face training, 2) coaching and mentoring, and 3) communities of practice through peer cluster meetings. After each year of participation in this combination of professional development opportunities, Head Teachers would also self-assess themselves as well as be assessed by coach each year on their progress towards their proficiency in teacher professional development competencies.

**Face- to-Face Training**

RaISES intended to offer 10 days of training to all Head Teachers in each cluster. The focus of the training would center around the Head Teacher professional development competencies with a focus on leadership strategies as well as “Opportunity to Learn” elements and tools. Opportunity to Learn elements are part of Output 4 and include the following:

1. There are systems and procedures to record and follow-up on teacher and student attendance.

2. Students are supported to learn how to read.

3. Teaching and Learning Materials are available and effectively utilized to support student achievement.
4. The school is open every school calendar day and the official instructional hours are observed.

**Coaching and Mentoring**

Learning Coaches would support Head Teachers to achieve proficiency on their own set of professional development competencies. Through monthly coaching sessions, Learning Coaches and Head Teachers would work together to assess progress against the competencies and establish goals for further improvement. Coaches would also support Head Teachers to review progress on their school improvement goals and help heads of schools decide future actions.

**Peer Cluster Meetings**

Similar to TLC’s, Peer Cluster meetings provided a community of practice for Head Teachers within a cluster of schools to meet three times a year to discuss progress to date on individual leadership goals and school OTL targets, share experiences and challenges. This served as a forum for heads of schools to help and learn from each other.

**Opportunity to Learn**

As part of the original design, the EdCo initiative planned for the development of a framework of targets and indicators for schools to try to reach that was based on United States Agency for International Development (USAID) -funded *Opportunity to Learn* research (Gillies & Quijada, 2008). Findings from the research identified the following conditions that needed to be in place within the school environment in order for students to have the opportunity to learn:

1. Early grade reading
2. Student attendance
3. Teacher attendance
4. Pupil-teacher ratio
5. Materials
6. Time on task
7. School is open
8. Office instructional hours

In collaboration with MEST, EdCo would develop indicators for the targets and monitoring tools. Head Teachers, with support from the teachers and community, would then be responsible for the management of the school keeping the established targets at the forefront of their school improvement plans. The project would provide OTL funds to schools to help implement their school improvement plans as well as teaching and learning materials. The project would pilot scorecards in 45 of the schools to evaluate their effectiveness in improving motivation

**Coaching as a Component of RaISES Professional Development Strategy**

Aware of evidence that traditional one-off trainings do not work in terms of harnessing teacher behavior change, EdCo developed the professional development model based on a set of five core principles that suggested that professional development must: 1) build on foundation of skills, knowledge, and expertise, 2) engage participants as learners, 3) provide feedback and follow-up, 4) measure changes in participant’s knowledge and skills, and 5) measure changes in student performance. These principles, informed by experiential learning methodologies and effective professional development research, guided DFID’s original business case for Sierra Leone and served as the
foundation for the ISIS/RaISES model. Given the evidence-base for coaching, EdCo included coaching as key part of their professional development model and adopted an instructional coaching model approach. EdCo defined instructional coaching as: “a professional development activity that involves a highly skilled professional (the coach) working with other professional (the teachers) in a collegial manner to raise instructional practices to the highest possible level” (Education Consortium, 2013b, p. 2).

EdCo hired 50 Learning Coaches (10 coaches per organization) and 30 Education Officers (six officers per organization). Learning Coaches were responsible for leading the school-based professional development activities and support for teachers and Head Teachers; Education officers were responsible for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities and non-coaching related project activities such as tracking school data, data collection and management, conducting the beneficiary stipend verification process, material distribution, and disbursement and tracking of stipends.

**Project-related Changes due to the Ebola Outbreak**

The Education Consortium initiative was ending its first year of implementation when the government declared Sierra Leone in a State of Emergency on July 31, 2014 due to the increasing spread of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak. With nationwide bans on public gatherings from July 2014 to mid-April 2015, schools were closed much of the 2014/2015 academic year for nine months. During this time, RaISES suspended all normal program activities in all implementing districts (Education Consortium, 2016). Depending on organizational priorities and staffing, some EdCo staff shifted their roles and responsibilities from EdCo programming towards the emergency health response while others supported the Ministry of Education’s radio education
programming intended to provide continued learning opportunities for children throughout the outbreak.

Meanwhile, MEST established working groups to lead aspects of the post-Ebola outbreak recovery process in the education sectors. EdCo member organizations played an active role in working with and supporting MEST during the planning processes for the post-Ebola outbreak recovery and transition period.

Once the number of Ebola cases had significantly dropped throughout the country and the emergency response capacity had significantly grown, the government declared the re-opening of schools for mid-April 2015. The re-opening of schools required a lot of preparation of schools and communities to ensure schools were clean and safe learning environments and communities felt comfortable to send their children back to school. To make up for the learning lost, MEST imposed a reduced academic school year for the two years following the crisis. The reduced school year was adjusted from the normal 38 weeks to 29 weeks in Year One and 27 weeks in Year Two. This reduced school year required the development of condensed/accelerated syllabi in order to ensure that the "normal" curriculum was covered in the shortened amount of time.

RaISES continued support to 450 schools and with continued focus on the original four outcomes: 1) increased access and attendance in JSS, 2) improved quality of teaching in primary schools, 3) improved quality of leadership in JSS and primary schools, and 4) improved students' opportunities to learn. However, EdCo revised project activities within each of these outcomes to respond to the changed context. Some of these changes included adding activities such as: leading the development of the national accelerated learning program. This program was intended to “help children to cover core
contents of the existing curriculum in 29 weeks during the current (2015/2016) school year and in 27 weeks for the following school year (January to July 2016) (Education Consortium, 2016, p.7). The accelerated learning program included the development of the teaching syllabi for accelerated learning, a master of trainers for nation-wide training on the accelerated learning syllabi, and roll-out of training teachers in all the districts.

RaISES led these activities as well as continued implementation of three-prong approach of their teacher professional development model including use of Learning Coaches to train, coach, and support TLCs. However, the content and focus of coaching shifted to align better with the MEST education sector post-Ebola outbreak recovery plan and the training roll-out and implementation of the accelerated learning syllabi.

Though I had planned to conduct this study prior to the outbreak, data collection did not take place until several months after schools had re-opened and Learning Coaches had returned to their roles as Learning Coaches. Due to the changed landscape and changed priorities of the donor, DFID discontinued funding for RaISES and the program closed shortly after I completed data collection.
CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature concerning instructional coaching is mostly dominated by descriptive studies, training manuals, and evaluations from initiatives in Western contexts, predominately the United States. Several strands of literature emerged from my review that informed the initial conceptual framework for my study for understanding the professional learning and experiences of Learning Coaches supporting teachers in a low-income Sub-Saharan African context. These strands include:

1. Coaching history, definitions and types,
2. Roles and responsibilities of coaches,
3. Influential factors on the effectiveness of coaching,
4. Coaching knowledge, skills, beliefs and dispositions, and
5. Supporting coaches’ professional learning and growth

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the components of effective teacher professional development component as identified from Western Contexts, and recent trends and barriers in teacher professional development and learning in low-income contexts particularly those supporting teachers in large scale reading reform. I then review the literature on coaching, using the five strands above as a framework, as a component of teacher professional development in developed contexts, and the existing empirical research on coaching in Sub-Saharan Africa. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the conceptual framework that I use to frame the analysis of this study.
Researchers agree that teacher professional development plays a critical role in preparing and developing effective teachers that have an impact on learning (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Guskey, 2002). The *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS) defines teacher professional development as the "activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise, and other characteristics as a teacher" (OECD, 2009, p.49). Others view professional development as a "continuous learning journey" as opposed to a set of "activities" (e.g. Hirsh, 2015). Those who share this latter perspective value the role of teachers as active partners in their own professional learning and growth and portrays their learning as an ongoing lifelong process (“Learning Forward: Definition of Professional Development”, n.d.). A European Commission report (2010) further illustrates:

…teacher learning is seen as an active and constructive process that is problem-oriented, grounded in social settings and circumstances, and takes place throughout teachers’ lives. (p. 32).

Results from the TALIS survey conducted with teachers from around the world found that the most common forms of teacher professional development activities teachers participated in ranked from most mentioned to least included “informal dialogue to improve teaching, courses and workshops, reading professional literature, education conferences and seminars, professional development network, individual and collaborative research, mentoring and peer observation, observation visits, and qualification programs” (OECD, 2009, p.57). Of course, teacher’s rate and levels of participation varied depending on the country, but such data provides a sense of what kind of professional learning opportunities are most commonly available for teachers.
Research on the elements of effective professional development programs consistently confirms that one-off trainings or workshops alone are not an effective means for teachers to learn and that teachers learn more when they are provided with additional, job-embedded, sustained forms of support that also fosters collaborative learning (e.g. Garet et al., 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Joyce & Showers, 2002, Guskey, 2002). Garet et al. (2001), for example, conducted empirical research on a US national program and explored the relationship between specific aspects of professional development of a sample of 1,027 mathematics and science teachers and their self-reported changes in learning. Findings from their study revealed the following features of professional development that influenced change: 1) type of activity, 2) duration, 3) collective participation, 4) content, 5) active learning, and 6) coherence. Based on Garet et al.’s (2001) findings, professional development was more effective when it provided more reform-oriented activities rather than just traditional workshops; sustained over longer periods of time, involved teachers from “same school, grade or subject”; focused on “subject-matter knowledge” and “how children learn”; promoted opportunities for active learning; and aligned and connected with other professional development standards or frameworks (Garet et al., 2001).

As experts in the field increasingly recognize teachers as active partners in the learning process, researchers have also expanded their focus in the last decade from exploring components of professional development activities that work towards a greater focus on characteristics of professional learning that actually lead to change in student achievement (Learning Forward, n.d). At the center of this perspective is the notion that effective professional learning links directly to improved student achievement. This
requires first, a greater understanding of factors that directly affect student learning. We can then better understand the teacher’s role in facilitating student learning. Hattie’s (2009) “Visible Learning” research was one of the most comprehensive “meta-analysis of meta-analysis” studies to date, which explored student achievement specifically, and in detail. In this study, Hattie compiled findings from 800 meta-analysis studies that examined student achievement and/or factors that influence student achievement. Factors were characterized into student, home, school, curricula, teacher and teaching strategies. More recently, Hattie (2015) updated the research to include analysis of 1200 meta-analysis studies. Findings from his most recent research identified and ranked 195 factors from the six core areas that directly influenced student learning. The top ten factors with the largest effect sizes included:

1. Teacher estimates of achievement
2. Collective teacher efficacy
3. Self-reported grades
4. Piagetian programs
5. Conceptual change programs
6. Response to intervention
7. Teacher credibility
8. Micro teaching
9. Cognitive task analysis
10. Classroom discussion

Findings such as these are critical and help us rethink what works best in the classroom and how we can better prepare teachers to support learning achievement.
Learning Forward, a U.S.-based national organization, led the development of a "Standards for Professional Learning" used to guide educators in planning and facilitating professional learning opportunities for teachers across the US. These standards, informed by research in the US and developed in collaboration with 40 other educational associations, propose that effective activities for teachers’ learning should:

1. support teachers to participate in learning communities,
2. give teachers access to resources,
3. include application of theories, research and models of human learning,
4. link to student learning,
5. be facilitated by skillful leaders,
6. be data-driven, and
7. provide on-going support to implementation of professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011)

A recent study conducted by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) examined 35 research studies of professional development that positively affected teacher change and student learning. Findings revealed seven common features of teacher professional development that positively influenced student learning:

1. Content focused
2. Incorporate active learning (utilizing adult learning theory)
3. Engage teachers in collaboration
4. Use models and modeling
5. Provide coaching and expert support
6. Provide opportunities for feedback and reflection
7. Sustained duration

These characteristics are similar to characteristics identified from Garet et al. (2001)’s study but with a more explicit emphasis on modeling, coaching, and feedback and reflection. Coherence, a characteristic previously identified, falls under content-focused professional development that aligns with school and district priorities.

In low-income and developing contexts, teacher professional development has largely failed to meet quality standards such as these, resulting in limited teacher change and low levels of student achievement (Burns & Lawrie, 2015).

In many parts of the globe—particularly in the world’s poorest and most fragile contexts where the need for quality teaching is greatest— the frequency of professional development is episodic, its quality variable, its duration limited, and support or follow-up for teachers is almost non-existent (Burns & Lawrie, 2015, p.7).

In-service training or continuous professional development, if available, usually involves a cascade-training model, a "mechanism delivering training messages from trainers at the central level to trainees at the local level through several layers" (Suzuki, 2008, p.1). Cascade models are a popular approach in low-income contexts because of their affordability and capacity to train large amounts of teachers in a timely manner (Suzuki, 2008, p.1). This model becomes particularly appealing in countries introducing new curriculum or tasked with rapid massive recruitment and training of untrained and unqualified teachers. Such models are rarely effective because content becomes "diluted" after passing through so many layers of training (Suzuki, 2008, p.1). By the time it reaches the teachers, the quality of the training decreases significantly (Suzuki, 2008).

Due to problems with one-shot, cascade training, coupled with growing research on the features of effective professional development and learning, governments, donors
and organizations in low-income contexts are trying more school-based, on-going support to teachers through activities such as coaching, mentoring, and teacher networks and communities of practices (Hardman, 2012, Hardman, 2015). We see evidence of this even in fragile and crisis-affected contexts (Burns & Lawrie, 2015; Frisoli, 2013).

The following section of this review focuses specifically on one of these evidence-based strategies—coaching—for providing on-going and sustained support to teachers. In the context of low-income and developing countries, coaching has recently gained attention as a promising strategy to strengthen the effectiveness of teacher professional development, particularly in early grade reading initiatives. Yet, a review of the literature on coaching in these contexts revealed little in the form of empirical research. For these reasons, for the remainder of this review, I first review literature on coaching from developed contexts to better understand what coaching looks like and how coaches are prepared and follow this with a brief review of the available but limited empirical research of coaching in low-income developing contexts.

**Coaching as a Professional Development Strategy**

Since the early 1980’s, education scholars and educators have increasingly publicized and promoted school-based coaching as a "promising strategy" for supporting teacher change in instructional practice and thus, leading towards improved learning outcomes of students (Joyce & Showers, 1980; Knight, 2007b; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2013). Coaching is commonly referred to in the literature as professional development that is “job-embedded”, “sustained over time”, and based on “evidence-based instructional practices” (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The theory of change behind coaching evolved from evidence in developed contexts that suggests that students
learn best when they have competent teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 2002) and those teachers learn more when they are provided with on-going, sustained support through coaching (Desimone et al., 2002; Joyce & Showers, 1980; 2002).

Though coaching was not a new concept, school-related coaching first gained popularity and traction in the early 1980's in the United States when Joyce and Showers began exploring coaching effectiveness through research on teacher professional development. In 1980, Joyce and Showers conducted a meta-analysis of 200 evaluations of trainings of teachers to identify key elements included in trainings that potentially worked. Results from this comprehensive review and analysis revealed the following components as critical to training success: "theory presentation, modeling or demonstration, practice, structures and open-ended feedback, and in-class assistance with transfer" (Joyce & Showers, 1980). The limitation of this research was that there was no critical understanding of the impact of each one. This spurred additional studies exploring the effectiveness of teacher professional development in which Joyce and Showers later found positive results more directly linked to peer coaching when combined with training (e.g. Showers, 1982; Showers, 1984; Joyce & Showers, 1995).

Similarly, Costa & Garmston (2002) developed a model for peer coaching in the early to mid 80s referred to as "cognitive coaching" (p.xix). Costa and Garmston developed this model based on key concepts from clinical supervision models that emerged from the work of Robert Anderson, Morris Cogan, and Robert Goldhammer in the 50's and 60's (p. 8). Clinical supervision models were developed as an alternative to traditional models of teacher supervision where an “expert” supervised teachers. With the
work of Anderson, Cogan, and Goldhammer, new models were developed that encouraged more mutual and collegial relationships between teacher and supervisor. Costa and Garmston (1992) defined this type of supervisory model as "a collegial relationship that supports teachers in becoming critically self-reflective about their work" (p.94). Costa and Garmston's Cognitive Coaching model mirrors some of the same concepts from the clinical supervision model but is referred to as a more "modern expression of this orientation" (2002, p.9). Cognitive coaching, similar to clinical supervision models, relies on three goals for coaching which include "trust, learning, and autonomy" (p.xviii, 2002). Additionally, cognitive coaching centers on a cyclical coaching process that involves planning, conferencing, observation, and follow-up conferencing with the teacher. Unique to Costa and Garmston (2002) model is its focus on the "cognitive development" of the teacher (p.5). Here they explain:

This focus is based on the belief that growth is achieved through the development of intellectual functioning. Therefore, the coaching interaction focuses on mediating a practitioner’s thinking, perceptions, beliefs, and assumptions to towards the goal of self-directed learning and increased complexity of cognitive processing (2002, p.5)

During the 1980’s and 1990’s coaching increasingly became touted as a promising yet evidence-based strategy due to several subsequent studies conducted by Joyce and/or Showers (Showers, 1982; Showers, 1984; Showers, Joyce & Bennett, 1987; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Showers & Joyce, 1996). Results from their research provided stronger evidence that teachers who received on-going one-on-one professional development support from "peer coaches" in addition to training improved their practice more than teachers who only participated in a one-off training (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Exact statistics from the study revealed that 95% of teachers
who received coaching in combination with 1) theory and discussion; 2) demonstrations, and practice, and 3) feedback demonstrated significant changes in their teaching practice in the classroom. This differed significantly from the 5% of teachers who participated only in training combined with practice and feedback, and 0% of teachers who only participated in training (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Coaching gained prominence in schools across the United States as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that stated every child must be proficient in reading by the end of Grade 3 (International Reading Association, 2004; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). This act spurred many different reading initiatives, such as the Reading First initiative and the Literacy Collaborative, which involved assigning literacy coaches to schools across the country to support teachers working with students with limited proficiency in reading. Several descriptive studies were conducted to demonstrate the promising approaches for coaching in its application to the teaching of reading. Walpole and McKenna (2013) claim that coaching as an important strategy for professional development became increasingly promoted because it aligned with best practices suggested for effective teacher professional development (p.17):

.....site-based coaching had all of the ingredients of effective professional development. It was content focused, involved active learning, was coherent with the rest of the work of teachers, was of sufficient duration, and involved collective participation of all teachers in a school (Desimone, 2009) as cited (Walpole & McKenna, 2013, p.17)

**The Effectiveness of Coaching**

Extensive empirical research on the effectiveness of coaching to improve student achievement is actually quite limited. A few key studies from the United States have made linkages between coaching and student achievement, particularly in terms of
reading (e.g. Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011; Matsumara, Garnier, Correnti, Junker, & Bickel, 2010; Sailors & Price, 2010; 2015). Other research found that coaching did not have a significant impact on neither teacher instruction nor student achievement (e.g. Garet et al., 2001; Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2012; Sailors et al., 2014). Coaching, however, remains a promising strategy due to the growing evidence that coaching does contribute to teacher change and thus can potentially influence student achievement. Outside of Joyce and Showers numerous studies linking coaching to teacher change in practice, a number of other studies evolved in the 2000s linking coaching to changes in teacher beliefs (Sailors et al., 2014) as well as practice (e.g. Joyce & Showers, 2002; Matsumara, Garnier, & Spybrook, 2012; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Sailors & Price 2010, 2015; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010).

**Types of Coaching**

My review of the literature revealed that most practitioners and scholars share a common understanding about what coaching is and its ultimate purpose of achieving improved student achievement. However, the literature reflects significant variation into how coaching is utilized in teacher professional development and the role coaches actually play. This section introduces some of the common coaching models frequently mentioned in the literature.

**Peer Coaching**

Joyce and Showers introduced peer coaching which "paired teachers with an outside consultant or an expert peer" (Joyce & Showers, 1980; Joyce & Showers, 1996; Showers, 1982, 1984). The peer coaching model focused mostly on curriculum and
instruction and included four components: theory presentation, modeling or demonstration, practice, and peer coaching (1980). Paired teams worked together to plan, develop materials, observe each other and reflect together. In later studies, Joyce and Showers (2002) intentionally omitted providing feedback from their original peer coaching model considering it to provide a more evaluative tone to the coaching relationship rather than promoting a collaborative model that facilitated shared learning.

**Cognitive coaching**

Costa and Garmston (2002) established the cognitive coaching model, which aims to make a cognitive change in teachers thinking, perceptions and beliefs (p.5). Cognitive coaches serve as a "facilitator of self-directed learning" and spend their time with teachers building a trusting relationship, asking questions to spur reflection and thought, and listening (Costa & Garmston, 2002, p.6). Cognitive coaches are "skilled at constructing and posing questions with the intention of engaging and transforming thought" (Costa & Garmston, 2002, p.6). According to Costa and Garmston (2002), Cognitive coaching strengthens professional performance by enhancing one's own ability to examine familiar patterns of practice and reconsider and reconsider underlying assumptions that guide and direct action (p.5).

Central to the Cognitive Coaching model is the coaching cycle which Costa and Garmston (2002) describe as a “continuous process of learning in which goals are set, actions are taken, and data is monitored, collected and interpreted, leading to a revision in actions form which new goals are set” (p.41-42).

The stages of the coaching cycle include a planning conference, the observation of an event, and a reflecting conference. Coaches work with teachers in a non-judgmental
and collaborative way to plan what the teacher would like to focus on, what the coach will observe, and what data the coach will collect. The coach then observes the teacher and collects information that aligns with their shared goals. After the coach observes the lesson, the teacher and coach hold a "reflecting conference" where the teacher and coach reflect on and discuss the lesson. The stance of the Cognitive Coach is not to evaluate the teacher but to maintain trust, "employ non-judgmental behaviors" and promote reflection (Costa & Garmston, 2002, p. 6). Any feedback the coach provides is centered on the data collected and absent of any judgment (p.24).

**Change Coaching**

In models like peer coaching and cognitive coaching, the work of coaches focuses mostly on work with teachers specifically on instructional change. Other models discussed in the literature utilize coaching as a means to support systemic change in schools or in large-scale reform efforts (e.g. Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Neufeld and Roper (2003) identified two different types of coaches: 1) content coaches and 2) change coaches. "Content coaches" work directly with teachers on a specific content. "Change coaches" play a different role. Their work with teachers spans across all grades and content and includes working with the principal in the school building capacity for whole school improvement that leads to instructional change (Neufeld & Roper, 2003, p.4).

**Instructional Coaching**

Instructional coaching is another model of coaching that focuses on changing teachers practice specifically with evidence-based instruction that is proven to improve
learning outcomes (Knight, 2007b). Knight (2007a) describes instructional coaches as "on-site professional developers" who "work with teachers to help them incorporate research-based instructional practices" (p. 12). Woods (2014) posits that instructional coaches do not necessarily play the role as "content experts" but rather require the "knowledge and skills to help lead individuals, teams, and organizations with demonstrating effective research-based instructional practices" (p.72/73). “Instructional coaches’ niche lies in their ability to assist teachers with implementing instructional best practices regardless of the content area” (Woods, 2014, p.21). In Woods (2014) instructional coaches work with teachers across all content areas.

Knight (2007a; 2011) advocates for a partnership approach to instructional coaching which emphasizes collaboration and equality between coach and teacher:

They (instructional coaches) should position themselves as equal partners collaborating with fellow teachers, basing their professional actions on partnership principles (2007a, p.27).

Knight (2011) identified the following seven partnership principles 1) equality between coach and teacher, 2) teachers have choice, 3) teachers feel free to express their voice, 4) there are opportunities to reflect on learning, 5) both teacher and principle engage in dialogue, 6) opportunities to apply knowledge and skills (praxis), and 7) shared learning or reciprocity (2007, pp. 18-21)

Similar to “change coaches” instructional coaches not only work with teachers but they may also work with school leaders as part of supporting school wide or system-wide change (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). In review of the literature, instructional coaching appears to be the common model implemented in most of the comprehensive school literacy and reform initiatives in the United States such as Reading
First or the Literacy Collaborative (e.g. Biancarosa, Bryk & Dexter, 2010; Deussen et al., 2007; Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2011; Knight, 2007b; Marsh et al., 2008; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco, Bach, Hovde, Rosenblum, Saunders, & Supovitz, 2003; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). In these initiatives, however, instructional coaches support teachers and schools specifically in school-wide changes in literacy instruction and are more often referred to as literacy coaches (e.g. ILA, 2015; Walpole & McKenna, 2013). According to the International Literacy Association (ILA, 2015) (formerly the International Reading Association), the role of literacy coaches are:

- **Work with teachers and facilitate efforts to improve school literacy programs.** These professionals may work with individual or groups of teachers to support them in their efforts to improve classroom instructions. At the same time, they may hold responsibilities that influence literacy programs school wide (e.g. developing curriculum, selecting instructional materials (ILA, 2015, p.8).

Thus, in these roles, Literacy Coaches do not necessarily support teachers across all subjects but rather work towards school-wide change and reform in terms of literacy and with a wide range of actors, including the principal or school leaders.

Though the literature points to extreme variations in coaching models and approaches to coaches, Knight (2009) highlights some key similarities that are often part of any coaching approach:

1. Focuses on professional practice of teachers
2. Job-embedded, meaning relevant to teacher’s classrooms.
3. Intensive and on-going
4. Grounded in partnership
5. Dialogical
6. Non-evaluative
7. Confidential

8. Facilitated through respectful communication (Knight, 2009, p.18-19).

In the following section, I explore more in detail the common roles and responsibilities of coaches. However, the roles of a coach and their associated responsibilities rely heavily on the type of coaching model and its purpose which, as mentioned also varies significantly. Roles and responsibilities also vary according to context (e.g. Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Rush, 2013). For the purposes of this research, I narrowed my review of the literature to research and descriptive literature focused specifically on instructional coaching and/or literacy coaching models where coaches work with both teachers and/or school leaders towards school-wide improvement in literacy achievement. Due to the paucity of research on the roles and responsibilities of coaches in low-income and developing contexts, I relied heavily on research in the United States and other western contexts where there is an overwhelming abundance of research and reports, some of them largely descriptive studies exploring the roles and responsibilities of coaches and factors that influence their ability to enact their roles as coaches.

**Roles and Responsibilities of Instructional Coaches**

Research studies, dissertations, and descriptive literature repeatedly report extreme variation of coaching roles and responsibilities across contexts as well as the role of a coach within the same contexts (e.g. Affinoto, 2011; Bean, 2004; Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Chiola, 2015; Deussen et al., 2007; IRA, 2004; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco et al., 2003; Schecter, 2014; Shanklin, 2006;

Since the overall purpose of instructional coaching in schools is to support teachers on instructional change that improves student achievement, the primary role of the instructional coach is then to provide "job-embedded, ongoing professional development" for teachers (IRA, 2004). However, in doing so, instructional coaches take on other varied roles and responsibilities in their jobs that are constantly changing over time depending on the needs of the teachers and the schools. Walpole and McKenna (2013) provide the analogy of the role of a literacy (instructional) coach as a 'stack of caps" explaining that coaches are constantly changing caps, or roles, depending on the day as well as the "needs of the teachers in a particular school building" (p.1). The various roles mentioned in the literature are too numerous to describe each one. Given the limited scope of my research, I highlight here only a few salient examples of roles described in the literature and the associated responsibilities to provide a general sense of what coaches working to improve literacy and school improvement might do in well-resourced contexts.

Killion et al. (2012) identified ten different roles coaches enacted in their position as a coach. These include coaches as a 1) catalyst for change, 2) classroom supporter, 3) curriculum specialist, 4) data coach, 5) instructional specialist, 6) learning facilitator, 7) mentor, 8) resource provider and 9) school leaders and 10) learner. (p.2). Deussen et al., (2007) conducted research to explore how coaches spent the majority of their time. Based on findings from their research of where coaches spent most of their time, Deussen et al. (2007) categorized coaches into five major types: data-oriented coaches, student-oriented
coaches, managerial coaches, teacher-oriented (group) coaches and teacher-oriented (individual) coaches. Findings from Walpole & Blamey (2008) study found that coaches served a dual role in schools, one as mentor to teachers, and the other as director who works closely with the school leader or administrator.

In a professional development initiative with English Language Learners, Mraz et al. (2009) identified four coaching roles: content expert, promoter of reflective instruction, professional development facilitator, and builder of a school-wide learning community (Mraz et al. 2009 as cited in Mraz, Salas, Mercado, & Dikotla, 2016). Walpole and McKenna (2013) suggest that literacy coaches play six specific roles. These include: grant writer, school-level planner, curriculum expert, researcher, teacher, and learner (p.3). Walpole and McKenna (2013) match these roles with IRA's most recent standards for reading specialist/literacy coaches (p.13). Walpole and McKenna (2013) further recognize the evolving role of coaches and how it continues to change over time particularly referencing IRA’s changing standards over time. Other commonly mentioned roles mentioned throughout the literature include terms such as: guide, administrator, liaison, encourager, mobilize-r, school improvement leaders, etc.

Smith (2009) argues that coaches play two roles, one of mentor and one of literacy advocate and that the responsibilities within these roles are constantly shifting over time. Smith (2009) provides a conceptual framework that recognizes the complexity of coaching and tries to organize responsibilities into a “three-level trajectory of instructional coaching within a recursive process of teacher change:” (p.1). The conceptual framework considers these dual roles and illustrates their shared trajectory over time. Level 1 includes initial steps of coaching responsibilities; Level 2 includes
necessary supports to teachers; and Level 3 includes responsibilities that aim to sustain support to teacher. In Level 1, coaches’ mentoring role serves to observe and discuss with teachers; coaches’ advocacy role is to help establish “teacher learning communities”. In Level 2, coaching responsibilities focus more on supporting teachers as they apply new skills and participate in teacher learning communities. In Level 3, coaches’ responsibilities aim to “create lasting teacher change, encourage the development of teacher peer collaboration, and focus on their professional development” (Smith, 2009, p.2).

The unique feature of the conceptual framework as seen in Figure 2 below is that it illustrates a “recursive change process” (Smith, 2009, p.2).

This trajectory is situated within a recursive process of change based on the concept of reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983) a process that includes reflection, goal setting, and action (p.2).

![Conceptual Framework: A Trajectory of Instructional Coaching Within the Teacher Change Process](image)

**Figure 2: Trajectory of Instructional Coaching (Smith, 2009)**

According to Smith (2009), this framework also “illustrates the complexity of coaching and the need to support teachers over time as they engage in the change process
to improve instructional practice” (p.2). Table 1 provides further description of coaching roles and levels.

Table 1: Explanation of Smith's (2009) Coaching Roles and Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COACHING ROLES AND LEVELS</th>
<th>MENTORING ROLE</th>
<th>ADVOCACY ROLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Address Teacher Beliefs and Orientations</td>
<td>Establish Teacher Learning Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1: Initial Steps</td>
<td>Coaches have conversations with individual teachers about literacy instruction, classroom management, thematic units, and other areas of interest. Coaches also focus on building relationships and establishing a level of trust necessary to engage teachers in the change process.</td>
<td>Coaches work to facilitate conversations with small groups of teachers to gauge willingness to collaborate and help brainstorm ideas of how teachers might support each other while involved in the change process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guide Teacher Implementation of new instructional skills</td>
<td>Facilitate Teacher Learning Community Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2: Necessary Supports</td>
<td>Coaches plan, set goals, observe, and debrief with individual teachers who are working to implement new instructional skills as part of the change process.</td>
<td>Coaches meet on a regular basis with small groups of teachers who have decided to collaborate as part of their effort to enact change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extend Coaching Learning and Knowledge</td>
<td>Encourage peer collaboration in Teacher Learning Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3: Sustaining efforts</td>
<td>Coaches attend district, regional, and national professional development opportunities to deep literacy knowledge and to support sustaining efforts to affect teacher change.</td>
<td>Coaches help small groups of teachers find ways to support each other in their effort to improve instructional skills as independent learning communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rita Bean also established a framework for understanding the varied levels of intensity of coaching activities (Bean et al., 2010; IRA, 2004). The framework, developed in 2004, categorizes activities on a continuum consisting of three levels starting with informal activities and moving towards activities that are more formal. Coaches in their initial work with teachers might begin with Level 1 activities, which are less intense and encourage the development of relationships; Level 2 and Level 3 activities tend to demand closer and more intense relationships with teachers, with more attention given to classroom teaching practices (Bean et al., 2010, p.96).
According to Bean’s framework, Level 1 includes informal activities that coaches usually do in the beginning stages to help establish trusting relationships with the teachers and school leaders (Bean et al., 2010; IRA, 2004). These might include school visits to have informal dialogue with teachers and school leaders, material distribution, or leading of study groups. Level 2 activities are considered formal coaching activities that help to define where teachers need more support. This level on the continuum requires more skills from the coach and may include activities such as co-planning lessons with teachers, professional development presentations for teachers, analyzing student assessment data, etc. Level 3 activities are more intense for both the coach and the teacher and as Bean suggests may "create anxiety" for either one (IRA, 2004). These activities require higher level of skills in order to do activities such as modeling, co-teaching, observing and analyzing lessons, and providing feedback based on data gathered. Walpole and Blamey (2008) describe the Level 3 as activities as the “the heart of coaching” and usually the “target of a coaching initiative” even if not always achieved (p.222). The International Reading Association (2004), now the International Literacy Association, later adapted this framework and updated it over time for use in guiding literacy coaches and specialist in understanding the levels of intensity of expected activities (ILA, 2015). This framework, provided in Figure 3 below, provides a great illustration of how coaches’ roles and responsibilities may change over time. These are just a few examples of how researchers and practitioners problematized the various roles and responsibilities throughout the literature.
Along with these varied and changing roles, the literature lists many different kinds of activities both with teachers and with school leaders which researchers. The scope of this review does not allow for thorough list and description of all the different responsibilities coaches might have or activities that coaches might do. However, I have included a summary in Table 2 of some of the more common activities highlighted throughout the literature. I have organized these activities into categories similar to Bean et al. (2010) who organized coaching activities she observed into the following categories: work with teachers (individual and in groups), planning and organizing, management, school-related, working with students, additional coaching activities, coach as learner, and non-coaching activities. I have added an additional category to include activities coaches do to build relationships since building relationships seems to be a central focus of their work according to other literature (Bean et al., 2010; Knight, 2007b; L’Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010; Rainville & Jones, 2008).
Table 2: Examples of Coaching Activities from the literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Build Relationships</th>
<th>• Activities coaches do build trusting relationships with teachers, school leaders and others.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Work with Teachers  | • Provide professional development workshops  
• Distribute materials to schools  
• Coaching Cycle  
• Co-teaching, Co-planning, Modeling instruction  
• Materials Development  
• Teacher-Coach Conversations  
• Observe classroom practice and Collect data or evidence  
• Facilitate discussions around data  
• Ask questions to prompt reflection  
• Listen  
• Provide feedback  
• goal setting with teachers  
• Coaching on the Fly (COTF Bean 2004)  
• Establish or encourage collaboration and communities of practice amongst teachers |
| Planning and Organizing | • Activities coaches do to prepare for visiting schools (monthly plans, organizing teacher records, preparing materials or lessons, etc.) |
| Management | • This included administrative tasks such as data entry, reporting, checking email, etc. |
| School related | • Share progress with school leaders  
• Support school leader on school improvement plans  
• Meetings with community or parents |
| Work with students | • Activities that coaches may do with students.  
• Administer assessments |
| Coach as Learner | • Activities that coaches pursue to further develop themselves as learners such as self-assessment. |
| Additional activities | • Additional coaching or non-coaching activities |

**Influential Factors to Effective Coaching**

The literature identifies numerous factors that can influence the effectiveness of instructional coaching (e.g. Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Poglinco et al., 2003; Smith, 2007). The majority of the evidence-base comes from research conducted in well-resourced
contexts, mostly from the United States, and findings are quite expansive. This section highlights some of the more common factors discussed in the literature to provide a glimpse into the complexities involved in translating the concept of coaching into practice in well-resourced contexts.

**Teacher Acceptance**

Teacher resistance can be a significant and common barrier for coaches trying to be effective in their work (e.g. Carroll, 2007; Knight, 2009; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Neufeld & Roper, 2002, 2003; Poglinco et al., 2003; Woods, 2014). Neufeld and Roper (2003) illustrate:

…teachers are not only uninterested in coaching, they are actively hostile to the practice. They might, for example, leave the room while a coach is modeling a lesson. More commonly, teachers simply ignore coaches’ suggestions (p.23).

The success of coaching relies on the receptivity and acceptance of teachers to receive coaching. If a teacher is unwilling or resistant to participate, potential impact to teacher change in practice is minimal.

Neufeld & Roper (2002) found that teachers resisted because: 1) teachers were content with their teaching and did not feel they needed to further develop themselves, 2) teachers did not value learning from younger or other less experienced colleagues (in the case of peer coaching), 3) teachers were embarrassed to be observed and possibly receive negative feedback on their weaknesses, or 4) teachers did not value the coach or the model itself, or 5) teachers felt a combination of these reasons (p.23).
While teacher resistance is usually evident by their lack of willingness to participate, Lynch and Ferguson (2010) found that in some cases, teacher resistance may not be so obvious and instead be more "covert" (p.202):

Teachers may also appear to comply with normative practices but maintain their own personal beliefs about teaching practices (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990), while others may resist peer coaching by simply refusing to participate” (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010, p. 202).

Atteberry and Bryk (2011) examined the variability of teacher exposure to coaching and the school and organizational factors that affect their participation. Their findings revealed three teacher-level predictors of teacher's participation with coaches which shed some light on understanding possible reasons for teacher resistance. These included prior experience levels of teachers, role conception, and teachers' level of commitment to the school. Their findings showed that "coaches worked more frequently with newer teachers (prior experience), and with teachers who were committed to the school (willingness to engage innovation) and had an active orientation toward their colleagues (role conception)‖ (p. 371). This would suggest then that teacher resistance might not always be at the fault of the coach or the relationships, but that there are other pre-existing factors that might play into their resistance including the level of teacher experience and their overall commitment to the school.

**Contact Time with Teachers**

Another critical issue discussed in the literature is limited time with teachers. Research studies demonstrate that the more time teachers participate in coaching, the greater impact to teacher instruction and student achievement (e.g. Deussen et al., 2007; Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2011; Ferguson, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Piper &
Zuilkowski, 2015; Poglinco et al., 2003). Yet, much of the research reports that coaches have to balance their responsibilities across many roles and responsibilities reducing time they are able to spend with individual teachers (e.g. Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen & Zigmond, 2010; Bean et al., 2010; Deusssen et al., 2007; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Schechter, 2014, Smith, 2007; Woods, 2014). For example, Bean et al. (2010) conducted research with 20 Reading First coaches to understand how they distributed their time. Results found that on average, coaches only “spent an average of 35.7% of their time providing direct support to coaches” (p. 95):

On average, coaches allocate the highest percent of effort to working with individual teachers (23.6%) followed by management (21.1%), school-related tasks (20.6%), planning and organizing (14.2%), working with groups of teachers (12.1%) and working with students (8.2%) (p. 95).

However, several factors often influence the amount of time a coach is able to actually spend with individual teachers. One of the influential factors noted in the literature is the number of faculty and schools coaches are responsible for coaching (e.g. Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Schechter, 2014; Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015). The Literacy Collaborative suggests that one coach should not be assigned to more than 12 teachers (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011, p.375). Piper & Zuilkowski (2015), some of the only researchers to conduct empirical research on coaching in a Sub-Saharan African context, suggest that coaches not be assigned more than 10 teachers per coach.

Another important factor that negatively influences time coaches may have with teachers is the additional roles coaches are asked to do including administrative tasks (Deussen et al., 2007; Knight, 2009; Marsh et al., 2008; Schechter, 2014) or unplanned interruptions such as teacher absence, meetings, or school events (Smith, 2007). Findings
from one of Knights' research on how coaches spend their time revealed that “only 25% of their time is spent on coaching tasks” (2009, p.19). Knight (2009) suggests that "principals and other district leaders need to ensure that they do not ask coaches to do so many non-coaching tasks that they rarely have the opportunity for sustained coaching” (p.19). Coaches in Lynch & Ferguson’s study (2010) reported that they needed more time with individual teachers either because their teachers needed more support in literacy or teachers were resistant requiring coaches to try to spend more time with them.

**Role Clarity**

Several researchers report a lack of clarity of coaching roles and responsibilities as a key challenge (e.g. Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Carroll, 2007; Deussen et al. 2007; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Marsh et al., 2008; Poglinco et al., 2003; Schechter, 2014). As Calo, Sturtevant, and Kopfman (2015) illustratively describe “like the proverbial airplane that is flown while being built, literacy coaches are often hired without a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities or specific goals” (p. 1). Though organizations may provide some guidance, coaches can still often perceive their roles differently from each other and often differently than the program intends creating room for a lot of variability between what coaches do, where they spend their time, and how well they do it (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Matsumara, Garnier & Resnick, 2010; Deusssen et al., 2007; Schechter, 2014, p.130). Studies such as Lynch and Ferguson (2010) and Poglinco et al. (2003) found that coaches reported they didn't actually have a full understanding of their roles at all. A coach in Lynch and Ferguson's (2010) study actually reported, "I am not certain I know what a coach is" (p.212) A few other coaches reported that their roles were constantly changing over time while others were learning
on the job as they went along (p.19). Even if coaches are clear on their roles, often
school leaders and teachers are not very clear on the role of the coach (e.g. Carroll, 2007).

As a result of these common findings concerning role uncertainty, many
researchers frequently recommend ensuring coaches have clear job description and
standards that define their role and support to understanding their role (e.g. Lynch &
Ferguson, 2010; Poglinco et al., 2003). Additionally, Knight (2009) adds that roles
between the coach as support and the school administrator as accountability be clearly
defined in the coaching process (p.19). Calo, Sturtevant, and Kopfman (2015) suggest
the importance of the principal or administrator in helping teachers to understand the role
of the coach:

Coaches and administrators can work collaboratively to help all school staff
members understand the role of the coach, the supports that the coach can provide
to all staff members, and underscore the benefits to the school community. This,
in turn, will help demystify the coaching process, help the coach build positive
relationships, and encourage teachers, both new and veteran, to open their doors
to the coach (p.9-10).

**Principal Support**

In line with effective teacher professional development principles, the role of the
principal or school leader plays a key role in whether any form of teacher professional
development is effective or not (Desimone et al., 2002; Deussen et al., 2007; Joyce &
Showers, 2002). This, of course, is the same with coaching (Bean, 2014; Carroll, 2007;
Kral, 2007; Knight, 2007a., 2007b, 2009; Lynch and Ferguson, 2010; Mangin and
Dunsmore, 2015; Marsh et al., 2008; Matsumara, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garnier., 2009;
Matsumara, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010; Stephens & Mills, 2014). For example,
Matsumara et al. (2009) found strong correlation between principal leadership behaviors
and beliefs with more teacher participation and receptivity to working with coaches. Matsumara et al. (2009) found that principals who "treated the coach as a "valuable professional" and were "actively involved" in the coaching program linked to stronger teacher participation (p.672). Kral (2007) writes about the importance of principals to literacy coaching reform and suggests that a strong relationship between the coach and the principal "is not a lofty ideal--it is a key factor that determines the efficacy of coaching" (p.2).

Teachers need to know that the principal is learning along with them, or is at least very involved in their learning. Teachers watch for principal reaction to and involvement in the work of the coach at their school. A distant relationship between the principal and the coach sends a message of low priority, which results in teachers’ opting out of the intended reform (Kral, 2007, p.1).

Knight (2007a) also posits that by having bottom-up and top-down support, a program ensures more sustainability. Otherwise,

A bottom-up approach that does not have the principal's guiding hand as the instructional leader will lead to teachers adopting new teaching practices but unsystematically (p.27)

However, according to the research, principal’s support for coaches often vary in terms of the extent of their involvement poses significant challenges for coaches. Most often, limited principal support is due to a lack of understanding to what the role and responsibilities of the coach is and how they as principals are to work with the coach. For example, Stephens & Mills (2014) found that school leaders and principals were not aware of the coaches’ roles and assigned them other roles, sometimes asking them to act as Vice Principal (p.202). Sometimes their lack of involvement may be due to just general commitment to the school and weak leadership. Lynch and Ferguson (2010)
found that coaches struggled to meet with teachers sometimes because principals would not allow teachers time to do so during the school hours (p. 210).

Some researchers suggest that school leaders should be trained or included in training with coaches so as to learn along with them (e.g. Matsumara, Garnier & Spybrook (2012). Lynch & Ferguson (2010) agree this might be beneficial but recognize that this might not be possible. Instead, Lynch & Ferguson (2010) “suggest a more realistic solution would be to involve principals in learning about coaching, to some extent to help clarify the coaching process” (p. 217). Others recommend a more partnership approach where the coach and principal partner together at the school (Knight, 2007b, 2011; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Matsumara, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010).

Matsumara, Garnier, & Resnick (2010) recommend programs should include:

- Principals and district leaders as partner in coaches’ work so that they can establish a shared vision of good literacy coaching and instruction and learn effective ways to support their coaches’ work with teachers (p. 268).

Knight (2009) encourages principal support and states:

- Principals need to support their coaches by attending coaching workshops, observing coaches while they conduct model lessons, speaking frequently about the importance of professional learning and coaching, learning what the coaching shares with teachers, and meeting frequently with coaches to ensure that their coaches share their vision for professional learning (p. 19).

Stephens & Mill (2014) recommend establishing “school leadership teams” where coaches, teachers, and school leaders meet together every quarter to “build a culture of learning and establish the school as professional learning communities’ (p. 202).
School Culture and Environment

In addition to strong leadership and principal support to coaching, other school-related factors can influence the effectiveness of coaching. Knight (2009) posits that teachers collaborate more with coaches when school environments are “learning-friendly” (p.19). Atteberry & Bryk (2011) found that when teachers did not have a voice in decision-making, coaching was less successful. Findings from Carroll’s (2007) dissertation revealed that parents who are not supportive of the school can be a deterrent. Findings like these suggest that school cultures that are open to learning and change, respect teacher voice and are supported by parents provide a more conducive environment for coaches to influence change.

The challenges and constraints faced in implementing coaching are numerous and complex, even in well-resourced contexts. Understanding, sharing, and addressing these challenges are critical. In additions to these challenges, a coach’s knowledge and ability to coach also can influence whether coaching is effective or not. The following section reviews the literature on what coaches need to do and be able to do.

Coaching Knowledge, Skills, Beliefs and Dispositions

Though the purpose and role of instructional coaches varies across contexts, the literature reflects a fairly shared consensus amongst researchers and practitioners on common qualifications, characteristics and competencies coaches need in order to work with teachers (e.g. Frost & Bean, 2006; IRA, 2004; Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2011; Killion et al., 2012; Knight, 2007b; Knight, 2009; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco & Bach, 2004). These characteristics are not necessarily proven by empirical research but are
prescribed as important. For this section, I briefly discuss some of the most commonly referenced knowledge, skills and dispositions from the coaching literature.

**Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (PCK)**

According to a review of the literature, the most commonly agreed characteristics required to be an effective coach is having both pedagogical and content knowledge of the subject area that a coach is required to support (IRA, 2004; IRA, 2010; Elish-Piper & L’Allier 2011; L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010; Poglinco et al., 2003). Pedagogical knowledge includes knowledge of appropriate methodologies and strategies needed to support student learning. Possessing pedagogical knowledge requires first an understanding of how children learn and how teachers need to facilitate that learning by utilizing specific techniques proven as effective. Depending on the age and subject level, pedagogical knowledge might include for example, individual, peer, and group work strategies; questioning and answering techniques; use of teaching and learning materials; demonstration, differentiated instruction, and classroom management techniques (Westbrook et al., 2013).

Alongside pedagogical knowledge, coaches require content knowledge in the specific subject areas they are targeting. For example, if a coach’s role is to support teachers in improving reading skills at the primary level, coaches need content knowledge in early grade reading acquisition and instruction. The International Reading Association requires previous teaching experience at the level in which they are coaching and an actual Masters degree or Certificate in reading acquisition as one of its standards for prerequisite qualifications for coaches participating in US nationwide literacy coaching programs (IRA, 2004). Interesting findings from Woods (2014) dissertation
research suggest that coaches reported that while having content knowledge was important, it was not necessary for them to be experts in the content. For them, the content knowledge was important for credibility but more important was the ability to recognize good teaching that facilitates learning and properly provide support to teachers’ learning, etc (p. 73).

Because instructional coaches must be able to model, observe, and provide feedback about instruction, it is important that coaches have some content knowledge and have been successful in teaching it (Dole, 2004) (Woods, 2014, p. 73).

**Teaching Expertise at Grade Level**

According to IRA standards (2004), to become a coach in the US requires previous teaching experience at the grade level in which they will be coaching. This standard is supported by other literature that suggests that if coaches have teaching experience they will be more competent to help teachers to problem-solve challenges (e.g. Frost & Bean, 2006; IRA, 2000, Killion et al. 2012). Killion et al. (2012) suggests that coaches with teaching experience will gain more legitimacy and credibility with teachers which may influence teachers’ willingness to participate (p.30). Killion et al. (2012) also add that coaches with teaching experience will be better suited to “demonstrate lessons, co-teach, co-plan, or give teachers constructive feedback” (p.30).

**Coaching Roles, Tasks, and Techniques**

In addition to pedagogical and content knowledge, coaches need to know and understand their job description and how to do their job (Poglinco et al. 2003). Such knowledge includes knowledge of the coaching role and associated responsibilities, the coaching process and activities, and administrative work involved in fulfilling their jobs
to support teachers and schools (Killion et al. 2012; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Reed, 2009). Coaches should also be proficient in specific coaching techniques that allow them to effectively support teachers in classroom instruction. Instructional modeling where coaches demonstrate a lesson or technique in front of the teachers or students is one of the techniques most commonly recommended as the most important skill (Frost & Bean, 2006; IRA, 2004; Poglinco et al., 2003). Poglinco & Bach (2004) suggest that when coaches provide in-class support through modeling instruction then teachers will be “more likely to “buy-in” and change their instructional practices” (p.399). Here they describe further:

of all the techniques coaches employ, modeling instruction in individual classrooms is most like to result in modifications in instructional practices and adherence to the instructional delivery formats. This finding confirms earlier research on coaching and teacher training, in which instructional modeling figures as an essential part of the coach’s role (p.399).

