

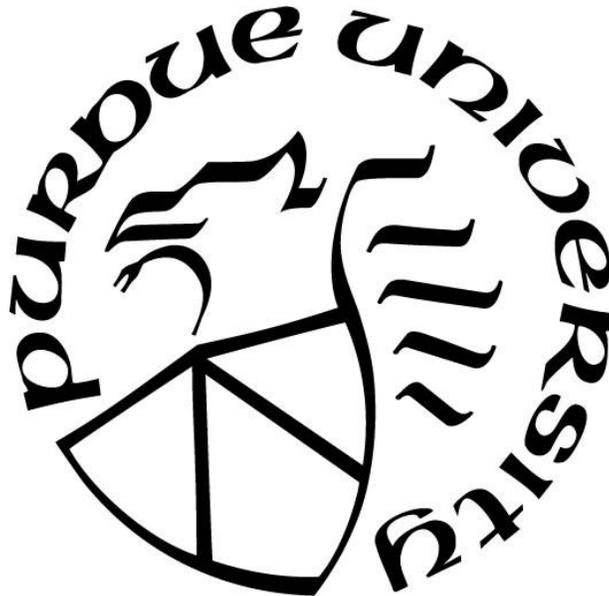
**EXAMINATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD COACHING IN PATHS TO
QUALITY RATING SYSTEM IN INDIANA**

by
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ABSTRACT

In 2008, Indiana launched a statewide child care quality rating and improvement system, called the Paths to Quality. To assist providers in improving the quality of their programs, professional development, coaching, and teacher support are provided. Yet the approach, format, and quality of coaching vary. This represents a potential disconnect between high-quality coaching, high-quality child care services, and positive child outcomes. The purpose of this study was to investigate stakeholder views on the strengths and needs of the early childhood coaches with respect to the current coaching system. To meet this goal, the focus group and dyadic interview data were collected with technical assistance administrators, early childhood coaches, and early childhood providers. Data were collected through audio recording and transcription of each data collection session. Results were analyzed by thematic analysis using the long-table approach. Five steps of familiarization, identifying, categorizing, labeling, and summarizing were used for interpretation of the results. The results showed that coaches have a passion for their profession and are very dedicated to helping support early childhood providers and teachers in their growth. On the other hand, the results also show the serious need for change in the coaching approaches and coaching model that is offered across the agency. There is a need for new complex formal training on coaching practices for both early childhood coaches and specialists and technical assistance administrators. Support for coaches needs to be established with an emphasis on an ongoing system of supports and follow up. Additionally, more specific areas of supports and its structure are presented in this study.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee (2019), Indiana has more than 500,000 young children under the age of five years. During the first year of life, one million synapses are formed every second in the brain. The quality and nature of brain architecture are affected by early experiences. The early experiences will also influence which synapses will grow and which will be reduced. This process makes the early years of child development a period of both great opportunity and great vulnerability (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. 2016). Additionally, the first years of human life are also crucial in establishing a strong foundation for children to succeed in school and on their way to adulthood (Bartik, 2014). In recent years, there has been a strong emphasis on high-quality early learning environments and their short- and long-term benefits for children (Sutherland, Conroy, Vo & Ladwig, 2015). Research has shown that the quality of the learning environment is highly associated with trained and competent teachers. A highly qualified and effective workforce is crucial for providing high-quality early care and education (EC) services for young children (Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2000; Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford & Howes, 2002; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009).

Significant attention has been dedicated to professional development that focuses on preparation of knowledgeable and skilled early childhood educators to design and provide high-quality early learning environments and experiences (Winton, Snyder, & Goffin, 2015). Professional development for practicing teachers can reduce staff attrition and improve classroom practices (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle & Farmer, 2011; Billingsley, 2004). One such important professional development strategy is called coaching (Joyce & Showers, 2003). Coaching has the potential to support the practitioner confidence and competence to implement evidence-based practices, which result in positive learning outcomes for children (Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015, Wood, Goodnight, Bethune, Preston, & Cleaver, 2016; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight, 2007).

In 2008, Indiana launched a statewide child care quality rating and improvement system, called the Paths to Quality (PTQ). PTQ assesses the quality within a childcare program and scores each program based on a 1 to 4 rating scale with Level 4 representing the highest rating

(Elicker, Langill, Ruprecht, Lewsader, & Anderson, 2011). In 2019 only 25 % of participating programs were considered high-quality (Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee, 2019).

When early childhood programs are enrolled in the PTQ, their goal is to obtain the highest ranking as an indicator of a high-quality learning environment. In order to improve ranking, service providers can obtain additional support in the form of technical assistance and coaching. As defined by training and technical assistance glossary, technical assistance is “the provision of targeted and customized supports by a professional(s) with the subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills to develop or strengthen processes, knowledge application, or implementation of services by recipients” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, 2011, p.9). One of the oldest and largest organization in Indiana that provides professional development, coaching, and teacher support to assist providers in improving the quality of their programs and ratings on the PTQ evaluation system is Early Learning Indiana (ELI), Child Care Answers. ELI uses coaches to provide technical assistance support to EC providers (Rouge, 2017). Coaching is individualized support for professional learning that opens the unique opportunity for educators to reflect, converse, explore, and practice new approaches to thinking and teaching (Knight, 2009). The role of the coach in PTQ is to provide support both to providers and teachers. However, the approach, format, and quality of coaching that providers receive vary widely across the state of Indiana. Additionally, training procedures and approaches for preparing effective coaches may also vary across the state. This represents a potential disconnect between high-quality coaching, high-quality early child care services, and child outcomes. Since 2015, ELI established a goal to improve the quality of coaching that providers receive. This goal was first recommended by the American Institute for Research that partnered with ELI to develop a strategy for quality improvement in high-quality programming as measured by PTQ in Indiana. Several strategies were proposed, such as (a) standardize the coaching model for providers, (b) offer professional development to coaches, (c) increase continuity of coach-program relationships, (d) take a comprehensive, whole program approach to coaching, especially in centers and registered ministries, and (e) target coaching to programs that are ready for change (Howard, Holod, Sowers, Perrot, & Manship, 2015, p. 8).

The coaching literature is not completely unified to provide solutions to this problem and there are still gaps in the field of coaching. That includes identifying the best practices for

coaches and understanding of what components of coaching are significant in order to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver research-based practices with integrity. And also, in identifying the best systems of supports for coaches that would enhance the quality of coaching (Sutherland, Conroy, Vo, Ladwig, 2015; Artman-Meeker, Fettig, Barton, Penney & Zeng, 2015; Wood et al., 2016; Cornett & Knight, 2009).

This study addressed the need for improvement in coaching in the PTQ to provide high-quality support for providers. This study also addressed the need for improvement in providing support for early childhood coaches. Therefore, this study examined: (a) the strengths and the needs of early childhood coaches in Indiana, (b) the areas of challenges and needs of early childhood coaches, and (c) the most appropriate support strategies in this particular setting. Strengths can be defined as something that people are passionate about and are good at (Gordon & Gucciardi, 2011). The strength-based approach comes from positive psychology and a person-centered approach, where strengths are identified to support inner potential and increase motivation, engagement, and hope (van Zyl & Stander, 2013).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine early childhood coaching in Indiana and identify challenges in coaching, and the strengths and needs of early childhood coaches to help suggest potential areas of needed professional development and training. The perspectives of three types of stakeholders (technical assistance administrators, early childhood coaches, and service providers) were explored.

1.2 Significance of the Problem

Since 2014, the number of high-quality early childhood programs in Indiana increased by 60% based on the PTQ ratings. There are 5,184 known programs with 130,517 enrolled children. However, currently still only 25% of programs are rated as high-quality (Level 3 and 4) leaving more than 79,000 children in the basic and low-quality childcare programs (Early Learning Advisory Committee, 2019). Programs enrolled in the PTQ rating system are supported by early childhood coaches. Coaching has proved to be an effective professional development strategy that leads to improved teaching practices and child outcomes (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Wood et

al., 2012). Understanding the strengths and needs in coaching support helped to detect gaps in provided coaching, and potential disconnects between all participating sides. Upon identification of gaps, solutions were established for the improvement of coaching support. Improved coaching support can significantly influence the quality of coaching in Indiana resulting in increased early childhood provider practices as measured by PTQ rankings, which has shown to improve children outcomes (Elicker, 2018).

Furthermore, the findings from this study helped to identify needed professional development and training strategies for early childhood coaches. These findings have the potential to support the coaching agency and coaches in using the best practices, resulting in providing high-quality coaching for providers in PTQ. These findings can also inform other coaching agencies and states in providing support for early childhood coaches as well as identifying areas of strengths and challenges in their environment. Consequently, the findings from this study can inform policymakers and agencies to create new ways or improvements in professional development to provide support to early childhood coaches or educational coaches. Finally, this study also adds to the literature of early childhood coaching and educational coaching.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the strengths of early childhood coaches that could be used for the improvement of coaching quality in Indiana?
2. What are the challenges and needs of early childhood coaches in Indiana?
3. What would the appropriate support for coaches look like based upon the findings?

1.4 Assumptions

The main assumptions were as follow:

1. Administrators of Early Learning Indiana, Child Care Answers agency will be willing to participate in the focus group session, as well as early childhood coaches.
2. Early childhood coaches will be willing to help recruit service providers.

3. Participants will respond accurately and honestly during the focus group process regarding to their own experiences, knowledge, opinions, and background in coaching in Indiana.
4. The number of participants chosen for this study will be sufficient enough for drawing any conclusions.
5. Participants will be able to attend one 90-minute focus group session.

1.5 Limitations

Limitations of this study were:

1. This study was limited to the number of volunteer participants (administrators, coaches) available from the ELI agency.
2. This study was limited to the number of volunteer participants of addressed service providers.
3. This study was limited by the availability of participants and their willingness to collaborate.
4. This study was limited by the amount of collaboration of Early childhood coaches in recruiting service providers.

1.6 Delimitations

Delimitations of this study were:

1. This study was limited to coaching in the state of Indiana; coaching in other states will not be studied.
2. The study was focused only on the outcomes from one agency that provides coaching support: Early Learning Indiana, Child Care Answers; coaching support from other agencies that are available across the state of Indiana were not analyzed.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

Child Care Answers – child care resource and referral program operated by Early Learning Indiana (Child Care Answers, 2019)

Coaching - an interactive process in which the coach assists and promotes other person development in the chosen area

Early childhood coach – a person who provides coaching in early childhood programs

Early care and education – “All forms of organized and sustained activities, often center- or school-based, designed to foster learning and emotional and social development in children such as preschools, kindergartens, and child-care centers” (Southern Regional Educational Board, 2015)

Early Learning Indiana – early childhood education nonprofit organization in Indiana Service providers – providers of all early childhood services (e.g., childcare centers, ministries, homes); a provider can be a teacher and/or teacher supervisor

Teacher – educator in early childhood services

Technical assistance – “is the provision of targeted and customized supports by a professional(s) with the subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills to develop or strengthen processes, knowledge application, or implementation of services by recipients” (National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, 2011)

Technical assistant administrators – supervisor who provides support to early childhood coaches

PTQ coach – early childhood coach that provides technical assistance to early childhood providers that are enrolled in the Paths to Quality rating system

PTQ specialist – specialists in specific areas of early childhood (inclusion specialists, curriculum specialists, instruction specialist, etc.) that provides support to early childhood providers.

1.8 Acronyms

ELI – Early Learning Indiana

ECE – Early Care and Education

PTQ – Paths to Quality

TA – Technical Assistance

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Coaching has a wide area of use with primary affiliation to sports. However, because of its individualized approach, coaching has quickly become a very popular professional development strategy in educational environments. Still, research is disunited about the best practices in coaching and the best professional development supports for coaches. This chapter provides an overview of the need for high-quality early learning environments with an emphasis on early childhood coaching in Indiana. Further, the author discussed the existing coaching support provided by ELI.

2.1 Methodology of Review of Literature

Coaching, as professional development, is being used widely in the early childhood environment. The publications used for literature review, in this chapter, were drawn from a search database of PsychInfo, ERIC, EBSCO host, and dissertation database ProQuest. The key terms used for the search were “professional development”, “early childhood coaching”, “educational coach”, “teacher training”, “coaching practices”, and “quality in early childhood”. The initial search started with sources and threads familiar to the author of this study. Since this study is focused on a specific environment, additional information was searched in other sources (e.g., Early Learning Indianan Committee, Paths to Quality, Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children websites). The “backward search procedure” was also used to examine the reference lists of reviewed resources for potential useful references. Finally, the literature review contained information and findings from research articles, books, book chapters, technical reports, dissertations, and websites related to coaching and early childhood.

2.2 Need for High-Quality ECE

Early childhood education benefits society in many ways. One of the direct benefits is a better life quality that benefits all. Higher incomes enable the individual to be more likely an independent and prosperous member of society. Higher economic production together with lower criminal activity are the main benefits for American society (Bartik, 2014). These long-term benefits were highlighted by some of the most known studies in early childhood education such

as the Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Program, and the Nurse Family Partnership (Bartik, 2014). Further, the first years of life are critical in brain development and developing a base for success in school years and later life (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016). The research showed that high-quality preschool education has a big influence on better intellectual, language, and social development for children (Lamb & Ahnert, 2007; Sammons, 2010). With the need for high-quality ECE, the main focus was brought to highly qualified teachers with an emphasis on not only what to teach students but how to teach them (Wood et al., 2016). This emphasis refers to the research-based practices that showed to be the most effective in promoting the development of children and improving learning outcomes (Division of Early Childhood, 2018).

Quality in ECE can be determined by Munton's systematic conceptual framework that expresses quality by structure, process, and outcome (Munton, Mooney & Rowland, 1995). During the years of focusing on quality within childcare programs variety of validated quality measures have been developed such as the Classroom assessment scoring system, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extension, and Childcare Interaction Scale (Sylva, 2010; Slot, 2018).

Moreover, the need for quality improvement resulted in developing quality rating systems that have been implemented in a variety of states across the United States. This initiation started in the 1990's (Rouge, 2017). Oklahoma was the first state that implemented a quality rating system in 1998. By 2017, the majority of the states implemented a form of quality rating systems (Elicker, 2007; Rouge 2017). More states were to follow. The quality rating system aims to assess, improve, support, and communicate the quality within childcare (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2010). Based on the systematic review by Slot (2018), quality rating systems have shown to be associated with higher process quality, which referred to more social, emotional, and instructional day to day staff-child and peer interactions. The state quality rating program structures and procedures vary but the main components of quality rating system are: (a) quality standards that apply to the participating programs, (b) assessment process of maintaining quality childcare, (c) systems of support that helps providers to move to the higher quality provided by technical assistance, (d) motivation for advancing the level of quality in the form of reward, and (e) promotion of quality programs to increase public awareness (Elicker et al., 2018; Rouge, 2017).

2.3 High-Quality ECE in Indiana

In 2018, a report on the economic impact of ECE in Indiana revealed that Indiana loses \$1.1 billion in economic activity due to the lack of access to child care (Littlepage, 2018). In 2019, the population of young children in Indiana at the age between 0 and 5 was more than 500,000 out of which 323,729 need care because both parents work. Yet, only 130,517 children are enrolled in known child care systems (Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee, 2019). Indiana has developed a quality rating system to fulfill the commitment of the importance of high-quality ECE for all children (Elicker et al., 2007). Among other states implementing quality improvement systems, Indiana was between the first in the nation to launch a statewide quality rating program. It started as a community-based improvement effort in 2000 implemented by Fort Wayne County (Elicker, Langlill, Ruprecht, Lewsader, & Anderson, 2011). In 2008, Indiana started with the implementation of the statewide childcare quality improvement system called Paths to Quality (Elicker et. al., 2007). Paths to Quality (PTQ) is a free, voluntary quality rating, and improvement system administered by the Family and Social Service Administration and Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning (Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee, 2016). The main goals of PTQ are to improve the quality of ECE for children, to assist parents, and give them support in identifying the best quality programs for their children. Last but not least, PTQ aims to support and recognize providers for providing high-quality programming (Elicker et al., 2007). PTQ rates the program based on the evidence-based quality standards starting from Level 1 as the basic quality to Level 4 as the highest indicator of quality with national accreditation (Elicker, 2011). These four levels apply to licensed child care centers, licensed child care homes, and registered child care ministries. ECE programs must meet the specific standard requirements to obtain the relevant level of quality. As shown in Table 1., this rating system has a building block structure (QRIS National Learning Network, 2015) and the standards are built on previous levels.

Table 1. PTQ Levels and standards (adapted from Elicker, 2007, p. 6-7)

Level	Standard	Sample requirements
Level 1	Health & Safety	Meet minimum health and safety standards. Develop and implement basic health and safety policies and procedures.
Level 2	Learning Environments	Provide an environment that is welcoming, nurturing, and safe for the physical, emotional, and social well-being of all children. Provide a variety of learning materials that reflect the age, interests, and abilities of each child.
Level 3	Planned Curriculum	Implement a planned curriculum that addresses the stages of child development. Demonstrate professional growth of director and staff in excess of licensing requirements.
Level 4	National Accreditation	Meet the highest standards for high-quality early care and education. Director agrees to assist other programs in quality improvement through volunteer mentoring.

The effectiveness of PTQ was evaluated by Elicker et al. (2018) by conducting three evaluation studies. A Longitudinal Child Care Provider Advancement study was the first one and lasted two years (2013-2014). Findings from this study showed that participation rates increased; however, approximately half of the providers from the sample did not increase their PTQ level during those two years. Findings also bring attention to the providers' personal characteristics but most importantly to the interaction with coaches as a predictor of the providers' advancement in the PTQ. The perceived helpfulness of the coach has shown to be associated with providers' advancement. The overall findings from the second study, A Longitudinal Child Outcomes, showed predominantly that PTQ programs were not necessarily associated with higher gains in children's development as assessed by Classroom Assessment Scoring System. The third study, Statewide Parent Survey, examined awareness and the use of PTQ. The most increase in awareness was registered from 2011 to 2015. The results also showed that parents would be willing to pay more money for a higher level of quality education.

