An examination of the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in Australian schools

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Doctor of Philosophy

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted previously for a degree or diploma at this institution, an Australian or overseas university, or any other institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to some very special people in my life:

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May this thesis serve as a testament to the enduring power of high expectations and the transformative impact of education.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the lived experiences of literacy leaders who both received and implemented coaching in Australian schools. Positioned within a national context of growing interest in evidence-based approaches to literacy instruction, the research explores how these leaders navigated their dual roles in supporting teacher capacity and improving student outcomes. Although the Australian Government has responded to declining literacy results through significant school funding and the introduction of instructional leadership roles – particularly in disadvantaged schools – the perspectives of those in these roles remain under-explored.

Using a phenomenological research approach, this study analysed data from nine participants via a questionnaire, two semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The participants were drawn from three Australian states and worked in the independent, state, and Catholic school systems. The findings indicate that while goal-setting remains a crucial aspect of the coaching process, initiating this step prematurely can lead to dissatisfaction among coachees. In addition, there is a knowledge gap in coaching and literacy theories, overlooking the essential foundation needed to inform and guide literacy coaching. The concept of coaching as a transformative tool within schools, particularly in shaping school culture and providing dynamic support during critical periods, surfaced in the data analysis.

The findings also reveal notable variations in how schools organise their coaching in literacy. This includes a significant divergence in the documents utilised by schools, reflecting both flexibility and structure in coaching approaches. However, the findings underscore the importance of scheduled coaching time and suggest standardising coaching documents could enhance quality and equity in literacy coaching practices. This study makes a significant original

contribution to knowledge by addressing gaps in the literature and providing a foundation for future research in literacy coaching in schools.

Keywords: designated literacy leaders, instructional leaders, phenomenology, coach, coachee, literacy, coaching, literacy coaches

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

In the context of this study, the following definitions apply.

Coach: A lead teacher serving as the designated literacy leader at their school. Coach is used throughout this study interchangeably with an 'instructional coach' to refer specifically to a designated literacy leader. A coach collaborates with teachers by engaging in a range of coaching activities to build their efficacy (Knight, 2018).

Coachee: A teacher who is receiving coaching in literacy as part of their professional development.

Coaching: A non-traditional approach to professional development, where instructional coaches collaborate with teachers to enhance teaching and learning, ultimately contributing to greater student success (Knight, 2018).

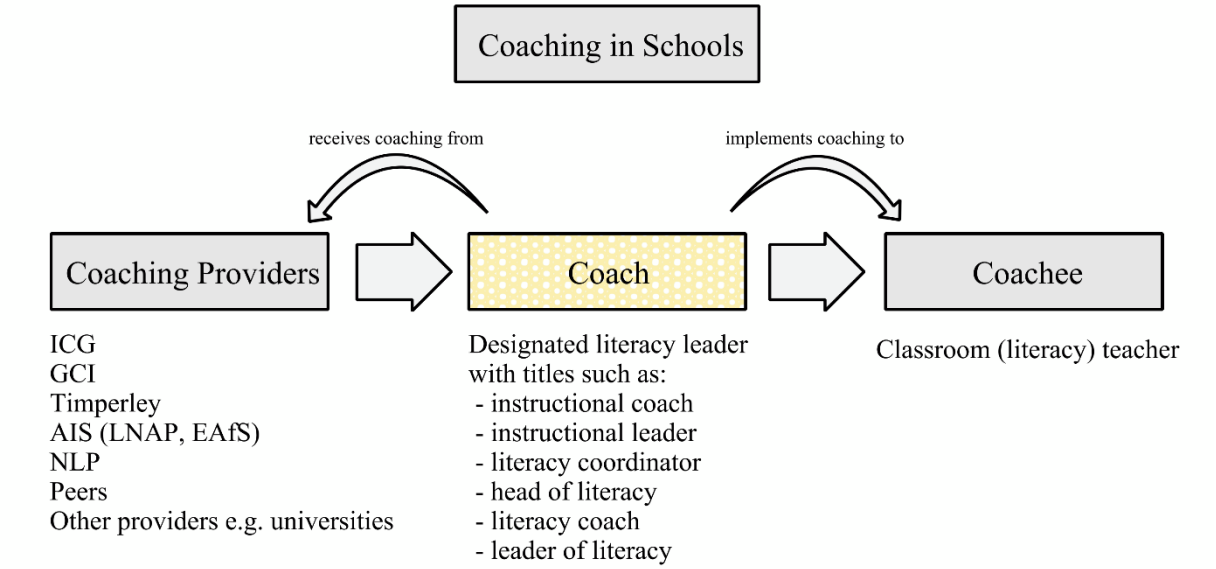
Coaching conversations: Dialogues between the coach and coachee centred on cultivating relationships through attentive listening, posing impactful questions, and other coaching activities (Knight, 2021a).

Coaching in schools: As illustrated in Figure 1, the term 'coaching in schools' in this study refers to a professional development approach. In this context, coaches undergo training facilitated by coaching professionals and subsequently impart this training to coachees, specifically literacy teachers, to improve their teaching practices.

Designated literacy leader: This phrase was designed for use in this study as a broad term to refer to a current or former leading teacher trained to lead the literacy program at their school through a formal one-on-one relationship with a classroom teacher for the purpose of improving the literacy teaching ability of that teacher and impact student outcome; a coach. Schools and states refer to this role using different names (Le Fevre, 2021), including instructional leader, instructional coach, literacy leader, literacy coach, and literacy coordinator.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Coaching in Schools



Note. I created this figure from my current understanding of how coaches are described in various schools across Australia and where they receive their coaching education.

Impact: The perceived effect - positive or negative – that phenomenon has on a respondent.

Instructional coach: Used interchangeably with 'coach' in this study to refer to an instructional leader who uses evidence-based practices to support the development of teaching and learning.

Literacy coach: An instructional coach focused specifically on literacy development in teaching and learning.

Lived experience: The study utilises Heidegger's (1962) phenomenological perspective on lived experience to describe an individual's first-person, subjective viewpoint and conscious interaction with the world. Within this framework, lived experience encompasses the totality of

an individual's perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and interpretations of their surroundings and interactions.

Phenomenology: The study of the way participants perceive and understand phenomena based on their lived experience. A comprehensive definition of phenomenology is provided in section 1.2.

Professional development (PD): Used interchangeably with professional learning, PD constitutes activities undertaken by teachers to enhance teaching quality and impact student outcomes. Throughout the study, professional learning is preferred, underscoring its collaborative and customised nature, distinct from the singular, one-event associations of traditional professional development. Throughout the thesis, the terminology will be aligned with that of the original texts cited, where possible.

ABBREVIATION OF TERMS

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Centre for Educational Research
AIS	Australian Independent Schools (New South Wales)
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
EAfS	Early Action for Success
EDI	Explicit Direct Instruction
GCI	Growth Coaching International
GROW	G (growth) R (reality) O (options) W (will)
GROWTH	G (growth) R (reality) O (options) W (will) T (tactics) H (habits)
ICG	Instructional Coaching Group
LNAP	Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NLNP	National Literacy and Numeracy Partnership
NLP	Neuro-Linguistic Programming
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Coaching is wanting change, so you have to be careful how you start your coaching to get your change – Shannon

1.1 Background of the Study

Coaching of teachers has become an essential part of the cache of continuous professional development (PD) offerings by schools that aspire to improve students' learning outcomes (Bean et al., 2010; Brown, 2010; Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010; Kraft et al., 2018). The traditional approaches towards teacher professional development must be reconsidered to achieve greater outcomes. More than three decades ago, Levine (1988) declared that teachers are entitled to "ongoing learning and development" (p. 31) that recognises their unique characteristics and needs as adult learners. This involves providing learning opportunities for teachers that will change their practices and lead to better student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Coaching is considered a viable PD option because it "reflects foundational ideas about what makes teacher learning effective" (Desimone & Pak, 2017, p. 4). Some schools have been investing significant resources into providing high-quality professional development to improve teachers' instructional capacity, which, in turn, is expected to lead to better literacy outcomes for students (Desimone, 2009).

As school leadership teams seek to improve students' literacy skills, they are cognisant of the importance of strengthening teacher capacity as a key foundation for this improvement. For those seeking to avoid the traditional one-day, in-service professional learning events typical in schools, coaching is a propitious way to facilitate professional growth in teachers (Knight, 2009). This focus on job-embedded, ongoing, targeted professional learning led to the employment of instructional leaders who would coach literacy teachers (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Their job required working with teachers in the classroom and supporting them with evidence-based practices to improve their instruction so that they could ultimately increase student

performance (Kowal & Steiner, 2007). Kowal and Steiner (2007) emphasise content expertise, especially in literacy, as one of three general categories of skills that instructional coaches need to possess to be effective at their job. With the urgency to build students' literacy capacity and the growing literature showing the effectiveness of coaching in schools (Knight, 2009; Wyatt, 2017), further study in this area is imperative for any government, organisation, or individual interested in reforming their education system.

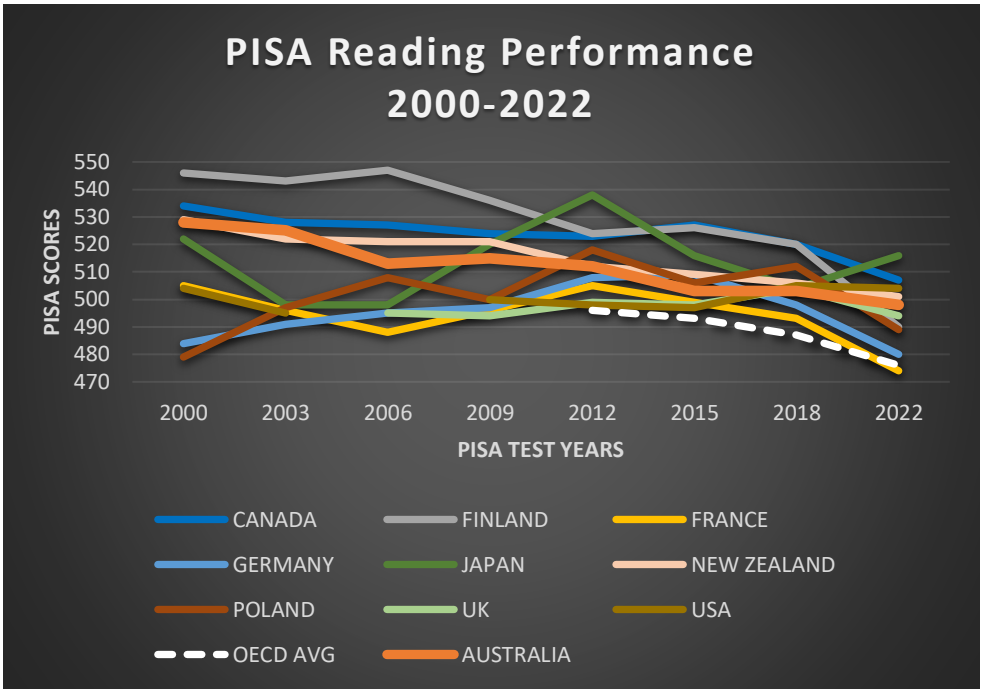
The data from a global comparative study of 15-year-old students' scientific, reading, and mathematical literacy demonstrated that Australian students' performance in these key domains has been declining when compared with peers from other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Duffy & Wylie, 2019; Echazarra & Schwabe, 2019; Thomas et al., 2013). As illustrated in Figure 2, despite a comparatively strong start in 2000 when the assessment began, the mean scores of Australian students in reading have steadily decreased over 22 years (OECD, 2022). While the OECD average also decreased, Australia went from a top-tier performer to average, now aligning with the OECD mean. Other countries with rising or stable scores, such as Poland and Japan, have surpassed Australia in reading performance. Possible contributing factors include systemic issues in education policy, curriculum changes, declining student engagement, growing inequities in education, and broader social shifts such as reduced reading for pleasure. It became evident that students were having difficulties with understanding, using, and reflecting on written texts. The performance in numeracy was similar. Anticipating the restoration of excellence in teaching and learning, the government at that time commissioned businessman David Gonski to investigate the issue and make recommendations for funding (Kelsey-Sugg, 2022).

The first *Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report 2011*, popularly referred to as the Gonski Review or Gonski 1.0, confirmed Australia's performance decline as highlighted by

international benchmarks such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results (Gonski, 2011). The report also revealed an urgency to close the growing learning gap between students from disadvantaged communities and schools and their well-performing counterparts. It promoted equity by advocating for every Australian child to receive the best education regardless of their home address, the economic status of their parents, power, or similar factors. Moreover, the report called for students to reach a minimum standard of achievement in literacy and numeracy before leaving school so that they can participate more fully in society.

Figure 2

PISA Reading Performance Scores



Note. The information in the figure is based on selected countries derived from OECD data (OECD, 2022)

Distinctly, the report recommended appropriate and consistent funding, approximately a $5 billion increase per year. Such funding would result in all schooling sectors being highly

resourced to guarantee an excellent education for all Australian students. This model would be done on a needs basis with a base level of funding to all schools via the School Resource Standard (SRS). Additional funds would then be released to the most disadvantaged schools through needs-based loading. Certain non-government schools deemed financially capable, that is, having the capacity to contribute, were expected to contribute. Therefore, those schools would receive less federal funding. The funding was scheduled to be released over six years but was interrupted by a change in government. This interruption was significant as two-thirds of the additional funding would have been allocated in the last two years of the set release period (Gavrielatos, 2022).

In April 2013, during an election year, the then Rudd-Gillard Australian Labor Party committed to providing $14.5 billion to the Australian states with a 65% to 35% contribution split between the federal and state governments (ABC News, 2013). The *Australian Education Act 2013* was enacted in June of that year to regulate Commonwealth funding to Australian schools, outlining conditions for distribution and the rights and responsibilities of those seeking access to said funds (Australian Education Act, 2013). Not all states or schooling sectors signed up immediately, and there were accusations of unfairness from the opposition parties. When the Abbot-led Liberal/National Coalition government came into power in September 2013, they re-committed to the funding promises but without the previous conditions. By November of that year, a new funding model had been announced.

Opponents of the Gonski model caution against the "self-evidently beneficial" (Gannicott, 2016, p. 16) nature of Gonski's recommendation. They note that on its own, the funding was inadequate to improve student learning outcomes (Joseph, 2017). Others praise Gonski for making "recommendations on funding [that] are worth supporting" despite limitations such as the "focus on schooling sectors" and "superficially [addressing] the problems

associated with social and educational segregation" (Kenway, 2013, p. 306). Gonski (2022) would later criticise his own report, particularly for putting a monetary figure on the funding and recommending payment to school systems. He reasons that by putting the $5 billion figure into the report, the resulting debate around the amount being excessive or insufficient became an unnecessary, regrettable distraction for people. Similarly, by focusing on school systems, there was an unfortunate departure from the original funding model to be needs-based and traceable to every student in every school (Gonski, 2022).

The new school funding reform was embodied in legislation that gave expanded power to the Australian Government. The *Australian Education Act 2013* seeks to provide for disadvantaged students in similar yet distinct ways to its American equivalent, the *No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (NCLB)*, with both acts addressing students' declining academic performance. Luke and Woods (2007) took a non-political approach to document their criticisms of the NCLB. They advised Australian policymakers to critically examine the past 5 years to avoid contradictory research findings such as those around reading and phonics instruction. In this example, the authors acknowledged the tendency in both Australia and the USA to promote the best way for literacy teaching without proper examination of contributing factors like access and student background.

New South Wales (NSW) was one of the first states to sign up to the proposed funding model. Subsequently, the NSW Government appointed instructional leaders to its schools, including "310 most socio-educationally disadvantaged [public] schools in the state" (Wyatt, 2017, p. 29). Through the Early Action for Success (EAfS), the strategy used by the NSW Government to implement its Literacy and Numeracy Plan (LNAP), children in the early years of school were targeted first. For Phase 1 (2012-2016) and then Phase 2 (2017-2020), the government committed more than $600 million towards improving literacy and numeracy in

NSW schools (NSWDEC, 2017). During the implementation phases, an increasing number of instructional leaders were employed. A NSW Department of Education report (NSWDEC, 2022) showed that instructional leadership had a positive impact despite disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The research supporting Gonski's findings noted four factors influencing student outcomes through additional funding: diagnostic assessment, differentiated teaching, targeted interventions, and instructional leadership (NSWDEC, 2017). These same four factors formed the key features of the EAfS. This study focused on the instructional leadership factor only, its specific relations to literacy, and examined how these instructional leaders described their lived experiences of coaching in literacy in Australian schools. Instructional leaders are considered to be "an effective strategy in schools wanting to improve the literacy . . . performance of their students" (NSWDEC, 2017, p. 4). In Australia, an instructional leader traditionally collaborates with the principal to create the literacy vision for the school. They also manage the literacy program, communicate its tenets to teachers and students, provide support (including professional learning opportunities), and evaluate its success (Wyatt, 2017). In these ways, instructional leaders provide non-traditional professional development for teachers. They are expected to be highly knowledgeable about literacy pedagogy and be acquainted with the latest research regarding its implementation (Munro, 2011a, 2011b). Both quantitative and qualitative research show that school leaders, particularly instructional leaders, have a positive impact on student learning outcomes (Bean et al., 2010; Hattie, 2015a; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson, 2007; Robinson et al., 2008; Wyatt, 2017). Findings also show that influential school leaders benefit from leadership coaching (Goff et al., 2014; James-Ward, 2013; Kelsen, 2011). The synthesis of research findings underscores the critical connection between effective instructional leadership, student achievement, and the added value of coaching in nurturing school staff.

As an acknowledgement of the varied nomenclature associated with the role of instructional leader across schools and states (Le Fevre, 2021), this study consistently adopted the term designated literacy leaders. This choice emphasises the function performed rather than relying on specific role titles. However, wherever a particular research is cited in this study, the original terminology will be upheld to maintain the integrity of the source publication.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

While the effectiveness of coaching in schools has garnered support over the years (Goff et al., 2014; James-Ward, 2013; Kelsen, 2011), further research would likely provide a more comprehensive understanding of coaching's impact and how users perceive its functionality. Investigating how coaching is implemented and perceived in a school context is important for understanding its overall effectiveness. This highlights the need for a nuanced exploration of coaching practices to comprehend better its varied dimensions and potential outcomes within the educational setting. Currently, the existing research is limited.

Wyatt (2017) provides helpful insight into instructional leaders' perceptions of their impact in Australian classrooms. His study reveals that instructional leaders perceive they have a noteworthy impact on teachers' use of students' data, instructional and assessment practices, and improving teacher capacity. However, Wyatt's (2017) study is limited in scope (K-2 instructional leaders only), sample size (NSW public schools), timeframe (done in 2017, shortly after the first 5-year plan) and context (one school). Recognising the importance of understanding and interpreting lived experiences, the study outlined in this thesis aims to provide an expanded understanding of literacy coaching in schools from those who both received and provided coaching. For this reason, nine (9) designated literacy leaders were chosen from across school sectors and school types in Australia. Participants involved in the study had themselves been

coached, though not necessarily in literacy and, as instructional leaders, were currently coaching other teachers in literacy.

The findings of this research will provide understanding and insights to stakeholders such as educational coaching providers, policymakers, and educational leaders to guide the design and implementation of coaching programs for designated literacy leaders that will further help them lead literacy development in their schools. Designated literacy leaders may also use the information in their reflection and evaluation processes following training. I hope researchers will replicate this study or find further gaps for their own original research.

1.3 Research Questions

Questions were formulated to align with the aim of this research study, and data were collected from a questionnaire, interviews, and documents supplied by participants. To elicit an extensive response from the leading research question, two sub-questions were framed as shown below:

Main question: What are the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in Australian schools?

Sub-questions:

1. How do designated literacy leaders describe the coaching they receive and implement in Australian schools?
2. What does coaching in literacy look like in Australian schools?

1.4 Researcher Positionality

During the annual staff appraisal with the school leadership team, I offered to use my growing interest, knowledge, and understanding of instructional coaching in schools to guide my peers toward building their capacity to meet the strategic goals set by the institution. Although I had never been professionally coached myself, I had embarked on a self-education path for at least a year prior. This journey included reading numerous journal articles on coaching in education, listening to relevant podcasts, attending online workshops and conferences, and actively building and engaging with professional networks in the field via social media platforms. As a result, I approached the role with genuine motivation to both share what I had learned and continue learning alongside my colleagues.

School leaders explained the new role to the secondary staff at the start of the new school year in 2020. I knew from experience that it would take significant effort and time to have staff see its value and be willing to participate. This was especially true because the school leaders had presented coaching as compulsory professional development for teachers. I had aspired to convince my peers to accept coaching rather than making it mandatory. Although the school had been promoting literacy across all key learning areas and collaborative practices for several years, uptake among secondary teachers had been slow. It was not common practice for secondary teachers to visit each other's classrooms, offer constructive feedback, or engage in professional conversations.

Coaching as a professional development option for upskilling teachers in the primary section of our K-12 school was already popular thanks to EAfS and LNAP funding. However, secondary teachers were reticent to become involved. I tried to be open and non-judgemental and demonstrated in words and actions that my role was not to judge or evaluate anyone's teaching but to support through collaboration, co-teaching, co-reflection and sharing research-based

literacy strategies. As I was also teaching four senior classes, I operated an open-door policy inviting my colleagues to observe and critique my practices. In this way, I strived to operate from a perspective of vulnerability and mutual trust.

Throughout the year, my superiors would meet with me to discuss, in general terms, the progress of the implementation of the instructional coaching. I wrote reports that focused on common areas of strengths and growth among teachers but avoided identifying individuals. As a coach, I was aware of the importance of the dynamics between leadership expectations and winning and maintaining the trust of the coachee teachers. It was challenging to balance these opposing expectations.

Approximately six months into my coaching experience, I was given the opportunity to be coached and benefitted from a few coaching sessions that year. My coach was new to coaching and was learning on the job. His approach was conversational where he would ask me a lot of questions about my job but did not give any feedback, emphasising that he was using a coaching method called the GROW method (Whitmore, 2002). He explained the acronym as follows: G for goal, R for reality, O for options, and W for will. Although I appreciated the opportunity to discuss my professional experience with my coach, I found the counselling style of the sessions less collaborative than I had imagined the experience would be.

My experience of coaching others and being coached ended one year before the data collection phase of this study; however, it is important to note the influence of these experiences. Undoubtedly, my experience of being coached and coaching others had a significant impact on my research positionality. These experiences influenced the way I approached and conducted my research, shaping my perspectives, biases, and overall approach to the study. Also, my experience as a coach reinforced my promise and commitment to maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants in my research. Just as I had refrained from identifying individuals

in my coaching reports to the senior leadership team at my school, I applied the same principle in my research to protect the trust and privacy of participants. This approach allowed me to align my research practices with the ethical considerations and professional standards of Avondale University under the guidance of my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) supervisors.

Overall, my experiences contributed to the ethical and methodological choices I made throughout the research process. For instance, my ontological and philosophical choices were motivated by a desire to be always mindful of the research participants' experiences that I was seeking to garner, acknowledging the inherent privilege involved in hearing their stories. These choices also helped me to engage reflexively with my pre-understandings, remaining open to shifts in perspective. Importantly, my experiences helped me to ensure a more comprehensive and empathetic understanding of the subject matter without compromising the validity of a qualitative study.

1.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter One provided a foundational introduction to the study, delving into the background and rationale for examining the lived experience of designated literacy leaders engaging in coaching within Australian schools. The chapter began with exploring the broader context, highlighting the general need to scrutinise the experiences of teachers engaging in coaching. The rationale showed the potential significance of the findings for professional development, offering insights to various stakeholders on the impact of coaching practices in schools. The chapter also presented the research questions, providing a roadmap for the subsequent investigation.

An important element integrated into Chapter One is a discussion on researcher positionality, recognising the personal and professional motivations for the study. The chapter strategically sets the stage for a review of extant literature covered in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

I think at the end of the day we are working with professionals, and I think it's important to acknowledge that . . . and to not treat them like children. So they are, you know, professionals and experts in their field – Paula

2.1 Introduction

In the field of education, a strong literacy foundation is regarded as an access point to knowledge acquisition for academic and life success (de Bruin et al., 2023; NSWDEC, 2017). However, underachievement in literacy has remained a persistent challenge in Australian schools (de Bruin et al., 2023; Duffy & Wylie, 2019). A notable response to this challenge has been coaching, a professional learning option that promises to support teachers in improving their teaching practices and, consequently, students' learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Pak, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018). The focus of this chapter is to review existing literature on these two pertinent areas of this research, namely coaching and literacy. The literature reviewed here explores the theoretical underpinnings and implications of literacy and coaching, examining the scholarly works of both national and international researchers. As set out in the rationale for this study, the experiences of coaching professionals are expected to provide an expanded understanding of how coaching in literacy works. Therefore, the literature review supports the aim of this project and highlights the existing gap in the literature on coaching in literacy in Australian schools.

To provide context for the study, the review begins with a brief discussion of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and its relationship to literacy and coaching in pre-service education. This is followed by an exploration of the necessity for professional development in schools, its function, and effectiveness. The review then examines the literature on coaching in education, including a definition of coaching as adopted within this project. Next is an examination of coaching theories, specifically adult learning theories, and an overview of

different coaching approaches and models. There is also a review of the literature on literacy with a focus on the Australian context. Several literacy theories are discussed within the context of learning theories. This is important because coaching theories and literacy theories are grounded in learning theories (Fazel, 2013; Handsfield, 2017) and are connected to practice. Nolan and Bridie (2015) highlighted this connection between theories and practice by suggesting that theories are formed from a set of principled ideas about "what learning could and should look like" (p. 5). When combined with "experience, thinking and understandings" (Nolan & Bridie, 2015, p. 5), these assumptions about learning are used to form theoretical perspectives and ultimately shape practice. Thus, as they design literacy programs and lead out in practice, designated literacy leaders should consider established learning theories as a viable way of selecting and evaluating other theories (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the intersectionality between literacy and coaching theories, focusing on adult learning theories as a basis for sustainable and meaningful professional development.

Arguably, over the past decade and a half, there has been a marked improvement in the quality and variety of research being conducted around coaching in schools, including research by Cornett and Knight (2009), Stringer and Barr (2022), and van Nieuwerburgh et al. (2019). Even so, the research on coaching in schools is limited, particularly around the lived experiences of those who receive and implement coaching. More research from broader contexts, such as the Australian context, is needed. This research study aims to help close that gap by adding to existing literature on coaching in Australian schools. To achieve this, the findings from nine participants from a cross-section of schools in three Australian states were analysed and presented in further chapters of this project.