Other important coaching techniques include co-planning, co-teaching, collaborative lesson-planning, ability to identify record, and analyze teaching practice, questioning techniques, how to give feedback, how to prompt reflection, coaching differentiation, giving assessments, use of coaching tools (e.g. Frost & Bean, 2006; Poglinco et al., 2003; Poglinco & Bach, 2004, Walpole & McKenna, 2013). Often these skills cannot be taught directly and rely on many years of teaching experience. Neufeld and Roper (2003) add that coaches (and principals) also need to understand ‘the big picture’ of the reform which they are engaged and the reasons that undergird the changes” (p.11). By understanding the vision or bigger picture of the reform or initiative, coaches can better place themselves and their role as part of the reform (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015).
Ability to Work with Adults

Other research and literature suggests that coaches need to know how to work with teachers as adult learners (e.g. Bean, 2004; Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; IRA, 2004; Marsh et al., 2008; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Reed, 2009; Woods, 2014). Just because coaches may have experience working in classrooms with children does not mean coaches know how to work with adults. As Marsh et al. (2008) aptly states “the skill set required to successfully teach adults is not the same as that required to successfully teach children” (p.13).

To be an effective coach requires an understanding of how adults learn and how coaches can help facilitate professional learning opportunities for teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders. With a foundation in adult learning theories and principles, coaches can understand that teachers come with various levels of knowledge, skills and experiences and the way a coach works with each teacher may vary according to the needs of individual teachers (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Additionally, coaches must understand that all adults learn differently and may have different styles of learning. For example, some adults may learn through reflection, while others may learn best through collaboration with their peers. Others may benefit more from self-directed learning. Because of the various experiences, needs, and learning styles, coaches need to be able to meet teachers where they are and learn to “adapt” or differentiate their coaching accordingly (Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Neufeld & Roper, 2003, p.8).

Interpersonal and Communication skills

Central to the work of a coach is building rapport and positive relationships with teachers and school leaders. Establishing and building relationships requires important
interpersonal skills to be able to interact together in a positive and productive manner (e.g. Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Costa & Garmston, 2002; Killion et al., 2012; Knight, 2007a; 2007b). Some of these include the ability to communicate, the ability to listen, and the ability to work in a group. In addition to some of these basic skills, coaches need certain interpersonal skills that are more specific for their roles as coaches such as gaining trust and respect of teachers, asking reflective questions, providing positive feedback in a positive manner, and/or working together to problem-solve and identify solutions. Coaches from Lynch and Ferguson (2010) study reported that they would benefit from strategies that will enable them to overcome resistant teachers (p.213). Sometimes these skills cannot be taught to an individual. However, coaches need to understand their importance and strive hard to incorporate interpersonal strategies into their work.

**Leadership Skills**

Several researchers suggest that the role of coaches is not only to serve as a support to teachers but also to support school leaders for school-wide improvement and/or reform (e.g. L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010; Calo, Sturtevant & Kopfman, 2015; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). For example, Walpole & McKenna (2013) posit that coaches have a role to play as leaders:

Literacy coaches are in a unique position to build the relationships that are required for teachers to enact a school’s school-wide vision—the real measure of leadership. These changes include an assessment system that informs instruction, a school-level, and classroom-level instructional schedule that supports teaching and learning, a set of high-quality instructional materials and strategies, a well-integrated and flexible intervention plan, and a system of professional support that responds to the needs of all adults who work with children. To enact these
changes, literacy coaches must recognize and attend to their roles as members of a leadership team (Walpole & McKenna, 2013, p.216).

Results from Walpole & Blamey’s (2008) research with coaches provide support to such views; findings from their research found that coaches viewed their roles as both “directors” for school-level change and “mentors” for teachers to make classroom-level change (p. 228). Coaches actually used “leadership terminology” when describing their roles as directors and referred to themselves as “administrative personnel” or a “top person” p. 228).

Calo, Sturtevant and Kopfman (2015) explored the changing roles and responsibilities of 270 coaches working in different contexts around the US and found similar results to Walpole and Blamey (2008); 93\% of coaches that participated in the study actually “considered themselves to be literacy leaders” (p. 4).

While support to teachers was overwhelmingly cited as the reason for seeing themselves as a leader in their schools, coaches also mentioned leading school improvement plans through leading school-wide literacy initiatives, managing change, collaborating with administrators, and acting as the administrator in the administrators absences as reasons literacy coaches viewed themselves as leaders in their schools(p.6).

Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman (2015), suggest that while these “leadership responsibilities impact teachers and could certainly be considered teacher support, they begin to move into the realm of organizational leadership” (p. 6). In situations like these, where coaches take on a leadership role in the school, many experts agree that coaches would benefit from preparation in leadership skills (e.g. Calo, Sturtevant & Kopfman, 2015; IRA, 2004, Walpole & McKenna, 2013).
Facilitation Skills

Finally, some authors stress the importance of facilitation or presentation skills either to lead conferences, training, or small teacher groups. The IRA (2004) for example, lists presentation skills as one of the major requirements coaches should have:

Reading coaches should be excellent presenters and be familiar with presenting to teacher conferences at the local, state, and even national levels. Reading coaches also should be skilled in leading teacher groups to facilitate reflection and change for their colleagues (IRA, 2004, p.2).

If a coach’s role is to provide professional development to teachers outside of coaching alone, such as facilitating training or establishing communities of practice, coaches need to have strong facilitation and/or skills (Killion et al., 2012; IRA, 2004).

Beliefs and Dispositions

Many researchers and practitioners suggest that a coach’s character is equally important to being effective as having the right knowledge, skills and qualifications. Calo, Sturtevant, and Kopfman (2015) uphold that view and state that "being a literacy coach today is as much about character or coaches' dispositions as it about competence" (p. 7). Relationship building is central to the job of a coach and requires not only specific interpersonal and communication skills, but also personal attributes and dispositions. These include a positive attitude, a friendly caring approach, a willingness to listen, a collaborative and reflective stance, ability to build a trusting relationship, and flexibility (Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Killion et al., 2012; Knight, 2007a, 2007b). Others suggest that passion and a willingness to learn are also important (Killion et al., 2012; Woods, 2014).
The coach’s beliefs, attitudes, values, and dispositions are the basis for being able to work effectively with teachers. Fundamental dispositions include a willingness to learn and a passion for ongoing development — beliefs that the coach must convey to others. Effective coaches recognize that coaches, as well as the teachers they serve, must continually seek deeper understanding. Conveying a positive attitude about lifelong learning helps coaches to model continuous learning for teachers (Killion et al., 2012, p.29)

Having a passion for and willingness to learn is particularly important when coaches may come into a program without meeting the “gold standard” of prerequisite qualifications, knowledge and skills and will have to learn on the job (Frost & Bean, 2006).

Killion et al. (2012) also stressed the importance of coaches’ specific beliefs. According to their guidance outlining the characteristics of effective coaches, they suggest that coaches must first believe that teachers can and do have the ability to learn and that it is the coaches’ role to try to “find ways to influence and engage teachers as learners” (p. 29). Also, coaches must be willing to admit that they are not the experts and do not have the answers to everything but instead are there to meet teachers where they are and work collaboratively with teachers to problem-solve solutions (p.29).

**Supporting Coaches’ Professional Learning and Growth**

Researchers and practitioners emphasize the importance of coaches engaging in continuous learning opportunities through professional development and on-going support (e.g. Killion et al., 2012; Matsumara, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010; Matsumara, Garnier & Spybrook, 2012; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco et al., 2003; Sailors & Price, 2015; Shanklin, 2007). However, my review of the literature revealed a paucity of research that explores how coaches actually develop and learn over time as well as what
factors, including types of professional development, have been proven to influence their learning (Galluci et al., 2010; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015).

For this section, I review both the practitioner-related literature and limited research studies to understand what we know from the literature about the professional learning and growth of coaches and what research and practice suggests are factors that influence their learning or how they should be best prepared. Given Neufeld and Roper’s (2003) overall suggestion that professional development of coaches should share the same features of what has been learned from recent research regarding the characteristics of effective professional development of teachers (p.11), I organized findings under the following characteristics identified in Darling-Hammond et al.’s (2017) latest research: 1) content focus, 2) active learning, 3) peer collaboration, 4) modeling, 5) coaching and expert support, 6) feedback and reflection, and 7) sustained duration. Where findings from the literature did not fit, I added a few additional categories. Given the scant research on coaches’ professional development, this serves as a framework to organize available findings from the literature only. It is not meant to provide a comprehensive framework of overall best practices of coaches’ professional development.

**Content Focus**

Based on findings from the literature, content tailored for the professional learning of newly hired coaches should consider the previous knowledge and skills they have coming into the program and build on the coaching knowledge, skills, and dispositions recommended in the previous section: pedagogical and content knowledge, teaching skills, coaching roles and responsibilities, coaching processes and tasks, adult learning principles, leadership skills and interpersonal and communication skills,
facilitation skills, and importance of coaching dispositions in building trusting relationships (e.g. Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Frost & Bean, 2006; IRA, 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Killion et al., 2012; Woods, 2014). Practitioners and researchers firmly stress the importance of providing coaches with a clear job description and strong guidance and support to understanding and developing into their roles and responsibilities (Blachowicz et al., 2010; Poglinco et al. 2003; Reed, 2009; Shanklin, 2007). In Poglinco et al.’s (2003) study, lack of clarity on the coach’s role was an important factor that negatively affected their success:

Perhaps one of most important factors that impinged on the coaches’ ability to be effective was one that may be hardest to resolve. That is, the ambiguity of the coach role and the uncertainty of what the relationship should be to the teachers, the principal, and the leadership team (p.41).

**Active Learning**

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) viewed active learning in professional development as the opposite of using traditional lecture-oriented methods but rather providing opportunities that recognize teachers (in this case) as adult learners and allow teachers to be more interactive and engaged in their learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p.7). In my review of the literature, I found two studies that also suggest providing active learning opportunities in professional development with coaches (i.e. Reeds, 2009; Rainville & Jones, 2008).

Reed’s (2009) dissertation research explored the changes in self-efficacy of coaches as a result of their professional development. In Reed’s (2009) research, coaches identified having opportunities to apply their learning and reflect as an influential factor to their learning and ability to perform their roles (p.153). Reed, who organized the
Coaches identified some of the homework activities as particularly valuable as well as the opportunity to lead book studies and some of the professional development sessions. (p.158). Rainville and Jones (2008), who explored the identity development of coaches, specifically suggested role-play scenarios and simulations as well as analyzing “audio transcripts and video of teachers and coaches at work” (p.447). They claimed these were valuable strategies for coaches, particularly in helping them “read” situations to help them decide how to position themselves” (p.447).

**Peer Collaboration**

Collaboration, a well-known critical feature in effective teacher professional development, allows colleagues to come together to reflect on experiences, share ideas, and problem-solve challenges. In the context of teachers this might include “small group collaboration to school-wide collaboration to collaboration with other professionals beyond the school”: (p.3). A review of the coaching literature revealed that collaboration is also viewed as a recommended component of any coaches’ professional development (e.g. Matsumara, Garnier & Spybrook, 2012; Reed, 2009; Woods, 2014). In Reed’s dissertation study, coaches perceived a “system of networking with other professionals” as a helpful component in their professional development sessions. Networking included face-to-face sessions, use of technology such as email correspondences, and principal’s attendance. Networking provided them with opportunities to collaborate and problem-solve together outside of training sessions:
They need to be able to network with other professionals (coaches and administrators) who may be experiencing the same issues. Such a network allows for communication, problem-solving and collaboration in order to achieve their goals (p.201).

Matsumara et al. (2012) recommended all training to include opportunities for peer collaboration:

All of the coaches reported that the training they received was very helpful for supporting their work in schools, especially the opportunity to collaborate and practice skills with other coaches in advance of working with teachers. As one coach described, conferring with another coach . . . really helps you clarify. Planning, for example, [a coach colleague] would ask me questions that I hadn’t thought of, and it helped me get my thoughts straight before I went and talked to the teacher . . . So when I [met with the teacher] I had gone through all those questions that the teacher might have been thinking, but might not have said something (p.223).

Findings from Woods’s (2014) dissertation research complemented findings from Reed (2009). Findings suggested that “coaches enjoyed being able to collaborate with other coaches” during professional development sessions and valued opportunities for “networking” outside of normal professional development sessions (p.115):

Instructional coaches value professional development that promotes collaboration, networking, and continuous learning opportunities so that coaches, teachers, and administrators can learn and grow together (Woods, 2014, p. 114).

**Modeling**

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), “curricular models and modeling of instruction provide teachers with a clear vision of what best practices look like” (p.3). For this, modeling instruction is an important aspect of the role of the coach:

Of all the techniques coaches employ, modeling instruction in individual classrooms is most likely to result in modifications in instructional practices and adherence to the instructional delivery formats. This finding confirms earlier research on coaching and teacher training in which instructional modeling figures as an essential part of the coach’s role (Poglinco, 2004, p.399)
IRA standards and Bean refer to modeling as a Level 3 activity, meaning that it is an advanced skill of coaching and represents the essence of the coaching role. Similar to how teachers learn, for coaches to model instruction and to learn how to coach teachers, they must be able to see for themselves what “good practice looks like” (Darling Hammond, 2017, p. 4). Given that coaches often lead professional development of teachers, it is also important for them to be able to see how training could be facilitated. For example, coaches in Woods (2014) research valued professional development that “models the process for effectively designing and facilitating professional development for adult learners” (p.114). Modeling in professional development or coaches is not just about how they should model to teachers but also how they are to work with teachers. For example, Blachowicz et al.(2010) reports how the facilitator of coaches in training may need to model the coaching cycle for coaches and practice with coaches until they feel comfortable to do it alone (p.356 ). Michelson (2013)’s dissertation research highlighted modeling of coaching as a key influence to how coaches in their study learned to navigate problems in practice:

Observing modeled coaching or facilitation practice in one-on-one or group settings seemed to mediate how coaches understood and responded to particular problems of practice in their work (Michelson, 2013, p.160).

Coaching and Expert Support

Darling Hammond et al. (2017) identified three possible ways for expertise sharing with teachers including one-to-one coaching, workshop facilitation, and remote communication using technology (p.3). Though the coaching literature doesn’t specifically mention “coaching” as part of professional development for coaches, researchers do suggest that coaches benefit from on-going training and technical support.
Blachowicz et al. (2010) illustrate how coaches are often co-learners and need support from a “more knowledgeable other” continuously as they move through a series of “recursive” learning phases. Each stage requires different types of support. For example, in the survival stage, the coach or expert might model the coaching cycle and then work with coaches to practice and feel comfortable in the coaching cycle before they are able to apply it alone with teachers. In the next stage, the role of the expert or facilitator might help problem-solve how to work with resistant teachers or how to analyze data. The role of the expert or “facilitator” is to not only model for coaches but to “support the coaches, so they could support the teachers” (Blachowicz et al., 2010, p. 356).

According to Shanklin (2007), the success of a coach relies on support to do their jobs:

In the end, the job of a literacy coach can be highly rewarding or frankly frustrating. The coach needs to be very knowledgeable about literacy and able to build trusting relationships within a school. At the same time, much of the coach’s success will depend upon on supports put in place so that the coach can do a good job. Coaches can gradually put many of these elements in place themselves, but the pace of progress may be slower. Some schools have no time to wait (p.5).

Shanklin (2007) outlines specific assistance that coaches might need including:

- Building trusting relationships
- Using time, managing projects, and documenting their work
- Organizing study groups
- Planning effective professional development
- Helping coaches to analyze data
- Providing access to resources
• Opportunities for professional development

• Feedback on their work (2007, p.2-4).

**Feedback and Reflection**

Some researchers recommend feedback and reflection as a key component of coaches’ professional development (e.g. Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Shanklin, 2007). Neufeld and Roper (2003) illustrate:

Just as teachers who are learning to improve their practice benefit from opportunities to observe and to be observed by their peers, coaches who are learning to improve their coaching will benefit from similar opportunities to observe other coaches’ practice and receive feedback about their own coaching work. Such a professional development strategy allows coaches to observe one another’s practice through coaching demonstrations and provides opportunities for coaches to reflect on their own and others’ best coaching practice (p.12).

Neufeld and Roper (2003) provided two examples where coaches demonstrated their work with a teacher, received feedback from others and reflected on their performance. One example involved professional development sessions led by the principal. The principal and a group of coaches would watch a videotape of a lesson facilitated by teachers. Coaches would then observe another coach working with that teacher after the lesson. Coaches would then provide feedback to the other coach. This process would be repeated until all coaches had an opportunity to demonstrate in front of their peers and receive feedback on their coaching. The second example involved a lead facilitator modeling a coaching session with an advanced teacher so that coaches learning how to coach can observe and learn from how the lead facilitator coached and pushed a more advanced teacher. Coaches would then reflect on this lesson. This second example
does not necessarily involve coaches receiving feedback, but allows them to see an expert
coach lead a coaching session that is more difficult and reflect on how they would do it.

Shanklin (2007) shares similar views to Neufeld and Roper (2003) and suggests
coaches be pro-active and solicit evaluation from their teachers or peers in their modeling
of instruction. Shanklin (2007) also recommends coaches to reflect on their own practice
and self-assess themselves regularly:

Honest, careful self-reflection about one’s practice using one of these assessments
 can help coaches pinpoint areas to target for professional growth. They can then
more thoughtfully plan for experiences that will help them achieve such targeted
growth (p. 5).

Coaches as participants in Reed’s (2009) research also valued reflection after
applying their learning as important to their growth and learning:

The coaches reported that this time of reflection not only allowed them to see
growth over time, it also allowed them to have more meaningful conversations
with the administrators and teachers regarding the overall growth of the group,
job descriptions, and how they spent their “coaching” time (p.190).

Sustained Duration

Similar to how teachers benefit from sustained support over time, findings from
research on coaching highlight the need to provide coaches with sustained support over
time. Coaches might not all come with the desired sets of skills and characteristics and
programs need to “grow their own coach and sustain them with relevant ongoing
professional development” (Neufeld & Roper, 2003, p.11). As coaches’ roles change and
evolve over time, they need additional on-going training and support to evolve with their
roles (Blachowicz et al., 2010; Galluci et al., 2010; Matsumara, et al., 2012; Neufeld &
Roper, 2003; Shanklin, 2007).
Blachowicz et al. (2010) found that coaching learning and development occurs in three recursive phases over time meaning "when a coach is in an unfamiliar phase, they revert back to the first phase" (p.355). Blachowicz et al. (2010) refer to the stages as 1) survival stage where coaches do not yet know what they are to doing, 2) developing craft knowledge phase where coach knows now how to do a task but has to learn how to help teachers do it, and 3) developing differentiation ability phase. This third stage is when the coach realizes they must differentiate their coaching and align it with the individual needs of teachers. As discussed previously, given these recursive phases, coaches need sustained support over time as they work through each of the phases (Blachowicz et al. 2010).

Galluci et al. (2010) conducted qualitative case study research exploring the professional learning and growth of one novice instructional coach working at the secondary level. Galluci et al. (2010) used a socio-cultural framework referred to as "Vygotsky Space" as the conceptual framework for exploring the following research questions: 1) How and what do instructional coaches learn in the context of district instructional reform?, and 2) What organizational structures and policies support them in that process? Findings from this study suggest that coaches in the midst of a reform context are learners themselves of the same new content concepts and instructional practices that coaches are supporting teachers to learn. As coaches become more proficient in new content and strategies, their ability to do their job also improves. A participant in Galluci et al.’s (2010) study had to “make sense of new ideas about instruction prior to, and sometimes in the context of, exploring them with other teachers” (Galluci et al., 2010, p.953).
Though Galluci et al. (2010) set out specifically to explore and analyze coaches’ learning, other research studies not necessarily focused on coaches’ learning highlight similar findings concerning the evolving role of the coach and the importance of providing on-going support to them over time (Marsh et al., 2008; Reed, 2009; Shanklin, 2007; Smith, 2009).

**Involvement of Multiple Actors**

Several researchers and practitioners stress the importance of including principals or school leaders in professional development offered to coaches (e.g. Galluci et al., 2010; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Matsumara et al., 2012; Poglinco et al., 2003; Reed, 2009; Shanklin, 2007). Some feel their involvement is important as it can help principal and school leaders to understand the role of the coach and how they can support coaches’ work (e.g. Matsumara, Garnier, & Spybrook, 2012; Neufeld & Roper, 2003)

Including school leaders in the coaching program could help establish a clear understanding of the [CFC] Coaches’ role and continued support for coaches’ work” (Matsumara et al., 2012, p.226).

Neufeld and Roper (2003) suggest that providing professional development for heads of schools can help strengthen school leadership and improve the school cultures making the school more conducive for coaching:

Implementing coaching well depends on the presence of a school culture in which it is safe for teachers to participate and to have their work observed and critiqued. Principals have great influence on that culture and, as a result, need to learn how best to create a climate appropriate for coaching (p.17).

Others suggest including additional actors in the training outside of just coaches and Head Teachers. Poglinco et al. (2003) recommend including “a few district-level administrators” in the training workshops to ensure more support to coaching in schools,
to ensure sustainability of coaching in schools throughout the district, and to “provide advocacy for district resources” (p. 46). When working in reform contexts, Galluci et al. (2010) share a similar view and suggest a professional development model that supports not just the coaches’ learning but the learning of “multiple actors” involved in any instructional reform:

Currently, most professional development events in reform settings are aimed at teachers, but we propose that a coordinated professional development system may be necessary to support the group of instructional leaders (such as coaches, specialists, or principals) who surround the classroom teacher (p.954).

Galluci refers to Billet's (2002) workplace pedagogy as a possible framework for informing organizational support to the learning of multiple actors working on a reform. According to Galluci et al. (2010), the workplace pedagogy includes the following three planes:

1) participation in work activities as an opportunity for learning, including access to all aspects of transforming work demands and organizational goals; (2) guided learning in practice including modeling, coaching, and scaffolding to supplement what the work itself affords in terms of learning opportunities; and (3) the provision of problem-solving scenarios to extend learning to novel situations (p.956).

Resources and Tools

Shanklin (2007) highlights the importance of coaches having access to resources in order to succeed. Examples of resources she highlighted included books and articles on literacy coaching, materials for demonstration lessons, and access to websites and blogs that provide coaching resources and forums to discuss and explore certain topics.

Michelson (2013) found the use of “conceptual and practical tools” as important for guiding coaches’ learning and development. According to Michelson, findings of the study support principles identified in socio-cultural learning theories particularly guided
participation theories (Rogoff, 1995; 2003) which suggest that children’s learning occurs as a result of a child’s interactions with others who are guiding them in using “tools of culture” (Michelson, 2013). So for Michelson, coaches’ interaction with others in the use of tools such as the experiential learning cycle or the coaching model became important contributors to coaches’ learning:

Tools of various kinds (the coaching model itself, the Student Centered Coaching Tool, the Experiential Learning Cycle. The Enrollment Conversation Tool) played a mediating role in coach learning in this study, and findings suggest that coaches needed additional guidance from more skilled participants in order to use them well. This finding goes beyond the notion of modeling; coaches needed more than to watch someone use a tool to solve a problem, they needed to participate in some guided interaction with the tool and a skilled user. …This theme suggests that practical and conceptual tools that reflect ways to participate in coaching are necessary mediators of coach learning and development, but not sufficient on their own without interaction with others (p.161).

Findings from Reed’s (2009)’s also suggested that coaches valued having access to research and professional resources. Specific resources Reed identified included resource books on coaching, hand-outs, articles, and websites (p.164). However, coaches also commented on how specific tools such as teacher assessments and coaching logs were useful for them in terms of reflection and learning.

**Coaching in Early Grade Reading Initiatives in Low-income Contexts**

A review of peer-reviewed articles on coaching as a component of teacher professional development in early grade reading initiatives in low-income or developing contexts, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa revealed a dearth of rigorous research in this area. However, coaching, when complemented with face-to-face training, is increasingly being recognized and advocated for as a promising approach to improving literacy instruction in low-resource and developing contexts (Bean, 2014) including conflict and
crisis affected contexts (Burns & Lawrie, 2015; USAID, 2014). Of the limited research available, studies suggest that coaching, particularly in literacy programs; have contributed to changes in teachers’ perceptions and behaviors (Sailors et al., 2014). No research as of yet has measured the direct impact of coaching on teachers’ change in practices in developing contexts. This section draws from available evaluations and peer-reviewed studies specific to literacy coaching in developing or low-income countries that have been conducted in Liberia, Kenya, Malawi, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria (Bean, 2014; Davidson & Hobbs, 2013; Harden, 2017; Hussain & Ali, 2010; Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015; Sailors et al., 2014). Additionally, it provides a summary of best practices for effective coaching provided in practitioner-related grey literature intended for developing contexts (Bean, 2014).

Davidson and Hobbs (2013) conducted research in Liberia to capture the experience of conducting a USAID-funded early grade reading intervention that involved both the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and an instructional model/intervention to improve the reading skills of Grade 2-3 students. The overall goal of the initiative was that “children would be able to read some words with fluency after one year of instruction” (p. 286). After conducting baseline reading assessments using EGRA seven sub-tests, a reading intervention was developed that involved a "one-level cascade model" of training of coaches who in turn would train and support teachers in reading instruction and continuous assessment on reading (p.288). Two different EGRA reading program interventions were implemented by two different partners, Concern Worldwide and the Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP). While both interventions implement two different approaches in different contexts within Liberia, both
interventions involved reading assessments, teacher training, coaching support, and provision of reading materials. The specific coaching model was based on Guskey's model of teacher change (1995) which suggests that teacher change in behaviors is preempted by their observation of student change and achievement (as cited in Davidson & Hobbs, 2013, p. 285). Within this approach, coaches worked with teachers on key skills, behavior changes and specific daily routines including continuous informal reading assessments of their students (p.286). In the final year of the project, coaches were expected to identify teachers at the school who could take on the coaching responsibilities beyond the life of the project (2013).

The primary purpose of the study was to measure the overall impact of combining the diagnostic baseline assessment with tailored literacy instruction using a cluster randomized trial design. After one and half years of implementation, reading scores improved significantly in control schools across all seven EGRA sub-tests which included letter naming fluency, phonological awareness, familiar words, unfamiliar words, passage reading fluency, passage comprehension, and listening comprehension (p.288). Teachers responded positively to both Concern Worldwide and LTTP's reading interventions and demonstrated commitment to the trainings (p.291).

Though the program has been successful, there were many challenges that inhibited this program from being sustained without significant donor support. Some of the challenges included: 1) contextual challenges (such as limited skills of untrained teachers, lack of supplemental reading texts available, frequent school closings, overcrowded classrooms, volunteer unsalaried teachers, and a high number of over-age students attending primary school); 2) high costs of training and coaching support; 3)
teacher and student absenteeism; 4) high costs of teacher and learning material provision; and 5) costs of EGRA assessment and need for skilled assessors for data collection (Davidson & Hobbs, 2013).

Results from this study relevant to coaching specifically suggested coaching would be better if done at school level. Additionally, coaching may not be able to be sustained by the government of Liberia due to the high expense. This study also highlighted an interesting and important finding regarding the challenges of providing support to teachers within the Liberian context, referred to by Davidson & Hobbs (2013) as a "weak educational setting" due to its long recovery from a brutal 14 year civil war (p.284). In a previous assessment conducted earlier on in the project, only 23% of teachers could pass with other 50% marks on the same literacy assessment given to the primary students (p.287). This finding provides a small but critical insight into some of the real life challenges of rolling out comprehensive reading programs in more fragile or post-conflict contexts challenged with even more limited infrastructure and human resources than other low-income or developing countries.

In Malawi, a US based research team collaborated with the Malawi Institute of Education to develop a USAID-funded literacy instruction model that included the provision of teaching and learning materials, professional development workshops, community mobilization and directive coaching as part of its model. After five months of intervention, Sailors et al. (2014) conducted a study to measure the effectiveness of the teacher professional development model on “teachers’ perceptions, attitudes and instructional practices” (p.209) As part of the study, the research also aimed to understand the role of the directive coaching component on teachers' changes in
perceptions, attitudes and instructional practices. The research compared a treatment group receiving the intervention vs. a control group that did not receive the intervention. Results from this study showed that the overall coaching model had influenced “teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about teaching” but after five months of implementation, the program did not have a significant effect on teacher’s practice (p.223). According to Sailors et al. (2014), the “scope of the program, degree of change required on the part of the teachers (in terms of literacy practices) and the novelty of the directive coaching model” may have negatively influenced the results of the study (p.225). Critical factors that helped facilitate positive outcomes were the way in which the team worked with local expertise to contextualize both the teacher training as well as the coaching model.

McDermott and Allen (2014) conducted case study research using quantitative and qualitative methods on a teacher education project in Sierra Leone that included a small coaching component as part of the model. The project introduced a Diagnostic Teaching Model developed by the International Reading Association as the curriculum for a reading initiative. As part of the program, 30 master trainers participated in three 5-day training workshops led by two international consultants in a span of 10 months to gain the necessary knowledge and skills needed to roll out training that would reach over 900 teachers working in rural schools in the Koinadugu District. Coaching was introduced to Master Trainers in the 3rd and final training in a day long module entitled “Effective mentoring and coaching practices”. The study, led by the two consultants themselves, set out to understand the perceptions of the master trainers regarding their own personal growth, successes and challenges to implementation, and the contextual variables that negatively affected the implementation of the project.
McDermott and Allen’s (2014) study focuses on the project as a whole and does not reveal much information about coaching nor how it was utilized in the project. However, findings from the study bring some insight into the experiences of teacher educators working with teachers as well as the overall context of Sierra Leone. Though the project was halted due to the Ebola outbreak, findings from the study suggested the following as threats to successful implementation: 1) teachers’ lack of formal education and teacher preparation, and 2) teachers’ lack of literacy skills. In a small group discussion, participants in the study reported that around 70% of the teachers were “uncertified volunteers” having no more than a primary education (p. 22). Other challenges include the condition of the roads, particularly in the rainy season, and limited funds for purchasing materials for the workshops. Aside from these challenges, master trainers as participants felt pride in their roles and felt they had developed their own knowledge over time regarding literacy. According to the researchers field notes, master trainers reported that they “believed that the mentoring model was one that offered potential for improving teacher knowledge in their regions” (p.21).

Piper and Zuilkowski (2015) examined coaching in the context of a large scale literacy and numeracy initiative in Kenya (PRIMR) funded by DFID and USAID and led by RTI International in collaboration with Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The overall goal of their study was to gather evidence regarding the “most effective ratios of coaches” to teachers in schools in Kenya. Their coaching model is also informed by Guskey (1995) theories of teacher change which posits that teachers must first observe changes in student outcomes before teachers change their beliefs and attitudes about pedagogies (Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015). Coaching is viewed as an
important element to providing sustained one-to-one support to teachers during implementation focusing specifically on instructional change. To conduct their study, RTI gathered results from the government’s Teacher Advisory Center (TAC) tutors that are embedded into the government’s primary school system as well as RTI supported instructional coaches that were hired to work in schools in non-formal settlements. Both TAC tutors and RTI sponsored coaches participated in the PRIMR initiative and were responsible for conducting the same activities including monthly school visits and observing every Class 1 & 2 teacher (p. 176). Results from this research suggested that:

1. Sustained direct contact with teachers over time is more effective.
2. 10:1 ratio of teachers to coaches produced greater outcomes than 15:1 ratio;
3. Coaches with more teachers are not able to make as many visits per teacher over time.
4. Consistent classroom observations can improve teacher pedagogy.
5. Paying tutors or coaches for transport helps increase classroom visits.
6. Student learning can be increased by reallocating coaches' times away from admin task and toward classroom instructional support.

These findings parallel with findings in western literature that there is a positive correlation between the time coaches spend with teachers and the likelihood in positive changes in outcomes (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2011). Effective coaching can be better facilitated by reducing the administrative tasks and ratio of teachers to coaches. The more teachers that coaches have to support means the less time they get to support individual teachers. The more time coaches spend with teachers the more teachers receive one-on-one support from a coach.
In Nigeria, USAID funded the Nigeria Reading and Access Research Activity (RARA) to examine an early grade reading initiative in Northern Nigeria. In one of the studies, RARA explored the relationships between coaches and teachers instructional practices. The study specially looked at relationships between 1) background of coaches and coach quality; 2) background of coaches and teacher practices, 3) quantity of coach visits and teacher practices, and 4) coach quality and teacher instructional practices (Harden, 2017, p.5). Preliminary findings from this study suggested that coaches with high academic credentials and number of years of teaching experience had more positive associations on coaching quality than with coaches who had several years of experiences as a Head Teacher or a coach. Additionally, the number of visits coaches made to work with teachers produced higher gains than the quality of visits.

In addition to these few studies on coaching within low-income or developing countries, USAID commissioned a descriptive review on coaching in low-income context document entitled The power of coaching: Improving early grade reading instruction in developing countries authored by Rita Bean, a coaching expert in western contexts (Bean, 2014). Bean's desk study draws from limited published and unpublished reports of research in and organizational documentation as well as feedback and perspectives from practitioners. Though not peer-reviewed research, Bean's review was a first and valuable attempt to start the conversation and start trying to understand what we know about coaching in low-income and fragile contexts and what research is needed. According to Bean (2014) the overall purpose of this document was to:

- review and summarize the available literature and research on coaching teachers,
- use the results to compile best practices for implementing effective coaching in early grade reading programs in developing countries, and
- provide a decision
Much of the review highlighted key areas already covered in this literature review but significant to mention are the context-specific items that were unique. For example, Bean (2014) identified the following barriers to coaches as part of her findings:

1. Availability of coaches
2. Ongoing training and support
3. High coach caseloads particularly with non-coaching duties
4. Absenteeism of both children and teachers
5. Large coaching loads and need for travel to great distances
6. Lack of leadership support at school level
7. Teacher resistance or reluctance for coaches
8. Time for teachers to meet with coaches
9. Underprepared teachers
10. Large workloads for coaches and teachers
11. Preparation and Support of Coaches

Bean (2014) also emphasized that within these contexts, coaches coming into their roles may have limited knowledge and experience both in coaching and literacy and thus, require professional development that provides them with adequate opportunities to develop and practice their learning over time:

Although coaches in developing countries may come to the coaching role with little experience in coaching or teaching literacy, a well-structured preparation program that assists them in gaining literacy content knowledge as well as knowledge about coaching will enable them to effectively take on their responsibilities. Opportunities for ongoing learning, via networking with other coaches and receiving feedback about coaching performance, are necessary to
facilitate coaches’ learning. Providing coaches with structured routines and practices about both content and processes helps to ensure a successful beginning (p.5).

While research and advocacy for coaching in early grade reform is increasing, still very little is known on the possibilities of coaching in low-resourced, developing countries nor the contextual factors that influence coaching (Bean, 2014, p. 6). Additionally, no research exists on the preparation and support of coaches in these contexts.

Of the research available discussed here, coaching is viewed in terms of being one of many contributing factor towards effectiveness of more comprehensive teacher professional development models. All of the peer-reviewed research studies mentioned used quantitative methods in randomized control studies and measured by changes in reading scores. Of these, Piper and Zuilkowski (2015) research on the ratio of coaches is the only research that focuses specifically on coaches. While understanding the impact and effectiveness of coaching is important, unless it is isolated and measured in comparison to other components of the intervention, we cannot know that coaching is a contributing factor to teacher change and thus student achievement in developing contexts. Additionally, of the coaching models being implemented in low-income contexts, little research or documentation exists that provides a better understanding of who the coaches are, what skills and characteristics do they need to be successful, how are coaches prepared and supported, or how coaches is implemented in these challenging contexts. According to Bean (2014),

Specific information is needed about the conditions that must exist in schools or regional offices if coaching initiatives are to be effective, the qualification and knowledge about coaches must have to be successful, and what coaches must do to have a positive impact on teaching practices and student learning. This
information is especially important for individuals who are responsible for establishing or working in coaching initiatives in developing countries where teaching and coaching conditions present many challenges (p.7).

Implementing coaching in low-income contexts may present a whole set of other challenges in addition to these challenges reported in well-resourced contexts. Very little evidence exists for us to understand the various challenges around the implementation of coaching. When reviewing the literature, I found a few sources that provide insight into some of the potential areas that could impact implementation. The first source was Burns and Lawrie's work previously mentioned that reviews teacher professional development initiatives in fragile contexts. This is not a review of coaching specifically, but the four barriers to TPD they identify provide a general understanding of potential barriers to coaching. The barriers they identify include: 1) difficult working conditions, 2) low-quality professional development, 3) systematic challenges, and 4) conflict are important to keep in mind when looking more closely at coaching specifically.

My review of the literature on coaching, both in developed and developing contexts, revealed significant gaps in the literature concerning the professional learning and development of coaches, particularly in low-income and developing contexts where no studies explored the experiences and learning of coaches nor their preparation and support needs in low-income and developing contexts. Qualitative research that explores coaching experiences and learning from the perspectives of coaches themselves working in the context of low-income and developing contexts could prove valuable for understanding their roles and responsibilities and factors that influenced their abilities to enact their roles in challenging, low-resourced contexts. Such research could provide
valuable insight into how programs can better prepare and support coaches to be more effective in their roles.

In response to this gap identified in the literature, I chose to explore coaches’ perspectives of their professional experiences in the context of Sierra Leone with ultimate aim to understand their experiences and how the RaISES program could be improved to better prepare and support their work within their contexts.

**Conceptual Framework**

Following my review of the literature, I developed an initial conceptual framework for approaching this study based on key strands of literature that commonly emerged including: 1) the role and responsibilities of coaches, 2) influential factors on the effectiveness of coaching, 3) coaching knowledge, skills, beliefs and dispositions, and 4) supporting coaches professional learning and growth. These key areas helped inform the development of my initial research questions I used to begin exploring the professional experiences and learning of RaISES Learning Coaches.

As the study progressed, I revised and refined my framework based on my discovery of Valsiner’s Zone Theory (Valsiner, 1997), a theory grounded in socio-cultural theories of learning, originally used to explore the learning and development of children. I felt this change was appropriate to make midway through the research given the similarities between the initial conceptual framework that emerged from the literature and aspects of Valsiner’s Zone theory. I chose Valsiner’s Zone theory because I felt it provided a tighter structure and analytical lens for exploring coaches’ experiences and learning. Therefore, this study uses a re-interpretation and adaptation of Valsiner's Zone
Theory as a conceptual framework and analytical lens for exploring the professional learning and development of coaches.

In this section, I provide a brief introduction to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development Theory followed by Valsiner’s re-interpretation and extension of the theory. I then discuss further adaptation of Valsiner’s theory and application in teacher education research. I conclude this section by sharing how I used combined adaptations of Zone theory with findings from my review of the literature to form the final conceptual framework I used for my study.

**Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development**

Lev Vygotsky, a 20th Century Russian psychologist, developed his social development theory from studying the learning and cognitive development of children. Social development theory recognizes the critical role that social interactions play in one's cognitive development and learning. Vygotsky posited that social interactions actually precede learning, and children learn when they interact with another person. Vygotsky's theory includes two major concepts: (1) the *More Knowledgeable Other*, and (2) the *Zone of Proximal Development*. According to Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development is:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers (1978, p. 86).

In other words, for Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development is the distance between what a child can do alone and what a child cannot do alone but can do with the encouragement and assistance of a “more knowledgeable other” such as a teacher or
more capable peer. The more knowledgeable other helps expand the child’s growth and narrow the gap between what a child can and cannot do alone.

**Valsiner’s Zone Theory**

Valsiner reinterpreted the Zone of Proximal Development in a slightly different way and defined it more as an evolving zone of “possibilities” for furthering learning that depended on both a child’s actual and potential level for development as well as how a child is able to interact in the environment; learning occurs as a result of these interactions (Bennison, 2015). Valsiner (1997) extends Vygotsky’s Zone of Development theory to include two other zones to consider when analyzing children’s learning and development. These consider the interactions an individual has within the environment and the constraints they may face within that environment (Bennison, 2015, p 564). Valsiner refers to these additional zones as the Zone of Promoted Actions and the Zone of Free Movement (Goos 2005a; Valsiner, 1997). Valsiner’s Zone of Promoted Action consists of the “activities, objects, or areas in the environment in respect of which the individual’s actions are promoted” (Valsiner, 1997, p.192). The Zone of Free Movement includes the aspect of the environment that “structures an individual’s access to different areas of the environment, the availability of different objects within an accessible area, and the way an individual is permitted or enabled to act with accessible objects” (Valsiner, 1997, p.192). In other words the Zone of Promoted Actions are the activities or areas in the environment that teachers are promoting the child to do and the Zone of Free Movement includes those aspects of the environment that structure how the child is able to act or interact (Goos, 2013).
By understanding the interactions that exist between the Zone of Free Movement and Zone of Promoted Actions, Valsiner suggested that one can better understand the possibilities for enhancing a child's growth. He considers this interplay between the two zones as the “ZFM/ZPA Complex” (Valsiner, 1997).

As these two zones work together, Valsiner suggested that they be considered as a ZFM/ZPA complex. He argued that development could be directed by structuring successive ZFM/ZPA complexes for the learner. However, development in a particular way cannot be guaranteed because an individual is free to accept or reject the actions that are being promoted (Bennison, 2015, p.564).

When creating this zone theory, Valsiner applied micro genetic studies as the method for exploring sets of possibilities for development and developed scientific notations for each of the zones. For the purposes of my study, I do not go into detail of the various interpretations and use of Valsiner’s zone theory. Instead, for the remainder of this section, I briefly discuss recent more simplified adaptations of Valsiner’s Zone theory in educational research that explores the professional learning of adults, specifically teachers and teacher educators. I conclude this section by explaining how I used these adaptations to form the basis of my conceptual framework that helped guide research study.

**Adapting Zone Theory in Teacher Education Research**

The use of Valsiner's theory in previous studies occurs most in mathematics and teacher education research. Researchers have used Valsiner's theory not only to explore children's learning and development (Bansilal, 2011; Blanton, Westbrook & Carter, 2005), but also to explore the professional learning and identity of mathematics teachers.
When adapting Valsiner’s Zone theory to analyze the learning and development of teachers, researchers again re-interpreted Valsiner’s Zone theory and redefined the individual zones to fit the needs of their research. For example, when looking at teachers as learners, Goos (2008) redefined the Zone of Free Movement (ZFM) as the "constraints within the teachers’ professional context" (p.237) and identified the following aspects of a teachers’ professional context that could constrain a teachers’ actions:

1. Students characteristics (behavior, socio-economic background, motivation, perceived abilities)
2. Access to resources and teaching materials
3. Curriculum and assessment requirements
4. Organizational structures
5. Organizational cultures (2008, p.237)

Goos (2008) also redefined the Zone of Promoted Actions (ZPA) as the “teaching approaches that might be specifically promoted by pre-service teacher education, formal professional development activities, or information interaction with colleagues in the school setting” (Goos, 2008, p. 237). Therefore, for Goos, the ZPA are the promoted approaches offered in teachers’ pre-service preparation and the ZFM are aspects of the environment that constrained certain promoted actions and suggests what of the promoted actions the ZFM allowed. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for Goos is a “set of possibilities for their development that are influenced by their knowledge and beliefs and how it is best taught and learned” (p.236). Goos claims that defining these zones in
this way can be useful for analyzing the relationships between the three zones and why teachers may either use or choose not to use specific actions in the context where they are working (Goos, 2009, p.212). Unlike Valsiner’s use of scientific notation, Goos illustrates these zones and the relationships between the zones in a Venn Diagram such as one in Figure 4 below (e.g. Goos, 2008, 2009).

![Venn Diagram]

**Figure 4: Goos’ (2008) Re-interpretation of Valsiner’s Zone Theory**

According to Goos (2008), this Venn diagram “implies that learning takes place at the intersection of the three zones” (p.238). Goos emphasizes that this is only one possible representation and will depend on an individual’s “configuration” of zones based on their individual ZPD, ZPA, and ZFM (p.238). Galligan (2008) critiqued Goos and other researchers use of a Venn diagram suggesting it “simplified” the theory by suggesting that the “three zones exist at same point instead of the ZPD constantly emerging as the next set of possible actions from the ZFM/ZPA interaction” (p.2).

In addition to adapting Valsiner’s Zone theory to explore teacher learning, Goos also advocated the use of Valsiner's Zone theory in understanding the learning and development of teacher educators, an “untheorized” area needing more research (Goos, 2008, p.294). As Goos highlights, research that explores teachers’ learning and what teachers need to do to support student learning is vast. Yet, teacher educators play a
significant role in supporting the professional learning of teachers and we know very little of how teacher educators learn themselves (Goos, 2009). By undertaking research that explores the professional learning and development of teacher educators, we might have a better understanding about how to better prepare and support teacher educators.

Application of Zone Theory and Effective Coaching Literature

For my dissertation research, I build on Goo’s adaptation of Valsiner’s zone theory in her work exploring teachers as learners (2005b; 2013) as well as Goo’s suggestions for exploring teacher educators as learners (2008, 2009) and apply it to explore the professional practice and learning of coaches supporting teachers within a complex professional context. Though I use Goo’s adjusted definitions for the zones, I adjusted Goo’s Venn Diagram of Zone Theory as indicated in Figure 5 to illustrate the emerging ZPD as result of the constantly changing ZFM/ZPA Complex. I also situate the Zones within the wider Sierra Leone and Sub-Saharan African context.

Recognizing that the learning and development of any individual is constantly changing, I use the framework as a means to take a “snapshot” of coaches’ experiences and map out areas of growth for coaches and the factors that influence the professional learning and growth of coach (Goos, 2013). By understanding the constraints in the professional context as perceived by the coach, I can see where coaches may be able to modify aspects of the environment. I can understand where coaches sought out different promoted actions in order to expand their zone of free movement that perhaps the program did not provide. I can also see where the Zone of Free Movement limits coaches or constrains coaching actions and understand where the program can provide better support to Learning Coaches’ professional learning to modify their Zone of Free
Movement. By analyzing these relationships and influences, I can better understand the possibilities for the professional learning and development of novice coaches.

Figure 5: Adapting Valsiner’s Zone Theory to Analyze Coaches’ Learning

In Table 3, I organize zones in a table and show linkages between the different zones from Zone theory, the key strands identified from the effective coaching literature that formed my initial framework, and important findings relevant to each literature strand. This table represents the final conceptual framework I used to guide this study and analyze my findings.
Table 3: Linking Zone Theory with Literature Strands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valsiner’s Zones</th>
<th>Literature Strands</th>
<th>Findings from the literature on coaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zone of Proximal Development</strong>&lt;br&gt;Set of possibilities for coaches’ development influenced by their knowledge, skills, and beliefs</td>
<td>Coaching Beliefs, Skills, Knowledge, and Dispositions</td>
<td>• Pedagogical and Content Knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Teaching Experience at grade level&lt;br&gt;• Coaching Roles, Processes, and Tasks&lt;br&gt;• Ability to work with adults&lt;br&gt;• Interpersonal Skills and Communication&lt;br&gt;• Leadership Skills&lt;br&gt;• Facilitation Skills&lt;br&gt;• Beliefs and Dispositions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>• Build on Pedagogic and Content Knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Build on teaching skills&lt;br&gt;• Coaching Processes and Tools&lt;br&gt;• Working with adults as learners&lt;br&gt;• Interpersonal/Communication Skills&lt;br&gt;• Leadership and Facilitation Skills&lt;br&gt;• Beliefs and Dispositions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Learning</td>
<td>o Opportunities to practice and apply new learning/hands-on experiences&lt;br&gt;o Role-play and simulations&lt;br&gt;o Analyzing Videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zone of Promoted Action</strong>&lt;br&gt;Opportunities provided for coaches to learn and promoted actions</td>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>• Modeling design and facilitation of pd for adults.&lt;br&gt;• Modeling how to work with teachers&lt;br&gt;• Modeling coaching cycles&lt;br&gt;• Modeling how to respond to problems in practice</td>
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<td>Characteristics of Effective Professional Development</td>
<td>Coaching and expert support with a more knowledgeable other</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feedback and reflection</td>
<td>• Feedback from peers and teachers on demonstrations&lt;br&gt;• Opportunities for reflection through self-assessments or coaching logs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>• Sustained and Ongoing Training and Support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Involve Multiple Actors</td>
<td>• Head Teachers&lt;br&gt;• District Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resources and Tools</td>
<td>• Books, articles, websites on coaching&lt;br&gt;• Models and Frameworks such as experiential learning cycle and coaching cycle&lt;br&gt;• Coaching logs (reflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zone of Free Movement</strong>&lt;br&gt;Constraints within the coaches’ professional contexts (teacher characteristics, leadership, schools culture, etc)</td>
<td>Constraints to Coaching</td>
<td>• Teacher Resistance&lt;br&gt;• Limited time with teachers due to number of teachers, workload, and additional responsibilities.&lt;br&gt;• Unclear roles and responsibilities&lt;br&gt;• Limited Principal Support&lt;br&gt;• School Culture/climate</td>
</tr>
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CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present the overall research design and methodology I chose to conduct this study as well my rationale. I then present the overall theoretical/conceptual framework I used to guide my data collection and analysis. Additionally, I introduce the setting and the participants and explain the selection process. Finally, I describe the processes I used for data collection, management, and analysis.

Purpose and Research Questions

This research aimed to explore the experiences of RaISES Learning Coaches as teacher educators in a specific context of Sierra Leone and understand what preparation and support they might need to be more effective in their support to teachers. The overarching question that guided my study was: What do the self-reported beliefs and experiences of a cohort of RaISES Learning Coaches supporting primary school teachers in Sierra Leone reveal about their professional learning and growth and what implications does this have for improving preparation and support for coaches? Using an adaptation of Valsiner's zone theory as the conceptual framework, the following sub-questions frame the study:

1. What coaching actions did the RaISES program promote, and how did the program prepare and support Learning Coaches to apply those actions? (ZPA)
2. How do Learning Coaches describe their knowledge, skills and beliefs about teaching, learning, and coaching? (ZPD)
3. How do Learning Coaches perceive aspects of their professional context that constrain their abilities to enact their roles? (ZFM)

4. How do Learning Coaches describe what actions they were able to promote in the face of constraints and what supports in the professional context allowed this to happen? (ZFM/ZPA Complex)

5. How do Learning Coaches perceive their professional learning and growth as they moved through the zones? (Emerging ZPD as result of ZFM/ZPA)

Question #1 captures information related to the Zone of Promoted Actions (ZPA) and includes what Learning Coaches say concerning the professional learning opportunities they participated in or pursued and the extent to which Learning Coaches valued those opportunities. Question #2 aims to capture information relating to aspects of the Learning Coaches’ Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This includes information regarding Learning Coaches’ education background and experience, beliefs about coaching, teaching and learning, beliefs about their role and responsibilities, and views of skills they should have to be effective in their work. Question #3 provides insight into the overall constraints Learning Coaches confronted in the professional context, the Zone of Free Movement (ZFM). Question #4 captures what Learning Coaches say regarding their actual experiences or interactions working in their challenging environment, and highlights what actions they were able to perform their context and what supports enabled them (ZFM/ZPA). Question #5 captures coaches’ perceptions about this their own professional learning and growth as they participated in the RaISES program. In alignment with Valsiner and Goos’ use of this framework, analysis of these key zones will provide insight into Learning Coaches’ professional learning and growth through
their participation in the RaISES initiative and suggest possibilities for further improving their opportunities to learn.