2.4 Coaching in ECE

The emerging quality rating systems with the goal of improving the quality in ECE all around the United States have one essential part: technical assistance. Technical assistance delivers targeted and customized support and is very often in the form of coaching (Rouge, 2018). Coaching has become an effective professional development strategy for ECE teachers and providers (Young, 2012; Smith, Robbins, Schneider, Kreader, & Ong, 2012). Coaching is a structured and organized relationship-based process where a learning relationship is built to develop new skills, improve professional practice, and build the competence and confidence of the coachee (Twigg et al., 2013; Rush & Sheldon, 2011). Rogers (2008) identified coaching as “a partnership of equals whose aims are to achieve speedy, increased, and sustainable effectiveness through focused learning in every aspect of a client’s life. Coaching raises self-awareness and identifies choices.” (p. 7). Coaching in ECE can be in the form of training, job-embedded professional development, or technical assistance (O’Keefe, 2017). Early childhood coaching connected with quality rating systems refers to a goal-oriented approach in coaching. The goal-oriented approach assists the coachee to assess, identify goals, and create an action plan (Ives, 2008). The focus of the coach varies based on the specialization and targeted area of coaching support. Killion (2009) introduced ten roles that the coach can represent such as a data coach, resource provider, mentor, curriculum specialist, instructional specialists, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, school leader, a catalyst for change, and a learner. Either role of coach helps the coachee to achieve desired outcomes. Rush and Sheldon (2011) described ten key elements of coaching in early childhood that apply as the foundation for coaching practice: (1) *Consistent with the principles of adult learning*. Coaching can be perceived as self-directed with emphasis on reflecting on experiences and building on previous experiences (Ives, 2008). (2) *Capacity building*, which refers to the overall development of the coachee in order to be independent and high functioning without the ongoing support of the coach. (3) *Nondirective*. An effective coach should know when to promote coachee’s development and when to provide more support and offer solutions. The regulation of the nondirective approach essential in quality coaching. (4) *Goal-oriented*. Achievement of the desired goals is the purpose of the coaching relationship. The coaching relationship should support the coachee in the identification of the goals and plans to achieve those goals (Moen & Skaalvik 2009; Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). (5) *Solution-focused*. Coaching helps to assess the current situation to identify possible solutions and encourage

change. Coach and coachee should work together to determine the best strategies and options for the intended goals. (6) *Performance-based*. The coaching purpose is also about learning and behavioral change. Performance emerges from the coaching interactions in forms of applying new knowledge and skills. (7) *Reflective*. Reflection is a way to think about knowledge or skills that coachee already knows and uses to identify what areas need to be targeted to improve or refine. (8) *Collaborative*. Coaching relationships should be based on the understanding of the role of the coach to set clear expectations (Twiggg et al., 2013). Understanding of coachee abilities, knowledge, and competencies are also essential. Mutual understanding of the roles and expectations leads to a partnership that avoids directiveness and intimidation. (9) *Context-driven*. The content of coaching should never be separated from the context in which the goals and changes are planned. Adaptations to practice or the identified goal are best to set in current situations to establish immediate solutions or provide examples to support the change. (10) *Hands-on*. The coaching process starts with providing as much support as needed with the goal of preparing the coachee to be independent. However, modeling and prompting are some of the key hands-on strategies to facilitate learning and change in practices. The coaching elements and work of coaches influence several factors such as the time of the school year, an experience level of the coach and experience level of the teachers, the role of the provider, and the school culture. These factors are essential to consider as they influence the whole coaching process (Killion, 2009).

The key elements of coaching in ECE have been transformed into a variety of forms of coaching plans, systems, curriculums, and programs. These coaching models differ in forms and sequences of actions, but all have similar characteristics of a relationship, observation, joint planning, action, reflection, and feedback (Twiggg et al., 2013; Rush & Sheldon, 2011; Artman-Meeker, Fettig, Barton, Penney, & Zeng, 2015). These characteristics are summarized in Table 2. with examples of studies implemented coaching models in early childhood environments that contained specific coaching characteristics.

Table 2. Coaching characteristics implemented by coaching models

Coaching characteristic	Description	Implemented in a coaching model
Relationship	Establishing rapport and trust to set a mutual understanding of expectations.	Snyder, Hemmeter & Fox, 2015; Neuman & Wright, 2010
Observation	Examination of coachees practices or actions to reflect and refine or develop new skills.	Rush & Sheldon, 2011; Gettinger & Stoiber, 2016; Mohler, Yun, Carter, & Kasak, 2009; Wilson, Dykstra, Watson, Boyd & Crais, 2012
Assessment	Gathering data about current practices in order to make data-driven decisions.	Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015, Koh & Neuman, 2009
Action-planning	Development of a plan to lead the goal achievement.	Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015; Koh & Neuman, 2009; Wilson et al., 2012
Reflection	Analysis of current practices in sense of what is going well and what needs improvement. Facilitating problem-solving strategies.	Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Neuman & Wright, 2010; Koh & Neuman, 2009; Wilson et al., 2012
Feedback	Information based on the performance of the coachee to facilitate learning and expanding the current level of understanding of the coachee.	Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015; Anderson & Radencich, 2001; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Neuman & Wright, 2010; Mohler, Yun, Carter, & Kasak, 2009

Besides the varying coaching characteristics, coaching in ECE has also different forms. On-site coaching contains visits of the coach in the classroom or the environment that coachee's goal is implemented (Neuman & Wright, 2010; Mohler, Yun, Carter, & Kasak, 2009; Koh & Neuman, 2009; Wilson, Dykstra, Watson, Boyd & Crais, 2012). On-site coaching is the most frequently implemented form of coaching as shown by the literature review conducted by Artman-Meeker et al. (2015). Distance coaching utilizes several types of communication such as

remote conference sessions, email or texting, and calls (Artman-Meeker & Hemmeter, 2012; Piasta et al., 2012). Some studies employed both methods for coaching teachers and/or service providers (Sutherland, Conroy, Vo, & Ladwig, 2014; Twigg et al. 2013).

The focus of coaching is also variable and is based on the character of the need of the coachee. Therefore, coaches are often specialized in specific areas. These specific areas include literacy coaching, instructional coaching, cognitive coaching, classroom management coaching, leadership coaching (Knight, 2009). The most commonly used strategies in ECE are instructional and literacy coaching. Data and interview results have shown that instructional coaching significantly increases language and literacy practices when used as part of professional development together with coursework. Coursework alone did not bring the same significant results (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Neuman & Wright, 2010; Clough, 2015). The literacy coach helps teachers to improve their practices to pursue increased literacy outcomes for children (Cornett & Knight, 2009). Studies have shown when literacy coaching is a part of teacher professional development to have a positive impact on children's literacy outcomes (Mohler, Yun, Carter, & Kasak, 2009). A TA provider study that was conducted in 2011 studied approaches of TA providers to improve ECE quality. Indiana was one of the participating states in this study. Results from this interview study revealed that the most frequent topic areas of coaching as technical assistance are the improvement of classroom/home setting environment, improvement focused on moving up in the quality rating system, improvement of practices that support social-emotional development, and help in the use of curricula (Smith, Robbins, Schneider, Kreader & Ong, 2012). Similar topics were found by another study conducted by the American Institute of Research that partnered with ELI (Howard et al., 2015) with one additional topic: improvement of safety and health.

The majority of the studies in early childhood coaching focus on the implementation and outcomes for teachers and children. Very little was done on exploring what support is needed for coaches in order to provide the best coaching practices. The literature review conducted by Cornett & Knight (2009) highlighted the need for learning more about the development of coaches, more specifically, more research is necessary for the area of professional development for coaches and administrators. A study addressing this problem was conducted by Agnamba (2012), who examined an instructional coaching program that provides professional development to early childhood educators. This study explored the training and support provided to early

childhood coaches with a focus on strengths and gaps, which rise from the available support and recommendations for future implementations. The findings of this study summarized the need for clear goals and objectives, training sequence for coaches, the importance for collaboration, peer observation, and support, the balance between process and content of coaching, and the importance of lead coaches. Implications for coach development were also discussed.

2.5 PTQ Coaching Provided by ELI

There are approximately 60 coaches and 28 specialists providing technical assistance and coaching in the PTQ. In 2017, 44 of the PTQ coaches were employed by local child care resource and referral agencies such as ELI, Child Care Answers. A total of 16 PTQ coaches were employed by the Indiana Association for the Education for Young Children. The ratio of coaches to all participating providers was 1:45. Therefore, not every provider enrolled in PTQ receives coaching as the technical assistance support is not mandatory and providers choose a self-guided approach. PTQ specialists are focused on infant and toddler development, inclusion, and school age. As summarized by Rouge (2017) Early Learning Indiana and PTQ TA provides coaching and support in areas such as health and safety, inclusion, infant and toddler care, improving teacher-child interactions, use of observational assessment tools, program administrations and management practices, school-age care, rating assistance, dual language learners, and curriculum and assessment. All coaches are using the same LEARN 360 model of coaching, which focuses on goal setting and collaborative work towards those goals (Rouge, 2017).

In 2015, ELI established a five-year initiative that by 2020 more children are going to have access to high-quality programs (Partnership for Early Learners, 2019). In more detail, their goal is to ensure that 75% of children who are enrolled in ECE are going to be in high-quality. ELI is committed to high-quality in ECE and believes that quality in early childhood environments should be aiming for more than advancing programs on a quality rating system. It is encouraged to create environments that put quality at the core of the values and beliefs of all teachers and programs (Partnership for Early Learners, 2019). Thus, ELI partnered with the American Institute of Research to develop a plan for improvement of the PTQ system (Howard et al., 2015). The state stakeholder interviews highlighted that the PTQ coaching support needs improvement in the form of training and professional development which was also supported by the PTQ coach survey where coaches self-reported the need for ongoing training. Howard et al.

(2015) developed goals to help achieve the ELI initiative. One of the sub-goals was to increase providers' PTQ ratings by supporting and refining coaching approaches for Indiana ECE providers. These approaches were identified in more detail and suggested to standardize the coaching model for providers, offer professional development to coaches, increase continuity of coach-program relationships, take a comprehensive, whole program approach to coaching, especially in centers and registered ministries, and target coaching to programs that are ready for change (Howard et al., 2015).

Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the PTQ coaching provided by ELI to identify strengths, needs, and challenges in coaching. The obtained findings were used to identify the best solutions for the professional development of early childhood coaches, which would allow facilitating high-quality supports for early childhood providers. The high-quality coaching would ensure the quality of early learning environments and advancement on the PTQ rating system.

2.6 Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of high-quality within ECE and the related quality improvement systems. Further, it summarized the relevant literature on coaching in an early childhood environment with an emphasis on coaching in PTQ. In particular, this chapter introduces the high-quality in ECE, the high-quality ECE in Indiana, ECE coaching, and PTQ coaching provided by ELI. The next chapter focuses on the methodology of this study with a description of the research design, methodology, participants, trustworthiness, and positionality statement of the researcher.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study sought to examine coaching in the PTQ ranking improvement system provided by ELI, Child Care Answers (Nolan, Macfarlane, & Cartmel, 2013). The primary goal was to understand the strengths and needs of early childhood coaches to identify the challenges that coaches encounter. In addition, identified results aimed to help determine what types of professional development in coaching in ECE on PTQ are required. Particularly, the identified results aimed to suggest potential coaching curriculum and training for early childhood coaches to provide adequate coaching support to service providers to help develop high-quality childcare programming, teacher competences, and children outcomes. To achieve these goals, the focus group session with early childhood coaches was conducted. Furthermore, focus group sessions with early childhood providers and technical assistance (TA) administrators were also conducted to obtain more detailed information from three different perspectives. Finally, a dyadic interview was held with TA administrators on coaching in PTQ Indiana to provide validation of data collected from the focus groups.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

In conceptualizing this study, the approach was drawn from two theories. First, the person-centered theory that originates from positive psychology and supports the strength-based approach that has been employed in this study (White, Motschnig-Pitrik, & Lux, 2013). In the person-centered theory, every individual has a tendency for development and enhancement (White, Motschnig-Pitrik, & Lux, 2013). This tendency for growth is essential in providing coaching. Creating a climate for change applies to all individuals who are engaged in the coaching process, in this case: the administrators, the coaches, and the early childhood providers or teachers. Rogers (1980) described three basic elements for creating a climate of change based on relationships: (1) the genuineness, which applies to the realness and transparency of the individual that puts into the relationship to support the growth, (2) the acceptance to create a positive attitude towards the individual to grow, and (3) the element of emphatic understanding, which builds trust through active listening. The strength-based approach was utilized for building

research questions and the data collection questions as it is believed that the strength-based approach increases motivation and interest in people (Van Zyl & Stander, 2013).

Second, coaching belongs to a community of practice. Wenger (2007) defines the community of practice as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p.1). Still, not every community can be a community of practice. However, PTQ coaching can be perceived as a community of practice because the early childhood coaches share the domain, the community, and the practice.

3.2 Research Questions

Research questions for this study investigated the need for improvement in coaching in PTQ as suggested by the American Institute for Research (Howard et al., 2015). The conceptual framework of this study draws from approaches of the person-centered theory and strength-based approach, thus the need to understand coaches on a deeper level was crucial. Therefore, two of the research questions were focused on coaches’ strengths and needs in providing coaching. This study provided the opportunity to examine the environment of early childhood coaching in PTQ from three different perspectives to establish the process of improvement. Learn about strengths of coaches was fundamental to build a positive environment where coaches can reflect on their skills and strategies and simultaneously these strengths could be used as a foundation to build on in later professional development. The needs of coaches were important to identify, in order to uncover challenges that coaches may have struggled with and areas of supports that are needed. The third research question sought to suggest professional development strategies that would correspond with the findings from the focus group sessions.

The research questions addressed by this study were:

1. What are the strengths of early childhood coaches that could be used for the improvement of coaching quality in Indiana?
2. What are the challenges and needs of early childhood coaches in Indiana?
3. What would the appropriate support for coaches look like based upon the findings?

3.3 Research Design

To address the purpose of this study and nature of the research questions, a qualitative multiple case study methodology was employed. Qualitative research enables the researchers to gain insights from the inside informal reality (Creswell, 2012; Gillham, 2000). The purpose of the research and research questions are in qualitative research stated in such a manner that one can best learn from participants (Creswell, 2012). This exploratory multiple case-study sought to explore the problems within the phenomenon of early childhood coaching in PTQ, Indiana provided by ELI, Child Care Answers (Yin, 1994). Qualitative case studies provide an opportunity to develop theories and evaluate programs in the context of the phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008) Qualitative evidence enabled to understand the environment of early childhood coaching in PTQ and perceive deeper meanings. These insights helped to identify possible explanations (Gillham, 2000). Furthermore, the research design employed in this study pursued to develop themes about experiences that emerged and were evident from the collected data. Thus, the inductive analysis approach was selected for this exploratory case study (Braun & Clark, 2006; Patton, 1999). Specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine early childhood coaching to identify the strengths and needs of coaches and challenges in providing coaching. Additionally, the purpose was to identify these aspects to suggest professional development and support for early childhood coaches to improve coaching quality as was suggested by the American Research Institution (Howard et al., 2015). The phenomenon was explored from three different perspectives, the administrators, coaches, and providers, which represents the multiple case study design.

Similar methodology as used in this study was implemented by Bambrick (2019). Multiple case study design was used to interview teachers on their perceptions of literacy coaching. The within-case analysis allowed the researcher to explore individual perspectives of the six participating teachers on literacy coaching.

3.4 Participant Recruitment

The participants for focus groups and a dyadic interview were recruited via ELI, Child Care Answers. The TA administrators were recruited by the author of this thesis via email. The

criterion for participation in the study was to be a facilitator of support for early childhood coaches in the PTQ.

The early childhood coaches and specialists were recruited via email after they received a digital or hard copy of a recruitment flyer (APPENDIX A). The recruitment flyer presented the focus of the research study, information on who and when can participate, and the contact information. The criterium for participation was to be a PTQ coach or a PTQ specialist providing coaching support in programs enrolled in the PTQ rating system.

The early childhood service providers were recruited with the help of the early childhood coaches after they received an electronic or digital version of the recruitment flyer. The only criterium for the early childcare service providers was to have experience with receiving the coaching support in their programs by participating in the PTQ.

A total of 23 participants were recruited for focus group sessions. The TA administrator focus group consisted of a total of seven participants. These participants were regional directors of childcare resource and referral support services, professional development coordinators, directors of programs, and program managers, who supervised the PTQ coaches and the PTQ specialists. The dyadic interview was held with the TA administrators. The coaches' focus group consisted of ten PTQ coaches and PTQ specialists who provide support in early childhood programs. The early childhood service providers' focus group consisted of six principals of early childcare centers and homes. The participant description and organizational roles are shown in Figure 1. All participants have filled out, signed, and obtained informed consent documents before participation. All participants also filled out a demographic survey (APPENDIX B).

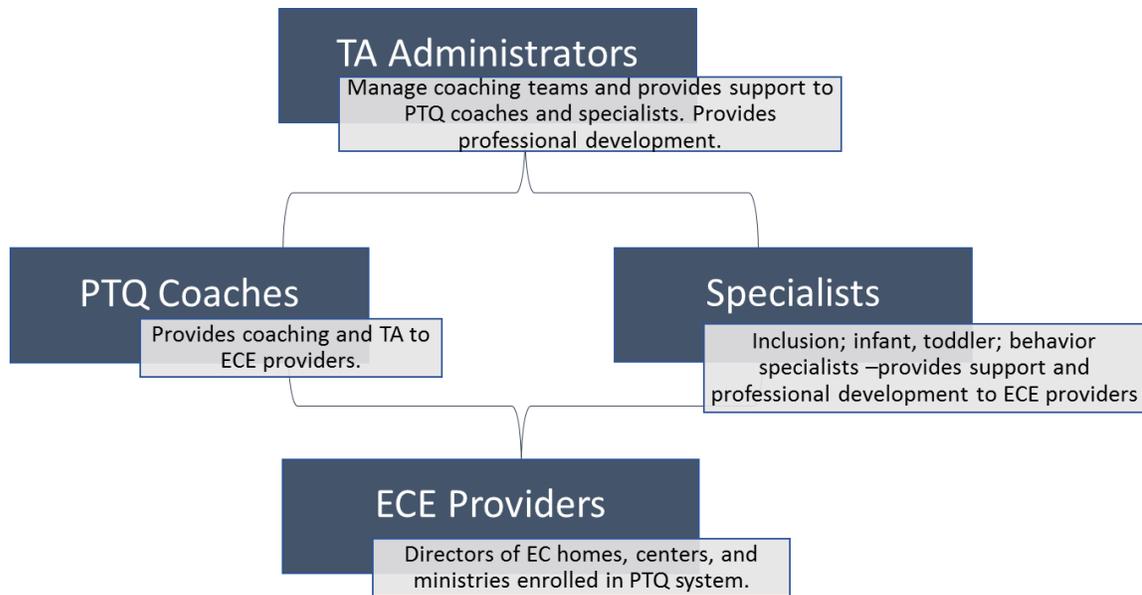


Figure 1. Role description and relationship chart

3.5 Participant Description

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the demographic information was collected from all participants through demographic surveys. The demographic surveys included questions about gender, age, ethnicity, highest educational level, and questions related to their job experiences and caseload. The participant descriptions and the results from the data collection are presented without any identifying information to meet the confidentiality condition and to protect the participants. Each participant was assigned a unique number and is referred to based upon their job role.