2.2 Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Shulman (1986) introduced the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge

(PCK) as a distinct category of teacher knowledge that merges subject matter expertise with pedagogy to make content understandable for students. Content knowledge refers to the teacher's understanding of the subject matter itself, such as a mathematics teacher knowing the formulas and theorems related to mathematics. However, Shulman (1986) described PCK as a form of content knowledge that "goes beyond knowledge of subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge *for teaching"* (p. 9). In other words, PCK is the teacher's ability to translate content knowledge into effective teaching strategies.

Effective teaching necessitates the integration of both content knowledge (what to teach) and pedagogical knowledge (how to teach) (Shulman, 1986). This combination includes "the most useful forms of representation of the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations- in a word, the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" (Shulman, 1986, p. 9). In addition, he emphasised that teachers must be able to adapt teaching strategies to meet students' learning needs and address student misconceptions. Therefore, having deep subject knowledge alone is insufficient; teachers must also know how to make that knowledge accessible and meaningful for their students. This next section provides a brief discussion of the evolution of PCK in Australian education and the role of pre-service education in literacy knowledge acquisition and coaching.

2.2.1 The Evolution of PCK in Australian Education

In Australia, the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) has evolved alongside national curriculum reforms and global educational trends. Prior to the 1970s, teacher preparation primarily focused on content knowledge, with teacher education occurring through apprenticeships and teachers' colleges (Aspland, 2006; Knight, 2012; Taylor, 2019). During the 1970s and 1980s, influenced by international research, the focus shifted toward developing

practical teaching skills (Aspland, 2006). Due to its international reach, Shulman's (1986) foundational work on PCK likely contributed to the increasing focus on pedagogical practices in teacher education. By the end of the 1990s, national reforms such as the National Inquiry into Teacher Education (1980) and the Quality of Education Review Committee (1985), along with frameworks like the National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching (Australian Teaching Council, 1992), and the National Statement and Action Plan for Australian Education (MCEETYA, 1999), underscored the importance of building teacher knowledge. The introduction of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2010) in the 2000s further reinforced the relevance of PCK principles in promoting teacher efficacy. Recent reforms have expanded to address equity, diversity, culturally responsive pedagogy**,** and the integration of Indigenous perspectives (ACARA, 2020).

In line with these developments, the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2010; ACARA, 2012) has emphasised the importance of cross-curriculum literacy, with every subject teacher holding the responsibility for teaching literacy. This framework acknowledges that literacy knowledge should be integrated across all subject areas, and not just English. The idea is that every teacher, regardless of their subject area, plays a role in developing students' literacy skills. For instance, teaching science literacy involves helping students understand the specialised language and texts used in scientific inquiry, while history literacy requires skills in analysing and interpreting historical documents and narratives. The teacher's ability to adapt the content knowledge into effective teaching strategies so that it is accessible to students takes literacy content into the realm of PCK. Building on this, Love (2010) introduced Language/Literacy Pedagogical Content Knowledge (LPCK) into her university's Master of Teaching program for pre-service teachers in secondary education. This approach resulted in positive outcomes for pre-service teachers, improving both their literacy teaching and subject-specific instructional

practices. Reportedly, there was also increased awareness of how to teach literacy with greater confidence and an understanding of how literacy practices could support student engagement and outcomes. This aligns with Shanahan and Shanahan's (2012) disciplinary literacy, where the authors argued that teaching literacy in a discipline-specific context enhances students' ability to succeed in that discipline. This framework of LPCK and disciplinary literacy underscores the need for teacher education to equip future educators with both content knowledge and the pedagogical skills necessary to teach literacy within their subject areas, which is crucial for supporting student engagement and achievement across disciplines.

2.2.2 The Role of Pre-service Education in Literacy Pedagogical Content Knowledge (LPCK)

In the context of literacy instruction, the concept of LPCK reinforces the critical role of teachers' understanding of literacy fundamentals in advancing student literacy development. Research (Moats, 2020; Hammond, 2015) has demonstrated that teachers with robust knowledge of language constructs—such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and morphology—are more effective in teaching reading, leading to improved student outcomes. Conversely, teachers lacking this foundational knowledge and practical skills may struggle to deliver effective literacy instruction, potentially hindering student progress (Hammond, 2015; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011). Therefore, without significant reform, pre-service education may continue to fall short in preparing teachers to meet the literacy challenges in contemporary classrooms.

Despite the recognition of PCK and LPCK in teacher education, research indicates that teacher training programs are struggling to meet the identified need. Meeks and Kemp (2017) conducted a study of final-year early childhood and primary pre-service teachers across 16 Australian universities in five states. Their findings revealed inconsistencies in teacher education programs as well as significant discrepancies between pre-service teachers' confidence in their ability to teach early literacy and their actual knowledge and skills. While many of the study's

participants reported feeling prepared to deliver literacy instruction, assessments of their content knowledge revealed gaps in fundamental areas such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and morphology. Other studies have confirmed the existence of gaps between perceived and actual competence and teacher knowledge versus teacher practice in Australian pre-service teachers, highlighting the role teacher education providers can play in closing these gaps (Hammond, 2015; Bostock & Boon, 2012). Similarly, Moon's (2014) study of secondary teaching undergraduates at an Australian university revealed significant deficiencies in basic literacy skills, such as spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation, demonstrating the need for teacher education programs to offer a strong foundation in literacy alongside content knowledge. A later study by Moon, Harris, and Hays (2019) concluded that approximately one-third of the 393 participants were inadequately prepared to effectively teach content literacy. Building stronger personal literacy skills and offering more literacy training in their teacher education course emerged as important considerations for addressing this issue.

Binks-Cantrell, Washburn, Joshi, and Hougen (2012) studied pre-service and in-service teachers and found that many teacher candidates preparing to teach reading lacked the necessary depth of knowledge in the field of literacy. This gap led to a mismatch between their qualifications and their ability to effectively teach reading, reinforcing concerns about the preparedness of new teachers. The authors concluded that addressing gaps in teachers' own literacy knowledge is essential for improving teacher preparation programs and ultimately supporting student learning outcomes in literacy. Likewise, in a study investigating how educators' understanding of language and literacy influences their teaching practices in early childhood settings, Hammond (2015) found a significant gap between teachers' knowledge of literacy precursors and their ability to teach these skills explicitly. The study highlights the

importance of professional development to address teachers' knowledge deficits and enhance their ability to effectively plan and deliver teacher-directed literacy instruction.

The deficiencies highlighted in these studies demonstrate the need for teacher education programs to offer a strong foundation in literacy alongside content knowledge. These findings highlight the need for more rigorous and targeted literacy training in pre-service education programs to ensure that teachers develop the necessary pedagogical content knowledge to effectively support students' literacy development. If pre-service teachers themselves lack competency in literacy, their ability to teach it effectively to students is significantly compromised. The principle that educators cannot teach what they do not know is well-established in educational research (Shulman, 1986). Furthermore, despite excelling in theoretical knowledge, if pre-service teachers lack the practical ability and enthusiasm to implement effective teaching strategies, they may struggle to foster a strong literacy culture in their classrooms, a phenomenon known as the Peter Effect (Applegate et al., 2014). Without adequate training in literacy, teachers may unintentionally perpetuate poor literacy practices, leaving students ill-equipped to meet academic and professional literacy demands (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2020; Bostock & Boon, 2012; Meeks & Kemp, 2017). To address these challenges, it is important to explore targeted interventions that directly aim to enhance literacy teaching effectiveness.

Over the past decade and a half, several systemic efforts have been made to address gaps in teacher education and improve the quality of teaching in Australia. In 2012, a comprehensive document outlining the requirements for ITE programs to achieve national accreditation was published, demonstrating a clear commitment to improving education standards (AITSL, 2012). This was followed by a review of accreditation standards, which led to the phasing out of one-year postgraduate programs, replacing them with two-year Master's degrees, while

undergraduate teaching programs extended to four years (Department of Education and Training, 2015). In addition, the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG, 2014) published a report recommending reforms, particularly in literacy instruction. The report noted, "responses to a national survey of primary teachers in Australia indicated that, in almost all courses, less than 10 per cent of time in compulsory subjects is devoted to equipping pre-service teachers with an understanding of how to teach reading" (TEMAG, 2014, p. 22). A 2019 report further highlighted concerns about the adequacy of literacy instruction in ITE programs and called for urgent improvements (Five from Five, 2019). Together, these documents chronicle significant reforms and evaluations aimed at enhancing the quality and effectiveness of teacher preparation in Australia.

The implementation of targeted professional learning opportunities, such as online courses focused on the science of reading, is one approach being used to address these gaps in literacy pedagogical content knowledge (Snow et al., 2024). The Science of Reading (SoR) is a comprehensive body of interdisciplinary research that explains how children learn to read and what practices are most effective in teaching them (AERO, 2023). According to SoR, children learn to read through a combination of decoding and language comprehension, both of which must be explicitly and systematically taught (Seidenberg, 2017). Effective research-based practices will emphasise five key components: explicit phonics instruction, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, fluency building, and comprehension strategies (AERO, 2023; Buckingham, 2020b; Moats, 2020). These practices ensure that instruction is aligned with cognitive science and evidence-based research, offering a solid foundation for literacy learning.

Furthermore, the Teacher Education Expert Panel (2023) was established by the Australian Government to enhance initial teacher education (ITE) and ensure classroom-ready teachers were entering the workforce. As a key outcome of their Strong Beginnings report, the

panel recommended embedding “effective pedagogical practices” (Teacher Education Expert Panel, 2023, p. 9) as one of four types of core content in all ITE programs to strengthen teacher training and better prepare teachers for the classroom. This report was influenced by several federal government initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher education in Australia and addressing workforce challenges. Significantly, the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (Department of Education, 2022a) highlighted the need for reforms to better prepare teachers for the classroom. Consequently, in August 2022, the government convened the Teacher Workforce Shortage Roundtable (Department of Education, 2022b), comprising education ministers, teachers, principals, and other education experts to gather insights and propose solutions for attracting and retaining teachers.

2.2.3 Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and Coaching in Pre-service Education

As mentioned in this section, Shulman’s (1986) concept of PCK argued that effective teaching requires a deep understanding of how to teach, not just what to teach. The emphasis is on combining content knowledge with impactful teaching strategies. Coaching has been found to be an effective professional tool for improving teaching practices and helping teachers implement research-based strategies (Knight, 2009; Lofthouse, 2019a). Teachers who engage in coaching are led through reflective practices that can help them to better understand how to bridge content knowledge with effective pedagogical approaches to support student learning. Joyce and Showers (1982, 2002) found coaching to be one of the most effective ways to transfer new teaching strategies into classroom practice. They claimed teachers who received coaching were more likely to implement changes and show improvements in student outcomes, compared to those who only received one-time workshops or training sessions.

Coaching aligns with Guskey and Yoon’s (2009**)** elements of effective professional development because coaching is collaborative, relevant to the teacher’s needs and context,

incorporates active learning, and is sustained over a period of time. This means that coaching can have a positive impact on teachers' PCK, allowing them to gradually apply new strategies and reflect on their teaching. Kraft, Blazar, and Hogan's (2018) meta-analysis examined multiple studies on teacher coaching for content-specific and general pedagogical coaching. The findings demonstrated that content-specific coaching, particularly in subjects like literacy, had a more substantial impact on improving teachers' instructional practices. Coaching has proven effective in other subject areas, too (Witherspoon et al., 2021). Recent studies have provided evidence that coaching focused on content-specific pedagogical strategies can help teachers better teach reading and writing by refining their PCK in these areas. For instance, Behrstock-Sherratt and Cushing (2023) found that coaching in writing instruction significantly impacted teachers' confidence and instructional practices. According to Chapman, Muyskens, and Brown (2021), virtual coaching sessions contributed to notable improvements in teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching learners with English as a second language (ESL). Research consistently supports the idea that PCK is crucial for effective teaching, and coaching is an essential tool in helping teachers develop and refine their PCK.

The research on embedding coaching formally into pre-service teacher education programs in Australia remains limited. While coaching in pre-service education is developing internationally (Taylor et al., 2022; Songsiengchai, 2021; Hoffman et al., 2015), there is a noticeable gap in the Australian context. Mentoring of pre-service teachers for skill development is more prevalent and widely researched in Australia (Byth, 2025; James, 2020; Hudson, 2013a; Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). However, instructional coaching has been growing rapidly in professional learning for in-service teachers, especially in literacy and numeracy (Hammond & Moore, 2018; Wyatt, 2017), and this growth provides an opportunity for expanding coaching models into pre-service programs.

Stahl, Sharplin, and Kehrwald (2017) reviewed 25 studies on coaching in pre-service teacher education, noting a primary focus on enhancing teacher effectiveness or examining attitudes towards coaching. Their analysis revealed that coaching, particularly when personalised, was generally effective in supporting the development of teaching skills for pre-service teachers. The authors concluded that coaching "deserves a more prominent role in pre-service teacher education" (Stahl, Sharplin, and Kehrwald, 2017, p. 27). While acknowledging that coaching in this context is still in its early stages, the authors emphasised its value, particularly in promoting skill acquisition. However, they also pointed out that the potential of coaching in pre-service education remains "untapped and under-researched" (Stahl, Sharplin, and Kehrwald, 2017, p. 27). In a later study, Sharplin, Stahl, and Kehrwald (2019) highlighted how real-time coaching (RTC) can support the formation of professional identity, enabling pre-service teachers to confidently trial and refine new pedagogical approaches within a supported environment. As a practice-based approach, RTC is positioned as a promising innovation in teacher education that narrows the gap between theoretical coursework and practical application. Nonetheless, the authors caution that careful attention must be paid to ethical implementation, emotional readiness, and the mentoring relationship to ensure its effectiveness. This research contributes to the growing literature advocating for practice-oriented models in teacher education and supports the integration of coaching as a strategic tool for developing pedagogical competence.

Recent reports like Strong Beginnings (Teacher Education Expert Panel, 2023) recommend embedding evidence-based practices into ITE, suggesting that coaching strategies could play a central role in this effort. This could signal a shift toward more formal coaching-related practices in pre-service education. Additionally, some universities are exploring practice-based teacher education, which may incorporate coaching elements such as instructional rounds

(Gore et al., 2017). However, these practices remain in the early stages of adoption (Harrison et al., 2021) and more research into this area will provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and long-term impact on teacher development and student outcomes.

The previous section examined the influence of pre-service teacher education on the development of pedagogical content knowledge in coaching and literacy instruction. The next section shifts focus to the professional development of in-service teachers, exploring the role of ongoing learning opportunities in improving instructional practices and supporting the effective integration of coaching strategies within literacy education.

2.3 Professional Development in Schools

Teacher professional development (PD) has been a long-established practice in schools as a response to the need to provide teachers with continuous development of their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Many professionals, such as nurses, accountants, and lawyers, are also required to participate in PD to upskill for their roles or maintain their professional licenses. For teachers, PD is seen by some as "the only way" to improve teacher capacity and influence student learning outcomes (Mizell, 2010, p. 3). The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, introduced in 2011, outline the standards for graduate and proficient teachers as the basis for obtaining and maintaining certification as teachers (AITSL, 2011). These standards inform the professional development activities that teachers are engaged in, beginning at the initial teacher education (ITE) stage and continuing throughout a teacher's career. The different states' awarding bodies ensure that Australian teachers demonstrate the completion of mandated professional learning hours each year as part of the teacher registration process. Whether in formalised ways such as seminars or peer teaching or through informal encounters such as hallway conversations, the ultimate purpose of PD is to enhance students' learning outcomes by supporting teachers to improve their craft.

In their article on professional development, Luke and McArdle (2009) provided an overview of the changing nature of PD in the Australian context from a centralised to a more localised form. Such changes have brought about issues of accountability. The authors argued for using more research-based PD models so there is more accountability, given the substantial financial investment being made at the federal and state levels. Despite schools investing significant amounts of the funding they receive annually into providing PDs (Desimone, 2009), research shows that teachers do not always use the new knowledge and skills as intended (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Rucker (2018) has identified several reasons why traditional,

generic, formulaic approaches to PDs do not result in the intended or desired outcomes. These include insufficient teacher involvement, little opportunity for reflection on practice, content not connected with teacher context, and lack of post-PD instructional support. On effective professional development, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) have advocated for "adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect" (p. 3) so that new ideas can be translated into practice post-PD.

There is also the issue of PD being focused on priorities set by a system for a particular purpose (Luke & McArdle, 2009) instead of what teachers really need. Some consider traditional models of professional development a waste of resources and advocate for a different approach with more teacher input (Horn & Goldstein, 2022). For Bartz and Kritsonis (2019), the Individualised Professional Development approach, which is tailored to the specific needs of teachers, should replace traditional forms of PD. The authors recommended micro-credentialling as the way to achieve this personalised PD. Micro-credentialling refers to professional development that seeks to improve a teacher's specific area of growth need, is personalised, and can be done on demand; that is when the teacher can fit studying into their busy schedules (French & Berry, 2017). Others argue for quality PD that provides an opportunity for reflection and practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009) and is adequate to the needs of adult learners (Kleisch et al., 2017; Smith, 2017). Despite flaws in the implementation (Rucker, 2018), the general need for and benefits of continuous professional development in schools are well-supported by research (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2002; Gore, 2021; Mizell, 2010; Paulina, 2008).

Gundry and Robison (2007) have implied that the need for professional development in the teaching profession would be ongoing and incomplete because "teaching is an unfinished profession" (p. 146). The insinuation here is that throughout their careers, the process of

becoming a better teacher and improving one's skills will never really be finished. There will always be new things to learn, new ways to connect with students and new teaching techniques. Therefore, the idea is that professional development for teachers is an unending journey because there is always room for growth and improvement. Teachers will always be learning and developing their craft. Gundry and Robison (2007) also related how common it has been for Australian public schools to begin the school year with PD activities for both novice and experienced teachers. This practice demonstrates "its ongoing importance through a teacher's career" (Gundry & Robison, 2007, p. 147). Phillips (2008) underscored that this investment in teachers is not only "critical for improving and maintaining teacher quality" (p. 37) but also for achieving improved student learning outcomes. This statement highlights the interdependence between teacher professional development and student achievement. Moreover, the assertion suggests that teachers are the primary drivers of students' academic achievement. Therefore, investing in teachers through professional development initiatives, such as coaching, can result in improved student learning outcomes.

Gundry and Robison (2007) have outlined three functions of professional development: acquiring new knowledge and skills (extension), renewing existing qualifications, and growing expertise. In an ever-changing world, teachers must develop their practice so they can meet the complex needs of students. Moreover, PDs help teachers to meet the national professional teaching standards. Furthermore, well-targeted PDs provide the opportunity for teachers to develop their expertise in an area of interest. In each of these functions, teachers become learners propelled by personal and systemic drivers, such as the ageing of a profession that struggles with teacher retention (Gundry & Robison, 2007). Therefore, school leaders take care that the professional development opportunities they offer are relevant. From Phillips' (2008) work, one can summarise that professional development must be relevant in at least three ways. It must be

contextualised to the individual and the school; recognise that adults are resourced with past knowledge and experience; and offer supportive, ongoing practice of new skills and knowledge. Phillips (2008, p. 38) further explained that the inability to "[link] the principles to practice in the classroom" serve as barriers to the effectiveness of adult professional learning programs. Therefore, creating a supportive environment for practice involves a recognition of the risk teachers take when engaging in professional dialogue and reflection, especially if the reflection is being done collaboratively.

A review of 43 articles from international periodicals about teachers' professional development in schools and its impact on school improvement illustrated the importance of a collaborative approach (Postholm, 2018). In this approach, teachers (the subject) must feel that they are an essential part of the school (the community) for professional development (the object) to be effective in changing classroom practice. The research highlighted that through collaborative practices, schools may avoid PDs becoming an infrequent event rather than the "forceful expansive learning process" (Postholm, 2018, p. 17) that it can be. Moreover, studies have shown that when teachers collaborate, the result is better teaching and improved student learning (Hattie, 2015b; Mofield, 2020; Muckenthaler et al., 2020), which are the ultimate aims of professional development. Notwithstanding, understanding the complex nature of collaboration (Hargreaves, 2019) is crucial to PD choice and school improvement.

Where the professional development takes place also impacts whether school staff utilises the new knowledge and skills. Mizell (2010) advocated for PD activities to occur at school because they are "most effective when it occurs in the context of educators' daily work" (p. 7), where the application can be instantaneous. An evaluation report about the Australian Government's Quality Teaching Program, established in 2000 to provide professional development for teachers, confirmed that mutual collaboration, at-school location and a problem-

focused approach to PD were identified as strengths by teachers (Ewing et al., 2004). Job-embedded coaching was recognised as an effective element of teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) and a beneficial collaborative way of improving teaching and learning (Mofield, 2020).

Professional development is not just a requisite but a mandated activity for teachers in Australian schools (AITSL, 2011). However, the mode of professional learning a teacher engages in is not specified by mandate. In Australia, there continues to be an extensive involvement of teachers in professional learning, with a high participation rate. However, this is offset by a limited number of days dedicated to PD (AITSL, 2017, 2023; Freeman et al., 2014). Coaching remains a prevalent professional development activity, which, combined with mentoring, was reported by 39% of Australian teachers as an activity they were engaged in over the past 12 months (AITSL, 2023). While this 2022 data exceeds the averages of OECD and PISA, there has been a slight decline since 2017, possibly attributable to the increased reliance on online professional development due to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (AITSL, 2023). Nevertheless, a systematic review of 125 studies conducted between 2010 and 2022 across multiple countries, including Australia, revealed that coaching is one of the most usual forms of PDs undertaken by teachers (Ventista & Brown, 2023). This is especially true for primary school teachers.

There has been a steady growth of coaching used in schools as a specialised form of professional development to improve student outcomes by building teacher capacity (Netolicky, 2016). Knight (2009) identified literacy, cognitive, and instructional coaching as common coaching approaches in schools. Knight (2009) described cognitive coaching as the use of dialogue, observation, questioning, and relationship to get coachee teachers “to reflect deeply on their practice” (p. 18). On the other hand, instructional coaching was characterised as a

partnership relationship that focuses on the coachee teacher's instructional practices. Although literacy coaching is used to refer to "teachers' practices and student learning related to literacy" (Knight, 2009, p. 18), Knight acknowledged the similarities between the three approaches. These shared attributes emphasise a focus on professional practice, are intensive and ongoing, and are embedded within the job. They are nonevaluative, confidential, dialogical, and grounded in a partnership that is facilitated through respectful communication (Knight, 2009). This understanding of coaching aligns with Guskey and Yoon's (2009) model of effective professional development, which highlights the importance of learning that is site-based, connected to school reform initiatives, and supported through structured follow-up—key features that are also central to effective coaching.

This study adopts a holistic perspective by refraining from making substantive distinctions between literacy, cognitive, and instructional coaching. Instead, the focus lies on coaching within schools around literacy, whether it is called instructional, cognitive, literacy coaching or is a combination of different approaches or models. This approach is adopted to ensure an inclusive examination that captures the broader impact of coaching on literacy practices, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the collective benefits of coaching in schools without narrowing the focus to specific labels or distinctions.

Evidence from international and local research suggests that while coaching in schools is not a guaranteed solution, it remains a promising professional development activity. In a review of 35 studies aimed at discerning effective professional development features, Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardener (2017) found a positive correlation between teacher professional development, teaching practices, and student outcomes. Notably, coaching emerged as one of the key features contributing to the positive relationship between professional development and its impact on both teaching and student outcomes. The authors highlighted one-

on-one instructional coaching as an impactful model due to its personalised, job-embedded support for teachers in their own classrooms. A notable example from the review is a study on a literacy coaching model for early childhood teachers, as cited by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardener (2017). This model began with a two-day orientation of program introductions and trust-building exercises between the coach and the teachers, followed by in-person or remote fortnightly coaching sessions. The in-person contact consisted of 90-minute classroom observations and 30-minute debrief sessions with oral and written feedback. For the remote coaching, the teachers submitted 15-minute video clips for which they received feedback. The coaching program lasted for one semester, resulting in 16 hours of workshops and seven coaching sessions. A two-year randomised control trial found that this coaching approach was highly effective in improving children's early literacy skills (Powell et al., 2010, as cited in Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardener, 2017). This suggests that coaching can play a pivotal role in enhancing educational practices and student achievement.

Similarly, Cornett and Knight's (2009) review of more than 250 publications revealed that teachers who underwent instructional coaching as a follow-up to a high-quality workshop had an 85% skill transfer rate. In other words, they were notably more likely to implement the new skills acquired during their professional development compared to those who did not have the support of a coach. This is due to what Eisenberg et al. (2017) described as "real-time, side-by-side support" (p.48) because teachers can instantly reflect on and modify their teaching methods with the coach's support. Cornett and Knight (2009) summarised that coaching is most effective when it is collaborative, embedded in teacher's daily practices, and sustained. Although the review does not directly address literacy coaching, these principles suggest that coaching can be an effective method for improving instructional practices in literacy and other subject areas.

A recent study by Warnock, Gibson-Sweet, and van Nieuwerburgh (2022) adds to the growing body of research focused on understanding teachers' perceptions of the benefits of instructional coaching. By conducting eleven semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers in the United Kingdom, the researchers found that coaching positively impacted teachers in five key areas: improved relationships, increased awareness, greater reflectiveness, enhanced practice, and a more positive attitude. The latter benefit, which involved increased confidence and motivation, was an unexpected yet significant finding. While the small sample size limits the generalisability of the findings, this research provides valuable insights into the experiences of the coachees, which is often under-explored. The study's implications suggest that coaching can be a valuable tool for supporting educators and that further exploration of its benefits should be considered by educational leaders and policymakers.

In a study involving eight schools on the North Island of New Zealand, Bennett (2022) explained how school leaders opted for coaching as the primary professional learning approach to support their teachers and improve student learning outcomes. The aim was to ensure that every teacher in the identified schools would benefit from coaching, whether they were recent graduates or had been teaching for decades. While the participants largely reported that the coaching was successful, a minority of participants reported minimal impact on student learning outcomes. Success was shown to be dependent on several factors, including coaching practices, contextual factors within each school, and leadership support. Importantly, coaching had a positive impact when it was tailored to teachers' needs and done in supportive, collaborative environments. While the study did not specifically focus on literacy coaching, the findings suggest that coaching can be effective in teaching practices when challenging factors such as time constraints, resources, and sustaining momentum are addressed.