**Research Design**

Given the unique setting of Sierra Leone and the limited knowledge of coaching within this context, I chose in qualitative research as the genre for my study. According to Marshall & Rossman (2006), qualitative research is best for "research that is exploratory or descriptive and that stresses the importance of context, setting and participant's frames of reference" (p. 54).

I used an, intrinsic case study research design. Yin (2003) defines a case study as an "empirical inquiry that: 1) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Yin (2003) also suggests that case studies are "best suited for research that tries to answer “how” and “why” questions", and when "the behavior of those involved in the study cannot be manipulated" (p. 13). Stake (1995) suggests there are three kinds of case studies: intrinsic case studies, instrumental case studies, and collective case studies (pp. 3-4). An intrinsic case is when the researcher simply has an "intrinsic interest" in "learning about a particular case", as opposed to an instrumental case, which may serve to "accomplish something other than understanding" (p.3). A collective case study is when the researcher chooses to explore more than one individual case. Stake (1995) differentiates between an intrinsic case and an instrumental case by asserting that an intrinsic case is "pre-selected" meaning that we have a specific interest in the case being studied, while in an instrumental case study, other cases might be more appropriate
to explore a certain phenomena because of the insight they might bring to other similar cases (p. 4)

Using an intrinsic case study approach was an appropriate approach for the research design of this study. My study is intrinsic in the fact that I, as the researcher, given my role in the RaISES initiative, have a genuine interest in a very particular case of a cohort of RaISES Learning Coaches working in the context of Sierra Leone. Given a project confronted with the extenuating circumstances due to the Ebola outbreak, my motivation was not to build theory or generalize findings across all other populations (Stake, 1995). I wanted to listen to the perspectives and experiences of a specific group of Learning Coaches to understand their professional learning and experiences working with primary school teachers in Sierra Leone. Findings from this study provide insight into what it means for preparing and supporting Learning Coaches in the future.

The Researcher

Rossman and Rallis (2003) remind us of the importance of being reflexive and sensitive to who we are in our work and how this shapes our perspectives (p. 36). For this, I feel it important to share with the audience a bit of my personal background before coming into this research. My own learning and experiences influence how I understand the world, and thus how I approach this study and derive meaning from it in my interpretations. This section briefly describes my background: how experiences have shaped my worldview as a professional and how the congruence of these also shaped the focus of my research.

My specific interest in coaching emerged from experiences throughout my career personally being mentored and coached in my role as a professional teacher and educator.
During my teaching practicum for my Bachelor’s degree and teaching certificate at the University of North Carolina, I first experienced coaching by Dr. Tamsen Banks Webb, a well-respected early education specialist and professor in the university and state school system at the time, who led professional development cohorts of student teachers during their practicum placements at schools. During the practicum in my final year, I benefitted tremendously from Dr. Webb’s leadership, expertise, and on-going support through coaching and mentoring, as well as from participation in a community of practice she established amongst our cohort. The learning and confidence I gained from this experience was invaluable and proved to be the most productive aspect of my experience learning to become a teacher. At that time, I could finally apply the evidence-based skills and methodologies we had learned through coursework, and transfer them to the classroom. Additionally, when I struggled or faced challenges, I had a coach and mentor to discuss my challenges with, as well as a community of practice amongst practicing teachers.

After graduation, I taught in upper primary and middle school classrooms for seven years, mostly in well-resourced accredited International and American schools abroad. My last experience of teaching in such a setting was at the Colegio Maya International School in Guatemala teaching middle school Language Arts. While there, I simultaneously worked on and completed my Masters of Education, which catered to teachers working in international schools. The combination of teaching experience and educational coursework contributed significantly to my professional growth as a teacher. Participating in on-going, professional development while teaching encouraged me to constantly reflect on my practice while applying some of the most up-to-date, evidence-
based methodologies in the classroom. At the time, I explored then-innovative methodologies in the classroom, such as performance-based and portfolio assessments, and the integration of Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory into instructional practice and assessment. During my courses on-site after work, I was able to share my experiences immediately with colleagues also participating in the same program and learn from them. Additionally, as a member of the school's Staff Development Committee, I led sessions where I shared my experiences and learning with other teachers in the school. At this point, I came to realize the influential role of collaboration, practice, reflection and action in my own learning and professional growth as an educator.

In 2000, I left formal teaching in hopeful pursuit of a career in international education and development. I accepted an assignment with Peace Corps Nepal as a teacher trainer. At the time, Peace Corps Nepal invited and assigned 10 experienced educators to partner with the Ministry to pilot a teacher training and support initiative across five districts. Peace Corps posted me in at a Resource Center in Kharipati, a rural hill village in the Bhaktapur District where my counterpart was a "Resource Person" responsible for supporting all primary school teachers in 19 feeder schools. For over two years, I worked alongside the Resource Person providing bi-monthly face-to-face training and on-going support to all English primary teachers in this cluster of 19 schools. Between each training workshop, we provided support to teachers through classroom observations, co-planning, co-teaching, and/or modeling. Our roles and responsibilities were those of pedagogical advisor or instructional coach.

During this time, I witnessed many Ministry-level cascade Trainer- of – Trainer workshops (TOTs) at the national and district level where content and methods of
instruction were often poorly delivered. In some cases, Master Trainers themselves were neither experienced in the primary-level classroom nor the curriculum. In other cases, their methods of facilitating TOT workshops were in lecture form rather than modeling new strategies for trainers to take back to teachers. Much valuable learning was lost at the highest level of training. I could only imagine how the training would be facilitated by the time it reached teachers at the cluster level. I realized then that on-going support to teachers in such situations was not just valuable but critical, particularly when teachers were tasked with applying a new curriculum and/or innovative instructional strategies they were not properly trained to do.

Fortunately, Peace Corps required us to teach in the classroom for the first year in order to become familiar with the primary school curriculum. This experience proved to be significant because, although I was trained and qualified with several years of teaching experience, my previous experience was more of a hindrance than an advantage. I came to the Nepali classroom and my work with teachers with preconceived notions of how children learn and how teachers should best facilitate their learning. I realized quickly that the progressive teaching philosophy and child-centered or active learning methodologies I had learned over the years were not easily transferrable in this context. With support from my other Peace Corps colleagues and teachers in the schools, I had to redefine my ideas of what teaching could look like in an overpopulated classroom with no books or resources. This required time observing teachers and students and trying to understand their challenges as well as things that seemingly worked. I also needed to spend substantial time teaching and trying new activities in Nepali classrooms, seeing them fail, and then trying something else before sharing and modeling strategies to
teachers. I never felt I mastered teaching in this context, but the experience itself exposed me to the challenges teachers faced first-hand and spurred me on an arduous journey to better understand and work towards improving learning opportunities for both teachers and children in similar contexts.

I have continued that journey over the last decade while pursuing my doctorate and working with international NGO-supported education projects in West and South Africa, with specific attention to teacher professional development and literacy instruction. Most of my work has primarily been in Sierra Leone, where I have lived and worked for the past six years. I first came to Sierra Leone as the Education Advisor for Save the Children UK, soon followed by a more recent role of Teacher Professional Development Specialist for International Rescue Committee. In both of these roles, I provided technical support to the design and implementation of a DFID-funded large-scale whole school improvement initiative implemented by a consortium of five INGO partners. The lead agency for this Education Consortium, International Rescue Committee, employed me as a long-term technical consultant from 2013-2015 to provide specific guidance to the teacher professional development component that included coaching. My primary role was training and providing support to 50 Consortium-hired Learning Coaches responsible for supporting teachers in instructional practice in reading instruction. Other responsibilities included assisting in the development of coaching resources, conducting coaching field visits to partner organizations, supporting the literacy consultant in the development of literacy materials and training, and developing a Teacher Learning Circles Workbook that was used as a guide for establishing a community of practice amongst teachers.
The experience of working with the Consortium was unique and exciting. I was passionate about the initiative, having become very familiar with the challenges in the educational landscape in Sierra Leone, particularly with issues concerning teachers. I felt strongly about teachers needing additional and on-going support and believed that coaching, if done well, could be successful in this context. I was thrilled to be part of a teacher education project in Sierra Leone that included not only training but also coaching and teacher learning circles as additional measures to support teachers at the school level. It was the first project where the essence of all the components included those aspects I personally valued in supporting teacher learning.

Throughout this experience, I developed on-going professional relationships with key staff and Learning Coaches from all the Consortium partner organizations over a three-year period and became quite familiar with the implementation, progress, and many challenges faced along the way. It was a great honor and good fortune to work on this project with the Consortium technical team as well as an amazing cohort of Learning Coaches. Over time, I became inspired and motivated by the excitement of the coaches, their willingness to learn, and their commitment to their role, despite their challenges. Having the privilege to see these Learning Coaches grow into their roles and hear their stories over time pushed me to hear and learn more from their personal experiences and thus became the impetus behind the focus and direction for this inquiry.

Though I had lived in Sierra Leone for almost six years and had established long-term relationships within the context, I was very concerned about doing my research in Sierra Leone. As a Westerner, either as a practitioner or researcher or simply someone visiting a friend in a village, I am a stranger and an outsider. I am also perceived as
having some element of authority, money, power, and/or influence. From my experiences visiting NGO-supported schools across the country for the last five years, I have found that, regardless of my role and purpose in visiting or the questions I ask, I frequently hear the same issues from teachers, Head Teachers, and school community members. My visit is often an opportunity for others to share the external, systemic challenges that affect the school (and every school), or for them to give positive praise for the project or organization with which I am affiliated. Such comments reflect a hope of continued donor and project support to the school community. This can often get in the way of having an honest and critical reflection and discussion about what is happening in schools with the project. I felt that, even though I was going as a researcher to talk about coaching and Learning Coaches and not as an NGO worker, I still would not be able to capture their true views and get an authentic sense of what they felt about coaching.

Another concern I had conducting research in Sierra Leone was the timing and the changed context due to the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak. Initially, I had planned to conduct this research before the Ebola outbreak and to focus on the case of coaching after several years of consistent implementation. As someone who had lived in this country prior to, during, and after the Ebola outbreak, I have witnessed in the last few years droves of international researchers arriving in Sierra Leone to publish research in the post-Ebola outbreak context. I felt personally uncomfortable proceeding with my research highlighting the post-crisis context as the significant factor. My interest was in coaching and what was happening in the context of Sierra Leone in education before the Ebola outbreak, not the recent crisis context itself. Furthermore, at the time of my proposal, I was not yet aware the extent in which RaISES-supported communities were affected by
the EVD nor the direction of the RaISES program once schools re-opened. For this, from the beginning, I was hesitant to include both teachers and Head Teachers as participants in the research not knowing the trauma and distress they might be recovering from nor the relevance of the research to them if program had to close.

For these reasons, I selected Consortium-supported Learning Coaches with whom I had been working before and after the Ebola epidemic as the primary informants for my study rather than include teachers, Head Teachers, and community members. Though the Ebola outbreak disrupted implementation and the EdCo could not implement the program fully as planned, I felt that the Learning Coaches had experiences worth exploring, and the relationships I had established with them over the years would allow for more honest and critical reflection on their work and experiences.

Because of the established relationships working with INGOs in Sierra Leone and with the Education Consortium partners particularly, I fortunately gained smoother access to research sites than I would have had normally with INGOs in any other country or context. IRC, the lead agency of the Consortium, willingly supported me and agreed to provide transport and accommodation to the relevant field offices and to communities where Learning Coaches were based. Concern Worldwide also contributed by providing accommodation during my visits to their field offices as well as the use of their vehicles when on-site. Because I was based in country, and had established relationships with Program Coordinators and Managers from each of the partner organizations, I was able to communicate easily and directly with managers who graciously assisted in scheduling and arranging interviews with Learning Coaches and mapping out school visits.
Even though I had access to organizations and established relationships, I was continually aware of how my position in the project might influence the interactions and discussions with Learning Coaches and the information they provided to me, particularly since I had provided professional development, technical support, and material and manual development to them. Given this role, I knew they might still want to say things that reflected positively on their experiences in the program or give praise to our technical team so as not to "shame" us. I hoped, though, that since I had already established collaborative relationships with Learning Coaches they would feel more comfortable reflecting honestly with me about their experiences rather than telling me what they thought I wanted to hear.

**Partner Organization Selection**

I selected Sierra Leone as the primary context for my research to explore coaching because I have been working in the education sector in Sierra Leone since 2011. I chose Learning Coaches within the Education Consortium RaISES initiative given my long-term familiarity and engagement with the project and with the individual Learning Coaches and their work. I was interested in better understanding these particular Learning Coaches’ experiences in the uptake and implementation of a large initiative in such a challenging context. Despite the project disruption due to the Ebola outbreak, I felt Learning Coaches had rich experiences to share from their direct work with teachers from which I and other practitioners could learn.

Prior to inviting particular Learning Coaches to participate, I had to choose amongst five INGOs working as partners with the DFID-funded INGO Education Consortium who employed the Learning Coaches. I first sought to establish a
Memorandum of Understanding with the Consortium Coordinating Unit at IRC, the lead agency of the Education Consortium, requesting permission for me to conduct research on their project and proposing the kinds of support I would need from partners in travelling to the field sites. IRC, as lead agency, kindly offered to support all my travel and accommodation to the field offices of the partner organizations where I decided to focus. Given my relationships with them as both coordinating agency and implementing partner and their willingness to support my research, I selected them as the first organization where I would focus the research. After finalizing an MOU with IRC, I introduced the research to other Consortium partner organizations to gauge their interest. Concern Worldwide was another organization that expressed interest and eagerness to support me, so I extended the focus of my study to include Concern Worldwide. Both IRC and Concern Worldwide offered invaluable assistance to the research by approving Learning Coaches’ participation in the research, providing access to documents, arranging field visits, and providing transport and accommodation in the field. In this next section, I introduce each of the organizations as well as the districts where I conducted the research. I then follow this with information on the Participant Selection.

**Organization Profiles**

**International Rescue Committee**, a US-based international humanitarian organization, began working in Sierra Leone in 1999, towards the end of the civil war. IRC’s focus during that time was supporting Sierra Leone government and other key stakeholders in recovery efforts and transition towards development after the war. IRC has remained a key actor throughout the post-war recovery and most recently during the response and recovery to the Ebola outbreak that affected the country significantly. IRC’s
work currently focuses on strengthening the country in the aftermath of the Ebola outbreak. According to their recent 2015-2020 Strategy Action Plan, IRC aims to provide "Adaptive, collaborative, and evidence-driven programming for a more educated, safe, healthy, and empowered Sierra Leone (IRC, 2015, p.2). For this, IRC's key areas of programming include education, health, and women's protection and empowerment. IRC works in all districts in the country through partnerships and consortia but focuses direct implementation of their own programs in the five districts of Tonkolili, Kono, Kailahun, Bo, and Kenema.

**Concern Worldwide**, an Irish-based international non-governmental organization, started working in Sierra Leone in 1996 amidst the decade-long civil war. After the war ended in 2002, Concern Worldwide transitioned from post-conflict programming to more rehabilitation and development programming in the country (Concern Worldwide, 2012, p. 8). Since then, Concern Worldwide’s programs have focused primarily on health, education, and food income and markets while also addressing some "cross-cutting issues" such as gender, disaster risk reduction, and protection, as examples (2012, p. 8). With the onset of the Ebola outbreak in 2014, Concern Worldwide expanded their focus to include emergency response and became critical players in the fight against the spread of the EVD. According to their Country Strategic Plan 2012-2016, Concern Worldwide's primary goal has been to "implement a results-based program that facilitates measurable and sustainable improvements in the living conditions of the extreme poor through more equitable access to and return on assets and enhanced resilience to shocks and stresses" (Concern Worldwide, 2012, p.8).
Concern Worldwide currently works in Tonkolili District, Bo District, and Freetown Western Urban Area.

**Site Selection**

For the RaSES initiative specifically, Concern Worldwide worked in Tonkolili District while IRC worked in both Kenema and Kono Districts. This research focused on Learning Coaches from one district from each organization: Tonkolili District (Concern Worldwide) and Kenema District (IRC). I selected Kenema District over Kono District to minimize long distance travel for both myself as well as the participants traveling into the field offices.

**Kenema District**, located in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone, is made up of 16 chiefdoms and four major cities including Kenema (the capitol), Blama, Tongo, and Yomboma. Kenema hosts a diverse population of various ethnic groups including Fula, Mandingo, Kono, Temne and Mende as well as two main religious groups, Christianity and Islam. Kenema is most popularly known for its long history of diamond mining; however, it also is a region important for timber industry and agricultural production of cocoa, coffee, and palm oil for exporting (“Sierra Leone: Kenema District profile” 2016). During the Ebola outbreak period, Kenema District was one of the first districts significantly affected by the spread of the EVD in 2014, with over 50,000 confirmed cases (“Sierra Leone: Kenema District profile” 2016).

**Tonkolili District** is located in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone, bordered by three other districts including Kono, Kenema, and Koinadugu. Magburaka. The district headquarter town is relatively close Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, and is
about a 3.5 hour drive. Tonkolili consists of eleven chiefdoms. During the war, Tonkoli was one of the districts most impacted by the rebel war.

**Participant Selection**

I used purposeful sampling in selecting the participants for this study on perspectives and experiences of Learning Coaches who support primary school teachers in an early grade reading initiative in Sierra Leone. According to Patton (2014), purposeful sampling is "selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study" (p.264). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend purposeful sampling when the researcher "wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p.96). By purposefully selecting from a cohort of Learning Coaches taking part in a large-scale initiative, I was seeking "information-rich" cases to help gain insight into the phenomenon of coaching in Sierra Leone (Patton, 2014 p.264):

Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (p. 230).

Amongst a cohort of 50 possible Learning Coaches from five different organizations, I invited 10 Learning Coaches from two of the five partner organizations. I based selection on the already-established relationships I had with each of the organizations in which these Learning Coaches were affiliated, and on the organizations' interest in supporting the research and approving Learning Coaches’ participation. The criteria I used for final selection of participants included Learning Coaches’ level of engagement in the project since the beginning, and their proximity to IRC and Concern Worldwide field offices. All 10 Learning Coaches who I invited expressed great interest
and enthusiasm in participating. However, by the end of the research, only nine were able to participate for the entire duration, due to one participant falling ill after the first round of data collection.

Osbourne is a 55-year old male. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Education and a Higher Teacher Certificate. Osbourne taught for over 29 years mostly at the Upper Primary Level and Junior Secondary Level in Social Studies and Language Arts.

John is a 32-year old male who has a Bachelor of Arts in Education with a major in Linguistics and minor in Literature. He also received a Master of Science in Rural Development studies from Njala University. John has over four years of teaching experience at the secondary level.

Moi, a 45-year old male, received a Bachelor of Arts in Literature and Linguistics and Diploma in Education from Njala University. In addition to seven years of teaching English Literature at the Senior Secondary level, Moi has experience working as a community mobilizer for an INGO in woman's protection and empowerment. Of all the participants in this research, Moi was one participant who did not participate in the first set of training workshops in coaching and literacy because he was sick. I included him in this research because he has been with the program from the beginning and with support from his colleagues and manager, he managed to embrace concepts and resume his work.

David, a 47-year old male, completed his Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education with a certificate in teaching. He has over 15 years of teaching experience, primarily in Mathematics and Science at the Secondary level. In addition to his experience in formal education, David has several years of experience working for local and international NGOs on health, community development and skills training initiatives.
BeeTee, a 52-year old female, received a Diploma in Business Management and Administration. She obtained both a Teachers Certificate and a Higher Teachers Certificate and taught for 29 years at both upper primary, junior secondary and senior secondary levels. She served as a Head Teacher for three of those years. In addition to her experience working at the school level, BeeTee has significant experience working on education initiatives with INGOS.

Tuba, a 43-year old male, started his career in education by completing a Higher Teacher Level Certificate at Secondary Level in Agricultural Science. He then completed a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education. He taught for a total of 12 years at both the Junior and Senior Secondary levels and served as Head of the Department in Agricultural Science in his last few years before becoming a Learning Coach.

CeCe, a 28-year old female, completed a Bachelor of Arts in Education with a major and teaching certificate in Language Arts and Literature. She has one year of teaching experience in addition to her six-month teaching practicum. Prior to becoming a Learning Coach, CeCe worked with Restless Development as a Marketing and Communications officer.

Godwin, a 32-year old male, completed a Bachelor of Arts in Education and received a teaching certificate in Linguistics and Literature. He has two years of teaching experience at the Senior Secondary level. In education to his work in education, Godwin has significant experience working in journalism, broadcasting and communication.

Gadiru, a 45-year old male, completed a Higher Teacher's Certificate for teaching at the Secondary Level from Bo Teachers College. He has over 15 years of teaching experience at various levels including upper primary, JSS level, and SSS level.
Gadiru also has served at a senior teacher status and as an examiner for the WAEC for the BECE exam. In addition to his experiences in the formal education system, Gadiru has experience working on for a German NGO on a skills training project for ex-combatants.

Organizing the Study

Before collecting data, I submitted my IRB application for approval with the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and established a Memorandum of Understanding with each of the organizations. Once both were approved by June 2015, I conducted an exploratory field visit in July 2015 to the IRC Kenema office. The purpose of this trip was two-fold: 1) to informally gauge where Learning Coaches were since the Ebola outbreak; and 2) to share the change in my role with the Consortium, from an employee with IRC providing technical support to RaISES, to the role of academic researcher to fulfill the requirements for my degree. I did not use the information collected from this field visit directly in the research, but compiled it as part of project documents and submitted it to the EdCo Consortium Coordinator as part of a field trip report in preparation for their next training.

When I met with each Learning Coach from IRC Kenema District, I shared an outline of my study and explained why I was doing it, who the information would be for, and what their role and level of engagement would be if they agreed to participate. I also collected a tentative list and contacts of Learning Coaches from IRC Kenema District who were potentially interested in participating in the study. From this meeting, I was able to understand what Learning Coaches had been doing throughout the Ebola outbreak, the frame of mind Learning Coaches were in returning to their jobs, and the
extent to which the Ebola outbreak had affected their communities. In this informational visit, I learned that Learning Coaches did not expect major challenges specific to the Ebola outbreak upon returning to their communities and schools, other than children’s loss of learning during the one-year postponement. All but one Learning Coach felt that their villages were not significantly affected; the Learning Coaches would be able to return to their normal role of supporting teachers. Thus, I felt more comfortable proceeding with my research, knowing that my research with coaches would not exacerbate distress and discomfort or cause them to relive experiences that were traumatic for them.

A few months after this informational visit, I met again with potential Learning Coach participants when they were all together attending one of the RaISES training. This time I met with the same five Learning Coaches I met with early from IRC as well as an additional five Learning Coaches from Concern Worldwide. In this meeting, I introduced the 10 potential participants to the purposes of the research and the changes. I emphasized that their participation was voluntary and their identities would remain anonymous. All 10 Learning Coaches that I spoke with expressed interest in participating in the research. However, halfway through data collection, one participant fell ill and was no longer able to participate in the study.

During the first phase of data collection, I met again with Learning Coaches and reviewed the purposes of the research, the kinds of questions I would ask, and the participants' rights as participants in the study as discussed in the informed consent. I gave each coach a copy of informed consent forms to take home and review and sign. I also gave them demographic forms to fill out and bring to the interview. At the start of
each interview, I officially collected the signed informed consent and demographic forms from each individual.

**Data Collection**

**Data Collection and Analysis Schedule**

I began the first official round of data collection in the first two weeks of November 2015. This allowed me five days with each organization and the remaining were travel and workdays. I conducted the first round of data collection after Learning Coaches had officially resumed their roles as Learning Coaches for the first time since before the Ebola outbreak. The nationwide training on the accelerated learning syllabus was just rolled out to all the schools, and Learning Coaches had just completed their second "Effective Coaches" training workshop and getting ready for their second “Foundations of Literacy” workshop. I conducted the second round of data collection in April 2016 following the same two-week schedule. The second data collection phase was after Learning Coaches had completed their second literacy training, rolled out the second literacy training to teachers and had a few months of coaching in schools. After each round of data collection, I transcribed interviews, read through interviews, uploaded interviews into Nvivo, and conducted preliminary coding and analysis. Included in Table 4 is a summary of the events during data collection and analysis.
Table 4: Data Collection and Analysis Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Date Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RaISES Effective Coaching Workshop- #2</td>
<td>Oct 12-18, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st round of interviews and school visits (5 days with each organization plus travel days).</td>
<td>Nov 1-15, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription of First Round of Interviews</td>
<td>Nov 16-Dec 20, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RaISES Literacy Training- #2</td>
<td>Nov 23-27, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading interview transcripts, preliminary coding and analysis of 1st interviews using NVivo, documentation review, and preparation for second round of data collection</td>
<td>Jan 19-April 16, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd round of interviews and school visits (5 days with each organization plus travel days)</td>
<td>April 17- May 1, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription of Second Round of Interviews and uploading all files into Nvivo</td>
<td>May 9- June 11, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading interview transcripts, documentation and review, continued coding and analysis</td>
<td>June 5- Aug 12, 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection Methods**

Case study designs are more effective with multiple-sources of data (Yin, 2003), because multiple perspectives allow for better triangulation and corroboration of data. For these reasons, I used a combination of qualitative research techniques including: semi-structured open-ended interviews, field visits and observations, and document review.

**Semi-structured, Open-ended Interviews**

I used semi-structured, open-ended interviews with nine Learning Coaches and two RaISES managers as my primary source of data. I chose this type of interview to allow for more in-depth conversation while also ensuring that the interview and questions aligned with the conceptual framework. The purpose of this interview was to collect data about how Learning Coaches viewed their roles and responsibilities, the challenges they encounters.
had anticipated or experienced or returning to their roles post-Ebola period, and the skills and dispositions they felt were important to be effective in their jobs. The specific questions I developed for interviews were informed by questions used in similar research in developing contexts concerning coaching roles and responsibilities, coaching experiences enacting their roles, and influential factors (e.g. Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). Examples of the interview questions include: How would you describe your role and responsibilities as a Learning Coach? What do you feel coaches need to know and be able to do to be effective? How confident do you feel enacting your role? How would you describe your experiences enacting your roles and responsibilities so far?

After the first round of interviews, I decided to use Goo’s adaptation of Valsiner’s Zone Theory as a conceptual framework to inform and guide the remainder of the research process. So the purpose of the second round of interviews was to continue to learn more of their experiences as well as address any gaps of information needed to use zone theory as an analytical lens.

By this time, Learning Coaches had already participated in the second literacy training, and facilitated the training with teachers and had been providing several months of sustained support to teachers. Similar to the methodology of Goos (2013), I asked questions according to the normative categories from each zone. For the Zone of Proximal Development, I asked Learning Coaches to share their previous experiences learning to read in school and their current beliefs about teaching, learning and coaching. I also asked Learning Coaches to elaborate on their perceived current roles and responsibilities as well as the skills and qualifications they felt Learning Coaches needed
to be effective. To understand the experiences of Learning Coaches’ promoting coaching actions in their Zone of Free Movement (ZFM/ZPA Complex), I asked Learning Coaches to share their experiences coaching in their schools since my last visit with them in November. Examples of such questions included: What have you been doing in the schools as a coach? How do you feel about the work you are doing? What has helped you? What has been challenging for you? What has been a barrier to your coaching?

On the last day of the second data collection phase with each organization, I met with all the participants as a group for about two hours. This meeting was voluntary, but all participants attended from each of the organizations except for one who was not able to come into the field office that day because of other commitment in their school community. I used this time as an opportunity to explain some of the preliminary findings arising out of the interviews and to verify and confirm data with them. These meetings were informal and addressed areas where I needed clarification or elaboration on specific concepts that had arisen across interviews with different Learning Coaches.

I also interviewed two RaISES program supervisors, one supervisor from each organization. I interviewed each of them once as a means of corroborating the data I collected from Learning Coaches (Yin, 2003). I posed similar questions to Program Managers as I had to Learning Coaches, but adapted questions to be more relevant to their job and roles as supervisors. For example, I asked them to tell me more about the recruitment of Learning Coaches and the criteria they were looking for in a coach. Other questions included: What did they perceive as the Learning Coaches’ roles and responsibilities? What qualities and characteristics did they feel Learning Coaches
needed to be effective? What did they perceive as the biggest challenges and supports to coaching?

I audio-recorded all interviews and focus groups using both an iPhone recorder and a small handheld Olympus recorder for back-up. After each interview, I took notes on my impressions of the interviews and wrote down any emerging themes arising from each of the individuals. I also jotted questions I needed for further clarification. I recorded these notes and questions on a template entitled "Interview Notes", which included space for me to write in the Date, Time, Description of Activity, Emerging themes, Reflections and Follow-up Questions.

Field Visits and Observations

For each data collection visit, I had hoped to visit at least one school per coach. However, due to travel distances, school schedules and other time constraints, this was not possible to visit schools for all the coaches. In total, I was only able to visit one school of eight out of the nine Learning Coaches- six schools in first data collection phase, and two in the second data collection phase. Out of all the participants in the study, I was unable able to visit one of BeeTee’s schools. Because of the travel distances between the field office and the schools of every coach, visits to schools were short. On average, I spent about 30 minutes to an hour in each of the eight schools I visited.

School visits were intended to help me understand the changed context and educational climate in which particular Learning Coaches were working, particularly in post-Ebola recovery, because I had not been to the schools since the Ebola outbreak started. For my visits, I accompanied Learning Coaches who had something to do at one of their schools so I was flexible in my expectation of what I might be able to observe. In
some cases, Learning Coaches were going to schools to observe teachers and provide feedback. In these situations, I intentionally did not observe them conducting formal coaching sessions with the teachers. Due to my previous role with RaISES, I felt that observing the coaching process might interfere with the relationship between the Learning Coach and teachers. I also did not feel it would provide me with an authentic picture of their normal relations between each other. I did try to meet informally with the Head Teachers and a few teachers in each school to informally discuss the purpose of my visit. I also tried to observe a class when and if classes were in session, but this was not possible in all cases and depended on the time of day we arrived in the schools. On some visits, I simply walked around the school compound if the coach was involved in some other activity. I encountered different activities depending on the coach, the stage of their work in the school, and school schedules. During my first week of data collection with Concern Worldwide coaches, for example, Learning Coaches were not based in their school communities for that week. Instead, they came into the field office to participate in a 1-day Annual Learning Review after we finished all interviews. Therefore, after I completed all the interviews in the first two days at the field office, I was able to take one day to visit schools of Learning Coaches based in the Chiefdom close to the field office. In the remaining time, I was able to attend the Annual Learning Meeting where all the Learning Coaches and Education Officers came together to review their progress and discuss the challenges and lessons learned in the RaISES project.

For all school visits, I used a simple School Visit Observation protocol to record my observations of students, teachers, the school environment, classroom context, and coaches’ natural interactions with the Head Teacher or teachers in the school
environment. When observing classes, I used this protocol to capture key notes, concerns, or follow-up questions, but I also referred often to the Learning Coaches’ own classroom observation tool, referred to as the Fidelity Tool. I wrote down notes of classroom observations in my field journal.

**Document Review**

As Stake (1995) suggests, "Documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly" (p. 68). I reviewed project documentation to compile data about the context, the program, and the Learning Coaches' experiences. This document review included a review of quarterly reports, donor narrative reports, minutes of staff meetings with managers and Learning Coaches, teacher professional development competencies, the coaching competency framework, coaching logs, and training and resource materials for Learning Coaches and teachers. I also reviewed relevant Ministry-level documents that provided insight into the government's plans for education and its priorities for teachers’ support and development. By reviewing these documents, I gained a greater understanding of the larger context, helping me to corroborate the interview data collected from Learning Coaches about their preparation and training, roles and responsibilities, activities, and experiences. Document review was particularly important for answering the research sub-question about professional development opportunities that the program offered, as well as the promoted actions Learning Coaches were expected to do in their work.
Data Management and Storage

During the first meeting with participants, I asked each participant to give me another pseudonym that I could use instead of his/her real name for the duration of the study. I then used these names consistently for all written, typed and printed data. I uploaded all audio and transcribed interviews as well as any other data into NVivo and archived in a folder on a password-protected computer. I regularly backed up files and saved them on two Passport hard-drives in case of computer failure, theft, loss, or damage. I kept all hard copies of data and hard drives in a locked trunk in my home office in Freetown.

Data Analysis

In line with Rallis and Rossman's (2003) recommendations, I analyzed the data on an “on-going” basis over 12 months, beginning with the first round of data collection and continuing until the writing phase (p.272). After each round of data collection, I followed a process similar to Creswell’s (2009) steps for data analysis, shown in Figure 6 below. However, given that analysis was an on-going and iterative process, starting over with each round of data collection, my data analysis was not sequential. These steps best describe the process I followed but was constantly repeating itself after each round of data.
After each round of data collection, I transcribed every interview line by line into Microsoft Word using Express Transcribe Software. For the first round of interviews, I transcribed interviews with 10 Learning Coaches and one Program Manager. For the second round of interviews, I transcribed interviews with the nine remaining Learning Coaches and one of the two Program Managers. Due to time constraints, I was not able to transcribe all focus groups that I conducted in the last round of data collection, but I listened and took detailed notes on the focus groups for details. In total, I transcribed over 28 audio hours of two rounds of interviews for each participant. In reflecting on this process, I underestimated the amount of time it would take to transcribe the data. However, I wanted to transcribe the interviews myself rather than hire a transcriber, since I was familiar with the voice intonations of the participants' spoken English. In the end,
while it took longer, I was grateful for the process, as it allowed me to become more familiar with the data and repeated phrases that reflected more of the emic voices of the participants.

**Read through all the Data**

After each round of data collection and transcription, I printed a copy of each transcribed interview and read through all interviews one time taking notes as I read. I was not coding yet but rather immersing myself in the data and becoming familiar with it. I used colored pens to separate sections of each interview according to categories of information I had focused on in my interviews. For example, when Learning Coaches talked about how they perceived their roles and responsibilities, I underlined their responses in red; when Learning Coaches talked about the activities they actually performed, I underlined these in orange. Though I did not do line-by-line coding at this point, I did keep notes in the margins when important codes or sub-categories emerged. For example, in sections of data where Learning Coaches discussed their roles and responsibilities, I sub-categorized those in terms of emerging categories such as "work with teachers" or "work with Head Teachers", etc.

As I read the data, I also made several notes of emerging topics and categories. For common categories and themes that emerged, I wrote several short "memos", a practice that Rossman and Rallis (2003) recommend:

> Whether analysis is ongoing or focused toward the end of data gathering, composing short memos (either to yourself, your advisor, a critical friend, your community of practice, or a scholarly audience) about emergent insights, potential themes, methodological questions, and links between themes and theoretical notions is invaluable (p.291).
I also recorded my activities and progress each day in a notebook, which helped me to track my activities each month as well as my thought processes at different points during the research. This tracking helped me see trends in reflections about research questions or key issues I continued to confront using my framework.

**Begin Detailed Analysis with a Coding Process**

After two or three readings of the first set of interviews, underlining and taking notes in the margins, and writing any memos with potential themes and questions, I uploaded demographic data, field notes, organizational documents, memos, and interviews to Nvivo Software for coding. Though Nvivo is not used for analyzing data, Nvivo proved important for organizing and coding data by key categories and themes for easy retrieval and review.

When I started coding the first round of interviews in Nvivo, I created "parent nodes" in NVivo with pre-established codes influenced by the key concepts identified in the literature and included in my initial conceptual framework. These pre-established codes or categories included coaching roles and responsibilities, coaching knowledge, skills and dispositions, coaching activities, and factors that influence effective coaching.

As I was coding data into these categories, I also maintained an interpretive stance and looked for emerging categories not initially the focus of the interviews. Examples of emerging themes included Learning Coaches’ beliefs as well as their personal growth and learning and included themes such as "coaching is a new concept", "learning on the job", "increased confidence", and "learning to work with adults". As I got further into the process of coding my first round of interviews and more heavily grounded in the literature, I realized coaches “learning and growth” was emerging as a significant theme.
in my data that I had not anticipated. This area of inquiry was also identified in the coaching literature as a significant gap both in Western and developing contexts (e.g. Galluci et al. 2010). Given my ultimate interest in understanding how to prepare and support coaches, I decided to refine my focus on coaches’ experiences to also include their learning experiences. However, as I began to read through and analyze my initial data from my first round of interviews I found that my initial simple framework wasn’t rich enough to capture and analyze both the Learning Coaches’ learning as well as the environment in which they were working and its influence on their coaching experiences.

Therefore, before the second round of data collection, I chose to use and adaptation of Valsiner's Zone Theory as a framework to explore the professional learning and experiences of Learning Coaches. I felt Valsiner's Zone Theory would be a more appropriate lens to explore and analyze the professional learning and growth as part of Learning Coaches’ experiences.

**Use Conceptual Framework in Data Analysis**

The overall purpose of using Valsiner's framework for data analysis at this stage was to have a conceptual framework to organize both pre-established categories and emerging categories, so that I could identify information gaps that I needed to gather in the second round of data collection. At this point, I also hoped the framework would serve as an organizing tool to provide a narrative description of the case and an analytical tool to visualize and understand the relationships and linkages between the zones, as Learning Coaches interacted in their professional work environments. The analysis of these elements would help me to understand the experiences and development of Learning Coaches in order to answer the main research question and discuss implications.
for practice, policy and research around preparing and supporting Learning Coaches in the future.

Choosing to use the Zone Theory as a framework required reorganizing and moving all initial parent nodes, or categories that I had established in Nvivo using the initial framework into one of three new parent nodes aligned with one of Valsiner's three zones: Zone of Proximal Development, Zone of Free Movement, and Zone of Promoted Actions.

In the Zone of Proximal Development Parent Node, I included any data related to Learning Coaches’ previous and most recent experiences, beliefs, knowledge and/or skills regarding teaching, learning and, in particular, coaching. This included their beliefs about their roles and responsibilities and the characteristics they felt were critical to being an effective coach. Since the ZPD is a constantly evolving zone, I also included any coded data where Learning Coaches commented on their professional learning and growth as a coach since participating in the program (Emerging ZPD).

The Zone of Promoted Actions covered the professional development opportunities offered to Learning Coaches through the program and the coaching actions promoted by the program. Since I knew about the professional development opportunities offered by the program and the promoted actions, and these activities were also documented in organizational documents, I did not ask Learning Coaches in interviews specifically what professional development in which they had participated. For the Zone of Promoted Actions parent node in Nvivo, I only included information from interviews where Learning Coaches mentioned an aspect of professional development and how they felt about it or experienced it. This would provide information as to what elements of the
professional development offered to Learning Coaches were useful for them in terms of fulfilling their roles as a coach.

The Zone of Free Movement parent node included coded data relevant to the constraints in the professional context. Like Goos’ (2013) and Bennison's (2015) data analysis strategy, I organized data into sub-categories similar to the characteristics Goos (2009) had suggested for a teacher educators' professional context but aligned with potential constraints in a coach’s professional context reported in the literature. These included teacher resistance, limited leadership and support, and limited contact time with teachers, school learning environments, organizational/project-related factors, and external context. Within each of these categories, I sub-coded constraints into how they negatively influenced coaching efforts.

The ZFM/ZPA Complex represents the interplay between the zones when Learning Coaches actually try to promote the actions in their professional context and meet either a constraint or affordance. In this parent node, I included coded data where Learning Coaches discussed activities they conducted in their environment and the interactions they had with people and resources in their "professional context”.

Table 5 below provides a summary table of the zones and their related factor as described in the literature. Refer to Table 3 in Chapter Three for the full table conceptual framework that links directly with findings from the literature review.
Table 5: Summary table of zones and corresponding factors for inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valsiner's Zones</th>
<th>Categories of Influential Factors relevant to coaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Zone of Proximal Development | • Previous teaching experience  
• Previous knowledge, skills and experience  
• Pedagogical content knowledge  
• Coaching process  
• Adult learning  
• Beliefs about literacy, teaching, and learning,  
• Understanding of roles and responsibilities  
• Skills coaches feel are important |
| Zone of Promoted Actions   | • Professional development content and promoted actions  
• Preparation and support of Coaches |
| Zone of Free Movement      | Constraints in the Professional Context  
• Perceptions of teachers’ characteristics  
• School leadership  
• School physical environment  
• School curriculum and assessment  
• Community perception of education  
• Road infrastructure  
• Organizational/programmatic factors |
| ZFM/ZPA Complex           | • Promoted actions that were allowed  
• Perceived available supports |
| Emerging ZPD              | • Shifts in learning  
• Supports to Learning  
• Professional learning needs |

Using an adaptation of Valsiner's Zone Theory, combined with conceptual categories that emerged from a review of the literature, as an analytical lens for my research required me to narrow my analysis to predetermined categories of data about coaching background, beliefs and knowledge, coaching actions/interactions in practice, and constraints and affordances in their professional context. Aware that these already prescribed categories might limit the inductive nature I desire for analyses, I also looked
for emerging categories reflective of the participants' language and their "emic view"

(Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.282):

All studies are shaped and therefore guided by the conceptual framework and its embedded theories, but the degree to which you confine yourself to the frame varies. Most studies are more or less open-ended or pre-figured; few are all one way or the others. Remember that the process of qualitative inquiry is an interweaving of inductive and deductive thinking. All researchers enter the field with a perspective. This perspective is usually articulated in the conceptual framework. Theories that inform this framework offer focus, questions, and potential categories and themes. At the same time, qualitative researchers remain open to the unexpected and let the analytic direction of the study emerge (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.274).

**Generate Description and Themes**

After I mapped all the categories of Nvivo into one of Valsiner's three zones, I created a matrix in an Excel document and organized rows by zones. Each column contained information about one of the participants. For example, the Zone of Proximal Development included the following categories: background, beliefs, understanding roles and responsibilities, knowledge and skills Learning Coaches perceive to be important to coaching, and Learning Coaches’ learning and growth. I combed through Nvivo, read each of the sub-categories in each of the zones, and recorded notes for each individual in the matrix where appropriate.

For example, I titled the first row as Background. There were 10 columns, labeled for each participant, and I filled the first row cells with information related to their backgrounds. The next row was about beliefs about teaching and learning, and I filled in all of the participant cells in that row with Learning Coaches’ references to their beliefs. In this way, I became more familiar with the data and able to look across individuals in each category to discover common themes.
Since the information was comprehensive for each individual, and this was a single case intrinsic study and not intended to be a multiple cross-case analysis, I did not write a full case analysis and narrative for each individual. I did, however, read through each of the Learning Coaches’ transcripts and recorded information across the zones. I also generated a brief profile of each of the participants, which focused mostly on their background and experience before coming into the program. I felt this allowed the reader to get a sense of the individual’s initial ZPD.

I then created a second Excel document where I set up columns that encapsulated all of the sub-categories of data: 1) Zone of Proximal Development, 2) Zone of Promoted Actions that influence to ZPD, 3) Zone of Promoted Actions, 4) ZFM/ZPA interactions, 5) ZFM/ZPA Supports or Affordances, and 6) ZFM Constraints. In Nvivo, I ran reports for each category and read through each one, taking note of common themes. I looked for both emic and thematic categories arising in each zone and wrote lists and memos on particular thematic categories that emerged from the data. I also printed a node report of the most significant categories of data based on the number of coded segments by the most Learning Coaches.

After coming up with themes across all of the three zones, I then looked across all three zones to see if there were any linkages or commonalities across the zones. For example, in the Zone of Proximal Development, Learning Coaches described building trusting relationships as a core belief about coaching; this was also a Promoted Action offered by the program, which Learning Coaches also reported as their biggest success in the Zone of Free Movement. This suggested that Learning Coaches believed what the program promoted and were able to promote that action in their professional context. For
each of the columns on the Excel document, I wrote common themes that participants had discussed for each of the zones and the interplays across the zones. In a second row labeled “Possibilities”, I wrote any information for the zone that might be considered for modifying the program to better prepare and support Learning Coaches. For example, in the Zone of Proximal Development, after reading through the themes or key findings per zone, I then included a column of implications for better supporting their learning. For example, Learning Coaches need more support in beginning to use the fidelity tool.

Represent the Description and Themes in the Narrative

The research design, methods of data collection and analysis provided rich data to answer each sub-question and provide a set of findings that helped me develop a narrative of the case I was exploring. I organized the narrative by first introducing each participant as individuals and then presented a collective case of the cohort of Learning Coaches with descriptive findings (or narrative description) (Stake, 1995, p.123) organized according to the sub-research questions and corresponding zones from the conceptual framework.

Interpret the Larger Meaning from the Description and Themes

Based on the findings from each of the sub-research questions which represented the perspectives of the Learning Coaches, I examined each of the coaching competencies that the program expected coaches to do and explored Learning Coaches’ experiences relative to each competency to better understand the interplay across the three zones and answer the overall research question. I then make conclusions regarding coaches’ professional learning, growth and needs. This interpretation allowed me to identify
possibilities for strengthening the RaISES professional development tailored for coaches to better align with their potential for development (Goos 2013, p.523).

**Ensure Validity and Accuracy**

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative validity is when "the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (p. 190). To ensure validity and accuracy to this research, I followed a few key strategies, including triangulation, member checks, reflexivity, and use of thick description (Creswell, 2009, p.192). Additionally, my prolonged time living in Sierra Leone, working with Learning Coaches as part of the RaISES initiative, and my time spent observing teachers and schools for the last six years in Sierra Leone helps ensure more validity and provide credibility to my research (Creswell, 2009, p 192).

**Triangulation**

For this research, I used one of Denzin’s (1984) protocols referred to as "methodological triangulation" (found in Stake, 1995, p.114). Stake (1995) refers to methodological triangulation as "multiple approaches within a single study" (p. 114) and emphasizes that, in case studies specifically, these methods include "observation, interview, and document review" (p.114).

Though semi-structured open-ended interviews were the primary source of data for this study, I used a variety of other data sources, including field observations and document review, to help corroborate findings from the data. For example, when Learning Coaches discussed their activities, I checked that these activities were evident in their coaching activity logs as well. I paid attention to any inconsistencies between
programmatic reports and Learning Coaches’ reports about activities they conducted, challenges confronted, and information about the context.

**Member Checks**

At the end of each data collection, I met with groups of Learning Coaches from each organization all together to share preliminary findings and emerging themes that were arising from the week of interviews. This provided me the opportunity to ask clarifying questions where there was lack of consistency amongst Learning Coaches when describing. After returning from the field at the end of each data collection and transcribing all the interviews, I either emailed, hand-delivered, or sent copies of the transcribed interviews to each of the participants, asking for them to read over and come back to me with any questions or concerns. Only one participant requested changes to his interview and these changes clarified a few points. I shared a copy of the final draft with individuals for review. However, at the time of completion, the program had been closed for over a year and many Learning Coaches had changed jobs and were in different locations. I was unable to make successful contact with all of the participants. Of the ones who confirmed receipt of their copies, only one came back to me with feedback.

**Reflexivity**

According to Rossman and Rallis, a good qualitative researcher needs to be self-aware of the influence his/her own role or presence has on the research itself. The researcher must be aware of his or her own "etic" perspective so as to "distinguish his (or her) sense-making from the sense-making of those he (or she) is studying" (2003, p.48). The researcher's reflection on this relationship is what is referred to as "reflexivity"
(2003, p.49). When qualitative researchers are aware of how their presence influences the research, the study ensures more "reliability and validity" (Delamont, 1992, p.8. as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 51). This is why I have included a section earlier in this chapter about my own personal biography and positionality in the study. I endeavored to maintain that sense of reflection throughout the entire study and during my interactions with participants, as well as in my interpretations of what they have shared.

**Rich, Thick Description**

Another strategy I used to ensure validity and creditability was the use of "thick rich description" throughout the narrative of this research. By providing descriptive details and interweaving them with direct quotes from the participants, I provide the reader with a more trustworthy, accurate account of the Learning Coaches' perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2009, p.192).

**Limitations of the Research Design**

The findings of my study were limited to the perspectives and experiences of a small sample of nine Learning Coaches working on the RaISES whole school improvement initiative in Sierra Leone. When I first designed this study prior to Ebola, I intended to include the perspectives of teachers and Head Teachers in addition to Learning Coaches to have a more comprehensive understanding of the work of Learning Coaches and their potential to influence teacher change in Sierra Leone. However, because of disruption to programming due to the Ebola outbreak, I redesigned the focus of my research to include only RaISES Learning Coaches given the uncertainty at the time of how school communities, Head Teachers and teachers might have been affected.
by the Ebola outbreak. Additionally, I deliberately did not observe coaching in action as I
did not want my presence to disrupt Learning Coaches’ work and relationships with
teachers. Because of unexpected school closures due to exam rescheduling and national
census at the time of data collection, I was not able to observe normal working days of
Learning Coaches or observe samples of teachers of each coach. Because of these
limitations, I cannot conclude that Learning Coaches’ perspective reflected the accurate
picture of the quality and extent of coaching in action. Furthermore, given the limited
scope, sample and focus in a very specific and unique context, these findings cannot be
generalized to all low-income, Sub-Saharan African countries.
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of RaISES Learning Coaches regarding their experiences and learning supporting primary-level school teachers in an early grade reading/whole school development initiative implemented in a poorly resourced, low-income context. The central research question I sought to answer was: What do the self-reported beliefs and experiences of a cohort of RaISES Learning Coaches supporting primary school teachers in Sierra Leone reveal about their professional learning and growth and what implications does this have for improving preparation and support for coaches? Using a re-interpretation of Valsiner's zone theory as the conceptual framework, I developed the following sub-questions to frame the study:

1. What coaching actions did the RaISES program promote, and how did the program prepare and support Learning Coaches to apply those actions? (ZPA)

2. How do Learning Coaches describe their knowledge, skills and beliefs about teaching, learning, and coaching? (ZPD)

3. How do Learning Coaches perceive aspects of their professional context that constrain their abilities to enact their roles? (ZFM)

4. How do Learning Coaches describe what actions they were able to promote in the face of constraints and what supports in the professional context allowed this to happen? (ZFM/ZPA Complex)

5. How do Learning Coaches perceive their professional learning and growth as they moved through the zones? (Emerging ZPD as result of ZFM/ZPA Complex)
Using an intrinsic case study design, I explored Learning Coaches’ perspectives of their knowledge, skills, and beliefs about coaching and the roles, responsibilities and requirements needed to be an effective coach. Furthermore, I sought to understand the perspectives of Learning Coaches on their professional learning and experiences supporting teachers in an early grade initiative in the context of Sierra Leone, a nation impacted by failed post-war construction efforts and more recently burdened by a complex health epidemic (Ebola). Amongst a cohort of 50 possible RaISES Learning Coaches working on a specific early grade reading initiative, I used convenience sampling to invite 10 RaISES Learning Coaches from two different partner organizations. Findings from this research provide insight into how programs might better prepare and support coaches in Sierra Leone, working on a similar initiative, to work more effectively in their professional contexts to effect change in teachers’ instructional practice.