3.5.1 Demographic Information and Descriptions of the TA Administrators

Each of the seven recruited TA administrators were female. A total of 86% of the TA administrator participants were African American and 14% were Caucasian. The average age of the TA administrators was 42.9 with a range from 38 to 49 years old. Five out of seven participants had a master’s degree. One indicated to hold an MBA and one BA degree.

Every TA administrator participant demonstrated a wide range of experience in the early childhood environment with rich experience in facilitating the PTQ technical assistance. Based

on the information collected from our demographic survey and the opportunity to observe and talk to our participants, it was evident that they all had very different roles and responsibilities. *Participant 1* has been working for six years as a TA administrator and supervised 15 PTQ coaches. Each of the supervised PTQ coaches worked with ECE providers focusing on children from infancy to school-age.

Participant 2 has been a TA administrator for four years and supervises five PTQ coaches. One of the coaches worked with providers with infants and toddlers from birth to three years, two of the coaches worked with providers with preschooler ages three to five years and one of them was supporting providers with school-age children.

Participant 3 has a two-year experience as a TA administrator and supervised nine PTQ coaches. All those coaches were supporting providers of all categories.

Participant 4 has been working for two years as a TA administrator and supervised six PTQ coaches. The majority of the coaches were focusing on providers with infants and toddlers and providers with preschooler ages.

Participant 5 has been in this position for five years and supervises PTQ coach facilitators that provided support and supervised other PTQ coaches and specialists.

Participant 6 has been working for four years in this position and supervised nine PTQ inclusion specialists around the state of Indiana.

Participant 7 has more than ten years of experience in being a TA administrator. She coaches and provides professional development for approximately 50 PTQ coaches and specialists. All of those coaches are providing supports to providers from infancy to school-age children.

3.5.2 Demographic Information and Description of the PTQ Coaches and Specialists

Each of the PTQ coaches and specialists participants were female. Ethnical structure of this participant group was as follows: 30% African American, 50% Caucasian, 10% Latino, and 10% Biracial. The average age was 35.9 years old with a range from 25 to 48 years old. Every participant held a bachelor's degree.

The PTQ coaches and specialists participants have all previous experience of being either the ECE teacher, provider, or both. This experience provides them with a strong insight into what providers are encountering, and they can relate to their positions. From observing the participants

during focus groups, it was evident that they build on those experiences when providing supports as PTQ coaches and specialists.

Participant 1 has 12 years of experience as an early childhood teacher and five years as an early childhood provider. She worked as a PTQ coach for approximately one year and there are approximately 60 ECE providers on her caseload. Each of the providers is focusing on infants and toddlers and preschool age. Nearly 40 of these ECE providers are supporting school-age children.

Participant 2 worked as a PTQ coach for five years and has previous experience as an ECE teacher. Her caseload consists of 25 to 30 ECE providers and approximately 40 ECE teachers. The majority of the ECE providers on her caseload are working with children from infancy through school-age.

Participant 3 worked six years as an ECE teacher, and this was her first year as a PTQ specialist. All the ECE providers that she is working with are providing care for children from infancy through school-age.

Participant 4 has 14 years of working experience as an ECE teacher. She worked as a PTQ Coach for three years and her caseload consists of 30 ECE providers. Most of the providers are working with children from infancy through school-age.

Participant 5 has been in the position of PTQ coach for 2.5 years with a caseload of about 40 ECE providers and between 80 and 120 ECE teachers. She has a one-year experience of working as an ECE teacher. All of the ECE providers are providing services to children from infancy to school-age.

Participant 6 has been a PTQ coach for 2.5 years. She has previously worked as an ECE teacher for 11 years. Her caseload consists of 25 ECE providers and 60 ECE teachers. Each of the 25 ECE providers is working with children from infancy to preschoolers and four of those providers are providing services to children of school-age.

Participant 7 has a two-year experience as a PTQ coach and previously worked as an ECE teacher for ten years. There are about 45 ECE providers on her caseload and more than 50 ECE teachers. Each of those ECE providers is providing services for children from infancy through school-age.

Participant 8 has been working as a PTQ specialist for two years. She also has ten years of working experience as an ECE teacher. As a PTQ specialist, she provides support to providers with children from infancy through school-age.

Participant 9 has ten years of previous experience as an ECE teacher and has been working as a PTQ coach for ten years. Her caseload consists of 20 ECE providers and more than 50 ECE teachers out of which 18 are focusing on infants and toddlers, 15 are providing services for children of school-age, and each of them is also focusing on preschoolers ages three to five.

Participant 10 has 12 years of experience as an ECE teacher and being a director of before and after school programs. She has been working as a PTQ Specialists for 3.5 years.

3.5.3 Demographic Information and Description of ECE Providers

Every ECE provider participant was female. Four out of five (80%) provider focus group participants were African American and one (20%) was Biracial. The average age was 54.2 with a range from 44 to 60 years old. The highest educational level of the participants was a bachelor's degree (60%), an associate degree (20%), and a master's degree (20%).

Each of the ECE provider participants has a long-time experience of providing programming for children from infancy to school-age. These experienced providers had an opportunity to be trained on PTQ and also to receive coaching from PTQ coaches and specialists. As shown from the collected survey data, the turnover of coaches and the frequency of coaching interactions vary between ECE providers.

Participant 1 indicated that she has been an ECE provider for 28 years and previously taken courses on early childhood development and training on PTQ. There are 78 children of age between infancy to 5 years old on provider caseload. This provider has experience of working with one coach.

Participant 2 has been an ECE provider for 12 years and have taken courses on early childhood development and training on PTQ. She supports eight children from birth to three years and four children of preschool age three to five years old. Her experiences with PTQ coaches include six different coaches that she has worked with. She also indicated she does not meet with her coach very often.

Participants 3 has six years of experience as an ECE provider. She previously took courses on early childhood development and was trained on PTQ. She supports 12 children from infancy to

school-age in her childcare. Her experience with PTQ coaches includes one PTQ coach that she meets once a month.

Participant 4 has been an ECE provider for over ten years and received multiple training on PTQ and early childhood development. She supports approximately 12 children in her childcare. She has worked with four PTQ coaches for about nine years. She indicated that meetings with her coach are very rare.

Participant 5 has five years of experience as an ECE provider in registered ministry. She also had previously taken courses on early childhood development and training on PTQ. This participant had ten coaches on her caseload that supports 70 children from infancy to five years of age. She has worked with four PTQ coaches and she meets with her coach once a month.

3.6 Data Collection

Yin (2009) refers to the case study analysis as an approach that uses as much evidence as available and data interpretation should report on all of this evidence. The measures for this study were focus group sessions and a dyadic interview. Data for this study were collected by the author of this thesis and the author's research advisor. The author's position in the data collection was an assistant moderator. The author's research advisor position was a moderator. A list of questions was developed for each of the focus groups by the author of this thesis together with the author's research advisor. The developed questions targeted each stakeholder group separately to reflect the research questions. The questions were aimed to examine the gaps and challenges in providing coaching, the strengths, and the needs of early childhood coaches and areas of needed support for coaches (APPENDIX C; APPENDIX D; APPENDIX E). The validation of these measures was also considered. Preliminary discussions with the TA administrators helped to identify the focus and the range of the questions. The focus group questions for the coaches and the early childhood service providers were discussed with the TA administrators to confirm the accuracy of the questions and any potential additional questions that might arise.

3.6.1 Focus Group Procedures

Each focus group was held in the Early Learning Indiana administration building in Indianapolis, IN. The TA administrators' focus group was held in September 2018. The coaches' focus group and the early childhood service providers focus group was held in October 2018. Each of the focus groups was audio-recorded and lasted approximately 60 minutes. The demographic surveys were collected using paper and pencil.

The data collection process was consistent throughout all of the focus groups. The assistant moderator developed instruments to secure the persistent and replicable structure of the data collection process. The moderator and assistant moderator checklists were developed to manage the focus group process and all participants. These checklists covered the whole procedure from arranging the room and greeting the participants to get people to leave and debriefing sessions. These checklists included a to-do list of responsibilities of each of the moderators.

Each of the focus group session had the following structure. The room was arranged into a circle, refreshment table, and registration table were also set up. The audio recording equipment was tested and set up. The assistant moderator welcomed and registered participants. Each participant received a folder with an assigned number that contained a consent form and a demographic survey. The TA administrators and coaches on top of that received recruitment flyers in their folder. Once the consent form was signed by participants, they completed the demographic survey. The moderator and assistant moderator introduced the focus group session with welcoming the participants, giving an overview of the topic and purpose of the focus group, the introduction of the moderator and the assistant moderator, acknowledging the audio recording equipment, and giving assurance of anonymity. Further, the introduction continued with establishing guidelines and ground rules of the focus group session and giving space for opening questions. Once all questions were answered the moderator began the focus group session. Once all established questions were answered the moderator summarized key findings and themes, asked if the perception was accurate, and gave space for additional thoughts and questions. After the focus group was finished, the moderator and the assistant moderator thank the participants and got people to leave. Finally, once the focus group was finished, both the assistant moderator and the moderator held a debriefing session to summarize all the findings. The debriefing session was audio-recorded and was used together with the collected data to develop a codebook for data analysis.

Additionally, the assistant moderator reporting form was developed to take notes during the focus groups. The assistant moderator was recording all important themes and non-verbal interpretations together with the mood in the room. These reporting forms also served as guidance during the debriefing sessions and for later codebook development.

3.6.2 Dyadic Interview Procedures

The dyadic interview with TA administrators was held in September 2018. This interview was conducted remotely using the Cisco Webex conference call. The dyadic interview was audio-recorded and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Participants received a consent form to read and sign before the interview call. The consent forms were sent and signed electronically through DocuSign. After both participants finished the signing process, they received and filled out the demographic surveys through email. The dyadic interview had a very similar structure to the focus group, with one major difference. This interview was led by the moderator only, without the assistant moderator. Thus, the moderator checklist was modified to consist of all necessary responsibilities. Such a decision was made to secure a trusting environment for remote participants. The dyadic interview structure consisted of welcoming the participants and the introduction of the moderator, giving an overview of the topic and purpose of the dyadic interview, acknowledging the recording of the session, and giving assurance of anonymity. Further, the introduction continued with establishing guidelines and ground rules of the dyadic interview and giving space for opening questions. Once all questions were answered the moderator started the dyadic interview. Once all prepared questions were answered the moderator summarized key findings and themes, asked if the perception was accurate, and gave space for additional thoughts and questions. After the focus group was finished, the moderator acknowledged the appreciation of the participants and closed the dyadic interview call.

Finally, the assistant moderator reporting form was also used in the dyadic interview. The assistant moderator watched and listened to the call and took notes. These notes were further used for codebook development and data analysis.

3.7 Procedures of Data Analysis

All audio recordings were transcribed using the online software, Transcribe, by the author of this thesis and three undergraduate students. For the data analysis, an inductive approach was utilized with the thematic analysis model to arrive at major themes across the collected data. The inductive analysis allows the researcher to interpret the data through the search for concepts, themes, and/or models by detailed readings of raw data (Thomas, 2006). The thematic analysis is based on data reduction (Alhojailan, 2012) and emerging themes. The themes capture important sections of data that are related to the research questions and represent a pattern of meaning or response (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The thematic analysis can be approached in a holistic, selective, or detailed approach as identified by Manen (1990). This study employed a selective approach. When using a selective approach, Manen (1990) recommends asking “What statement(s), phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?” (p.93), while reading the text. Statements relevant to this question were highlighted. The data were analyzed using the “long-table approach”, which involves data analysis by hand with color-coding to mark parts of the texts, cutting, and categorizing (Creswell, 2012). The data analysis in this study consisted of five steps: familiarization, identifying, categorizing, labeling, and summarizing. Each of the focus group and the dyadic interview were analyzed separately.

The familiarization step started with an initial reading of the text data. The text was read at least twice before the next step. The repetitive reading allows creating links between the information that the participants shared and enables the themes to emerge as recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). The step of identifying was to identify codes that generate a systematic approach to the data and collect data relevant to the code. The codes represent the initial interesting features that emerged from reading the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The categorizing step was used to categorize the codes and search for emerging themes. Segments of text were created by cutting and highlighting. Further, the labeling step incorporated the reduction of the redundant text resulting in emerging new subthemes. Ongoing refinement of the themes and checking of the correct labeling was also part of the labeling step. Last but not least, the themes and the subthemes were summarized and organized for data display. Although the hand analysis is more strenuous and time-consuming, it was used because of the relatively small

files that allowed easily locate the text passages. For easier orientation, these steps are described in Figure 2.

The data analysis further employed the within-case analysis (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafel, 2003). After each of the focus group was analyzed separately and the themes were summarized, the themes were also examined and compared across cases. From this cross-analysis, the major themes were finalized. The themes found from dyadic interviews were used for validation of the focus group findings.

Familiarization	Identifying	Categorizing	Labeling	Summarizing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •reading the text Form: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •many pages of text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •establishing codes from closely reading the text Form: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •reducing data into segments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •emerging themes are categorized into segments Form: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •specific number of categories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •reducing redundant text and identification of subthemes Form: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •reducing the number of categories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •organizing themes and subthemes for presenting the results Form: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •reducing data to final categories

Figure 2. Selective thematic data analysis procedure

3.8 Credibility of the Study

Patton (1999) describes credibility as a way of enhancing the quality of the qualitative analysis. The author defines three techniques of credibility; the rigorous methods for data collection and analysis with attention to validity and reliability; the trustworthiness of the qualitative researcher; and the philosophical beliefs in the qualitative inquiry.

The trustworthiness of this study was established by the use of several key validation strategies. First, two different types of qualitative research methods were used for triangulation. The focus group data were validated by a dyadic interview conducted with the TA administrators. Furthermore, focus group data were collected across all stakeholders that are part of the coaching process. Such a strategy allowed the researcher to establish a complete picture of the situation as well as to investigate each perspective individually.

Second, an examination of the previous research findings was employed to assess the degree to which the findings were consistent with the previous research (Shenton, 2004).

Third, the face validity of the measures was secured by confirmation of the focus group questions with the TA administrators about their accuracy and completeness. Furthermore, the measures and data analysis procedures developed by the assistant moderator were validated by the moderator of the focus group sessions and dyadic interview. Peer debriefing of the data analysis process was established between the assistant moderator and moderator. Moreover, additional checking of the data analysis and theme development was established by the third member that has not been part of the data collection procedure. This step enabled the author of this thesis to secure objectivity as well as a clear understanding of the emerging themes by a third person who has not been familiar with the data. Finally, each of the focus group sessions was very similarly structured to minimize variability in the data collection procedure and/or the facilitator style.

Additionally, trustworthiness was also secured by a rich description of the methodology of this study. Detailed and structured descriptions of participants, data collection procedures, and analysis procedures also contributed to the trustworthiness (Yin, 1994).

The topic of this study was close to the area of the researcher's background in early childhood and the researcher's interests. The author's experiences in early childhood education shaped the researcher's perspectives to support and advocate for high-quality ECE environments. This background enabled the researcher to understand the purpose and importance of this study and provided a base to explore quality in ECE and coaching. However, the researcher experiences were gained in a different country, specifically in the Czech Republic. The researcher encountered the environment of PTQ coaching for the first time during this study. Thus, the researcher had to do in-depth research on the topic of PTQ system and coaching to understand the environment of early childhood programming in Indiana. The author of this thesis collaborated closely with her research advisor, who had a very rich experience and understanding of this problem. There were no connections to any of the participants before conducting this study. During the data collection, the author of this study was an assistant moderator. Being an assistant moderator enabled the researcher to take notes during the data collection and observe people's attitudes. The opportunity of observing the data collection procedures facilitated a deeper understanding of the participants and their sharing. Further, the author served as the data analysis instrument. Therefore, the role of the assistant moderator

enabled the researcher to take notes and connect the data analysis procedure with real-life experience.

3.9 Summary

This chapter presented the methodology employed in this qualitative study. The research questions and the research design were described. The qualitative methodology of an exploratory multiple case study was selected. The research design described the participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The description of the participants and their demographic background was presented. Finally, the trustworthiness of this study was discussed with the positionality statement of the researcher.

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF THE DATA AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, the results from focus group sessions and a dyadic interview are introduced. The collected data provided the researchers with insight into the functioning of ELI, Child Care Answers coaching and understanding of the intertwined relationships and roles of each stakeholder. Most importantly, the collected data and its analysis brought attention to the aspects of ELI coaching that need support and areas that all stakeholders would greatly benefit when addressed. First, the focus group and dyadic interview findings are presented separately. Codebooks for each of the data analysis are presented. The presentation of the findings consists of raw data textural descriptions as well author’s findings summary. Second, this chapter also presents the findings of the focus group across analysis.

4.1 Within Analysis of TA Administrators Focus Group

4.1.1 Coding

The participants shared their experiences and thoughts about the current situation in providing coaching support to the ECE providers and teachers. Participants expressed their opinions with a purpose of potential professional development and support to provide better coaching performances, and opportunities for the ECE providers to benefit and enhance their programming for children. To meet this purpose, thematic analysis was used with six steps of data coding and reduction as mention in Chapter 3.

As transcript was read, the analysis process took place concurrently. As a result, eight categories were established. For each of the categories, the relevant codes that emerged from transcript reading were developed to arrive at major themes as shown in Table 3. The codebook consists of an example of each of the code for more accurate interpretation.