In Australia, Dr Mark Dowley's experience at a Melbourne school underscores the transformative potential of coaching. Dowley, in a podcast interview with Reid (2022), described how his school utilised a blend of facilitative coaching known as GROWTH (Growth, Reality, Options, Will, Tactics, Habits) coaching as well as instructional coaching approaches. This combination brought about a marked improvement in staff relationships, school culture, teaching and coaching skills, and, importantly, student learning outcomes. The transformative change unfolded over several years of regular, fortnightly coaching sessions, which began with coachees who were willing to participate. These scheduled coaching sessions were regulated by a curriculum map that emphasised the skills and knowledge of coaching and instructional practice (Reid, 2022). In another local study involving 14 participants from a pre-kindergarten to Year 12 school, similar findings emerged (Netolicky, 2016). The study, which investigated the implementation of cognitive coaching combined with the Danielson Framework of Teaching, revealed that reflective practice and collaborative dialogue between coaches and teachers can lead to professional growth. The findings suggest that implementing such coaching models can result in significant shifts in teaching practices and school cultures, metaphorically described as "oil in water" to show the subtle yet far-reaching influence of coaching on professional development.

The literature reviewed in this section showcases the versatility and effectiveness of coaching in diverse school settings, emphasising its potential to positively impact professional development, teaching practices, and, ultimately, student learning outcomes. Given that traditional workshop-style PD rarely results in skill transfer (Knight, 2011), the job-embedded nature of coaching presents itself as a more conducive approach (Knight, 2009).

Also significant to any discussion about coaching in schools is an acknowledgement of the role trust plays for that practice to be effective. Without trust, the coaching process may

encounter barriers that impede its effectiveness. Research supports the essential role trust plays in creating a conducive school environment for coaching practices (Eisenberg et al., 2017; Finkelstein, 2016, 2019). Trust is fundamental for fostering open communication, establishing a collaborative relationship between coaches and coachees, and creating a safe space for professional growth (Finkelstein, 2016, 2019). Likewise, the significance of school leaders in allocating uninterrupted, scheduled coaching sessions that prioritise confidentiality and avoid punitive measures for participants is consistently emphasised in research (Eisenberg et al., 2017). To continue the discussion on coaching in schools as a professional development option, the upcoming section begins by establishing a definition of coaching utilised within this study. This is followed by an examination of the literature on coaching in schools. Then, there is a discussion of relevant coaching theories and some of the popular coaching approaches and models used in education.

2.4 Coaching

2.4.1 Coaching Definitions

The word coaching derives from ‘coach’ used in several European languages in the 16th Century, such as French ‘coche’ or Hungarian ‘koczi’, to refer to a carriage that transported people from one place to another (Hoad, 1996). It was also used colloquially to refer to a private university tutor who supported a pupil to improve their learning. The understanding and use of the word coaching have undergone some terminological evolution. However, central to its definition has always been the concept of a supportive relationship and the idea of getting someone from one point to another. Throughout its evolution, different terms have been used synonymously to refer to the coaching relationship: guide, adviser, teacher, counsellor, and mentor (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), with mentor being the most common.

In contemporary understandings, commonly used definitions of coaching come from several fields, such as sports, business, psychology (counselling and mentoring), medicine, and education. A challenge of this study was that there is no universally accepted definition of coaching and, as a result, there is a divergence of definitions and approaches (Yossi, 2008) even within a particular field. For instance, Landreville et al. (2019) discussed the "conceptual tension" in coaching within the medical field and claimed there is a lack of "a clear operational definition that is relevant to both education researchers and frontline clinicians" (p. 110). This lack of clarity can lead to confusion and hamper efforts to effectively implement and evaluate coaching in the medical field. Therefore, the authors advanced the concept of coaching in this field as "a process that guides a learner towards performance improvement" that would go beyond feedback to include "practical suggestions for improvement" (p. 109). This performance approach to coaching is similar to that seen in sports coaching, where a coach supports an athlete's mental health (Mazzer et al., 2012) and improves their motivation (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Interestingly, research shows there is a reciprocal effect of this coaching relationship so that these coaches are also being professionally developed through evidence-based practices (Bissett et al., 2020; Breslin et al., 2017).

Coaching in business began with the humanist movement of the 1960s, which focused on helping people reach their full potential so that the organisation's goals could be achieved and their effectiveness could be improved (Stern, 2004). However, coaching would not gain popularity for another three decades. Instead, mentoring through counselling by trained psychologists (Sperry, 1993) was being offered to leaders so they could more confidentially communicate their work-related issues. Grant (2017), in a case study on leadership coaching, presented that the first noticeable inception of coaching began in the 1990s and was focused on managing the performance of executives who were already having difficulties. The first decade

of this century saw the second generation, which "attempted to be a more humanistic, goal-focused version of performance management conversations" centred around coaching conversations (Grant, 2017, p. 41). However, with its variety of coaching methodologies, this approach was inflexible in structure and jargonised. Moreover, the emphasis on sit-down meetings was a continuation of the first-generation structure that did not seem to suit busy leaders.

The third generation of coaching, since 2010, has continued the focus on performance while integrating a focus on well-being. Importantly, this iteration of coaching aims "to give leaders and managers the tools and skills so that they can coach employees (and themselves) into . . . the space of sustainable high performance . . . [where there is a] culture of quality conversations, . . . where performance and developmental conversations are the everyday norm" (Grant, 2017, p. 45). This is also where "authenticity, realism and self-congruency are . . . vital parts of the coaching conversation" (Grant, 2017, p. 48). Cheliotes and Reilly (2018) further elaborated on these coaching conversations, characterising them as intentional interactions that "focus on the other person – her strengths and her challenges and the attributes she brings to the conversations" (p. 3). Drawing parallels with coaching in sports, there is a growing body of research into coaching within businesses as diverse as healthcare and finance that extols its transformative power on leaders. Several scholars (Ballesteros-Sánchez et al., 2019; Dippenaar & Schaap, 2017; Goleman et al., 2012; Reyes Liske & Holladay, 2016) have explored the impact of coaching on leaders and organisations, highlighting coaching's capacity to impact leadership and drive organisational change.

While there is no universal consensus or single definition of coaching that spans all fields, a commonly accepted definition describes coaching as "unlocking people's potential to maximize their own performance" (Whitmore, 2002, p. 8). Similarly, coaching is seen as "the

practice of providing deliberate support to another individual to assist him/her in clarifying and/or achieving goals" (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 5). Keywords or phrases in these definitions are "unlocking potential", "maximize performance", "deliberate support", and "assist". These words collectively demonstrate that although it is the coachee's responsibility to reach their highest potential, they are being supported and guided, without being directed about what to do, think, or how to act. These are valuable insights because, in school environments, coaching is increasingly being seen as one of the best supportive practices in professional learning (Marzano & Simms, 2013).

Notably, the definitions above also encapsulate well the main definition of coaching in education selected for use in this research: "instructional coaches partner with teachers to help them improve teaching and learning so students can become more successful" (Knight, 2018, p. 4). Knight's definition was chosen for this project for its clarity and explicit focus on the professional development of teachers for the ultimate benefit of students. The use of the word partner holds particular significance in this definition, allowing for a flexible and contextual approach to how schools organise and deliver coaching. This implies that a school's coaching approach can take various forms, including directive, facilitative, or dialogical (Knight, 2021b), depending on the unique needs and context of each school. By emphasising the collaborative nature of coaching and allowing for contextual flexibility, this definition resonates with the multifaceted and evolving nature of the educational landscape.

This project also partially relied on a secondary definition of coaching in education, particularly in the initial stages of the study. The significance of incorporating this definition lies in the nuanced elements it highlights, providing a detailed understanding of coaching dynamics.

> A one-to-one conversation that focuses on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach

> facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate. (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012, p. 17)

Van Nieuwerburgh's definition enriches the understanding of coaching interaction by delineating its fundamental activities as highlighted by the verbs: question, listen, challenge, support, and encourage. These verbs illuminate the dynamic and interactive nature of coaching, portraying it as a tailored and collaborative process geared towards promoting self-directed learning and personal development.

The definitions explained in this section highlight an approach that empowers coachees with confidence, passion, curiosity, and the space for reflective practice. By incorporating both the primary and secondary definitions, this study establishes a foundation for replicability. This dual-definition framework ensures a comprehensive understanding of coaching dynamics, contributing to the study's methodological robustness. Moreover, the definitions are coachee-focused, personalised, supportive, and focused on an individualised professional development process. Even so, an overview of coaching definitions necessitates addressing the distinction between coaching and mentoring.

It is not uncommon for coaching and mentoring in schools to be considered interchangeable practices, but there are important differences between the two. Allison and Harbour (2009) described the mentor/coach dichotomy in this way: "coaching is not about telling, it is about asking and focusing. That is what separates mentoring from coaching" (p. 2). Coaching relies on the coach using a combination of predominantly open-ended questions in a way that invites the coachee to reveal their personal and professional goals and ways to achieve these goals. The practice of coaching determines that the coach does not simply offer a solution but helps the coachee become more self-aware so that the coachee can arrive at their own

solutions. The coach does not simply tell the coachee what to do or think even if that would be the simpler option. Considering coaching is focused on the individual's performance, the practice is time-bound and the coachee is often aware of an end-date for the relationship. In these ways, coaching is shown to be a self-directed yet supportive practice that is "non-hierarchical and does not depend on any expert/subject specific knowledge" (Allison & Harbour, 2009, p. 2). Furthermore, Knight (2007) has purported that the growing interest in instructional coaching is due to its impact on teacher quality and the ineffectiveness of traditional professional development.

Despite new and complex definitions of mentoring being put forward (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2019), the traditional understanding of a mentor is a person who has committed to nurturing the professional growth of a less experienced colleague, providing them not only with guidance, attentive listening, and advice but also a consistent presence throughout their professional development (Heery & Noon, 2017). This understanding demonstrates mentoring's focus on personal development instead of performance, its use of an informal structure, and its long-term timeframe (Zust, 2017), which, although a supportive relationship, is rather directive. Mentoring is also inherently hierarchical and relies on one individual being an expert or more experienced and the other being a novice. However, the practice of mentoring also uses similar skills that are essential in coaching, such as listening and questioning (Lofthouse et al., 2020).

Despite their distinctiveness, research shows that both coaching and mentoring are effective ways for schools to provide teachers with curriculum support and create professional conversational spaces (Lofthouse, 2019). Regarding the primary school context, Lofthouse et al. (2020) expounded upon the distinctions between coaching and mentoring, positing that the two practices were "different, but not wholly distinct" (p.78). Consequently, the authors advocated for an embracing or co-existence of both practices, demonstrating through the experiences of

others that sometimes the demarcation between the two is indistinct during interactions. It is noteworthy that, concerning coaching, cautionary measures were emphasised to ensure that it remains a supportive tool rather than one that could be wielded abusively, particularly when addressing teacher underperformance.

Both mentors and coaches have been used in schools as part of professional development and school improvement. A three-year study involving six (6) experienced Australian principals demonstrated the benefits of coaching and mentoring when used collaboratively and contextually (Moyle, 2016). In school settings, mentors support mentees in understanding how to navigate the school's teaching and learning environment. This usually involves an experienced teacher, often a departmental head teacher, who acts as a guide for an early career teacher or pre-service teacher. Research showing the successful use of mentoring for pre-service and early career teachers is plentiful (Hudson, 2013b; Paris, 2013). However, mentoring pre-service and early career teachers is sometimes complex, as shown in a mixed methodology study of selected Catholic schools in Western Australia (Topliss, 2020). The researchers found that the lack of a mentoring framework can affect the mentoring outcome. Earlier, Salter (2015) questioned the reliance on mentoring for pre-service teachers. This focus on mentoring early-career individuals instead of coaching them is not only school-based but also happens in business (Clutterbuck, 2009). Another pertinent issue with mentoring is its appropriateness for highly experienced teachers who require upskilling in a particular area. In a study of seven experienced secondary public school teachers, mentoring was described as successful (Jewell, 2007). The teachers chose to be mentored in the first place and had specific issues they wanted to resolve. The research showed that these teachers were able to develop both professionally and personally due to factors including knowledgeable colleagues with expertise in an area of recognised need. Research into mentoring of experienced teachers was challenging to locate.

Coaching and mentoring are both valuable approaches for maintaining teacher efficacy; however, there are potential advantages of the former in schools. In particular, instructional coaches "partner with teachers to analyse current reality, set goals, identify and explain teaching strategies to meet goals, and provide support until the goals are met" (Knight, 2018, p. 3). To put it differently, coaching aims to achieve specific objectives by pinpointing deficiencies and devising approaches to accomplish set targets or goals. From this, it can be deduced that when it comes to upskilling in a particular area of curriculum, such as literacy, coaching seems to have an advantage for the experienced teacher.

This study seeks to make a distinction between mentoring and coaching. Coaching's emphasis on developing the individual personally and professionally is arguably a better fit for the school environment, which is dynamic and complex. This does not decrease the benefit or importance of mentoring but rather elevates the unique perspective of coaching. Therefore, in this study, whenever coaching is mentioned, it is in distinct contrast to mentoring, which, although prevalent in schools, is more focused on career transitions than performance. Hirsh (2011) advised that "organizations must . . . focus on coaching" (p. 7), which has been justified by studies as an effective way to develop leadership capacity in school leaders, including new principals (Ezaki, 2015; Turnbull et al., 2015; Wells, 2014). This support is invaluable when transitioning from teaching to administration (Bloom et al., 2005; Simon et al., 2019), which is where most coaches in schools operate. Although the findings of the studies cited in this section show a positive correlation between coaching and teacher capacity, further research is needed to understand the lived experiences of those teacher-leaders who receive coaching and then coach others. For this reason, this current project aims to examine the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive coaching in schools and how that impacts the way they lead classroom literacy teachers.

2.4.2 Coaching in Education

Coaching in education is an outgrowth of the third generation of business coaching and emerged in response to the need for more relevant professional development for existing school leaders (Bloom et al., 2005; Goff et al., 2014; James-Ward, 2013; Moyle, 2016) and to cultivate a continuum of capable future leadership (Blackman, 2010; Creasy & Paterson, 2005; Gray, 2018). The past two decades have witnessed a surge in educational research highlighting the positive influence of school leaders on improving student learning outcomes (Bachkirova et al., 2014; Copland, 2003; Fullan, 2010; Kraft et al., 2018; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008; Stringer & Barr, 2022). Likewise, an increasing body of evidence demonstrates the beneficial impact of coaching on student engagement and achievement (Kelsen, 2011; Shidler, 2009). A growing corpus of research shows the benefits of coaching for teacher professional development (Joyce & Showers, 1982; Knight, 2009; Lofthouse, 2019a). These compelling outcomes have led to coaching being more widely used for school improvement and professional development.

To delve into the multifaceted realm of coaching in schools, this sub-section begins by exploring international research, shedding light on both its complexity in use and its far-reaching landscape. This is followed by an examination of regulation in coaching and the absence or presence of national frameworks to guide coaching practice in school systems. An overview of major challenges and controversies with school coaching is also provided.

Schools are complex and dynamic. Likewise, coaching within schools is complex and dynamic, as evident in a qualitative study carried out by Lofthouse (2019a). A focus group approach was used to collect data from six United Kingdom (UK) education coaches about their experiences. The data was then categorised and analysed in themes. The findings showed that the best results are achieved when coaching is used intentionally and purposefully to deal with

"authentic challenges, professional interests and dilemmas" (Lofthouse, 2019a, p. 33). The author also suggested that coaching could be used to deal with teacher and leadership attrition, which are also serious issues in the Australian education system (Trent, 2019; Weldon, 2018). The implication is that coaching provides multifaceted benefits that go beyond individual professional development, addressing broader organisational and systemic concerns.

Duron-Lara (2019) researched six elementary instructional coaches in the United States of America (USA) using a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher analysed findings that showed positive results when instructional coaches collaborated with teachers to support teacher professional reflection. The evidence demonstrated that when the coaches used reflective practices, this impacted how they coached. For instance, they self-reflected on their conversations with teachers and this helped them to build trust and adopt a facilitative approach to coaching. The coaches' self-reflection also resulted in them changing their instructional practice when dealing with reluctant coachees. In the end, the coaches could relate that their experience resulted in personal growth and transformation.

A study in New Zealand (NZ) secondary schools (Bennett, 2019) validated international findings of the benefits of teacher coaching but called for further specific research to be done in secondary schools to assess the impact. The study demonstrated that coaching is widely used in NZ secondary schools in varied ways and for various reasons. In many instances, coaching is funded by the government and, in some cases, by the schools, with many coaches chosen from existing lead teachers. Although differing perspectives exist about what teacher coaching truly is, its different uses include supporting new teachers and whole-staff professional development. Bennet (2022) advised school leaders to "be aware of the concept of teacher coaching [as] a social construct that is influenced by its unique environmental context and the individual

perceptions of those involved" (p. 81). This guidance highlights coaching as a dynamic and contextually-embedded process within schools. It is also clear that the school environment, including its culture, structure, and resources, will shape coaching's implementation and impact. Furthermore, there has been a warning about a potential conflict of interest when a leader, such as a head of a faculty, is used as both a teacher's coach and appraiser (Lofthouse, 2019a).

This concept of coaching as a social construct is evident in the Australian study carried out by Hammond and Moore (2018) in an urban primary school where the practice-based researchers led a directive approach in a school focusing on explicit instruction. After ten hours of professional learning about the area of focus (explicit instruction), the coaching intervention began. One of the authors acted as an external expert or specialist coach, while three school leaders were assigned observation roles. The coachees felt that the feedback they received was supportive because it was "specific and targeted, [. . .] overwhelmingly positive and rarely didactic" (Hammond & Moore, 2018, p. 127). The findings indicated that most teachers perceived their coaching in explicit instruction as valuable despite their initial negative perception of the impact of coaching on their pedagogy, efficacy, and student learning outcomes.

These four studies, across four countries, show that coaching in education is used for a plethora of purposes, for vastly different reasons, and across different school sectors and types as a value-added professional development strategy. Despite this, while coaching has been steadily increasing in education and other areas in Australia, there is growing concern about its unregulated nature (Spence et al., 2006). In particular, concern is growing regarding coaches' qualifications and the shortage of empirical research that focuses on coaching methodologies (Frost & Bean, 2006; Grant, 2006). Frost and Bean (2006) observed that the United States' approach to meeting the pressing need for highly skilled literacy teachers was to employ literacy coaches. Unlike other school professionals, literacy coaches come with a variety of professional

experiences, certifications, and training that are ambiguous. Despite the unregulated nature of their qualifications and concerns about implementation and preparedness, schools have chosen to move forward with these literacy coaches. There seems to be the expectation that universities and other governing bodies will develop relevant training programs. Similarly, Gallant (2011) shared the results of a 2010 pilot study conducted in Canada on coaching capacity within the Nova Scotia community and school system. The study showed that there are few qualifications required to become a school coach. The United Kingdom (UK) is not very different. UK studies of sports coaches show that coaches perceive formal coaching education courses as limited but useful (Nash & Sproule, 2012) when they are "open and discursive" (Piggott, 2012, p. 535). Researchers have an opportunity to explore the area of regulation and qualification of coaches in education and other fields.

Although there is a dearth of research about coaching qualification and its regulation, there is more clarity about coaches' characteristics. In an analysis of the characteristics of effective literacy coaches, Coskie et al. (2005) provided four essentials. The authors pointed out that the ability to support teachers while building trusting relationships, knowledge of literacy, and the ability to demonstrate content through literacy skills are three important characteristics. The fourth characteristic is the coach acknowledging that they, too, are learners and taking intentional steps to co-create a coaching environment. No mention was made of specific coaching qualifications. Coaches seemed to be mostly former classroom teachers who have been highly effective in their craft (Reddy et al., 2019) and possess university degrees. In an American survey of middle and high school literacy coaches, Blamey et al. (2008) reported that the vast majority of respondents (94%) held undergraduate degrees in three fields: English education, elementary education, or non-education fields. Of those surveyed, 76% had state certification, 48% held reading specialist certification, and 40% had a master's degree in literacy. On average,

the coaches had 19 years of teaching experience in the classroom, ranging from 2 to 40 years. No mention was made of specific coaching qualifications.

In certain countries, national frameworks or templates have been created to offer a helpful structure for conducting coaching, which serves as a guide for both coaches and coachees. In 2005, the UK's Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) published the findings of research and consultation in the form of a national framework called the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (CUREE, 2005). Commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the five-page Framework contains a set of principles, core concepts, and skills for effective mentoring and coaching programs in schools. The Framework is not a coaching model and is not prescriptive. Its declared purpose is to guide schools that want to utilise coaching as a continuing professional development option to impact student outcomes. Despite a wide search, no national frameworks for coaching in education used in Australia were identified. However, other frameworks exist within education. An example is The Global Framework for Coaching and Mentoring in Education developed to integrate research into practice (van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2019). More recent studies have recommended new approaches to coaching education that include dialogue and reflection as part of the practice (Cope et al., 2021; Voldby & Klein-Døssing, 2019). Despite the growth of coaching in sports and education, gaining formal academic qualifications is not mandated. In fact, "there are no nationally approved qualifications or standards for coaches working in educational contexts" in the United Kingdom (Lofthouse, 2019, p. 33) or in Australia. Frost and Bean (2006b) recounted the challenges in the American situation where qualified literacy coaches were not always available, and there was a fear that those employed in the position were not sufficiently qualified. Other challenges and controversies regarding coaching in schools exist.

Knight and van Nieuwerburgh (2012) identified three challenges with coaching in schools. The first challenge concerns the use of the terms mentoring and coaching interchangeably, which results in confusion. Research carried out by Hussey and Campbell-Meier (2021) acknowledged this confusion in a study of librarians from Canada, the USA, and New Zealand. The study demonstrated that mentoring and coaching are related yet distinct approaches. Confusion between the two may lead a person to seek out one approach when the other is more suitable for the purpose. Therefore, the difficulty to properly define and differentiate coaching affects not only theory but also praxis. The second challenge identified is the difficulty that occurs when the manager or leader is also the coach. Knight and van Nieuwerburgh (2012) emphasised the tension between coaching and performance management, particularly when a school leader assumes the role of a coach. The tension arises because the two roles require different approaches. When a school leader also performs the role of the coach, the question might arise about how to achieve a partnership approach that is based on elements such as equality and choice, as advocated by Knight (2007). A review of the literature by Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh (2014) highlighted the important role school leaders play in creating the right conditions for coaching in schools. The third and final challenge raised by Knight and van Nieuwerburgh (2012) concerns the lack of evidence-based coaching models in schools. This challenge reflects a gap in research and practice thereby showcasing the need to develop and validate coaching frameworks that are grounded in empirical evidence and tailored to the unique needs and context of schools.

Further to the aforementioned challenges, in a study carried out about recurring conflicts in coaching, Finkelstein (2016) identified a lack of trust, which creates tension, as a significant challenge in the coaching process. Finkelstein (2019) then researched building trust between literacy coaches and coachee teachers through critical discourse analysis with a grade two

teacher at an urban public school in the United States of America (USA). The study involved a single coach and a single coachee and highlighted the critical role the literacy coach has in building and maintaining trust through an understanding of relationship dynamics as well as the careful use of supportive and inclusive discourse. However, further studies are needed to establish whether these results are replicable for larger population sizes.

In addition to challenges, there is also controversy about who should provide coaching for teachers in a school setting. In the USA, instructional leadership is seen as the principal's role (Gorr, 2016; Hallinger, 2005). However, McEwen (2019) found that principals perceived their leadership training as too theoretical to prepare them to perform adequately in this role. Principals conveyed that more professional learning was needed for them to support teachers in "instructional strategies and resources for teaching and learning" (McEwen, 2019, p. 118). This issue of self-efficacy was found to be significant in a recent study of six secondary school principals (Johnson, 2021). The research examined the participants' perceptions and found that self-efficacy played an important role in principal retention following the requirement for them to also function as instructional leaders in addition to managers. In contrast to the USA, principals in Australia are not required to provide instructional leadership but rather to support and supervise the instructional leaders employed to do so (Wyatt, 2017). In his evaluation of a five-year government initiative known as Early Action for Success, Wyatt (2017) reported that there were signs of success with this school-embedded approach to building teacher capacity in literacy despite early issues with acceptance. More research into the challenges and controversies surrounding coaching in schools is recommended as a way to increase the dialogue on this important topic. Research into the coaching qualifications needed and how the lack of regulation impacts the quality of standards is recommended. Also, further research is needed to examine

coaching in diverse school settings and, similar to this study, get the perceptions of different stakeholders about their lived experiences.

2.4.3 Coaching Theories

Many theories exist about how adults learn (Merriam et al., 2007), with studies revealing interesting findings that highlight its complexity. Edgar (2012) outlined the history of learning theories as a guide to understanding the domain of learning development throughout human history. The theories of Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates were precursors to other theories. During the Middle Ages, learning was highly influenced by the Roman Catholic Church. The Renaissance period undermined the church's influence and domination and led to a revival of ancient philosophical theories. Later, Martin Luther challenged the prevailing notions of learning, seeking more accessibility to everyone, not just the elite. The promotion of accessible education for all continued during The Age of Enlightenment and the post-Romanticism era. By the 20th century, learning focused on the unique interests and needs of the individual with advocates like John Dewey, a philosopher and psychologist. Psychologists became more interested in the scientific study of the mind and how human behaviour affects learning. Behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism were popular schools of thought, but several other theories exist (Dominguez & Hager, 2013; Edgar, 2012).