In this chapter, I use an adaptation of Valsiner's Zone Theory as a framework for organizing findings in the form of a case narrative and an analytical lens for exploring their experiences and learning. The first section includes findings relevant to the Zone of Promoted Actions. The second section includes findings relevant to the Zone of Proximal Development. The third section includes information relevant to the Zone of Free Movement. The fourth section includes information related to the ZFM/ZPA Complex. In the final section, I discuss findings that reflect RaISES Learning Coaches’ perspectives on their own professional learning and growth as a result of their interactions between all of the zones.


**Zone of Promoted Actions**

Sub-research question #1: What coaching actions did the program promote, and how did the program prepare and support Learning Coaches to apply those actions? (ZPA)

The Zone of Promoted Actions includes the coaching actions promoted by the program and the professional development opportunities that were offered to the Learning Coaches to help them be able to effectively promote specific coaching actions in their assigned school. Given my role in the design and preparation and support to Learning Coaches, I did not ask Learning Coaches their perspectives on what was offered to them. Instead, I answered this question by conducting a document review of internal program documentation and donor reports. This included coaching manuals and resources, scope and sequences for training, training reports, donor reports, etc. I also drew from my own personal experience where some things were not been fully documented. For this section, I specifically report information regarding the expected role and responsibilities of RaISES Learning Coaches, the overall coaching framework and process, and what professional learning opportunities and support were offered to the Learning Coaches throughout the program. For information where Learning Coaches state something about their professional learning opportunities and growth, I report this in a later section where I discuss the ZFM/ZPA Complex.

**Expected Role and Responsibilities of RaISES Learning Coaches**

**Overview**

Each Learning Coach worked in nine schools (six primary and three junior secondary schools). Due to far distances of schools from their organization’s field offices,
the program provided each Learning Coach with a motorbike and posted each coach in a nearby community to the schools they supported to allow for easier travel each day to their schools. The overall role of Learning Coaches was to support the on-going professional learning and growth of both teachers and Head Teachers towards their proficiency in their respective teacher professional development competencies. However, Learning Coaches primary coaching role was to provide on-going support to teachers:

Specifically, they will work with teachers to identify learning goals and assess progress towards competencies through varied approaches such as lesson observations, checklists, and self-assessments against competencies. The coaches will team teach with the teachers and model lessons (during instructional time) to support the teachers’ implementation of new methods (EdCo, 2013, p. 25)

The RaISES initiative followed a three-pronged professional development model approach to working with teachers and Head Teachers and initially planned for three 5-day face-to-face training workshops, monthly coaching, and communities of practices through learning circles and cluster reviews. Overall, Learning Coaches were responsible for the following:

1. Train Class 1-6 teachers in Core Competencies (15 days)
2. Coach 18 teachers, grades one to three, in Core Competencies (Monthly)
3. Establish and co-facilitate Teacher Learning Circles at each school using a TLC teacher guidebook.
4. In collaboration with Education officers, support nine Head Teachers in Primary and JSS levels in OTL targets indicators for school improvement.
5. Collaborate with DEO and Education Officers to lead quarterly Cluster Peer Review Meetings.
Teacher Professional Development and Support

For the training component, RaISES paired each Learning Coach with a Lecturer from Teacher Training Colleges who had been previously trained in reading and writing instruction through another program. Lecturers with support from Learning Coaches were responsible for facilitating three, 5-day face-to-face professional development training workshops for an average of 36 Class 1-6 teachers. However, after the first training, RaISES decided to not use the Lecturers and instead paired two Learning Coaches together to facilitate the second training. The exact rationale for this adjustment is unclear but presumably was due to budget constraints that became an issue when the program resumed after the Ebola outbreak. Some Learning Coaches also alluded to the fact many Lecturers were not as effective at facilitation as hoped and perhaps the program felt that the Learning Coaches could do the training on their own.

For the coaching component, RaISES expected Learning Coaches to provide ongoing coaching support to Class 1-3 teachers (approximately 18 teachers per coach). They were to work with teachers to: “a) identify teacher strengths and areas of improvement in teaching literacy, b) set learning goals based on areas of improvement, and c) support teachers as they improve their practices” (EdCo, 2013, p.2). RaISES promoted the coaching approach and the work of the coach as a:

“…collaborative and transparent process that promotes learning and shared accountability among the teacher and the coach. It is based on an improvement model; that is, the work of the coach is to support teachers as they improve their ability to help each student learn” (EdCo, 2013, p.5).

With each teacher, Learning Coaches were expected to follow a 4-stage coaching cycle at least once per month. The four stages as shown in Figure 7 below included a pre-
classroom visit conference, a classroom visit, analysis and strategy, and post-classroom visit conference.

As the EdCo Framework for Learning Coaches indicates:

“Each stage is interconnected encouraging collaboration, reflective practice, the use of useful data, and problem solving. And although systematic, the coaching process requires flexibility as coaches tailor their professional conversations to the needs of each teacher that they coach” (EdCo, 2013, p.5)

The **Pre-Classroom Visit Conference** was the first step of the process and was between the Learning Coach and the teacher. The purpose of this stage was to continue building rapport and establishing trust with the teacher and discuss the next classroom observation and what the focus would be based on what the teacher felt they wanted to improve. The **Classroom Visit** would take place shortly after the pre-class visit and involved the Learning Coach observing a teacher conducting a lesson. During the classroom visits, Learning Coaches would use a fidelity tool that was directly aligned with the teacher professional development competencies and indicators as a means to document evidence of strategies that Learning Coaches observed that were reflective of good practice. The purpose of the fidelity tool was not to assess teachers on their
performance, but to keep track of strategies that teachers were using in the classroom. This tool also served to guide coaching conversations between the Learning Coaches and the teachers. The **Analysis and Strategy** stage directly followed the classroom observation and involved the Learning Coach reflecting on the lesson and planning a follow-up meeting with the teacher to discuss strengths and improvements and possible strategies they might work on together. Learning Coach planned their conversations based on the evidence collected and recorded on the fidelity tool. The **Post Classroom Visit conference** was the final stage of the coaching cycle and served as the follow-up meeting the coach and teacher have together to reflect on the classroom visit and for the coach to provide some feedback based on what they observed. Together, the Learning Coach and teacher would set goals and possible strategies to prepare for the next classroom visit. Some of the strategies that Learning Coaches might do with teachers could include: co-planning lessons, co-teaching, modeling lessons, and visiting peers.

Learning Coaches were encouraged to conduct the entire coaching cycle with a teacher within one day, two days at the max, so that feedback and reflection was immediate. Learning Coaches were expected to try to conduct a coaching cycle with each of the 18 teachers at least once a month.

In regards to the TLCs, Learning Coaches were expected to establish TLCs in each primary school and lead the initial facilitation of TLCs meetings until teachers were comfortable with leading the TLCs themselves using scripted modules outlined in the TLC workbook.
**Head Teacher Professional Development and Support**

RaISES Learning Coaches were also expected be trained in school leadership and to facilitate three 5-day face-to-face training workshops with Head Teachers from each of the schools in the second or third year of implementation. Similar to their work with teachers, Learning Coaches were expected to eventually support Head Teachers in the development of proficiencies in their own set of professional competencies. They were also responsible for communicating regularly with Head Teachers concerning their work with teachers and their progress. Learning Coaches were responsible for collaborating with Education Officers and conducting a quarterly Cluster Review meeting where Head Teachers could come together and share their experiences, discuss challenges, and develop school improvement plans on meeting the Opportunity to Learn (OTL) targets.

Due to the program changes after the Ebola outbreak, the program had to eliminate the Head Teacher training component from the project and Learning Coaches were only responsible to support teachers in the remaining duration of the project. Therefore, while Learning Coaches supported Head Teachers informally in the first phase of the project; Learning Coaches never participated in a formal training on School Leadership.

**Preparation and Support of Learning Coaches**

**Training Personnel**

The Education Consortium Coordinating Unit (CCU) hired a consultancy team of three specialists to work in collaboration with the IRC Headquarters’ Technical Unit and the in-country Consortium Technical Team to develop and implement a comprehensive
training and materials package for Learning Coaches and teachers. Each of the three specialists held distinct and varied roles within the team but also collaborated with each other to support each other’s efforts. A Literacy Specialist, a reading professor from the United States with significant experience in literacy training here in Sierra Leone, led the development of the literacy materials, training, and resources for both Learning Coaches and teachers. A Literacy and Teacher Professional Development Specialist based in the United States with experience in both literacy and coaching models led the development of the coaching materials and resources for coaching. I, based in Sierra Leone, served as the Teacher Professional Development Specialist and provided support and feedback to the other specialists in the development of both the literacy and coaching materials. Additionally, I led the training of Learning Coaches in “Effective Coaching” and helped co-facilitate and support the “Foundations of Literacy” training workshops led by the literacy specialist. I also developed the RaISES Teacher Learning Circles Workbook for teachers to be aligned with the teacher professional development competencies and trained Learning Coaches on how to help establish TLCs in their schools. Since I was the only consultant based in the country, I conducted field visits to each of the organizations field sites to meet with Learning Coaches to understand how they were doing and provide support where I could.

Content of Coaches’ Training and Support

The content of the professional development of Learning Coaches centered on three competency frameworks that were central to their work as a coach. The first competency framework outlined the eight teacher professional development competencies with relevant indicators. This framework guided the work of Learning
Coaches in their work with teachers specifically. The second competency framework outlined the Head Teacher professional development competencies and served to guide Learning Coaches’ work with Head Teachers to support school improvement. The third competency framework was a set of nine coaching competencies established for Learning Coaches specifically outlining the skills and knowledge Learning Coaches were expected to be proficient in and the dispositions and actions that were expected to be promoted in their role as a Learning Coach. These sets of competencies provided a clear framework for Learning Coaches to better understand what the project expected each coach to know and be able to do well as what the project expected teachers and Head Teachers to be able to know and do. The competencies not only guided the training and workshops, but also Learning Coaches in their own learning and professional growth. For this purpose, for this section, I have included each of the nine coaching competencies that were the coaching actions promoted by the project.

1. Learning Coaches facilitate teacher understanding of the eight teacher professional development competencies concerning the following areas:
   a. lesson preparation
   b. use of varied teaching methods and resources
   c. positive communication
   d. student assessment techniques
   e. classroom management
   f. reading and writing as a lesson and across subject areas
   g. Teachers productively working with colleagues, parents/caretakers, and community members.
h. Teacher willingness to examine and implement change, as appropriate.

2. Learning Coaches demonstrate an understanding of the foundational skills, concepts, and strategies needed for teaching reading and writing. These include print concepts, phonemic and phonological awareness, alphabetical abilities, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing.

3. Learning Coaches understand how adults learn, maintaining a collaborative, supportive, and reflective coaching relationships with teachers, Head Teachers, and the wider school community that is meant to foster school improvement efforts.

4. Learning Coaches apply the coaching cycle (pre-observation, observation, analysis, feedback, and goal setting) to support teachers as they meet or exceed improvement goals.

5. Learning Coaches use a range of data to inform practice and support teachers.

6. Learning Coaches co-plan, co-teach, or model lessons as appropriate

7. Learning Coaches support school leaders as they create school based coaching plans.

8. Learning Coaches demonstrate a willingness to self assess their practice, receive feedback, and model lifelong learning.

9. Learning Coaches manage their responsibilities in supporting teachers in nine schools.

The team of specialists designed the training materials, workshop facilitation, and coaching support with the premise that the Learning Coaches themselves are adult learners and benefit more from having multiple professional learning opportunities that
build on what they already know, are practice-oriented, collaborative, and active, based on real and relevant challenges, and promote reflection. We ensured training activities provided multiple pathways of learning to meet different learning styles and were “interactive and informative, providing Learning Coaches with as much practice with the tools and concepts as possible” (Education Consortium, 2013b, p.10). We introduced Learning Coaches to the adult learning cycle (Figure 8) as the underlying conceptual framework for their professional learning as well as the model they would use to support teacher’s learning.

![Adult Learning Cycle](image)

Figure 8: Adult Learning Cycle (Adapted from Gragg, 2007).

**Orientation**

At project start-up in August 2013, Learning Coaches participated in a three-day orientation. This training, led by the EdCo Coordinator, brought all 50 Learning Coaches from the five organizations together to help prepare Learning Coaches to start work in schools for the first term of the school year 2013/2014. The orientation introduced and provided opportunities for discussion on the following topics: the roles and responsibilities of their work with teachers, Head Teachers, and community structures,
desired dispositions of an effective coach, professional development competencies for teachers and Head Teachers, the OTL framework, and creating school-based plans with teachers and Head Teachers. Given this was the beginning of the project, the CCU also introduced baseline observation tools and provided opportunities for Learning Coaches to practice using these tools for their initial school visits to meet with teachers.

**Face-to-Face Training**

The project initially planned for Learning Coaches to participate in a series of three 10-day workshops within the first year of the project. The training would bring in all 50 Learning Coaches from all five partner agencies and train them together. The overall goal of training for Learning Coaches was to “ensure that Learning Coaches have (had) the necessary knowledge and skills to support teachers as they effectively implement teacher competencies and literacy strategies that will improve the students’ ability to read and write ability” (EdCo, 2013b, p.10). The first week of each set of workshops was designed to focus on knowledge and skills regarding the foundations of literacy and other teacher professional development competencies that they would be supporting teachers to use in their classroom. This would help Learning Coaches build their own pedagogical and content knowledge and skills in the competencies expected of teachers particularly those focused on the foundations of literacy. The foundations of literacy training focused on the following content: print concepts, phonemic and phonological awareness, alphabetical abilities, vocabulary, comprehension and writing. This training would also be the same content and format of training the Learning Coaches would immediately roll-out to the teachers. The second set of trainings would help Learning Coaches grow into their roles as Learning Coaches supporting teachers. This
would include ensuring they understood their roles and responsibilities and how to do them. These trainings were informed by the coaching competency framework that established what Learning Coaches needed to know and do to be an effective coach in this context.

Due to the disruption in the program due to the Ebola outbreak, the entire professional development plan for Learning Coaches did not go as planned and the third set of training workshops for Learning Coaches did not take place. Additionally, training workshops planned for Year 2 and Year 3 on Head Teacher Competencies were also cancelled. This section highlights the professional learning opportunities Learning Coaches participated in up to the time of the study.

**First Workshop Series**

The first face-to-face 10 day training with Learning Coaches was conducted in Bo District in November 2013. EdCo brought in all 50 Learning Coaches and program managers from all seven districts to come together for sharing and learning. The first 5-day session, led by the Literacy Specialist, was the “Foundations of Literacy” training which prepared Learning Coaches to train primary school teachers in teacher professional development competencies focusing on foundational early grade reading and writing skills. Key focus areas for this training included: lesson planning practice and demonstrations, preparing teaching materials, introduction to the foundational literacy concepts and strategies, and positive classroom management and communication in the classroom. The Literacy Specialist facilitated this training in the exact way Learning Coaches would be expected to facilitate the training with teachers. For this reason, 21 master trainers, already experienced in early grade reading, were included in this training
along with new Learning Coaches since they would be co-facilitating the teacher training workshops with the Learning Coaches.

As the Teacher Professional Development Specialist, I led the second 5-day training session which prepared Learning Coaches to start conducting monthly school visits and effectively support teachers in improving their practice. Program managers and coordinators from each organization also attended this training to become knowledgeable of the Learning Coaches’ roles and how to best support them. Key areas of focus for this workshop included: characteristics and competencies of effective coaching, using the fidelity tool and identifying evidence of classroom teaching, analyzing evidence, introduction to the coaching cycle, applying adult learning principles in coaching conversations and relationships, and clarifying coaching roles and responsibilities.

In both workshops, facilitators provided Learning Coaches with many opportunities to learn not only from new knowledge introduced by the facilitators but through collaborating and learning with their peers in their own organizations as well as those from the other partner organizations. For example, in the Literacy Workshop, Learning Coaches observed the modeling of teaching provided by the facilitator and then practiced modeling those same teaching strategies to their peers. This allowed them an opportunity to practice amongst each other before modeling to their assigned teachers. Learning Coaches also practiced preparing and conducting lessons through joint lesson planning and team-teaching as well as preparing teaching and learning materials. In the “Introduction to Effective Coaching” workshop, Learning Coaches participated in pair work, group work activities, and panel discussions where Learning Coaches had to problem solve together or teach each other new concepts or share experiences and reflect
together. They observed demonstration lessons and practiced using coaching tools such as the fidelity tool and the coaching planner and teacher progress log to plan their coaching conversations. Through role play, they practiced coaching conferences based on what they had observed in demonstration lessons and practiced giving feedback to each other.

**Second Workshop Series**

The second 10 day face-to-face training initially was planned for July 2014 but was postponed due to the onset of the Ebola outbreak. Once schools re-opened in September 2015, EdCo re-scheduled the training. Due to scheduling conflicts with the specialists, the 10 day training was split up into two separate workshops and offered at two different times. The first 5-day training session, the Introduction to Effective Coaching Workshop # 2 took place in September 2015 shortly after Learning Coaches were returning to their coaching role in schools. This training aimed to continue preparing Learning Coaches concerning their roles and responsibilities as well as how to support teachers through more advanced skills such as coaching differentiation and supporting Head Teachers. Due to the long unexpected gap since the first training, a large focus of the training was spent reviewing concepts from the first training as addressing some of the challenges they were currently confronting in the field working in schools during the post-Ebola period. Sessions also focused on how to support teachers on the accelerated learning syllabus as well as a one-day orientation on Teacher Learning Circles and the coach’s role in supporting their roll-out.
Consortium Resources and Materials

Prior to each training, the team of technical specialists prepared coaching and teaching resources for both Learning Coaches and teachers to have with them as a learning resource. These materials provided additional content to support both teachers and Learning Coaches to further develop their proficiencies both in and outside of training. These materials were distributed at each of the training workshops for Learning Coaches and included Master Training Guides for roll-out of Foundations of Literacy Training for teachers, Literacy teaching materials for Learning Coaches to use with teachers, Coaching Resource Manuals for Workshops I & II, Coaching Tools and Templates for planning, documentation and record-keeping. A Teacher Learning Circle’s Workbook was also distributed to each of the Learning Coaches that provided additional resources in each of the foundations of literacy.

Monthly Coaching Learning Circles

During training workshops, we encouraged Learning Coaches to extend their learning outside of the training through continued collaboration with their peers through regular coaching learning circles or working with another coach on particular issues. We encouraged managers to allow Learning Coaches to meet together at least once a month by themselves to share their experiences, discuss areas they needed support in from each other, and problem-solve common challenges they were having in their work. We did not make this a requirement but Learning Coaches from each organization ended up establishing a regular forum for Learning Coaches to get together to share their experiences and problem solve together.
**Reflection Journals**

In the first training, we provided Learning Coaches with a blank journal and encouraged them to use it as a tool for further reflection and learning. In the training workshops, we modeled journal reflection by providing daily prompts at the end of each training day to prompt Learning Coaches to reflect on their own learning in the training. As part of their coaching manual, we included a list of reflection prompts they could use in their journal on their own if they wanted. We did not require Learning Coaches to use reflection journals but promoted their use as an important tool for self-learning, one of their nine coaching competencies.

**Self-and Peer Assessments**

We provided Learning Coaches’ self-assessment and peer-assessment tools that Learning Coaches could use voluntarily either individually or with peers to assess their own growth towards proficiency in their own coaching competencies. Learning Coaches were encouraged to regular assess their selves using this coaching peer and self-assessment tool. These tools were intended for Learning Coaches’ use only, not for managers to assess Learning Coaches’ performance and their growth.

**On-going Programmatic and Technical Support**

Outside of formal training and materials offered by RaISES, managers provided any technical support in their daily work as needed. Each organization also had a senior level Education Coordinator or Advisor that could support Learning Coaches for major issues. As part of my role as a consultant with the CCU, I conducted periodic field visits to select partner organizations to specifically work with Learning Coaches on specific
technical components such as the fidelity tool or managing their tool box as well as any major technical issues they were having in fulfilling their roles. On each trip, I documented lessons learned from the trips and shared with the EdCo Coordinator and the other specialists to inform our focus for the next training. Furthermore, the EdCo Coordinator conducted occasional monitoring visits to each of the organizations and was there to provide support to Learning Coaches if needed.

**Zone of Proximal Development (Initial)**

*Sub-research question #2: How did RaISES Learning Coaches in Sierra Leone describe their professional knowledge, skills and beliefs about teaching, learning, and coaching?*

Interview questions related to the zone of proximal development and sub-question # 1 captured the Learning Coaches’ perceptions of their own professional knowledge, skills and beliefs related to coaching, teaching and learning. By gathering this information, I hoped to gain a better and broader understanding of the background and experiences of the cohort of Learning Coaches both prior to coaching and at the time I conducted this research. The interview questions also aimed to capture their perspectives on how Learning Coaches conceptualize and understand their roles and responsibilities as well as the skills and dispositions they feel are important for being an effective coach in the professional context where they are working. In this section, I introduce each of the individual participants with information about their teaching experience and educational background before coming into the program. I follow this with key categories which discuss common themes across Learning Coaches, including their earlier experiences learning in schools, their beliefs about teaching literacy, and their beliefs about their role
as a coach, and the knowledge, skills and dispositions they felt necessary to be an effective coach.

In this section, I first provide demographic information about and a profile of each of the Learning Coaches for the reader to get a sense of the individual Learning Coaches that make up the cohort or case that this study explores. This profile introduces readers to the participants as individuals while also providing insight into the previous knowledge, skills and experiences of the individual Learning Coaches so as to better understand common elements of their emerging ZPD. I follow this with their previous experiences learning to read and perceptions of their beliefs about learning, teaching, and coaching. Coaching beliefs are categorized into the following sections:

1. emerging beliefs about teaching and learning,
2. beliefs about the purpose and value of and their approach to coaching;
3. their coaching role and responsibilities; and
4. their perceptions of the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be an effective coach.

Recognizing that the ZPD is constantly changing and emerging and varies across individuals, I organize data of all Learning Coaches in this section to provide a brief snapshot of this cohort of Learning Coaches’ common background and previous experience coming into the program. As Goos states, "studying the ZPD is difficult because it involves aspects of development that are currently emerging" (Goos, 2013, p.525). For this reason, this section does not include all aspects of the Learning Coaches’ collective ZPD. I will discuss other aspects of growth that occurred during the program in
later sections that illustrate Learning Coaches’ perceived shifts in growth and learning as a result of their interactions in their environment.

Profiles of Learning Coaches

Since this case study focused specifically on individual coaches, a short profile of each coach’s’ previous skills, knowledge and experiences coming into the program will help the reader get a picture of who these Learning Coaches are before considering their perspectives on coaching.

Osborne is a 55-year old male supporting nine schools in both Small Bo Chiefdom and Nongowa Chiefdom in Kenema District. He completed a Bachelor’s degree in Education and received the Higher Teacher Certificate Secondary early on in his career. Later, he obtained a certificate in Educational Administration for school executives from the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) of the University of Sierra Leone. He also taught for over 29 years of teaching experience mostly at the Upper Primary Level (Class 6) and Junior Secondary Level (JSS 1-3) in Social Studies and Language Arts. Additionally, he worked as a tutor at a vocational training center in Bo where he helped youth who did not advance in formal education with their language, communication, and numeration skills.

Moi, a 45-year old male, grew up in Kono District in the eastern part of Sierra Leone. He completed a Bachelor's degree in Literature and Linguistics and a Diploma in Education from Njala University. He has seven years of experience teaching Literature in English at the Senior Secondary level. After leaving teaching, Moi worked as a Community Mobilizer for the IRC's Woman's Protection and Empowerment Program and later as a Supervisor. Moi became a RaISES Learning Coach in 2013 and worked in rural
schools in three chiefdoms in Kenema District: Lower Bambara, Nongowa, and Malegohun Chiefdoms. Of all the participants in this research, Moi was one participant who was not able to participate in the first set of RaISES training workshops because of a short-term illness. However, I included him in this research because he was recruited at project inception and was part of the original orientation program with Learning Coaches. Though missing the first set of workshops, Moi had a “passion for the job” and relied on support from his colleagues and manager to help him understand the concepts he missed from the training. Moi feels a strong responsibility and commitment towards contributing to his country moving forward and found working in education as a teacher and a coach as an opportunity to do so:

…as long as I am able to overcome the obstacles, I will be in a position to do what I have promised to do. For instance, because I have a love for the job, and as an educationalist, I want to see that my country goes forward. And I will do all in my power to make sure that, whatever I have promised, like the coaching or attending school functions, seeing teachers do what they are supposed to do, I will be there to do it to make sure that the educational system will be in a better position…for if it had not been what I did as a young boy, I would not be in the position I am today. So, seeing those kids coming up, it is my responsibility as a citizen and as a worker to see what will be done for them, to do what they are supposed to do [Moi, Nov 2015].

John is a 32- year old male who has Bachelor of Arts in Education with a major in Linguistics and minor in Literature as well as a Master of Science in Rural Development studies from Njala University. Prior to becoming a Learning Coach, John had four years of experience teaching Language Arts at the Junior Secondary level in the Freetown Secondary School for girls. In addition to this teaching experience, John volunteered with a local youth-led NGO as a means to develop his administrative skills. For John, working in education has been his “passion” since first starting his degree. However, during his teaching experience he taught for four years without ever becoming
on the payroll. His mentor, a lecturer from Freetown Teachers College, knew of John's passion for education particularly in the area of literacy and informed him about the position opening with Concern Worldwide as a Learning Coach. John was happy at the prospect of being able to help people acquire knowledge while building his own capacity at the same time:

Well, honestly education has been my passion all this while. Even when I was in college, I was thinking how I will come out and get a job that can ask me to support other people to acquire knowledge. So the frustrating thing by then [was that], I was not on payroll. I taught for four years without getting a salary, so I was searching. I never knew I would come across a job like coaching. Honestly, because it was new. So when I saw this advert, in fact, I got to know about this advert through my mentor, he was working and is still working as a literacy specialist. He is a lecturer at Freetown Teacher's College. He has been a Master Trainer. You must know him. Since he knew I had the passion for education, especially in the area of literacy, so he contacted me and said there is an advert going on for coaches. I said what is that for? He said, come over to my house and we will discuss that. So I said no problem. So at the end of the day, I left the school immediately. I visited him, and he explained to me and gave me the job description. Because it is not taken me away from the school system, I will try it. Alright, go and see what you can do. So when I went through, I was so happy because I just thought of it as I will have an opportunity to help people, and at the same time, I will build my capacity along the line [John, Nov 2015].

At the time of this study, John coached teachers in six primary schools and three junior secondary schools all within the Yoni Chiefdom of Tonkoli District.

David, a 47-year old male, is an experienced teacher with over 15 years of teaching experience. David first started teaching after completing his 5th Form (higher secondary school) and taught Class 3 for three years before leaving to obtain his Bachelors of Science degree in Agricultural Education. After graduating from college in 1990, David taught for 12 years at the Senior Secondary school level teaching mathematics and science first in Magburaka and later in Freetown. During the later part of his teaching experience, he was promoted to the rank of Senior Teacher and later to
that of the Head of the Department, which allowed him to act as Acting Vice-Principal in
the absence of the Principal. During the war in 2001, David shifted his work from the
school system and became engaged in development work with a local NGO in his
community as an Agricultural Officer facilitating community development. During the
time of the war, he completed a Commonwealth Diploma in Youth and Development
through a Distance Education Course taught by the University of Ghana and the
University of Sierra Leone. He later started work at Concern Worldwide as a Community
Development Officer facilitating community health programs but had to take a leave of
absence from work for some time due to his health. During his absence and prior to
returning to Concern Worldwide as Learning Coach, David volunteered to work on a
youth development project that focused on literacy, numeracy and vocational skills
training. David worked as a Learning Coach in nine schools in the Kholifa Rowalla
Chiefdom in the Tonkolili District.

CeCe is a 28-year old female who completed a Bachelor of Art in Education with
a major and teaching certificate in Language Arts and Literature. In addition to
completing her six month practicum, she taught for one year at the secondary level. Prior
to becoming a Learning Coach, CeCe worked with Restless Development as a volunteer
Marketing and Communications officer. While CeCe's previous experiences in teaching
were more limited than the other Learning Coaches, CeCe appeared confident in her
work as a Learning Coach. CeCe expressed she felt that coaching had helped her a lot in
working with teachers to improve learning outcomes for pupils. Though she admitted
there were many challenges to coaching, she did not feel inhibited by them and saw them
as an opportunity to become stronger. She felt “proud of the work she was doing and that her work was being used as an “instrument of change” and making an impact:

Some of them actually do appreciate the idea (of coaching) and the direct support they are getting from coaches! It is really appreciated so I actually enjoy coaching because supporting others to improve education is paramount or the backbone for development. I am proud of doing it [CeCe, Nov, 2015].

CeCe worked as a Learning Coach in nine schools in the Kholifia Rowalla Chiefdom in the Tonkoli District.

**BeeTee** is a 52-year old female who received a Diploma in Business Management and Administration. She obtained both a Teachers Certificate and a Higher Teachers Certificate and taught for 29 years at both upper primary, junior secondary and senior secondary levels. She served as a Head Teacher for three of those years. In addition to her experience working at the school level, BeeTee has significant experience working on both community and education initiatives with local community-based organizations and INGOs including Save the Children, Christian's Children Fund, and War Child. She later became a Learning Coach with Concern Worldwide. During her time at Concern Worldwide with RaISES, she also had a special opportunity to receive additional training in early grade reading through another Concern Worldwide supported reading initiative. BeeTee’s commitment to education is driven by her natural love for children and desire to want to help them that began for her at a young age based on her earlier experiences in the classroom:

Naturally, I love children! I have the love and the passion for children. And I have the passion to share information and so I don't want to say what I know, and just have it on my own. I like to share. Because thinking far back when I was a school girl I think I was blessed whenever we were taught in the class. I picked up things quickly and others would be struggling so the teacher would come, flog them, and I did not want to see that kind of things. So in the teacher’s absence, I would sit to
teach to explain things so that the weaker ones would try to understand. So from that point, I had it my mind I would be working with children, working for people to really develop educationally. So, that is it... just the flogging of teachers, the weaker ones, making them cry, suffering seeing the bumps on their bodies, which was very pathetic for me so I stood to say that I will help people so that they will not suffer [BeeTee, April 2016].

It is because of this drive, commitment and her experiences as a professional teacher and an NGO worker that Bee Tee came into her role as a Learning Coach feeling very confident:

Yes, my experience also, as a professional teacher, really, and having spent a long time in the classroom meeting with children and teachers and colleagues in these kind of things, really helps me to be confident with my work really. Yeah. And all throughout my life, I have just been working for children, teachers and community people so that one is not a strange thing to me. It helps me build more confidence [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

Bee Tee coached teachers in nine schools in Tonkolili District. All of her schools were located in Yoni chiefdom near Mile 91. The farthest distance she had to travel to anyone school from her base was approximately 25 kilometers, which took about an hour on the motorcycle.

**Godwin**, a 32- year old male, completed a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Eastern Polytechnic and received a teaching certificate in Linguistics and Literature. He has two years of teaching experience at the Senior Secondary level. In addition to his work in education, Godwin has significant experience studying and working in investigative journalism, technology, radio broadcasting and communication. He relied on these latter experiences in journalism and broadcasting to help finance his education and complete his degree.

In comparison to the other Learning Coaches, Godwin was the youngest male and was placed in the most remote communities requiring long travel between schools often
requiring travel across big rivers and streams through dugout canoes or an old push-pull ferry. However, Godwin appears very committed to the schools and communities where he works. He loves “talking with people” and finds great joy being based in actual rural communities, a new experience for him.

For me personally, being a coach is like I have been upgraded to be a better teacher and at the same time, it gives me great joy, because initially, I love talking to people. Yeah, from the broadcasting knowledge I love talking to people and I have been a presenter so it gives me great joy wherein whenever I go to the field I see people and talk to them. The experience of living in the rural community had not been there and that is one thing I have gained and I LOVE! it. Giving the support to teachers out there is really good [Godwin, Nov 2015].

As a teacher in the classroom, Godwin stated that he always tried to make his class pupil-centered by engaging students in lively and interactive activities that were relevant to their lives and asking students’ questions.

Godwin worked as a Learning Coach in nine schools located in three different chiefdoms in Kenema District. The three chiefdoms were Simbaru, Wandor, and Goroma Mende Chiefdoms. Godwin’s communities were the furthest from the field office and posed the most travel challenges due to the limited road infrastructure. He was based in a nearby community to his schools and had an average of 12 miles of travel to his schools.

**Gadiri**, a 45- year old male, began teaching both at primary and secondary level while he was still in secondary school in Bo District. Later he started pursuing his Bachelor of Agriculture at Njala University but was not able to continue because of the war. He later returned to Bo to complete a Higher Teacher's Certificate for teaching at the Secondary Level from Bo Teachers College and taught for a few more years up to the Master level before starting work for German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ) on a skills training project for ex-combatants. Gadiri eventually returned to teaching again
and later became an examiner for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) for marking student results on the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) for Science. In total, Gadiru says he taught for over 15 years at various levels including upper primary, junior secondary and senior secondary school levels.

Gadiru coached teachers from nine schools in the Kenema District. The schools where he worked were located in Dama Chiefdom, Gaura Chiefdom, Nongowa Chiefdom, and Small Bo Chiefdom. The average travel distance from his base to his schools was 25 miles.

**Tuba**, a 43- year old male, started his career in education by completing a Higher Teacher Certificate (HTC) at the secondary level in Agricultural Science at Milton Margai Teachers College. He taught for four years at the secondary level before continuing to Njala University to complete a B. Sc in Agricultural Education. He taught for a total of 12 years at both the Junior and Senior Secondary levels and served as a Senior Teacher and Head of the Department in Agricultural Science in his last few years before becoming a Learning Coach. Tuba described himself as having “charisma” and able to help teachers “feel relaxed” when he is with them by being friendly with them, joking with them, and listening to them. Tuba worked as a coach in Kenema District in three chiefdoms including Simbaru, Dodo, and Lower Bambara.

**Demographic Background and Educational Experience Summary**

Nine Learning Coaches participated in this research. Out of the nine coaches, two were females and seven were males. Ages of participants ranged from 28 to 55. I have included in Table 6 a list of each coach’s gender and age.
Table 6: Participant Gender and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gadiru</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BeeTee</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CeCe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godwin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osbourne</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All but two of the Learning Coaches had a Bachelor of Arts in either Linguistics and Literature or a Master’s of Science in Agricultural Education. Graduates of this level received Diploma level teaching certificates, which were tailored for Secondary level teaching. Some of these participants also had received a Higher Teachers Certificate for secondary school level, a certificate they pursued before entering school for their undergraduate degree. The two participants that did not have Bachelor' degrees did have formally recognized teacher certificates and more years of teaching experience in comparison to the other participants. For example, BeeTee had received both a Teacher Certificate for primary level and a Higher Teacher Certificate for Secondary Level as well as a diploma in Business Management. Gadiru had started a Bachelor’s but was unable to finish due to the war. After the war, he pursued his HTC at Bo Teachers College. In Table 7, I summarize the educational level of each coach.
Table 7: Participant Education Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Certificate(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gadiru</td>
<td>HTC Certificate</td>
<td>HTC Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BeeTee</td>
<td>B.A. Business Management</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HTC Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CeCe</td>
<td>B.A. in Education</td>
<td>Bachelor Diploma Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M.Sc. Rural Development</td>
<td>Bachelor Diploma Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>B. Sc Agricultural Education</td>
<td>HTC Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godwin</td>
<td>B.A. Education</td>
<td>Bachelor Diploma Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osbourne</td>
<td>B.A. Education</td>
<td>Bachelor Diploma Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moi</td>
<td>B. A. Education</td>
<td>Bachelor Diploma Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>B.Sc. Agricultural Education</td>
<td>Bachelor Diploma Level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Learning Coaches’ teaching experienced ranged from 1.5 to 29 years. However, most Learning Coaches had taught at the junior and senior secondary levels. Only four Learning Coaches had actual teaching experience at the primary level and this experience was mostly in upper primary. Also, those with primary level teaching experience had taught in schools after graduating from Senior Secondary and before entering formal training as a teacher. In Table 8, I summarize each Learning Coach’s teaching experience including the number of years they taught, the grade level, and subject areas.
Self-Reported Beliefs about Learning, Teaching, and Coaching

In this section on beliefs, I describe Learning Coaches’ perceptions and self-reported beliefs on the following four categories:

1. emerging beliefs about reading, teaching and learning,
2. beliefs about the purpose and value of and their approach to coaching;
3. their coaching role and responsibilities; and
4. their perceptions of the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be an effective coach.

Emerging Beliefs about Reading, Teaching and Learning

Learning Coaches’ early educational experiences varied from whether they attended schools in more rural areas or more resourced urban areas such as Bo or Freetown. Variations also existed between the different time periods in the educational system of Sierra Leone. For example, most Learning Coaches attended primary school
before the war with the exception of CeCe who was in primary school during the war. However, when Learning Coaches reflected on their earlier experiences learning in school, most all of the Learning Coaches described similar school and early learning experiences. Most Learning Coaches described their teachers in the early grades as being more traditional in nature utilizing corporal punishment and teacher-dominated methods such as writing on the blackboard, chanting, and memorizations. Osborne refers to the old methods in stark contrast than what one sees in schools today and refers to that period of time as more disciplined than schools today:

I can remember when I was in school especially at the primary school, the way our teachers were handling us was quite different than what is in now in schools. Corporal punishment was the order of the day which forced us to learn because they had all the rights. They just had all the rights. The children were only there to be seen and not to really participate. Most of what went on in the classroom was teacher dominated and pupils [would] just sit in the class. We are just there to be seen and not to be heard. That was one experience I got. That is against what is obtained today. I am talking about yesterday's schools which we attended. WE were not really of paramount importance in the schools as pupils. The greater attention was paid to the teachers. They owned the school, they owned the class, and they could do anything to the pupils. That was how it went. And we went through that hard way, but that is not what is obtaining now [Osborne, April 2016].

BeeTee, of similar age to Osborne, witnessed also flogging of what she referred to as “weaker” students in her school experiences, to the point of “making them cry “and suffering from bumps on their bodies”. Fortunately for BeeTee, she was able to “pick up things quickly” unlike some of the other students in the class and was able to avoid a lot of flogging and instead tried to help students learn so they would not have to suffer anymore:

Because thinking far back when I was a school girl I think I was blessed whenever we were taught in the class. I picked up things quickly and others would be struggling so the teacher would come, flog them, and I don't want to see
that kind of things. So in the teacher’s absence, I would sit to teach to explain things so that the weaker ones will try to understand. So from that point, I have it my mind I will be working with children…working for people to really develop educationally so that just the flogging of teachers, the weaker ones, making them cry, suffering seeing the bumps on their bodies, that was very pathetic for me. So I stood to say that I will help people so that they will not suffer [BeeTee, April 2016]

CeCe and Godwin, who are much younger than Bee Tee and Osborne, also referred to their school experiences as having corporal punishment and discipline through flogging. Godwin reported “it was very difficult at that time but on the contrary in those days there was a lot of discipline. If you failed to read, the cane visited you”. Godwin reported that this fear of punishment drove him to study harder. CeCe, the youngest coach with the more recent primary school experiences suggests that flogging was common during her time in school as well and she believes continues to this day across all teachers. CeCe reported that flogging had to do with teachers not understanding that there were two kinds of learners, a fast learner and a slow learner:

They didn't have all these methodologies of how to cajole a child to learn such as giving the child time, space and some amount of encouragement to bring him or her aboard because the teachers have this idea that you must learn. They were not operating in you have two sets of learners. You have the first learner and you have the slow learner. You have children that the moment you write and teach something, they get it. You have some who it will take them time to actually understand and get the concept of what you are teaching. They are not operating in that way. So, the thing when they teach you, you must know. And if you don't know, you are a stupid child and you should become punished [CeCe, April 2016].

In addition to learning being forced out of fear, Learning Coaches reported that their learning experiences as a child were dominated by teacher-led methodologies. Bee Tee remembers her teacher writing on the blackboard for all the students to read out-loud either as a group or individually in front of the class:
Well, during that time, we just read from the blackboard when the teacher writes on the blackboard. They [would] read and then we [would] follow up reading after the teacher and at the end of the day, the teacher [would] sit down. We went to the board, one after another, to just read loudly like that. And sometimes we memorized this kind of reading. When we went out, we begin to sing it off [our] head like that [BeeTee, April 2016].

Learning Coaches expressed beliefs differing from the way they described their past experiences learning and learning to read, both in primary schools and when they were learning to become a teacher through teacher education. For example, Bee Tee came to believe as a young primary school girl that she did not support teacher’s flogging “weaker” students and, after seeing this in her class, became driven to help students learn so that they could minimize teachers flogging them for their poor performance. Godwin felt that the fear of punishment forced him to study harder at home with his uncle to avoid being flogged. When he became a teacher, he worked hard to facilitate a more pupil-centered classroom where his students felt comfortable and were engaged.

When I asked Learning Coaches about their beliefs about teaching and learning, specifically around reading, Learning Coaches responded with more progressive beliefs than the types of education they had experienced as children, including student-centered and participatory instruction, positive communication, the importance of writing a good lesson plan, utilizing a variety of instructional methods, and teaching reading effectively. These beliefs directly aligned with the Teacher Professional Development Competencies promoted by the RaISES program. However, Learning Coaches’ beliefs were influenced by factors such as their own personal experiences in school, learning from a family member, learning to teach through their teacher preparation programs, and through their participation in the RaISES program, which introduced new instructional methodologies.
Each Learning Coach emphasized slightly different beliefs about reading, teaching and learning. For example, Godwin emphasized the importance of positive communication with students:

I have a strong belief in Competency 3 which is the one that has to do with communication. No matter how well planned the teacher is, no matter how organized the classroom is, no matter how hard you try to satisfy all the other competencies, if the way you communicate with the class is inappropriate you might know but because you cannot communicate it well, they perceive it differently. So I have a strong respect for Competency 3 and I believe if Competency 3 is attached to any of the other competencies…..or whatever thing we have, I believe it facilitates better understanding [Godwin, April 2016].

David discussed the importance of teachers being prepared and believed that “good teaching starts from getting a good background on what you are going to teach and what you want children to learn”.

Learning Coaches talked passionately about the importance of teaching reading effectively. They emphasized the teaching of sounds and teaching for comprehension instead of memorization, which none of them expressed learning either when they were a child or when they were learning how to teach. Learning and teaching the sounds as well as teaching for comprehension were new approaches for Learning Coaches and ones they saw as important for the teaching of reading for understanding:

It (the teaching of sounds) is very much important because even me being a teacher for 29 years long ago, to even help my children at home, I was just using the same chanting method or so, but this time around,… my grandchildren, I use them to direct them… Teaching a child to identify to even pronounce those sounds could be just two letters. That is learning for the day. That is a good learning for the day. So that idea was absent. And I am seeing it to be very good, very beneficial to them that will help them to go a long way. To even start reading at an early age because they are able to see and identify [Bee Tee, April 2016]

Well, definitely, the area of teaching starts with seeing the letter itself. Then, having the sound of that particular letter, then whenever that sound is any word, you will be able to connect that sound to numerous sounds that are in there then
you will be able to pronounce so that whenever you are reading now, you look at all the things in there and you will be able to decode any word that you see. So by having that then, you will be able to teach effectively and that is the way people learn reading more easily [David, April 2016].

On how to teach reading … I think the philosophy there is to let you the teacher get to know the letter sounds,…then through that you can put all those small sounds together. Get that to make a word. The children know that it is these small, small sounds put together to give a word, and I think they can read better. But when they don't know the sounds of these letters, how can they put them together and sound them and read. So my philosophy is to let the letter-sound identification be made paramount [Osborne, April 2016].

Well, yes, but when you learn to read without learning the sounds sometimes you will sound a word but not the correct way. It won't be the correct way....you heard it from somebody you have pronounced maybe the wrong way, just the way the person pronounced that word that way, but if you know the sounds, then you can pronounce [Moi, April 2016].

Even though Learning Coaches adopted new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning, they still viewed chanting as a useful strategy for learning to read words, or memorizing words, because it helped them learn to read. However, they recognized that learning through chanting or memorization was not sufficient as it did not help them learn to read for understanding:

Well, learning depends on different strategies depending probably on needs of the learner or what suits the learner. Some learners are tactile, you know. But also in regards to chanting, is one good way to teach. Just chanting cannot help somebody actually understand some concepts rather than just memorizing. For example, the way we used to learn the alphabet, and the way I have learned about how to learn, had I known that you even some higher grade learners who can read these letters but not write them well because of these kinds of stuff...so I just think that if we apply these literacy strategies will help because the essence of all that we are talking about is for that child to be able to read, then you read how to learn for understanding. Because just learning how to read is not sufficient for that child to be able to make use of what he or she is learning. So once you have learned to read, you need to read how to learn...so all of those stages that I think are doing now, are VERY MUCH! effective instead of that traditional way we are used to ….chanting, memorizing, you know, all of these things [John, April 2016].

…reading is paramount. If you cannot read, later you cannot comprehend. In fact, there were certain subjects I did in school like Chemistry and Physics there were
some words that I used to memorize for me to pass. I memorized them because of the time set for the exam. Though at that point, I don't understand. But with the notes given to me, I try to take them up, upstairs, so that later I would write it then when I go ahead and understand it but for exam purpose, but for now, this type of learning, this sound, it is really basic. That is the fundamental, the way I look at it. But in those days it was not like that. Though we have like in English, we have this ESP and S wherein you have the parts of speech that helped actually so that we can know the tenses, when to use those tenses and where to use them and how to use them. That one they told us when I got to SS1 (first year of senior secondary). That helped me to read really [Gadiru, April 2016].

Learning Coaches emphasized that these were new beliefs for them and were a result of the RaISES program:

I think what I have learned from Dr. J is a little bit above what I learned as far as teaching is concerned, even at University. Even at university, no one will come down to tell you, you have to use flash cards, you have to use this. They think you know, so therefore they do not go back to all those little things. But I think Dr. J took her time to really teach the minute [teaching details] that I was not expecting, like flash cards, word wall, vanguards, the condition of classrooms [Moi, April 2016]

Actually, to be honest ... [it was] within these three years when I joined the Consortium, definitely. Yes. For instance, when we went to the first training of coaching, it was during the coaching aspect when we were preparing, that when you go [on a coaching visit], these are some of the things you are supposed to do. And even before the training, we know that these things were centered on literacy, so we went to the training, we read the materials connecting to the literacy, and we started to see the basics. Going into the training, we were fully taken through these things and the beliefs started there. That is how it happened [David, April 2016].

For John, these new beliefs were reinforced when he actually witnessed changes as a result of the actions he was promoting:

One is because I have a simple philosophy, which is openness. I am open to every new thing that comes my way you know, because I know learning is a process and ideas keep on changing over time. So before now, because I used to be a teacher, I am already a teacher, but I have not gone through this system of teaching that we are introducing to them. So, when I had the opportunity to go through the training and all of things, more especially, when I was part of some planning assessments so I was even able to identify some of the challenges why children can't read at a certain level. So I saw how useful these things [teaching techniques] are, so I started embracing them and I am seeing how they are working. That is why I am
just too engrossed with these methodologies. I am even praying that even when
this program shall have ended, I am hoping if the Ministry could adopt some of
these things, we will get increased learning outcomes in our schools, especially in
rural communities where you have limited amount of trained and qualified
teachers and all of these things. It is very difficult [John, April 2016].

Beliefs about Coaching Purpose and Value

Learning Coaches shared similar views regarding the purpose and value of
coaching. Learning Coaches recognized that teachers in Sierra Leone needed additional
training and support and believed that if teachers were provided with such support they
would improve their teaching. When I asked Learning Coaches what they felt about
coaching, its purpose and what it achieves, Learning Coaches all viewed coaching as a
valuable strategy for helping teachers to improve their learning and thus, improve student
learning in the classroom. Here are some examples of their views:

The overall purpose of coaching is to help the teachers build up the capacity of
teachers in classroom teaching so that children will really gain [Osborne, Nov
2015].

(The purpose of coaching is)…quality educational outcome. Because you give
support to the teachers through trainings, through coaching, co-planning, co-
teaching, whatever it takes...modeling, at least you give the support so they can
learn more. And at the end of the day, they will in turn teach the children because
they are with them always in the class. You only come once in awhile to see them
and talk to them but if they are given the chance, they are given the support, and
given the right training, and the right materials, I believe they will do it. And at
the end of the day, they will have quality educational outcome in the rural areas
where we are operating [Godwin, Nov 2015].

We are doing our best to focus the key important things to promote learning
because our mission is to improve learning outcomes. Not only to pupils but even
to the teachers. Our coming here is not just to visit teachers to support them, but
to see how best learning outcomes will improve in our schools. So what tells me
that something is going on is the performance of the children, which is what I
normally tell them [John, Nov 2015].

Yes, yes, indeed. It [coaching] is a very good thing…because it improves the
quality of the teachers teaching in the classroom…Coaching is of paramount
importance! [Gadiru, Nov 2015]
Yes, because most of these teachers if you say you are just going to explain to them, they will...but if you DO it or you all do it together, they will grab it faster [CeCe, April 2016].

John felt coaching provided teachers with additional opportunities to improve their professional skills outside of college, something he felt was available in other sectors in the country but was not available in the education sector. He also felt coaching was a valuable approach for providing follow-up support to teachers if they do participate in training to see if and how teachers are implementing what they learned:

It (coaching) is highly valuable! Because if you look at other social spheres in the country like you talk of health, you talk of sports, you do have in-service training. When you come to the education sector, it is lacking. It is lacking completely! People only have the opportunity to improve their professional skills when they go to college. Once they go to college, they only attend meetings. Or you have one or a two day training that sometimes is not focused on improving learning outcomes, and even when they benefit from this training there is nothing like follow-up support to see whether they are being implemented…..So, to me, the coaching is VERY, VERY valuable! [John, April 2016]

BeeTee felt that coaching provided a mechanism for keeping teachers accountable to be in schools regularly and stay focused on the quality of their teaching in the classroom:

And for me, this coaching system is very much good for the benefit of the children, and even the parents that are spending their money, as I was saying teachers sometimes are lethargic because they don't have immediate benefit from the school so if there are people, coaches’ monitoring, going every now and then, you will keep them on track. You have them focused to even guide them where and where. We are using the fidelity tool, we have some areas wherein the content of the lesson is it at the developmental stage of the children, because these teachers, if they are not guided, they will come up with things to teach the children that are above the age and when it is above their age, learning will not take place. If it is far too below, you will just keep them there, making noise and that kind of thing, if just accurately to their own level you will see learning will take place. And these teachers, those that are UU teachers they will not know this if there are no coaches. If they don't go on training, no workshops, no kind of thing beneficial they will not know. They will just do things to satisfy that I have taught, I am teaching, I am a teacher. So to be a coach, it is very advantageous
because you guide, you lead the process, and you direct the process to the right way wherein you will have people benefit at the end of the day [BeeTee, April 2016].