Table 3. Administrator focus group codebook

Category	Codes	Example
Coach qualification	Required degree	<i>“It’s a Bachelor’s degree in early childhood, child development, elementary, or related.”</i>

Table 3. continued

	Experiences	<i>“Two years in the classroom.”</i>
Coach training	LEARN 360	<i>“our training is basically how to use the tools”</i>
	Formal training	<i>“You just jump in. There’s no coaching training.”</i>
Coach evaluation	Strategies	<i>“... so we as the master coach, goes out and use those new forms to evaluate their coaching practices based off of the self-assessment TA model, Learn 360, and how they're using all of those techniques.”</i>
	Impact on providers	<i>“... there's no way for us to measure the frequency at a particular provider”</i>
Coaches strengths	Coaches strengths	<i>“Very dedicated - they have a passion for the work, they all have a passion to see, to make a change.”</i>
Areas of needed support for coaches	Coach training	<i>“And, so there is probably zero fidelity from north to south, east to west.”</i>
	Coaching practices	<i>“So how do they help the provider to see the problem to help create the solution and not give them the answer”</i>
	Professional relationships	<i>“as they worked with a coach, we have some coaches who have a relationship that's not professional”</i>
Elements of the coaching curriculum	Specific practices	<i>“We saw a couple great videos in some of the sessions of coaching in action I think we can talk and talk, and talk about it so I'm definitely thinking some video of it”</i>
	Tools	<i>“How do we measure success?”</i>
	Structure	<i>“Where you actually have a course and then you're doing it and someone is giving you feedback and you're testing it so pretty much implementing a continuous quality improvement method.”</i>
Barriers in providing support to coaches	Professional development	<i>“We're restricted as far as travel is concerning.”</i>

Table 3. continued

	Funding sources	<i>“It’s hard to give support to something that’s never been supported.”</i>
	Lack of training	<i>“Like it’s hard for me to give support to the coaches if I’ve never been trained on what that support should be. “</i>
	Disconnect	<i>“So now it just looks like you’re just adding band aids on a rocky foundation instead of creating, adding these pieces from the beginning.”</i>
Barriers in coaching providers	Relationship issues	<i>“There are some who struggle with that and feel like it has to be, like you mentioned a friendship relationship and then that brings in the problems, for some, the problem of honesty, because this is your friend.”</i>
	Old and wrong habits	<i>“So how do we help switch off that. I’m not here to tell you what to do, I’m here to support you on what you are doing.”.</i>

4.1.2 Focus Group Background

As mentioned previously, the author of this thesis served in the role of assistant moderator during the focus group session. Therefore, the researcher had the chance to take notes and observe the participant behaviors and reactions.

It is important to point out that it was the TA administrator’s initiative to establish collaboration with the researchers with a goal to potentially build a new coaching curriculum. Thus, they were willing to openly discuss the current situation in their coaching agency and share their experiences with the researchers. The participants shared their opinion with confidence, and they were open to talking about all aspects of coaching and their work. All of the participants were colleagues that worked together on a regular basis; thus, they knew each other very well. As observed by the assistant moderator and the moderator, the participants built a trusting environment. However, it is important to keep in mind that some areas of the focus group shared sensitive information. Despite the fact, all participants actively participated in the focus group and the atmosphere in the room was very pleasant.

4.1.3 Findings

The summary of each of the major themes is provided below. Each theme is presented with quotes and descriptions from participants shared during the data collection session.

4.1.3.1 Coach Qualification

The TA Administrators reported that coaches are being hired with a bachelor's degree in early childhood, child development, elementary or related fields. Coaches are hired with various experiences as a childcare center director, childcare homeowner, and/or ECE teacher with a requirement of a minimum of two years working in a classroom. Having experience working with adults is an advantage but not a requirement. Thus, early childhood coaches are usually hired without any background in areas related to adult learning.

4.1.3.2 Coach Training

The training that coaches receive varies widely across the agency. The only available training is onboarding training of the coaching system, LEARN 360. This training targets LEARN 360 materials and database usage. Another onboard training is a 90-day period without caseload shadowing other coaches. The PTQ coaches and specialists do not receive any form of formal training that would be consistent between coaches. The structure and availability of training opportunities for each coach are also based on individual TA administrator and what supports they offer. Some of them are using modeling and on-site observations and feedback as a form of training. One of the coaches said: *“our training is basically how to use the tools, how to write up activities, how to enter data”*.

4.1.3.3 Coach Evaluation

The TA Administrators use the specialist on-site coaching tool to evaluate coaching practices. Another form of coach evaluation is feedback from a provider survey. However, this survey is not a mandatory aspect and thus is only received: *“from time to time, and that's just me sending out an email and asking, we have a survey that they would complete. Don't get a lot of response on those but sometimes we get feedback in that sense.”*, as reported by the TA administrators.

4.1.3.4 Coaches Strengths

The TA Administrators considered several areas of strengths of PTQ coaches and specialists such as strong dedication to the job and commitment to make positive changes. The TA administrators said: *“I can't think of one but all of them want to do better. And if that means doing more, that's what they'll do.”* and: *“I think longevity. We don't have a high turn-over rate.”* Another strength is being resourceful as captured in: *“They collaborate a lot with each other, they're going back and forth sharing ideas.”*. Further, coaches are good at relationship building and are open to learning new ways and training.

4.1.3.5 Areas of Needed Support for Coaches

The TA Administrators expressed collectively a need for professional development for coaches focusing on communication skills and a professional approach to the role of a coach. They voiced: *“We have some coaches who have a relationship that's not professional. So, helping them maybe develop, how, where does that line end and begin”*. As shared by the participants, there is a lack of understanding of the coaching role. Coaches are very often building relationships that are not professional. These unprofessional relationships happen to disrupt coach - coachee rapport and coaches often struggle with leadership. The repercussion of these situations are aimless coaching sessions and consequently waste of time of the coaches whose caseload are already very demanding. Therefore, the coaches need support in how to use effective strategies to build a healthy, professional rapport, where the coachee feels trust and openness but the goal of the coaching sessions is not at risk. Another area of needed attention to the coach professional development is the coaching practices. The coaches need to step out of the role of the personal assistant to be a coach. *“..., it's never really been the provider driving their improvement.”* The coaches need to learn how to embed coaching practices into practice and how to be intentional.

“... but I think they see a problem and they want to give the solution to fix it.” “Because that's how we've always done it.” “Because we put out fires.” All: uh-huh.” You know, we coach to put out fires. So how do they help the provider to see the problem to help create the solution and not give them the answer.” As continued, the administrators believe this issue comes from the old habit of direct tasks that are given to the providers to enhance the level of quality of the PTQ

system. However, this approach does not help the providers to implement effective practices. “*So how do we help switch off that. I'm not here to tell you what to do, I'm here to support you on what you are doing.*”, “*I mean, how do you get them to strive for best practices*”.

Finally, the administrators concluded the need for coaching training before getting the coaching license that would prepare them to effectively support the ECE providers. “*So, I would say, a minimum in my brain of three months of learning what coaching is...*”. They also think that this training should be purely on coaching practices regardless of the PTQ.

4.1.3.6 Elements of Coaching Curriculum

The TA administrators expressed the need for a coaching curriculum that would be a strong and consistent model wrapped around practice and connected to the PTQ. “*So, understanding coaching first and then how to embed PTQ or whatever into that coaching specific. I think it should be specific to what you're doing* “. They wish to use a model that is usable and understandable with the evidence of being effective rather than starting building from scratch. The most important voiced aspects were a business-minded curriculum that builds a coaching attitude, is data-driven, and connects theory to practice. The participants have expressed the need for specific practices in the coaching curriculum. These practices are reflective questioning, video recording, modeling, reflective feedback, leadership strategies, and needs assessments. The administrators would also like to have a way of implementing continuous quality improvement methods. They feel that it is important to evaluate coaching practices and have feedback on their practices. The participants said: “*Like even if you video like so video yourself coaching then I have to send it to you and then you have to say this is what you did well blah blah blah to get feedback that's what I see.*”

4.1.3.7 Barriers in Providing Support for Coaches

One of the main expressed barriers in providing support for the PTQ coaches and specialists across the agency is a disconnect between the state and the agency. The participants expressed that the disconnect in funding sources and disjointed partners led to a lack of structure in the agency. This lack of structure is apparent from the tools that are supposed to be used throughout the agency; however, there is no connection between them (PTQ, LEARN 360,

Technical Assistance Framework, Indiana Core Knowledge and Competencies) and no connection in implementing these tools to practice. They said: *“And then so it's a lot of pieces so and the perfect world. And I've said this before if you look at our coaching system, I think we have a lot of the pieces there. I think we have a lot of them there, but we've never put them all together at one time. -- Yeah. So that you can really see how they all flow. We've been giving them to them as somebody felt like that it was a good idea. So now it just looks like you're just adding band-aids on a rocky foundation instead of creating, adding these pieces from the beginning.”*

Therefore, the TA administrators need to be able to establish supports and unify the structure of the coaching. Nevertheless, as shared by the participants, it creates more disconnect as each of them interprets the supports individually. They reflected: *“It's hard to give support to something that's never been supported.”* The lack of the structure translates to another barrier in supporting coaches as TA administrators also have no formal training. Additionally, as expressed during the session, there is also a lack of professional development opportunities for them. *“Like it's hard for me to give support to the coaches if I've never been trained on what that support should be.”*

Another aspect that the TA Administrators perceived as a barrier in providing supports for coaches and specialists is the lack of guidance for the PTQ specialists. They said: *‘And historically, the specialists have never been part of the coaching conversations that have taken place in the state... -Um, so, they've really had no guidance -No. ...little to no guidance on coaching and what that looks like.’.*

4.1.3.8 Barriers in Coaching Providers

One of the main barriers expressed by the providers was the barrier of a too personal relationship that often is established in coach-provider collaboration. The providers slip very often into building relationships with their coaches that are too personal. The PTQ coaches and specialists do not have the tools and training to establish professional, honest rapports that are creating a positive and effective environment for changes. The administrators reflected: *‘And then being honest too. I think we have a problem with honesty because we're afraid to hurt feelings. - Yeah. So being honest in a respectable manner, understanding the culture, understanding the difference that this program has but just being overall honest. - And I think,*

just in my past coaching experience, you get that great relationship and then there comes a point where you have to be honest because they might've had a violation, and then that could change the relationship a little bit. That's hard.'

The TA administrators also expressed that there is a barrier of “checklist mindset” that is established by the PTQ system and following regulations. The providers’ checklist mindset puts to coach into the role of a resource. The participants shared that it is very common that providers are expecting coaches to get them answers on problems without them actively trying to solve the problem by themselves.

The TA administrators said: *‘Yeah. we’ve never really, it’s never really been the provider driving their improvement up until we’re really working, we’ve been working on it the last year or so.’* And *‘Cause the struggle is, and we joked about this the other day, they don’t know what they won’t like... [Laughter] How do you help the providers know what they want. Because, they, because there’s so many regulatory things that they have to do and they’re used to people telling them, do this, do this, do this, when we come in and say but you get to tell us, they’re looking like, Ohh. - No, you tell, have to tell me what to do. So how do we help switch off that? I’m not here to tell you what to do, I’m here to support you on what you are doing because they’re so used to the regulation part.’* And also, *‘And I think sometimes with the regulatory things, so your licensing consultant says this but we’re saying this because we’re not going to tell you bare minimum, we’re not going to tell you the minimum work to do. we’re going to tell you the best practice.’*

4.1.4 Summary of Findings

The administrators provided perspective on the training coaches receive, with the majority of that training occurring shortly after coaches are hired. The training offered to coaches is mainly focusing on how to use the tools of the coaching model and documentation. Once coaches begin coaching, they can be evaluated through self-assessment, LEARN 360, feedback from providers, or administrator observation. From the administrator's point of view, coaches have a variety of strengths, including relationship building, dedication, passion, desire to improve, resourcefulness, and collaboration. However, the administrators felt that there are still areas where coaches need further support. These areas include training/professional development, learning how to model practices for the providers and help them to embed new practices instead of just doing things for them, planning for coaching visits, focusing on making the programs the

best they can be instead of just meeting the checklist, and differentiating between reflective coaching and the PTQ coaching/finding a way to connect the two. In order to accomplish some of these goals, the administrators would like to see a coaching curriculum that is easy to use, allows for reflection, helps coaches connect information with practices, helps with creating data-driven assessment tools, includes professionalism training, modeling training, evaluation tools, and opportunities for use of technology such as video recording. The administrators feel that there are some factors currently preventing them from providing the coaches with the support they need. These are factors such as administrators' lack of training on how to support coaches, disconnect between practices and state requirements/programs, and lack of time to help the large number of coaches they support. Still, other factors can hinder the coaches' ability to support the providers in the best way possible. For example, some providers are unsure of the role of their coach, and it can be difficult to draw the line between building a good relationship and being honest about changes that need to be made. Other coaches lack experience and do not have the skills to help the providers solve problems on their own or to reflect on their practices. Finally, the documentation can be another barrier as there is a lack of connection with the coaching model. Appropriate tools are also missing. That enables the coaches to evaluate provider practices and measure small units of change.

4.2 Within Analysis of PTQ Coaches and Specialists

4.2.1 Coding

The PTQ coaches and specialists shared their experiences, thoughts, and opinions on the current situation of coaching the ECE providers within the PTQ system. They reflected on their job positions as well as their professional aspirations with the purpose of potential new training resources for them in mind. The same thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected from this focus group. The analysis of the data with the method mentioned in Chapter 3 led to summarizing the findings into eight categories, i.e. themes. Codes with descriptive examples that emerged from reading the transcripts were used to develop a codebook (Table 4) to identify outcomes.

Table 4. PTQ coaches and specialists focus group codebook

Category	Code	Example
Purpose of coaching	High-quality environment for children	<i>'I would say the main reason I think that we coach is to, just to, help providers, teachers figure out what they need and what direction to go in with improvement or change.'</i>
	Enhancing providers	<i>'I feel like ultimately the goal is to create the best possible environment for those children that are coming into that environment so by coaching and training and working with the providers, we're able to help elevate that.'</i>
Coaching practices	Used practices	<i>'I think when you start the statement, "When I was a teacher, I..." or "I remember being a teacher in classroom" it seems like you can tell in their facial expressions, they're like Ohhh, okay so you get it, you know.'</i>
	Assessment	<i>'Well, officially it is the checklist and then, the level advancement plan, which is a plan of corrections after anything on the checklist is check no, they goes on the level advancement plan, those are the standards we know we need to work on before they can advance to the level. Umm, then I do my personal assessments.'</i>
	Resources	<i>'NACY articles, stuff that other coaches have given.'</i>
Caseload and coaching structure	Caseload	<i>'I believe I have around 82 total but we have all three types of care on our caseload so we have homes, ministries, and centers, and depending on how large the centers are, or the homes, is how many teachers or staff or you know, people that we're working with when we're in the program so...lots of teachers I guess...'</i>

Table 4. continued

	Coaching structure	<i>'And specialists don't really have caseloads, we go anywhere and everywhere, so we collaborate with the Paths to Quality coaches and provide support at those sites, but we also go to sites that have no interest in Paths to Quality...'</i>
Coach training	Formal training	<i>'I'd say the only real formal training was, and formal I use loosely, was just how to document our sessions...but yeah not, it's been on the job learning.'</i>
	Other training	<i>'For me, just having been through the process as a director receiving the coaching, I think that's been the most powerful.'</i>
Area of most needed support for providers	Provider needs	<i>'Eliminating worksheets, like just staff like that. Developmentally appropriate practices. And age appropriate expectations. That's huge.'</i>
	Types of supports	<i>'All hands-on deck for those people that need a lot of support. That's when the collaboration within specialist needs to be the most helpful.'</i>
Elements of coaching curriculum	Structure	<i>'Framework, teach us the framework, show us how to do it, and let's be. [All talking together and agreeing]'</i>
	Focus	<i>'The time to really get in there and work with them and have that reflective coaching happen. And reflect on ourselves, I mean just time. I don't know.'</i>
Coaches strengths	Coach perceived strengths	<i>'I'd say for all the frustrations, there is the common characteristic that everybody's very persistent.'</i>
Barriers in coaching	Documentation	<i>'nobody's scheduling anything, the state needs to be okay with that, or whoever. For a certain period of time. Because even though they say that's not the expectation, everybody's still freaking out and thinking about mentor worksheet and who's not meeting what, so.'</i>

Table 4. continued

	Disconnect	<i>‘Well there's the checklist debate, coaching to the checklist but yet in order to trigger a visit you have to 100% meet the checklist so you can't disregard it. And I don't know that it's a bad thing anyway because to me that's the minimum rubric for the provider. So, I think there's more to coaching than that, but I don't think that should look frowned upon because it's the tool.’</i>
	Lack of training and professional development	<i>‘I don't receive any coaching. I just was sent to the field and learn. That's it.’</i>
	Provider mindset	<i>‘I was gonna said, some of the other barriers might be their biases or mindsets. So, they have been doing it for 30 years, [Laughter]. It is the way, you know, that kind of thing. Those are challenges to be open to change, so... I like, they look at me and they are like: You are so young, like what is your background and what do you. And I am like: No, trust me, I know, I promise.’</i>

4.2.2 Focus Group Background

The focus group with the PTQ coaches and providers had a larger number (10) of participants. Thus, it was important to heed on good organization, keep in mind to include and probe all the participants, and to set a positive environment where the participants feel comfortable to speak openly. Based on the observational notes of the assistant moderator and the moderator, the environment of this focus group was very positive and open. The participants were very active and the majority of them shared their opinions willingly and without the need to probe. However, two of the participants were not as open and were more restrained with expressing their opinions. Therefore, the moderator of the focus group needed to make sure they are included in the conversations and probed their responses several times to give space for their perspectives. It is important to point out that the participants were asked questions related to their employees. And so even though the participation was voluntary, there was a level of

cautiousness about the extent of what to share with the research personnel. Thus, it was essential to create a confidential environment and allow the participants to feel that way. Based on the collected data and the observation of the moderators, the pleasant and trusting environment was built. Another aspect that was observed by both the moderator and the assistant moderator was the participants' enthusiasm for their involvement and their profession. The participants seemed very motivated for future opportunities. It was evident that they love their job and are open to changes.