A discussion on coaching can only be effective with an examination of learning theories, specifically adult learning theories. These theories offer diverse perspectives on adult learning, thereby reflecting the complex and multi-faceted nature of the learning process in adulthood. One notable theory is Levinson's (1978) Seasons of Life Theory, which emphasises the unique characteristics and needs of individuals at each stage of their adult development. Understanding each stage could shed light on the potential effect on learning and provide important information for professional development in schools. Similarly, Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory

posits that adults learn best from hands-on experiences and reflect on the learning from those experiences. This theory could impact the way teachers are professionally developed by focusing on practical and reflective practices. Andragogy or Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1978, 1984) emphasises self-directed learning and the importance of the learner's past experiences in the learning process. The implications of andragogy are significant, as coaching often involves guiding adults through learning and development. Heutagogy has also been promoted as a necessary and logical next step to accommodate effective adult learning in the twenty-first century, where the learner is truly the one directing their learning (Hase, 2013). Other adult learning theories further demonstrate the rich and diverse ways adults learn. For example, Transformational Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2003) focuses on transformative learning experiences, while Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory emphasises observational learning. An understanding of these theories can inform professional learning in schools and shape the adult learning process within that context.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) related that as adult learners, teachers "cannot reconceive their practice" on their own and therefore "a collaborative culture of problem solving and learning must be created" (p.601). This statement highlights that another important aspect of any professional development for teachers is understanding that adult learners have very specific needs and requirements that may affect the success of the PD being provided. The implication here is that the knowledge of theories about how adults learn is valuable in shaping educational policy and practice, including the type of professional learning teachers undertake. Ultimately, these learning theories came out of the need to understand how individuals learn. They stem from philosophical and psychological theories and have changed over time in popularity depending on societal events, such as world wars and industrialisation, technological advancements, and enlightenment in terms of growing societal needs like recognising human

rights (Edgar, 2012). In turn, theories have impacted the practice of education, from how programs are designed and delivered (for example, literacy programs) to how teachers and school leaders are professionally developed (for example, via coaching). The choice of which theory or combination of theories to adapt will depend largely on the type of learning an institution desires to achieve as well as the institution's capacity.

Research shows that to effectively support teachers, instructional coaches must understand the principles of adult learning (Eisenberg et al., 2017). The literature on andragogy suggests that adults learn differently from children in important ways (Knowles, 1984) that may influence how teachers can be professionally developed. Two focal points are: one, there is a connection between an adults' personal experiences and their professional development; and two, adults' reliance on these experiences during the learning process (Hoare, 2006). These aspects of andragogy connect with constructivism's consideration that learners construct new knowledge from pre-existing knowledge (Liu & Matthews, 2005). Andragogy draws on the works of constructivist theorists like Vygotsky and Dewey. Vygotsky (1978), for instance, observed the impact the social environment has on learning. Similarly, Dewey (1938) observed the influence of past experiences and the environment on learning, believing that one's past experiences and the learning environment contribute significantly to new learning. Both offer clarification about the complex nature of professional development. Applying Vygotsky and Dewey's principles to professional development in schools would involve creating a dynamic learning environment that is active, supportive, collaborative, and reflective.

Learners and society are complex and dynamic. Knowledge is continuously evolving; therefore, the changing nature of theories may provide a pathway for theories to impact practice in a relevant way. Darling-Hammond et al. (2001) elucidated that "theories can give us some consistent ways of looking at classroom practice and some rational explanations for what occurs"

(p. 17). This means that theories can help us measure the effect of professional development and provide a rationale for its use. Importantly for this study, leaders who desire to provide coaching as a viable professional development option for improved literacy in their school may want to gain some knowledge and understanding of the philosophical and psychological learning theories that will underpin their pedagogy.

2.4.4 Coaching Approaches or Models in Education

Coaching is saturated with different approaches, models, types, and categories, sometimes causing confusion when used synonymously. There is executive coaching, cognitive coaching, performance-based coaching, solution-focused, peer coaching, instructional coaching, and behavioural coaching – to name a few (Devine et al., 2013). Most coaching models in education originate from outside of Australia and sometimes carry contextual differences in meaning. Cornett and Knight (2009) list four standard coaching models used in the USA: literacy coaching, instructional coaching, peer coaching, and cognitive coaching. These can be compared with four models outlined by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), the organisation responsible for teaching and leadership excellence in schools, to be used in Australia (AITSL, 2013). These models have been reproduced in Table 1 and reveal some similarities across both countries. However, in the Australian context, instructional coaching and literacy coaching are broadly used synonymously (van Leent & Exley, 2013; Wyatt, 2017). It is noteworthy to state here that the purpose of this study is not to define each of the coaching approaches or models used in various contexts but instead to focus on coaching as used within schools.

Table 1

Summary of Common Models of Coaching Used in Schools

Coaching Model	What the model is about	Advocates of the model	Notable references
Peer Coaching	Teachers are coaching other teachers to improve the teaching and learning space.	Beverly Showers & Bruce Joyce (US)	Showers, Beverly & Joyce, Bruce 1982, 'The Coaching of Teaching', Educational Leadership vol. 40, no. 1, pp 4-8, 10; Showers, Beverly & Joyce, Bruce 1996, 'The Evolution of Peer Coaching', *Educational Leadership*, vol. 53, no. 6, pp 12-16.
Specialist coaching **Collaborative/ co-coaching**	*Specialist coaching* – coaching for specific purposes in a specific area of practice, e.g., literacy or numeracy. *Co-coaching* – peers take turns to coach each other to develop their coaching knowledge and skills. *Mentoring* – support provided during transitions.	Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) (UK)	Department for Education and Skills 2005, *National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching*, DfES, London.
Instructional Coaching	Teacher leaders become coaches and then use their acquired abilities to develop other teachers professionally in particular content areas.	Annenberg Institute for School Reform (US)	Annenberg Institute for School Reform 2004, *Instructional Coaching: Professional Development Strategies that Improve Instruction*, Brown University, Providence
In-class Coaching	As part of their induction program, early-stage teachers are coached in class to develop the necessary abilities to impact student outcomes confidently. The coach adapts different roles based on the coachee's needs - coach, collaborator or consultant.	Institute for Professional Learning, Department of Education (WA)	Department of Education, Western Australia

Note. The information was reproduced from AITSL (2013)

How coaching is used in schools varies. Nevertheless, three main coaching approaches are used in education – facilitative, instructional, and blended. Within these approaches, there are several models. Van Nieuwerburgh and Barr (2016, p. 2-3) summarised that schools are using coaching in four main ways:

1. to support educational leadership;
2. to improve the professional practice of educators;
3. to support students directly and
4. to connect educational institutions to their communities.

Facilitative coaching is often used to support teachers in improving their teaching practices, particularly when implementing new teaching strategies. According to van Nieuwerburgh et al. (2019), coaches who use this approach position the coachee as equal to themselves. Facilitative coaches do not make decisions for the coachees but serve as guides or facilitators to help coachees reach a decision or goal.

The coach provides feedback, encouragement and support so that the coachee can achieve their goals. The facilitative coaching process involves a series of conversations and activities designed to help coachee teachers identify and set goals, as well as develop plans to achieve those goals. For facilitative coaching to be effective in schools, coaches need to have strong communication and interpersonal skills, but they do not need to be subject experts. The assumption is that coachees are already resourceful, and coaches are there to help them utilise their own expertise. The GROWTH coaching model utilises facilitative coaching in schools. This model was developed nearly two decades ago in Australia and has its roots in positive psychology (van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2019). The acronym forms the language of the framework used for setting and achieving goals and stands for goal, reality, options, will, tactics, and habits. The GROWTH coaching model is flexible and emphasises the importance of setting clear and specific goals, understanding the current reality, exploring options and solutions, building commitment and motivation, and developing a concrete plan with accountability measures.

Instructional coaching is a research-based approach that is personalised and differentiated to recognise the unique needs and strengths of individual teacher-coachees and provide tailored support to meet their specific needs. Like facilitative coaches, instructional coaches work collaboratively with teachers to identify and set goals and develop plans to achieve those goals. However, unlike facilitative coaches, instructional coaches bring subject expertise to the coaching relationship. Knight (2021b), the creator of instructional coaching, presented three models or strategies within instructional coaching – facilitative, dialogical, and directive. The model chosen depends on the experience level, knowledge base, and/or aspirations of the teacher being coached. For example, the facilitative model relies on questioning to guide the coachee towards identified goals. The coach avoids sharing their expertise in this approach unless necessary. In the dialogical model, the coach and coachee work collaboratively using meaningful

dialogue to reach a desired goal. They share a partner relationship where the coach can provide expertise, but the coachee's ideas are equally important. In a directive coaching model, there is a knowledgeable person, the coach, who possesses expertise in a particular area of teaching and learning for which the coachee or the learning environment has an identified or suspected need.

Blended coaching refers to the coaching approach espoused by Bloom et al. (2005). Blended coaching simultaneously uses a facilitative approach to guide a coachee "through the use of feedback and reflective questions" and an instructional approach to provide "expert information, advice, and resources" (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 8). Researchers have supported the relevance of blended coaching in education. Lochmiller (2014) carried out an in-depth qualitative study on the impact of coaching on novice principals in a three-year university-based induction program and found that a blended model responsive to the changing needs of those leaders was a successful professional learning activity. The study consisted of 27 educators: 12 leadership coaches who were retired administrators, 13 novice or early-stage (one to three years) principals, and two university staff members directly associated with the induction program. Throughout the three years, a combination of coaching strategies was used, beginning with instructional coaching in the first year, facilitative coaching in the second year, and the third year focused on the coach guiding the coachee to develop a reflective practice based on their school context. The study's findings supported earlier research done by Bloom et al. (2005), which determined that blended coaching, with its facilitative and instructional approaches, supports novice principals to become better instructional leaders with the ability to guide their schools toward improved student learning outcomes. However, as that research was conducted in the USA context where principals are expected to be instructional leaders (Leithwood et al., 2004), further research is needed in the Australian context to determine whether the results can be replicated. In Australia,

instructional leaders are more likely to be employed as designated literacy and numeracy leaders at the deputy principal level (Wyatt, 2017).

Although students, educational institutions and communities are important stakeholders worthy of coaching, this project focuses on the use of coaching as an element of teacher professional development. Designated literacy leaders are tasked with providing coaching in literacy to improve teaching quality so the desired level of student attainment can be achieved. This study focuses specifically on designated literacy leaders who received coaching and subsequently coached other teachers as part of a professional practice aimed at ensuring teachers perform at the highest levels of quality teaching. Given this focus, section 2.5 will further explore the literacy aspects that inform and guide this capacity-building practice.

2.5 Literacy

2.5.1 Historical Overview and Literacy Definitions

Since its inception in 1945, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has claimed to be a champion of education as a human right and worked to drive quality in this area (UNESCO, 2020). At successive international conferences, UNESCO conducts meetings with literacy experts, which result in new and improved understandings of literacy. However, because of its evolving and adaptive nature, only a working definition of literacy, rather than a definitive one, has ever been proffered (Smyth, 2005). The historical timeline of UNESCO's most notable definitions of literacy shows a conscious shift from a limited focus on what Street (1998) termed autonomous to an ideological model of literacy. This is evident in the definitions below:

- 1958 definition: "A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his or her everyday life." (UNESCO, 1959, p. 93)

- 1978 definition: “A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community’s development.” (UNESCO, 1978, p. 18)
- 2005 definition: “Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with various contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential, and participate fully in community and wider society.” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 21)

The evolving definitions demonstrate the importance of establishing a consensus on how literacy is defined, particularly within the context of literacy education in schools. Influenced by research, this changing view of literacy shows its complexity and contextuality (Freebody et al., 2014) and bears a caution that literacy is not merely limited to “the ability to decode words and sentences” (Olson, 1994, p. xv). The shift in definitions from a narrow focus to a more contextual and ideological model highlights the complexity of literacy. Freebody and ACER (2007) stressed that consensus in literacy definitions is important for the success of literacy programs. Therefore, the definition adopted for this study is the one published by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA):

> Literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in school activities and in their lives beyond school. Success in any learning area depends on being able to use the significant, identifiable and distinctive literacy that is important for learning and representative of the content of that learning area. (ACARA, n.d.-b)

ACARA's definition of literacy presumes that designated literacy leaders are well-informed about the changing nature of literacy, the elements literacy entails, and how to coach others in this area. ACARA was established by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment in December 2008. This statutory body is responsible for setting the standard for what Australian students from Kindergarten to Year 12 should know and learn. The definition, as conceived by this institution, considers the functional and technical side of literacy, including the ability to read and write. At the same time, it presents a multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted aspect that focuses on how an individual's possession of higher-order abilities equips them to function in varied contexts.

ACARA has endorsed literacy as one of the seven general capabilities that are essential skills for 21st-century learners (ACARA, n.d.-a*)*. Australian education has endured several committees, reports and reviews to reach its current seven general capabilities. Weldon (2019) outlines a brief history of this metamorphosis from the 1985 Karmel Committee report through the Finn Report and Mayer Report of the 1990s and the subsequent Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) of the 2000s. The premise of the Australian Curriculum's seven general capabilities was to have an inter-disciplinary integrated approach to teaching across the curriculum, aiming to provide successful implementation and support (Batham, 2012; Wassell, 2015) across various key learning areas and stages. However, some critics have denounced its imposition as adopting an inquiry and constructivist approach to learning that will leave learners without the specific skills they need for life or further study (Bantick, 2013; Young, 2011). Regardless, literacy is one of only three general capabilities (others: numeracy and ICT) that the 2014 reviewers of the Australian Curriculum recommended to be "treated in a cross-curricular fashion" (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p. 248) and, alongside numeracy, was promoted as a compulsory learning area in New South Wales schools (NSWBOSTES, 2014). This capability is

subdivided into input skills (comprehending texts through listening, reading, and viewing) and output skills (composing texts through speaking, writing, and creating). Both interconnected processes are supported by knowledge in four key areas: grammar, text, word, and visual (ACARA, n.d.-b).

It is not the purpose of this project to determine whether ACARA has taken the right decision, nor is this a review of the development or effectiveness of the general capabilities; for a discussion on this topic, refer to Gilbert (2019), Weldon (2019), and Yates (2018). However, a brief exploration was deemed important because literacy is an integral element of the required competencies and sits within a wider curriculum discussion of both the general context of this study (Australia) and a priority learning area. To conclude the overview of the Australian context, section 2.5.2 provides a brief discussion of the changing practices in literacy instruction in Australia.

2.5.2 Changing practices in literacy instruction in Australia

Literacy education in Australia has undergone substantial changes over the past few decades, influencing both teacher preparation and classroom practice. From the 1980s to the early 2000s, whole-language approaches dominated the field. During this time, interventions such as Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985) were widely implemented to support struggling early readers experiencing difficulties. Developed as a one-on-one intervention aimed at Year 1 students performing in the lowest literacy bands, Reading Recovery employed strategies including the use of levelled readers and contextual cues, such as picture prompts and syntax. Despite its widespread adoption, Reading Recovery came under increasing criticism. Concerns centred on its limited use of explicit phonics and the lack of long-term impact on student reading outcomes (Chapman & Tunmer, 2025; Shanahan, 2022; Tunmer & Chapman, 2015). These critiques contributed to growing unease with the whole language model as a whole.

In the 2000s, a new program known as L3 (Language, Learning and Literacy), was introduced in New South Wales primary schools (CESE, 2020). This in-class intervention aimed to provide earlier support to a broader group of students, thereby reducing reliance on more intensive programs like Reading Recovery. L3 was less intensive and more integrated into daily classroom practice. It continued to utilise levelled readers and promoted oral language development and reading strategies, such as prediction and rereading. The L3 program was reviewed, and several challenges were identified (CESE, 2020). Some critics (Neilson & Howell, 2015) argued that it failed to meet its intended outcomes.

However, by the early 2020s, both Reading Recovery and L3 had been phased out across many Australian jurisdictions (Baker, 2020). This transition aligned with growing concerns about stagnant literacy outcomes (Duffy & Wylie, 2019; Thomas et al., 2013; OECD, 2022) and rising awareness of research in cognitive science (AERO, 2023), which illuminated more effective methods of teaching reading (Buckingham, 2020a; Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018). The shift marked a turn toward what is now referred to as the Science of Reading – a body of evidence-based practices drawn from multiple disciplines, including psychology, linguistics, and education (AERO, 2023; Seidenberg, 2017). The current definition of effective literacy instruction (Buckingham, 2020a; Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005; NSWDEC, 2022) includes explicit, systematic instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness, evidence-based strategies aligned with the Science of Reading, and the use of decodable readers instead of levelled readers.

2.5.3 Literacy Coaching Models Used in Australia

Following the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, the Teaching Reading Report was published with recommendations for significant reform in how literacy is taught in Australian schools (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005). The report

emphasised ongoing in-service professional learning for teachers, which "is vital to building capacity in literacy learning" (Department of Education, Science and Training**,** 2005, p.58). Subsequently, literacy coaches were soon appointed in schools nationwide as part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Partnership (NLNP) initiative to improve National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) literacy results. These coaches were tasked with working with teachers, that is, with adult learners, which was a distinct change from the reading specialists who had been employed to work directly with children.

The uptake among education departments across Australia resulted in one of the earliest studies being done in a public school in the Queensland Department of Education. Australian researchers van Leent and Exley (2013) carried out a phenomenological two-year research study that examined the coaching experiences of a newly trained and newly appointed literacy coach in Queensland, intending to theorise the practice. During year one, there was a focus on building rapport and developing relationships, but in year two, the model was disregarded in favour of focusing on literacy identities. That research used Sheehan's literacy model (as cited by van Leent & Exley, 2013), which had been commissioned by the Queensland Department of Education and developed for the initiative. This coaching model was then used to guide the practice and methodology of the coaching performed by the designated literacy leader, who was formally identified in that study as a literacy coach. The model was organised around five fluid areas: building relationships with teachers, communicating with teachers through facilitative conversations, modelling explicit teaching, providing feedback, and celebrating success (Sheehan in van Leent & Exley, 2013, p. 20).

The findings offered a theoretical perspective on new ways of working as a literacy coach (van Leent & Exley, 2013). However, there are several potential limitations to the study. First, data was collected only through informal interviews and from a singular research context

confined to one school. Second, it is difficult for the study to be replicated and verified because there is a lack of information regarding, for example, criteria for purposeful sampling. Third, the sample size was limited. Finally, while coaching is contextual and should change to meet the school's needs, it is surprising that while testing the model, the authors would abandon it partly in favour of another idea. These limitations raise important questions about the skills and strategies necessary to meet 21st-century educational expectations.

Throughout the education world, ongoing discussions exist about exactly what skills students need to possess to meet 21st-century expectations (Care et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2017; Tedesco et al., 2013). It is a fair assumption that a teacher's understanding of literacy theories is likely to influence how they teach literacy skills and, by extension, affect student learning outcomes. The following sections explain the major theoretical perspectives and establish the intersectionality between literacy and coaching theories in teaching and learning. Its purpose is to demonstrate how literacy theories influence teachers and shape pedagogical practices.

2.5.4 Understanding the Intersectionality Between Literacy and Coaching Theories

This section outlines the theoretical research perspectives that guide this study on literacy and its intersection with coaching theories. Theoretical perspectives are important because "teaching and learning is a mutually constituted process that changes over time" (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 2). This understanding acknowledges the ongoing interactions that lead to the continuous development of knowledge within educational contexts. Like learning and literacy theories, coaching theories have underpinnings in psychology and philosophy (Eggers & Clark, 2000) and impact and inform practice. In a study of 31 high school biology teachers, Furman Shaharabani and Yarden (2019) explained that "the gap between theory and teachers' practice is a barrier to education" that can be bridged by finding "new ways to meaningfully relate theory and practice" (p. 1). One such way is to develop professional learning programs that "explicitly

combine educational theory and practice" (Furman Shaharabani & Yarden, 2019, p. 1). Coaching in schools presents an opportunity for facilitating such an iterative cycle of learning. In this way, coaches would be more like co-investigators of teaching and learning alongside classroom teachers who are the day-to-day practitioners.

In a podcast interview, van Nieuwerburgh posited that "practice is the most important aspect [of coaching] because this is where it's making a difference for learners" (Hatcher, 2018, 3:15). This statement highlights that it is through the actual implementation and application of actionable literacy coaching practices that meaningful change and growth occur. Van Nieuwerburgh also emphasised that there is an interplay between theory, research and practice that is important "because coaching is an implied intervention" (Hatcher, 2018, 2:50). In the context of this study, coaching is not regarded as an intervention; rather, it is viewed as a collaborative practice done with teachers, not one imposed upon them (Eisenberg et al., 2017; Lofthouse et al., 2020). Coaching is high-quality ongoing professional learning that supports the coachee in achieving the expected or desired performance level.

The best coaching happens in a school environment when it is implemented effectively (Gawande, 2011) – one that builds an individual's knowledge, understanding and skills or addresses a perceived need proactively. The implication is that effective coaching has a potentially significant impact on human performance. Suppose van Nieuwerburgh's tripartite relationship between theory, research, and practice is followed. In that case, it is beneficial to research how designated literacy leaders perceive coaching's impact on the way they lead in literacy. After all, they are tasked with turning theory (literacy) into practice (student learning) but also engage with theorised practice (coaching). A useful place to begin is to understand the literacy theories and how they relate to coaching, as summarised in the theoretical framework discussion.

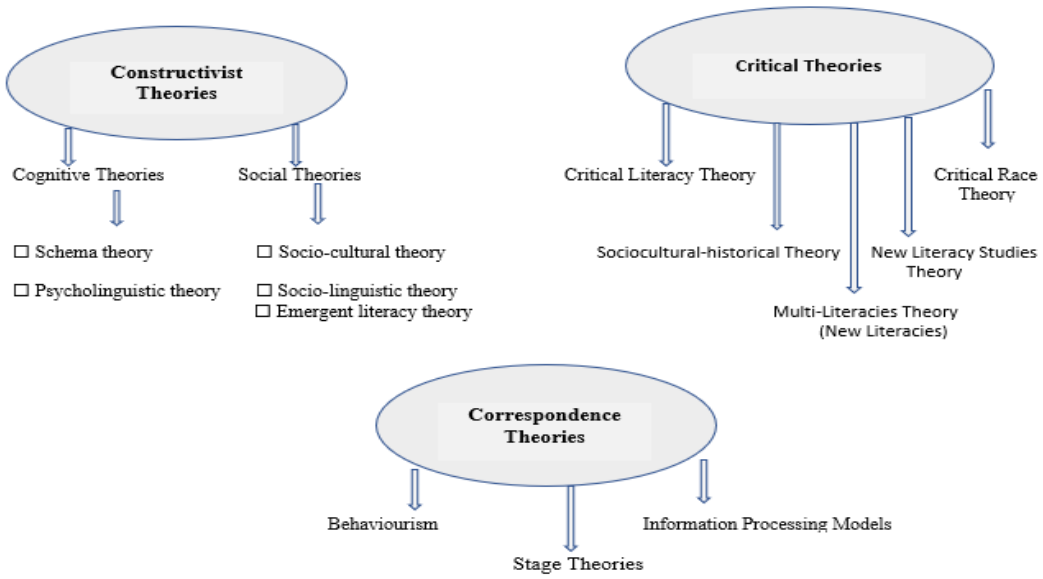
2.5.5 Literacy Theories

Theories are often extensions of each other (Handsfield, 2018), as evidenced by the constructivist and critical approaches espoused in this study. This section of the literature review discusses the major literacy theories as categorised by Handsfield (2017) and visually represented in Figure 3. This discussion will deliberately exclude correspondence theories, as they are considered irrelevant and outdated to progressive 21st-century ideals of teaching and learning in literacy (Handsfield, 2017).

As Figure 3 shows, there are several constructivist literacy theories, many of which overlap. Constructivist theories provide a lens through which to look at literacy because they emphasise the process of learning rather than the end product (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002b). For instance, cognitive constructivism sees all learning as an internalised process where the learner is acquiring specific knowledge, understanding, and skills through a process in which they have some control over what they learn and how they think (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Piaget's (1962) work on schema theory extends this understanding of how an individual's cognitive abilities are constructed and developed over time. Schemata, or cognitive structures in their brains, allow learners to recall stored information from their long-term memory and apply these to new situations.

Figure 3

A Partial Visual Representation of Literacy Theories



Note. This representation was created based on the categorisation of Handsfield (2017) and does not offer an exhaustive list of theories.

The applicability of these theories can be seen in qualitative research conducted on expert teachers, which showed that adult learners' ability to retrieve pedagogical schema benefits literacy teaching (Lauterbach et al., 2019). These findings are validated by other studies on schemata's effectiveness in literacy learning (McVee et al., 2016; Thomas & Jones, 2020). A knowledge of schema theory is therefore valuable to this study as "schemas give practitioners a framework through which to interpret their observations" (Bruce et al., 2015, p. 77), and so could be a credible lens through which designated literacy leaders can examine the way they lead in literacy after receiving instructional coaching.

Within Handsfield's (2017) grouping of constructionist theories (see Figure 3) those that examine the sociocultural context are also crucial to this study. Important aspects of context include the people involved, the location, and the timing of literacy learning (Pearson, 2015). This contextual framing reflects Albert Bandura's social learning theory which pays attention to people's immediate surroundings and how they learn within their social context (Bandura, 1977;

McLeod, 2016). Similarly, Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory seeks to understand how the influence of social and cultural backgrounds affect our learning – the way a person talks, thinks, sees, and understands the world around them (McLeod, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). This theory also examines how people mediate or choose the knowledge and skills they learn depending on what is valued in their community. Vygotsky specified that for humans to learn, they must consider their relationships with significant others because "all the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals" (1978, p. 57). In this way, Vygotsky promoted the connection between a person's learning environment and social interaction to the development of knowledge (Anderson & Dron, 2011; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). This connection has proven successful in various disciplines beyond education, such as nursing (Brandon & All, 2010; Duane & Satre, 2014) and e-learning (Koohang et al., 2009).

The constructivist theories presented in this study demonstrate the importance of being aware of the different literacy theories and how such awareness can facilitate the selection of the right theory for a particular school environment. There is an emphasis on "the increased attention to the learning context" (Merriam, 2008, p. 94) and "recognition that learning is a multidimensional phenomenon" (Merriam, 2008, p. 95). This perspective fits within the transformative nature of coaching in literacy as defined within this study.

Critical theories also provide a lens through which to look at literacy because they are based on critical psychological approaches to learning that maintain that beyond knowledge acquisition, learning is mediated by the meaning students ascribe to their social interactions with others. Critical literacy theory, devised by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1985), focuses literacy on the interplay between language, experience, and who has power and control over how knowledge is acquired. The theory moves to decentralise the dominant experience as the ideal, favouring a repositioning of the marginalised group's experience. It should be noted that

"Freirean pedagogy is not unilateral but a reciprocal and dialogical negotiation of power" (McLaren & da Silva, 1992, p. 51). This means that the learning dynamics shifts so that there is shared power between the learner and the teacher or the coachee and the coach. In Freirean pedagogy, or critical literacy theory, "individuals can gain a greater purchase on social agency" (McLaren & da Silva, 1992, p. 52) because they are empowered with the ability to control and narrate their own lives. This is potentially valuable in literacy learning because it recognises the learner's prior knowledge and builds on existing schemas through participatory dialogical discourse (Larson & Marsh, 2005). This theory has been popularly used in the UK and USA and extensively researched in Australia for nearly three decades (Luke, 2000, 2012; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Luke & Freebody, 1999).