Godwin and CeCe felt that coaching would be particularly valuable for those teachers most in need, such as untrained and unqualified teachers in rural areas:

Giving the support to teachers out there is really good. There we have ...what can I say...we have a "galaxy" of unqualified and untrained teachers so when we go there to give support we want to give them support to be on the same page with what is operating in urban areas ….so we give support so that they can be on the same page as the urban areas…coaching for me personally is very good [Godwin, Nov 2015].

The standard of teachers, especially in the provinces and the sub-communities, are really low. They are really low. We have some teachers that cannot even construct a sentence. They didn't even have an idea about teaching. Some of them are school drop outs, maybe they were taught by the community or they volunteer to assist the children because not every certified teacher is willing to go down to those communities. So coaching is really doing a great deal of help to those teachers because somebody has to be teaching. Of course, he or she has no know-how to teach, but by gaining knowledge, training, mentoring from someone on how to develop his teaching ability to teach the kids is really a positive approach. So I believe coaching is really important to upgrade the standard of education in this country [CeCe, April 2016]

Tuba and Moi felt coaching would also be beneficial for teachers that were trained and qualified as well:

Coaching is very much important, it is very, very important even for those who are trained and qualified. They need coaching. It is just like being a refresher course. It is like …if somebody trained 5, 10, or 20 years ago from the University or the Teacher Training College is in the classroom, he will become relaxed. He will say “well I know this…Why are they coming to coach me?”...But they have stopped making lesson notes, as soon as they get through the University. “But when you are there as a coach, they know that (because of) this program they are benefitting, and they have to listen to you [Tuba, April 2016].

The value is...for instance, teachers who may not understand the syllabus, how to go about writing the syllabus but if you and the teachers sit together and you plan, sometimes, you look at your own idea and his or her own idea…the teacher may have been 30 years in the classroom, but you see he has a problem...and especially in the areas where we work...we have a series of teachers who are not trained and
qualified, they have taught for some time, even though they are not on payroll, but by sitting together with them, it makes them learn a lot...[Tuba, April 2016]

CeCe, John and Bee Tee felt that coaching was making a difference in their schools and should become a nationwide approach “to upgrade the standard of education in this country” [CeCe, April 2016]:

I want coaching to be adopted because even most of these teachers they have gone through the Training Colleges for ages ago. And some of these methods are very new to them, so if coaching is in schools that will help them to upgrade because you are not going to ask that teacher to go back to the training college but your regular support to that teacher will help them to be abreast with the current level, current method of teaching that is operating at the university and acceptable in the classroom [CeCe, April 2016].

Well to me, coaching is a key thing that should be spread out all over the country in schools because for now, we are only focusing on a few schools and these schools are benefitting while the others are not and so if it is just limited to our own schools,……But if EVERY school is being involved...that will be good for the benefit of the country [BeeTee, April 2016].

There is a way for us to find a way to support the others in terms of this coaching, it would be helpful. That has to be done by the government. You know. It is really helpful, as I am talking to you, if you go to most of our schools, you will see a system, and if you visit other schools that are not benefitting from this program, you will see a difference. You will definitely see a difference. Because these people are talking of lesson notes and they know the steps. Those people don't know the steps and you start to question why. It is because of the coaching! (with emphasis) [John, April 2016].

Beliefs about Coaching Approach

Learning Coaches all used similar language when describing in detail what coaching is and how it should be done. Most Learning Coaches repeatedly differentiated coaching from that of being a boss, supervisor or an inspector. Learning Coaches described supervisors and inspectors as coming with all the knowledge to monitor the schools and highlight their poor performance. Learning Coaches referred to these supervisory roles as sometimes “harsh”, “directive, and “imposing knowledge”. Learning
Coaches reported coming to their own understanding of coaching as more of a “collaborative and transparent relationship” or a “mutual relationship” between the coach and teacher that centers on support and mutual learning. This understanding of coaching as a mutual relationship rather than one of authority was rather new for them based on their previous experiences in their culture with “more knowledgeable others” such as professors or supervisors.

In order to build a collaborative and transparent relationship, Learning Coaches felt that it was critical in the initial stages to develop a positive rapport with teachers and establish trust between each other. In doing so, Learning Coaches believed that it was important to maintain a friendly positive stance with everyone they worked with and put themselves on an equal manner with everyone. Learning Coaches believed that being transparent about their role and being consistent would help establish trust. Learning Coaches described needing substantial time to build relationships and trust with teachers and Head Teachers and communities. As it was a shift for Learning Coaches to see their role not as a supervisor, teachers also had to shift their perspectives that Learning Coaches were not there to evaluate or judge but to support them. John describes how he had to spend time with teachers to encourage them to see him as a supporter.

I always encourage them to see me as a supporter coming to support. I am not here to write anything about your school. I am not here to evaluate your school. I am not here to prepare teachers. Just work with me individually and see how best I can help you [John, April 2016].

Learning Coaches believed that the collaborative and transparent relationships were not just isolated to relationships with those in the schools but within the greater community. As BeeTee aptly states “our professional relationship is not just limited to the school but includes the community at large”. CeCe remarks that one’s relationship
with the community at large “has to be strong”. Godwin and Tuba felt strongly that in order to do they needed to become completely immersed and integrated into their communities.

Yes, it's important. Yes, because when they see you they feel belong. You just don't go and come back. You know what they are up to. Even those communities, if the school has a problem--if you are not with them there, they don't operate? But if they see you there, they know your process, they can come up with ideas, solutions, materials so they can build up the schools. You know. So our presence in the community is important. That is why we are field-based.- we leave there and we go and work. Even if there is another problem in another community they will come and meet me because they know I am staying there. They meet me. I will tell them I will come there tomorrow to make sure and we will have a meeting [Tuba, April 2016].

From my point of view, coaching can be described as something that goes beyond the training of teachers for better classroom performance. It extends to that of a guidance counselor, mediating community issues that have to do with education and integrating into the community as a member. From this point of view, coaches’ interface with these communities in order to admonish them to address the issues of running the schools as theirs, monitoring teaching and learning activities in the school and look for steps to overcome challenges faced with the retention of community teachers. Being integrated into the community makes the community to trust you as one of them through which you can unravel things that one way or the other affects both teachers and pupil's performance. So coaching is shouldering the responsibilities and competencies of a teacher in a double fold [Godwin, Journal Entry, April 2016].

Learning Coaches also emphasized that coaching must be driven by the individual needs of the teachers, and that Learning Coaches need to understand that they are not there to impose knowledge on the teachers and point out mistakes. Instead, Learning Coaches reported that they are there to support the learning of teachers. This requires Learning Coaches to first recognize that they are “not the source of knowledge” and knowledge has to come from the teacher(s). As Gadiru describes, Learning Coaches must have that understanding or belief that “no one is empty”. 
Well, for coaching, it's like you can say a centered learner coaching, wherein you the coach do not assume you know everything, and you really give opportunity to the learner to take charge of the learning [John, Nov 2015].

Well actually effective coaching to a large extent, you cannot just go and carry the ideas-you come to wherein and you bring in a particular situation and allow the thing to come out from him or herself [David, April 2016].

John differentiated coaching from mentoring and considered coaching as “less directive” than mentoring. He sometimes takes a more directive mentoring approaches because of the level of the teachers:

Well, for coaching, it's like you can say a centered learner coaching, wherein you the coach do not assume you know everything, and you really give opportunity to the learner to take charge of the learning. Unlike mentoring, where you the mentor will even decide the content of what you want the learner to achieve. And it is kind of directive learning. Do this, do this. Do this. So if you look at the context of where we work, we are dealing with adults, so if we just depend on mentoring, that directing, directing, directing, we will not enhance that collaborative learning environment, so more or less we are using more of coaching than mentoring, but for most of the teachers, we use more of mentoring because of their level [John, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches reported that building on teacher’s existing knowledge meant prompting teachers to reflect on their own practice. Learning Coaches viewed questioning techniques as a useful approach to prompting teachers to reflect, and referred frequently to this approach when talking about their work with teachers:

…Then I will step in as a coach, to ask some reflective questions, to know how best we can at least develop those skills so based on the outcome of the conversation, I am going to tailor my support for that particular teacher [John, Nov 2015].

These are adults….they know something...you don't have to give the impression that you know ALL. In fact you can learn from them…by questioning, probing them. You can learn from them. They need to tell you their experiences so they will feel “belong”…..before coming to the actual formal coaching now....you know [Tuba, Nov 2015].
David felt that this would help the teacher realize that “there is something in him, that he can make use” and that by “bringing that reflection” then he/she will begin to realize that the answers are within him and that teacher will become more confident to improve their teaching practice.

…you cannot just go and carry the ideas—you come to wherein and you bring in a particular situation and allow the thing to come out from him or her. But based on the previous experience and what the teacher knows, it is on that basis you develop it along the line, prompting questions that will bring in to build on capacity of the teacher—so that is my belief that is not just carry the idea to person itself but by asking reflective questions, reflective questioning! (says with emphasis) is one principle that is a very good idea on coaching plus on developing the capacity of an individual to a level that you want that teacher to be able to reach [David, April 2016].

**Beliefs about Coaching Roles and Responsibilities**

Learning Coaches acknowledged that during and immediately following the Ebola outbreak, their primary roles as Learning Coach shifted to support the emergency response and early recovery and did not involve coaching as the initiative intended. Though Learning Coaches supported their assigned schools in the re-opening period of April 2015, they did not resume serving the official role and responsibilities of the Learning Coach until October 2015. The findings in this section focus on the Learning Coaches’ perspectives of their roles and responsibilities serving in position of a formal Learning Coach, not as INGO staff responding to the emergency and early recovery activities.

When I asked Learning Coaches to share their view of their key roles and responsibilities in their school communities, all Learning Coaches shared a similar understanding of their overall roles and responsibilities noting first that their primary role was to support and guide teachers to help them develop their skills so as to ultimately
improve learning outcomes in the schools. Secondary roles included working with Head Teachers to help them understand and improve on their roles and responsibilities as the heads of schools, working with community structures to sensitize communities on the importance of education, and other roles such as developing themselves as Learning Coaches so as to be more effective in their every day work with teachers and schools. These roles are similar to those described by Bean (2010) and include:

1. teacher- related role and related activities
2. head-teacher role and related activities
   - community role and related activities
3. other roles and activities

**Teacher-related Roles and Activities**

All Learning Coaches recognized their primary role was to support teacher learning so as to improve learning outcomes of children. They believed their support was specifically to help Class 1-6 teachers develop proficiency in the six teacher professional development competencies specifically related to teaching in the classroom, which included competencies in the following:

1. lesson preparation,
2. use of a variety of teaching materials,
3. positive communication with students,
4. utilization of student assessment techniques,
5. classroom management, and
6. teaching of reading and writing as a lesson and across subjects.
The other two professional development competencies were not related to teaching, specifically, but rather outlined other expectations of teachers outside the classroom.

By supporting teachers to improve these competencies, Learning Coaches felt that teachers would improve their practice and students would be able to learn:

I give direct support to teachers in terms of teacher professional development competencies, wherein we have 8, but now we are looking at 6, you have the lesson preparation, you have the teaching techniques, you have communication, you have assessment, classroom management and the teaching of reading and writing [CeCe, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches shared a similar understanding of the broader activities they were responsible for conducting with teachers. The most commonly mentioned activities amongst all Learning Coaches included:

1. providing professional development to Class 1-6 teachers through face-to-face training workshops in literacy foundations,
2. conducting monthly coaching cycles to 18 teachers, grades one to three, following a specific format and utilizing specific strategies,
3. co-planning, co-teaching, and modeling, and
4. supporting the roll-out of TLCs in primary schools through orientation training and co-facilitation.

When Learning Coaches shared their beliefs about their overall roles and responsibilities, they discussed the activities more broadly rather than providing much detail on each. Learning Coaches provided more detail about the activities they conducted in their role when they discussed their actual experiences which come later in this chapter. However, when Learning Coaches shared their beliefs about their role
working with teachers specifically, they did discuss the coaching cycle as an important aspect of their role, in more depth, since this perhaps represented the bulk of their formal coaching role with teachers. Their main coaching responsibilities with teachers were to provide direct support to Class 1-3 teachers through individual coaching. They viewed the coaching process as a coaching cycle that included the following four stages:

1. a pre-visit conference,
2. classroom observation,
3. analysis, and the
4. post-visit conference.

Learning Coaches reported they were responsible for following these four steps with each of their 18 teachers each month, and they tried to conduct the entire cycle with one teacher in two day:

But like coaching now, we have a cycle,….You do a pre-visit, you sit down and plan with that teacher, you go and come and observe, you analyze, you set goals [John, Nov 2015].

Well, it's just to prepare the teachers for our visits, which is the classroom visit, we prepare them which we call a pre-visit, then after preparing them, we sit down together, select a time at teachers convenience for me to meet that teacher after planning lesson materials which have to be used, give me a time, to come and meet and be able to meet together and me observe them. So we set up at a time for me to visit her or him. So from there, I observe in certain areas. I look at certain areas, they have competencies which the teacher should be able to implement during the teaching, okay but I will not go to look at ALL! these competencies at a go, I have a focus on one and when we focus on that one, if the teacher also touches on the other competencies, I have to take recognition of that but my focus is on one. But this time around, the lesson preparation, let's say is the focus. When I go there, I need to look at whether the teacher has prepared lessons, whether it has all the qualities of a lesson plan, whether the context is there and suitable for the children, and this kind of thing. So from there, the way the teacher portrays his teaching, his materials, his methodology, and the way the children responds to the teaching, at the end of the day, I call on him or her, sit with them, and tell them
their weaknesses and strengths. So therein I will sit again for a post-visit. And in that post-visit, we set up a time for another pre-visit [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches described the pre-visit as the initial stage of the cycle where the coach and the teacher met together to establish a time for a classroom observation and discuss what the teacher would like to focus on in that lesson. Areas of focus aligned with the teacher professional development competencies and based on areas that the teacher wanted to improve and were working together with the coach to improve. Tuba described the pre-visit as an important stage in helping the teachers to feel more “relaxed” and prepared for the upcoming classroom observations:

What is important is the pre-visit, because you really have to prepare the teacher [because] one, that is when you create the friendship…so in that pre-visit, you really want to tell them what you want, and what you are coming to do, you review that competency and you share with them, you read it one after the other, with that they can become relaxed [Tuba, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches recounted that after the pre-visit, their responsibility was to observe the teacher in their classroom. Learning Coaches understood that during the classroom observation they were responsible for collecting “evidences” of teachers using strategies that had been promoted in the teacher professional development competency framework. They reported having to use a “fidelity tool”, a document that provided indicators for each of the competencies and spaces for Learning Coaches to record evidence of instructional strategies they witnessed in their classroom observation.

After the observation, Learning Coaches said they were supposed to sit alone and write an analysis of the classroom observation based on the evidence they collected. John described using a document referred to as the “progress planner” to write their analysis and plan an initial strategy for discussion in the post-conference visit:
After the observation I have to sit outside and do my analysis very quickly [using] the progress planner… that is the form I will use to guide my discussion [John, Nov 2015].

After the analysis stage, the Learning Coaches described having to me meet with the teacher in the post-visit conference to discuss the lesson and their strengths and areas of improvement. Learning Coaches believed it was important to keep these conferences positive and described how they would listen to the teacher first to understand how the teacher felt the lesson went.

Well, I am not going to be harsh with him, more or less…. I have to put him in the same position as me more or less. I know he or she may have some problems. I should try to understand that and really take note. If something is being done wrongly, I am not going to be harsh with him to tell him roughly that he or she is doing what is not good, but can talk with that individual teacher in a very mannered form so that he or she can understand that indeed I am a friend trying to help him [Osbourne, April 2016].

We talk about it in the post-visit and discuss the strength of the teacher and area to be improved. Sometimes we don't call it weakness, they see that word as not appropriate so we say these are areas that you need to improve and how do you go about it. If the person tries to bring in something, you sometimes, say what if you go this way or do it this way then they are oh yes, yes. And if they see it as necessary they will buy the idea [Gadiru, April 2016].

Learning Coaches reported that the teacher and the coach were then supposed to set goals or a plan for what the teacher could work on based on their needs and how the coach could support them in preparation for the next classroom visit.

Yes, they really have a month. We set the goals. So their goals might be in the area of classroom management or communication. Or some aspect of literacy. This is what they will be working on {David, April 2016].

So looking at these six areas, the teacher might be good in one or two areas and may have HUGE gap in the other, so as a Learning Coach, of course, we have a tool, the fidelity tool that we are using, so in a classroom observation, if I notice that this teacher needs support in lesson preparation, then we discuss with the teacher, together we agree on lesson planning or preparing a lesson together. It can be co-planning or I will guide the teacher to plan by himself, or I will plan and share with the teacher or I will model it or maybe if he is having difficulty
with presentation, lesson presentation as that also is another key in teaching [CeCe, Nov 2015].

Godwin asserted that it was then the coach’s responsibility to follow up with a visit between coaching cycles or find time during the coaching cycle to provide targeted support to teachers through co-planning, co-teaching, and/or modeling lessons:

You give support to the teachers through trainings, through coaching, co-planning, co-teaching, whatever it takes...modeling, at least you give the support so they can learn more [Godwin, Nov 2015].

**Head Teacher-related Roles and Activities**

Learning Coaches recognized that, though the focus of their work was to improve teacher practice, they also had a responsibility to support Head Teachers to help them understand and fulfill their leadership role and responsibilities. Learning Coaches reported that their support to Head Teachers was guided by a set of “Head Teacher professional development competencies” provided to them at the beginning of the project. Learning Coaches also reported they were responsible to work with the RaISES Education Officers and the District Education Office to train or conduct Cluster Review Meetings with Head Teachers and support them on specific issues such as record keeping, discuss progress in the schools, share experiences and challenges, and develop action plans for school improvement.

Of course, the Head Teachers, we are giving them direct support again in terms of improving or developing their leadership skills, they also have their own competencies, the Head Teacher Development competencies, we are working with them on that but we have not yet been trained on leadership but there are some other things like with the District Education office we are giving them some leadership training on school administration and record keeping [CeCe, Nov 2015]

And even with the Head Teachers to identify some of their own competencies and work with them to help overcome their own difficulties they have in their schools [Osbourne, Nov 2015].
Well as a Learning Coach, I am responsible to work with teachers and school administrators (Head Teachers) in a transparent way for school improvement to an extent that we (address) issues of literacy promotion and issues of school improvement for improving learning outcomes [David, Nov 2015].

Working with Head Teachers, since they are the heads of the schools that we operate in, it is good to really have a cordial relationship with them, so that they in turn, will come down and influence their teachers to cooperate working with us. And in working with them, we give them some training, training for administration so that they will be able to know how to handle their teachers and even their schools. We also train them on record keeping. We also training them on how to plan their school activities, We come together with the Education Officers, we do things together during those trainings, we are there sharing ideas together we also help to facilitate...These meetings they have been done at cluster basis. We bring schools together that are in close vicinities [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

**Community-related Role and Activities**

Learning Coaches believed that their role was also to work with the community and/or through community structures, such as the School Management Committees (SMCs), to help community members understand the project, the importance of education, and the community’s role in supporting the schools so that children can have better opportunities to learn. Learning Coaches felt they were there to encourage and mobilize communities to take ownership of the schools:

We also work with community people [and] SMCs in particular because these people we need them to come together with the teachers and the schools so that we all work together as one body to promote children's learning. So these SMCs is a body that represents the community and the schools and that is the teachers so whatever, so whenever they find problems in the school they go back to the community, try to influence the community people to put hands together to help the teachers to promote the learning situation [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

and I make sure that I organize the community to make sure that community is doing what they should be doing in order to see that the educational system works properly in their communities [Moi, Nov 2015].

However, Learning Coaches’ responses varied in terms of whether they felt this was an on-going role or something they just needed to do at the beginning of the project.
to help communities become aware of their role in the schools and mobilize community support. For example, David believed it was only part of their role in the beginning of the project in order to introduce communities to the project and gather their support.

getting SMCs for them to be aware of the project so that at least what we are doing and what they are expected to do. SO that is just one way we had community entry. For them to know why and where Concern is working, because Concern has a lot of programs, so to let them know that this program is for this, for this, and for that so that everyone knows our limits so that they will not be over expecting. And that is one nice thing, is making communities to be aware of what you are providing….Although initially that was part of our role, we were supposed to be from time to time attending meetings to know what are the current problems…but it has been some time since we have been attending meetings anyway [David, April 2015].

While others felt it was an on-going responsibility or duty to attend regular community meetings, mobilize communities on the importance of education and encourage them to be more involved in their support to the schools.

The Learning Coaches are not only there to talk about teaching! There are other aspects in the school system that they need to take care of [Osbourne, April 2016]

I attend meetings, with the Community Teachers Association (CTA), the School Management Committee (SMC), in connection with the school improvement. Yeah…because for the attendance sometimes, some parents, except we need to sensitize them in meetings, when we hold meetings…CT meetings together with the parents, the teachers, sometimes we explain to them the important role of those community teachers that they are not on payroll so they need to encourage them [Gadiru, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches like Moi and Osbourne even felt it was their role to ensure community structures such as SMCs and CTASs understood their roles and responsibilities and to hold them to account:

And I make sure that I organize the community to make sure that community is doing what they should be doing in order to see that the educational system work properly in their communities [Moi, Nov 2015]
The coaches’ role should be to enforce that it (in talking about punctuality and attendance of teachers) is being put in place (by holding SMCs accountable to fulfilling their roles and responsibilities [Osbourne, April 2016].

In addition to these roles commonly reported by all Learning Coaches, a few coaches mentioned additional roles not mentioned by other coaches.

Other Roles

Moi discussed responsibilities he had as an NGO staff member to represent the organization in a positive and respectful manner, to communicate regularly with his manager, and to write his reports. Gadiru shared a similar view, but referred to his work with the organization as “extra work that draws us from the field”. CeCe shared how she felt it important to work closely with the District Education Office and conduct joint monitoring of the schools:

They have to be abreast with our activities so that when they come to our schools that are not being told something that is not new to them [CeCe, April 2016].

John expressed his view that part of his role was to develop and manage himself as a coach:

Then, it is also my role to develop myself as a coach because if you are talking about helping other people, you must have the required skills to help other people, more especially when this is a new role to me because I have never been working as a coach before. So starting to work as a coach requires me to develop my capacity so in that light, I am always ready or even eager to attend any trainings related to coaching….Then I know it is also my responsibility to manage myself so I always ensure that the documents I am working with are always in place because if I really want to support teachers to develop these skills then I should demonstrate them. I should put into practice. So these are some of my roles and experiences I have going through as well [John, Nov 2015].

Beliefs about Coaching Skills and Dispositions

All Learning Coaches emphasized the importance of “being au fait” or knowledgeable about and proficient in professional development competencies. Given
their focus at the time of the study, Learning Coaches emphasized the teacher professional development and the coaching professional development competencies. The teacher professional development competencies are project-defined key competencies, pedagogy and content teachers need to know and do to facilitate teaching leading to improved learning outcomes. The coaching competencies outlined what the Learning Coaches needed to know and do to support teachers.

We must be au fait with the coaching competencies and the teaching competencies. If you know what each competency means, you know what you are supposed to be doing. And what you are supposed to use to equip the teachers. When you know those two things (both competency frameworks) you have the confidence to stand before whatever, irrespective of where the teacher is coming from [Moi, April 2015].

For me to be a good player I need to have the skills. So if I want to be a good coach I need to have the skills and we are lucky to have a framework on coaching competencies that really guides us on how we are to support teachers so like if we have an in-depth understanding of the coaching competencies, we will be able to do our work effectively [John, Nov 2015].

Within these two competency frameworks, Learning Coaches identified specific competencies they felt were most important to know and understand to be effective: content knowledge in literacy foundations, roles and responsibilities, how to work with adults as learners, coaching process and tasks, and interpersonal skills for building relationships. Learning Coaches added that to be effective required some amount of training and a commitment and love for the job. In order to reflect more of the emic voice or language of Learning Coaches, I categorized these into phrases Learning Coaches commonly used when they described knowledge and skills Learning Coaches needed to be effective.
“You must be knowledgeable about the foundations of literacy.”

When discussing the importance of knowing the teacher competencies, Learning Coaches commonly referred to the competency concerning the content or subject matter in which they were supporting teachers in their case, foundations of literacy:

If you are supporting in literacy, you have to be abreast with training on how to teach literacy, and how to support teachers to teach literacy in the classroom...you have to have a strong background or a clear understanding on the foundations of literacy [CeCe, Nov 2015].

Well, to first of all, to be effective, one needs to be refreshed in the literacy foundations skills, because the project is geared toward early grade reading, so being an effective coach, especially for our project means you must be abreast with literacy foundations for the early grade. One must be able to understanding and interpret and demonstrate literacy foundations, this print concepts, phonological awareness, alphabetical abilities, etc [David, Nov 2015].

Tuba uses mathematics as an example to express the importance of knowing the subject content, so that Learning Coaches can correct teachers if they present incorrect content y.

Of course, you have to know how to teach, you have to be knowledgeable...you cannot say that I am a coach but I don't know mathematics...no... you should be au fait with this subject that the teachers are teaching in the classroom...If you are not au fait with it, how do you do corrections?...if the man is teaching about seedlings...and he is teaching about seeds...and he doesn't know the difference between seed and seedlings, you as a coach must make the correction [Tuba, Nov 2015].

“You must know your roles and responsibilities as a coach.”

Learning Coaches also felt they needed to know their roles and responsibilities as a coach and be competent to fulfill them. Learning Coaches referred to the coaching competency framework as their guide of what they needed to know and be able to do regarding their roles and responsibilities:

Coaches also have their competencies. As a coach, we have up to nine competencies that we need to be au fait to be an effective coach because you have to know your roles and responsibilities as a coach [CeCe, Nov 2015].
If you did not know your roles and responsibilities, it will be very difficult besides the academic side of what you are doing…You have to be au fait with your roles and responsibilities [Gadiru, April 2016].

And then you should know what you are there for. Because you are there to guide or to direct. So if you don't know, you are blank, it means that you will not have that kind of thing to make a change. So when you know what you are there for, and you know what you are to do, then you will be able to make a change [BeeTee, April 2016].

“You must know how to work with the adult learner.”

Learning Coaches stressed the importance of knowing and being able to apply the principles of adult learning as one of the most important coaching competencies a coach could have, outside of the pedagogical and content knowledge. Learning Coaches felt that by knowing principles of adult learning, one could be in a better position to help establish positive trusting relationships with teachers and thus better facilitate teacher learning. Learning Coaches prioritized principles such as understanding that teachers already have prior knowledge and experience, and thus Learning Coaches are not there to impose new knowledge but rather to begin with where an individual may be and help build on what they already know. In doing so, Learning Coaches commonly referred to the need for understanding how to ask questions that prompt teachers to think and reflect on their own practice or generate their own ideas instead of Learning Coaches telling teachers:

You don't tell them, but that having the techniques and strategies to at least to ask reflective questions, so that you can be more abreast and more knowledgeable in wide range of reflective discussions so that at least it will generate ideas from them and have it come from themselves. Because when it is generated from them, it will be more concrete. So that will make them to apply that principle rather than you just telling them. So this is why adult learning is another key towards being an effective coach [David, Nov 2015]

John recognized that adults learn best when they are supported and he stressed the importance of collaboration and transparency in that support:
We should also take note that you are working with adults. So you as a coach need to understand some of the principles of adult learning. That will help you to work with them very well. Now like when we say we work in collaboration, I don't just go and impose, impose as if I am the boss. No. I always encourage them to see me as a supporter coming to support. I am not here to write anything about your school. I am not here to evaluate your school. I am not here to prepare teachers. Just work with me individually and see how best I can help you (John, Nov 2015).

“You have to know how to go about your coaching.”

Five out of the nine Learning Coaches mentioned other coaching competencies that centered specifically on coaching processes and activities. These included the coaching cycle, coaching differentiation, and using and managing coaching tools:

And of course, coaching we have different steps, you have to have an understanding of how to go about your coaching cycle, beginning from pre-visit, classroom visit, analysis, post-visit conference [CeCe, Nov 2015]

Well, of course, like we said, for us to support or for the coaching exercise to be successful, the coach and the teacher needs to know the purpose, the steps, and the activities that are involved in the coaching process, we normally call the coaching cycle [John, April 2016]

This could include setting a foundation on coaching and co-planning, coaching differentiation and other things, these are all key things again, especially coaching differentiation. So, coaching skills! Coaching skills! Training in coaches’ skills! Yes! So, if you have these things continuously, one will be very much effective [David, Nov 2015].

Well, of course, managing my tool box as well is also very key to me. Because, if we are talking about evidence-based coaching, we need to at least have proper documentation so now that the Consortium has helped us to file our documents, it is just a matter of putting everything into practice and see how things will go. So now, if I want to get any information about a particular teacher, I will just take the file, look at it, look at the development of that teacher, whatever. So I can really prepare before going into that school whether than just mixing up and putting everything. So if you look at this (he pulls out something) what I was saying about the log, so very helpful, you know. This school, what I have to do, I do it, when it is completed, the Head Teacher will have to sign, all of these things. This is NEW because we have not been signing before so now when I go, I tell them why they need to sign. You know. So, all of these things are really helpful [Nov 2015].
“You have to know how to develop strong relationships.”

Several Learning Coaches reported that to be an effective coach required being a social “interactor” or “mixer” and able to establish trusting relationships. According to John, “all about coaching depends on your relationship with people”. Coaches reported specific interpersonal and communication skills needed to establish trusting relationships with adults and facilitate their work as Learning Coaches.

So to be a good coach, you have to have good relationship with people; you should know how to communicate with people [BeeTee, April 2016]

A coach needs to have some clear speaking abilities to be clear about whatever he or she says for example, a coach might not be someone who likes beating around the bush, you need to be straight to the point, at the right time...good communication skills [Godwin, Nov 2015].

Moi felt that you must be “someone that will listen to other people”. BeeTee reports that is not just how to talk or listen to people but that one needs facilitation skills to bring people together and mobilize them.

The skills they need are facilitation skills really. They are the most paramount. The facilitation skills, that is you should be able to, since you are meeting different levels of people, you community, children, teachers, and this kind of thing, so you should be there to be able to talk and convince whoever you may meet, and you should have that kind of skill. How do you communicate with this kind of person so that the person will be able to accept you? That is the most paramount. So to be able to way through in whatever activity you do, you should know how to talk to people, how to mobilize them, bring them together, and I think those are the skills needed... a good facilitator. [BeeTee, Nov 2015]

BeeTee, Osborne and Godwin believed facilitation skills related to effectively facilitating training: being properly prepared to communicate ideas, able to articulate concepts clearly and positively, able to facilitate discussions, and as Osborne states, “being able to engage the participants in the facilitation”.

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Learning Coaches also mentioned the ability to establish rapport and develop trust. Learning Coaches reported that to establish rapport and develop trust required being friendly, being in communication frequently, being consistent, being respectful, and being truthful with the things you say:

First of all, the communities you find yourselves in are only ready to work with people they trust. So, if you are going to a community, especially when going there for the first time, make sure you try to earn their trust. Make sure people trust you. Don't say things you know you can't accomplish. Don't say things that you haven't been given order to say. Say things that you know are true and things that you know you can accomplish. That's it. That's one. And two, make sure you always communicate with them. Be in constant touch [Godwin, April 2016].

Well, coaching, actually you need to have a really good rapport. Humbleness also is there, you don't make yourself that you are otherwise, or they will not cooperate with you. You must go in a very simple way and that you establish regular rapport right from the administration unto the teachers [David, April 2016].

Many Learning Coaches also mentioned the importance of having patience and tolerance and specifically mentioned when working with “slow learners” or “hot-tempered” teachers. Learning Coaches felt that it was important to be patient and maintain a positive, friendly attitude during these circumstances.

To do a discussion, a lot of things will come up. And there you find that, some teachers have things they believe in that may be difficult to change. So you need to have that that convincing power for them to see why see the reasons why they should change what they have been doing. So if you don't have that patience as a coach, you will not be able to succeed. Because at the end of the day, they will just say yes, i think this is the best practice but when YOU go, they will continue to do the old practice again. So the time you sit to analyze to them this new methodology, are they trying to know the impact of this in the learning process, we have to take time for them to realize for them to see. And again, some are very quick to lose focus of conversation [John, Nov 2015].

a coach must be patience because you have slow learners...so you don't say I have taught you lesson planning, I have done co-teaching, I have done modeling, and I have done what else...and I have come independently and find you cannot prepare lesson plan and that means you are fool...no you need to have that patience, so that whatsoever, if you can't do it, I need to stick with you and give you the support until you are through with this particularly competency and I know you
can prepare your lesson plan to the point and accurate and we move on to the next competency but I must have that patience. A coach must be someone who is very patient [Godwin, Nov 2015].

So for them to do what you expect them to do needs patience and time. It is a gradual process. In coaching these teachers, we spend a lot of time, a lot of talking [because] their ability there is low [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

The coach himself has to be tolerant...they should be ready to accept corrections and also give corrections….Yes, tolerant in the sense that you really look at what people are doing and accept them. You don't overload them [Osbourne, Nov 2015].

You have to be patient. You are coming to do something some know, some do not know. Some know how to do it. Some don't know how to do it. You have to be patient with them, you have to respect them. You have to respect their own view. because they know things they you don't know because I have been working here. So you learn from them, and they too learn. You tell them that you are coming to help them to see this learning process or outcome is good. That is what you have to tell them [Tuba, April 2016].

Finally, several Learning Coaches reported the need for motivation and mobilization skills in working with the community:

Yes, because you are dealing with people...how can you bring them together if you don't have community mobilizing skills or [be able] to mobilize them. For instance, if a school has a problem, you need to involve the stakeholders in order for you to resolve the problem... you must have the motivation skills. Otherwise, they will not come [Moi, Nov 2015].

Well you have to really sensitize the community people. That is one area. If the community people have interest in their school, learning development will be easy because they will come together. As a coach, I have been telling them that the school is theirs. We are just there to give support. Ministry of Education is there to give support and any other person coming here is just to give support. The school is yours, as parents, as community leaders, as teachers, as children [BeeTee, April 2016].

If you go to the community, you really have to create a situation where in the community feels they own the school. The school belongs to them because most of the things you do you must bring them for them to realize this school is part of this and this man is just here to help us. He does not have a child here, but he is here to help us as a community. That is one [Moi, April 2016].
“You must have a love and commitment to the work.”

All Learning Coaches recognized that coaching required more than just specific knowledge and skills in supporting schools and teachers but also other personal dispositions or interpersonal skills to be effective in their work. The most commonly reported interpersonal skill reported by Learning Coaches was having a “passion”, “commitment” or “love” for the work or the job. This was usually linked to a broader moral purpose or commitment they expressed to being a “responsible citizen” and improving the educational system of the country:

One is the Love for the job. That is one. Being that some of us, whatever we answer to, if I say I will do this, irrespective of what obstacles may come, as long as I am able to overcome the obstacles I will be in a position to do what I have promised to do. For instance, because I have love for the job, and as educationist, I want to see that my country goes forward. And I will do all in my power to make sure that whatever I have promised, like the coaching, attending school functioning’s, seeing teachers do what they are supposed to do, I will be to do it to make sure that the educational system will be in a better position....for if it had not been what I did as a young boy, I would not be in the position I am today. So, seeing those kids coming up, it is my responsibility as a citizen and as a worker to see what will be done for them to do what they are supposed to do [Moi, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches believed that along with this commitment, Learning Coaches needed to be willing to learn:

I think for a coach to be successful, he has to be ready to learn. Because the more he learns the more he has knowledge and replicate this knowledge to whoever you want to coach. …To be a good coach, I think I have always I learn beyond, or I study, or read beyond what I am supposed to coach so with that I can do well [Osborne, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches felt that if one had this commitment and love for the job and a willingness to learn, they would be more likely to go the “extra mile” to learn what they
need to do and be better positioned to confront, navigate, and endure the many challenges in their work.

You have to be committed to your work because commitment goes a long way. Let's say this fidelity tool. It has too much of focus on writing, filling, summary all of these things. If you are not committed, then you just do this and leave it. When the other cycle comes you want to do that one, you will not be able to do. There will be too many of lapses [BeeTee, April 2016].

“You have to “undergo some amount of training.”

When analyzing the Learning Coaches’ responses, only six of the nine coaches mentioned the importance of coaches having previous teaching experience, implying that Learning Coaches could be trained and supported to acquire proficiencies in the competencies even though they may not have had teaching experience or an educational background. However, three Learning Coaches mentioned the importance of an educational background in literacy or coaching to be effective; if not, new Learning Coaches should undergo some sort of training:

Well, sometimes I want to relate coaching to teaching. Because it is more like teaching but the difference there is while you are talking about coaching, you have to be well trained before you become a coach. So to become a teacher also you want to be an effective teacher, you have to go through training. So if someone is to be a good coach, he has to undergo some amount of training. I think the philosophy there is training. Because all that we have learned, we never knew what we were doing before, we were teaching of course, but some of the things we are now talking about as coaches like talking about teacher competencies, we never knew what they were. It was only through this project that we have come to know. So I believe coaching is very important and should be given priority [Osborne, April 2016].

Godwin suggested that not all the current Learning Coaches had teaching experience and would benefit from a week of training on just how to teach.
Zone of Free Movement

Sub-research question #3 According to Learning Coaches, how did specific aspects of the professional context constrain their promoted coaching actions?

The Zone of Free Movement includes those aspects of the professional work environment that influence a Learning Coaches’ ability to promote specific coaching actions. The research question I developed related to this zone focuses only on the professional constraints that Learning Coaches experienced working in their professional context. By understanding the constraints within the Zone of Free Movement, we can understand what promoted actions coaches were allowed or permitted to enact. I discuss aspects of the professional context that helped support the work of the coaches in the later section on the ZFM/ZPA complex where I discuss what coaching actions were allowed and what aspects of the professional context helped support Learning Coaches to be able to conduct them.

In this section, I lay out specific categories of the professional context that are relevant to the professional context of Learning Coaches and within each discuss how they constrained coaching actions. Informed by both Goos research with teachers’ professional contexts and effective coaching literature on influential factors, I adapted and defined the professional context for Learning Coaches to include the following aspects:

1. teacher characteristics,
2. school leadership and accountability,
3. school physical environment,
4. school curriculum and assessment,
5. community perception of education, 
6. road infrastructure, 
7. organizational and programmatic factors, and 

I focus on those barriers that seemed to be the greatest inhibitors to effective coaching, given its purpose of providing sustained support to teachers.

Teacher Characteristics

Learning Coaches reported barriers related to teacher profiles, including teachers’ qualifications and remuneration status, limited teacher competence, and poor teacher motivation and commitment to their jobs, which resulted in chronic teacher movement and/or absenteeism. I will first discuss the different teacher profiles that Learning Coaches faced, and describe specific teacher characteristics that significantly constrained coaching actions.

Teacher Heterogeneity

Based on Learning Coaches’ responses, Learning Coaches worked in schools where teachers vary considerably in terms of their qualifications, remuneration status, competence, and motivation levels. According to Learning Coaches, they confronted four different types of teachers in their schools based on their qualification and remuneration status, which affected their coaching in different ways. These different types included: 1) trained and qualified teachers approved by the government and on payroll, 2) trained and qualified teachers not approved by the government and not on payroll, 3) untrained and unqualified teachers receiving a small salary; and 4) community teachers sometimes provided stipends or incentives by the community. To better understand teacher
characteristics and which characteristics provide constraints for Learning Coaches, I felt it important to first briefly describe how Learning Coaches described the various kinds of teachers that are working in the school because each type of teacher influenced their experiences differently.

**Trained and Qualified Teachers approved by the Government**

Trained and qualified teachers either completed formal training through a University or a Teachers College. The Ministry of Education officially approved teachers and assigned them with a pin code placing them on the payroll. Learning Coaches described qualified teachers as being the most committed to teaching and their jobs most likely motivated by the fact they received a monthly salary and have some level of accountability. Osborne describes this accountability more as "fear" with the authorities:

My experience shows that this group of teachers can be very good and effective because they already have the pedagogical know how and are motivated by the salary they receive. They are compelled to work for fear of being punished by the authorities.

When Learning Coaches described their work with qualified teachers on payroll, Learning Coaches found that qualified teachers on payroll were more committed to stay in the schools where they are assigned, and had more confidence in their abilities. Learning Coaches felt that teachers came with a stronger foundation in pedagogical skills and knowledge and more advanced skills in general. Because of teachers' status, they often are given responsibilities by the Head Teachers, which sometime can limit their time in the classroom. Responsibilities may include attending meetings, preparing master time tables, duty roster, etc. Qualified teachers often take on a leadership role in the
school. In cases where they are the only qualified teachers in the school, they often play the role of Head Teacher.

Learning Coaches described their relationships with qualified teachers as mostly positive. Qualified teachers are generally receptive to coaching and support and able to grasp the new concepts quite well. Some Learning Coaches did remark, however, that qualified teachers can be more resistant to changing their ways than the other teachers particularly when following the RaISES lesson plan format. Learning Coaches did not refer to whether or not qualified teachers were satisfied with their salaries nor whether they were consistently paid on time.

**Trained and Qualified Teachers Not Approved**

Teachers trained and qualified but not approved have the same qualifications and educational levels as trained and qualified teachers that are approved. The difference is that they have not yet been approved by the Ministry of Education thus do not have a pin code to receive a salary. Many qualified teachers wait several years before being approved and thus work for many years without getting paid. Learning Coaches described qualified teachers not on payroll as “less committed”, “less motivated” and “not respectful of time”.

Most of the teachers are less motivated. They sometimes give a lot of excuses when it comes to giving them tasks that will keep them in school [John, April 2016].

According to David, teachers were prone to looking for "greener pastures" or "transferring to other schools with hopes to have an easier entry to payroll”. Those that did stay in schools were motivated by the hope that authorities would eventually approve
them. As Godwin describes "They have the foundation and are cooperative--they hope that they may one day have an approval from the government."

Bee Tee felt that her relationships with qualified teachers not on payroll were often motivated by the thinking that "Learning Coaches also have a part to play towards their approval for salaries".

**Untrained and Unqualified (UU) Teachers Receiving Stipends or Incentives**

Learning Coaches reported that the majority of the teachers (more than half) they work with are untrained and unqualified. On average, schools may only have one qualified teacher who is usually the Head Teacher. To address this shortage, communities recruit volunteer persons from the community to help fill the gap. According to Learning Coaches, these teachers come in with limited education levels, often around the junior secondary level. Learning Coaches reported that many of the UU teachers are not even able to read at a basic level.

Schools normally place them often at the lower level classes (1-3) so they can place any of the available qualified teachers at the upper levels. Some communities offer either a small stipend or incentive for UU teachers to stay in schools and be committed to their work. In situations where UU teachers are receiving stipends or incentive either from the community or supported by an NGO, Learning Coaches find that they though they may lacking academically, they appear more committed to their work, motivated and willing to learn. Some of them participate in Distance Education programs to enhance their skills and become certified or are looking forward to the opportunity to do so.

This group is better committed to teaching in the schools because they have hope of getting qualified on day and approved for salary [Osborne, April 2016].
Untrained and Unqualified Teachers Who Do Not Receive Stipends

In some cases, communities are not able to provide stipends or incentives to the untrained and unqualified teachers. Learning Coaches felt this was mostly due to the lack of awareness in the communities to the value and importance of education and limited interest in supporting the schools. Learning Coaches reported that some UU teachers without stipends or incentives are interested in learning but often are pulled by the “economic factor”. And in such cases, they can often be the most difficult to work with because of their lack of commitment to the schools and motivation levels which often result in frequent absences or consistent teacher turnover as teachers left schools in search for other sources of income.

This group of teachers is the most problematic in the schools. The school authorities have no hold on theirs and they always go to school as and when they like. They are therefore not totally committed to teaching and can leave the school for any opportunity they see at any time [Osborne, April 2016].

Given that Learning Coaches are required to work with this wide range of teachers, constraints vary as per the status of this teacher. However, coaches most commonly reported the following characteristics affecting their work as a coach amongst all teachers.

Teacher Shortages

Learning Coaches all reported that the shortage of teachers in the schools where they worked was a serious issue that negatively influenced both effective teaching and effective coaching. There simply were not enough teachers in the schools to teach Classes 1-6. Most Learning Coaches reported that there were not enough teachers in the schools to teach all six classes and majority of their primary schools only had three
teachers. As a result, teachers would often teach two or three grade levels at the same time which Learning Coaches referred to as “double grade” or “multi-grade” classrooms. For example, one teacher might have Classes 1 and 2 all together one classroom and another teacher would have Class 3 and 4 together in another classroom. According to BeeTee “two classes occupied a room which makes teaching and coaching difficult”. John stated that in some of his classes, “one teacher is having 60, 70 or 80 pupils in one class”. For Osborne, this affected teaching as it increased the teacher to pupil ratio which he felt was “not appropriate for effective teaching”.

Depending on the number of students, teachers would either teach them all the same lesson or the teacher would divide the classroom and teach each grade separately. Tuba describes “If the roll is down, they bring it together, but if it is full, then they always divide it”. In this latter scenario, teachers would divide the blackboard into the different grade levels and have separate lessons on the board. Then the teacher would move to the other side of the classroom to teach the other grade level. Moi described this as difficult for the teacher to facilitate learning:

For effective learning to take place, it will be a little bit difficult because sometimes they only have one teacher taking Class 1 and Class 2 so whatever he wrote on his board then he moves to the other board to write, so it is sometimes a bit difficult for them [Moi, April 2016].

Learning Coaches reported the understaffing of schools not only affected the teaching, but affected their coaching. Based on Learning Coaches’ perspectives, it appeared that Learning Coaches struggled with knowing how to conduct their classroom observation when a teacher was teaching double classes. While Learning Coaches demonstrated different strategies, it appeared that Learning Coaches lacked confidence and knowledge of how to confront the situation of double classes both in how to observe
the classroom as well as how to provide proper guidance to teachers working in double classrooms.

The only issue is that you have some multi-grade, not multi-grade but peer teachers handling one class. How can you push those teachers at same time? That is a problem. You cannot coach each teacher, while you observe a teacher, and come again...what I have been doing for schools that have this kind of situation, if the class enrollment is too large, I advise them to divide, each teacher get some aspect of the class, and divide them instead of one teacher handling that huge or large class. So that is the situation. But generally, most of them are committed [John, April 2016].

**Teacher Competence**

Another significant constraint Learning Coaches reported was the limited skills and knowledge of most all of the teachers they worked within in their assigned schools. Due to the shortage of qualified teachers, the majority of teachers that Learning Coaches worked with were untrained and unqualified. Learning Coaches reported the skills of UU teachers to be extremely limited with little to no foundation of content, pedagogy or managing a classroom. Many had completed no more than a junior or high school degree. And some Learning Coaches reported that their teachers were not even able to read.

Then there are barriers again, having coaching teachers that are UU’s, untrained and unqualified. This has also been a problem because you try to talk with them about one thing, one thing, one thing, it is a problem! Some can even hardly read! Read! Read! That is a problem, this lower level of education is an issue we are having, and these are key barriers to effective coaching [David, Nov 2015].

With these teachers, Learning Coaches needed to spend more time introducing and explaining basic concepts. Limited teacher abilities demanded Learning Coaches to spend more time working on one competency area at a time, such as lesson planning, rather than progressing through competencies quickly. Learning Coaches felt their
existing workload would not allow for the time that was needed to spend with them. Here BeeTee describes:

Now, the teachers in my own schools, most of them are community teachers, they are volunteers teachers, they are just there from maybe junior secondary school level they go there since they are the educated people in their communities, so they decide to become teachers without undergoing the proper trainings. So these teachers, when they come to the classroom, they don't do things, they cannot easily get what you want them to do, because they are not matured enough in the educational aspect. So for them to do what you expect them to do needs patience and time. It is a gradual process. In coaching these people, we spend a lot of time, lot of talking to their ability there is low [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

While it was often the case that Learning Coaches felt that qualified teachers had a stronger foundation than the other teachers and were sometimes easier to work with, Learning Coaches still felt challenged by their limited competence. Either qualified teachers were not trained in primary schools, they had not practiced strategies they learned since the time they became trained, or they struggled with newer methodologies and competencies introduced by the project. Learning Coaches reported that many teachers did not create or follow lesson plans prior to the coach arriving to their schools.

Yeah, and some time you ask them among all of what I explained to you what area you want to focus...some begin to say, Well. Mr. Gadiru, this lesson planning some people will call it, I only prepare my lesson plan when I was doing my teacher practice after that, I have forgotten except you actually tell us so I had to come in. So I had to come in and tell them exactly how to go about it. That was number one! [Gadiru, Nov 2015]

Learning Coaches attributed the absence of lessons plans to teachers’ inability to create them, lack of time to prepare lesson plans, lack of available curriculum in schools to guide them, lack of motivation to do so, particularly if not paid, and limited accountability to have to do them. Since lesson preparation was a key competency of the RaISES program and teachers had not been well experienced in doing them, Learning
Coaches had to spend a lot of time with all teachers on the basics of preparing and following a lesson plan. However, when introducing the RaISES format, there were some issues as well with the qualified teachers or teachers participating in a teacher education program, because they had learned on UNICEF and the Ministry of Education’s older “child-centered teaching techniques” format referred to as the CCTT. At the beginning of the project, teachers were hesitant to use the RaISES format, a simplified version of the CCTT, because of fear that supervisors might not accept them. This seemed to be less of an issue later in the project when the accelerated syllabus was rolled out and teachers across the country were trained on all the same format.

Another area that teachers struggled with was some of the new strategies for the teaching of reading and writing. Learning Coaches reported that teachers as well were not familiar with these new strategies, particularly learning the sounds of the letters of the alphabet. Learning Coaches reported that even after sometime, teachers themselves did not know all the sounds of the alphabet yet were trying to teach these sounds to their students.