4.2.3 Findings

The summary of each of the major themes is provided below. Each theme is presented with quotes and descriptions from participants shared during the data collection session.

4.2.3.1 Purpose of Coaching

The PTQ coaches and specialists expressed their perspectives on what is the purpose of coaching and what is the essence of their coaching. The participants across the focus group agreed on the purpose of finding gaps and needs for providers improvement or change to support high-quality learning environments for children from different backgrounds. They said: *'I feel like ultimately the goal is to create the best possible environment for those children that are coming into that environment so by coaching and training and working with the providers, we're able to help elevate that.'* They see the purpose of their work in providing support to the providers not just on the PTQ but also on the best practices as they expressed: *'I think it's also like best practices to show them how to do things better than licensing, coaching, and you. I think I am on the top of that because licensing is minimum. PTQ is good but you can be better, yes.'*

One of the participants reflected on the purpose of coaching as ultimate support: *'I feel like my role as a coach is to guide and support ultimately, depending on what the provider's needs are.'* The coaches also agreed that it is rewarding to witness providers improve their practices, to have positive feedback from providers on the coaching process, and further to have a greater impact on children.

4.2.3.2 Coaching Practices

The PTQ coaches and specialists have reflected on what they perceive as effective coaching practices and they summarized the ones they use, such as modeling, relationship building, being relatable, using video recording, letting providers have opportunities to fail, and being reflective.

The participants mainly agreed and reiterated on the aspect of being relatable in the coaching relationship. The coaches said: *‘I think when you start the statement, "when I was a teacher, I..." or "I remember being a teacher in classroom", it seems like you can tell in their facial expressions, they're like: "Oh, okay so you get it, you know". [Yeah, I was totally gonna say that. Mmhmm. Yeah me too.] Because if they know that you've been there, and if you can tell some stories about your past and your experiences, it's like their shoulders relax and they're ready to, you know, I've been there, I've been in the trenches, I understand, but let's do this, we can do this. - Yeah and reassuring them like I'm not coming in to tell you all the things you're doing wrong. [Mmhmm. Exactly.] I'm not coming in to be like "This is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong," I'm coming in to, just help you think about, like "Okay you're doing things this way right now, but you have me here because you need help, so how can we help?"’.*

Another aspect of coaching practices that was heavily discussed during the focus group was assessment. The participants answered that they decide what to coach on mainly based on initial visits with providers by listening, asking questions, and doing observations. They reflected on the initial visit: *‘Talking, building that relationship, getting to know them, explaining our role, listening to what their role is, learning about their past experiences, their program, their thoughts. Do they know about PTQ? What is their vision with PTQ? The goal is how can I help you? How do you learn best? Are you visual? Do you like to hear it, do you like to see it? Do you like to have hands on it?’.* The coaches also voiced that the official assessment of the provider's needs is the PTQ checklist and the level advancement plan (the plan of corrections after anything on the checklist is checked “no”). However, they agreed on conducting their assessments with the providers as well. One of them explained: *‘I don't have like a template or anything like that. It was just when I am doing my plan of action for them. I may not share everything because I don't think they can handle everything at one point. Umm, I will try to tight it in to, cause you have to have standard to go with whatever you are saying to them. But just taking it deeper without them really knowing. That you are going a little bit deeper.’.* Another participant

continued: *'I don't really know if that's an assessment per se, but [name] and I sat down and kind of created like a "Map your path", just to kind of visualize where they felt like where they are at, and the Indiana PTQ Path, from registered ministries all the way to PTQ Level 4 and we put there different components and, so they kind of viewing it and seeing it like: Ooh, I feel like we are here, I feel like my stuff is here, I am here, the board is here. And I feel like, that's kind of helped a little bit. Oppose to us, telling them: You are here.'* Further, the coaches and specialists agreed on using other coaches that have experience with the provider to gain an understanding of their programs and their needs.

The coaches and specialists use a variety of resources to help support the providers. They shared that they mostly use articles from the National Association for the Education of Young Children and Infant/Toddler special sheets. Nevertheless, they reflected that they mostly use each other as a resource. They have built a SharePoint resource library to share the resources.

4.2.3.3 Caseload and Coaching Structure

All the participants shared their caseload of providers and teachers that they are supporting. The coaches shared that the numbers differ from the total ECE providers on their caseload based on how many of the ECE providers are currently active. The numbers were variable but mostly the monthly caseload of one coach ranged between 60 to 93 ECE providers from which between 20 to 50 ECE providers and teachers were active. Each of the participants also focused on different types of ECE providers. One of the PTQ coaches was supporting strictly the early childhood ministries. The rest of the participants seemed to support all kinds of ECE providers, which include ECE centers, homes, and ministries.

The PTQ specialists are supporting ECE providers based on current needs and based on state referrals. Therefore, the specialists do not provide technical support, instructional support, and coaching only to PTQ programs, but they provide supports anywhere it is needed. As the participants said: *'And specialists don't really have caseloads, we go anywhere and everywhere, so we collaborate with the Paths to Quality coaches and provide support at those sites, but we also go to sites that have no interest in Paths to Quality... ..and we receive referrals from the state as well if they have concerns about a program that they visited during licensing visit.'* However, the specialists do not have any structured caseload and planned schedule and thus their schedule changes every month. They reflected: *'Depending, some of us are more busy, some are*

less busy depending on what the supports are or what the needs are. And depending on the month. I would say 15ish on average for me, a month.'

4.2.3.4 Coach Training

The coaches and specialists shared that they do not receive any formal coaching training from their employees. They are hired usually with rich experience from the ECE environment, but most of them have never received any training on adult learning and coaching. The participants reflected: *'I don't know that there's ever been: "If you're a coach, here is exactly how you're supposed to be coaching these providers and if you're a specialist here's exactly how you should be providing, like technical assistance, because I know as specialists when we go into different programs, everybody's approach is a little bit different which I think is helpful because we're all different people and we're all individuals and we're all unique, but at the same time, in general, you know, here's what TAs should look like...I don't...I know me personally, I never received any kind of like...training...on what to, what it should look like.'* - *'I think we...we get more like resources and say here it is...figure out what to do.'* - *'There's no follow up.'* - *'Yes, I think we get that more, yes.'* One of the coaches further mentioned that the only formal training they received was on LEARN 360, which was only focused on documentation of the on-site visits. They said: *'I'd say the only real formal training was, and formal I use loosely, was just how to document our sessions...but yeah not, it's been on the job learning.'*

The coaches and specialists further shared that they are using other resources to prepare themselves for the role of a coach. They are using very often their own previous experience as a director receiving coaching to help them in their role as a coach. They are also using their own experience as being a teacher, education specialist, assistant director, and director. The majority of the participants further mentioned prior coaches and their shadowing and observation helped them to be prepared for the role of a coach. Additionally, the coaches and specialists shared that they have created their internal support by using a coach's thread. They shared: *'And I think we've created kind of our own internal support with our thread (laughs) that some days goes all day, every day (laughs).'* *'Moderator: Your thread?'* - *'Yeah, coaches thread, so just troubleshooting questions or what do you think or what would you do about this situation.'* - *'Through text.'* *'So, we have kind of taken care of each other that way.'* *'Moderator: So you guys have a group text and you touch base?'* *'Mostly they've taken care of me as the newer coach*

[Laughter]. – ‘I think it's all around, we all...it's also a group email too, so the text or the email has been helpful.’

Finally, the coaches shared that they feel frustrated by not having any supports and training. One of the participants shared: ‘I was able to be trained by the person that was in my role prior and that was incredibly helpful for me. And it was like awesome, I felt like I know what I am doing, what happened in the past what that looked like. I shadowed her for a good month, umm. And then the second that I stopped shadowing her I was talked to about how we are not going what it used to look like, it's totally changing. *[Laughter]* So it was like, Ok, but that was it. I was told like now, these are your expectations kind of for that day, so it's like... You missed out on this meeting but I was told that this tramps that meeting, but now it doesn't, so it's like: Huh, I had this awesome monthly training, that I thought that I knew what I was doing and now I am not. And then there is no follow up though, I just have to like figure out. It's really frustrating.’

4.2.3.5 Areas of the Most Needed Support for the Providers

The coaches and specialists reflected on the most common issues or needs that they are helping to support the ECE providers and teachers. The participants mentioned several areas such as staffing, ratio, business management, guidance, work culture, and professional mindset. The coaches discussed the professional mindset in more depth and reflected that it is important to help the ECE providers to realize the real essence of the profession, the children. Some providers may approach their job too business-minded and forget about how important the profession of early childhood is as perceived by the coaches and specialists. Another very common area of needed support for providers is providing developmentally appropriate practices, which include eliminating worksheets, have age-appropriate expectations, and closing the gap between family and school. The participants further discussed that they often help the providers to see family as their partner who might help them to understand the child.

The participants also shared that there are vast differences between the ECE providers and the types of supports they need. The coaches and specialists reflected on the needs from the providers that they need a lot of support where they feel like there is a need for “all hands on deck” and that this is usually the time when they need to bring in the specialist. The ECE providers in these situations usually need help with the organization and a lot of professional

development. Providers that need moderate supports are usually provided with onsite professional development, which includes modeling and building an action plan.

4.2.3.6 Elements of the Coaching Curriculum

The participants have expressed several views on what their needs are and what supports they would like to have through the new coaching support. They all agreed on the need and desire for a standardized curriculum that would be connecting all documents and materials that are used across the agency together. They further expressed the hope for unified training and rules every coach would follow. With that, the participants also expressed their concern about the new approach to coaching not being accepted “across the board”. They said: *‘And I think that’s the other thing too, as far as like, the curriculum is concerned, if this is the curriculum, and this is what we’re doing, then making sure that it’s not just these people in this room right now who are like “Okay this is what we’re doing,” making sure that it’s across the board...’ - ‘Good point.’ ‘...from top-down, that everybody is like, “This is what we’re invested in. This is what we’re doing now.”’*

The coaches and specialists also reflected on the importance of individualism in the new coaching curriculum. It is evident throughout the focus group that each of the coaches and specialists is using their unique methods and systems of work that are adjusted to the current needs of each specific provider. They said: *‘I don’t think we need to be micromanaged either. Umm, and we are not, we are not micromanaged at all. But I don’t wanna us to move to that because we are so individualized, you know. Framework, teach us the framework, show us how to do it, and let’s be.’ [All talking together and agreeing] – ‘Like give us the bounce.’ - ‘Don’t give us the detail where we had to like. I want to tell the story, but I want to tell the story how it happened and not trying to figure out where to plug it in. [All talking together, finishing the sentences together in agreement]’*. Coaches and specialists further desire to have coaching curriculum and training that provides continuous, intentional support and feedback for them as they expressed here: *‘Yeah, like feeding off of kind of what [participants name] saying, like follow up and feedback too. Like, I don’t know what that looks like for us but like after I do the training, then I need to like, have followed up. Like I can’t just be like go out and conquer because it doesn’t happen overnight. It doesn’t happen after one training. So, like I don’t know what that looks like, but continuous, intentional support...’*

Additionally, all participants expressed several needed aspects of the curriculum and training throughout the focus group. They expressed the demand for “full-blown training” or “orientation, training, shadowing packet” where they would learn from the basics of coaching. They mostly agreed on several coaching strategies that they would like the curriculum to be focused on. Those coaching strategies are in the area of relationship building, trauma, reflection, feedback, and assessment.

4.2.3.7 Coaches Strengths

The coaches and specialists themselves reflected on their personal and professional strengths. They all agreed on three main characteristics: being persistent, having a passion for their profession, and desire to improve and be the best version of a coach to be able to help others to be better. They expressed: *‘...I think that's what makes us unique as a group. We do care about what we do. And we do wanna help them.’* – *‘And I think that's what...Yeah. I think that's what drives us sitting here and saying, you know, the support and all these different things because, at the end of the day, every single person in this room just wants to be the best they possibly can be at what they do every day...’* – *‘Yep.’* – *‘Yeah.’* - *‘And that's why I think we're all in this room.’*

4.2.3.8 Barriers in Coaching

Throughout the focus group session, the participants expressed several barriers or difficulties they encounter as the PTQ coaches and specialists. The two major barriers were leading towards several aspects in the organization and the funding sources and the second major focus was on the coach and provider collaboration. The aspects of the organization and the funding sources create a barrier of disconnect between the state and the agency. This disconnect translates into several barriers such as disconnect in coach and specialist collaboration and disconnects in coaching model and documentation, which is a barrier in coach day-to-day work. The coaches and specialists are using the LEARN 360 coaching model. However, they are trained only on the documentation piece of it. Thus, they struggle with the understanding of the coaching model, which subsequently creates confusion about the documentation piece. The participants expressed that they do not have a full understanding of the documentation process

and it makes their job more difficult. They also did not receive any support or feedback on their documentation. They said: *'Yes, letters, alphabet and then sometimes I confuse every E, with I.'* – *'Like it was kind of rolled out, and then figured out and now we are gonna monitor that. But do we even know if we doing it correct?'* – *'It's a foreign language for me.'* And continued *'I think he spends a lot of time stressing about how to document, then to really capture what you did on site. When we first started PTQ, we did not, of course, we didn't have the 360 model. We would just...'* – *'Take our notes, Yeah.'* – *'There was no code or category. It was just what was your summary, what did you do. And what was the plan? Or the outcome. Mm, 360 is more of a ... I have to remember where this goes, or you know... And probably never put it in the right spot anyway... Because reflection could have been action plan, or training follow up. I mean, yeah. And you have to break each one down by the time, and which can go wrong.'*

Moreover, all participants agreed on a barrier of lack of training and professional development opportunities as well as continuous support. They reflected: *'I don't know, I don't really know what that looks like...and that's the barrier, that's the struggle, you know that you need something, you need some training, you need additional support in coaching, but, what does that look like? And in what area?'* The participants also shared that there are intentions to move towards better coaching practices and the use of more effective coaching strategies. However, they reflected that there is a lack of much-needed supports regards to the pushes towards new coaching practices from the agency. One of the coaches said: *'And I think now we've been talking cause it'll be almost a year that I've been here we've been talking about reflective coaching for about that long without any more discussion on what really does that mean. And so, we're again, well I guess I'll speak for myself too, I feel like I wanna do that because that's what's expected, but I haven't had any sort. There's no resources for that. It's just "do this, be sure you're doing this" but what am I doing? And you know and not having much of the formal training it's just figuring it out on your own and trying to make sure that you're getting all the pieces effectively.'*

Finally, one of the common barriers in coaching expressed repeatedly was the provider mindset and the approach to coaching. The coaches experience the ECE providers having a “business-minded” approach to their profession. Some of the ECE providers prioritize their advancement on the PTQ levels but not always really strive for quality. Based on their experience, the providers often tend to improve their practices solely to advance to a higher level

of quality on the PTQ rating system to receive the incentive. The participants shared: *‘I think, at the end of the day, all of the coaches have a higher standard than just what that checklist says you know we I think we exceed that checklist or we try to put in best practice in you know, this is not just for your rating you are not just doing this for the rating visit. This is what you should be doing every day. But at the end of the day, it is all about that checklist. It is all about that rating visit it's all about moving to the next level. I mean that's the end result especially now that reimbursement is attached to their pass of quality level. You know their mind is business and the children are secondary quality is secondary. That's the reality of it and I think because our standards are higher, we're trying to shift that mindset but the providers are not coming along that easy so what does that look like for us. We want to do this reflective coaching. We want to be more intentional but then not only are we getting the pressure of meeting numbers we're getting pressure from them. I have a business I have to run and if I hurry up and move then this is what is coming in for my business so you're kind of stuck there.’* The participants also shared that they often struggle to establish appropriate rapport with the coachee and their rapport shifts to a too personal relationship. They also feel like the providers are very often not open to change and they do not understand the role of the coach and what are the expectations in the coaching rapport.

4.2.4 Summary of Findings

From the coach's perspective, the goal of coaching is to help providers improve their practices to create the best possible environment for children. They feel that some of their strongest assets are persistence, passion, and a desire to improve. Currently, the coaches shared that their most-used practices are modeling, observation, and video recording, while assessments are used in the beginning to determine what to coach on. The coaches also want to implement reflective coaching and build strong relationships with providers. Throughout coaching, the coaches use resources such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children articles, SharePoint, infant/toddler specialist sheets, and each other's expertise to support providers. However, the coaches feel that they lack the necessary training and support to coach the most effectively. They could benefit from shadowing other coaches without having to worry about neglecting their responsibilities, or they could benefit from having more formal training before starting the job. The specific areas that the coaches would like to obtain professional

development are relationship building, trauma, and its effect on children’s behavior, how to coach, and reflective coaching. There is also a desire to be able to travel to learn these skills and attend conferences. The coaches feel that providers need the most supports in areas including staffing/ratio, business management, behavior, developmentally appropriate practices – eliminating worksheets, age-appropriate expectations, work culture, seeing family as their partner, having a professional mindset – seeing it as more than a business but as a career and calling, and organization. To best support these needs, the coaches would like a curriculum that offers a framework allowing for individuality, time for flexibility in visits, time for reflection, extensive training on how to use the framework, and that connected with the state requirements. To conclude, there are several things that the coaches see as preventing them from practicing the ideal methods of coaching, such as documentation requirements (LEARN 360), lack of training, some directors’ resistance to video recording, different approaches needed at homes versus at ministries and centers, directors and teachers having differing goals, close-mindedness of providers, an overemphasis on business and ratings instead of quality, confusion about the coach’s role, balancing a relationship with professionalism, and large caseloads.

4.3 Within Analysis of ECE Providers

4.3.1 Coding

The analysis of the data collected in this focus group followed the same procedure as described in Chapter 3. This procedure led to the development of a codebook where all the main themes were organized into five categories. The codebook in Table 5. shows each category with the established codes and example quotes. The codebook was finally used to identify all information and summarize the findings shared by the ECE providers.