Luke (2012) described critical literacy as the "use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life" (p. 5). This premise is both a continuation and development of the Freirean perspective on literacy that focuses closely on how critical literacy is developed for and in schools attended by Indigenous learners and students from marginalised low socio-economic communities. In this advanced understanding of critical literacies, Luke (2012) explained that "there is no correct or universal model" but instead "historical works in progress" whereby parties are continually seeking to find ways for "representing and reshaping possible worlds" (p. 9). This may be demonstrated in the coach-coachee relationship when designated literacy leaders provide guidance and choice rather than employing a traditional top-down leadership approach. A possible result is a power shift where "learners become teachers of their understandings and experiences, and teachers become learners of these same contexts" (Luke, 2012, p. 7). Such instances display continuous learning and a reciprocal exchange and co-construction of knowledge.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) carried out case studies in the 1990s after rejecting the notion of literacy only as a cognitive ability in preference for literacy as a social practice (Gee, 1996, 2012; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1998). Barton and Hamilton (1998) concluded that literacy is a social practice: "something people do; . . . an activity . . .located in the interaction between people" (p. 3). Discourse is a concept popularised by Gee (1996, 2011), where 'discourse' (lower case 'd') represents the language in use, written or oral, versus 'Discourse' (upper case 'D'), which refers to the combination of language in use and social practice (such as how one thinks, feels, and behaves). The continuous engagement of critics and New Literacy Studies (NLS) users indicates that this theory provides meaningful educational applications (Street, 2003). The implications of the NLS theory are insightful for every participant in the educational context and could potentially influence the way literacy coaching conversations are conducted in schools. Designated literacy leaders need to understand how their use of Discourse can affect the teachers they coach, particularly how it positions them in terms of power and control. To this end, teachers need to check their ideological assumptions and practices to ensure that they are providing an equitably balanced coaching environment that caters to the needs of the coachee regardless of their social class, race, ability group, gender, sexual orientation or religious background that may be different from their own (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Literacy could become a tool for promoting equity and inclusivity, ultimately improving students' learning outcomes.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study adopted a multidisciplinary, constructivist-critical approach, seeking to understand the dynamic relationship between designated literacy leaders and the teachers they coach. Grounded in Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, the focus was on how adults acquire knowledge and skills. Knowles (1984) identified five distinct

ways that adult learning (andragogy) differs from children learning (pedagogy): adults are intrinsically motivated, prefer a self-directed approach, bring prior experience to their learning context, are ready to learn, and are problem-centred. Questions have been raised about whether meaningful differences exist (Hartree, 1984; Merriam, 2001), especially when considering non-traditional processes such as natural learning (McDonough, 2013). Even so, these distinctions have significant implications for coaching. In suggesting that adults are intrinsically motivated and self-directed, andragogy assumes they prefer to take control of their learning. Therefore, one can infer that any coaching experience should use an approach that fosters a sense of autonomy and ownership. Likewise, in emphasising the value of adults' experiences, this theory encourages coaches to reflect on their past experiences and extract insights that are relevant to the contextual challenges they may be facing. Furthermore, andragogy supports the belief that adults who perceive the learning they are receiving as applicable to their lives are ready to learn. This suggests that coaches will be more effective after establishing coachee readiness and tailoring the coaching to address their needs. The practical, problem-centred approach of coaching seems to align with andragogical principles, making the experience more meaningful for those being coached.

As highlighted earlier, there are several approaches concerned with how adults learn (Merriam et al., 2007), such as experiential learning (Hutchinson, 2011; Kolb, 1984), transformational learning (Mezirow, 2003), and motivational theory (Keller, 1987). It becomes evident that these theories are not mutually exclusive and that no single theory can fully explain adult learning (Bélanger, 2011; Chen, 2014; Merriam et al., 2007), necessitating an integrated approach. General learning theories such as cognitive constructivism, social constructionism, and some correspondence theories all have unique applications to the way adults learn and, consequently, how they can be coached (Fazel, 2013; Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). Therefore, it is

acknowledged here that due to the complexity of adult learning, teachers often draw on multiple theories to inform their teaching practice. However, for this study, andragogy is considered a valuable element of coaching (Justin et al., 2019; Lubin, 2013) due to its alignment with constructivist principles.

The conceptualisation of literacy coaching in this study frames it as a socially constructed, dialogic process in which "practice [becomes] theorized as practice is transformed over time" (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 2). This statement recognises the dynamic nature of literacy coaching, showing that it undergoes a theoretical examination as the practice evolves and changes over time. Given the adult nature of literacy coaching, this process is mediated by the prior experience and knowledge of those involved. This becomes important when ascertaining what are the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who received coaching and subsequently coached others in a school environment.

The framework not only acknowledges the contextual factors influencing literacy coaching but also recognises the potential impact of cultural, institutional, and other contextual elements on the application of theories. A nuanced understanding of the coaching experiences requires careful consideration of these contextual factors. The chosen theories are justified by their collective ability to address the research questions and aims. Empirical studies, such as those supporting the value of andragogy in coaching (Justin et al., 2019; Lubin, 2013), affirm the relevance of these theories in the context of literacy coaching in schools. This theoretical framework guides the research design and methods by informing how the principles of andragogy, constructivism, and other learning theories are integrated into the coaching process. It lays the groundwork for the collection and analysis of data to uncover the intricacies of literacy coaching experiences.

This theoretical framework, integrating various theories, sets the stage for the subsequent methodology chapter. The dynamic nature of literacy coaching, along with contextual considerations, highlights the complexity of this practice. Furthermore, empirical support underscores the need for a nuanced exploration of the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in a school environment.

2.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter Two examined the existing literature on coaching and literacy in Australian schools. To situate literacy coaching, the chapter scrutinised the evidence that underscores the significance and efficacy of professional development within school settings. The literature review highlighted a steady shift from traditional forms of professional development towards one embedded in teacher practice within the school setting. Due to its job-embedded nature, coaching emerged as a compelling option for professional development in education, with examples of its successful use drawn from both local and international educational contexts. Nevertheless, the literature revealed the unregulated nature of coaching in schools and exposed associated challenges and controversies. Various coaching approaches, including facilitative, instructional, and blended, were explored, demonstrating coaching's flexibility and utility. The discussion on coaching concluded with an exploration of the theories shaping coaching practices, with specific attention given to adult learning theories.

The literature review also explored evolving definitions of literacy, showing a progressive shift towards the current conceptual definition. An overview of the Australian context weaved together a narrative that encapsulates the multifaceted nature of literacy in educational discourse. Similarly, examining literacy theories provided an understanding of the diverse perspectives underpinning literacy in schools. This exploration offered insight into the

dynamic relationship between coaching and literacy within the Australian educational landscape, thus providing a foundational base for this research study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

[Coaching] *has to be measurable. Otherwise, it's just a conversation that just makes people feel good* – Renee

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study, as outlined in Chapter One, is to understand and interpret the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in Australian schools. With increased investment in the number of coaches in schools, the findings offer stakeholders potentially useful decision-making information about this form of professional development. Although its effectiveness has been supported, the use of coaches in schools is relatively recent, and therefore, a broader scope of their impact needs to be ascertained. Moreover, more research needs to be done on coaches' experiences. The description of participants' coaching experiences, both in receiving coaching and subsequently coaching others, was anticipated to yield insights and further understanding into the phenomenon of the lived experiences of literacy coaches. In doing so, I aimed to add to an already existing and growing body of research on coaching in literacy education.

This chapter outlines and explains the iterative process in formulating this study's research methodology. The chapter begins with a brief exploration of the relevance of qualitative research. It delves into the rationale behind opting for the hermeneutic phenomenological approach as an effective means of capturing participants' lived experiences as coaches in Australian schools. Next is a description of the study's participants: how they were recruited, the sampling strategy used, sample size determination, and considerations regarding saturation. The data collection procedures and methods are described, followed by an outline of the data analysis process. The chapter ends with a reference to potential researcher bias and ethical considerations, including the process of obtaining informed consent. The research framework employed in this study, illustrated in Table 2, reflects my approach to understanding and interpreting the

phenomenon under investigation, focusing on lived experiences, interpretation, and meaning-making.

Table 2

The Research Framework of the Study

Research Framework:

Ontology	Social constructivism
Philosophy	Phenomenology
Epistemology	Hermeneutics
Methodology	Qualitative
Approach	Inductive
Research design	Qualitative, phenomenological
Methods of data collection	Questionnaire, semi-structured in-depth interviews, document analysis
Methods of interpretation	Hermeneutical analysis, thematic analysis

3.2. Qualitative Methodology, Phenomenological Approach

The main research question was: 'What are the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in Australian schools?' After formulating the main research question, the next step was to decide which research methodology would be best to gain a deep understanding of coaching in literacy. I considered that the correct methodology would allow for an exploration of the experiences shared by the participants and help to understand the phenomenon better rather than prove or disprove a claim (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative research methodology was chosen as the most fitting for investigating the phenomenon of literacy coaching. This methodology was employed because of its suitability in understanding, describing, and interpreting the participants' experiences of literacy coaching. Qualitative research is "a valued paradigm of inquiry" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1). Despite "legitimate concerns about the rigor of qualitative research" (Merriam, 1995, p. 52), there is increasing acceptance of qualitative research, which can be attributed to improved rigour and advanced data collection strategies (Hamilton, 2019; Rose & Johnson, 2020). Qualitative researchers "seek to understand the world from the perspectives of those in it" (Merriam, 1995, p. 56) and are therefore concerned with utilising a research methodology that is consistent and dependable, understanding that an exact replication is unlikely due to the complexity of human experience. Merriam (1995) emphasised the importance of adopting a qualitative worldview, considering the purpose of the study, how it was conducted and the accuracy of its completion.

Due to the focus of the research question of this study, qualitative research proves particularly valuable as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the nuanced and context-specific nature of literacy coaching experiences. By capturing the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders, qualitative research can reveal the complexities, challenges, and successes within literacy coaching, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of this field. In the

broader context of education, qualitative research plays a crucial role in exploring multifaceted aspects of the educational experience (Patton, 2002). This approach allows researchers to investigate the lived experiences of both teachers and students, facilitating insights into the dynamic nature of teaching and learning environments. Qualitative education research acknowledges that people's lived experiences are not solely based on objective reality but are inherently shaped by their subjectivity (van Manen, 2015). Furthermore, the qualitative research methodology, particularly the phenomenological approach, aligns with the concept popularised by Denzin (1989), whereby observations transcend the peripheral and seek to provide a rich, detailed, and contextually embedded understanding of people's experiences.

It is important to note the two definitions selected to underpin the research methodology of this study. The first definition explains qualitative research as "the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312). With this understanding, I committed to emphasising and respecting the lived experiences of the individuals under investigation regarding the phenomenon in question. The second definition of qualitative research underpinning the study emphasises "building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1994, pp. 1-2). It became clear that the value of this methodology would lie in my ability to capture the diverse perspectives and experiences of the phenomenon as described by the participants. If done effectively, this could result in rich insights into the phenomenon. Furthermore, in building a holistic picture of the participants' experiences, the research is driven by the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) have pointed out, the focus of qualitative research is not to rely on objective measurements such as numbers or associated statistics. Instead, the focus is on providing participants with the

opportunity to express detailed viewpoints in a comfortable setting using data collection methods such as interviews, pictures, or observations.

In considering which approach would complement the chosen research methodology, several qualitative research methodologies, such as ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study were explored. Phenomenology was considered relevant approach for this study. In a classical sense, phenomenology is an approach whose roots can be traced back to several philosophical developments. Phenomenology is concerned with a person's lived experiences, considering aspects such as consciousness, first-person perspective, epoché, and the meaning or essence of phenomena (Thorsby, 2016). Thorsby (2016) noted the influence of prominent philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Hume as influential figures toward the founding of phenomenology. Descartes' cogito (Descartes, 1980), which asserts that despite doubts one cannot truly deny their own existence, establishes the groundwork for delving into the phenomenological exploration of the first-person perspective and the subjective nature of lived experience in the works of early phenomenologists (Gillespie, 2006; Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 2013). Similarly, Thorsby's (2016) summarisation of Locke's conception of the mind contributes to phenomenology's investigation into how a person's mind interacts with the surrounding world. For example, Locke's notion that the mind is not preloaded with innate ideas but instead acquires knowledge through sensory experiences resonates with phenomenologist Husserl's (2013) emphasis on directly examining experience without preconceived ideas. According to Thorsby (2016), Hume's empiricism initiated the turn towards phenomenology by connecting our knowledge of the world to our experiences, extending the phenomenological exploration into how individuals make meaning from their lived experiences (Lanfredini, 2019). Classical phenomenology would depart from or build upon these and other philosophical thinking.

The statement by van Manen (2017a, p. 779) that “genuine phenomenological research is not easy” resonated with my experience while conducting this study. It is important to acknowledge that phenomenology has been defined in various ways (van Manen, 2017a). Hence, the need arose to establish the relevance and applicability of this approach to the context of education and literacy coaching. This led to three pertinent questions recommended to determine whether a study is phenomenological: 1) “Are the questions and objectives phenomenological?” 2) “Does [the study] look like phenomenology?” and 3) "Are the results of the study originary phenomenological insights and understandings?” (van Manen, 2017a, pp. 775-776). These questions compelled the consideration of the study’s aim, orientation, and output depth. The decision was made easier when it became known that phenomenology has been consistently utilised over the past few decades in educational research, demonstrating its effectiveness in examining various perspectives. Examples include studies exploring the perspectives of itinerant teachers in schools (Benson, 2001), the role of literacy coaches in schools (Lowenhaupt et al., 2014), and the effect of the coronavirus on preschool education (Yıldırım, 2021).

This project utilised a phenomenological approach that acknowledged but departed from the philosophical intentions of Husserl (2013), widely regarded as the father of phenomenology. Husserl advocated for a rigorous and unbiased study of the phenomenon to gain unique insights and understandings into the phenomenon. His approach, known as descriptive phenomenology or transcendental phenomenology, uses a research pattern in which the researcher abstains from directly interpreting participants’ experiences. Instead, the researcher suspends any pre-conceived ideas or presuppositions about the phenomenon during the investigation through a process known as epoché or bracketing (Moran, 2000; Smith, 2018). However, completely suspending natural attitudes and presuppositions about the phenomenon proved challenging and impossible. As a researcher with decades of experience as a school teacher in varied roles and

contexts, it proved impossible to alter the present being or erase past experiences. To place oneself within a particular phenomenological tradition became an iterative process. In recognition of these constraints, it was determined that departing from transcendental phenomenology was necessary. This departure was based on my recognition that bracketing was not fully achievable. I also embraced researcher subjectivity and moved toward interpretation rather than pure description. The renewed aim was to make sense of the participants' experiences while preserving the researcher's identity and values throughout the research process.

In this study, I relied more on Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, which is a partial departure from Husserl's approach. Heidegger (1962) defined phenomenology as "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (p. 58). Heidegger's statement advocates for the researcher to prioritise an encounter with the phenomenon that is not mediated by preconceived ideas. Instead, the encounter is received with a level of passivity and openness that allows a natural manifestation of the phenomenon to occur without the strict application of epoché. This approach necessitates an elevation of the phenomenon being studied in relation to the person experiencing the phenomenon. In other words, the emphasis is on understanding the phenomenon on its own terms and in its true nature. This is achieved by relating the phenomenon from the subject's perspective, thus calling into importance the uniqueness or subjectivity of the individual's lived experiences. Moreover, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed me to focus on how the literacy coaches describe their lived experiences with coaching.

To emphasise, the study centres on designated literacy leaders and their lived experiences while receiving and implementing coaching in Australian schools. The study delves into the subjective aspects of these literacy leaders' experiences as they actively participate in coaching within their school context. This methodology encourages an exploration of their experiences,

placing particular emphasis on the unique perspectives of these teachers as individuals. The research seeks to uncover the deeper meanings embedded in these lived experiences and to understand how these individuals describe and make sense of their roles as literacy leaders within the framework of coaching in Australian schools.

To understand phenomenology from Heidegger's perspective, I relied on the works of various adherents, such as van Manen, while acknowledging that phenomenology is varied and complex. The clarity given by van Manen (2017a) about ensuring the phenomenological method is situated within a truly phenomenological approach provided some guidance for the methodological design in three main ways. First, when establishing the objectives of this project and forming the research questions, I sought to ensure that they were formulated to provide meaningful understandings and insights into the phenomenon of literacy coaching. To achieve these objectives, the interviews included questions like: 'Tell me about how you became involved in coaching and literacy. How did your journey begin?' which allowed the participants to respond deeply about their engagement with the phenomenon.

Second, during the data analysis phase, I looked for findings that were not merely thematic groupings of ideas but "originary understandings and insights into the phenomenality of human experiences" (van Manen, 2017a, p. 779). In other words, intentional actions were taken to go beyond surface-level observations to find the essence and meaning of the participants' experiences. There was a desire for a deeper understanding, a more profound analysis of the phenomenon's fundamental aspects. Themes are "intermediate reflective tools for phenomenological inquiry and writing" (van Manen, 2017a, p.777). As such, themes are a means to an end and, therefore, cannot be offered as final phenomenological findings. Hence, the themes that were induced in this study were interpreted through a dynamic process that used the hermeneutic circle (Heidegger, 1962) to unearth a deeper understanding of the different

perspectives of each participant's story. This process aims to generate the best possible interpretations and avoid negatively affecting the validity of the findings. The concept of the hermeneutic circle explains the interpretive process of comprehending a text that requires the researcher to be immersed in the experiences of the research participants. This involves in-depth reading and re-reading of the data. It suggests that our understanding of the entire data is developed by considering its individual parts and the data as a whole in a circular relationship that emphasises the iterative recontextualising process (Heidegger, 1962).

Third, the study adhered closely to Heidegger's approach to epoché or bracketing, which means acknowledging but withholding the researcher's opinion and allowing the description of the lived experience to speak for itself (Heidegger, 1962). In short, Heidegger acknowledged that complete bracketing was impossible but required researchers to try to set aside their presuppositions. In this project, I accepted that it is not possible to achieve full epoché (Merleau-Ponty, 2001) and followed close adherence to the tenets of the hermeneutic circle (Heidegger, 1962) during analysis as ways to achieve research validity. This meant looking at what all participants said and how they described their experiences and then grouping commonalities into themes. However, the focus was not simply on commonalities or themes but on the search for original meanings or understandings about the phenomenon. This way, the focus remained on participants' stories and not simply the researcher's interpretations. This study also used reflexivity to establish transparency, rigour, and credibility.

Reflexivity has been long-established in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Gilgun, 2006, 2010; Rolfe, 2006). Reflexivity is defined as:

> an awareness of the researcher's role in the practice of research and the way this is influenced by the object of the research, enabling the researcher to acknowledge the way

> in which he or she affects both the research processes and outcomes. (Haynes, 2012, p. 72)

In this project, reflexive practices were applied from the start of the project – from choosing the research area, formulating the research question, choosing the research design, recruiting participants, collecting data, analysing, and reporting stages. However, there are different levels and ways of doing reflexivity (Haynes, 2012). For this project, I decided to utilise introspective reflection, memoing, margin notes, and discussions with co-researchers as sufficient and sustainable ways to be reflexive.

Reflexivity plays an essential role in hermeneutic phenomenology because the researcher becomes aware of how their own prior experience can impact the data analysis process if not bracketed (van Manen, 2014). While a knowledge of bracketing is essential, the researcher may not necessarily implement it. Instead, managing presuppositions is advocated through reflexivity and thoughtful reflection. The hermeneutic circle (Heidegger, 1962) comes into play again to explain that despite intentional attempts at bracketing, it would be insincere to pretend that researcher presuppositions were not involved during the research. However, the hermeneutic circle allows the researcher to deepen their interpretation of the phenomenon through a cycle of revisiting the parts of the text and the whole text. Modern hermeneutical thinkers like Heidegger approached the hermeneutic circle to gain some level of objectivity by acknowledging that preconceived ideas are necessary to achieve an understanding of a phenomenon (Grondin, 2016). For instance, without some presuppositions, I would not have asked the type of research questions recorded in this project. However, any presuppositions or assumptions are secondary to what the data reveal about itself. Therefore, the aim of this study remained to elucidate an insightful account of the phenomenon and look beyond prevalent, conventional assumptions.

This qualitative, phenomenological study sought to capture the participants' subjective perceptions (Alase, 2017) about the impact of literacy coaching by using an open-ended questionnaire, holding interviews, and conducting document analysis. Designated literacy leaders described their lived experiences of being coached so that they could lead others in literacy. Hycner's (1985) advice is for researchers to ensure the phenomenon remains central to the research, a principle followed in this study. I discovered that phenomenology is not merely challenging but also perplexing, demanding, and, at times, intricate. Despite these complexities, phenomenology presents a valuable opportunity for teachers to learn from themselves about themselves because it explores how a person's lived experience is situated within their world. In summary, the rationale for adopting the research methodology stems from its alignment with the research questions' exploratory nature, adherence to disciplinary norms, and practical considerations. The existing evidence supporting its effectiveness in educational contexts further reinforced its suitability for understanding the lived experiences of designed literacy leaders engaged in coaching within Australian schools.

3.3 Setting and Participants

Recruitment. Participant recruitment in qualitative research is a crucial step in the research design process that has been largely underattended in texts despite its importance in providing quality data and validating the study (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). Butera (2006) has documented the struggles social researchers often face in attracting participants because of a mistaken belief that "there is a world of people out there waiting" (p.1263). This is particularly challenging when other stages of the research process, such as sampling, are seemingly prioritised. However, researchers should "look for fresh ways of attracting participants" (Butera, 2006, p. 1279) and be proactive in managing the challenges that arise while recruiting participants. With this in mind, some of the challenges faced during the recruitment process of

this research project and the strategies used to overcome them will be related in this section. Notably, although it was necessary to make some adjustments, I used a planned approach to recruitment.

Archibald and Munce (2015) warned that "failure to anticipate recruitment challenges and to devise strategies to address them may threaten the feasibility and quality of a research study" (p.34). As the researcher and recruiter, I faced three specific challenges during the recruitment process, and a number of strategies were relied on to ensure the project's viability. The first challenge involved contacting potential participants through institutional gatekeepers. Institutional gatekeepers refer to individuals representing their organisation through whom consent to access potential participants of a study is sourced (McFayden & Rankin, 2016). Research shows negotiation with gatekeepers over recruitment and access to participants in education is complex, whether dealing with adult participants (Amundsen et al., 2017), such as in this study, or participants who are children or young adults (Miller et al., 2022). Following confirmation of candidature, leaders of educational systems were contacted to discuss what protocols and processes needed to be followed to access potential participants and collect data. I approached this activity from an understanding that the institutional gatekeepers' control of access was to ensure that the research activities aligned with their organisation's policies. This included ensuring that legal and ethical standards were being met. This approach proved helpful for maintaining patience and understanding when there were lengthy response times regarding access to participants.

After obtaining ethics approval, contact was made with the NSW State Education Research Applications (SERAP) regarding access approval. It should be noted that I was employed within the NSW public school system when contact was made with SERAP. Initial enquiries were made by telephone, at which time I was informed that there were no objections to

the research because the potential participants did not include children. A follow-up email was sent to SERAP. In response, I received confirmation from SERAP that their approval was not required if participants were not being recruited through schools. During our telephone conversation, SERAP expressed interest in the research findings and requested a copy of the thesis upon completion of the research study.

The recruitment process in public schools had limited challenges as I was able to make direct contact with potential public school participants through existing networks, such as literacy educators' associations and research groups. All contacts were made outside of work hours. In contrast, there were several barriers to navigate in the independent school system. The directors of independent school systems had to be contacted directly with a request for them to locate and recruit potentially appropriate staff. Recruitment emails, also known as calls for participants, included links to an information letter explaining the project, a consent form, and the questionnaire, which acted as a secondary screen for participant eligibility. This process was challenging because, as the researcher-recruiter, I had no control over the directors' time or urgency in sending out the call for participation. I needed to be careful not to appear bothersome or impatient with the process. Reminder emails were sent to the directors and followed up with emails and calls to schools with identified potential participants. This adjustment to the approach was planned for and was helpful in significantly speeding up the recruitment process. In total, five different independent school systems were contacted with participants from three systems engaging with the research.

The second major challenge of the recruitment process concerned the struggle to honour the recommendations from the ethics approval committee around abstaining from using social media to recruit participants. Using social media for participant recruitment could compromise the study's purposive sampling strategy, as it introduces the risk of including individuals who do

not meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This lack of control over participant selection may weaken the trustworthiness of the study and raise ethical concerns regarding the identification and suitability of respondents (HREC, personal communication, August 11, 2021). I was already a member of several professional and semi-professional groups of teachers and other educators on various social media platforms. It would have been easy and fast to put out a call for participation directly to these groups. Instead, a different approach was made that included a general announcement about the study, inviting people to reach out if they were involved in literacy coaching in their schools. This was a missed opportunity to use an insider understanding of how to connect with busy teachers as a recruitment tool. The call for participants was sent only to those educators who took the initiative to make direct contact.

The third challenge was determining whether a participant met the criteria for joining the study. All participants were required to meet three selection criteria described in the sampling strategy section. Several respondents met two of the three criteria, but although their experiences were potentially insightful, they had to be excluded. Given my preexisting commitment to ensuring a representative sample and remaining attentive to how bias may influence my interpretation , it was easier to hold firm to the selection criteria to maintain the study's trustworthiness. Although not a selection criterion, efforts were made to recruit participants from all states in Australia.

Sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling was used to identify and select participants who possessed knowledge of and experience with the phenomenon and would likely provide relevant information (Patton, 1990). Patton explains that "[t]he purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 169). Therefore, for this study, participants were selected "based on their anticipated richness and relevance of information in relation to the study's research questions" (Yin, 2009, p. 311). To

achieve this, I used a criterion sampling strategy to ensure participants met three essential criteria: (i) currently occupy the role of a designated literacy leader at a K-6, 7-12, or K-12 Australian school; (ii) have completed or be currently engaged in coaching in education; and, (iii) coach other teachers who teach literacy. The sample was limited in these ways to keep the study focused on the research question because a "purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of many" (Merriam, 2009, p. 224). Moreover, it was essential to limit the participants to those with direct experiences with the phenomenon under investigation (Kruger, 1988). To achieve this, participants were invited from a wide geographic spread across Australia and all school systems. Notably, I was transparent about adhering closely to the participants' characteristics outlined in the selection criteria despite the probability of a reduced sample size. Through that action, the intention was to simultaneously reduce bias while gaining insights into the literacy coaches' experience.