**Teacher Motivation and Commitment**

Another key constraint that Learning Coaches reported was the perceived lack of commitment and motivation teachers had towards their own work in schools. According to Learning Coaches, the level of motivation and commitment varied by the status of the teacher in terms of qualifications, work conditions, and payment of salary or incentives. Overall, Learning Coaches found that qualified teachers on payroll exhibited more commitment to their work in schools. They usually had greater attendance, and if they were absent or late, it was often due to having other responsibilities in the school.
However, some Learning Coaches did report “de-motivation” amongst qualified teachers on payroll. Here, John describes an instance where teachers sometimes are “de-motivated” because of not being promoted:

For the qualified teachers, well, motivation does not always come with money even to improve skills. You will find that in most schools, you have all the teachers that are teaching in that school that have not been promoted. They are still teaching in that school and you just seeing a younger teacher come in as head of that school. So on the whole, they will feel de-motivated even though they are paid. They are not able to do what they are supposed to do. They will just see it as a means of disrespect from their side taking a younger teacher to be a head. Even when the younger teacher tells them to do this, to do this, they don't do it. So they have that problem. They quarrel. There is a school in K. in Mile 91 where the teacher is not too young per say but is new in the school. She met other teachers, older teachers for that matter in the schools, who are on payroll. She is facing serious challenges in terms of delegating responsibilities who should do what all of these things. Each time I go there she tells me Mr. John this work is not working. I really want to leave this community. These people are causing problems for me [John, Nov 2015].

John and Bee Tee reported an overall general lack of interest in the job as a profession and felt that teachers are driven by financial gains rather than learning and developing themselves as a better teacher.

That mentality is in us, and unless we change it, things will never develop in this country. When you go to workshops, even if you observe, you give notepads to people. Some will even use them, you give manual to people, and they only open this manual during the training no sooner they go home. No sooner they go home. So that even when you go to the training, you are given manuals, like Tell us a Story. We had to force some of them to use them. They don't use them in their planning. So their focus is just to go to training, to get money, and come home……This is so discouraging. Even this accelerated learning, the training we went for. We were expecting that they should take the lead to ensure teachers will implement the roll out this training to the communities. Nothing much is going on [John, Nov 2015].

That commitment is not there. And so maybe their love for the job is not there. It's all about money, money, money. Because you can see teachers go to the classrooms with business like systems. They go with some items, markers, some food for children to buy and when they enter the class, and the attention is only on
selling to children, selling to children, unto the time it is time to focus on teaching, there is not time so the children will not learn [BeeTee, April 2016].

While motivation levels were low across most all the teachers, Learning Coaches did report significant differences in the level of commitment from the qualified and unqualified teachers that were not being paid through salary or other incentives like distance education. According to Learning Coaches, this lack of motivation translated into negative teacher behaviors that became constraints for Learning Coaches. Of the negative teacher behaviors that resulted from low motivation, Learning Coaches stated that teacher absenteeism and teacher “movement” were the biggest constraints to them being able to do their job effectively. Given that majority of teachers are not qualified and trained, most of the teachers that Learning Coaches worked with were community teachers neither on payroll nor provided incentives by the community. Community teachers struggled to meet their daily needs thus often left schools in search for "greener pastures" or other opportunities. Or community teachers would just come and go as they pleased with no real commitment to regular attendance in the schools.

Community teachers who are not on payroll have less motivated support from their communities and as such are often irregular and not punctual in school. The vacuum created by these teachers in the schools create a hell of problems for the coaches, Head Teachers, and even the children [Osbourne, Demo Narrative, Nov 2015]

This was also an issue with qualified teachers that were not approved by the Ministry and thus were not payroll. Also, as David mentions, some of those that are not approved are not at the schools they are “attached to” so do not necessarily take things seriously:

Many will say that their conditions are very difficult. We have to move this way, some of these teachers are not approved, they are not on government payroll, and
even those that are government approved, at times some of them are not in the very schools they are attached to. That's another issue as they are receiving salaries in other schools, so Head Teachers may find it very difficult to work with them……when they are not on payroll, they will not take the things seriously and at times, they will not be there [David, Nov 2015].

Teacher movement and absenteeism poses a significant challenge to Learning Coaches as it means that teachers they train and start coaching eventually leave, resulting in fewer teachers in the school or teachers are replaced with new teachers. Here Osbourne explains how teacher movement created a shortage of teachers in one of his schools:

Well the major challenge I can remember really is the inadequate teaching staff in schools, a very big challenge. I can remember in two schools. There are six classes and you only have three teachers teaching, how do we manage that kind of school. So that is a problem. And that is a result of teachers moving from one school to the other. They go to schools we are not supporting. Like I can say about this Blima School, when we started this program, they had about six teachers, and now they have only three teaching staff [Osbourne, April 2016].

This became a problem for him because he did not know how to observe a teacher that was teaching all three classes at the same time.

Tell me, now I am supposed to have three teachers to be observed, not so? One teacher for Class 1, one teacher for Class 2, and one teacher for Class 3. And if you go to a school like that where there is insufficient number of teachers, you only have one teacher for all these classes, how are you going to assess. So it is a problem [Osbourne, April 2016].

When teachers that leave are replaced with new teachers, this also creates a problem for coaching as it requires Learning Coaches to have to start all over and bring new teachers up to speed on the concepts and start coaching them.

The movement of teachers from one school to the other is a big challenge in a coaching process. It makes the coaching work difficult because it makes coaches continuous to do one training over and over. That is when you trained one set of teachers and they moved, you are surely going to train the new set that will be coming to the school [Moi, Journal, April 2016].
One of the barriers posing as a challenge is in regards to the teachers’ movement. The movement. They will leave the school voluntary or the school management will move them from one location to the other, but if you go there again, you have to begin all over with the teacher in the classroom, another difficulty. And another thing, teachers who are not on payroll...yes, if a teacher is not on payroll, the school does not have absolute control of the teacher, and the teacher, we have some of them who cannot even prepare lesson plan, they tell you they don't have time. You cannot get that commitment that you want from them; they will not be committed as that of a paid teacher. So that also is posing a challenge [CeCe, Nov 2015].

In the case of absenteeism, Learning Coaches would visit the schools and teachers they had come to see were not there, so Learning Coaches had to reschedule and come again.

Yeah...it is kind of hectic because some schools, you go, let’s say, I have my work plan, and I am working in this school for today, eventually I went there, one or two teachers are not around, I have to reschedule that visit again [CeCe, Nov 2015].

In both of these situations, Learning Coaches are not able to provide sustained support to any one teacher over time and thus the value of coaching is largely missed with a majority of the teachers.

**School Leadership and Accountability**

All Learning Coaches emphasized the influential role that the Heads of School have on the success of their coaching in schools. For this, Learning Coaches prioritized maintaining communication with Heads of Schools and meeting with them regularly concerning their work in the schools. Learning Coaches also were responsible for supporting Head Teachers in fulfilling their own management responsibilities. Learning Coaches reported that the majority of Heads of Schools in their communities were receptive and supportive of coaching in the school. This afforded them a lot of opportunities to establish relationships with both Heads of Schools and Teachers in the
schools and make efforts fulfill their roles and responsibilities as a Learning Coach. However, outside of the positive support to Learning Coaches, Learning Coaches described school leadership in schools as generally weak and poor and felt it to be a key constraint to their coaching effectiveness in some of their schools.

Most Head Teachers in the schools where the Learning Coaches worked become Head Teachers because they are the most qualified teacher in the school not because they have been trained in school leadership. In fact, most of Head Teachers still hold teaching responsibilities in the schools. So as John describes, “most school leaders do not have adequate leadership skills to support teachers”.

Learning Coaches most commonly reported a general “laziness”, “laissez-faire attitude” or lack of interest and engagement in the schools resulting in them being absent more frequently. Learning Coaches found in general that many of their Head Teachers were rarely in the schools and if so, hardly ever all day. When Learning Coaches would ask for the Head Teachers, they felt that the Head Teachers always made excuses such as “I went for training” or “I had a meeting with the ministry”:

Yeah. The other barrier is the laziness of the heads. The heads, you can go there, you sit with them and tell them exactly what you want them to do, by the end of the day, when you go, they are fond of attending more of workshops, outside, this sort of things, you see they leave out the schools with the teachers, and those teachers when the head is not there, they care less. They don't do much. So, the laziness of the Head Teachers, and going out from their schools is another barrier because you are expecting them to be every day in schools, but sometimes when you go you don't meet them. Most times during the week, you will only meet them once or twice. When you ask them, they say the Head master has gone to the District office, he has gone to a workshop, and he is being called there. So they are not steady really help us to really see...things go the way they should go. [BeeTee, Nov 2015]

Each time I get there, he says very nice words, but to put them in action it is difficult, that is what the teacher tells me. When I get to the place, they tell Mr. Gadiru, you see that fine, fine talk that man is saying...that is the end. He goes
about his own, he is not there all the time, he is at the Ministry, and he is there as a Head Teacher. Sometimes I say to him, you are the head you have to be in the school... He says I went for salary; I went for this...you know excuses. Too much of this is not good [Gadiru, April 2016].

Learning Coaches felt that this lack of engagement and leadership affected the general climate of the schools as teachers would often relax and there would be no sense of accountability at the school for teachers. Teachers could come and do as they wanted often translating into frequent absenteeism, misbehavior, or relaxed teaching. For those teachers, who were committed to their work, they were often affected because they would not have access to the materials. Most often, the Head Teacher kept all the materials in his office and when he travelled away from the community, he would lock the doors often leaving teachers without even chalk to write on the blackboard.

Learning Coaches also reported that many Head Teachers had poor relationships with the teachers in the school and communities. Some of this had to do with Head Teachers not being transparent to the communities’ about how they spent the government subsidies provided to the school creating some distrust amongst the community:

Bee Tee described an instance where the Head Teacher ran off with funds that were provided by the program as part of the school improvement fund also referred to as the OTL funding for school improvement:

To some extent, they have some disgruntled feelings amongst themselves, the reason being that some schools that are being funded with subsidies that is given to them from the ministry for the children, those Head Teachers are not transparent with their community members, they don't come out explaining things how they spent the money for the benefit of the children. They hold onto them. And so, to some extent the SMCs come to query to ask how far they have gone with this money, how did they use them, so there is no proper accountability there is constant ruckus. Then again, we have this OTL funding, opportunity to learn, when that one comes again, the head wants to sit on it, grab it alone, though they will do what Concern is asking them to do, they present or give us some presentation. But the SMC or the community members only think that this money
is only given to them and have them in their pocket and so that kind of distrust is there among them [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

Tuba observed that many of his Head Teachers did little to empower or encourage teachers.

And even some schools, some Heads, some Heads don't delegate duties, some schools, they don't delegate duties, but when you delegate duties, even some of the teachers .they can feel belong because when they are not on payroll, but when you delegate duties to them, they can feel belong, they can be on the sport committee, they can be on the other committee...there is so many committees in the schools, if you just delegate it to them, they come and report [Tuba, Nov 2015].

Weak leadership and support to teachers constrained coaching actions in several ways. For example, if Head Teachers were not present in their schools and not effectively overseeing teachers, there was no control of teacher attendance. This affected Learning Coaches’ time with teachers as they spent a lot of time travelling to schools only to find teachers not there. Withholding of subsidy fees meant teachers were often not provided with the prerequisite materials needed to make and utilize teaching and learning materials in the classroom. Strained relationships with communities in schools and teachers required Learning Coaches having to mediate relationships between people rather than using that time to support teachers in the classroom. And finally, lack of accountability meant that teachers were not accountable for improving their teaching practice. This was evident during the roll-out of the accelerated learning training. While all Learning Coaches shared the view that Head Teachers were a significant constraint to their coaching, this was not the case for every one of their schools, but was a common constraint and a significant one for their coaching.

According to Learning Coaches, district level accountability and support to schools was also weak. If Inspectors or Supervisors came to visit the schools Learning
Coaches reported that they were there to find out what teachers were doing wrong and then collect bribes if they did not want to be reported. In the case that Inspectors or Supervisors actually came to monitor, Learning Coaches felt that they were not there to support teacher learning but to monitor the school on specific aspects.

**School Physical Environment**

The schools that Learning Coaches worked in varied in terms of infrastructure, furniture and resources. For example, some Learning Coaches that worked in areas closer to roads or semi-urban areas may have more schools that are permanent structures whereas others that work in more rural, remote communities like Godwin had more makeshift schools than permanent structures. In a few cases, Learning Coaches may have worked in rural areas but all of their schools were permanent structures as a result of school rehabilitation projects after the war, such as the government’s Sababu Education Project.

It is rural; it is indeed rural area. In fact there are certain areas, you know the past government actually improved on the infrastructure, not the present the government, before then they built schools after the war, yeah and every and all the infrastructure except those schools that have just started very recently, but schools were actually built. The only thing now is the furniture now is that it can get spoiled, yeah, and needs to be replaced but the structures are there it was only the attendance that the kids are?? but some structures are there...in my own schools....all schools he works in have good structure and were part of the Sababu education project...all of them [Gadiru, Nov 2015].

The majority of Learning Coaches worked in permanent to semi-permanent buildings that often had makeshift classrooms in order to accommodate large numbers of students. Whether schools were permanent or makeshift, Learning Coaches commonly
reported that there was limited space and seating to accommodate all the students so students often sat on the floor. Classrooms were overcrowded.

Such classroom conditions posed challenges for Learning Coaches in their support to teachers. Of the many challenges they mentioned, the makeshift building and the double classrooms affected their work the most. For the makeshift classroom, walls were not appropriate for hanging the teaching and learning materials that were promoted by the program. As a result, teachers could not really improve their competencies in this area and show progress. Also, Learning Coaches struggled to know how to best observe or support those teachers teaching double multi-grade classrooms. For example, Osbourne wasn’t clear on how he was to observe a teacher that was teaching all three grades at the same time. When I asked him how it affected his work as a coach he answered:

It affects me greatly! Tell me, now I am supposed to have three teachers to be observed, not so? One teacher for Class 1, one teacher for Class 2, and one teacher for Class 3. And if you go to a school like that where there is insufficient number of teachers, you only have one teacher for all these classes, how are you going to assess? So it is a problem! [Osbourne, April 2016].

School Curriculum and Assessment

Comments from some of the Learning Coaches (and observations from field visits) suggested that prior to Ebola, few schools had copies of the 2004 harmonized syllabus which functioned as the national curriculum. According to John, “we had one that was existing, but the availability of these things in the schools was the problem” He felt that the Ministry did not have the “strength” to reach out to all of the schools and those that did have access did not know how to use it. So teachers were only teaching from what they knew would be on the exams or from textbooks if they were available.
John emphasized that “there were no clear learning outcomes, no clear strategies”. Other Learning Coaches did not raise this as a particular issue for them but my assumption based on my own personal field visits to schools inquiring about availability of the curriculum, was that many of the schools that Learning Coaches were working in also did not have access to the syllabus. When I asked some Learning Coaches in informal conversations, some Learning Coaches also were not aware of a national level curriculum and were focusing their lessons with teachers on the resources and curriculum provided by the program.

Learning Coaches did, however, report more similar experiences concerning the accelerated learning syllabus that was rolled-out nationwide during the post-Ebola recovery period. During the post-Ebola recovery period, MEST and partners developed a nationwide accelerated and condensed curriculum and training program intended to be rolled out down to the school level and ensure all teachers knew how to use the curriculum and plan their lessons. Learning Coaches participated in the training and were engaged with monitoring the roll-out of the training and distribution of the syllabus to their assigned schools and surrounding schools. However, Learning Coaches reported that both the roll-out of training to the school level and the distribution of the syllabus were ineffective. David shared an illustrative example of what he witnessed when he followed up with some of the schools after the accelerated learning syllabus training roll-out. When he first went to the schools to see if teachers were using the new scope and sequence to plan their lessons, he realized that teachers did not have any of the resources that were supposed to be distributed. When he inquired he learned that the Deputy Director in the District office had not yet distributed them.
Well, one big challenge I had when we rolled out this AC training, we needed to follow up and see if they were using this AC but we went to schools to see if each teacher is using their scope and sequence and lesson planning and even knowing how to do that. So we were having problems. When we go to the schools, you will not even see these books. Where are these? You are supposed to be preparing lesson notes based on this? They said “oh we were not given them”. The Head Teacher was there, I asked well, these people are saying they have not been given and do not have access to this AC, and the Head Teacher said “well we issued books and handover books to Deputy and the Deputy is supposed to be giving them whenever they are required”. So I called on the Deputy and he said they were there. This was the same man that went to the training, the deputy and the Head Teacher. They are there. Then, what could happen was that the issue was lesson planning preparation or implementation of the AC was not happening as it was supposed to be. That was the issue. So we found out the issue was that the materials were not provided [David, April 2016].

David also realized that the training itself had not been rolled out effectively to the teachers. The Head Teachers and peer support teachers that were tasked with rolling out the training to all the teachers did not have the skills to properly train the teachers so did not do it correctly:

Teachers were sent to the training. The head of the school and the teacher …what they call the peer support teacher. It is supposed to be a mentor but because of the capacity, they are peer support. So the peer support teachers, based on their level of education that went, found it very difficult to implement the roll out of the training. Those teachers that went to the training, they didn't roll out the training to these people well, even in the area of lesson planning, [David, April 2016]

Instead, they just held meetings to tell the teachers to use the books and the syllabus and to teach the four core subjects

The peer support teachers were supposed to roll out the training to all the teachers in the school but it was just by passing it in a meeting when just they said we must prepare lesson notes and use the books and the syllabus and teach the four core subjects. That was the issue [David, April 2016].

This resulted in teachers continuing with their old ways of working so David had to spend more time with teachers outside of his coaching to bring teachers up to speed with the curriculum and how to use it with their lesson planning.
They didn't do it the way there were supposed to do it and they parked the books and continued with the old work. So I said now what can we do? And the teacher said, okay now, please, what we want you to do for us, I am going to gather all the teachers in the school so you can at least give us a clear idea on how we are supposed to do these things. .....so you have to give special! time to sit with them so they will be able to grasp this and all for that we waste time in the advancement in what is to be learned [David, April 2016].

Moi shared similar experiences and noted that even though the Head Teachers and the peer support teachers went to the training they did understand enough to pass on the information to the teachers correctly. They asked him to help with the roll-out to the teachers and meet with the teachers to make sure they understood how to use the materials.

The problem was that after the AC syllabi (roll-out), the people they sent to the meeting, they way they explained the syllabi to them and the lesson plan was not that much correct. So they asked me to sit together and plan how to go about it. So when we came after our coaches’ meeting, that was the first thing I did with them. They received it (the training) but the people who went to the training...the way they passed on the message to them...the message was not better understood. So they were looking out for someone that could do that for them….So we have to spend extra time training them, knowing, telling them to how to even use the ALS the content, the focus, and the lesson plan [Moi, April 2016].

**Community Perception of Education**

All Learning Coaches reported that most all of their communities did not have a strong perception of the value of education and for this did not “attach much importance to education”. Parents either do not enroll their children in schools at all; or if they did, they do not provide students and schools with proper support nor do they value their regular attendance in the schools.

If you go into these communities, you see the way children appear in their schools you will know that there is no much importance in primary education. There are no learning materials from the side of the parents. Even the uniform they wear, you can tell from that. That perception and they don't prioritize the girl children education because you go to the community and see a girl child busily doing this
farming and not being in the school and when you ask, they will just tell you that this child is not well and if you inquire what is the cause of the illness they will probably say epilepsy or any minor illness that will not stop that child from going to school or they will tell you that child is an orphan and they are unable to pay for that child or that child is living with his or her grandparents or I have no time to monitor or encourage them to go to school. So all of these things. So the community perception is very weak [John, Nov 2015].

According to Learning Coaches, parents instead would value other community activities as more important for their children such as diamond mining activities, secret society initiations, or agricultural practice which affected student enrolment, retention, and attendance. For example, Tuba identified how his communities were often affected by farming activities that often meant students would not be coming to school during those times:

There are two farming activities that slow down my work in the communities as a coach. For example, in the months of May and June, they have farming activities that is known as ploughing. Some communities can be involved in these activities and even the children (pupils) leave school hours to go and work on the farm. Secondly, presently there is one known as harvesting, which is presently going on, some communities involve their children which are school going children and then the classrooms are empty [Tuba, Demographic Narrative, Nov 2015].

Both Godwin and Moi talked about the diamond mining in their communities:

Most of the communities I work in are diamond mining areas. The people prefer mining more than education. So most of the time, they don't allow children particularly above 10. They deem it necessary for them to go to the mining makers and help them mine diamonds and not allow them to go to schools [Godwin, Nov 2015].

Sometimes the parents in the diamond area…a lot of them believe in the mining…like the area where I am working most of the parents believe in mining…so there are certain time (children) they have no say and are not aware of what education actually has done for them instead of the mining..[Moi, Nov 2015]

Gadiru stated that prior to the Ebola outbreak, the communities importance to secret societies often meant that teachers and students would not come to school either for fear of being initiated or because they were initiated and would be taken out of school
for at least a month due to the initiation period. Gadiru further commented that often girls who go away for initiation come back being pregnant requiring them to do drop out of school when they return. Moi also worked in communities where secret societies and agricultural work affected their work.

The community activities sometimes becomes a problem such as initiations of secret societies and agricultural work all these will stop the activities of a coach and even the school work. When there is a secret society in the community if the coach is not a member of that society he will stop from going to that community and the pupils sometimes fear to go to school [Moi, Journal Entry, April 2015].

Learning Coaches viewed the weak perception of the community as a significant burden in their work. One, when student attendance was inconsistent, this negatively influenced the potential impact their work with teachers might have on student learning. Second, Learning Coaches felt that it was the community’s responsibility to help pay the teachers that were volunteering in the schools to reduce teacher turnover and movement. Learning Coaches believed that if communities provided incentives for the UU teachers, then teachers would be more likely to stay in schools and be more committed.

**Road Infrastructure**

As part of the program design, Learning Coaches were based in villages in close proximity to the schools they supported and were provided motorbikes and fuel. Still, Learning Coaches felt their work was slowed down due to the poor road infrastructure and long travel distances between all of their schools. Gadiru explains “the locations where I work have a very bad network”. When I travelled with Moi to visit some of his schools, we turned off the main paved road from Kenema onto a dirt road and Moi said to me “We are NOW going to Africa”! Though the dirt roads we traveled seemed in great
condition compared to others I had been on throughout the country, we met very difficult crossings where the community had built unstable makeshift bridges that sometimes could not handle the weight of big Land Cruisers or trucks so would often break or cause vehicles to overturn. I witnessed a couple of trucks overturned on my school visits with Learning Coaches. According to Tuba, sometimes these would cause roads to close for days or weeks which often became the case for him on one of his roads.

Godwin reportedly had the most challenging travel conditions and sometimes had to cross rivers by a small ferry or canoe to get to some of his communities:

Well, it only has to do with my location. I have to cross rivers. Yes. So most of the times, like the place we are going on Thursday, we have to cross the Sewa river. There is a ferry. But there are certain times you go and you may not meet the Ferry in working order or maybe the workers themselves will go out and do something…..During the normal school year, when school reopen in September, Sept to October, it is very difficult for me because the ferry may not be working. So if I have to go there, I go through Kono which is far away from here and go to Mashindy and then enter that way…so it is like I have to take two days travelling on motorbike before I enter these communities. And there are certain times, like Jabrima, these communities can be no go areas for me [Godwin, April 2016].

The poor road infrastructure was particularly a constraint for Learning Coaches in the rainy season when some roads were not even passable preventing some Learning Coaches from visiting their schools as well as teachers and students even attending. Bee Tee reports

Now that the rains have fallen down, the roads really are not good for riding. You see, sometimes, you may set your plans by 8 o clock I should be in the school, but the challenges you meet on the way will not allow you. And when you go now, you may just have small time to really attend to the teachers [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

John claimed that for him it was very difficult to reach some schools more than two times per month because of the “rough terrain” of the roads. This is particularly exacerbated in the rainy season. Because of this, he spent more time in closer schools than the others:
For the rainy season, I have a school that is called Amadayia C.; the road is so slippery that when you go there, if you are not careful with your motorbike, you will not be able to return. So for you to be going there regularly, it is very difficult. So most of the schools that are very close that are around Mile 91 are benefitting more, because even there are times when I think I will complete my circle in two weeks then I am able to complete in less than two weeks [John, Nov 2015].

Godwin was often restricted from even getting to his communities during the rainy season due to over flooding and inability of ferry to cross the rivers:

Well, natural things that can be barriers is when the rainy season, I do little at times no coaching. It's really tough in the rainy season because the roads are horrible. Certain times I can have no access the areas that I cover with certain communities. …..I have two schools that in the rainy season, like Sennu, I have not visited since schools reopened recently. For now it's about a week and half now, nobody has stepped out of the town to come towards Bamma. The river is over-flooded. Well, before I access Bamma, I have to cross this big river with the ferry. And now the ferry is not in good working order. And from Bamma to access Sennu again, I have to cross another stream. That stream can be over flooded and people cannot find their way to Bamma which is a bigger town. And there is another town Jabrima...I have to cross a river, but with a canoe...So I have to park the motorbike and cross the river. Presently, I cannot access there simply because the river is over flooded. Even the place where I used to park my bike, it's all gone [Godwin, Nov 2015].

For all of the Learning Coaches, the limited road infrastructure required more time to travel short distances and thus affected the amount of time they were able to spend in the schools with teachers. During the rainy season, Learning Coaches had even less time with teachers.

**Organizational and Programmatic Factors**

Organizational and programmatic factors Learning Coaches reported as influencing their time were:

1. Workload and number of teachers and schools
2. Additional administrative responsibilities outside of their regular coaching with teachers, and

3. The abbreviated schedule and project-related changes due to the Ebola outbreak.

**Workload**

Learning Coaches described their inability to spend enough quality, sustained contact time with teachers, which they felt was critical to affect change. Given the limited knowledge and skills of the teachers, Learning Coaches needed more time with teachers than the program allowed in order to help them improve their practice. According to John, “the more contact hours we have them, the more they feel our presence, and feel free to say whatever thing they want to do with us”. John and David claimed that only going to the schools once a month to conduct a coaching cycle was not enough for the level of support teachers needed. Learning Coaches felt it was possible to promote expected actions of the program but needed more time in between coaching cycles to provide support that would be effective. Here John and David expand on their perspectives:

For now, I spend most of my time planning to visit these teachers, meet with them, to set goals and then I observe them. Like I said this morning, we need more time than the time we are spending with them. Some of these concepts cannot be understood in one to two hours--trust me. So if you go to observe, you analyze, and you give feedback, it will not be very effective. And the time to leave that teacher to practice all of those things (beats hand on table for emphasis) that teacher might have some challenges with things which you may want to put adjustments in place; there is not enough time [John, April 2016].

Even the time I seeing, it is not even enough. It's like, after coaching, completing a pre-visit up to post-conference, where there is chance, having one or two days just full of visits, you sit down and work what is to supposed to be done, like spending a whole day or time preparing a lesson, even amongst yourself demonstrating this particular lesson, then you allow them, ask them questions before ever you can do this, IF there is ANY time! outside of this normal cycle,
then it will build their capacity more than just the few contact hours that we are having with them [David, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches, particularly those with more than 18 teachers, actually struggled to complete coaching cycles with all their teachers in a month (EdCo, 2015).

Learning Coaches, particularly in the earlier stages of the program, were “troubled” managing their time and schedules to visit all of their teachers in their classroom, schedule the pre and post-visit conferences, and document their activities for all 18 teachers each month [Coaches’ Training Report, Dec 2015]. Learning Coaches felt having to support 18 teachers was too difficult to manage and do all that they were required to do as a coach. Most Learning Coaches stated that having fewer numbers of teachers and schools would give Learning Coaches more time to prepare and properly support each teacher effectively.

So the number of schools up to six for you to go to all the six schools and coach within a month maybe some times will not be that much effective because some schools you have up to 20 teachers at that school, so you the two days in the month to work, so are you sure you are going to see all those teachers even when you have other activities to attach to so if that number can reduce a little bit [Moi, April 2016].

To manage 18 teachers for the mentoring or coaching to be intense it’s too much. I would suggest at most 10-12. 10-12 you can manage and you can prepare them very well [CeCe, April 2016].

**Additional Administrative Duties**

When Learning Coaches discussed their normal workload and additional responsibilities, some were directly related to their coaching role such as administrative paperwork such as planning, documentation and reporting while others related more to their additional responsibilities as an employee of their organization. Organization-related activities included attending or helping with non-coaching related activities such as
meetings, visitors, workshops, or supporting other staff with other project-related activities.

For instance, David felt that given his close proximity to the field office, when he came into the office to do regular paperwork such as reports, he often got asked to do other things in the office that were not related to his role but were part of his job as a staff member to the organization.

What I am saying, what I mean, in the contact time means for instance I have, let's look at it like this; I have a coaching cycle let's say within two days I must have completed the cycle…which means in three weeks time I come for the other cycle but during those times, I will be visiting other schools. I will be visiting other schools and doing other work in the office or meetings or workshops, so during that process, there will be limited time to come again and discuss with them. For me, there is limited contact time with the teacher. This is a barrier for me working with them. That is one. Because the issue of having work in the office, when you have deadlines for submission of reports, or possibly for workshop preparation, documentation and other things, I am sure that one will be over because since, more especially myself, based in Magburaka office, so a lot of other activities like you saw what happened this morning, so when you want to move, they say okay this thing…ah..prepare this (for annual review). It means you have a lot of extra time to spend in the office preparing some office documentation, as well as coping with my coaching [David, Nov 2015].

In the Concern Worldwide office, the education program faced a severe teacher turnover at the beginning of the project due to illnesses and other reasons and some Learning Coaches had to take on over Learning Coaches’ workloads in their absence. Once the positions were filled, Learning Coaches had to spend additional time orientating new Learning Coaches to their roles and their communities. Other Learning Coaches talked about time spent supporting the Education Officers to distribute teaching and learning materials or assisting with the roll-out of the Consortium assessment. Some Learning Coaches talked about having additional roles
such as supporting the Education officers in the distribution of materials or supporting the EGRA assessment.

**Project-related Changes due to Ebola**

The other major external factor that challenged the work of the coach was the project-related changes due to the Ebola outbreak and the post-Ebola priorities in the educational and donor landscape. When discussing the impacts of the Ebola outbreak on their work as a coach, Learning Coaches referred to school closures as well as how their roles shifted toward the response. However, once schools re-opened and Learning Coaches resumed their roles in school, most Learning Coaches, with the exception of one, reported that the Ebola outbreak did not impact their communities directly and life resumed to normal in their communities once the government lifted public bans. The major constraints Learning Coaches reported that were a result of the changed landscape due to the Ebola outbreak were 1) dealing with the time that was lost with teachers and the need to refresh their skills, and 2) learning a new curriculum while working with teachers in a condensed school year. Additionally, Learning Coaches reported having to spend more time supporting the roll-out of the national training in many of the schools where the accelerated learning syllabus training was not properly rolled out to the schools. These combined with school closures and the closing of the project further reduced Learning Coaches’ opportunities to provide sustained support to teachers for the kind of time needed to facilitate change with teachers.
ZFM/ZPA Complex

Sub-research question #4: How do Learning Coaches describe what actions they were able to promote in the face of their constraints and what supports in the professional context allowed this to happen?

In this section, I report findings related to sub-question #4 which focuses on the interactions Learning Coaches have promoting coaching actions within their environment. The ZFM and ZPA are "dynamic and interrelated, and are constantly being re-organized by the adult in their interactions with the environment) (source). The ZFM/ZPA complex describes when Learning Coaches go into their professional context and try to promote the actions they have learned through the professional development offered to them. It is where participants describe what they were allowed to do and promote and the supports provided by both the ZPA and the ZFM that allowed them to do it. For this section, I first discuss the promoted actions that Learning Coaches were permitted to do within their professional contexts followed by the perceived supports that were available within the environment.

Promoted Actions Allowed

Despite the many constraints, Learning Coaches reported being able to implement many of the actions promoted by the project. These included building collaborative and trusting relationships, facilitating teacher understanding of TPD competencies, applying the coaching cycle, co-plan, co-teach, and model lessons, and supporting schools leaders as they create school based coaching plans, as well as continue their own development as Learning Coaches. This section briefly describes each of the actions Learning Coaches commonly reported being able to do within their context despite the constraints.
**Build Collaborative and Trusting Relationships**

One of the most important promoted actions that Learning Coaches reported being able to do and achieve was building rapport and establishing trusting adult relationships with teachers, heads of schools and community members. Though RaISES promoted building collaborative and transparent relationships as a key action, Learning Coaches also valued its importance in their work as a coach and thus focused much of their attention on trying to build these relationships. Learning Coaches reported they established trust by conducting specific and intentional actions such as being friendly with them, being respectful, and being dependable and trustworthy by saying what they mean. Learning Coaches repeatedly referred to the importance of understanding adults as learners and the significance of applying adult learning principles such as building on where they are and asking reflective questions.

David felt he “tried to make it a friendly atmosphere”. Godwin felt he helped everyone feel comfortable by being around more consistent and being familiar with them. He felt this was important to do with students as well as the teachers and Head Teachers.

Most of the times, I am there to make ourselves more familiar particularly with the kids. I don't just make myself familiar with the teachers but with the kids. Certain times I have snap shot just to make them feel comfortable when they see me around [Godwin, Nov 2015].

He also felt it was important to spend time with village authorities:

I make myself familiar with village authorities, there are certain times, well, they come up with issues and sometimes these issues might not be relevant to your job but they just bring them to you, you listen to them and they talk. And then I say well this is not my area, but whatever it is, this, this and this is exactly what you should do [Godwin, Nov 2015].

and to communicate:
Now that you are leaving the school at least that will be a reminder for you to put things in place. I have their phone numbers because I check on them regularly. You see. So, frequent communication has helped me a lot. I don't only talk to you when I am on my coaching or when I am doing a coaching cycle. I talk to you when I am on leave. I talk to you when I am in Kenema. If I am going to a workshop, I tell them I am going for a workshop in Bo. They should know that after the workshop we will see [Godwin, April 2016].

Instead of getting frustrated with teachers when they are absent of “stubborn”, CeCe interacted in a way so they would not feel angry:

Sometimes if a teacher proves to be stubborn, I try to manage the situation in a way that he or she doesn't feel anything like anger in me. If we have agreed to meet on this very date, and I go to their school and they are not present with any valid excuse, I will observe the other teacher and go back. I will reschedule the dates and go back…… so I try as best as I can to manage the situation, even though I am on the disadvantage side, I manage it well, [CeCe, Nov 2015]

Osborne described his relationships as being very close and very “cordial”:

I am very close with them, I discuss with them, we share issues and matters affecting the school together so if my relationship with them had not been cordial, probably they will run away with me each time they see me [Osborne, Nov 2015].

As a result of the Learning Coaches’ efforts, Learning Coaches felt tremendous acceptance from the teachers, Head Teachers and communities they worked with were extremely positive and one of the biggest successes Learning Coaches discussed. Overall, Learning Coaches felt teachers were receptive to their support and though progress was slow and gradual, most teachers were trying new strategies and making efforts to change their practices.

**Provide Support to Teachers**

Learning Coaches reported that their primary role was to provide support to teachers to develop proficiency in their teacher professional development competencies so as to improve their practice and thus, improve student learning outcomes. Learning
Coaches seemingly did the best they could to provide on-going support to teachers despite the limited time they had with teachers due to the many constraints. Learning Coaches described their overall approach with teachers as not being an expert or a supervisor but rather a support or guide, one that helps teachers reflect on their own practice and build on what they already know. Learning Coaches were able to introduce new concepts in teacher professional development competencies through training followed by on-going school-based support. At the time of the study, Learning Coaches felt the focus of their work with teachers had been specifically on lesson planning, classroom management and some basic strategies in literacy instruction namely print concepts, phonemic awareness, and alphabetical abilities such as letter recognition and letter-sound identifications. With the changed context post-Ebola, Learning Coaches felt their primary focus shifted towards providing support to teacher understanding of the new accelerated syllabus and lesson planning that had recently been rolled out to all the schools at the time of the study.

Assuming there were no disruptions, Learning Coaches reported that they could visit each of their schools and conduct one full coaching cycle with all their teachers within six weeks. This assumed that schools were in session and on normal schedules and all teachers were present at the time they visited. Conducting a coaching cycle with each of their teachers included a pre-visit conference, classroom observation, analysis, and post-visit conference. Learning Coaches highlighted that in the classroom observations they collected evidences using the fidelity tool. During the analysis stage they used a planner document to review the fidelity tool and plan for their post-visit conferences. During the post-conference visit Learning Coaches reported prompting teachers to reflect
on their lesson by asking them reflective questions rather than Learning Coaches just telling them their opinions of how they performed:

What exactly I do, whenever I observe a particular class, after the observation during the analysis and strategy, after making my plans. During the post-visit conference, we will sit; initially I used to discuss the strengths and areas of improvement first before we review the competencies. We must review the competencies at any time. But what exactly I did this time around I made sure we reviewed the competencies first, especially the competency I am focusing on, and if it is Competency 1 we review the competencies first. When you review the competencies, without even starting the discussion, they start realizing that oh this area needs to be improved. I did not do this well, I did not do this well. So we first review the competencies before we start discussing your strengths and improvements so that is exactly what I have been doing [Godwin, April 2016].

For these last few months I was doing some coaching by doing the coaching cycle. That is helping teachers to do their lesson preparations and during that lesson planning I make sure they follow the steps that are there. That is the 5 steps you should follow. That is introduction, material preparation, learning activities, and the assessment and so on. And so I also guided them on co-teaching. Co-teaching is they teach, I teach, we learn from each other. I sit down modeling with them, that is sit with them, tell them what they are expected to do, prepare things together and this kind of thing [BeeTee, April 2016].

While the coaching cycle was the most reported support to teachers, Learning Coaches also reported spending a lot of time with teachers co-planning particularly on the lesson planning format, literacy instruction strategies, and the accelerated syllabus.

Whenever I do the classroom observation I do the analysis and the post-visit conference and we plan. So normally, I will dedicate Friday to them to make sure we review we did talked about in the post-visit conference and we discuss...if we both plan a lesson (co-plan), I come back on Friday, we sit and discuss and make sure they perfectly understand the lesson. I don't just go and forget about them. I come back on Friday and I dedicate that Friday to the weaker ones. That's what I do [Godwin, Nov 2015].

If I notice that this teacher needs support in lesson preparation, then we discuss with the teacher, together we agree on lesson planning or preparing a lesson together. It can be co-planning or I will guide the teacher to plan by himself, or I will plan and share with the teacher or I will model it or maybe if he is having difficulty with presentation, lesson presentation as that also is another key in teaching. Because some teachers can prepare lesson plans well directly from the book because they have a model that is guiding them, they can prepare it well but
when it comes to presentation they will they do something different than what is written in the lesson plan and IF that is what is observed, at the end of the day, we will discuss and agree whether I will model that lesson with the teacher, I will present and he will sit back as a pupil and watch me and then he will know the step and the flow between introduction to assessment [CeCe, Nov 2015]

For these last few months I was doing some coaching (as part of the) coaching cycle. That is helping teachers to do their lesson preparations and during that lesson planning I make sure they follow the steps that are there. That is the 5 steps you should follow. That is introduction, material preparation, learning activities, and the assessment and so on. And so I also guided them on co-teaching. Co-teaching is they teach, I teach, we learn from each other. I sit down modeling with them, that is sit with them, tell them what they are expected to do, prepare things together and this kind of thing [BeeTee, April 2016].

… After we complete the coaching cycle...well most of the time we do...If i am assisting, for example if I am working with them on lesson planning or we are working on a particular competency, we don't use the school time. That is what I do. I don't allow us to use the school time because the more you use the school time you allow some doubts that happen during school hours. So I wait until after school, we go…because I am not observing a single teacher. Let's say I observe 3 teachers--that will take me...let's say after the observation I have to do all the post-visit conferences that will last over 3-4 hours. So after school if you have some problem with lesson planning, maybe we will have a forum either within the school compound or we find some place cool that we can work but if you have problems with lesson planning, I address them their needs one by one [Godwin, April 2016].

Learning Coaches reported working more with print concepts, letter-naming and letter-sound identification as the focus for literacy instruction. During the span of the project, Learning Coaches also reported encouraging and motivating teachers to come to school or do the work as well as mediating bad relationships.

**Establish Teacher Learning Circles**

In the latter part of the program, Learning Coaches established Teacher Learning Circles and oriented teachers to its purpose and procedures. Some Learning Coaches were able to conduct several TLC meetings before the closing project. Though the TLCs
were rolled out later in implementation, Learning Coaches felt that TLCs were going well and were a promising addition to their coaching and training.

David said when they saw content from the TLC they were able to recall aspects of the training more readily.

The latest experience I have seen as very valuable is these TLCs. The TLCs are very good. You go to these trainings; these teachers will not read or do anything. But when you facilitate the TLCs, especially, the introduction of TLCs you see them remembering, recalling the training. And with them together, they are reminded of what they are supposed to do…They actually have a tool to be a guiding principle so that at least they can implement what they are supposed to do. …I think doing it together will remind them to do better. So that is one area they will get use of, so these teacher learning circles need to continue [David, April 2016].

Gadiru felt the TLCs allowed them the time to provide more of the direct support outside of the coaching cycle. He felt this allowed him more time to do the co-teaching and modeling depending on the topic they were discussing. At the time of the second round of interviews, Gadiru was able to complete three of the modules: Orientation, Lesson Planning and Classroom Management.

But the bulk of it, we do during the teacher learning circles. And sometimes we can do co-teaching there, modeling, depending on the topic we have to talk about. Like if we use a particular module, let's say lesson planning, everything about it we have to discuss it so that every teacher will actually understand [Gadiru, April 2016].

Gadiru also felt that the TLC helped guide teachers in the knowledge or skills they wanted to improve:

So that one, and the books, the two books, that one, even the Head Teacher said, this is a material. He said one thing at one time, Gadiru, the educated man is the man who has the material, say even you come here and talk and talk and talk, we don't have the material with us, we will not taking that much seriously. But being that the materials are here, we read through, and that book alone is a guide, without someone telling you, they actually tell you what to do [Gadiru, April 2016].
Here Moi describes how at first he wasn’t sure that teachers would actually come to the TLCs without a stipend but he was surprised at how many teachers were attending.

The teacher learning circle is going well. yeah, because initially I thought because I don't know if you remember there was an argument in Bo when I said some of us are working in diamond areas and those people at the end of the day sometimes want to go to the mining fields so if they are not given stipend they will not attend some of these sessions. But it is a bit different than I expected and operating very well because one time for a month, and they go out to attend that session. So for me it is working well or otherwise they would not attend. If they are benefitting from what they are attending, meaning it is working well [Moi, April 2016].

Osbourne also felt that teachers were responding well to the TLC roll-out and actually taking the initiative.

The other strategy is the support I am giving to these schools to really implement these TLCs. I see that as a very big success, because the teachers are helping themselves to teach themselves now, they share ideas in those meetings, and from my observations, they have been doing quite well so that too is a success story…. Yes, and now they are doing it on their own. What I did was… there are about 16 topics, themes. I gave them these themes and said these are to be done in two years, so let us select the first eight that we will be doing this year, and they did their own selection. And from those selections, they are following what they should be doing. They are taking the initiative [Osbourne, April 2016].

Learning Coaches reported several perceived changes in teacher practice particularly in terms of better preparing and following lesson plans even though this was challenging. They also felt that teachers and students were improving on letter-sound identification, something neither teachers nor students were doing before. Learning Coaches also reported that the teachers’ responses to the Teacher Learning Circles were one of appreciation.

**Support Head Teachers on School Improvement**

Another significant action Learning Coaches reported being able to promote was providing support to Head Teachers in fulfilling their leadership roles and working
towards school improvement. The most commonly reported activities that Learning Coaches were able to do with Head Teachers was 1) conducting informal meetings with Head Teachers, 2) co-facilitating quarterly cluster review meetings to develop school improvement action plans, and 3) monitoring progress on school improvement plans such as use of school records and documentation. Learning Coaches reported meeting with Head Teachers for a variety of purposes. The most common meeting shared by all Learning Coaches was meeting with teachers upon entering the school to keep Head Teachers informed of what they were doing in schools and how teachers were doing. All Learning Coaches stressed the importance of always meeting with the Head Teacher when visiting the school to check-in, show respect, and share with them the purpose of their visit with teachers. Learning Coaches felt this was critical if they were to ever “have an audience with teachers”. Osborne referred to it as a “protocol” for visiting schools.

Well the first and foremost as a coach, when I get to the school, the foremost thing I do I have to observe some protocols. Go to the Head Teacher, tell him my mission, and probably discuss maybe one or two things I intend to do in the school before [Osborne, April 2016].

CeCe describes a similar approach with Head Teachers of keeping them informed so that they can help support the visits.

when I go to the school head, I say I am here, I am here for this particular visit, and after the visit, I give him the feedback and if I am to come to a classroom visit, I will tell him, hey Mr. B I have just spoken Mr. S. and we have set date for this particular day, I will be coming around to observe their classroom so he as the head of the school he will try to put things in place to make sure it is success [CeCe, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches also reported having meetings with Head Teachers after working with the teachers to update them on their progress and see how the Head Teachers might be able to support.
Though Learning Coaches were not initially trained as intended in leadership skills, some Learning Coaches reported supporting Head Teachers on their own professional development competencies. Godwin describes how he started doing this at the beginning of the project but stopped once this was no longer a priority in the program and only focused on those Head Teachers that were also teachers in the classroom.

Initially, I used to discuss the Head Teacher Competencies with them because we had copies of it but since we learned we are going to focus more on the classroom now, but most of the times, we do discuss, though we have few Head Teachers whose are classroom teachers as well, those are the ones I spend more time with.

Other Learning Coaches reported meeting with Head Teachers on an as-needed basis to either bring up issues that were brought up by teachers such as lack of teaching and learning materials, solicit support of Head Teachers in supporting teachers, or problem solving issues in the school that were impeding learning such as infrastructural challenges, community problems or personality conflicts.

The other key area that Learning Coaches reported providing support to Head Teachers was through the cluster review meetings. Learning Coaches, in collaboration with Education officers and the District Education Office, led quarterly meetings with Head Teachers from all the schools in the cluster. The cluster review meeting served as a forum for Head Teachers to share their experiences in the schools and problem-solve challenges they were having in terms of meeting their Opportunity to Learn targets. Education officers with support from Learning Coaches often used these meetings to provide training and support to specific OTL elements like record management. Learning Coaches also used these meetings to share problems and areas where they needed support in working with teachers such as addressing teacher movement. Head Teachers would
then develop school improvement action plans that outlined what they would do in their schools to improve:

so they will develop that school action plan, it is just like a work plan for this month, this month, this month, this month, this is what my school will engage in, these are the things we are focusing on. They will express their objective, their expected outcome, and the date and time they will complete that particular activity. So they will meet and review and also they will discuss things, things like record management, individual sharing like a school will present, this is how we are managing our record keeping, maybe if another school is having a challenge with record management, because they have already been trained on record management, but you know, some people are slow learners, they cannot get the concept straight off, that is why we normally bring them together to share experiences and also at the end of the day, we give them so back-ups like in school administration, how to handle teachers that are untrained and unqualified, how to maintain teachers in schools, because of late, we have been experiencing movement of teachers, and also teachers leaving schools, especially teachers who are not on payroll [CeCe, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches valued the cluster review meeting as an important forum for sharing and learning amongst Head Teachers. Here David shares his view of its importance:

It has been a very good forum wherein they come together as a community of practice, sharing their successes, what has helped them to succeed, their challenges, what lessons they learned, the way forward, so that they learn from each other so these one has been a very healthy conversation process. That is one another way we have been working with them [David, Nov 2015].

Yes, this forum creates room for reflection. Even the Head Teachers' cluster review meeting we normally have, because they have their plans and by discussing their plans, we sit from the ground, they come with these generated ideas, when these ideas are generated, that will guide us to which area we are going, it is like you are discussing them after that school with the summary, but this one is a wider way....? And it's creates a way of even them getting best practices from their colleagues to implement in their schools so when you go there, then you know that things are in place, so these are things that are helping us [David, Nov 2015].

Moi highlighted the importance of the meetings for the less experienced Head Teachers to learn from the more experienced Head Teachers.
So, we were very happy when they brought in this cluster meeting so that we bring them together for each of them to learn from those who are over experienced and more qualified or been in their schools for quite a long time...so when we bring them together you will find out that the majority of them learn from those who have all went to colleges or to training colleges and are qualified and have taught for some time and try to bring in ideas wherein the other teachers who have never been to colleges and who did their certificate through the Distance Education you will see that they are always learning from those who are so...it was very nice that the project brought that kind of idea [Moi, Nov 2015].

Prior to the Ebola outbreak, these meetings were occurring on a regular basis every three months but after the Ebola outbreak, these meetings were no longer prioritized as the program started coming to a close at the time this research was being conducted.

Finally, many Learning Coaches reported following-up with Head Teachers to check on progress of school improvement plans such as checking their record –keeping and documentation, or building of make-shift structures to add classrooms.

In schools with weak leadership and accountability, Learning Coaches spent a lot more of their time sensitizing and mobilizing communities to support schools, encourage and motivate teachers and Head Teachers to perform their roles properly, mediating conflicts between teachers, Head Teachers, and/or school communities, or collaborate with others to problem-solve challenges to school improvement and learning.

**Manage other Responsibilities**

Outside of the work Learning Coaches were able to do within their communities, Learning Coaches were also able to manage other responsibilities that were more administrative in nature or unrelated to coaching. Given the vast number of activities that Learning Coaches were responsible for in a month, some Learning Coaches reported spending time planning their monthly schedule of both coaching activities as well as
office-related activities. Here David shares how Learning Coaches in his organization prepared their work plans for the month:

Well, for instance, especially when we returned from Bo, we sat here and planned. Looking at the normal work for Concern, having those dates assigned, we are left to fit into those blank dates so that at least we do have an amount of coaching. For normal activities in the office, like bi-weekly meetings on Fridays, like we have these reviews that normally happen annually, and then we have coaches’ learning circles that happens every month, once every month, and every 3 months we have this Head Teachers Cluster review meeting. This we have them. Except otherwise, if there are any special functions that is something in the office we are called upon. So based on that, we prepare our work plan and send to the Coordinator at the moment, which is supposed to be the manager, so normal coaching now is entered into those [Available] days [David, Nov 2015].

In addition to planning their schedules, Learning Coaches reported coming into the office to prepare and submit monthly reports, manage their coaching files, and attend regular sector and/or organization wide meetings.

Of course for the office, we have bi-weekly meetings every Friday and after the meetings, normally we have sector meetings where we meet [Cece, Nov 2015].

For normal activities in the office, like bi-weekly meetings on Fridays, like we have these reviews that normally happen annually [David, Nov 2015].

In some cases, Learning Coaches were asked to support other project-related activities such as helping the education officers distribute materials or letters to the schools or support them in training Head Teachers on record management.

There are time we coaches, when the education officers move in, when they are choked with work, especially with the OTL, distribution of letters, inviting them to come, we will also help them to distribute these letters then initially, there was a training on school administration and record management, so we all supported them in some of these areas [David, Nov 2015].