Table 5. ECE providers focus group codebook

Category	Code	Example
Coaching experience	History of working with a coach	<i>‘Since day 1. Since 2009.’</i>

Table 5. continued

Requirements of coaches	Areas of needed support	<i>'I mean, just to help you even what you are talking about, as far as what you were talking about applying for grants and stuff like that. We need someone to help us do these things.'</i>
	Professional requirements	<i>'As much training as they possibly can get. Umm, like [name] said. Umm, on the job type training. I mean, I understand, I think few of the coaches come from directors, whatever. But directors don't really get down to the lower level.'</i>
	Relational requirements	<i>'... see them as humans and not just as some invasive character in your program, disrupting everything, come to me as equal'</i>
Communication	Type	<i>'They don't want us doing that, but [name] would pick up the phone and say: I did send the email, but I know, I want you to make sure you. Did you know about this? Those are those coaches they would stop by and handed, be like, you may not have read, but this needs to get into your hands.'</i>
	Frequency	<i>'I want a coach hotline'</i>
Changing practices	Tools	<i>'... they'll show a video of it when it looks good, and a video of it when it doesn't look so good. And that's kind of a highlight of the course. So, because of that, personally, I would be open to that. I would be open to having my practices recorded so that I can get the feedback.'</i>
	New resources	<i>And I think the coaches need to step up to whoever needs, the higher platform in, and be an advocate for us to...</i>
Barriers in coaching	Coach caseload	<i>'Because just having one coach do everything we didn't see enough and it was too much on them, it just is, it's too much. Umm and she's right they get us to that level and then once we're there they are gone.'</i>

Table 5. continued

	Lack of experience	<i>‘You know. Umm, coaches, I feel they should at least got their feet wet. They should, they need the experience, I agree with her. They need that type of hands-on, go to a practicum.’</i>
	Disconnect	<i>‘The one frustration that I have is that sometimes it's like coaches and state. Well, Paths to Quality and state aren't on the same level.’</i>

4.3.2 Focus Group Background

The last focus group was held with the ECE Providers to identify their experiences with the PTQ coaching and areas of needed improvement. The participants in this focus group were directors from all types of ECE institutions such as childcare centers, childcare homes, and childcare ministries. The ECE providers in this focus group were very enthusiastic about their profession, which brought advantages in their openness and active participation. Each of the participants was coming from different backgrounds with a rich history of being an ECE provider. Furthermore, they were very passionate about sharing their experiences. As observed during the focus group, this was a unique opportunity for them to connect with other ECE providers. They shared their common hardships and prosperities and often tended to steer the conversations into other directions and topics. Hereby, the moderator of this focus group needed to regulate the conversations much more than in the other focus groups. However, this situation helped to build a friendly and open environment where with slightly more guidance, the participants shared some very personal and beneficial information.

4.3.3 Findings

The analysis of the collected data led to the summaries presented below. The summaries present experience and opinions on the coaching provided by the PTQ technical assistance of ECE providers.

4.3.3.1 Coaching Experience

Each of the participants has several years of experience working with the PTQ coaches. One of the providers has worked with coaches since the very beginning of the PTQ in 2009. Others shared that they started to work with a coach in 2013 and 2014. The participants also reflected that some of the coaches they worked with already retired. They experienced turnover and changes in PTQ coaching. One of them expressed: *‘When [name of the previous coach] retired, it’s like I broke down and cried.’* The providers also reflected on the previous experiences with coaches in a very positive manner and compared it to the current situation as follows: *‘... they cared I mean if they drove past your center. They did- they go to another, they stopped in to say "How are you? Did you get everything you need? Do you need anything? Great job with the kids" they made sure that you were aware of anything that came down their channel. They made sure "did you know about this?" If it was an email if it was a phone call. They pick- and I think that that's where people getting lost. People don't pick up the phone anymore. Everybody's like: Oh, I sent the email.’*

4.3.3.2 Requirements of Coaches

The providers shared repeatedly several areas of supports they would like to have but they do not receive support from their coaches. The providers wished the coaches would be resourceful and provide them with supports in areas of financial professional development (grant writing, funding); accessing potential staff; professional development opportunities; and guidance to diverse resources (podcast). They would like to have coaches that lead them to extra beneficial opportunities, not just bare necessities. The providers also agreed on the importance of having guidance in regulation and change of policies. Another area that providers would like to have support is creating a positive environment between all ECE providers and opportunities for networking. They said: *‘I agree with what you're saying [name of participant]. We need to share among each other because we are all in the same boat. - We're all trying to get the child to the place that the child needs to be. And the coaches can help with that. Help bridge the gap. - Changing practices, community of professionals.’* – *‘Absolutely, since they are the bridge.’*

The participants further expressed their opinions on what aspects make a coach a good coach and what are their professional requirements on coaches. The providers straightforwardly

agreed on the importance of understanding the family childcare. Moreover, they all strongly agreed on the need for coaches to have real-life experience of being an early childhood teacher and spent time in the classroom. They also reflected on the current situation, where they experienced some coaches coming straight out of college, some of the coaches previously worked as directors; however, the providers felt strongly about having experience from all angles of early childhood professionals. The providers reflected: *'But coaches, at least one of their requirements, you need to have experience.'* Moderator: *'So, you're saying that a coach should go into a practicum?'* – *'Yes, you know, go to a center.'* – *'Before. They should.'* – *'Yes, absolutely, they should be required, yes, when you get these new coaches, they don't know anything about...'* – *'I agree, I agree with you 100%.'* – *'I think that's the difference, between all of us and me. With me, my coaches were directors. They know exactly what I'm going through, right, they've been through it all. Both of them. They understand completely.'* – *'Are you serious? Like, no. We are blood sweat and tears right here. This is blood sweat and tears. And you're gonna send somebody to us who's never gotten their hands dirty with some poop or snot? Please, don't. Don't. It's insulting. [Laughs] It's insulting.'* The providers further reflected that they would like to have coaches as advocates that would help communicate with the state.

Consequently, the coaches would not only bring information and resources to providers but also might advocate for providers based on their needs. One of the participating ECE homeowners shared: *'Cause I think homes get overlooked. And I think the coaches need to step up to whoever needs, the higher platform in, and be an advocate for us too.'* The coaches being advocates translates to another aspect of the provider's requirements of an effective coach. The providers mentioned the need for coaches to have a better connection with the state to have thorough support and the latest policy information. They suggested the idea of connecting all parts of the coaching process, thus the state, coaches, and specialists would make a team with the providers.

Throughout the focus group, the participants repeatedly shared the importance of having a strong and positive relationship when working with a coach. They reflected on several relational requirements they see as essential when they are coached. They want to establish partnerships and personal relationships where the coach understands their program and shows relatable experience. One of the providers reflected: *'But coaches, at least one of their requirements, you need to have experience. And I think that's where [name of a previous coach] and those others--they've been there. They've been in that classroom. They've been in that*

director's seat. So, they've been on both sides of that puzzle. And so that's where their understanding and that's where their compassion and that's where the relationship, it's like "I've walked in your shoes, now I'm here to provide you help, support, and anything else you need.". Moreover, they want the coach to support the quality of childcare programming and advertise for that (come to the childcare events). They want a qualified coach who is informative about how they can help the provider and about the goal of the coaching process. The providers further reflected they wish their coaches would develop relationship-based cooperation. "A teamwork" between provider, coach, and the specialists. They shared: *'What's the inclusion specialist gonna come and do, what is their purpose, what are they doing okay? And then you get them, or you don't get them. But I would like for them to relationship network and introduce that person with us.'* They further expressed that they would like the established relationships with the coach to last longer without having to build a relationship with a new coach over again. The providers also shared what they see as the ideal method of coaching. One of them shared: *'Information sharing, relationship, understanding, jump right in and say, "Hey I think you could do it differently, let me tell you how." I'm a how person, show me...I'm the show-me state.'*

4.3.3.3 Communication

The coach and provider communication were brought up during the focus group several times in different situations. The providers are usually communicating with their coaches via email and during face-to-face visits. However, the participants agreed on what they perceive as the ideal communication with their coach. They shared that ideally, the coach would communicate with them using all possible ways of communication (i.e., phone, text, email). The providers said: *'People don't pick up the phone anymore. Everybody's like: Oh, I sent the email. [Laughter] Well, we are doing everything. When you are director, we don't have time to sit at the computer and clicking on. That's not what we do in the course of that.'* So, ideally, the providers would like to have the opportunity to get an email or other types of notification. The frequency of coach-provider interactions varied between the participants. One of the providers was in contact with their coach regularly, once a month. Others expressed that they need more frequent communication with their coaches. One of the participating providers shared: *'I want a coach hotline. [Laughter] Hello! I have a problem right now and I don't know what to do. I mean I would like to be able to send an email and get a response from the email, you know if that counts*

as connecting with a coach. I don't necessarily need to sit with her every day or every month or whatever. But just, know that I can be-- know that they can be accessible.' The providers further shared that they are using an online platform called Schoology to connect with coaches and other providers: *'OK. So, imagine Facebook, but for people that do what we do.'*

4.3.3.4 Changing Practices

The participants shared views on new potential tools to change practices when working with a coach. The providers discussed the power of video recording their practices to receive feedback. They reflected that they see this method beneficial as it allows them to improve practices in their institutions. Although, some concerns exist that teachers would act differently when they know they are being recorded: *'But when they know they're being recorded they're the super teacher. - They're, they have the patience of job!'* Further, the participants also reflected that they would like the coaches to model new practices to help them connect theory with practice.

Additionally, the participants agreed on the desire to communicate, share resources, and information with each other, and suggested the need for a community of professionals. This community of professionals would offer a possibility to provide peer supports.

4.3.3.5 Barriers in Coaching

The providers voiced two major aspects in their coaching experiences that they perceive as a challenge or a barrier to effectively work with a coach. First, the participants reflected on coach caseload and how it affects their collaboration. They shared their experience with a coach and their caseload: *'Coaches are overwhelmed, just like we are. Truthfully, it's just not enough anymore. Because it is so...it's a lot. I mean, there's literally a childcare facility, whether it's a home--put it this way. I was told that there are 10 Level 3 and Level 4, and that's just Level 3 and Level 4 Paths to Quality, within a 3-mile radius of me. That's just 3 little miles. And that's just 10. And that's only the level 3 and 4's. That's not speaking of ones that's not on Paths to Quality, that's not speaking of centers that have nothing to do with that, that's just those 10 alone. I mean there's brand new facilities opening up and homes. The east side is bombarded with childcare. So, if you have a coach or coaches that's assigned to that particular area, they don't sleep.'*

[Laughter] No, literally. I have received emails from my coach, I mean that they sent out 2, 3 o'clock in the morning. I'm like, I mean like seriously? I'm like texting you know what, this is, this is ridiculous. Seriously, are you sleeping? You know, because I care about this woman. They've helped me. I'm like this is too much. As far--you can give them all the information they need on how to coach and what to do and what to say, but they're still gonna be overwhelmed because their plate is full right now.' Further, they reflected on how the overwhelming caseload of coaches intervenes with their goals to improve when working with coaches. They shared that coaches often do not focus on follow-ups with providers. Thus, there is a lack of reflection and feedback.

Second, the provider participants perceive that there is a disconnect between state and coaches. They shared: *'I think our coaches help us get to next levels of things. Um, they're much needed. They also keep us abreast of changes. The one frustration that I have is that sometimes it's like coaches and state. Well, Paths to Quality and state aren't on the same level.'* – *'Mhm.'* – *'Mhm.'* – *'So, I would like to see the intertwine and the mesh because coaches they get us over here and they take us here and then state says huh so, no do it this way. And that's the frustration.'*

4.3.4 Summary of Findings

The providers feel that they would benefit most from coaches with who they can develop a long-term relationship. The strong relationship between the coach and the provider is seen as an essential element to the process, with a focus on the coach being a partner to the provider. The clarity in defining the role of the coach is an important aspect as well. The providers would also like coaches to provide them with resources and opportunities that go beyond the bare necessities, such as podcasts, professional development, etc. If there are new policies, the providers expect the coaches to inform them of those as well. In addition, the providers see a need for coaches who have experience in the roles they are coaching and coaches who have experience shadowing other coaches. Video coaching is one potential method that providers see as being beneficial to allow them to see their practices and receive feedback, although concerns exist that teachers would act differently when they know they are being recorded. Additionally, providers expressed that communication with coaches should be open, frequent, and take multiple forms (calling, email, and texting) to ensure that the message is received and that questions can be answered

easily and quickly. However, potential barriers that exist that prevent coaches from providing all these things include large caseloads, lack of experience, a disconnect between the state and coaches, and complications due to funding providers.

4.4 Focus Groups Across Analysis

4.4.1 Coding

The first step was to analyze the focus groups separately and identify findings as shown above. The next step was to look across the collected data to arrive at the major and the most important themes that were found in the focus groups. This step allows the researcher to see which themes are reciprocated across all three groups of stakeholders. The themes identified in the across analysis are also themes with the strongest reliability as they are confirmed from three different perspectives. To identify those major themes, the same process of thematic analysis was used as described in Chapter 3. For consistent analysis, the codes were summarized as shown in Table 6 for this across-analysis.

Table 6. Across focus group analysis codebook

Category	Code	Example
Barriers in coaching	Coaching relationship	<i>'There are some who struggle with that and feel like it has to be like you mentioned a friendship relationship and then that brings in the problems, for some, the problem of honesty, because this is your friend.'</i>
	Caseload	<i>'Because just having one coach do everything we didn't see enough and it was too much on them, it just is, it's too much. Umm and she's right they get us to that level and then once we're there they are gone.'</i>
	Disconnect between state and the agency	<i>'And I think that's the other thing too, as far as like, the curriculum is concerned, if this is the curriculum, and this is what we're doing, then making sure that it's not just these people in this room right now who are like "Okay this is what we're doing," making sure that it's across the board...'</i>

Table 6. continued

	Lack of training	<i>'You just jump in. There's no coaching training.'</i>
Coach training	Received training	<i>'It's called on-boarding training. It's for HR kind of stuff, it's not really for coaching.'</i>
	Coach experiences	<i>'I was able to be trained by the person that was in my role prior and that was incredibly helpful for me.', 'And I think, I know we have a lot of new coaches like you said, you have some coming straight out of college,'</i>
Coaching practices	Used practices	<i>'They really try to access the environment, the children we are caring for at that exact time, what their needs are, and putting us in touch with different people, inclusion specialists, professional development opportunities, things like that.'</i>
	New practices	<i>'I've been trying a lot of video...recording...teachers are on board with it but it's the directors that I'm having the most difficult time allowing the teacher to watch the video and then allowing the time for the reflection.'</i>
Areas of needed supports	Specific practices	<i>'Because some coaches feel like they're doing it but I'm like you're really not, you're giving her the answer. I mean some are, but just to see what reflection, that conversation looks like...'</i>
	Specific training areas	<i>'Like, I don't know what that looks like for us but like after I do the training, then I need to like, have follow up. Like I can't just be like go out and conquer because, it doesn't happen overnight.'</i>
Areas of strengths	Coaches	<i>'We're all incredibly passionate about what we do. You kind of have to be, in this world [laughs], so.'</i>

4.4.2 Across Analysis Findings

The summary of each of the major themes that emerged across stakeholders of all of the three focus groups is provided below.

4.4.2.1 Barriers in Coaching

Across all of the three focus groups, the participants shared their views on the importance of having a good and strong relationship between a coach and the coachee. However, all three groups also expressed how the relationship can become a barrier to provide and receive coaching support. Based on the findings, it is evident that the ECE providers seek and have the tendency to build very personal relationships and have very high demands on what they expect from the coach. Furthermore, personal relationships often are the barrier to lead the coaching process effectively and with transparency to help support higher-quality programming.

Another perceived barrier across all the stakeholders is the coaching caseload. The PTQ coaches and specialist heavy caseload often enable to do follow-ups and provide continuous support. This barrier has an impact on both the coaches and the ECE providers. The heavy caseload might be a barrier for the PTQ coaches and specialists to not only provide continuous support and feedback but also to receive it as part of their professional development.

Further, all stakeholders perceive the disconnect between the state and the agency. This disconnect creates a barrier in receiving appropriate supports and for the whole agency to be on the same page with coaching. Lastly, this disconnect has an impact on the ECE providers and the quality of coaching supports they receive. The participants across all three focus groups expressed the frustration that comes with this barrier.

The barrier of disconnect translates into the next barrier. The next barrier expressed throughout all perspectives is the lack of training. The lack of training infiltrates the whole coaching structure. There is a lack of coaching training for the TA administrators; thus, they struggle to provide adequate supports to the PTQ coaches and specialists. Furthermore, the PTQ coaches and specialists do not receive any formal coaching training of any kind. The ECE providers repeatedly expressed the need for the PTQ coaches to have more qualifications and more supports to establish effective and high-quality coaching support.

4.4.2.2 Coach Training

The form of received training was disclosed by both the TA administrators and the PTQ coaches' focus groups. The training PTQ coaches receive is on the LEARN 360 coaching system.

However, as discussed across both of the focus groups, this training only introduces the coach with the system of documenting their work.

Nevertheless, the coaches are using other streams of supports to prepare themselves for the position of coach. They have the opportunity to shadow a coach when they are hired. Further, they are sharing resources and documents amongst themselves using a group chat and a web-based collaborative platform.

The TA administrators and the PTQ coaches reflected on the need for more professional development opportunities and the desire to receive unified coaching training. The participants shared the need for a new coaching curriculum that would provide continuous supports to all parts of the coaching system with a focus on coaching practices and organization.

4.4.2.3 Coaching Practices

The participants across all the focus groups shared the nature of the current coaching supports that coaches provide. It was supported by all three perspectives that coaches are using a lot of resources and also are sharing resources. Coaching takes place during onsite visits as well as through remote communication. The coaches are using the PTQ Checklists to assess provider advancement. However, this checklist is focused on the advancement of the institution in general, not on improving practices. There is a tendency to move the coaching support from the checklists to measure more individualized supports and effective practices. Therefore, there is an initiative to use reflective coaching and assessment.

Ideas for using more coaching strategies and opinions on what these strategies might look like have been presented by the participants in all three focus groups. Across the focus groups, the participants have agreed on the new strategies mostly focusing on follow-ups such as video recording to use feedback and reflection, and reflection and feedback alone. Further, they discussed the tendencies to more structured assessments and organization of onsite visits.