As part of the sampling strategy, I provided telephone contact, an email address, and other network contacts for respondents who needed further clarification about the study. Once general eligibility was confirmed, the respondent was guided to the next step of the research study: to complete the online questionnaire. This step included confirmation that they had read the information letter and had given consent for the interviews to be recorded. Out of thirty-eight (38) initial respondents to the call for participants, 13 did not fully meet the selection criteria for the study, five were too busy to participate, and nine declined, citing disinterest or other reasons. Ten of the 11 respondents who met all three criteria initially agreed to participate in the study. However, in the end, nine participants participated fully in the entire study, which means they completed the online questionnaire and the interviews. Documents were also provided where available.

Sample size and participants. With the awareness that small sample sizes for phenomenological studies can be suitable (Bartholomew et al., 2021), an initial target sample size was set for this study of between ten (10) and 20 participants. I knew that the sample size could change during the study (Merriam, 2009), and there was no necessity for a fixed sample size as this study did not include a quantitative research method component (Creswell, 2013). The aim was also to ensure the study's sample size remained within the five (5) and 25 range recommended for phenomenological studies by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Creswell (2013). Therefore, once a sample size of ten participants was achieved, it was deemed sufficiently extensive for this study and ended the recruitment process. The final count was nine coaches after one participant exited the study after the first interview. This sample size was determined adequate to describe the phenomenon and the study proceeded with the nine remaining participants. The sample size comprised all female coaches from schools across three Australian states. Creswell and Creswell (2023) confirm that qualitative research was flexible enough to allow for the purposeful selection of participants and sites.

The study's sample size reflects the composition of the Australian school context. The number of female teachers in Australia far exceeds that of male teachers, and the gap is growing steadily (ABS, 2022). For instance, over the 40 years from 1981 to 2021, the percentage of male teachers significantly decreased from 40.5% to 28.7%. Conversely, the number of female teachers rose to a 2021 figure of nearly three out of four teachers (ABS, 2022). No allowance was made for teachers who identify differently from the two major genders in these statistics. Considering these statistics, it was expected that most participants would be female. However, it was surprising that there was no male representation. The recruitment strategy and purposive sampling included all genders but resulted in only female participants volunteering for the study.

While this did not significantly impact the data, no male or non-binary perspectives were captured in this study.

The nine participants were initially assigned a code involving letters and numbers (for example, ABC12F). The code was used in communication with the participants, for instance, when emailing the transcribed interview to them for verification. However, following consultation with co-researchers, the code names were changed to pseudonyms to personalise the participants and enhance the study's readability.

Saturation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) define saturation as "the criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category . . . [because] no additional data are being found" (p.61). While data saturation is acknowledged within qualitative research as recommended practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018), its pragmatic application remains a subject of scholarly debate (Saunders et al., 2018). Notably, some researchers like Morse (2015) argue against the practicality of achieving data saturation as a universal benchmark in qualitative research. Therefore, instead of seeking data saturation within this study, the focus remained on making participants comfortable to share their lived experiences of literacy coaching without feeling forced or coerced. Furthermore, I took into consideration the concern of some scholars that saturation is more appropriately used in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) due to its focus on developing a theory about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In contrast, this project aimed to describe participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon rather than develop a theory about those experiences.

3.4 Data Collection

In this study, I assumed the primary role in data collection, utilising multiple methods to explore the phenomenon. The selected data collection methods employed were a questionnaire, two semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, all widely recognised as common

sources of qualitative data (Patton, 2002). These diverse methods were chosen with the anticipation that they would collectively offer rich and multifaceted descriptions of participants' experiences with coaching in literacy.

To further enhance the rigour of the study's data collection procedures, insights and strategies from prominent researchers, such as Creswell and Poth (2018) and Merriam (2009), were also considered. These insights provided valuable guidance on how to design and execute qualitative research, emphasising the importance of thorough data collection processes to ensure the study's credibility and trustworthiness. There are strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research methodology (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1995). These strategies include triangulation of data which, in this study, came from interviews, a questionnaire, and document analysis. Another strategy utilised in this study was a statement of researcher bias, which is outlined in section 3.6.

The aim of utilising a combination of questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis was to create a triangulated dataset. This dataset was intended not only to validate the findings but also to offer a nuanced and holistic portrayal of the designated literacy leaders' experiences with coaching. Triangulation of data promises to provide reliability and validity to the study by enhancing credibility and trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 1995). According to Flick (2018), triangulation serves as a quality-promoting strategy in qualitative research. By employing various methods to examine the same phenomenon from different perspectives, triangulation enhances research outcomes and ensures consistency (O'Leary, 2004).

Questionnaire. As highlighted by McLafferty (2010), questionnaires are useful for gathering data about people's perceptions of their experiences and are a valuable tool in qualitative research. Questionnaires offer several advantages, such as time efficiency, data volume collection, ease of analysis, and the ability to retain participants' confidentiality

(Lambert, 2019). Despite possible limitations, including design and ethical concerns, Lambert (2019) noted that questionnaires are commonly used by researchers in the field of education.

Considering its merits, a questionnaire was selected for use in this study to gather data via standardised, formally structured questions to understand the ways designated literacy leaders experience coaching. The questionnaire included a mix of open and closed questions to allow for both structured responses and deeper insights into participants' experiences. The data derived from the questionnaire provided a foundation for the in-depth interviews that followed, forming a basis for the exploration of designated literacy leaders' experiences with coaching. This approach allowed for triangulation of data, whereby understandings from the document analysis and interview data complemented insights from the questionnaire. According to Lambert (2019), questionnaires and interviews go well together because interviews allow questionnaires "to be fleshed out with greater depth and detail" (p. 2). This triangulation strategy was advocated by Altrichter et al. (2008) to "[give] a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation" (p. 147). The iterative nature of the triangulation process facilitated the collection of broad descriptions of participants' experiences with coaching in literacy that might have been overlooked through a singular methodological approach.

The questionnaire played a pivotal role in identifying the participants for the study. Specifically, at the beginning of the questionnaire (see Appendix D), there is a reminder of the three eligibility requirements for participating in the study. This reminder allowed potential participants a third opportunity to consider the selection criteria following the call for participants (see Appendix A) and the information letter (see Appendix B). Additionally, question nine of the questionnaire provided a fourth opportunity for potential participants to thoroughly consider their eligibility by requiring them to explain how they meet the three selection criteria. Importantly, participants who did not meet the selection criteria were prevented

from progressing. Approximately eight potential participants did not submit a completed questionnaire after realising they met some but not all three selection criteria. In this way, the questionnaire functioned as an additional gatekeeper, ensuring that only experiences relevant to the main research question were collected. Furthermore, the participants' questionnaire responses provided an understanding of participants' prior and current engagement with literacy coaching and their daily routine activities as designated literacy leaders. This understanding facilitated the formulation of pertinent follow-up questions during the interviews.

Due to the need for cost-effective approaches to data collection (Sue & Ritter, 2016), the questionnaire was administered through an online Google form. Using an online form was also valuable to make accommodations for potential social distancing requirements or preferences (Lobe et al., 2020). Throughout the data collection phase of the study, Australia, like the rest of the world, was grappling with the challenges posed by the global coronavirus pandemic (Cook et al., 2020; Mahase, 2020). The pandemic significantly influenced the modus operandi of research and academia, necessitating a transition to online platforms for scholarly activities (Donohue et al., 2021; Kerr-Sims & Baker, 2021; Lobe et al., 2020; Mahdy, 2020). Considering the prevailing circumstances, conducting the questionnaire online became a practical one. On average, the study's nine participants completed the questionnaire in approximately 26 minutes. This was done between September and October 2021.

The questionnaire design incorporated key questions related to the research question (de Vaus, 2014). The questionnaire contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions (see Appendix D). There were six closed questions: the first two questions related to consent, followed by four questions requesting demographic information. The remaining seven questions were open-ended questions designed to elucidate more detailed information from the participants about their experiences with literacy coaching. The questionnaire was the first data collection

instrument utilised in the study. It was accessed via a link in the Call for Participants (see Appendix A), an information resource sent out to potential participants during recruitment. The resource also contained links to an Information Letter (Appendix B) and a Consent Form (Appendix C), which provided participants with detailed information about the study and their potential roles if consent was given.

Interviews. Qualitative research interviews are suitable for gathering data where the interviewee's subjective perspective of a phenomenon is desired (Merriam, 2009). Interviews that are open or semi-structured are considered among the best ways to collect phenomenological research data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Consequently, in-depth semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary means of collecting information about the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders with coaching. However, due to significant challenges caused by the global coronavirus pandemic (Mahase, 2020), alternatives to face-to-face interviews became necessary because of social distancing requirements or individual preferences (Lobe et al., 2020). As a result, telephone and online Zoom interviews were offered as suitable alternative interview methods.

Zoom meetings are a viable interview option due to satisfactory experiences among participants when using Zoom (Archibald et al., 2019). However, a research study of 12 participants using interviews as the primary data collection method highlighted a greater response rate when participants were given the choice of interview method (Heath et al., 2018). Heath et al. (2018) found that most participants chose telephone interviews over emails, an online method (Skype), and face-to-face contact. Telephone interviews are considered "feasible to conduct in-depth interviews" (Drabble et al., 2016, p. 132) and are valid, trustworthy, inclusive, and cost-effective (Saarijarvi & Bratt, 2021). After conducting a literature review that confirmed the utility of telephone interviews in qualitative studies, Farooq and de Villiers (2017)

concluded that telephone interviews are “sound” and “valuable” (p. 314). However, there are key criteria to adhere to, such as ensuring the researcher is proficient in using the telephone to communicate with others. Additionally, it is important to avoid relying solely on time and cost savings as the rationale for choosing telephonic methods (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017).

All nine participants were given the opportunity to choose between Zoom calls, with or without their face showing, or telephone calls. Seven (7) of this study’s nine (9) participants chose the telephone interview. Participants completed the first interview within an average of 60 minutes, with the first nine interviews being conducted between September and November 2021. Semi-structured interviews allowed for follow-up questions from the interviews as they happened. Follow-up questions also came from the questionnaire that the participants had completed and any documents they provided prior to the interview dates. One-on-one interviews were efficient in gauging when to ask additional questions to better understand the coaching stories that the participants were telling. Non-verbal cues were not recorded, but the one-on-one interviews “[permitted] the researcher to probe and explore hidden meanings and understanding” (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 310). Open-ended questions allowed the participants to expand their responses as they shared their experiences of receiving and implementing literacy coaching in Australian schools.

Prior to the telephone interview, I emailed each participant individually with multiple dates and time slots, including before-work and after-work options. This email was usually sent within a day of receiving the completed questionnaire. Accommodations were made for the date and time availability of the participants, including cancellations and postponements. Two reminder emails were sent to participants with the upcoming date and time. The first email was sent approximately a week before the interview, the second a few days prior, and a mobile text message was sent 30 minutes to an hour before the interview began. There was some flexibility

in the number of reminders sent to each participant depending on personal request and the proximity to the appointment time. The mobile text message reminders were helpful because several participants connected from interstate and different time zones. On the interview day, steps were taken to ensure that the interview materials – telephone for facilitating the call, telephone for voice recording, laptop for backup voice recording, electronic notebook, and sticky notepads – were ready and easily accessible. All devices were tested for functionality.

Each telephone interview commenced with me thanking the participants for their time and engaging in brief small talk, such as discussing the weather, to establish a comfortable atmosphere. This introductory phase lasted a maximum of two minutes. Subsequently, I read from the script of the Interview Protocol (see Appendix E), reminding the interviewee about the purpose of the study and reaffirming their permission to record the interview. Once these formalities were addressed, the interview seamlessly transitioned to the substantive phase, with the predetermined and follow-up questions. Questions from the completed questionnaire requiring further explanation or clarification were also raised during the interview. The interview lasted for an average of 60 minutes. Immediately following the interview, the audio recording was saved and then uploaded a copy to a password-protected folder on the computer. This folder was then uploaded to the university's cloud system, which is also password-protected. The recording on the telephone was then deleted. Next, I transcribed the content of the recording.

The possibility existed for a second interview should the need arise for further clarifications by both parties: the researcher or the participants. Participants were informed that this would likely occur after the initial analysis of data. The second interviews were scheduled to last a maximum of 30 minutes but ranged from five to 25 minutes based on participants' openness to respond to clarifying questions. All the participants participated in the second interview, all of which were completed by the end of 2022. The data collected in the second

interview consisted of additional information and clarifications requested due to perceived inconsistencies in participants' statements. Some participants used the second interview to expand on their coaching stories, having had time for a more considered response. Any revised data given during the second interview was used to correct misunderstandings or misinformation given elsewhere. Both interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. A copy of the de-identified script was sent to participants to check the accuracy of the transcription to ensure a true representation of the themes that emerged later (Chapman et al., 2015). Participants were also able to request any changes, and two participants requested minor but important changes that were effected. Any subsequent request for a change to the transcript was granted. Ultimately, two rounds of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with everyone who fitted the description of the designated literacy leader.

Document analysis. Document analysis is a "systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material" (Bowen, 2009, p.27). Document analysis is considered a valuable way to focus on how participants interpret their experiences and elicit meaning without the researcher's intervention (Bowen, 2009; Morgan, 2022). Patton (1999) pointed out that "multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill" (p.1192). This underscores the belief in qualitative research that incorporating multiple methods of data collection and analyses enhances the quality and depth of research (Lambert, 2019). However, the specific documents used in document analysis can vary widely (Bowen, 2009). Written texts include books, emails, organisational documents, and diaries. Electronic texts include websites, blogs, social media platforms and media sources. Visual materials like photographs, maps, and charts can also complement textual analysis in qualitative research. Given this broad choice, in this study, an analysis of various documents was conducted to gain insight into what coaching in literacy looks

like, that is, how it is organised in Australian schools. The analysis of pre-existing documents adds to the research data by providing a valuable, useful, and advantageous method for triangulation (Morgan, 2022). It was also determined that document analysis would be useful to add quality and credibility to the research and, through triangulation, avoid or limit researcher bias.

For this study, participants were asked to provide and/or describe any relevant documents they utilised to organise coaching activities in their schools. To ensure the robustness and reliability of this research method, I adhered to four critical elements highlighted by Flick (2018) as fundamental to document analysis: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. In selecting the documents for analysis, the inclusion criterion was any documents that participants used to guide or manage the coaching process. In essence, no document was excluded if it was being used in the practice of coaching. Participants were asked to submit only existing documents and explicitly asked to refrain from creating any documents that were not available. Additionally, they were given the choice to describe the documents instead of submitting them, should they prefer this option, or there were issues with confidentiality around a third party accessing said documents. The participants in this study collectively used 18 different documents, 16 of which were provided for analysis.

During interviews, each participant was requested to describe the nature of the documents they used, whether they supplied them for analysis or not, thus highlighting the documents' inherent significance in the research context. Participants were also verbally reminded to provide copies of the documents used in their schools if none was supplied, and a request was made in a follow-up email (see Appendix F for a sample). Another essential element of the document analysis involved selecting the form of analysis for this method. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2022) was chosen to maintain consistency with how the other two data collection

methods used in this project – questionnaires and interviews – were analysed. Reflexive thematic analysis is a worthy choice as it acknowledges the researcher's insights while limiting the researcher's assumptions (Morgan, 2022).

Table 3 shows how the research questions corresponded with the three data collection methods. Under each method is a list of questions used to invite participants to share their lived experiences of literacy coaching in schools. The request for documents was included in the Call for Participants (Appendix A) and verbally communicated to the participants.

Table 3

The Planned Research Questions

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Main Research Question: What are the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in schools?</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Sub-questions 1:
How do designated literacy leaders describe the coaching they receive and implement?</td><td>Questionnaire questions
▪ Tell me about how you became involved with coaching and with literacy. How did your story begin?
▪ How would you compare the way you were coached to the way you coach others?
▪ Explain what you most want to achieve for yourself and others through your coaching in literacy experience.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interview questions
▪ Tell me everything you can about your experience with coaching in a school.
▪ Can you describe with as much detail as possible what theories about literacy and coaching, if any, you were exposed to during your coaching training?
▪ How has COVID-19 affected the coaching in literacy experience?</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Sub-questions 2:
What does coaching in literacy look like in schools?</td><td>Questionnaire questions
▪ School Type: state, independent, Catholic and K-6, 7-12, K-12
▪ Teaching & coaching qualifications _____
▪ Schools ICSEA number (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) _____
▪ Explain how you meet the three criteria for this research study as outlined in the information letter and written above.
▪ Describe what a typical fortnight in your role as a designated literacy leader is like. (Include the actual job title used by your system/school, for example, instructional leader/coach, literacy leader/coach, etc., to identify that position).</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interview questions
▪ Tell me about your journey in education/teaching, from the beginning to now.
▪ You have provided (or not) some documents about how coaching in literacy is organised at your school. Can you tell me more about this?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Document Request
▪ Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Soon, you will receive an email reminding you to provide any available documents that guide how coaching is implemented in your school. You may wait for the email reminder or forward the documents now by email to the researcher. (Source: Questionnaire)
▪ You have provided (or not) some documents about how coaching in literacy is organised at your school. Can you tell me more about this? (Source: Interview)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Closing interview questions
▪ Do you have any more reflections on the coaching in literacy experience?
▪ Is there anything about your experience with coaching in literacy that I have failed to ask you that you would like to tell me about?</td></tr>
</table>

3.5 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis can be considered the "final stage of listening to hear the meaning of what is said" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 226). According to Braun and Clarke (2019a), qualitative research "is about meaning and meaning-making" while qualitative data analysis "is about telling 'stories', about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the 'truth' that is either 'out there' and findable from, or buried deep within, the data" (p. 591). In other words, qualitative data analysis involves crafting stories and narratives that capture the nuanced and subjective aspects of the participants' experiences rather than seeking a singular, objective truth. In this study, participants' descriptions of their lived experiences of receiving and implementing literacy coaching elevate these explanations.

Grounded theory was considered as a data analysis method for this study. However, the primary reason for not choosing grounded theory was to focus on the participants' understanding of their lived experiences rather than developing a new theory about their experiences (Charmaz, 2014; Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While making every effort not to privilege one particular qualitative data analysis method over another, two methods were adopted for the data analysis process: thematic analysis and hermeneutic circle. Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen mainly because of its flexibility (Nowell et al., 2017) and, notably, because it is "an analytic method, rather than a methodology" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 120). This meant not having to adhere to any particular framework or methodological stipulations. In using TA, the aim was to utilise an analytic tool that would help the researcher "make sense of [the] data" (Braun et al., 2016, p. 191) as it is presented, but without any restrictions or prescriptions. It was also important that the method chosen was flexible enough to analyse various kinds of data present in the study and be appropriate for a phenomenological study.

Thematic analysis fits within the phenomenological approaches to data analysis (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011) and so was chosen and used in this investigation.

A step-by-step outline of the process of gathering and analysing the data collected from the questionnaire, transcribing semi-structured interviews, and documents to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings was followed (Nowell et al., 2017). This was based on Braun and Clarke's (2019b) reflexive thematic analysis, where the researcher is central and active in the data analysis process, transparent about their subjectivity, and explicit about the processes and procedures used. In reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher actively generates meaning from the data through close, repeated reading of the data to identify patterns, which are then coded and organised into themes to be analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2019a). This analysis "involves a reflective process designed to illuminate meaning" (Sundler et al., 2019, p. 735) that is new and meaningful but not a mere response to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2019a).

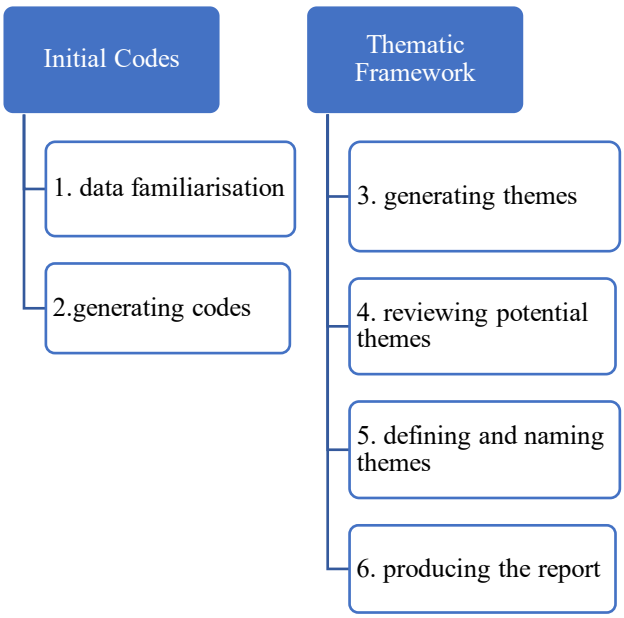
I utilised a qualitative computer data analysis software called NVivo, which has been used successfully in qualitative research (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Maher et al., 2018; Siccama & Penna, 2008) to help organise data collected from the questionnaire and interview and place them into categories of words or phrases ready to be analysed. To be transparent, using a qualitative computer analysis program somewhat departs from the approach taken by van Manen (2014), whose criticism is that "these are not the ways of doing phenomenology" (p.319). However, NVivo did not provide an analysis of the data; instead, it was a useful tool for managing a large amount of data in a time-efficient manner. To minimise the pitfalls of using technology in data analysis (Heidegger, 1977), I verified the electronic coding and did not feel "compelled to make use of auto coding just because it is available" (Lewis & Silver, 2007, p. 21). In the end, an effort was made to be transparent so that stakeholders could "make an informed assessment of the validity of the study" (Chapman et al., 2015, p. 204).

The decision to employ reflexive thematic analysis alongside hermeneutical analysis in interpreting the dataset was driven by the aim to ensure a nuanced and deep understanding of the participants' experiences with coaching in literacy. Reflexive thematic analysis, as articulated by Braun and Clarke, provides a systematic yet flexible approach that aligns well with the interpretative nature of hermeneutic phenomenology adopted in this study. This flexibility allowed the integration of these two methods, resulting in a more robust exploration of the dataset. The combined use of reflexive thematic analysis and the hermeneutic circle complemented each other, offering a nuanced, contextually rich, and reflexive approach to understanding qualitative data regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

Thematic analysis process. The thematic analysis process, following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019b) framework, consists of six steps or phases, as illustrated in Figure 4. Despite appearing linear, these steps are inherently non-linear, allowing for an iterative and reflexive approach to interpreting data. This framework provided a structured yet flexible guide for uncovering recurring patterns and themes within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2019a). The reflexivity inherent in the process acknowledges my subjective role in shaping interpretations while being careful to bracket or limit presuppositions. This aligns with the hermeneutical emphasis on valuing the participants' experiences. Additionally, thoroughly examining the dataset provides a holistic perspective on the phenomenon being investigated.

Figure 4

Representation of the Thematic Data Analysis Process



Note. This representation was created based on the thematic analysis process by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019b)

The thematic analysis process for this study began with becoming familiarised with the data as they became available. The questionnaire provided the initial data, which was reviewed and re-read multiple times to ensure familiarisation. The interview data was collated next, with the familiarisation process involving listening to the audio recording first, followed by multiple readings after transcription. The document analysis was the last data to be analysed as the documents were received ad hoc. Following data familiarisation, codes and later themes were generated using NVivo as an organisation tool. The other three steps included revising the themes, naming the themes, and writing drafts based on what was being induced.

Typically, for all three datasets, no notes were taken at the first reading or hearing of the text as the aim was to become familiarised with the participants' experiences without being distracted by notetaking. Subsequently, each text was read several times and notes on initial thoughts, impressions, and insights were made on printed copies of the questionnaire, transcribed interviews, or documents. Memoing was also used to write down ideas that came to mind during

the familiarisation process. During the coding phase, care was taken to utilise an inductive coding approach wherein meaning was assigned to selected text at the semantic level, mainly using one-word or short phrases. I conducted multiple reviews of the data, questioning any assumptions made during the process. Following this process, I generated new codes or revised existing ones as necessary. As my familiarity with the data grew, I incorporated some latent-level coding. Subsequently, the code labels were further revised, with changes made through additions and deletions. NVivo helped to simplify the coding process and manage the large amount of data gathered.

In formulating the thematic framework, the aim was to capture significant aspects of the data that would help deepen understanding of the participants' experiences. Therefore, initial themes were induced from a place of shared meaning of the participants' experiences, which were located in the patterns across the dataset. As a result, the codes were examined, and those with perceived shared meanings were collated. When naming themes, an effort was made not merely to make them respond to the research question but to connect them with a central idea being developed. The process of constructing themes was lengthy and involved more familiarising with the dataset, being flexible about changing prior assumptions, and searching for new meaning through further analysis. Consequently, I reviewed the themes across datasets until "the 'essence' of what each theme is about" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92) was identified. Themes were discarded or kept based on attributed relevance to the main research question and the study's aim. To this end, the themes that were determined to contribute to a meaningful understanding of the phenomenon were kept, and themes that insufficiently addressed the research aim were discarded.

Writing was conducted throughout all stages of the analytic process, primarily in dot point form for later expansion. This process of reflexive thematic analysis meant the data

analysis went through all six steps in a non-linear and iterative manner. The principles of the hermeneutic circle were also crucial in analysing the data, starting by considering individual participant data as a part, then examining the collective data from all participants, and finally revisiting the individual and collective data iteratively in a non-linear manner.

Hermeneutic analysis process. Following the principles of the hermeneutic circle, the hermeneutic analysis process integrated seamlessly with the reflexive thematic analysis process. A crucial initial step involved becoming aware of existing preconceptions about the phenomenon and attempting to bracket those preconceptions before delving into the data analysis. The subsequent stage focused on data familiarisation, akin to thematic analysis, and involved a deep and immersive engagement with the dataset. This engagement began with understanding the individual parts of the dataset and then moving on to the whole dataset, exploring their contribution to meaning. Achieving this required reading the data collected from the three collection methods from individual participants and trying to gain an initial sense of the patterns and key concepts presented. The process mirrored that of thematic analysis with continuous refinement of the interpretation as the process unfolded. The hermeneutic analysis process involved a cyclical and iterative approach to understanding the dataset, and like reflexive thematic analysis, this was not a linear process.