**Develop Themselves as Learners**

Learning Coaches also reported actions they participated in or took upon themselves to develop themselves further as a coach. All Learning Coaches reported
participating in regular Coaching Learning Circles where Learning Coaches came together on a regularly basis to share their experiences and successes in their schools and to problem-solve challenges together. In one organization, this was led by the Manager while the Learning Coaches from the other organization conducted these meetings without the manager. Learning Coaches also reported attending training workshops led by the Consortium both in literacy instruction and effective coaching. Other ways that Learning Coaches reported developing themselves varied by coach. For example, John would often take advantage of having internet at the office to look up additional resources to download on his tablet to read later.

I don't have access to internet in the field so when I come to the office, I will make sure I go to the net and search about things that are related to coaching especially in the area of literacy. So I can have my tablet and whatever relevant information I get, I will download it just to read. And I always using my manuals just to learn new things and being in a better position to support the teachers [John, Nov 2015]

David stated that he had actually started using his reflection journal to “note down” a few things and he wanted to start using it more and improve on it.

Available Supports in the ZFM

“People are excited to see us.”

Learning Coaches repeatedly commented on the acceptance of teachers, Head Teachers, and community teachers as a contributing factor to them being able to enact their roles and responsibilities as coach. Learning Coaches recognized that there were certain things they did to gain that acceptance, such as building rapport and establishing trust in their relationships. However, Learning Coaches felt that in general teachers, Head
Teachers, and communities were initially supportive of the coaching model and receiving support.

The positive embracement of the Learning Coaches supporting teachers to improve on the professions as teachers by Heads of Schools, Communities, and Some teachers who desired to excel in the teaching has greatly influenced my work as a coach [CeCe, Demo Narrative, Nov 2015].

The interpersonal relationship with the teachers, the pupils and even the community is very much encouraging and that has helped me so much. That is what I am saying. When I say teachers, I am talking about Head Teachers as well. ….Yes, they are very supportive. In fact, when they heard this project was closing, they were disappointed. They don't want the project to close. They are always asking if there is any way of furthering this project. I say well the program ends in August. We have no control of that except otherwise. That is always what I have been telling them. So they are really enjoying it [Osborne, April 2016].

“Teachers are making efforts.”

While several characteristics of teachers adversely impacted the success of Learning Coaches, Learning Coaches identified a few significant characteristics of teachers that supported them to be able to enact their roles more effectively. Outside of the relationships that Learning Coaches had developed with teachers, Learning Coaches felt that there were certain characteristics teachers possessed that helped them better enact their roles as Learning Coaches: 1) responsive teachers willing to try new things and make changes, and 2) committed teachers that were on payroll or had incentives.

Overall, Learning Coaches felt that teachers were responsive to coaching and were willing to try new things and make changes to their teaching practices in their classrooms.

As I am saying, teachers are making efforts now to write their lesson plans, when you go you will see lesson books on their tables when they are teaching. They are making as I said, teaching aids and materials. They have their learning corners where they put materials like seeds, stones, sticks, bottle tops, for children to do
their counting. Especially when we are there as coaches, trying to observe, you see they make use of all these things. They ask children to come and put these stones on their table to do some subtraction and addition as they are teaching mathematics. And then also, they have this print book. This print book they have drawings, write the names of items, sometimes they ask children to come with items from their different locations at home. They come with these items, paste them in these books, so the children will not forget the names of these things that they see at home because the teacher really explains. [BeeTee, Nov 2015]

Yes, coaching, coaching is quite interesting because like, it's actually a new idea to our people but if you look at coaching and you look at before now, before our intervention in the classrooms, especially when this untrained and unqualified teachers, they had absolutely no idea about teaching, even to manage the kids, even the blackboard organization, you know. All of these things. They will have the stuff, they will know what, but to deliver their lesson presentation, you know, if you look at all of these areas are key in teaching so as a coach, or coaching, these people have actually, some of them, especially in the schools that we are working with, are somehow reformed their way of teaching. Yeah. Some of them actually do appreciate the idea and the direct support they are getting from coaches! It is really appreciable so I actually enjoy coaching because like supporting others to improve education which is paramount or the backbone for development, I am proud of doing it. Yes [CeCe, Nov 2015]

Some of the schools, the only school that is posing as a challenge, one school but all the other schools are actually trying in times of reading, I could say, let’s say 65%-70% are actually doing well...they are practicing the new strategies, in terms of lesson preparation, lesson presentation, the use of the AC, like the school I went, they are using the AC to teach, because the other time I thought the math, even the one they taught today, I thought it was a bit higher for their level but it is in the AC but it is within their level just at the start, you begin with the two letter, the two numbers and then you work and go up to that level as the word for word they will understand more. That's how you saw the pupils were doing their math [CeCe, Nov 2015]

Well what I feel good about, is that when I started going to these classrooms we were not even finding an alphabet strip that the pupils will be able to learn in the absence of the teacher well now they are accustomed to them having it there and not only having it there, but the right characters, knowing the upper cases and the lower cases that would be very much good for pupils to be able to do it, even emphasizing it with the class, then now you see it has something like been even with the teachers, the sounds, the phonemes, the phonological awareness of even the teachers themselves. For now there is improvements, though not perfect or 100% yet, but you see that the pupils are surely knowing the sounds and pronouncing them and even matching them and trying to decode some of these things from words just like the issue of decoding there has been some improvement concerning that. Having that, once again I learned there has been
meaning added to the teaching of these teachers, yes. Because when they teach, they are attaching the teaching to a particular scenario, then the pupils will be able to link that something like an angle, it will be life long, they will not forget. And this can happen as a result of even the introduction, knowing that when I want to teach, I should have a prior knowledge, previous experience of pupils when they are in their homes or in a lesson that will connect them and will even help the pupil to remembering what they learned the previous day. When that happens then you will have learned as a continuous process, (not understandable)....there has been improvement in this particular thing in the schools on the average [David, Nov 2015]

This varied according to teacher qualifications and remuneration status. Learning Coaches commonly reported that UU teachers with incentives were the most promising type of teachers that would not only benefit from coaching the most, but were more responsive. Learning Coaches felt that even though their skill levels were low; UU teachers were more interested in learning new strategies. Those UU teachers that had some incentive such as participation in Distance Education Program offered by NGO tended to be more engaged in the project. However, in some cases, even if UU teachers did not have a direct incentive, they were often motivated by the hope that they would be chosen to participate in Distance Education program eventually if they did well in the RaISES project. Learning Coaches overall found UU teachers with incentives much easier to work with and ones that tried the most.

Qualified teachers on payroll were the next best group of teachers Learning Coaches reported being able to work with them. Qualified teachers on payroll usually demonstrated more commitment to the schools through regular attendance. Qualified teachers were also easier to work with in terms of them having more basic skills and knowledge about teaching than those who were not qualified.
“Some Heads of Schools are doing their best.”

Though most Learning Coaches were challenged by weak leadership in at least some of their schools, Learning Coaches reported that some of the school leaders were actively engaged in their schools and make efforts to monitor their teachers. Learning Coaches were motivated when Head Teachers were making efforts and were receptive to improving as school leaders and supporting teachers more effectively. Learning Coaches reported Head Teacher willingness to attend and participate in Peer Cluster Review meetings as a promising sustainable approach that was making an impact on how Head Teachers thought about their schools and their roles. Learning Coaches reported seeing improved efforts and practices of some of their Head Teachers particularly in terms of tracking attendance, record-keeping and checking lesson plans. Learning Coaches felt that when Head Teachers were there to hold teachers accountable for both attendance and lesson planning, Learning Coaches’ potential for impact increased.

“All this community participation makes me very happy.”

Though the RaISES program did not specifically expect Learning Coaches to work with communities or community structures as their primary role, Learning Coaches’ statements demonstrate the underlying value and belief Learning Coaches have concerning the importance of community involvement in schools. When that involvement was not provided to schools, Learning Coaches saw that as a huge constraint. So when Learning Coaches saw communities actively engaged in supporting their schools or responsive to supporting the school when mobilized, Learning Coaches felt that this significantly influenced their success with coaching. Several Learning Coaches reported specific stories of how some of their communities came together to help solve individual
problems at the school whether it was through donating resources to build additional structures to the school, providing rice for some of the community teachers, or taking over the community teachers harvesting duties so that they could stay in school and teach.

While all Learning Coaches had at least one story to share, I was particularly struck by the way that Godwin talked about his communities, some of the more remote communities that received the least support from other organizations and the DEO because of their difficult locations. Here Godwin illustrates the kind of community support he experienced in one the schools he worked with which was “IRC was the first and only NGO to visit that community”.

.o, because of the river, none of the other NGOs had ever visited...all whatever all the NGO benefits coming into communities, none of them had tasted anything. So upon my arrival, I told them that I am from IRC and they were delighted. The entire community is concerned about whatever happens to the school and they are very grateful for the materials that we give them and everything so initially they were occupying a makeshift building so it was destroyed by a storm and after some time, the community itself had to reply...they were using someone's house as a temporary building...temporarily. Then the community applied with support from the chiefs and other people, they applied to the District Council...District Council had to do some documentation and then give them a structure in about four weeks [Godwin, Nov 2015].

“The organization has helped me a lot.”

All Learning Coaches referred to some (or several) aspects of the organization that significantly helped them enact their roles more effectively and efficiently. The most commonly reported factor was the logistics that each organization took care of for Learning Coaches in order for them to be prepared and get out to their villages in a more efficient way. Specific logistical support that Learning Coaches repeatedly mentioned was the provision of motorbikes and fuel that allowed them to get to the schools they
needed to each week and provided them with the flexibility they needed to schedule their visits.

One is this movement on the bike. The bike is of great help. Yeah, the bike makes you too make your movement as scheduled. You go at your own pace, your own time; you go at your own plan. Yes, it helps you rather than asking somebody to take you along or looking out for these kinds of things. The bike is one instrument that really promotes the work [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

Also, the organizational support. Like I said, quite apart from depending on my salary, there is that kind of effective support for me to do my work. There is a means of transportation, because we look at the context we are working. The roads are not good. But the organization is ALWAYS there to support. We have been provided a motorcycle and for each time you have a problem with your motorcycle, let's say its break up or whatever, they will give you another source of transportation, they will either provide you another vehicle to do your work, or they will find another way so that you will be able to do your work even if you are not going to the field directly or at least to do other things to help promote the program. And the organization is really trying in that area [John, Nov 2015].

Another common organizational factor that supported Learning Coaches’ experiences was the organizational reputation and community’s familiarity with each organization.

When working with teachers, they always express to me about what our program is doing for them and how they feel when they are among their fellow teachers. They considered them to know more about teaching since IRC is always training them and even supporting them in teams of school materials. The other thing that influences my work as a learning coach is they honor my organization has in the environment of the schools. Most of the people talk about what IRC does for those areas such as medical and education. In area of education all schools we are working are supplying both learning and reading materials [Moi, Demo Narrative, Nov 2015].

People actually appreciated the school and they send their children more with the intervention of IRC. IRC has actually made impact…since IRC is here, I think it is only now that IRC is going to Bo, so they have actually made a mark. We are very proud of that...so wherever we go, people tend to accept us. Because they know what they have done not only in education, but in other aspects because normally you see the side boards all over, so the moment you say this is IRC intervention, people will take it serious [Gadiru, Nov 2015].
Contributing to the reputations of the organization are the other activities that the organizations do to contribute to the schools and the community. Learning Coaches reported that this kind of organizational support provided to schools as part of the OTL funds was another factor that helped them in their roles as a coach. For example, many Learning Coaches talked about the slates, books, school materials or furniture their organization contributed to students in the school.

As part of another project, one of the organizations supported UU teachers throughout the district to enroll in the Distance Education Program, a certification program offered by the Teacher Training Colleges for UU teachers. Some of the teachers they supported were UU teachers in the schools where RaISES Learning Coaches were working. These Learning Coaches all reported the significant impact this had on community teachers staying in schools, meaning that Learning Coaches had more sustained contact with these particular teachers and did not have to deal with high rates of teacher absenteeism as they did in other schools where teachers were not supported. For those teachers that were not receiving support, Learning Coaches felt that they had hope that their organization would soon support them in Distance Education. This hope also influenced teacher staying in schools more regularly.

Another important organizational factor reported by some Learning Coaches was the direct support provided by their field office manager whether it was through regular meetings or providing on the spot support when need.. Here Godwin talks about the availability and prompt responses of his manager and even the initiative his manager took to follow up on him and his work:

My manager always gives prompt support. No sooner you call, and one thing about her is that you call her in the middle of the night, she will respond. So that
prompt response, support to mistakes, frequent communication...Whether you LIKE it or not, she will call you. Even if you don’t call her she will call you maybe once or twice. Even this morning I was called [Godwin, Nov 2015]

Osbourne and Moi shared similar feelings about their manager:

The manager is always in the position to explain details what we are supposed to know about the program because that alone motivates you to do what you are supposed to do. Like whenever, she gets any information sent to her, she makes sure she prints out for everybody! And when it comes to the fidelity tool, she tries to print for everybody...but if I am printing on my own, out of my own money, you think I would continue? I would not be motivated because if I have 5000 Le, I would not go to the cafe to just print everything. No! I might do that once, but maybe one time in a month, but unfortunately, no. But she prints everything, clips it and keeps it for us. Whenever we come, she says, Moi, this is yours, you have to take it to the field, this person, this is yours you have to take it to the field, so if that is done, it means that person helps me [Moi, Nov 2015]

What also is helping me, perhaps to be successful in my coaching, is the feedback I get, or the input I get from the management...Always, at meetings. Monthly meetings or weekly meetings on Mondays when we come here together, she always tells us what and what we are supposed to do as Learning Coaches when we get to the schools, so from there we learned a lot and put it to practice. That makes us successful [Osbourne, Nov 2015]

Zone of Proximal Development (Emerging)

Sub-research question #5: How do Learning Coaches perceive their professional growth and learning experiences as they moved through the zones? (Emerging ZPD as result)

The ZPD actually starts from the initial beliefs and knowledge of individual Learning Coaches, which I partially discuss in sub-question #1. However, the ZPD is never static and is constantly emerging because of the numerous interactions Learning Coaches have within their professional context. For sub-question #5, I specifically report findings where Learning Coaches specifically discussed their own coaching growth and/or learning as they moved through their zones. I have organized the data in the following sub-themes: 1) perceived shifts in their own professional learning and growth, 2) perceived supports to professional learning and growth, and 3) perceived future
learning needs. This section does not provide my own assessment of their growth and learning but only the Learning Coaches’ perceptions of their own growth and needs based on their experiences. Additionally, this section does not capture all of Learning Coaches’ growth and knowledge but only key areas Learning Coaches identified through the interview. I discuss other areas of growth reported by the coaches in the initial ZPD section as well as in my own analysis across the zones.

**Perceived Shifts in Growth and Learning**

Learning Coaches reported several changes in their own growth as a result of their participation in the RaISES program and interactions in their professional contexts. Key areas of growth included: 1) understanding their roles and responsibilities, 2) becoming a better teacher, and 3) feeling more confident to enact their coaching roles and responsibilities. Several Learning Coaches mentioned other areas but these were the main ones common to all Learning Coaches.

“I know my roles and responsibilities.”

Interviews with Learning Coaches reflected a growing confidence in their understanding of coaching and their role. Learning Coaches reported this was not something that happened immediately and evolved over time as they worked in their roles and gained more experience. Some Learning Coaches reported actually feeling fear at the beginning when going to talk with their teachers that they may not say the right thing:

Initially when we were employed as Learning Coaches, we didn't know what our responsibilities would be. In fact, the Title! (with emphasis)...even the title of Learning Coach was very strange. We were like what, what are we going to
do...we didn't know exactly what to do so at the end of the day after the first training, we knew exactly these are our responsibilities, then after the first training, like, we came to the field, we were somehow scared but we started implemented and becoming used to it. But after the second training, I can now boast that I am more confident as a coach than ever before [Godwin, Nov 2015].

So I think I am confident enough really. I know my job. I know what I am to do. I know my roles and responsibilities [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

One of the most common phrases Learning Coaches repeatedly used when talking about their growing understanding of their coaching role was adjusting to the understanding that they were not coming in as a “supervisor” or a “boss” or an “inspector” but as a support to teachers, someone who is there to encourage them, guide them, and also learn from them. Coming to understand this aspect of their role appeared to be a significant shift for them in understanding their role.

In terms of supporting teachers, I have a great idea in the foundational skills I have a very good professional relationship. I am being respectful. I know my roles and responsibilities. I am not posing as their teacher or their boss; I am posing as a colleague who is there to support them directly. And we are learning from each other. I am not a reservoir of knowledge. I am also learning from them. So it is a shared learning [CeCe, Nov 2015].

The coaching is different from being a supervisor and an inspector because as a coach, you are trying to let the teacher know exactly what he is doing that is not correct or what he is doing that is correct without reprimanding that teacher. You are not monitoring him as if you are a boss over that teacher. You are going there telling him to do things that you are all working collaboratively so that you can improve learning in the school system [Osbourne, April 2016].

“I am a better teacher.”

During interviews all Learning Coaches reported that through their participation in the program, one of the most significant areas of growth for them was in understanding the teacher professional development competencies and what they look like in action.

I think one of the successes I have is that I do understand how to interpret the teacher professional development competencies to the teachers especially in the
area of lesson planning, I think I am very successful with that [Osbourne, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches felt that by learning these, they themselves had become better teachers than what they were before.

Of course, now if I am to go back to the school to teach, hey. Don't even try me (Laughs!) I will employ ALL the teacher competencies, perfectly! So I can even become even a better teacher, yes, so this coaching has actually helped me to not only be a good coach but to be a better teacher. If I am to go back to the classroom to teach, I believe I will do extremely well, because I have got ALL the skills we acquired to teach [CeCe, Nov 2015].

One thing that has formed the basic foundation for my coaching is by knowing the teacher competencies and that of the coach because knowing these competencies is like an umbrella for learning broader than knowing what a teacher should be and should do and that of a coach, like it has given me so much knowledge, even if I leave the coaching today and enter the classroom, I can also be a better classroom teacher to management of documents--- [Godwin, Nov 2015].

Learning Coaches felt that they had a better idea of effective teaching than what they had learned in their pre-service teacher education and/or certificate programs.

These are things are not taught in teacher training colleges, so though we were trained as teachers...even preparing accurate lesson plans.....was not the case. So, I now feel better that I can even teach these things to other teachers that are trained and qualified. Initially I used to read, but the way I read now, it's like I read with passion. I read frequently [Godwin, Nov 2015].

Then the issue with the teachers, I have been teaching on limited subjects for instance, integrated agricultural and science. But by going through these foundational skills of literacy and effective coaching, then, formally since being a teacher, I have limited staff But now I have built my capacity to advise more teachers on key competencies, on how to REALLY! present an effective lesson with very perfect learning outcomes [David, Nov 2015].

Given that Learning Coaches had limited exposure to what “effective teaching” looked like as promoted by the program, many Learning Coaches struggled in the beginning of identifying and capturing evidence in classroom observations against all the indicators.
Learning Coaches initially were challenged in grasping and understanding what each of the indicators of the teacher professional development competencies looked like and what they were actually expected to train and support teachers. Learning Coaches were unclear what some of them meant.

“Coaching is a part of me now.”

In addition to Learning Coaches having a shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities and improving their own abilities as a teacher, Learning Coaches reported a growing confidence in their abilities to actually support teachers and Head Teachers through specific coaching actions. All of their responses aligned with the different competencies promoted by the program and ranged from applying the coaching cycle, to collecting data using the fidelity tool, to managing coaching documentation, to communicating in a positive manner, to asking reflective questions to prompt reflection, to supporting school leaders. Amongst all of these, Learning Coaches reported that these were all very new at first and difficult to grasp, but with time, Learning Coaches expressed feeling more and more confident.

For example, several coaches reported struggling with understanding how to use the fidelity tool and collecting evidence but with time and support became more confident to use it. Here Bee Tee explains her initial struggle:

…that fidelity tool. My first experience seeing that one, I found it to be very difficult, very tedious, too many things to look at. But for now, I know exactly what is there, so I have confidence, just to look and pick major things that I feel are very necessary. So before this time, I thought I had to do EVERYTHING!! on that so I was scared and (felt) fear, you know, so I was scared really thinking that I am not doing the right thing, I may not be doing the right thing, but for now, with your trainings, I have more confidence now, I know exactly what to do there...something that is very great in you, or that you have done...more explanations, more trainings, really have made me confident to handle these
tools...I am also able there to be able explain to others where there is some doubt, so that is a good thing. I have really been exposed to certain things that I was not expecting [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

Godwin also expressed feeling fear when he was first conducting classroom observations using the fidelity tool and after time and training he began to feel he was more “on track”:

Initially I was just whatever it takes for me to do...he laughs...I was just doing it that way...that gives me much more confidence and I now have BETTER! (with emphasis) understanding especially when it comes to the fidelity tool...Initially, it was a very big challenge. When it comes to classroom observation, maybe for the whole night I will have no sleep...somehow I am going to the field to do classroom observation, how am I to going to fill out the ENTIRE!!! Fidelity tool (he laughs,...) it was a very big challenge... so there were times even for you to observe certain indicators on the fidelity tool and the competencies, you find it very difficult to write and write and write until you become sick and tired of it...you just sitting there...but now I know I can manage a particular competency, I can observe it and make my analysis, in a very short time, swift one indeed and accurate you see,...during the first training, coaching competencies but it was not too clear for us, but the second training was more, managing our box files, and one thing that amazes me the most..within myself, I was like he...this fidelity tool maybe I am not on the right track...you see...if I go with them I will find out I have not been doing anything....but no sooner I noticed that I was on the right track, my comments, and I am checking the indicators, checking the competencies, the evidences, and I said wow, I know I have been doing great...he laughs greatly...so I know I actually am on track....until then this training, I thought I was not on track [Godwin, Nov 2015].

David also shared his challenges using the fidelity tool at first, particularly in identifying and collecting evidence on the individual indicators for the teacher professional development competencies. For him, the competencies were not yet right there “within his head” so he could not easily turn to the page where it was to write it down. He sometimes reverted to writing things down on a piece of paper rather than using the tool.

When I started as a Learning Coach, being new into the system I would move into the class, even the teacher professional development competencies may not have
been within my head so I would have to be turning pages round or even having a list of them by my side or even knowing which indicator is this to which one when I started! But as I gradually moved on the teacher professional development competencies are within me and I know what to look at and exactly which page for which area. This particular activity that this teacher is demonstrating is THERE! And quickly I will be able to find that page and get the evidence. But initially, I had to delay, and to an extent, I had to get another separate paper, writing it, and even dividing these things, but now there is at least development in that capacity swiftly I will be able to look at a point and have some tangible evidence but initially again, I found it very difficult to even know which one would be very good evidence, but now I have knowledge of getting very good evidence to report on…I really tried to take the evidences but it was very difficult [David, Nov 2015].

David also struggled initially with having enough time to analyze and develop strategies for the post-conference visit so he was just writing a few things down to move fast so as not to forget. But David felt that over time after knowing how to use the tool and follow the stages through the process, he began to see a gradual change.

So, to an extent I would not even get time to analyze and strategize. I would just get a brief snap shot analysis but the actual order in which to analyze. I was having a problem of doing it initially. Even going on to the preparation and planning for the post-visit conference visit. Because I saw it as being s a bit too long, I had to take more time [David, Nov 2015].

Many Learning Coaches shared similar examples of how at first they were unsure of what was expected in terms of some of the other competencies but with time also became more confident in understanding them and being able to apply them in their work in schools. For example, Gadiru mentions here how he can now boast of modeling to teachers:

Yes. And now I can boast of even modeling to teachers but before this time it was not like that. Yes. I was also learning on the job, because if you have the willingness as an adult, you will learn when you make efforts. So there is a change, improvement [Gadiru, Nov 2015].

The most frequently reported coaching-specific competency reported by all Learning Coaches as an area of growth was learning how to work with adults as learners.
Some Learning Coaches talked about their growth in this area in general terms of just being introduced to the principles while others talked about specific principles they learned how to apply that helped them in their work. For example, here CeCe states how since she is more “abreast with the principles of adult learning” she now knows how to better work with adults overall.

Because I am abreast with the principles of adult learning I know. Now I know how to approach an adult, how to share an idea, how to impart knowledge in an adult, and maintain a professional atmosphere without he or she getting offended [CeCe, Nov 2015].

Godwin talked about his growth in adult learning principles and how that has helped him be able to work with adults that are older than him.

Yes, it was an experience I learned....things I have never learned in connection with adult education and the way adults learn...how to give response to them whenever I am among people who are older than me, I actually know how to respond [Godwin, Nov 2015].

John shared how he developed in terms of building relationships with adults as learners and communicating. He talked specifically about being able to facilitate more reflective discussions that allow him to understand where the teacher is and then tailor his discussion and support based on the needs of the teachers.

But honestly, there are things that I have developed over the years being a coach. One of them is, well, engaging with my teachers in those kinds of reflective discussions. I see it as pleasurable, and I think I am trying in that way, in that sense. Because everything you do depends on the context of your discussion and there lies the state of you the coach, because you tailor your discussion based on the needs of that teacher. It is not like you have a specific model, I am using this one and this is what I am going to follow, whatever, but based on what you discuss with your teachers will build the foundation of how you will support that teacher so my strength lies in my interaction with teachers.....normally, when I attend this training, the way I talk to them, the way I do things, the way I put off things, you know, they really appreciate and they normally tell me. You are a good teacher. You are a good teacher because if, I am working with adults they know...they have already knowledge and I want to take that from them. I need to
do it skillfully because it is my responsibility to build on what they already know so the way you discuss with them, this determines the extent of the relationship, so I think that is something I am really working on [John, Nov 2015].

**Perceived Supports to Learning**

When Learning Coaches discussed their own professional learning and growth, Learning Coaches attributed much of their learning to various features of the RaISES professional development program as well as some specific individual characteristics. While many Learning Coaches discussed certain aspects more than others based on their own individual learning styles and growth, the most common features reported by Learning Coaches included the 1) on-going training, 2) peer collaboration and shared learning, 3) common frameworks that guided them 4) manuals and resources, and 5) feedback from their managers.

“**The routine trainings we are having have helped GREATLY.**”

All Learning Coaches made reference to the value of the Consortium-led training workshops in helping them understand their role and responsibilities and providing them what they needed to know in order to be a better coach. For example John and Godwin talked about how the training helped them understand what their responsibilities were as a coach.

Initially when we were employed as coaches, we didn’t know what our responsibilities would be...in fact, the Title! (with emphasis)...even the title of Learning Coach was very strange. We were like what, what are we going to do...we didn't know exactly what to do so at the end of the day after the first training, we knew exactly these are our responsibilities [Godwin, Nov 2015].

It has been a good experience so far, you know. When I started the job earlier, I was thinking how am I going to start coaching, how am I going to start coaching? I know some basic literacy concepts, I know some of the schooling system in Sierra Leone, but how do I go about to start this coaching? Initially, there was no framework, even when I was going through my job description because normally
when you start working with such organizations like Concern, you have to set objectives. I was thinking now I am going to set an objective on coaching, how am I going to do this coaching? So later, a plan came that we would have to go for training, I said wow I think this is the first step for us to have a kind of simple playing ground. So, immediately after the coaching training, I realized how it would be very easy as long as you put into practice what we have learned so far. So since then, I find it very interesting working with teachers in coaching [John, Nov 2015].

Whereas CeCe highlight how training on literacy and coaching helped her be a better coach.

So, I believe with training I gained from the literacy training and the training for coaches, I gained from the Consortium is actually helping me to be a better coach [CeCe, Nov 2015].

While all Learning Coaches reported training overall as the most commonly reported factor to their learning, many of the Learning Coaches emphasized the importance of the “routine” or “ongoing” training that made it particularly valuable. Learning Coaches felt that having consistent training over time allowed them go out into the field and practice and then come back together to get clarification on some areas where they were struggling while also being introduced to new skills to take back with them.

What really helped me, of course...the training, the frequent trainings we are having, the reviews, reflecting on what we have been trained and worked on, the issues we have, and going to reflect, and retrain, it has helped! Greatly! (with emphasis). I have seen some gradual improvements because let me see, the three workshops we have attended, and every time we went, I am seeing some improvement added to the previous experience, the community work I have with people. So the routine trainings we are having, has helped GREATLY! [David, Nov 2015]

Here Godwin highlights that it was not until after the second training that he began to feel more confident in his work.

Then after the first training, like, we came to the field, we were somehow scared but we started implemented and becoming used to it. But after the second
training, I can now boast that I am more confident as a coach than ever before [Godwin, Nov 2015].

“Collaboration with my other colleagues.”

All Learning Coaches reported how collaboration with their peers helped them learn a lot, particularly in addressing challenges they met in their daily work. Learning Coaches’ responses ranged from simply going to their peers informally to talk about their work and learn from them, or meeting with peers regularly through the monthly learning circles, or being able to spend time with the larger network of Learning Coaches across all organizations when they all came together for the training workshops. The most shared aspect reported by Learning Coaches were the monthly learning circles. Learning Coaches felt that the regular learning circles allowed Learning Coaches’ opportunities to share their experiences and learn from each other concerning their challenges and successes and how to overcome particular challenges. Here are a few examples of what Learning Coaches said about the monthly learning circles and how they helped them:

The coaching meetings we have there is to share our experiences together with others. You share challenges, successes, achievements wherein you learn from your challenges that do not allow you to succeed. From the other end, when the person will tell you how he managed to succeed, so we learn from there. Then the achievements, what they have been able to achieve, the person will tell you, how did you go about doing this, the others may learn from you. You, too, will learn from others. So from there, when you go, so maybe wherein, there were challenges, you are able to skip through. The next time. So when you come back the next time, maybe, you have different things to say to your colleagues. So that is the essence of us having our coaches’ learning circles [BeeTee, Nov 2015].

The monthly Learning Circle we are having….That has really helped! because if we have every month a particular, key thing to discuss and one person may lead it and in addition, everybody gives update of successes, their challenges, so when one shares their challenges then we will be able to pick some of these things as part of the learning process, and then you go on well [David, Nov 2015].

These are monthly because all of us we meet here in this room and discuss and share some ideas, we talk about our successes in the field individually each
individual coach and some of your challenges, the lessons learned. We discuss all those things. So from that, you can borrow (or buy >) the idea of another coach who was able to overcome a similar challenge that probably you might have learned. That also improved me made me to be effective [Gadiru, Nov 2015].

Yes, it has changed to a positive move somehow. At first, I did not grasp the competencies...with time, through collaboration with my other colleagues, we discuss, if I had some problems with some areas, we tried to have some discussion, so from the discussion, I was getting to understand. At first I never knew, I did not read the manual serious actually, at first. I was not reading that manual honest speaking. I only look at it briefly, but when we began to discuss I began to look at the content of the manuals I began to look at the manuals. there was that kind of improvement and that makes me to even talk like this......connection with that one. Yes. And now I can boast of even modeling to teachers but before this time it was not like that. Yes. I was also learning on the job, because if you have the willingness as an adult, you will learn when you make efforts. So there is a change, improvement [Gadiru, Nov 2015].

Some Learning Coaches also referred to the shared learning they gained from collaborating with their teachers. CeCe mentioned that she learns from her teachers every time she observes a class.

I am not posing as their teacher or their boss; I am posing as a colleague who is there to support them directly. And we are learning from each other. I am not a reservoir of knowledge. I am also learning from them. So it is a shared learning. Whenever I observe the class, I sometimes learn one or two things that are happening in the classroom that I have not known before. You know. So it’s a learning process all for me [CeCe, Nov 2015].

d even the time I spend with my teachers, also helps me a lot because I get a general context of what learning is like in Sierra Leone. Because honestly, I want to believe, I am not generalizing, but what is happening in Tonkolili, if you go to Bombali, you might see similar things. You go to Kailahun you might see similar things. So even if that small way I am looking can give me a clue of what is happening nationwide. What are the challenges? What are the gaps? I have the opportunity to learn about how learning is taking place at the low level in the country [John, XX].

“We are lucky to have a framework.”

Many Learning Coaches reported the value of having common frameworks to guide their work as Learning Coaches. Common frameworks they mentioned were not
only the competency frameworks but the overall adult learning cycle approach and the coaching cycle. Learning Coaches felt that these frameworks provided clear guidance on what Learning Coaches needed to know and be able to do and what they needed to strive for both in their own learning as well as teachers. Learning Coaches also felt these frameworks provided everyone with a shared approach that allowed them to support each other.

For example, John discussed how the competency frameworks helped guide his work as it outlined what he needed to know to be effective at this work:

So if I want to be a good coach I need to have the skills and we are lucky to have a framework on coaching competencies that really guides us on how we are to support teachers so like if we have an in-depth understanding of the coaching competencies, we will be able to do our work effectively. Because one, definitely you need to know about eight teacher professional development competencies. If you know them, then you will be at ease to support them. If you know all the foundations of literacy, you will be able to answer questions relating to the foundations of literacy. If you know about how to manage data to support the coaching process, I think you will be able to provide the adequate support to teachers. So like we are saying the competencies are really but the key ones are the ones we are focusing on and they will help you to become an effective coach. So if you have this one, all other skills and other factors will help you to work in a very conducive environment [John, Nov 2015]

By having these frameworks, John felt he knew exactly what skills he needed to develop as a coach and needed to practice when he went out to do his work in schools.

I am highly confident because I am sure because the competencies that we should develop or already develop. It is just a matter of practicing them. That is what I am doing. And I just believe that the only way I could develop these competencies is when I put them into practice. So like, I read them, I try to understand them, and apply them and I even share them with colleagues [John, Nov 2015].

The competency frameworks for teachers and Head Teachers also provided Learning Coaches a vision for what effective teaching and leadership should look like in
the schools. Learning Coaches reported that they never knew these concepts and that by knowing them they could better understand where to support teachers. Here Godwin describes:

One thing that has formed the basic foundation for my coaching is by knowing the teacher competencies and that of the coach because knowing these competencies is like an umbrella for learning broader than knowing what a teacher should be and should do and that of a coach, like it has given me so much knowledge, even if I leave the coaching today and enter the classroom [Godwin, Nov 2015].

While many Learning Coaches talked about the importance of understanding and applying adult learning cycle as an important area of growth, David specifically highlighted that the adult learning cycle and principles provided them all a shared or common model to follow in their work with teachers as adult learners.

We already had that disposition but with the adult learning cycle, it gives us a model, a common approach in terms of how we work with teacher which is why I keep emphasizing the training, but by bringing it and reminding it and bring it to the forefront [David, Focus Group, April 2016]

We are very lucky being in this Consortium and having this strategy of training people; they built our capacity on how to enter the communities in the schools. Because of that capacity, then we gradually walked into the schools, to the extent that allowing them to talk more is just a matter of us prompting, asking questions, and from there, they will reflect on what they have been doing, and based on the reflection, and we too are asking these questions, this will generate areas of improvement. Within themselves, they will realize by asking them questions, they will realize that oh yes, this is true that I did it, but I was supposed to have done it this way. So by so doing, you then you will be able to improve and even set goals for improvement [David, Nov 2015].

**Coaching and Literacy Training Manuals, Resources, and Tools**

Learning Coaches also reported the value of the training manuals and resources that accompanied each of the training workshops. Each coach referred to how they used and valued the resources in different ways. The most common resources specifically mentioned were the training manuals and resources provided for both “Teaching
Reading” and “Effective Coaching”. Some Learning Coaches referred to specific content in the manuals such as the “adult learning principles” or “coaching challenges” or “coaching tools with examples”:

We were given the manual during the coaching training recently and there is a section there which tells us about the coaching challenges, there are sample questions there. So what I did after that training, I tried to answer those questions [John, Nov 2015].

That is one, and not only the routine trainings, but they are followed with the materials, the reading materials that you can even contact. That has helped…The literacy materials are one, even the Effective Coaching materials, especially this issue of you having topics like adult learning principles, this has helped GREATLY because it capacitates you knowing how to work with adults, or people in the field there. IT has HELPED! That is one. Coupled with the tools we are provided with, the well prepared tools we are working with. These have also helped because having them on hand, then you are guided…you are guided. And also not only the tools, because there are some examples that have been given, so you follow these things enough to make you go on well. This has helped A LOT [David, Nov 2015].

“The feedback I get from my manager.”

Several Learning Coaches also discussed how their manager supported their learning. Some of this coincides with the organizational support to logistics but Learning Coaches also felt their manager helped them learn more about their role and responsibilities as a coach and how to do it more effectively:

The manager is always in the position to explain details what we are supposed to know about the program because that alone motivates you to do what you are supposed to do [Moi, Nov 2015].

What also is helping me, perhaps to be successful in my coaching is the feedback I get, or the input I get from the management… Always, at meetings, monthly meetings or weekly meetings on Mondays, when we come here together, she always tells us what and what we are supposed to do as coaches when we get to the schools, so from there we learned a lot and put it to practice. That makes us successful [Osbourne, Nov 2015].

..but the manager is always around, we do come, we explain, she always gives us updates, after the updates, then we give our own updates, about how things are in
the field and if there areas to rectify and there are things we must do wherein there might be some confusion about what to do she will give her own support and her own pieces of advice and tell us exactly what we have to do [Godwin, Nov 2015].

**Perceived Learning Needs**

When I asked Learning Coaches what additional skills or support did they think they needed to be more effective in their work, all Learning Coaches reported wanting and needing more advanced skills in both coaching and literacy instruction. Here, John stated that everyone was trying and doing well, but recognized that the program could not do everything but felt that Learning Coaches would definitely benefit from more skills:

> Coaching is a very complex concept that needs in-depth learning and I know that this is a program that cannot plan everything about coaching within this program…but I would like it if there will be probably MORE! skills, more technical skills that you think are very important to promote, like you are doing this research now. I will be very much happy to learn from it... In general, we need MORE support on things we are doing now…More on coaching [John, Nov 2015].

In addition to these core areas, individual Learning Coaches reported on specific support they wanted as individuals and these varied across Learning Coaches. For example, David wanted to strengthen his knowledge in the core areas of literacy and coaching but also expressed need for specific support in terms of using more reflective practices.

> As I was saying, the key areas in terms of strengthening is the area of continuing increasing foundational skills, literacy foundational skills coupled with more coaching advanced strategies, especially in the issue of reflection, reflective questions, reflective journal and especially on the use of this journal, and also the continuous use of the journal, because at times we don't be used to doing these journal prompts, journal usage, and how it can help you plan your life and plan improvement strategies for schools. I think this is one key I want to be accustomed with. I want to improve on. Yes, I journal, but very few key things that I just note down [David, April 2016].
Tuba wanted to improve on the post-classroom visit, while BeeTee and Godwin wanted to improve on managing their box file of coaching tools. All of these answers varied and reflected more individual improvement goals for Learning Coaches if the program continued.

However, one final area where majority of Learning Coaches requested more support for next phase was training on school administration and leadership since this had been eliminated from the project as part of the revised changes and Learning Coaches had not received formal training on leadership. Here David shares his thoughts:

Well one area I would like to learn more is in the area of working with school leaders for school-wide improvement because since we are also administrators and like we are working in the schools, so if I am developing, having that leadership skills on how to work with leaders then it will be a very great achievement for the program. I would be able to do more and support them to do more in the school system [David, April 2016].
CHAPTER 6
ANALYSIS OF THE ZFM/ZPA/ZPD SYSTEM

In this chapter, I examine each of the nine coaching competencies that the program promoted (ZPA) and explore Learning Coaches’ experiences (ZFM/ZPA) and learning (ZPD) relative to each competency. Such analysis helps to unveil Learning Coaches’ knowledge of the actions they were promoting with teachers and factors from each of the zones that interacted and influenced their abilities to promote specific actions in their professional context (Goos, Dole & McCall, 2007, p.34).

Overview of Promoted Actions

The primary role of RaISES Learning Coaches was to support primary-level teacher change with the ultimate aim to improve student learning outcomes (ZPA). At the beginning of the project, Learning Coaches were specifically responsible for the following key activities:

1. Train Class 1-6 teachers in Core Competencies (15 days)
2. Coach 18 teachers, grades one to three, in core competencies (Monthly)
3. Establish and co-facilitate Teacher Learning Circles at each school using a TLC teacher guidebook.
4. In collaboration with RaISES Education Officers, support nine Head Teachers in Primary and JSS levels in OTL targets indicators for school improvement.
5. Collaborate with DEO and Education Officers to lead quarterly Cluster Peer Review meetings with Head Teachers.
RaISES provided multiple professional development activities to prepare and support Learning Coaches to develop proficiency in nine coaching competencies that in theory would enable them to enact their roles and support teacher change. Coaching Competencies 1 and 3 focus on the pedagogical and content knowledge and professional development abilities Learning Coaches needed to support teachers in the teacher professional development competencies. Competencies 3-9 outline competencies specific to coaching activities.

1. Facilitate teacher understanding of the eight teacher professional development competencies.

2. Demonstrate an understanding of the foundational skills, concepts, and strategies needed for teaching reading and writing.

3. Understand how adults learn, maintaining a collaborative, supportive, and reflective coaching relationships with teachers, Head Teachers, and the wider school community that is meant to foster school improvement efforts.

4. Apply the coaching cycle (pre-observation, observation, analysis, feedback, and goal setting) to support teachers as they meet or exceed improvement goals.

5. Use a range of data to inform practice and support teachers.

6. Co-plan, co-teach, or model lessons as appropriate.

7. Support school leaders as they create school based coaching plans.

8. Demonstrate a willingness to self assess their practice, receive feedback, and model lifelong learning.

9. Manage their responsibilities in supporting teachers in nine schools.
Competencies 1 & 2: Knowledge and Skills to Assist Teacher Learning

In order to facilitate teacher learning, RaISES Learning Coaches needed to understand eight teacher professional competencies (Coaching Competency 1). RaISES focused on six teaching competencies in the first year of implementation including: lesson plan preparation, varied teaching methods and resources, positive communication, student assessment techniques, classroom management, and teaching reading and writing across subjects. RaISES also expected Learning Coaches to develop pedagogical and content expertise in literacy and be able to demonstrate an understanding for the foundational skills, concepts, and strategies needed for teaching reading and writing across subjects (Coaching Competency 2). Foundations of literacy included print concepts, phonemic and phonological awareness, alphabetical abilities, vocabulary, comprehension and writing. To demonstrate knowledge in these areas, Learning Coaches need to ability to: 1) explain each of the literacy foundations and their importance; 2) assess teacher’s ability to implement classroom practice that reinforce literacy development and 3) provide evidence-based feedback, and 4) contribute to training sessions on literacy foundations.

Learning Coaches reported that they grew significantly in both teaching as well as enacting their roles as a Learning Coach. Learning Coaches felt they had learned more through RaISES about effective teaching and learning than in their pre-service education and certificate programs. In my interviews, Learning Coaches talked eloquently and with ease about both the teaching competencies and the coaching competencies. This demonstrated to me that they were comfortable with the content and adapting much of the concepts as part of their own belief system and discourse. For example, Learning
Coaches talked passionately about the importance of teaching the sounds of the alphabet and teaching for comprehension instead of memorization. This represents a tremendous shift in their own beliefs about reading since they never grew up learning the sounds of letters of the alphabet and instead learned to read by chanting and memorization.

Though we know Learning Coaches helped lead two 5-day training workshops for teachers, outside of pre and post training self-assessments, the project did not test coaches to see if they had gained, through the training of trainers, the content knowledge they needed to facilitate the training workshops for teachers with any degree of fidelity. The project also did not formally observe or document the Lecturers or coaches’ delivery of the teacher training, to determine the fidelity with which they delivered the training. Additionally, the project did not assess the Learning Coaches’ ability to facilitate the orientation to the TLCs and establish TLCs in all the schools. While the project had rigorous measures in place to assess the fidelity of implementation of teaching, they did not include such measures for assessing coaching. Furthermore, it was beyond the scope of this dissertation to determine the effectiveness with which Learning Coaches transferred their knowledge and skills to their work with teachers. Therefore, we know very little of the actual extent to which Learning Coaches acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to enact coaching strategies and support teachers with fidelity of implementation.

Findings reveal, however, that Learning Coaches’ perceived shifts in knowledge, skills and abilities were not automatic and instead happened over time. For example, Learning Coaches indicated how immediately after the first training, they lacked confidence in knowing how to support teachers effectively. For example,
Coaches initially struggled to use the fidelity tool when observing teachers; they were unable to identify and record evidence of good practice. While the use of the fidelity tool is a skill required for coaching (Coaching Competency 5), this could indicate that Learning Coaches began supporting teachers without having adequate understanding of the pedagogical and content knowledge they needed to observe, record evidence and facilitate teacher understanding. Learning Coaches were developing their own understanding of new teaching competencies at the same time they were learning to coach, train, and support teachers to gain proficiency in teaching competencies. Though Learning Coaches struggled after the first training, Learning Coaches reported that after time on the job and participation in the second training, Learning Coaches felt much more comfortable and confident in their roles and abilities to enact their responsibilities more effectively including the fidelity tool.

Overall, Learning Coaches identified specific factors that influenced their learning including: routine training led by specialists; competency frameworks that provided a shared vision for effective teaching and coaching; peer collaboration and networking that helped problem-solve challenges; literacy and coaching resources; feedback from their manager; and other opportunities to learn on the job while working with teachers.

These findings suggest that Learning Coaches in this context need adequate time to acquire and become proficient in the necessary pedagogical and content knowledge in order to facilitate teacher understanding. Given the tremendous shifts in learning that was needed, findings bring attention to the need for the program to include rigorous measures to assess the fidelity of implementation of coaching on an on-going basis. These findings also suggest that Learning Coaches benefit from on-going, competency-driven
professional development that provides multiple opportunities to learn in between
training workshops while Learning Coaches are applying their skills on the job. However,
Learning Coaches could benefit more with on-going technical support, such as coaching,
in-between training sessions to provide more timely technical support in their roles.

**Competency 3: Adult Learning Collaboration and Support**

RalSES expected Learning Coaches to develop an understanding of how adults
learn, as the basis for coaches to develop competency in maintaining collaborative and
supportive relationships with the teachers with whom they worked (Coaching
Competency 1). Learning how to work with adults as learners in a collaborative and
transparent manner was a new concept and dramatic shift for Learning Coaches, given
their previous learning and professional experiences, which were embedded in a cultural
context that demands respect for authority. However, Learning Coaches reported shifts in
their understanding about working with teachers not as supervisors or as experts but as
collaborators in improving teaching. According to Learning Coaches, building trusting
relationships was a significant aspect of their roles, particularly in the first few months of
the project when Learning Coaches first started visiting schools and meeting with
teachers. Throughout interviews, Learning Coaches commonly used language aligned
with the content of the training and resources (ZPA), such as “building on what teachers
know” and “letting the knowledge come from them”.

Learning Coaches perceived the adult learning cycle and principles as a useful
framework for helping them support adults’ learning. Learning Coaches touted the use of
reflective questioning as an important technique for them in guiding teachers and others
to reflect and identify problem areas and set goals (ZPA). Learning Coaches emphasized
the importance of having a common framework for understanding how adults learn in order to communicate and build relationships with teachers, Head Teachers and communities, leading the coaches to feel accepted by those with whom they worked. Learning Coaches perceived most teachers as willing to try new concepts they introduced in the training. Learning Coaches connected this feeling of acceptance to knowledge and actions they learned from RaISES program (ZPA) and applied these principles to build those relationships (ZFM/ZPA). The relationships they were able to build allowed them to continue progressing in their coaching roles.

These findings suggest that Learning Coaches valued adult learning principles as important to their work and believed it was feasible to apply them in their professional context; they adopted them as their own and felt competent to apply them; and they felt confident that by using these principles they were able to develop trusting and collaborative relationships. However, these findings represent the opinions and perspectives of Learning Coaches only. Therefore, we do not know from this data, the extent to which Learning Coaches could apply adult learning principles in their interactions with teachers and other individuals and if those interactions actually led to trusting and collaborative relationships. Given the importance of interpersonal skills and establishing rapport and trust and collaborative relationships in the coaching role, programs would benefit from an assessment of the interactions between coaches and teachers given the large shifts Learning Coaches had to make in their own learning about coaching versus supervising as well as the possible power distance that coaches might automatically have in school as representatives of NGOs coming into a rural community to provide support.
Competency 4: The Coaching Cycle

Learning Coaches emphasized the implementation of the coaching cycle as a key responsibility in their support to teachers (Competency 4). The coaching cycle consisted of observing teachers, collecting evidence about their teaching using the fidelity tool, reflecting on the lesson together, and establishing goals for teachers to work towards, based on the observed lesson. Learning Coaches all demonstrated an understanding of the coaching cycle and its stages and talked in detail about how they planned, scheduled and conducted the cycles with teachers. The most significant constraint in conducting the coaching cycle was the limited sustained contact time they had with teachers. Reaching assigned teachers and conducting the full cycle was difficult to accomplish each month, thereby reducing effectiveness of their coaching. Three factors influenced coaches’ work with teachers. First, teachers’ limited foundational knowledge and skills, particularly untrained and unqualified teachers (ZFM) with only basic teaching knowledge, required more time and skills than Learning Coaches felt they had. Untrained and unqualified teachers who were not receiving stipends represented a large majority of teachers in schools. Though Learning Coaches felt all teacher abilities were limited despite their qualifications, Learning Coaches felt particularly challenged by UU teachers that did not have sufficient basic reading skills or foundational skills in teaching. Learning Coaches felt that the time provided by the program was not sufficient to effectively develop the foundational skills they needed as well as strengthen their proficiency in the expected competencies. Given the limited skills of teachers, Learning Coaches spent a lot of time reviewing the same concepts, such as lesson planning and letter-sound identification. Since the majority of teachers did not have sufficient prior knowledge and foundational
skills in teaching for Learning Coaches to effectively support them on new strategies introduced in the RaISES training. Learning Coaches became the front-line professional developers helping teachers acquire basic teaching skills. Therefore, Learning Coaches did not have adequate time with teachers to bring them up to the level that the program anticipated, thereby reducing the value of coaching for implementing reading reforms.

Second, teacher movement and high absenteeism (ZFM) required coaches to reschedule and/or start over with new teachers, thus minimizing sustained contact time with any one teacher. Teacher movement and absenteeism was also highest amongst untrained and unqualified teachers who were not receiving stipends or incentives. When teachers were absent or teachers had left the school, Learning Coaches had to spend additional time to return to the school another day when the teacher was in attendance or to start all over with new teachers that may have replaced the previous teachers. While RaISES can do little to reduce teacher movement or absenteeism, there are policy changes that the government could enact to reduce movements in teachers’ deployments and to ensure greater commitment of teachers to stay in the schools where coaching is offered. For example, in Concern-supported schools, Learning Coaches had fewer challenges when UU teachers received support by another program to attend the Distance Education program for teacher certification. This implies that UU teachers with incentives can be a promising cadre of teachers if coaches have adequate time to build their skills. In situations where teacher movement cannot be minimized, the program might prepare Learning Coaches better to work with new teachers that have replaced other teachers.
Third, Learning Coach felt they had too many teachers to coach (ZPA). Their time with teachers focused mostly on conducting coaching cycles, and coaches did not feel there was sufficient time to work with individual teachers between each coaching cycle. Furthermore, after the roll-out of the accelerated learning syllabus and its nationwide teacher training, which did not effectively reach teachers in all schools, Learning Coaches felt they had to spend additional time catching teachers up to the content of the training, rather than building on new reading instruction strategies the teachers had learned in the RaISES training workshops. Since Learning Coaches were not able to modify this aspect of their working conditions, it signifies the need for ensuring that teachers received initial training in foundational skills before receiving coaching, or that the program should assign each coach fewer teachers with whom to work, resulting in more contact time with individual teachers.