4.4.2.4 Areas of Needed Supports

The participants across all three focus groups expressed several aspects of the coaching system that require and would benefit from more attention. First, there is the need for supports on specific practices such as the need for support in establishing professional rapport, reflection

and feedback, assessment of needs, organization, and clarification of the goals of coaching and the role of a coach. Second, the need for training, professional development, and a system of supports for the TA administrators and the PTQ coaches and specialists translate to all the areas mentioned above. Furthermore, the need for clarification of the focus of coaching also exists. Coaches are required to use the PTQ checklists, however, at the same time, there are tendencies to use other instruments. Last but not least, there is a need to unify and organize coaching instruments and documentation.

4.4.2.5 Areas of Strengths

Across all of the three focus groups, the participants expressed how coaching is a beneficial profession and what are the strengths of the coaches. The participants' perspectives on the strengths of coaches were very similar. The participants reflected that coaches are very passionate about their profession. This passion also translates into the characteristics of the PTQ coaches and specialists as the participants reported that they are dedicated to supporting providers and ultimately to help support high-quality childcare programming. Further, the participants also expressed that the strengths are being persistent and resourceful, developing peer supports, and building relationships with providers.

4.5 Within Analysis of Dyadic Interview

4.5.1 Coding

The dyadic interview with the TA administrators was conducted to collect more precise and in-depth data on the coaching situation in the PTQ system. The data analysis followed the same procedure as described in Chapter 3. For thorough analysis and easier orientation, the codebook with major categories, codes, and coding examples was developed as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Dyadic interview codebook

Category	Code	Example:
Coach qualification	Required degree	<i>“We assume because you have a Bachelor’s degree and/or Master’s degree, we can give you some information, you can read it, and you can apply it and you should be successful”</i>
	Experiences	<i>“you have people who have been family chapter home owners, you know, of those types of businesses, you have people who have been teachers, you have people who have been directors”</i>
	Coaching structure	<i>“... so, you’ve got master coaches, Paths to Quality coaches, you’ve got advancement coaches, you’ve got specialists, different types of specialists, so depending on what part of the system they’re in, they may get quarterly contact.”</i>
Coach training	LEARN 360	<i>“the first, well they really get that as soon as they’re hired on, the Learn 360 training modules”</i>
	Other training	<i>“So like, there is a coach support session that I do once every quarter, so this is for new hires, so people who are 12 months and under, and they, it’s really more designed, it’s not an onboarding or anything like that, but it’s more designed that okay you’re out in the field, you know, now let’s come together and talk about what your struggles are, what your celebrations are.”</i>
Coaches strengths	Coaches strengths	<i>“I think a strength would be that the majority of them do understand child development. I do think that a strength would be the fact that we realize that relationships is important.”</i>

Table 7. continued

Proved coaching practices	Effective practices	<i>“They were very intentional about what the game plan was before they went out there. This is what I’m going to do, these are the tools I’m going to use, anything that I can frontload the provider within via email or phone conversation before I get there.”</i>
Areas of needed support for coaches	Coach training	<i>“For me, I think it’s actually going in having a strong model curriculum to say this is what we do.”</i>
	Coaching practices	<i>“They don’t use the training follow up technique as much as they need to.”</i>
	Professional relationships	<i>“I’ve gone in and honestly said “oh my gosh if you do all this, you’re more so the assistant. you’re their personal assistant.” Instead of- why is that they can’t do that for themselves?”</i>
Elements of coaching curriculum	Specific practices	<i>“And being aligned at this point to how they should be having those reflective questions and critical thinking conversations and interactions with children”</i>
	Structure	<i>“Everyone that’s involved in it who is from our role, whoever’s supporting understands what TA is and how to get there. And then being able to- something that’s usable and understandable that they can follow.”</i>
Barriers in coaching	Caseload	<i>‘But that’s one of the biggest- time is one of the biggest barriers. Another barrier I think is, there is too few of us and a whole lot of them.’</i>
	Disconnect	<i>“So, whatever the curriculum is and I think that a lot of the tension has to be centered around alright how is that system fit into what we are actually doing.”</i>
	Lack of training	<i>“Because I don’t know [name] if you would agree. When you are hired in here, it’s just hit the ground and run.”</i>

4.5.2 Dyadic Interview Background

This dyadic interview with the TA administrators was conducted with the goal to collect additional information about the situation in the coaching system. The dyadic interview with two TA administrators was conducted remotely using a video conferencing program. The goal of the moderator and the author of this thesis was to establish a trusting and pleasant environment to collect in-depth data. Therefore, this session was led only by the moderator without the presence of the assistant moderator (i.e., the author of this thesis) to secure the above goals. The session was audio and video recorded; thus, the assistant moderator had the opportunity to watch the interview session for further analysis. Both participants were TA administrators with a long history of working in this position and a long history of supervising the PTQ coaches. Based on the observation of the interview session, both participants were open to sharing their experiences with the motivation for the improvement of the agency practices.

4.5.3 Findings

Summaries of TA administrators shared opinions, experiences, and thoughts based on the developed codebook are shared below. Each summary of the major theme is presented with quotes from raw data.

4.5.3.1 Coach Qualification

The TA administrators in this interview confirmed the educational requirements of the coaches when they are hired. The coaches need to have a minimum of bachelor's degree in early childhood development or related area with a preferably a master's degree. However, both participants reflected on this requirement. They expressed that the level of education is not an indicator of the ability to coach and develop other professionals. One of the participants shared: *'We assume because you have a bachelor's degree and/or Master's degree, we can give you some information, you can read it, and you can apply it and you should be successful. That is soooo not true. And I've had some debates even in our offices about that. You know if that was true, that reading comprehension equals proper implementation, then we all should be able to take a recipe for a cake and come out with the same cake every time.'* Further, coaches are hired with a variety of backgrounds such as family homeowners, teachers, directors. Thus, their level

of experience and expertise differs widely. The participants also reflected on this fact as follows: *'... you have people who have been directors and I strongly feel that just because you've been in those positions does not mean you have the skill set to, doesn't mean you can't get it, but doesn't mean you automatically have the skill set to influence or inform someone else's professional development. I would hope and believe that those who have been in the position of the role of director may understand it a little bit more, but they struggle. I mean and you're talking about as a coach, we're going in and we are...not just assisting with how to help children to develop, we're talking about how to help adults develop, so we're talking about how to develop the adults who can develop the children. We're talking about how to develop in some cases, new business owners, and helping their business practices, and how all of that intertwines and connects to running successful childcare.'*

Finally, the TA administrators explained that there are different coaching positions such as master coaches, Paths to Quality coaches, advancement coaches, specialists, and different types of specialists.

4.5.3.2 Coach Training

The participants acknowledged that training and professional development are available for coaches. They referred to the LEARN 360 training modules provided to coaches as onboarding training. They also clarified that further professional development opportunities vary based on which part of the coaching system they are part of and who is their team supervisor. One of the administrators explained the supports she provides to coaches on her team. She provides coaching supports in-person during onsite visits observations and she also uses this time for evaluation. She said: *'Well, for those under my watch or I don't even know if that's the proper term, but for those who are with me, I have a system working with them every other month. I usually try to go out, observe them, do a debriefing, give them some feedback. Sometimes when I'm observing, we typically have like a buzz word, because sometimes they look to me and ask for help, so I use this as an opportunity to model. And then when we debrief, I say hey what did you see me do? Is there something you have questions about or is there something I did that you feel like you can incorporate into your practices, because you're not me, it's not going to look the way I did it necessarily, but it's more developing them.'* Further, the participants mentioned that there are opportunities for coaches to attend webinars. Lastly, they

also acknowledge the available supports of coach support sessions for newly hired coaches under 12 months. They explained: *'... it's not an onboarding or anything like that, but it's more designed that okay you're out in the field, you know, now let's come together and talk about what your struggles are, what your celebrations are, because I don't want it to always be negative, or something that they always have to improve on but more so acknowledging that oh yeah you're on the right track, right?'* They also explained the procedure of the coach support visit: *'Okay, so I just sat and observed you for four hours, and I have jotted down everything that I have seen them do, I ask them maybe like 5 or 6 reflective questions to make them kind of think through their processes. How do you think it went? Do you feel like your provider was receptive or not? Is this a typical visit? Do you feel like you met your expectations? What were the provider's expectations? Did you feel like you met their expectations? So, it's not a talk at, it's kind of a back and forth.'*

4.5.3.3 Coaches Strengths

The participants reflected on the areas of strengths of coaches. The main perceived strengths are knowledge in the topic of early childhood, relationship building, and being resourceful. One of them shared: *'I think a strength would be that the majority of them do understand child development. I do think that a strength would be the fact that we realize that relationships is important. And I believe that they are, that most of us recognize that this is important work and really want to be, to do well. And do what is best for children and families. I think that those are very- actually, I think those are the strongest strengths that I see.'* The other participant shared: *'I can agree wholeheartedly with what [name] said for the coaches as well. Some of them like I said because as far as their TA skill set, some of them are really, really strong in the relationship-building piece. I would say that modeling is getting better. Reflective questioning maybe I would say is about is at 50/50 right now. I've learned that for those who are really good at reflective questioning it comes natural to them. And those that are not, it's more something that has to be taught. How to prompt and how to do that follow-up. And it seems for whatever reason it's harder to do that with adults than children. But I would say that there is some that have nice strengths there. I will say they're all strong in going out and finding information. Like being in that resource and researching things. I think they all have that strength.'*

4.5.3.4 Proved Coaching Practices

The TA administrator participants in this interview shared their views on coaching strategies that represent an effective coaching approach. These strategies were practices used by previous coaches during the administrator's years of experience. The participants used them as an example of what coaching might look like to be effective. Those practices were intentional planning and organization. The participant shared: *'I have to say this I have seen some of the strongest coaches make meaningful impact in less than four hours. But it's because- the impact was meaningful because they did the work on the front end if that makes sense. They were very intentional about what the game plan was before they went out there. This is what I'm going to do, these are the tools I'm going to use, anything that I can frontload the provider within via email or phone conversation before I get there, then I can make my time there more meaningful.'*

4.5.3.5 Areas of Needed Support for Coaches

The participants expressed several aspects and areas of weaknesses that coaches would benefit from more supports. The major theme that both participants agreed on is the need for more formal training that would provide unified continuous support to coaches. As one of the participants referred to the lack of unified practices between the coaches: *'And because we have a system that embraces autonomy (laughs) that means, you don't know, a wide range of how their practices, or how the outcomes of their practices are gonna be. So, at least for the coaches, they're all over the place with their skill set. There are some that got it right away because of what their experiences were and their work experiences prior to.'* This need for appropriate training for coaches translated to further areas that coaches are struggling with and need more supports in. The participants shared that there is a need for change in the coach's mindset and approach to coaching in the PTQ system. There is a need to shift from a coach's mindset of a rater and solely giving out resources. As shared by the participants, coaches are used to giving providers answers without creating an opportunity for providers to look for answers. The shift needs to be towards coaches providing professional development to providers with appropriate adult learning practices. One of the participants shared: *'...but you're talking about people who were used to coming out and just being resources. And in some cases that's still a struggle, if you go to some people and you say, What do you feel like your role is, or What's your goal, we've*

been doing professional development goals for them as coaches, what's your goal in your work? "I want to be a better resource." They reiterated: 'Because it started off with giving information. Right? That is what their role is. When I sit and hear how coaching used to be at the beginning. They come in and they coach two standards. And they say, "here is what you need to do to pass". [Laughter]. Instead of, "here is what needs to happen to build quality." And getting them out of the mindset of the rater is going to want to see. You know? Seeing those type of things versus saying, "here we are this is the best practice because..."'. The participants also shared that coaches need to learn how to lead the coaching process and create opportunities for providers and teachers to control their progress. They shared: 'I've gone in and honestly said "oh my gosh if you do all this, you're more so the assistant. you're their personal assistant. Instead of- why is that they can't do that for themselves? I've heard a lot of wide range of excuses of, "Well, I want it done right." I'm like, "well how do they, it's their..." in a lot of cases it's their business, their livelihood. And it goes back to my original statement of "you have no power". You can only influence it. So, you want to get them to a point where they are able to do this without using you and become self-sufficient. So that piece I think is pretty huge on where they can improve.'

Further, the administrators in this interview agreed on the need to train coaches on how to maintain professional relationships. One of the participants reflected: 'About learning principles and how do you really move past relationships. Because I really think we get stuck there a lot. And that's sometimes why we can't see a lot of movement, as much movement as we would want to. - I agree with that 100%.'

The participants also reflected on specific practices in which the coaches need more support. These practices include reflective questioning, support in connecting received professional development with practice and embedding practices, intentional planning, and reflection, and follow up.

4.5.3.6 Elements of the Coaching Curriculum

The major elements that TA administrators would like to have in a new system of supports are wrapped around specific practices. They shared that the new system of supports should be focused around embedding practices and the connection of theory to practice. They shared: 'They give them the information and they expect them to be out there through the

practice part of it. And we don't do that for them. So, that was that one wish that would be it. To help them around the practice pieces and not just talk them through it. I mean, we meet people we have meetings to death. But then the action piece is what's missing.' Further, the administrators prefer the potential system of supports to be focused on real-life examples. They reflected on the real-life professional development: *'And that type of professional development for them seems more received, at least for the ones that I've worked, that I work with because it's right in the moment and we don't have to figure out these scenarios, because each scenario has a different variable that usually isn't captured when we're all in one big group. And, it also speaks to those people who don't like to speak in big groups, and then you can individualize it to their learning style and the way that they, you know, take in information.'* Further, the participants reflected on the need for training with the emphasis on adult learning principles, relationship building, and reflection. The participants also shared that it is important to have a strong coaching model that is understandable and usable across the agency with a continuous system of supports that reflects the coaching supports. The coaching model should be used to support both coaches and providers. The participants reflected: *'And then being able to- something that's usable and understandable that they can follow. And then a system where, that can be continuously implemented model reflected upon. And then I liked what [name] even said earlier. The fact that whatever the model is these are the skills that we are trying to ideal in the providers. However, I coach them to be how they coach providers.'*

Additionally, the participants shared specific practices that might be effective in the new coaching curriculum. They reflected on the benefits of using technology in coaching such as video-recording of providers and coaching sessions to use it for reflection. They shared: *'And then they have to videotape themselves creating in that session and then have so many questions that they might have to self-reflect. Because it is unrealistic that we that there would be funding to have more of us to support them. But we also recognize that for them to be able to see themselves. So, I think to use the technology for some of those things.'* Finally, they proposed the idea of creating an online support system to create a network to reflect on coaching practices. They reflected: *'So, somehow having, you know, the bug in-ear or videotaping, yea using technology would be great. And it would eliminate us being there so often.'*

4.5.3.7 Barriers in Coaching

Both administrators in this dyadic interview agreed and supported their perspectives on barriers or challenges in the coaching system. One of the main barriers in coaching in the PTQ is the disconnect between expectations. Coaches are often following the original mindset of the rater. They were used to rate providers on the PTQ checklists to see if they are ready to advance into the next level on the PTQ system. However, the new more effective approach leans toward measuring smaller advancements of individual practices to build quality with the ECE providers. There is a need to clarify expectations for coaches and to be transparent about the coaching expectations throughout the whole coaching system. The participants shared: *‘But the intent of how the coaching framework is set up. Because that’s the quality coaches that is a checklist. Specialists get called in because there is a problem or a challenge. And then when we are talking about practice-based coaching, growth mindset, setting goals, that’s a whole other type of reason to be in the facility.’*

The next major barrier that has been expressed during the interview is the caseload. A barrier in caseload applies to both the TA administrators and the PTQ coaches and specialists. The heavy caseload is closely connected with very limited time to provide appropriate supports. Therefore, the importance of providing supports in intentional planning and creating a unified network of supports is essential. One of the participants shared: *‘But that’s one of the biggest-time is one of the biggest barriers. Another barrier I think is, there is too few of us and a whole lot of them.’ – ‘We’re outnumbered. It started off being the only one of coaching specialist. There are multiple specialists like [name], but at first, it was just me for the whole state so you’re talking there was one to a ratio of fifty across the state. Now there’s two of us, there’s [name], no relation. But we split the state in half. But ok, so if I look at the number of coaches, so there’s twenty-six that fall under me, directly. And I want to say seventeen that fall under her, directly. And then at any given moment, there may be some overlap with coaches and specialists. So sometimes we’ll support specialists. But then that works vice versa. So, they come over, the specialist come over, and are needing to support the coaches if that makes sense. But again, you’re talking about spreading out over several different counties. So, I take Marion county all the way down to the bottom of Vanderburg- and that’s a lot. So even with me driving one way, it’s about three hours at any given moment. If I go to the city, it might be four. So that’s probably*

the biggest barrier those two things, is that onsite time and there's too few of us and more of them that need some one-on-one. Because not everybody operates well within a group.'

The last major barrier expressed by the participants was lack of training and supports. They expressed that there is no formal coaching preparation. They shared: *'When you are hired in here, it's just hit the ground and run. There is- there is- and a lot of times of course if you're out in the field and if you're not used to being out in the field without someone to be there right with you to bounce off of it can be really intimidating.'* The coaches are receiving resources on how to coach. However, they have never been trained on how to use the information and turn it into practice. They shared: *'When you take your driving test for the first time. You know, when we were little, you know of course your dad or mom helped you practice. But my nieces and nephews they're going through their driver's test. There is a requirement that you have to have fifty hours of driving time before you can get your license. You know, why is this any different as a coach? We give them all of this information and we expect them to be able to execute it on the sheer fact that they're college-educated. That's it. And I think that's the most frustrating piece.'*

Furthermore, they reflected on this barrier and its complexity. The lack of training and appropriate system of supports translates into the way coaches are providing supports to providers and teachers. The TA administrators expressed: *'At the end of the day isn't that what they're doing with the providers that they serve? They give them the information and they expect them to be out there through the practice part of it. And we don't do that for them. So, that was that one wish that would be it. To help them around the practice pieces and not just talk them through it. I mean, we meet people we have meetings to death. But then the action piece is what's missing.'*

4.5.4 Summary of Findings

The administrators in this dyadic interview clarified the types of training coaches receive. Newly hired coaches are trained on the LEARN 360 coaching model. Further training and professional development opportunities vary between coaches as they are receiving coaching support based on their supervisors. This coaching support is mainly offered through on-site observation visits, where coaches are given the opportunity to reflect on their practices. These observational visits are also a form of coach evaluation. The administrators perceive that the strengths of the PTQ coaches are mainly in building relationships, being resourceful, and desire

to improve. Next to these areas of strengths, administrators also feel that there are many areas that the coaches would benefit from more support. These areas of supports include specific practices such as embedding practices, reflective questioning, and intentional planning. The administrators further reflected that coaches need support in changing their mindsets from rater to facilitator of change. The focus of coaching should be shifted to making programs the best they can be instead of just meeting the checklist. Thus, there is a need for clarification of coaching expectations for coaches and providers. Moreover, there is a need to shift from coaches feeling responsible for providing resources and answers to issues to rather hold providers and teachers accountable to drive their improvement. The administrators feel that there are several aspects that might help address these needs. They would like to see a new coaching system that is understandable and usable across the agency and provides support to the mentioned coaching practices with an emphasis on connecting theory to practice. They see a big importance in training coaches on practices to help providers implement effective practices. These practices include modeling and using technology in coaching. They perceive video-recording as an effective practice to reflect and provide feedback on practices. They also brought attention to creating a network of supports where technology might help to remove some of the barriers in the coaching system. The heavy coaching caseloads of the administrators and the coaches might be partially solved by using technologies, especially video recording. To conclude, there are still some other major aspects that are preventing coaches to be more effective. The lack of formal training on how to coach is one. The other aspect is the disconnect in coaching focus which creates confusion in expectations of the coaching process across the agency.