In generating codes, I engaged in comparative analysis across the data from the questionnaires, interviews, and documents, looking for convergences, divergences, and contradictions between the data sources. This involved iteratively moving between the whole and the parts, gradually refining my understanding of the data. After gaining insights from smaller parts, such as individual responses or documents, these insights were related back to the overall context and vice versa. This process led to the point where recurring themes in the data could be identified, and how these themes were connected to the research questions could be examined.

As a result, asking for clarification from some participants regarding contradictory information became necessary. This data triangulation enhanced the credibility of the findings and validated interpretations through cross-referencing the information provided.

Throughout the combination of the thematic and hermeneutic analysis, I practised reflexivity through reflection on my own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions. This extended the analytical process, particularly as my perspective evolved during the analysis. Reflexivity helped with adapting initial interpretations based on the evolving understanding of the data. Notes taken throughout the process were then used to expand the interpretation into narrative form, as shown in the remaining chapters of this project.

3.6 Researcher Bias

Simundic (2013) has defined researcher bias as "any trend or deviation from the truth in data collection, data analysis, interpretation and publication which can cause false conclusions" (p. 12). The implication here is that at all stages of the research process, researchers must be aware of potential biases they hold and the potential effects of their biased work being published. In the quest to capture the stories of participants about their lived experiences, the concept of truthful or bias-free work becomes a significant consideration for qualitative researchers. Galdas (2017) opined that rather than emphasising bias, attention should be directed towards "concepts such as rigor and trustworthiness [which] are more pertinent to the reflexive, subjective nature of qualitative research" (p.2). However, research bias continues to be an important topic within academia because of funding and research impact (Galdas, 2017) and, therefore, is worthy of being addressed in this thesis.

Researchers bring their perspectives, experiences, and beliefs to the study, potentially influencing how they collect, interpret, and present data (Galdas, 2017; Holmes, 2020). For Simundic (2013), bias awareness and management are not about eradication but moral

responsibility. Thirsk and Clark (2017) urged qualitative researchers to fortify their research practices by incorporating similarly rigorous "devices commonly used in quantitative research" (p.4). This is crucial to ensuring the quality of qualitative research is maintained and outcomes are "not just well-composed rhetoric of a well-meaning, but biased, researcher's opinion" (Thirsk & Clark, 2017, p. 4). With this knowledge in mind, the decision was made to write about potential researcher bias in this project because transparency and self-awareness are crucial elements in addressing researcher positionality (Galdas, 2017; Holmes, 2020). The aim was to openly discuss these aspects in the work and demonstrate how addressing researcher bias contributed to the credibility and integrity of this research study.

Due to past research participation, there was an awareness that my own lived experiences as a schoolteacher, researcher, and instructional coach in Australian schools could influence my understanding and interpretation of the dataset. Notably, my first year as an instructional coach coincided with my first year as a doctoral student. This dual role prompted the critical examination of the need for safeguards early in the study to minimise potential biases. Given these circumstances, the research approach was characterised by a reflexive mindset, acknowledging the influence of positionality on the study's outcomes (Holmes, 2020). Reflexivity in qualitative research enables researchers to acknowledge and address their biases, fostering transparency and credibility in the study (Braun & Clarke, 2019a; Finlay, 2021).

Throughout the study, I adhered to a phenomenological approach guided by van Manen (2017b) and incorporated reflexive thematic analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2019a). While both approaches recognise the importance of reflexivity, van Manen's phenomenological perspective introduced the concept of bracketing. However, it became evident that it was impossible to entirely suspend preconceived ideas due to being an insider with knowledge and experience with the phenomenon. Consequently, van Manen's approach was

employed as a general checkpoint for introspective reflection. This involved establishing the objectives and formulating the research questions from a phenomenological theoretical position. For instance, crafting research questions that authentically reflected a genuine perspective involved multiple iterations and discussions with co-researchers. This iterative process compelled the critical assessment and reconsideration of the framing of questions and the underlying motivations behind them. Recognising the need to bracket assumptions around coaching in schools was necessary. There were instances where the co-researchers challenged my existing knowledge of the phenomenon. Recording these discussions permitted reflective thinking and the development of strategies to address potential biases.

Braun and Clarke's (2019a; 2022) approach to reflexivity in thematic analysis proved particularly beneficial during the data analysis phase, encouraging me to consider my role and actively engage in a reflexive process. Throughout the process, I embraced reflexivity, kept an open mind throughout the entire process, and maintained a balance between acknowledging one's own experiences without centring them. The non-linear nature of both approaches facilitated an iterative reflexive process inherent in the thematic analysis framework, as illustrated in Figure 4 in section 3.5. This flexibility allowed for navigation between phenomenological exploration and thematic identification, thus refining understanding of the phenomenon. One of the strategies employed was writing memo notes in the margins of the printed interview scripts while reading them. Triangulation was also utilised as a methodological approach to ensure the study's credibility and validity.

Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003) argued that the researcher serving as the primary medium poses the most significant risk to the credibility of qualitative research. To address this concern, I implemented various strategies throughout the research process to enhance reflexivity and mitigate potential biases. For example, during the interviews, I strived to maintain a non-

interruptive and non-commentary approach to avoid influencing participants' responses. It was also helpful to prepare questions and prompts beforehand (see Appendix E – Interview protocol and questions) and strategically place memo notes in visible places during phone interviews as a reminder to refrain from using leading questions and to maintain a neutral stance. Additionally, to avoid steering them in a particular direction, best efforts were made to wait until there was a recognisable pause in their speaking before asking participants to clarify or expand on something they had said.

Throughout the research process, my understanding of bias evolved through various learning experiences and challenges, contributing to professional growth. Engaging in phenomenological research introduced a novel learning experience, and many hours were spent exploring its different schools and adherents. This included carefully selecting the most relevant approach for the study. The phenomenological approach resonated with the study's purpose and aligned with my personal qualities (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). Creswell (2013) emphasised the importance of researchers having a solid understanding of the philosophy and its tenets when applying a phenomenological approach. This evolution in understanding bias was instrumental in my overall development.

One notable challenge was the realisation that while both Heidegger (1962) and van Manen (2017a) advocated for bracketing, which works to mitigate biases in phenomenological research, their perspectives can initially be confusing. Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology seemed absolute and theoretical, making it challenging to fully grasp the emphasis on setting aside presuppositions. In contrast, van Manen's approach appeared more pragmatic and flexible regarding reflexivity while posing its own complexities. As an insider with some knowledge and experience of the phenomenon, I recognised the need to depart partially from both positions to

find a comfortable stance for this study. This dilemma triggered feelings of imposter syndrome, prompting self-questioning about the legitimacy of such adjustments by a novice researcher.

Despite taking steps to minimise bias by being transparent and reflexive, the research remains potentially limited due to bias. The main biases considered in this paper are researcher subjectivity, positionality, and underrepresentation. First, an open acknowledgement has been made regarding the presence of subjectivity in this research. It is impossible to detach from the research or its outcome completely. As Galdas (2017) highlighted, achieving such separation is neither feasible nor desirable. However, as explained, bracketing and reflexivity were utilised to minimise bias. Second, Holmes (2020) warned that positionality "can be seen to affect the totality of the research process" (p. 3) and encouraged researchers to disclose that positionality bias in their research. Consequently, this section contains disclosure regarding the bracketing of researcher knowledge and experience as an insider – a coach in Australian schools - to minimise the influence on participants' stories. Third, although bias could be perceived, the absence of male and non-binary representation in this study was unintentional. As explained in section 3.3, the inclusion criteria were equally open to individuals of all genders throughout the recruitment process. Admittedly, incorporating the perspectives of non-female identifying participants could have enriched the understanding of the phenomenon. It is recommended that future researchers consider expanding their outreach to include male and non-binary individuals in their studies.

In summary, I have acknowledged and openly discussed how potential biases in this work have been addressed. By being transparent, the aim was to demonstrate how addressing researcher bias contributed to the credibility and integrity of this research project. The discussions addressed potential limitations and offered recommendations for researchers to further mitigate bias, thereby fostering continuous improvement in qualitative research practices. Notwithstanding the measures taken to minimise bias in this study, it is crucial to acknowledge

that bias, influenced by personal beliefs, remains an inherent aspect of qualitative research (Mehra, 2002).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The research proposal successfully underwent an ethical review conducted by Avondale University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The approval from the HREC affirms that this project is conducted ethically, respectfully, and in a manner relevant to its intended purpose. The committee also ensured that no harm would be caused to the participants and that their dignity and privacy would be upheld.

Confidentiality measures were rigorously implemented, with all data collected securely stored. Participant identities were initially protected through assigned codes and subsequently through the use of pseudonyms. Participants were reassured that their identities would remain anonymous. They provided signed consent forms indicating their voluntary and informed agreement to participate in the study.

Prior permission was obtained from relevant stakeholders and gatekeepers. Participants were fully briefed on the nature of the study and their right to withdraw at any time during the research process. A transparent disclosure was provided regarding the researcher's role, clarifying that no personal benefit would be gained other than the advancement of research. The study strictly adhered to the HREC's stipulations throughout its duration.

3.8 Chapter Summary

Chapter Three presented the design for this study, beginning with the rationale for the qualitative research methodology chosen for the study to understand the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in Australian schools. The chapter outlined why a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was considered the most

effective for gaining insights into the experiences of nine participants from three Australian states. The participants who came from both the independent and public school systems in Australia were selected through purposeful sampling. The steps taken to safeguard participants' identities through the use of pseudonyms and upholding confidentiality were also outlined.

The chapter detailed the triangulated utilisation of a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis for data collection. The strategy for data analysis was outlined, which was a blend of Braun and Clarke's (2019a) reflexive thematic analysis and the principles from Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic circle. Both analytic methods allowed for an iterative approach to examining and understanding the data and generating findings that are valuable and pertinent to the lived experiences of the participants. Chapter Three also included information about researcher bias in the study to demonstrate transparency and methodological rigour and acknowledge the researcher's potential influence on the research. Similarly, the ethical considerations in the study addressed the process of ensuring research integrity.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The greatest thing that we wanted to achieve in providing quality coaching to our staff was that we wanted them to feel as though when they spoke it was a safe space, and what they had to say was respected – Cate

4.1 Introduction

This chapter, which reports the findings generated from an analysis of the data, is organised into four (4) major sections, beginning with background information that provides readers with an understanding of the participants' characteristics, motivations, aims, qualifications and training. This background information situates the participants' experiences within their context and informs the reader about what drives the participants professionally. Next, there is a presentation of the most significant findings based on induced themes for each of the two sub-questions, beginning with **1: How do designated literacy leaders describe the coaching they receive and implement in Australian schools?** The primary data source for sub-question 1 came from the questionnaire and interviews. The main source of data for sub-question **2: What does coaching in literacy look like in Australian schools?** came mainly from documents provided by participants and any descriptions in the questionnaire and interviews. Throughout the chapter, raw data are presented as quotations from participants. These quotations are written in italics to differentiate them from those sourced from other works, such as journal articles and books. The conclusion provides a summary of the main findings.

4.2 Background Information

4.2.1 Profile of the Participants

Data from the questionnaire was leveraged to construct a comprehensive profile of participants, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Categorical Profile of Participants

Participant pseudonym	State	School sector	ICSEA (score)	School type	Grade level	Role title
Cate	NSW	Independent	Above benchmark (1015)	K-12	Primary	LNAP Leader/ Instructional coach
Fiona	NSW	Independent	Below benchmark (957)	K-12	Primary	Instructional Leader for the Explicit Teaching of Literacy and Numeracy (LNAP) and Literacy Curriculum Coordinator
Holly	Vic	Public	Below benchmark (953)	7-12	Secondary	Instructional Leader
Paula	SA	Independent	Above benchmark (1026)	K-12	Secondary	Middle and Secondary Literacy Coordinator
Portia	Vic	Independent	Above benchmark (1118)	K-12	Primary & Secondary	Head of Literacy K-12
Rebecca	NSW	Catholic	Below benchmark (988)	K-12	Secondary	Literacy Coach and Leader of Literacy (stage 4 and 5)
Renee	NSW	Public	Below benchmark (936)	K-6	Primary	Instructional leader EAfS
Shannon	NSW	Public	Below benchmark (-)	K-6	Primary	Instructional leader EAfS
Tahnee	SA	Independent	Above benchmark (1026)	K-12	Primary	Primary English Coordinator

The table categorises participants based on pseudonyms, state, school sector, the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA), school type, grade level, and role title. ICSEA, a dynamic measure used in Australia, assesses the socio-educational advantage of school communities by considering students' socio-economic background and other contextual information. Schools are evaluated against a national benchmark score of 1000. Schools with a score above 1000 indicate serving students from more advantaged socio-educational backgrounds, while those below 1000 are recognised as serving less advantaged student

communities (ACARA, 2016). Including ICSEA within the data enriches the understanding of the socio-economic context within which coaching experiences are explored in this study.

The ICSEA scores vary, with five participant schools below benchmark and four above benchmark. This distribution is indicative of the inherent randomness in the selection criteria used in the study. The participants are listed alphabetically using pseudonyms unrelated to their actual names to ensure anonymity. All participants who completed the entire process identified as female, a notable characteristic in the context of this study. The majority of participants live and work in New South Wales (NSW), with representation from Victoria (VIC) and South Australia (SA). Participants span three school sectors – independent, Catholic, and public, with a predominant presence in independent schools.

Table 1 also displays three distinct school types—K-12, 7-12, and K-6—with K-12 being the most common. Several participants (five of them) serve as designated literacy leaders in primary schools, while three work within secondary school settings. Additionally, one participant holds a role spanning both primary and secondary education. Despite variations in the role titles across states and systems, 'instructional leader' emerged as the most frequently used term, notably in public schools in NSW and VIC. The data also indicate diverse coaching sources, with peer coaching a common way of being coached among participants.

4.2.2 Motivations and Aims of Participants

In the questionnaire, participants outlined what motivated them to enter the teaching profession and what they wanted to achieve through their coaching of other teachers.

Cate has always wanted to be a teacher and was influenced into the profession by a primary school teacher with whom she still has contact. She began teaching seven (7) years ago and advanced up the career ladder, becoming a stage leader after three years. She has been performing her part-time coaching role, which she shares with a more experienced colleague, for

about a year. Through coaching, Cate desires *to support and coach teachers to improve their confidence in teaching literacy, collecting, collating and analysing data and making adjustments accordingly to support all students of varied needs*. She believes she will also be able to grow her understanding in this way.

Fiona was initially influenced into the profession by her kindergarten teacher, who left a lasting impression. However, teaching was ultimately pursued as a contingency plan alongside a music degree at the insistence of her father. She is very dedicated to her students. Through coaching, Fiona desires *the teachers in* [her] *team to be able to confidently develop, engage and deliver a meaningful lesson that is explicit and includes all of the research-based components* [and to] *understand the role of data is* [to] *ensure the needs of all students are being met*. Fiona has been coaching for four years and teaching for approximately 19 years.

Holly was influenced to become a teacher by two of her high school teachers. She worked abroad while completing her bachelor's degree before returning to Australia. Holly joined the Teach for Australia program, where she was first introduced to coaching. She has approximately four-and-a-half (4.5) years of coaching experience in schools and nearly ten (10) years of experience as a teacher. Through coaching, Holly desires *to develop the knowledge and skills of those* [she coaches] *to become experts in providing literacy intervention so that they can justify all of the instructional decisions they make and, in turn, can teach others*.

Paula began her teaching career in the public education sector seven (7) years ago after graduating with her bachelor's degree. She enjoys interacting with children and is passionate about teaching, particularly reading. Through coaching, which she has been engaged in for the past three (3) years, Paula desires *the whole school implementation of a multi-pronged literacy approach . . ., a greater frequency in low-stakes writing tasks and the explicit teaching of*

subject-specific vocabulary. She hopes this experience will lead to opportunities in leadership or other literacy positions.

Portia went into teaching over 30 years ago and sees teaching as an opportunity to give back to the community and serve students. Through coaching, which she began seven (7) years ago, she desires *to provide support to enable teachers to develop into experts, masters of their craft . . . advocating for the rights of teachers to pay attention to their professional development in a climate where they often neglect their own development due to lack of time or work pressure*.

Rebecca was motivated to teach through her learning experiences, particularly the social, emotional and well-being aspects of education. She has taught in various schools and roles for four (4) years and has been coaching for three (3) years. Through coaching, Rebecca desires *to provide teachers with the confidence that they can teach literacy, that literacy is the foundation of all subjects, not just in literacy or English classes.* [Also, she] *wants all students to have the skills and knowledge needed to communicate, not just in school but also once they leave school*.

Renee comes from a family of teachers. Despite initial ambivalence, she enjoyed her early teaching experiences and worked in several independent and state schools nationwide. She has been teaching for 20 years and coaching for the past four (4) years. Through coaching, Renee desires to provide coachees with sessions that are *useful, practical and can see them as directly improving their classroom practice*.

Shannon was motivated to become a teacher because she did not like her high school teachers. She likes children and has a strong sense of equity in education. After completing a teaching certificate, she worked as a casual teacher before obtaining her first permanent position. She began teaching 36 years ago and has been coaching for 12 years. Through coaching,

Shannon desires to see *teachers and students have a love for literacy, the language in literacy and how it can impact their world while improving speaking and listening, reading and writing*.

Tahnee has been teaching for about 35 years, although she did not plan to become a teacher. She has worked in several schools across the country and believes this variety has kept her in the profession. Tahnee has been coaching for approximately 12 years. Through coaching, she desires *to help teachers see that teaching literacy is something to enjoy and that it doesn't have to be difficult*.

In this section, participants related their motivations and aims for engaging in coaching, demonstrating their commitment and approach. Section 4.2.3 delves into the participants' qualifications and training.

4.2.3 Qualifications and Training

The questionnaire and interview data showed that most participants had no specific literacy education. Only one coach reported having a specific literacy qualification: a master's degree in literacy. Most had what could be termed as adjacent qualifications. In this project, adjacent qualifications are defined as any qualification wherein it could be reasonably expected that literacy was a component covered within the program but not the focus of the teaching and learning. These adjacent qualifications would include teaching degrees in English and linguistics and teaching English to students of other languages (TESOL). The remaining participants possessed qualifications, for instance, in history or humanities, wherein literacy would be an insignificant component and, most likely, not included in the teaching and learning of the qualification.

The coaches in the study were experienced teachers, with many being in the profession for over a decade. Their coaching experience varied, with some having recently started while others had spent many years in the role. Rebecca became a coach with the least teaching experience, after just one year in teaching. She was also the only person who did not receive any external coaching. Portia had one of the longest teaching experiences (approximately 30 years), the only explicitly relevant teaching qualification (a master's degree in literacy), and the most diverse coaching credentials and training—both facilitative (via GCI) and instructional (via ICG).

The teaching qualifications and coaching training obtained by each participant are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Literacy Qualifications and Coaching Training of Participants

Pseudonym	Teaching experience (years)	Teaching Qualification(s)	Coaching experience (years)	Coaching Qualification(s)/Training
Cate	7	Bachelor of Education (primary) Master of Education (Curriculum) – incomplete	1	Peer and AIS (LNAP)
Fiona	19	Master of Education (primary) - English, Gifted & Talented Bachelor of Music Education Bachelor of Primary Education	4	Peer and AIS (LNAP)
Holly	10	Bachelor of French and History Master of Teaching	4.5	Teach for Australia
Paula	7	Bachelor of English and History	3	Leadership Training that included coaching
Portia	30	Diploma of Education Master of Education – Literacy	7	GCI (accreditation program) and ICG
Rebecca	4	Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Secondary – Humanities and Social Science	3	Peer
Renee	20	Bachelor of Education – Special Education Master of Instructional Leadership	4	GCI and EAfS
Shannon	36	Bachelor of Linguistics	12	Timperley Method peer and network
Tahnee	35	Diploma of Teaching (primary) Postgraduate Certificate (TESOL)	12	NLP Certified Master Coach

4.3 Findings: Major Themes

Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 report the major themes of the study that relate to research sub-question 1: How do designated literacy leaders describe the coaching they receive and implement in Australian schools? For clarity, this question will be outlined under two headings: i) how the participants describe the coaching they received and ii) how the participants describe the coaching they implemented. The themes were generated inductively through a thematic analysis of the interview and questionnaire data, following Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis and Heidegger's Hermeneutical Circle.

4.3.1 How Participants Described the Coaching They Received

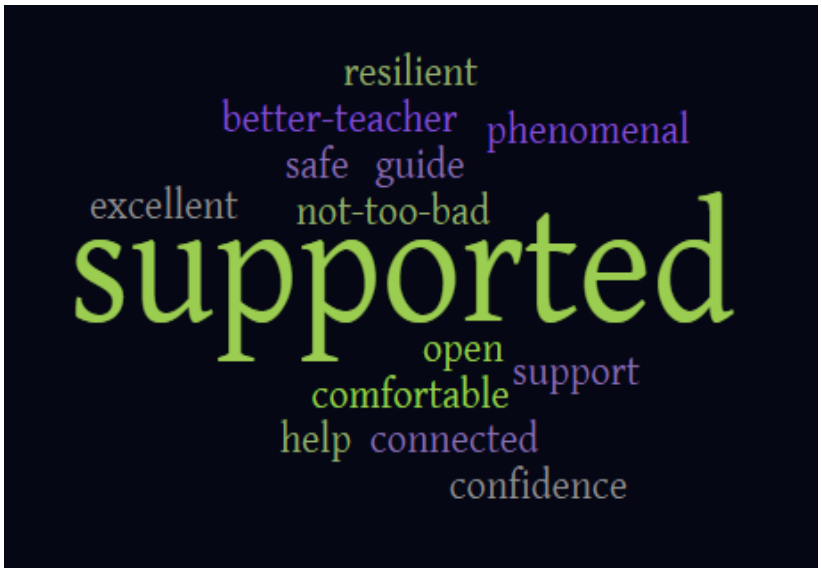
Three major themes were induced from the data in response to how designated literacy leaders described the coaching they received. These were:

1. The impact of having a supportive coach
2. Challenges with being coached
3. Coaching in literacy: background and theoretical knowledge

4.3.1.1 Theme 1 - The Impact of a Supportive Coach. Having a supportive coach was a strong theme among the participants. Many of the participants described their experiences of being coached using language that can be categorised as positive. Evident in their responses was the repeated use of some form of the word "support", depicted in the word cloud illustrated in Figure 5. The word cloud was generated using NVivo software (QSR International, 2023).

Figure 5

Word Cloud Showing the Impact of a Supportive Coach



> *I was extremely supported in my role from the coaching that I was given. Anything that I needed I could ask for, which was comforting at that time because I was new in this role - new leading a team, new coaching a team. . . . I felt connected to that person and supported by that person as well, and I felt safe*. (Rebecca, interview 1)

Rebecca felt supported because her coach was open, which led to feelings of comfort, connectedness, and safety. She was receiving coaching and coaching others simultaneously because her leaders selected her to work in the literacy space. Rebecca recounted being supported in coaching older, more experienced teachers as well as same-age and similarly experienced teachers. She found this experience challenging because of differences in ranking and pedagogical style. However, due to being supported through the coaching process, Rebecca recalled that the result was her becoming a coach able to focus on the coachee's specific needs. Rebecca described her experience as being *well, well supported* and that led to improvement in her coaching her team. She also credited her improvement to gaining more experience in coaching and literacy. Rebecca welcomed feedback from her coach, which she described as

constructive because it helped her become *a better person, a better educator, and a better coach*. She emphasised her supportive, first-time experience of being coached as a partnership: *It was very you and I are in it. It's kind of a collaborative space, but I would do something, she would do something, we would come back together, we'd talk and discuss*. Rebecca also contrasted how she was being coached currently, elaborating that her current coach was somewhat supportive because she *did assist when I asked for assistance*. However, the relationship was not described as a partnership because *I kind of had to make decisions or guide things* when Rebecca expected her coach to *be that go-to person*.

Renee's coaching experience helped her build her self-confidence in her leadership ability. She felt supported by the coach, whom she said provided *the best professional learning,* which she claimed was personalised to her needs and *driven by where I was going* (interview 1). Due to the support she received, Renee maintained a relationship with her coach even after moving schools. She has contacted her on *numerous occasions* by phone because the coach is such a *lovely person* who supports her through coaching challenges. Renee described her relationship with her coach as *good* and mentioned feeling *really safe* during coaching. Despite this, she felt facilitative coaching was *frustrating a little bit* because she needed more input, feedback, and direction from the coach.

For Cate, being coached represented a welcome challenge, as it provided her with guidance throughout her journey. Before beginning her role as an LNAP instructional coach, she shared that she had received LNAP coaching as a teacher for approximately two years from her peer and found it to be *a positive experience.* She further explained:

> *I love being challenged and I think having her come and observe me in the classroom and then have our coaching session and we would talk about some of the things she might have seen and then from that be able to develop a bit of a plan as to how I can grow*

> *professionally . . . I've got someone here that can support me and help me and guide me along the way.* (Cate, interview 1)

This experience of being coached was a catalyst for Cate becoming a coach herself. She revealed that she *fell in love with this idea of coaching* and agreed when offered the role of a coach. Cate recalled that she was also coached by an AIS consultant and the referenced peer, whom the same consultant had previously coached. The coaches had similar coaching styles, so Cate felt *lucky that I had two people that were supporting me and helping me grow.* Despite these supportive relationships, Cate lamented she was not *trained properly just due to COVID* when all learning moved online. She elaborated that the coronavirus pandemic caused her not to receive the *full amount of support* that she believes she would have been given, and that has affected her confidence to coach by herself. Cate also mentioned that prior to the advent of the pandemic, she had enjoyed the sessions with her AIS coach who used role-playing and demonstrations to train her to become a coach. She felt being coached via Zoom was less effective than face to face coaching.

Shannon, Holly, and Fiona recognised the result of such a supportive relationship as professional growth. Shannon described being coached informally by experienced teachers, including principals and directors of education, stating [they] *had a good understanding of where I was and the needs that I had at that point . . .* (Shannon, interview 1). Shannon was pleased it was not a directed relationship but a more collaborative one. She explained that her coach supported her *in building my own capacity rather than saying you go and do it in this way and do it and I'm gonna watch you. It was a collegial discussion*. Shannon related that the formal coaching she received through the Timperley method was useful for equipping her to be able to coach teachers on how to teach children to read and write.