**Competency 5: Use of Data to Inform Teachers’ Practice**

The fidelity tool is a tool Learning Coaches used in classroom observations (as part of the coaching cycle) to capture evidence of teachers using new reading strategies; the ability to use this tool was Coaching Competency 5. This evidence served as the basis for feedback, coaching conversations, and improvement goals in the final stage of the coaching cycle. However, as indicated earlier, Learning Coaches struggled with the use of the fidelity tool when they first began coaching. While this was primarily due to Learning Coaches’ limited understanding/visualization of the teacher competencies’ indicators. Learning Coaches also felt the tool itself was too long and complicated to use in one observation.
Over time, and with more training and support on teaching competencies and use of the tool, Learning Coaches became more comfortable using it when observing teachers. The second training addressed coaching competencies in more detail, including the use of the fidelity tool. These findings suggest a need for a review and revision of the scope and sequence of training content for coaches. Learning Coaches need a stronger foundation in the pedagogical and content knowledge prior to enacting most of their coaching roles and responsibilities, including the use of the fidelity tool to observe teacher and give feedback.

**Competency 6: Co-Planning, Co-Teaching, or Modeling**

According to Bean’s levels of intensity of coaching activities (ILA, 2004; Bean, 2010), modeling instructional practices, co-planning, and co-teaching lessons together with teachers represent the more formal and advanced skills of coaching. If time allowed, Learning Coaches provided this type of support to teachers, usually within the coaching cycle period. However, during the time frame of the program, Learning Coaches focused primarily on reviewing reading concepts with teachers, asking reflective questions, and co-planning lessons to include instructional strategies for teaching reading, such as print concepts, letter-sound relationships, and using materials such as alphabet strips and a word wall. Towards the end of the project, Learning Coaches focused their support with teachers on planning lessons with the accelerated learning framework. Though Learning Coaches saw instructional strategies modeled during their first RaISES training, so that they could replicate this modeling in their training with teachers, RaISES did not train Learning Coaches on co-teaching, co-planning and modeling as a specific coaching strategy until the second training. Therefore, the program did not expect Learning
Coaches to use these strategies until after the second training, perhaps an explanation of why Learning Coaches did not talk in-depth about modeling and co-teaching as part of their coaching experience. However, after the second training, at the time I conducted this research, Learning Coaches should have started modeling and co-teaching with teachers to some degree. Instead, Learning Coaches were still co-developing lesson plans with teachers. According to Learning Coaches, this was because teachers needed more time to review lesson planning due to the long gap in program implementation because of the Ebola outbreak. In some cases, Learning Coaches were starting over with new teachers. Additionally, Learning Coaches did not have time between coaching cycles to return to schools to co-teach with teachers or model lessons.

These findings raise questions as to whether or not coaches were able to model and just did not have time in their schedules, or whether Learning Coaches lacked the pedagogical and content knowledge and ability to demonstrate advanced coaching skills. If Learning Coaches did not have the right knowledge and skills to model the pedagogical and content and strategies the program introduced, we can assume that teachers’ acquisition of new pedagogical and content knowledge was also limited, thus obstructing any potential for teacher change in instruction. This raises an additional question as to if the new pedagogical and content knowledge was too far outside of the zone of proximal development for coaches or if coaches had more time in their roles with continued support they would have been able to develop these skills with more time.

**Competency 7: Support to School Leaders**

Another coaching action RaISES promoted was to support Head Teachers in the creation of school based coaching plans and work towards school improvement...
(Coaching Competency 7). This required Learning Coaches to meet with Head Teachers regularly to discuss the progress of teachers, identify barriers to school improvement, support Head Teachers in the development of school improvement plans, and problem-solve solutions together. The RaISES training component designed for Head Teachers was planned for the second year; therefore, Learning Coaches were not officially trained nor expected to officially coach Head Teachers in the earlier stages of implementation. Despite not having a formal training on school leadership at the time research was conducted, Learning Coaches played a supportive role to Head Teachers using the Head Teacher Competency framework and Opportunity-to-Learn components as their guide. Outside of meetings about teachers, Learning Coaches worked with Head Teachers to deliver Cluster Review Meetings, where Head Teachers from different schools came together to learn from each other.

Coaches viewed weak school leadership and limited accountability in schools as a significant constraint to their work with teachers. With strong leadership and accountability, teachers attendance rates are more likely to increase; community involvement might mean more unpaid teachers supported by stipends and attending regularly. As a result, Learning Coaches spent considerable time sensitizing and mobilizing communities to support schools; encouraging and motivating teachers and Head Teachers to perform their roles properly; mediating conflicts between teachers, Head Teachers, and/or school communities; and collaborating with others to problem-solve challenges to school improvement and learning, such as poor infrastructure.

Thus, even without training in school leadership, Learning Coaches felt it important to work with Head Teachers and communities to fulfill their roles and
responsibilities towards school improvement. Given the amount of time Learning Coaches spent trying to ensure the appropriate conditions were in place for them to coach teachers, the program should consider how to focus first on ensuring these elements at the school level are in place before introducing coaching for teachers.

**Competency 8: Self-reflection and Lifelong Learning**

The RaISES program also expected Learning Coaches to model lifelong learning and develop themselves as learners (Coaching Competency 8), by participating in training, reviewing their own progress, self-assessing their coaching practice based on the competencies, and identifying areas for improvement. The RaISES program encouraged Learning Coaches to seek support where needed, either through collaborating with peers, asking for support from managers, or using available resources. Modeling the TLC approach, RaISES also encouraged Learning Coaches to develop their own Coaching Learning Circles at the organizational level and asked managers to allow them time and space to do so.

Findings from this research suggested that Learning Coaches sought opportunities to learn and model lifelong learning, which varied by coach. Some reached out to their managers for support while others reread training materials or gathered resources from the Internet. A few Learning Coaches indicated that they were starting to use their reflection journals and peer-assessments but this was not happening frequently amongst all Learning Coaches. However, all Learning Coaches consistently reported participating in the Coaching Learning Circles and found this forum critical for their learning, particularly in terms of solving common coaching problems.
Competency 9: Coaching Management

The ninth and final Coaching Competency expected of Learning Coaches was to successfully manage their responsibilities in supporting their nine assigned schools, including scheduling a monthly calendar of school visits, tracking and logging all of their activities on appropriate forms, documenting and filing teacher progress reports, and filling out and filing fidelity tool and summaries. From the interviews, I could not assess the extent to which Learning Coaches managed these responsibilities and files, although some suggested they could use additional support in managing their files. Based on my personal visits to Learning Coaches, where I collected files to review and provide feedback to Learning Coaches and Managers, I can also report that Learning Coaches would benefit from more supervision and feedback to their use of tools and documentation as these varied in quality.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This intrinsic qualitative case study aimed to answer the following central research question: What do the self-reported beliefs and experiences of a cohort of RaISES Learning Coaches supporting primary school teachers in Sierra Leone reveal about their professional learning and growth and what implications does this have for improving preparation and support for coaches? Using a re-interpretation of Valsiner's zone theory as the conceptual framework and analytical lens for this study, I developed the following sub-questions to guide the study:

1. What coaching actions did the RaISES program promote, and how did the program prepare and support Learning Coaches to apply those actions? (ZPA)
2. How do Learning Coaches describe their knowledge, skills and beliefs about teaching, learning, and coaching and their roles and responsibilities? (ZPD)
3. How do Learning Coaches perceive aspects of their professional context that constrain their abilities to enact their roles as a coach? (ZFM)
4. How do Learning Coaches describe what actions they were able to promote in the face of constraints and what supports in the professional context allowed this to happen? (ZFM/ZPA Complex)
5. How do Learning Coaches perceive their professional learning and growth as they moved through the zones? (Emerging ZPD as result of ZFM/ZPA Complex)
Findings related to sub-research questions #1, #2, and #3 illuminated factors from each of Valsiner’s three individual zones that could have potentially influenced Learning Coaches’ experiences enacting their roles. Findings related to sub-research questions #4 and #5 helped understand Learning Coaches’ perspectives of what factors from each of the individual zones may have intersected in their professional context and shaped Learning Coaches’ experiences and learning. Figure 9 illustrates the overlapping of factors from each zone and their potential influence to the emerging ZPD of Learning Coaches.

![Conceptual Framework based on Zone Theory](image)

**Figure 9:** Conceptual Framework based on Zone Theory

Examining data by each coaching competency and across the three zones unveiled Learning Coaches’ growth and actions and helped to see “possibilities” for strengthening
programming to better prepare and support them to enact their roles in full (Goos, 2013, p.523).

In this chapter, I summarize and interpret the findings of Learning Coaches’ perspectives from each of the individual zones and across the zones to answer the overall research question concerning Learning Coaches’ professional growth and needs. I then follow with recommendations for improving the project design to better prepare and support Learning Coaches in this context. I conclude the dissertation with implications for future research and policy.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

**Zone of Promoted Actions**

The primary role of RaISES Learning Coaches was to support primary-level teacher change in practice with the ultimate aim to improve student learning outcomes (ZPA). As part of this role, Learning Coaches also were expected to work with Head Teachers to support school improvement efforts that would help ensure a more supportive school environment conducive for improving student learning. These roles align similarly to what Neufeld and Roper (2003) referred to as “change coaches” or Knight (2007b) referred to as “instructional coaches” meaning that coaches not only work with teachers to improve instructional practice, but also with school leaders to support school-wide change (Knight, 2007b; Mangin &Dunsmore, 2005; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Wood, 2014). The collaborative and mutual approach that Learning Coaches reported as their approach to coaching aligns similarly to Knight’s suggested “partnership” approach that stresses equality and collaboration between the coach and teacher (Knight 2007a, p.27)).
The overall aim of the RaISES professional development of coaches (ZPA) was to prepare and support Learning Coaches to develop proficiency in nine coaching competencies that in theory would enable them to promote certain coaching actions to support teacher change and school improvement. Content from the RaISES’ competency frameworks aligned with best practices commonly promoted in western contexts particularly around effective coaching in (e.g. Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Frost & Bean, 2006; IRA, 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Killion et al., 2012; Woods, 2014).

Examples of content included: expectations of roles and responsibilities; pedagogical and content knowledge in foundations of literacy; adult learning principles; communication and interpersonal skills including reflective questioning and positive feedback; coaching cycle; co-teaching, co-planning and modeling; analyzing teacher data to inform practice; and support to school leaders.

The process and activities of the RaISES professional development of Learning Coaches also aligned with characteristics of effective professional development for teachers (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Garner, 2017; Garet et al., 2001; Learning Forward, 2011); characteristics also recommended for coaches’ professional development (e.g. Blachowicz et al., 2010; Matsumara et al., 2012; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Reed, 2009). RaISES professional development included job-embedded, on-going training and support that was content-focused and included active learning; peer collaboration through coaching learning circles; modeling; expert support through technical specialists; feedback and reflection, and frameworks, resources and tools (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Garner, 2017). RaISES’ training, informed by adult learning theories and the learning
cycle, provided multiple pathways for Learning Coaches to actively learn and practice through presentations of new concepts, modeling of new instructional pedagogies, guided practice, group work, individual work, role play, debates, micro-teaching, and observing, feedback, reflection, etc. RaISES planned ongoing training workshops to occur every six months, balancing the introduction of new knowledge and skills with time for Learning Coaches to apply and practice skills in their work with teachers. RaISES recognized Learning Coaches as adult learners and encouraged them to play an active role in their own development and model lifelong learning outside of formal training through use of coaching and teaching resources, reflection through journals and self-assessment tools, and collaborating with other peers regularly through monthly learning circles (Competency 8). The one area that characteristic that RaISES did not include that is Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Garner (2017) recommended in the literature is the 1) involvement of multiple actors in the training such as Head Teachers or District Administrators, and 2) on-going coaching of coaches by expert support.

From these findings we learn that the ZPA of Learning Coaches was predominately aligned with evidence-based practice both in coaching and literacy instruction; guided by a shared vision informed by professional development competencies established for teachers, Head Teachers and Coaches; and grounded in adult learning principles that highlighted multiple pathways of learning through practice, collaboration, reflection, and action.

**Zone of Proximal Development (Initial)**

The initial zone of proximal development (ZPD) of Learning Coaches entering the program differed significantly from the minimum qualification and standards
espoused in western-based literature as necessary prerequisites for recruitment. For example, the International Reading Association requires coaches in programs in the United States to have both teaching experience at the level in which the coaches will work and a Masters degree in reading acquisition (IRA, 2004). Newly hired coaches are expected to have strong pedagogical and content knowledge, and grade-level appropriate teaching experience, given that the coaches’ role is to “model, observe and give feedback to instruction” (Woods, 2014, p. 73). Yet, in low-income countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, recruiting educators with such credentials can prove challenging, given the limited qualifications of the teaching workforce resulting from poor quality pre-service education and lack of continuous professional development (Akyeampong et al., 2011). To address this potential recruitment problem in Sierra Leone, RaISES required Learning Coaches only to have completed a higher education degree and obtained a teaching certificate.

Findings from this study confirmed the difficulty within this context of recruiting coaches with minimum credentials required. Of the nine participants in this study, seven of the Learning Coaches had a higher education degree with a diploma level teaching certificate; the other two participants did not have a higher education degree but did have formally recognized teaching certificates and more years of teaching experience than the others. The Learning Coaches’ teaching experience was predominately at the junior and senior secondary levels therefore Learning Coaches had limited to no experience in primary level teaching or early grade reading. Also, Learning Coaches were new to the concept of coaching as a means of professional development and support to teachers.
Learning Coaches were a product of traditional educational system in Sierra Leone and a paternalistic culture around them, therefore their beliefs about teaching, learning and even leadership were grounded in their own experiences growing up in the system. For example, a transmission style of learning in the classroom is the dominant form of teaching in most schools in Sierra Leone still today. Coaches actually learned to read themselves through chanting and memorization, something that is engrained in the exam-driven culture. Additionally, high power-distances, hierarchical relationships, and top-down leadership styles are the norm.

We can conclude that the initial Zone of Proximal Development of Learning Coaches at the beginning of the program included a narrow understanding of literacy instruction, child-centered pedagogy appropriate for the primary level, and coaching. Additionally, their ZPD was heavily influenced by traditional beliefs about teaching, learning, and even providing support to teachers. Thus, Learning Coaches came into the program needing significant assistance and time to develop their capacity to meet the basic minimum requirements normally expected of newly hired coaches.

**Zone of Free Movement**

According to the literature, effective coaching requires supportive working conditions (ZFM), including teacher acceptance of coaching, adequate contact time with teachers, clarity of roles and responsibilities, Head Teacher support for coaching, and a supportive school culture and environment (e.g. Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Poglinco et al., 2003; Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015; Smith, 2007).

RaISES Learning Coaches reported inadequate sustained contact time with teachers as their most serious challenge. Learning Coaches identified multiple constraints
in their Zone of Free Movement that directly or indirectly influenced their time with teachers. These included: diverse teacher heterogeneity; qualified teacher shortages; limited teacher competence; poor teacher motivation and commitment to their job; weak school leadership and accountability; poor school physical environments; poor community perception of and involvement in education; weak district accountability and supports to schools; inadequate road infrastructure for travel to schools; heavy workload, and number of teachers and schools; additional administrative responsibilities such as planning, reporting, and documentation; and the project-related changes due to the Ebola outbreak. The extent to which these factors directly or indirectly affected Learning Coaches’ time with teachers varied between coaches as well as across schools and amongst teachers. However, Learning Coaches reported teacher movement, teacher absenteeism, limited competence of teachers, and their workload as the most significant constraints that limited their ability to provide sustained contact time with teachers. Teacher movement and absenteeism resulted in Learning Coaches having to either return to schools or start all over with a new teacher. Teachers’ limited competence required Learning Coaches to spend more time with teachers learning basic skills. The large number of teachers and schools that each Learning Coach supported further limited the amount of time a coach could spend with each teacher within a month. Based on findings from this study, Learning Coaches worked in professional contexts that were not

We can conclude from these findings that the Learning Coaches’ Zone of Free Movement did not provide the enabling conditions necessary for coaches to have sustained contact time with teachers, thus limiting the potential of coaching to affect change. Sustained contact time with teachers is the ultimate purpose and value of
coaching. Evidence from research suggests that the more time coaches have with teachers, the greater impact they can have on teacher change and student achievement (e.g. Deussen et al., 2007; Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2011; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010).

Aspects of the Zone of Free Movement would need to be modified considerably in order to create a supportive environment for coaching, particularly around issues of teacher welfare and school leadership and accountability.

**Interpreting the ZFM/ZPA Complex and Emerging ZPD**

The limited ZPD of this particular sample cohort of Learning Coaches, combined with the potentially ambitious professional development program (ZPA) and the challenging professional context (ZFM), could have potentially resulted in an extreme misalignment between the Learning Coaches’ actual potential for development, what the program offered and expected of Learning Coaches, and the promoted actions they could feasibly implement in their professional context. The RaISES program demanded Learning Coaches to make large paradigmatic shifts in understanding how both child and adults learn that differed significantly from how Learning Coaches learned in schools. However, the analysis of the interplays between the zones suggests that the professional development for Learning Coaches, while largely reform-oriented and perhaps ambitious in its expectations, did have overlap with Learning Coaches’ zone of proximal development: the promoted actions required by the program were not completely out of reach of Learning Coaches’ development levels and their interests.

Finding from the study suggest that Learning Coaches were able to adopt new beliefs about both teaching and coaching; come to an understanding of their roles and responsibilities; improve their own teacher knowledge and skills; and feel more confident
to enact their coaching roles and responsibilities as described in their coaching competencies. Coaches particularly felt confident in establishing and maintaining relationships in their schools and communities and working with teachers as adult learners (Coaching Competency 3).

The language Learning Coaches used to describe their changes in beliefs, knowledge and skills aligned closely with the content of the professional development the program promoted (ZPA). Learning Coaches highlighted the following content as important to their work: coaching competencies; adult learning principles; knowing how to work with teachers and communicate with them as adult learners; learning the sounds of the alphabet and its importance to learning to read for understanding rather than memorization; how to conduct a coaching cycle; and the importance of asking reflective questions to teachers to prompt reflection. These findings suggest that their participation in RaISES had some influence on shaping their beliefs and understanding about teaching, learning, and their roles and responsibilities (ZPD).

Learning Coaches learned (emerging ZPD) through a combination of different professional development and supports including: 1) formal training, resources and support that the program organized and provided to Learning Coaches on an on-going basis (ZPA), and 2) informal learning on the job from their experiences with teachers, Head Teachers, and other coaches in response to constraints they faced in their work (ZFM/ZPA).

Learning Coaches identified specific professional development processes, activities, and tools (ZPA) that influenced their coaching practice and learning during the program. Routine face-to-face training served as an important stepping stone for
Learning Coaches to acquire new knowledge and skills about literacy instruction and coaching. Having more than one workshop, with time to apply new learning between each workshop, helped reinforce content for Learning Coaches and allow Learning Coaches opportunities to reflect on and draw from recent experiences from their work, adjusting their understanding and practice where needed. This supports other research that suggest that coaches need and benefit from sustained support over time as they evolve into their roles (i.e. Blachowicz et al., 2010; Galluci et al., 2010). Opportunities for peer collaboration through Consortium networking and monthly learning circles were another significant source of learning for Learning Coaches, particularly in terms of navigating their constraints within their professional contexts. Peer collaboration allowed Learning Coaches to make sense of the new knowledge introduced in training workshops and adapt it to the context in ways they felt were feasible. These findings support similar research conducted by Reed (2009) that found that networking with peers provided opportunities for coaches to collaborate and problem-solve together outside of training.

The provision of models, frameworks and tools such as the experiential (adult) learning cycle, competency frameworks and four stage coaching cycle provided Learning Coaches with a shared vision, structure and discourse for what effective practice should look like for Learning Coaches, teachers, and Head Teachers to ultimately affect change. Findings from Michelson’s (2013) research also found tools such as the experiential learning cycle and the coaching model as important contributors to coaches’ learning. Michelson suggested, however, that while tools are “necessary mediators of coach learning and development”, coaches need support from more knowledgeable others on how to use them properly (p. 161). Additionally, access to resources such as the literacy
and coaching manuals, TLC workbooks, and literacy resources were valuable. Though Learning Coaches did not have on-going technical support outside of face-to-face training and periodic visits, managers were available and able to provide support to help Learning Coaches use the tools and get feedback on their work overall. These findings suggest that Learning Coaches benefit from competency-driven professional development that provides multiple opportunities to learn over time particularly ones that combines routine training with opportunities for peer collaboration, tools and frameworks.

Learning Coaches identified several supports in their professional context (ZFM) that increased their ability to conduct their coaching roles in schools. These included the receptiveness and acceptance they felt from teachers, Head Teachers, and community members; teachers’ attendance and willingness to try new things; Head Teacher support and engagement; engagement of school community structures such as SMCs; and organizational and programmatic support such as the provision of motorbikes and feedback from the manager. Learning Coaches felt that when these supports were in place, they had an easier time enacting their roles and responsibilities and felt they could do more.

While the absence of these supports in the ZFM significantly influenced the work of the Learning Coaches, Learning Coaches did not always view their constraints as paralyzing barriers in their roles as coaches. In fact, Learning Coaches discussed challenges as “learning opportunities” and sought ways to minimize these constraints and expand the boundaries of their Zone of Free Movement by modifying aspects of the environment. The zone theory literature refers to these challenges as “productive tensions” when a change is made either by the individual or the program to “bring zones
into alignment” (Goos, 2012, p.523). For example, teacher movement was a significant barrier to having sustained contact time with teachers. However, Learning Coaches tried to modify the environment by establishing more accountability mechanisms in schools through mobilizing community involvement and support or encouraging and motivating teachers to fulfill their duties as citizens. For example, in schools where communities or schools did not provide incentives for untrained and unqualified (UU) teachers and UU teachers were either not attending regularly or leaving schools, Learning Coaches encouraged and tried to mobilize communities to support the schools and provide stipends for the teachers. RaISES did not promote community mobilization nor expect Learning Coaches to do so, but Learning Coaches (or perhaps the organizations in which they worked) valued the role of the community and their participation as an important support to their work with teachers in order to be effective. Some Learning Coaches tried to encourage districts to place qualified teachers in the lower grades to ensure more stable participation in the program. The types of challenges that Learning Coaches modified depended on the individual coach and the individual constraints she or he faced. This approach to navigating challenges suggests that Learning Coaches began to develop some level of self-efficacy about their abilities to work within the professional contexts and fulfill their roles and responsibilities. It also suggests that Learning Coaches felt most promoted actions were feasible, but limited due to insufficient time.

Of course, some of the ZFM constraints, such as teacher absenteeism and teachers’ limited skills, were beyond the Learning Coaches’ control and not easily modified. In such situations, Learning Coaches adapted. For example, when teachers were absent from school, Learning Coaches would reschedule another visit. When
teachers moved to other schools, Learning Coaches started over with new teachers. This required more time with new teachers who had not participated in the training workshops; however, Learning Coaches prioritized time with them to help them catch up with the other teachers. For teachers with more limited skills, Learning Coaches spent more time with them on lesson planning. In classrooms where one teacher taught two grades or two teachers taught in one classroom, Learning Coaches did not know how to observe or collect evidence nor how to support such teachers in better classroom management. In response, many Learning Coaches encouraged teachers to divide the classrooms with a bamboo board and separate the grade levels to help make things easier both for the teachers, as well as for the Learning Coach observing. If communities were not actively involved or had conflicts with Head Teachers, Learning Coaches spent time mobilizing communities or mediating conflicts between the school and the community.

Making such adaptations, however, meant that Learning Coaches were not able to promote other actions with the level of frequency or quality the program expected particularly in their time with teachers. Learning Coaches’ time with teachers focused mostly on building relationships and trying to conduct at least one full coaching cycle with each teacher in a one-month period. Reaching each teacher to complete a full cycle often stretched over a two-month period or longer due to many disruptions. During the monthly coaching cycle visits, Learning Coaches focused primarily on observing and giving feedback. Due to time constraints, direct support outside of the coaching cycle was limited mostly to co-planning lessons and helping to develop materials. Learning Coaches had minimal time in their visits to co-teach or model instruction. Given the skill levels of teachers and the frequent absences, Learning Coaches did not feel this time was
sufficient for teachers to acquire proficiency in all the teacher competencies, including all the foundations of literacy.

Overall, the activities that Learning Coaches were able to promote and those they promoted less (such as modeling) are similar to levels of activities identified in the coaching literature and the expected trajectory given the time frame of the project (Bean et al. 2010; ILA, 2015; Smith, 2009). Based on Bean’s levels of intensity, Learning Coaches mostly implemented Level 1 and 2 activities as opposed to Level 3 activities, which are more advanced and formal. According to Bean’s framework (ILA, 2015), Level 1 activities are informal and include initial coaching activities such as school visits, informal dialogues, establishing relationships, and leading study groups; Level 2 activities require more skills of coaches and include activities such as co-planning and providing professional development to teachers. Level 2 is also where coaches “begin to analyze practice” (ILA, 2015). Level 3 activities are more formal and require more advanced skills of coaches, such as modeling, co-teaching, observing teachers, analyzing data and providing feedback. This stage is where coaches actually begin to “focus on changing practice” (ILA, 2015). Thus, RaISES Learning Coaches were on the right trajectory of coaching, given the limited project duration, disruption to the program due to the Ebola outbreak, and frequent turnover of teachers.

The professional growth of Learning Coaches occurred over time throughout the duration of the project. This finding mirrors the findings from previous research in other contexts, suggesting that coaches need time to evolve into their roles, and the more time coaches work in their roles and benefit from continuous learning opportunities and support, the more comfortable and confident they become (i.e. Blachowicz et al. 2010;
Galluci et al. 2010). Findings from Galluci et al.’s (2010) research suggested coaches in a reform context are learners themselves and may have to learn “new content and pedagogy at the same as the teachers they are expected to coach” (p. 953). Additionally, findings from my research suggest that the more Learning Coaches performed their roles and benefitted from additional professional learning opportunities, the more coaches became confident. These findings also support Galluci et al.’s (2010) research that suggested that as coaches had more time to become comfortable with the new content of instruction, the more coaches’ ability to coach improved (p. 953). Other research reported similar findings that suggest learning to coach is an evolving process that takes time (i.e. Blachowicz et al., 2010; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Shanklin, 2007).

Learning Coaches’ competencies perhaps were “likely to strengthen over time” with continued opportunities to learn, both through formal and informal professional development opportunities (Bennison, p. 571). Learning Coaches might have reached Level 3 types of activities had the program continued as planned or as modified to allow Learning Coaches more time with teachers. However, findings from this study raise critical questions as to the extent in which Learning Coaches actually became proficient in their competencies and whether the performance actually matched the programs’ expectations for fidelity and quality. While the program included several mechanisms to assess teachers’ abilities to implement with fidelity, findings revealed that the program did not include formal mechanisms to assess Learning Coaches’ acquisition of knowledge and abilities to support teachers.
**Recommendations for Practice**

The analysis of the relationships and influences across the zones helped understand Learning Coaches’ limitations and “possibilities” for furthering their professional learning and development (Goos, p.2013, p.523). Following are my recommendations for strengthening the RaISES model to better maximize coaches’ learning and their promoted actions within this professional context.

**Collect Baseline Data on Teachers’ Training, Practices and Needs**

Sierra Leone faces a severe shortage of qualified and competent teachers. Teachers in schools vary significantly in their experience, training, reading skills, and pedagogical and content knowledge; they also differ in terms of their qualification and remuneration status resulting in varied levels of motivation and commitment. These factors all combined significantly influence the time required for coaching calling for significant improvements in teacher recruitment, pre-service and in-service education, teacher deployment and compensation as a start. Barring these circumstances, a coaching intervention would benefit from a baseline assessment of teacher backgrounds, current practices, and needs as a valuable starting point to inform the program design and development of competency frameworks and training materials for teachers. The assessment might include teacher self-assessments, surveys regarding teacher beliefs about teaching and learning, reviewing documentation of their educational backgrounds, observation of their teaching practice in the classroom, and assessment of their own proficiency in reading. Program designers could review school- or district-level data on number of qualified teachers, number of qualified teachers on payroll, number of untrained and unqualified teachers with stipends, number of UU teachers participating in
Distance Education, and number of UU teachers without incentives. This assessment would help the program focus their attention to, for example, target untrained and unqualified teachers who do not have incentives and develop incentives for those teachers to stay in schools throughout the duration of the program. Alternatively, the program may opt to focus on qualified teachers on payroll and build on their existing skills in teaching.

Assess “School Readiness”

Findings from this study demonstrate problems with accountability and leadership in schools, overcrowded classrooms, teacher absenteeism and infrastructural needs of school environments, amongst other school-related challenges. As Matsumara, Garnier & Spybrook (2012) highlight:

Providing professional development to coaches and concentrating coaching resources may not be sufficient for ensuring full principal support and teacher participation. Additional strategies likely are needed to promote the implementation of the program (p.226).

While the RaISES program expected to target some of these issues in its second year, with the intention that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) would define a set of national Opportunity-to-Learn (OTL) benchmarks towards which the program could work, program changes post-Ebola required RaISES to eliminate the focus on school leadership and OTL. As a result, Learning Coaches spent significant time addressing challenges to coaching that OTL was meant to solve, or mobilizing heads of schools and communities to intervene and address these school-level problems. These efforts reduced coaches’ time with teachers.

Therefore, prior to any program, as Matsumara et al.(2012) suggest, programs should assess schools’ and communities’ “readiness for change” and elicit the
commitment of relevant stakeholders, such as teachers and head teachers, prior to programming rather than during programming:

The literature on assessing a community’s readiness for change emphasizes the importance of gaining unambiguous buy-in from stakeholders, ensuring that organizational structures are in place to support the intervention, and clarifying how an intervention fits within community priorities for change. Applied to implementing a literacy-coaching program, program leaders would obtain teachers commitment to participate in coaching and principals’ commitment to support the program in advance of placing literacy coaches in schools (Matsumara et al. 2012, p.226).

The program can then prioritize school selection based on the available supportive conditions needed for effective coaching and/or tailor the model to prioritize and address the gaps and needs to promote a supportive environment for coaching. In addition to gathering buy-in and commitment, this assessment in Sierra Leone should include the school’s pupil, teacher and Head Teacher attendance rate; strength of school leadership; presence of active School Management Committees; Pupil-Teacher Ratio; availability and access to teaching and learning materials; and number of makeshift structures and/or multi-age classrooms. Where there are gaps, the program could discuss what Head Teachers and communities will do to address some of these gaps prior to the coaching intervention.

Maximize Sustained Contact Time in Program Design

The more sustained contact time coaches have with teachers, the greater potential there is for coaching to influence teaching practice and student achievement. Sustained contact time with teachers emerged as a significant limitation in RaISES Learning Coaches’ experiences, due to both programmatic and contextual constraints. Program
design should prioritize maximized contact time with teachers. In the cases of RaISES, there are several adjustments that could be made to maximize sustained contact time:

1. **Narrow purpose and role of Learning Coaches.** This research reveals that teachers and Head Teachers need support, and Learning Coaches can provide valuable support to schools, particularly when certain conditions are place. However, the constraints Learning Coaches met at the school level were tremendous and could not be effectively addressed through coaching alone, particularly with coaches’ heavy workload. Thus, the official role of the coach should focus solely on providing on-going support to teachers, rather than also trying to address other pressing problems such as poor school leadership and lack of accountability, low levels of teacher motivation, conflicts between school and community members, lack of community engagement, infrastructural needs.

2. **Reduce number of teachers and schools the Learning Coach is assigned.**

RaISES Learning Coaches worked in six primary schools and coached an average of 18 teachers. Recent research in Kenya demonstrated that coaches assigned to 10 teachers were more effective than coaches that were assigned to 15 teachers because they were able to make more visits with each teacher (Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015). Findings from the RARA study in Nigeria also demonstrated that more coaching visits with teachers produced greater results (Harden, 2017). Findings from my study clearly demonstrate that Learning Coaches did not have enough sustained contact with any one teacher, and workload was one of the contributing factors. Thus, I strongly recommend reducing the number of teachers per coach. Even though all teachers would benefit from coaching, the program
could prioritize certain types of teachers; for example, Learning Coaches could focus (at least in the first iteration of the program) on qualified teachers that have the prerequisite knowledge and skills in teaching and need less support. Qualified Teachers on payroll also have more incentive to attend school regularly, ensuring more coaching opportunities and contact time. Alternatively, since schools are comprised mostly of untrained and unqualified teachers, the program may choose to prioritize coaching for untrained and unqualified teachers; in this case, the program would need to consider providing incentives for teachers or ensuring some sort of commitment to minimize their movement.

3. **Minimize administrative work.** In addition to work in schools, Learning Coaches spent significant time fulfilling administrative responsibilities such as attending organizational meetings, supporting distribution of materials, and planning, documenting, and reporting their work. Learning Coaches also spent time learning how to use and manage new coaching tools and templates to document their work such as the monthly coaching calendar, monthly activity log, coaching planner and teacher progress log, and fidelity tool, etc. These were in addition to regular reporting required by each organization for their own reporting purposes such as weekly updates and monthly reports. Given the limited contact time Learning Coaches had with each teacher, I recommend programs to consider minimizing and simplifying the amount of administrative work required of coaches, including coaching documentation, extraneous activities and meetings unrelated to coaching. For example, findings from this study revealed that Learning Coaches struggled with understanding how to use the fidelity tool.
While some of their challenge was due to not yet understanding the competencies, some of their challenge was due to actual use of the tool and its length. In the case of RaISES, I would strongly recommend a revision and simplification of the tool. Also, I recommend programs to align coaching documentation with organizational reporting mechanisms to avoid repetition.

4. **Advocate for longer program duration to maximize impact.** Findings from research suggest that learning to coach takes time (i.e. Blachowicz et al., 2010). The original RaISES program was planned for at least three years, but this was disrupted due to the Ebola outbreak and then shortened by program closure due to change in donor priorities. In contexts like Sierra Leone, where Learning Coaches and teachers have to make big shifts in their beliefs and knowledge, it appears that a longer period of program operation is necessary for coaches to master the more advanced skills. Additionally, Learning Coaches felt the period for implementation of the program clearly was not sufficient for them to affect sustainable change with teachers.

**Prioritize Focus on School Leadership and Improvement**

In this context, Head Teachers, like teachers, lack proper preparation, training, and support to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Findings from this study suggested that the weak leadership and accountability of Head Teachers negatively affected their coaching. Given the vast needs of teachers, Head Teachers, and schools that this study highlights, Learning Coaches cannot provide the needed support to both teacher learning and Head Teachers’ school improvement efforts and do it effectively. Given the important role of the Head Teacher and the vast school improvement needs, I recommend
focusing on the school leadership component and OTL component earlier in implementation so that schools are ready, and teachers are regularly in school and ready for coaching support. In the case of RaISES, I recommend the Education Officers play a greater role supporting Head Teachers, which would require the program to prepare and support them in school leadership and accountability, infrastructure assessment and improvements, and community/school engagement. Alternatively, program could consider hiring additional staff to lead in this role.

**Revise Teacher Competencies and Professional Development Activities**

This study did not examine the impact coaches’ professional development had on teachers nor the value of the professional development approach RaISES used with teachers. However, findings from the study did reveal that teachers needed support, were accepting of Learning Coaches’ support, and were making efforts to try new skills, mostly in terms of lesson planning, use of resources, teaching letters and letter-sound relationships, and using more questions in class. Learning Coaches confronted challenges, however, helping teachers who had limited foundational skills and knowledge in teaching and reading develop proficiency in all the competencies RaISES promoted. Results from this study do illuminate adjustments EdCo could make to the professional development model for teachers to better align with their abilities and need.

1. Modify and simplify TPD competencies and associated indicators to align with teachers’ needs as identified in the comprehensive baseline assessment and their realistic potential for development within the duration of the program.
2. Review and modify scope and sequence of content introduced in the RaISES training workshops with teachers. Consider introducing teachers to all competencies in the beginning, including strategies from all five foundations of literacy to ensure they have a shared and common vision of what effective teaching looks like rather than compartmentalized into separate competencies. From there, sequence training content for teachers by beginning with basic skills and strategies so teachers can easily demonstrate success before moving on to higher-level competencies.

3. Introduce Teacher Learning Circles in the early stages of program. Due to the disruption in implementation, RaISES did not introduce TLCs until after the second phase of training workshops with coaches and teachers had been completed, just a few months before the program was closed. Therefore, Learning Coaches and Teachers did not have sufficient time to benefit from the TLC rollout. However, in the limited time, Learning Coaches and program reports indicate that the TLCs forum and workbook were a promising approach and helped both Learning Coaches and teachers to understand the teacher competencies in full. Learning Coaches felt TLCs had potential to be sustained given the interest of teachers and the minimal cost for teachers to meet. I recommend that TLCs be introduced right after the first training so that teachers have more opportunities earlier to collaborate with their peers, engage with the TLC workbook to reinforce and new learning, and solve problems together.

4. Develop measures to ensure fidelity of coaching implementation across all organizations, particularly in terms of facilitation of training workshops, modeling
of instructional practices, TLC orientation and facilitation, interactions and communication with teachers, and coaching cycles. Such measures should be more than just voluntary self-assessments and peer-assessments and should be similar in rigor to the structures in place to ensure the fidelity of implementation of teachers (i.e. observations using fidelity tool, etc).

**Revise Coaching Competencies and Professional Development Activities**

Results of this study show that many aspects of RaISES Coaches’ professional development shaped the learning and development of coaches. Learning Coaches benefitted from specific content provided and outlined in the coaching and teaching competencies. Similar areas of growth amongst all Learning Coaches included understanding their roles and responsibilities, understanding the teacher competencies particularly the foundations of literacy and the importance of learning how to teach to read for understanding and not memorization, how to communicate and work with adult learners, how to conduct the coaching cycle, and importance of asking reflective questions. These findings align with content areas informed by research such as pedagogical and content knowledge, adult learning principles, coaching process and tasks, and interpersonal and communication (i.e. Frost & Bean, 2006; IRA, 2004; Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2011; Killion et al., 2012; Knight, 2007b; Knight, 2009; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco & Bach, 2004). Learning Coaches reported, however, they would benefit from having more training and support in other skills such as school leadership and management as well as more advanced skills in both coaching and foundations of literacy.
Learning Coaches learned through both formal professional development offered by the program as well as informal learning on the job in navigating constraints with support from their peers, managers, as well as tools and resources provided by the program. Influential elements of the competency-driven RaISES professional development approach included: 1) routine training workshops in both coaching and literacy that introduced coaches to new concepts and allowed time for practice between; 2) opportunities for peer collaboration both in training and outside of training workshops; 3) provision of common frameworks, models and tools such as competency frameworks, adult learning cycle, coaching cycle, and teacher observation/fidelity tools that provided a shared vision and guidance for them in learning the content and what was expected of them; 4) availability of literacy and coaching manuals and resources; and 5) feedback from their managers. However, findings suggested areas where professional development components could be strengthened and more on-going support could be provided to Learning Coaches over time.

1. Modify indicators within each coaching competency to align with refined purpose and scope of coaching work. This is particularly relevant when identifying the coaching role with Head Teachers and communities and training role. For example, if Learning Coaches are responsible for leading the training with teachers, perhaps the program could include a separate coaching competency about Facilitation and Training Skills with more explicit focus on this in the training. If Learning Coaches are to have specific roles supporting school leadership, the program needs to better specify what their role should be in the
competencies and provide proper training and support for Learning Coaches to enact those roles with intention and more consistently as a cohort.

2. Extend existing content to include how to address some of the challenges coaches faced, such as supporting teachers in multi-grade classrooms, developing and managing materials in make-shift structures, etc. Training could incorporate successful strategies that previous Learning Coaches actually used to adapt to constraints. Support coaches on how to work with different types of teachers (UU teachers vs. qualified teachers). Coaches would benefit from learning concrete classroom management strategies to work with mixed age, or multi-grade groups or effectively manage overcrowded classrooms with limited furniture. The program could also assist Learning Coaches on how to support teachers and schools with material development, storage and management appropriate for makeshift structures. For example, coaches could benefit from support on how to develop materials they can easily transfer from class to class each day, easily display in a classroom with no walls, and properly and safely store when not in use.

3. Extend days of training in the first few months of implementation to to allow adequate time earlier in implementation for coaches to become more proficient in pedagogical and content knowledge as well as understand the basics of their roles and responsibilities in full. Findings revealed that Learning Coaches came in with limited relevant skills to what the program promoted so they themselves had to develop new pedagogical and content knowledge and skills while also learning how to work with teachers. Like teachers, Learning Coaches too required time to
learn and develop. Additional time in training could provide more time for Learning Coaches to be comfortable with all literacy foundations, begin modeling instructional strategies and getting feedback from their peers, developing lesson plans and practicing coaching with other and giving feedback to teachers. Facilitators could also incorporate use of videos of teachers conducting a lesson and coaches could practice observing and analyzing the lesson using the fidelity tool. Coaches could also practice with each other or model how they would conduct a post-observation visit with the teacher and give feedback.

4. Review and modify sequence of content, to align sequence of content with a reasonable trajectory of activities given the limited skill levels of the Learning Coaches coming into the program (i.e. Bean’s levels of intensity framework (Bean et al. 2010; ILA, 2015) or Smith’s (2009) coaching roles and levels). For example, Learning Coaches struggled with the fidelity tool in the time between the two workshops. RaISES might adjust the coaches’ responsibilities and introduce fidelity tool in the second training. Instead, the program could introduce TLCs in the first training and have coaches focus mostly on 1) building relationships with teachers, 2) establishing TLCs, and 3) observing classes informally and having informal dialogues about current teaching practices leading up to the second training. Learning Coaches would then receive training on fidelity tool in the second training after they have become familiar with the teaching competencies and content embedded in the fidelity tool.

5. Formalize peer collaboration of Learning Coaches through regular Coaching Learning Circles (CLCs). RaISES encouraged but did not mandate CLCs. While
Learning Coaches in this study benefitted from the CLCs, Learning Coaches in other organizations may not have followed this practice. By formalizing this forum, RaISES’ staff could provide coaches with guidance on activities they could practice together and give feedback to each others, such as modeling of lessons or instructional activities for teachers.

6. Along with monitoring for quality assurance, I recommend programs provide a full-time technical specialist to provide the necessary support to Learning Coaches while on the job. In RaISES, with the exception of periodic monitoring visits by the CCU and myself, program managers and coordinators were the only sources of on-going support to Learning Coaches. Their support, while extremely valuable, was mostly managing implementation, ensuring everyone was on same page and doing their jobs, and providing them with necessary materials to do their job. Having a technical specialist specifically assigned to support the work of RaISES Learning Coaches could aid in quality assurance and ensure Learning Coaches had on-going technical support in a timely manner.

7. Establish stronger internal monitoring mechanisms and processes to ensure the fidelity of coaching implementation. In RaISES, the program designed mechanisms and tools for monitoring the fidelity of teacher implementation, but did not establish rigorous mechanisms for monitoring and assessing the quality of coaching implementation. Outside of pre- and post-self-assessments coaches completed in each training workshop, feedback to selective coaches during training, and coaching self and peer assessment tools, the program lacked adequate mechanisms for monitoring and immediately strengthening the fidelity
of coaching itself. The design of the program assumed that if teachers were implementing practices properly, then coaches must have implemented their coaching actions with fidelity. However, I recommend programs add the proper mechanisms earlier to monitor and assess coaches’ acquisition of pedagogical and content knowledge, facilitation of training with teachers, modeling of instructional practices for teachers, and coaching interactions with teachers including the coaching cycle. By doing so earlier, the program can tailor support more directly to the immediate needs of coaches and provide more timely feedback so that Learning Coaches can adjust their practice earlier than later.

**Include Actors across Multiple Layers**

Findings from this study revealed that school leadership and accountability were weak at all levels including the district, school, and community. Though the RaISES initiative was a whole school development initiative, the program primarily worked to strengthen the capacity of teachers as well as Head Teachers to work towards school improvements that would result in improved learning outcomes of children. The program design did not include formal professional development for actors at the district level; additionally, due to the project-related changes due to Ebola, Learning Coaches were not able to provide the intended professional development for Head Teachers. Therefore, the program only provided formal professional formal development to Head Teachers and District through the facilitation of the quarterly Peer Cluster Review meetings. According to Galluci et al. 2010, the focus on teachers alone is not sufficient; professional development programs for coaches in reform-oriented contexts should strengthen the capacity of “multiple system actors” who surround the work of a
In order to provide greater support to Learning Coaches, RaISES could include Head Teachers and District Education Officers in all training of Learning Coaches so they are not only aware of what instructional methods are being taught to teachers, but also what the role of a Learning Coach is and how they support teachers and schools (Galluci et al., 2010; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Matsumara et al. 2010; Matsumara et al., 2012; Poglinco et al., 2003; Reed, 2009; Shanklin, 2007). While Learning Coaches reported peer cluster review meetings as important sources of learning for District Education Office and Head Teachers, this perhaps was not sufficient. RaISES could consider expanding program to include district capacity strengthening in their roles and responsibilities and ensure the professional development of head teachers as initially intended. RaISES could also extend professional development to actors at other levels responsible for school improvement such as the School Management Committees and Community Teachers Association, local structures that according to the Education Act of 2004, should be in place and active in all government schools and responsible for overseeing school activities (GoSL, 2004). If such structures are established and functioning adequately in supported schools, many of the constraints Learning Coaches confronted, could be minimized including teacher absenteeism.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Most of the available research on coaching comes from well-developed contexts. Research on literacy coaching in low-income, Sub-Saharan contexts is growing but remains extremely limited leaving options for future research vast and expansive. With the growing trend in randomized-control studies that try to understand coaching and its direct impact to teacher change and/or student achievement, more qualitative studies in
sub-Saharan low-income contexts faced with similar challenges would help add thick description and context to these findings. I specifically recommend the following areas for further research: 1) expand research on Learning Coaches’ perspectives to include teachers and Head Teachers’ perspectives of coaching as a form of professional development, and 2) examine in more detail Learning Coaches’ fidelity of coaching implementation particularly concerning their training of teachers, modeling instructional practices, and Learning Coaches’ interactions with teachers. Potential research questions could include: How did teachers and Head Teachers participating in the RaISES program view and experience coaching in their schools? To what extent do Learning Coaches establish positive, collaborative relationships and implement coaching actions with fidelity of implementation? How does coaches’ fidelity of implementation influence teacher change? Furthermore, to inform policy-oriented action around strengthening teacher welfare in Sierra Leone and other similar low-income contexts, I recommend research that focuses on the backgrounds, characteristics, lived realities, and motivations of teachers themselves.

**Recommendations for Policy**

Findings from this study expose the many systemic barriers in the education sector today that significantly limit the potential of coaching in Sierra Leone. Most problematic for RaISES Learning Coaches included severe qualified teacher shortage, teacher absenteeism, inadequate preparation of existing teacher workforce, limited number of teachers on payroll or with incentives, and weak school leadership and accountability to keep teachers coming to school regularly. Since the civil war, the Government of Sierra Leone and collaborating partners have developed and drafted
policies to address many of these barriers but have not yet successfully been able to enforce and implement effectively. For example, The Education Act of 2004 and Local Government Act policy called for the decentralization of basic services to local governments, which included the governance and management of schools. However, to date, the decentralization process has been slow and ineffective in large part due to lack of capacity at the local level and limited understanding of roles and responsibilities. Additionally, a Teachers Service Commission Act was developed to focus on issues of teacher welfare including teacher recruitment, retention and compensation. However, to date, the Teachers Service Commission Act is still not functioning. Therefore, longstanding issues continue to remain unresolved.

Implementing such policy actions are a massive challenge in low-resource contexts, particularly in Sierra Leone. To optimize the potential of coaching or any teacher professional development initiative, MEST and donors must streamline their efforts to ensure: (1) policies are properly enforced, (2) sufficient number of teachers are recruited and deployed, (3) teachers have adequate basic foundational skills to teach, (4) teachers attend school regularly, and (5) school leaders and communities fulfill their responsibilities and hold teachers accountable.

Systemic reform that capacitates and provides support to actors at all levels to ensure effective policy implementation is urgent to address the consistently, chronic constraints inhibiting student achievement in schools in Sierra Leone today. I recommend priority be placed on teacher preparation, management and welfare; strengthening school leadership capacity and accountability; developing minimum standards such as an Opportunity to Learn framework for school improvement and
strengthen capacity of local structures such as Community Teachers Associations, and School Management Committees, to ensure greater involvement and accountability of more effective management of schools. Until existing policies around these issues are enforced, the overall effectiveness of any teacher professional development initiative to make change, particularly coaching, is minimal.

In the interim, I encourage donors of similar projects in the current context to recognize the multiple systemic barriers to sustained change and consider the additional layer of capacity development, time, and resources needed to prepare individuals, such as coaches, responsible for implementing large-school reform-oriented approaches. Additionally, I encourage donors to consider the time teachers with limited foundational skills need to develop and change. Reform-oriented approaches require substantial time to make a lasting impact that facilitates change, even in contexts that benefit from more ideal enabling conditions.

**Concluding Remarks**

International development actors increasingly view coaching as a necessary component to teacher professional development in early grade reading and math reform initiatives in low-income contexts. Findings from this study illustrate the significant need for and potential of instructional coaching as a valuable support to teachers in low-income contexts, specifically Sierra Leone. However, this study raises questions concerning the potential for its effectiveness and sustainability in contexts challenged with deeply embedded systemic barriers that remain largely unaddressed. If teachers are constantly absent or not staying in schools for any length of time, the potential of coaching to make an impact, no matter how knowledgeable or skilled the coach is, is not
likely to affect change. While modifications can be made both in the program and in the environment to increase the potential for coaches to create change and impact, in order to create lasting change that improves the learning outcomes of children, large-scale reform and effective action that addresses school accountability and the welfare of teachers is required. Such reform requires dramatic changes and improvements across different layers in the system and involvement of various actors across the layers and cannot be addressed in a short-term whole school improvement initiative. If addressing these issues is not prioritized, initiatives such as RaISES will continue to have minimal chance for sustained impact to teaching and learning in schools in Sierra Leone.
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