4.6 Summary

This chapter presented the participant description collected via demographic surveys. Further in this chapter are presented findings from three focus groups and one dyadic interview. The findings are presented with textual descriptions to preserve the authentic thought of participants. The data from focus groups are presented separately as well as through across analysis to reveal consistency across the findings. Each analysis findings are summarized.

CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has explored the stakeholder perspectives on early childhood coaching provided by technical support in the PTQ rating system in Indiana. The posed research questions sought to reveal findings that would create a proposition for potential future improvement of early childhood coaching. This chapter provides a summary of the study where the purpose, significance, and methodology are discussed. Further in this chapter, the findings from focus groups and the dyadic interview are synthesized to provide an overview of the study results. Finally, the results are discussed together with the findings from literature and the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

5.1 Summary of This Study

According to the Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee (2018), Indiana has more than 500,000 young children under the age of 5 years. Significant attention has been dedicated to professional development that focuses on preparation of knowledgeable and skilled early childhood educators to design and provide high-quality early learning environments and experiences (Winton, Snyder, & Goffin, 2015). One such important professional development strategy is coaching. Coaching has the potential to support the practitioner's confidence and competence to implement evidence-based practices, which result in positive learning outcomes for children (Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015).

In 2008, Indiana launched a statewide child care quality rating and improvement system, called the Paths to Quality. Paths to Quality assesses the quality within a childcare program and scores each program based on a 1 to 4 rating scale with Level 4 representing the highest rating. To assist providers in improving the quality of their programs and ratings on the Paths to the Quality evaluation system, there are several agencies across Indiana that provide professional development, coaching, and teacher support. Yet, the technical assistance that providers receive from these agencies varies widely. Additionally, training procedures and approaches for preparing effective coaches are also variable across the state (Howard et al., 2015). This represents a potential disconnect between high-quality coaching, high-quality childcare services,

and positive child outcomes. When coaches are skilled in coaching and knowledgeable about recommended practices, they can affect positive improvements in teacher and provider practices.

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to investigate stakeholder views on the strengths and needs of the early childhood coaches with respect to the current coaching system. Further, this study aimed to arrive at stakeholder views of appropriate ways of supports of early childhood coaches. To meet this goal, we held a focus group and dyadic interview session with technical assistance administrators, and focus group sessions with early childhood coaches, and early childhood providers. Data were collected through audio recording and transcription of each data collection session. This study employed the inductive thematic analysis with a selective approach to arrive at findings from this study. When using selective approach Manen (1990) recommends asking “What statement(s), phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?” (p.93). This strategy was used for data analysis through the long-table approach. The long-table approach allowed the researcher to get very familiar with the data by reading the raw transcripts several times and handling the segments of texts manually. Five steps of familiarization, identifying, categorizing, labeling, and summarizing were used for interpretation of the final results. Analysis findings are presented together with descriptions of each of the participants. The findings of the focus groups are presented both individually and across. Each of the data analyses is presented with a corresponding codebook used for better orientation and consistency in the data analysis. Findings from the dyadic interview were also presented with the developed codebook.

The research questions and the study design were built on the strength-based approach to investigate personal views on aspects that might be crucial in providing coaching supports. The strength-based approach is formed from the person-centered theory of positive psychology. The person-centered theory promotes human development and growth and advocates for creating a climate for change. In addition to that, a strength-based approach boosts motivation and interest for change (White, Motschnig-Pitrik, & Lux, 2013; Rogers, 1980). Consequently, participants had the opportunity to share their perspectives on areas and forms of improvement, with the purpose of empowering each stakeholder in the process of investigation. Furthermore, this concept created a welcoming, positive, and informative environment.

As a result of the data analysis, several consistent themes emerged targeting the research questions of this study. These themes are presented below. The research questions addressed by this study are:

1. What are the strengths of early childhood coaches that could be used for the improvement of coaching quality in Indiana?
2. What are the challenges and needs of early childhood coaches in Indiana?
3. What would the appropriate support for coaches look like based upon the findings?

5.2 What are the strengths of early childhood coaches that could be used for the improvement of coaching quality in Indiana?

Several key strengths of early childhood coaches and specialists have been confirmed across each group of participants. It is evident that **the coaches are passionate about their profession with a strong dedication to help support early childhood providers and teachers** in their growth. Based on the observation and the collected data this strength is crucial in this profession. Having a real interest in supporting quality early childhood environments might be one of the main characteristics that are important when building coaching relationships, as shared during the provider focus group. Another strength of the coaches that have been confirmed through each of the data collection procedures **is a desire for professional growth**. Coaches are very open to professional development opportunities and are motivated to improve their coaching practices. This quality is essential with the goal of improving the quality of coaching in Indiana. The positive attitude toward change might help successfully implement potential new strategies in the coaching system in Indiana. There was an agreement between all groups of participants that **coaches are strong in relationship building**. Coaches are establishing deep and trusting relationships and it is evident that this feature is very important in the ECE community. Thus, it would be beneficial for all participating sides of the coaching process to build on the coach-coachee relationship. Finally, the agreement was also established for the coach's strength in **peer support**. Coaches have already built their form of professional development. They created a network to share resources and materials. This established peer support would be a great source of continuous support for coaches when built into the new coaching curriculum appropriately.

5.3 What are the challenges and needs of early childhood coaches in Indiana?

Two common themes emerged across all collected data that identify the answers to this question. The two major themes were barriers in coaching and areas of needed supports for coaches. Several key findings were identified by these themes.

First, there was a general consensus regarding an increased **need for TA administrator professional development to support coaches**. The lack of professional development opportunities for TA administrators has a huge repercussion on the coaching support provided by the early childhood coaches. This challenge infiltrates the whole coaching structure, as the representable model is missing.

Second, coaches receive zero formal coaching training. The training received by coaches is mostly based on self-learning and resource sharing. Thus, there is a necessary **need for coaches to receive general training to address their varying backgrounds and skillsets**. Participants from all data collection procedures agreed on various areas that coaches need support in. Coaches would greatly benefit from targeted supports in connecting theory to practice, fostering professional relationships, organizational skills, intentional planning, assessment, and reflection. Most importantly, coaches need training on the use of effective coaching practices that helps target the mentioned areas such as modeling, reflective questioning, active listening, etc.

Third, there is a **need to clarify the roles of coaches, goals of coaching (how to coach), and the focus of coaching (what to coach on) across all the relevant stakeholders** (i.e., administrators, coaches, and service providers). This need translated from the finding of disconnect in the coaching agency. There is a disconnect between the funding sources which creates confusion of what the coaching model and its focus should look like. This disconnect applies to tools that coaches are required to use. These tools are PTQ checklists, Indiana Core Knowledge and Competencies, and LEARN 360 coaching model.

Fourth, there is an increased **need for support in the area of building professional relationships**. A relationship is inevitably an essential base of coaching, as shown by the findings. Based on the findings, coaches often struggle to establish rapport with their coachee that is built on trust and openness but does not shift into an overly personal relationship. Therefore, it is desired to bring attention to appropriate practices on how to balance coaching relationships.

Fifth, coaches face **challenges in providing continuous supports to the providers because of their heavy coaching caseloads**. Across the participants, the findings show there are needs and desires for lasting and continuous coaching supports. Thus, coaches would benefit from supports in areas of organizing on-site visits.

Overall, there is an increased need to develop formal training for coaches and administrators with corresponding materials and standardize the coaching focus, procedures, and structure across the agency. This would allow the coaches to use a strong coaching model to support ECE providers.

5.4 What would the appropriate support for coaches look like based upon the findings?

The findings across all data collections show that the key elements the stakeholders would like to have in a new system of supports are **wrapped around specific practices**. These specific practices are discussed above. To conclude, they shared that the new system of supports should be focused on effective coaching practices, relationship, assessment, embedding new practices, and reflection. Further, the findings show that all sides prefer the potential system of supports to be **focused on real-life examples with emphasis on adult learning principles**. Therefore, using video-recording as an instrument for reflection and feedback might be beneficial. Video-recording might be a powerful tool used in several ways. Coaches might use it to record their practices and consequently reflect and revise them. Another way is using video recording in coaching sessions to record providers and use it for reflection and feedback. This would allow the coaches to provide data-driven reflection which would potentially help to solve the balancing of professional supports.

The new coaching model and system of supports should be **strong, understandable, and usable across the agency with space for individualism**. As identified by the results, coaches are using very individualized supports, thus it is important for them to preserve this aspect. There is a desire for a coaching system that applies **a continuous system of supports on all levels**. That applies to TA administrators, coaches, and supports provided to ECE programs. Thus, a new system of vertical support (administrator to coach) and peer support (coach to coach) would be an appropriate solution. Another appropriate solution might be creating an online coaching network. As shown in the findings, coaches already partially employed this method of resource sharing and group communication. An online coaching network would allow vertical and peer

support to happen regularly and in a structured way. Coaches would have the opportunity to collaborate, brainstorm, and reflect without adding presence to their heavy caseloads.

Another very important aspect is **developing appropriate tools for coaches**. As presented in the findings, coaches struggle to measure smaller units of change with providers and teachers. The checklist system does not measure individual growth. Thus, appropriate instruments for needs assessments, planning, and on-site visits structures would unify the coaching practices and target some of the coach challenges.

Finally, coaches and the coaching agency would greatly benefit from **a new structure of supports** provided to ECE programs as revealed by the findings. One of the potential solutions might be building **a multitiered support system linked to PTQ** that would focus on low intensity supports, followed by targeted supports, followed by intensive individualized supports. This structured support would potentially help coaches to create a better organization in on-site visits and thus, it would potentially solve the concern of heavy caseloads. The targeted support would also potentially create more connections between coaches and specialists to build a team of intensive support for sides where it is needed.

5.5 Discussions

Based on the literature review conducted for this study, it is evident that the majority of research related to coaching and technical assistance is focusing on the implementation of coaching supports and outcomes for teachers and children. However, very little research was dedicated to exploring needs and supports for coaches to help improve their coaching practices, especially with investigating all participating stakeholders (administrators, coaches, and ECE providers) perspectives on the provided coaching, as employed by this study.

The conceptual framework employed in this study was a strength-based approach that originates from positive psychology. This concept led to a unique approach that investigated the areas of strengths of coaches. Specifically, the strength-based approach supported the data collection process and allowed the researchers to create a trusting and open environment. Consequently, this study approach also uncovered potential areas to build on and helped to establish a positive environment for change.

The findings from this study show the need for training wrapped around specific practices and developing a new system of coaching based on several characteristics. These

practices include relationship building, intentional planning and assessment, reflection and follow up. One of the very interesting facts about the participants was that they shared a lot of their views on what is needed to support high-quality coaching, however, the participants never directly mentioned any specific coaching model they either follow or they would like to have the supports to follow. Despite that, the need for focusing on the mentioned practices reflects the commonly used characteristics employed by researchers of effective coaching models as discussed in Chapter 2 and shown in Table 2. The lack of awareness about coaching models might be a consequence of the missing training on coaching skillsets and general coaching as an adult learning strategy for the PTQ coaches and specialists as well as TA administrators.

The findings from this study also support the coaching agency and PTQ initiative to increase PTQ ratings and provide more children access to a high-quality program. The initiative was supported by the plan for improvement of the PTQ rating system conducted by the American Institute for Research (Howard et al., 2015). Howard et al. (2015) suggested several strategy recommendations to achieve the initiative such as to support and refine coaching approaches for Indiana ECE providers by standardizing the coaching model for providers and offer professional development to coaches. Findings from this study are consistent with Howard et al. (2015) recommendation of the need for quality coaching support. However, Howard et al. (2015) looked at the needs to enhance provider PTQ ratings, while this study investigated the needs of early childhood coaches. Consequently, the findings of inside perspectives of each group of stakeholders of this study together with the results of the Howard et al. (2015) study bring to attention the real importance to work toward the change in the early childhood coaching and technical assistance linked to PTQ.

5.6 Implications for future studies

When looking at the research of coaching in early childhood it is clear that the area of preparation, supports, and effective coaching practices needs to be brought to more attention. This area would benefit from focusing on measuring the advancement of a coach and their practice implementation. Such findings would bring more clarity to the effectiveness of training, professional development, and supports that coaches receive. Further, very few studies have been conducted to investigate the complex coaching structure and measure how professional development offered to coaches impacts the ECE provider and child outcomes. Thus, research

around the effectiveness of different supports and preparation of coaches would help to identify strong coaching models.

Regards to the situation in PTQ coaching in Indiana, there is an urgency for change to provide appropriate supports to early childhood coaches and establish a new coaching model that would be applied to providers. Future research might focus on building such a curriculum based on the findings of this study. It would be beneficial to measure the coach preparedness, use of coaching practices, and on-site time dedicated to reflection and feedback before the implementation of the new coaching curriculum with the system of supports. These results might be then compared with post results of these measures to see the progress in coaching practices and effectiveness of the provided supports.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!



Who?

We are looking for Paths to Quality™ coaches

What?

Participants in Focus Groups help develop the Practice-Based coaching training program

How do I get involved?

To participate please contact us!

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Institutional Review Board
Number: 1807020803

APPENDIX B

Early Childhood Practice Based Coaching Focus Group Participant Demographic Information Coach

Date:

What is your assigned number for the Focus Group: ____

Gender – M/F (circle one)

Ethnicity:

Age:

Highest Degree:

Licensure:

How many years have you been a coach? ____

Were you an early childhood teacher or provider prior to being a coach?

If so, how many years have were you an early childhood teacher or provider? _____

How many centers are on your caseload?

How many teachers are on your caseload?

How many of the early childhood providers that you coach work with infants and toddlers from birth to three years?

How many of the early childhood providers that you coach work with preschoolers ages three to five years?

How many of the early childhood providers that you coach work with school-age populations?

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Questions – TA administrators

1. What is the main purpose of coaching?
 - Are coaches focused on teacher professional development or on moving centers forward in PTQ?
2. How many coaches do you currently supervise?
3. How many institutions does each coach need to cover?
4. How does the coach become one? What qualification does the coach need?
5. How are coaches evaluated?
6. What are some factors that would help you evaluate the teachers/providers you support?
7. What are the most important aspects in the relationship between coach and teacher/provider?
8. What PTQ level do you believe requires the most intensive coaching?
9. Do providers get copy of PTQ workbooks? What other materials do they have for self-instruction?
10. What training do coaches already have?
11. What professional development opportunities are available to coaches?
12. When you think of effective coaching interventions, what are some things that come to mind?
13. What are some of the strengths of your coaches?
14. What are the most common areas in which that coaches need support?
15. Given a perfect scenario, with no limitations, what would be the ideal method of coaching teachers/providers?
16. What barriers exist in providing this effective support to coaches?
17. What are elements of a coaching curriculum that are necessary?
18. What is element of a coaching curriculum that would be nice, but not essential, to include?
19. What other comments or perspectives would you like to share about the roles and support coaches need?

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Questions – Coaches and Specialists

1. What is the main purpose of coaching?
2. How many teachers/ providers do you currently supervise?
3. When you think of effective coaching practices, what are some things that come to mind?
4. What is the most rewarding part of coaching?
5. Describe your strengths as a coach.
6. What supports have you received to prepare you to coach?
7. What additional professional development opportunities or supports would be helpful for you as a coach?
8. What barriers exist in providing this effective support to providers?
9. How does Learn 360 support your coaching skills?
10. What aspect of Learn 360 do you incorporate into your coaching?
11. What aspects of Learn 360 are the most difficult to incorporate?
12. How do you decide what practices to coach providers on? What guides those decisions?
13. What types of supports would you provide to a provider in need of a lot of support, in need of moderate support, and in need of little support?
14. Which part of coaching is the most difficult?
15. What is the most common issue that providers need help with based on your experiences with previous sessions?
16. What procedures do you follow to assess provider practices?
17. What resources do you use to help with teacher's practices?
18. Given a perfect scenario, with no limitations, what would be the ideal method of coaching teachers/providers?
19. What are elements of a coaching curriculum that are necessary?
20. What other comments or perspectives would you like to share about the roles and support coaches need?

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Questions – Teachers/Providers

1. What is the main purpose of coaching?
2. How long have you been working with a coach or specialist?
3. What do you expect from coaching?
4. How do you determine what the focus of coaching will be?
5. Do PTQ Workbooks help you to set professional development goals?
6. What kind of support have you received in a past from a coach?
7. What is the structure or nature of those supports?
8. What are strengths of the coaches and specialists you've worked with?
9. What are areas of growth for the coaches and specialists you've worked with?
10. How often would you like to connect with your coach? How long should each coaching session last?
11. What type of communication would you prefer with your coach? (Face to face, online video, phone)
12. Video self-recording of teaching is one of the most powerful tools to improve teaching practices. Talk to us about your comfort in being video recorded for your own professional growth? What barriers might need to be addressed for video self-recording to occur?
13. Given a perfect scenario, with no limitations, what would be the ideal method of coaching for you?
14. What other comments or perspectives would you like to share about the collaboration and support from coaches?