Holly (interview 1) summarised that coaching had made her *a better teacher and more resilient* because she had another adult to observe her and ask her probing questions such as *What about this? Have you thought about it this way*? Her first coaching experience occurred during her second year of teaching. She described having a *pretty amazing coach* who coached her on *how to work with other people and how to think about myself and how to listen to other people and get their feedback*. When she joined a school with weekly compulsory coaching for teachers as part of the teaching and learning program, Holly reported that after two years she was identified as a suitable candidate. She was then supported into becoming a coach herself. She noted that leadership gave her autonomy over the teaching and learning program at the school. Holly positively described the coaching activities she was engaged in, like classroom observations, receiving critical feedback, and debriefing as *not new* because she had been supported with a coach since her university course. She described seeing *a shift* in teachers seeking out coaching because they wanted to professionally develop and change what they believed was not working in their classrooms. She also reported improved conversations that she attributed to coachees becoming coaches.

Similarly, Fiona recounted that she had observed positive teacher development, too, because coaching had metaphorically given teacher coachees *tools to put in their toolbelts* (interview 1). Overall, Fiona described having a greater professional growth mindset than her younger peer-coach, who she noted was preparing to leave the teaching profession and did not appear to be very committed to the role. Even so, Fiona credited her coach for introducing her to explicit instruction in literacy, which she described as *game changing* because of its positive effect on student learning. She recounted responding to the literacy coaching she received by putting what she was learning into practice and conducting her own professional learning to gain

deeper knowledge. Fiona revealed that she found the coaching through the AIS *probably more valuable and worthwhile* than what she received through her peer because of greater experience.

Portia's introduction to coaching came about before she was employed as a coach at her school. She related that, along with other key personnel in the school, she was selected to receive facilitative coaching training with Growth Coaching International (GCI) as part of their professional learning. She also recounted her GCI coaching did not involve literacy coaching, so she *went and bought every single book on literacy coaching that* [she] *could find in the world and read them.* Shortly after her training, Portia became the school's literacy coach and obtained further training in the instructional coaching model. She reported being supported by leadership in establishing what coaching was going to look like at the school, and they settled on instructional coaching as a more supportive way of coaching due to its partnership principles. She liked that she could support teachers more directly with her expertise. She explained that *it didn't make sense for* [her], *with a master's in literacy, to be a literacy coach who didn't bring anything to the conversation.* Portia further explained that instructional coaching was *more than just facilitating a conversation* or goal-setting. Instructional coaching was more about building a partnership with the coachee and sharing knowledge so that both parties *get something* from the relationship. Moreover, the coach is allowed to *bring their expertise to the relationship* and, in this way, meet the coachee's needs. With this approach to coaching, Portia described her school as *flourishing* and one that had gone from a *mediocre independent school . . . to* [a] *very competitive* one. For Portia, coaching *transformed* her school and resulted in improvements in outcomes and grades - *the best . . . results ever* in literacy in Australian low-stakes and high-stakes exams (interview 1).

Paula (interview 1) described being exposed to *a lot of informal coaching* and being coached informally by experienced teachers, including a deputy principal. She did not have any

formal coaching experience until she began working at her current school, where she enrolled in leadership training with a coaching component. She described receiving *peer-to-peer coaching* in a small group setting where participants would share their experiences and offer feedback to each other. The support Paula received came from peers rather than the coach, who she said only performed a facilitative role. She explained that *the coach didn't do a whole lot in those sessions other than like help spark conversations if conversations needed to be had.* She also used mentoring and coaching interchangeably at times throughout the interview. Staff engagement, interests, commitment and willingness are what Paula described as the measure of coaching's impact on her school.

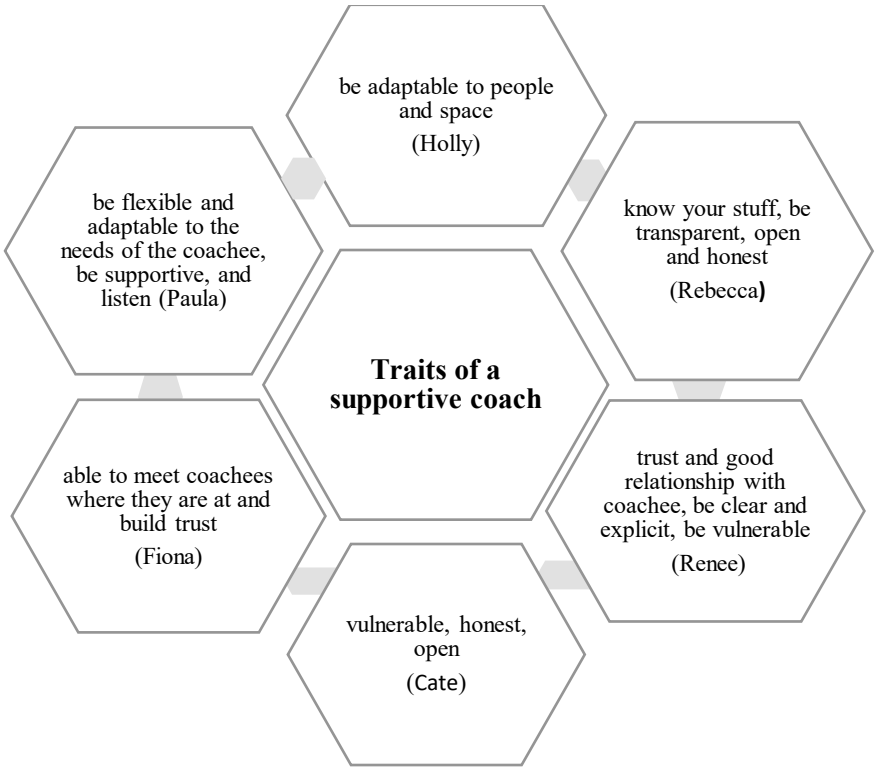
Tahnee (interview 1) described her introduction to coaching as accidental: *an unplanned kind of coaching situation* that became necessary as she moved to different teaching locations with different literacy teaching methods. She described her first coach as supportive of her as a new teacher. That coach helped Tahnee *become a better teacher* of literacy despite being *a little bit rough and abrupt . . .* [not] *warm and fuzzy.* Tahnee explained that she always had an experienced teacher to coach her in literacy; someone who guided her and *also supported my curiosity about how to do literacy in a better way.* She recounted that she even received coaching over the phone from her second coach when she moved around Australia for work. Tahnee described this as a *positive relationship* because that coach *was a different kind of personality really and would really work from asking questions and then offering the support where I'd shown that I felt I needed it.* As a result, Tahnee credits her coach for guiding her to become a *strong teacher of literacy.* Eight years into her teaching, she became her *little coaching cycle,* honing the ability to coach herself. Her passion for knowledge about literacy led her on a coaching journey where she became *an accidental coach* for her peers who approached her for

literacy support. Tahnee shared that *at some point in time, it sort of went from me being supported to me then supporting others* (interview 1).

The responses from the first interview revealed a breadth of traits and provided insights into the qualities that participants perceived in a supportive coach (See Figure 6). These traits could be categorised into four categories. The first trait category, adaptability, includes the participants' descriptions of a coach being adaptable to people and space, meeting coachees where they are at, and being flexible and adaptable to the needs of the coachee. The second trait category, knowledge and transparency, includes the participants' descriptions of a coach demonstrating expertise, being clear and explicit, and being transparent. The third trait category, trust and relationship building, includes being open and honest, building trust and good relationships with coachees, and showing vulnerability. Support and communication, the fourth trait category, was described as being supportive and being able to listen well.

Figure 6

Traits of a Supportive Coach



In summary, the findings revealed that having a supportive coach was significant to the participants' experiences while being coached. Rebecca felt comforted and safe due to her coach's openness, while Renee gained self-confidence in her leadership abilities. Cate appreciated the guidance, Shannon, Holly, and Fiona experienced professional growth, and Portia valued the coach's expertise in meeting her needs. Also, Holly noted that coaching improved her teaching and resilience, and Fiona observed positive teacher development. Paula, however, found peer support more impactful than her facilitative coach, who mainly sparked necessary conversations. Tahnee always had an experienced teacher guiding her and supporting her curiosity. The participants also identified flexibility, adaptability, and being a good listener as valued traits of a supportive coach. Additionally, transparency, honesty, trustworthiness, and vulnerability were emphasised, along with the ability to build trust and meet coaches at their

level. Whether their introduction to literacy coaching was incidental or planned, the participants shared how having a supportive coach helped them to grow professionally.

4.3.1.2 Theme 2 - Challenges With Being Coached. The participants described aspects of the coaching experience using language that could be labelled as unfavourable. For instance, the coaches outlined challenges around goal-setting, being coached in a particular method, the lack of coaching in literacy, and perceptions of the coach.

(i) Goal-setting. Renee, Shannon, and Holly expressed dissatisfaction with coaching due to the requirement of goal-setting. One respondent described being coached *as some of the best professional learning I've ever had because it was just very personalised to me; it was very much driven by where I was going* (Renee, interview 1). However, she also found the experience *frustrating* because she could not come up with a goal on her own and claimed she *struggled* . . . [and] . . . *found it really difficult to kind of land on a goal* by herself. She remained in contact with her coach and still calls her for advice when she needs support. However, she now coaches in a *very different* way from how she was coached. She now uses a process that begins with an analysis of the data with her coachee, followed by a conversation that probes the coachee to use that evidence from the data: *What do you see?. . . What's happening with your kids at the moment?. . . I notice that you're breaking content down, but you're not checking for understanding.* Renee explained that after such a reflective start, she uses GROWTH coaching *to kind of develop that idea of what the goal is going to be and usually, to be honest, that goal-setting at the beginning when I first start working with somebody takes a long time to get the goal. To land on the goal, it takes a while* (interview 1). Renee also ensures that goal-setting is broken down into *actionable steps* so coachees can measure success immediately.

Similarly, Shannon (interview 1) found it off-putting having to come to a coaching session with a goal ready before she had received sufficient professional development or had

been taught how to set goals. She explained that she had not been prepared for goal-setting at all, or if she had, it was not done well. She expressed that with the teachers she now coaches, she tends to *look at their point of need – what they need, where they're at* instead of focusing on setting goals from the start. However, she emphasised taking care when discussing the coachee's needs because *coaching is wanting change. So, you have to be careful how you start your coaching to get your change.* Therefore, after a needs analysis based on data conversations, Shannon provides feedback, models a task, and allows coachees time to practise without interference. When the coachees are ready, she will then observe them and discuss with them. For Shannon, this process is crucial because *if you don't begin the right way, you're never going to get it back again.* The 'it' she refers to here is the trusting relationship between the coach and coachee. Like Renee and Shannon, Holly related her troubles with goal-setting. She mentioned that her coach *let me identify my own goals but in hindsight, I can see that I did not know what I wanted or needed to learn* (questionnaire). Instead, she would have *benefitted greatly from having someone else be quite directive and explicit*. This experience has now led her to be a more explicit, directive coach.

(ii) Coaching method. Some participants revealed that they found a particular coaching method challenging. For instance, Renee described the GROWTH coaching she received as *a little bit sterile . . . it's not like a conversation* because what she needed was *feedback from somebody else to kind of say 'hey, you're doing really well in this area, maybe this is something we continue on, or maybe you know this is an area you could improve on.* Renee also referred to her coaching experience as sometimes feeling more like a *counselling session*. She questioned whether the aim was to *make somebody feel better or . . . about actual real improvement* (interview 1). Shannon echoed similar sentiments, characterising being coached under the GROW method *a little bit not made up, but forced*. She offered more insight into her experience:

> *Well, the GROW method to me is sort of a set thing, and you tick the little boxes off, and I can't miss the O, R in it because then I won't grow. As an adult and an adult learner is that what I need to do? To me, it's like a little assessment checklist thing. I want to be able to talk to my colleagues and say this is my area of need; how can you help me? . . . But then some people really like the GROW method because they can set their goals. I don't know what the R stands for. Because I haven't liked it . . . I don't even know what all the letters stand for. What's the O? What's the W?* (Shannon, interview 1)

Shannon admitted that she had never received formal training on the GROW method, although it was the method used by the school where she was employed. She clarified that her limited use of this method is likely because she had only participated in it without being formally trained. She also disliked the role-playing in the GROW method because it was directive, with the coach *doing it to me so I could learn how to do it to others.* In the end, the challenges Shannon faced using the GROW coaching method caused her to abandon this method when she coaches others. Instead, she utilises the Timperley method, which she finds more *real . . .* [because] *it wasn't a ticker box, checklist thing*, and more focused on sitting with teachers and discussing.

The experience of being coached in GROW coaching was the main challenge Portia recalled about being coached. She described the GROW method as *more facilitative coaching . . .which was an interesting approach but probably hadn't quite hit the nail on the head for me* (interview 1). Portia explained that this approach meant she found it difficult to bond with her coach, especially since he believed *every conversation was like a coaching conversation.* This experience meant that she found it difficult to relax in his presence and become acquainted with him. However, after she spoke with him about these difficulties, he *softened his coaching approach* and became *a much better coach*. Portia advocates for the inclusion of *the casual* rather than *a very structured* approach to coaching. This approach ensures

that coaches are *building relationships and trust* and are engaging authentically rather than mechanically.

Conversely, Cate identified the lack of proper training as a significant challenge for her. She blamed the disruptions on the novel coronavirus pandemic of 2019. She perceived that she was not sufficiently exposed to a particular coaching method.

> *Because I didn't go and do the intense program, I feel as though I didn't really have the, I guess, background knowledge of why you do the things that you do within coaching . . . So yeah, unfortunately, I didn't get probably the full amount of support I needed in order to feel completely confident to do coaching alone with someone.* (Cate, interview 1)

Despite these challenges, Cate recognised the benefits of having both her coaches using similar styles because they had been trained through GROWTH coaching.

(iii) Coaching in literacy. Holly reported that she did not have any formal coaching in literacy and found this lack posed a significant challenge to her. She narrated that *in the early years* [of]*coaching, literacy was not part of the discussion* (interview 1). The instructional coach at her school was devoted to a method of literacy acquisition—Reading Recovery—that Holly felt was not best practice. However, she *had no knowledge with which to dispute* the coaching she was receiving. Holly noted that her early experience with that literacy improvement method influenced how she coached. It left her dissatisfied with the coaching she had received, as she felt it lacked sufficient focus on literacy. Subsequently, Holly engaged in self-learning, including attending online webinars, and began pursuing research independently.

Like Holly, three other participants disclosed having to engage in their own learning to build their coaching knowledge, specifically around literacy.

> [I] *went and bought every single book on literacy coaching that I could find in the world and read . . . I just wanted to soak it all up. So, all of my reading and research led me to*

an understanding of what literacy coaching was. (Portia, interview 1)

I started to look up other explicit instruction people who are like the go-to in their area of education and so I did all of that because I was really inspired by what I had started the process with and so very quickly excelled at that. (Fiona, interview 1)

I would read different things or go and do little courses and things that were related to literacy. . . . Then I would actually experiment and almost run like my own little investigations on how different things would work. So, I get a little bit of learning, do a bit more reading and then just try some stuff out and see how it went and then kind of reflect on that, then change it or keep going with it, whatever felt appropriate, so it sort of almost became my own little coaching cycle for myself. (Tahnee, interview 1)

For Paula and Rebecca, it was the coach's lack of engagement that was challenging. Each participant voiced an expectation for more involvement from their coach than they received.

The coach didn't do a whole lot in those sessions other than like help spark conversations if conversation needed to be had, but most of it, I think, came from people sharing their experiences. (Paula, interview 1)

There was hardly any coaching that was occurring. The coaching that I received was very surface level and it always felt rushed . . . There was no, I guess, rapport that was built between her and I believe that was because of her lack of experience. (Rebecca, interview 1)

The self-learning experiences shared by the participants included reading books on literacy coaching, conducting research investigations, completing courses, and trialling ideas.

(iv) Perception of the coach. In Rebecca's case, the dissatisfaction was levelled against a subsequent coach after positive experiences with the first coach, whom the participant had

described as *lovely*, *excellent*, and *supportive*. She described her current coaching experience as being *very surface-level and . . . rushed,* with no weekly meetings and poor coach-coachee rapport. She attributed this change in her coaching experience to the coach's inexperience, lack of confidence and expertise in literacy, and the number of people the coach was assigned to support simultaneously.

Fiona's challenge was finding value and worth in her coach's actions when, because the coach was not a practising classroom teacher, these actions did not match what the coach told her. Fiona (interview 1) claimed the coach *wasn't actually doing the walk and it's very hard when it's monkey see instead of monkey see and do, not monkey tell you what to do*. Fiona further explained that although the AIS coach was also off class, she felt that, as coaches, they were more *in touch with what they were doing*.

In summary, the participants described various challenges with being coached. Some participants, including Renee, Shannon, and Holly, expressed dissatisfaction with the coaching process, particularly due to the requirement of goal-setting. They found it frustrating to be told to set goals independently. Additionally, some participants faced challenges with specific coaching methods and their perceptions of the coach. For instance, Rebecca was dissatisfied with a subsequent coach after having positive experiences with a previous one. At the same time, Fiona struggled to find value in her coach's actions, as the coach was not a practising classroom teacher. Holly highlighted significant challenges due to the lack of formal coaching in literacy. The next section explores the findings related to the background and theoretical knowledge that forms the basis for literacy coaching.

4.3.1.3 Theme 3 - Coaching in Literacy: Background and Theoretical Knowledge.

The participants described entering their coaching role with varying degrees of background knowledge and interest in literacy. Some had already been involved or were keenly interested in

literacy before taking on coaching responsibilities. They also outlined some details about how they began their coaching roles and the level of theoretical knowledge to which they were exposed. When discussing theories related to coaching and literacy during their training, some participants identified coaching theories, while others identified literacy theories. The coaching theories mentioned included GROWTH coaching (Cate, interview 1), Jim Knight's instructional coaching (Portia, interview 1), the Helen Timperley method (Shannon, interview 1) and NLP (Tahnee, interview 1). Among literacy theories, Explicit (Direct) Instruction was noted by Cate, Fiona, and Renee, while Rebecca mentioned inquiry-based learning and visible learning. Some participants sought clarification on the definition of 'theory'. For instance, Cate, Shannon, and Rebecca asked for clarification, while Paula needed more thinking time.

Several participants (Cate, Fiona, Renee, and Shannon) shared that they received coaching focused on literacy due to their involvement in programs like LNAP/ EAfS. Most of Cate's coaching was from a colleague the AIS had previously trained. She also received intermittent coaching support, due to the coronavirus pandemic, from the AIS. Despite challenges in identifying specific coaching and literacy theories she was exposed to during her training, she pointed out that knowing and being trained in coaching and literacy theories *would have probably given a little bit more purpose*. She further elaborated that *it's like anything – if you know the theory or the background around something, you're more likely to get more out of something.* She said having a colleague who was trained and knowledgeable in the theories made her feel *lucky*. She received some coaching via the GROWTH model and, within literacy, the explicit teaching model. Nevertheless, she explained that greater awareness of the theories would have helped her to focus more on literacy instead of *going in blind.* In particular, she explained that she would have been better prepared to *tackle some conversations or tackle some things*

around what needed to grow within that literacy space within our school. In this way, Cate acknowledged the potential benefits of theoretical grounding in guiding coaching practices.

Fiona praised the five-year journey on the LNAP program as really effective, especially explicit direct instruction in literacy. For Fiona, explicit direct instruction was her exposure to literacy theories, and she referenced the works of Hollingsworth and Rosendahl. There was no exposure to coaching theories. Fiona did not feel the lack of coaching theories affected her because she kept up to date through her own research and reading scholarly articles. For instance, she has been self-taught about how to have challenging conversations. Fiona summarised that coaching theories were *not overly significant but there are elements that you need to learn* (interview 1). These elements included how to emotionally connect with others, build trust, and have dialogue. Fiona said literacy theories were important because of pedagogical changes over time.

Renee came into her current role as an instructional leader for the Early Access for Success (EAfS) program. She struggled with the literacy aspect of the EAfS program because she did not believe the program was grounded in evidence-informed practice. Renee (interview 1) related that the program also *didn't teach you how to actually work with teachers*. She decided to enrol in coaching training simultaneously but said the EAfS instructional leader did not support her in this aspect. She mentioned that during her GROWTH coaching training, she was provided with a manual that included a framework for questioning, which she continues to use when she coaches. She related that this coaching involved *touching on some of the research* around coaching, but she could not offer any details. Renee described Jim Knight's instructional coaching as *probably the closest kind of thing I've used as a theory*. She also credited the theories around Jim Knight's instructional coaching for positively shaping her coaching and helping her know that what she was doing was *actually working.* Renee did not offer any details

of the actual theory she was exposed to during coaching. She concluded that knowing literacy and coaching theories helps a coach to be effective.

Shannon entered the coaching role after undergoing formal and informal training in literacy, focusing primarily on the L3 pedagogical approach—language, learning, and literacy. She also received coaching via the Timperley Method to be able to coach the teachers and explained Vygotsky is the theorist that is connected with coaching under that method. However, Shannon was unable to specify this as her training had occurred a long time ago. She also mentioned that she found the Timperley Method to be more genuine than the GROW method of coaching, in which she briefly participated. However, she was unable to recall any theories associated with the GROW method. Shannon further explained that the reason for the lack of theoretical knowledge during her coaching stemmed from the fact that they were already trained teachers. She acknowledged that more exposure to theories would have been helpful for other people, but not herself, because of her training within the Timperley method and L3 training.

Despite studying languages, Holly described beginning her coaching role in literacy with formal coaching in other areas but no formal coaching in literacy, which she felt was partly because she was a secondary school teacher. However, she was exposed to literacy through Content, Language, Integrated Learning (CLIL) during her studies and Reading Recovery in her first job. Holly expressed that the lack of theoretical knowledge, evidence, and opportunities for critical thinking was limiting. This experience had a significant influence on how she approaches coaching because she now ensures that coachees know how to use evidence and think critically. Her coaching in education training was not specifically focused on literacy, and this left Holly feeling somewhat dissatisfied with this particular aspect of her experience. Ultimately, she had to find her own way, which led her to evidence-based, explicit instruction. Holly pointed out that a lot of the coaching she received was *focused around how do I develop people and how do I work*

with people (interview 1). She was unable to recall any specific coaching theories that she had encountered during her training. However, she recalled her coach encouraging wide reading of books around coaching individuals and groups.

Rebecca came into coaching from a humanities background and received peer coaching in literacy while coaching others. She received no specific, concrete theories but was exposed to literacy strategies such as Michael McDowell's inquiry-based learning and John Hattie's visible learning. About coaching, Rebecca expressed that *there weren't any specific, concrete theories that would help me coach literacy at my school* (interview 1). She reflected on the impact of knowing the literacy and coaching theories when she first took on the role and expressed that,

> *It would have been helpful to have those theories presented to me to work with, to read about, and to gain knowledge . . . What do I have to fall back on besides experience? So having the educational theories to rely on, to read, to understand would be beneficial in that situation . . . I felt as though I was supported really well through my coach, that although that absence was there from those theories, maybe it didn't necessarily affect me, nor did it really cross my mind at the time.* (Rebecca, interview 1)

Paula's school created a position that provided *the opportunity to implement and affect change . . . to improve the school's literacy capabilities* (questionnaire). Although the formal coaching she received was focused on leadership, she explained that her background in English and literacy teaching prepared her for the role. Paula could not discuss theories in the first interview but covered them during the second interview after she had had more time to think. She shared theories/theorists that influenced coaching in the literacy space at her school and mentioned *Pavlov and Skinner, particularly in terms of learning as a process of forming habits and the repetition of information and habit building . . .* [and] *really frame the way we look at literacy skill development* (interview 2). Similarly, Vygotsky's theory about the place of social

interaction in learning guides the literacy skill development process. Paula uses a subject-specific backwards-by-design process that begins with assessments to determine what literacy skills to focus on developing. ACARA's national literacy learning progressions provide the framework for identifying and developing these literacy skills.

Paula also mentioned Hattie and Timperley as guides to providing crucial, worthwhile feedback to build (literacy) skills. Similarly, the influence of implementing low-stakes writing across the curriculum comes from teacher consultants such as Rosie Kerin. The actual coaching activity is on understanding what teaching and learning activities are best suitable to achieve the identified literacy skill to be developed. Paula asserted that coachees *lead that discussion because, obviously, they know their subject* (interview 2); the coach is a facilitator of that process. However, Paula did not recall any particular coaching theory. However, she warned *it's important to . . . not kind of like treat them like children in that respect* [but as] *. . . professionals and experts in their field* (interview 2). She pointed out that having a theoretical basis is impactful but did not believe it was necessarily important, although it could be, to take a more explicit approach to theories.

Portia (questionnaire) applied for the coaching role after it was advertised. Her background as an English teacher prepared her well for the role; she also received extensive coaching through Growth Coaching International (GCI) and in Jim Knight's instructional coaching. In addition, she read 20 books on literacy coaching to make up for the lack of specific exposure to literacy theories. However, she was unable to recall any specific literacy theories at the time and stressed that *90% of my coaching is in literacy* (interview 1). Portia did not name any coaching theories but described coaching as *the best way to embed new knowledge . . .*[and it is about] *giving teachers a voice.* She narrated that *it's important for the coach to know the theories* to get buy-in, but confirmed their absence did not affect the way she coaches.

For Tahnee, the role began naturally when her colleagues would seek her out as *the person to go to with any questions or problems with . . . developing students' literacy skills* (interview 1). She described becoming an accidental coach for other people because *I was experimenting with stuff, and they'd come and say, oh, you know, I want to know what you're actually doing in your class because you seem to be getting reasonable results and that kind of thing*. The coaching she received was not in education but she related that it has helped her to be a better coach. During the second interview, Tahnee was asked for clarification about theories she was exposed to during her coaching in literacy training. She then explained that *the theories that were most prominent were around whole language and . . . individualisation within literacy* (interview 2), which were supplemented by personal study and reading. As for coaching, because she mainly received informal coaching from experienced teachers, Tahnee said there were no particular coaching theories to which she was exposed. In her formal coaching as a Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) master coach, the theory was focused on the power of words, which she applies to her coaching in schools.

Overall, the participants' descriptions of their theoretical knowledge of literacy coaching varied widely, influenced by their backgrounds, program affiliations, and exposure to educational theories. The participants' experiences underscored the diverse pathways into literacy coaching, with some having had a background and interest in literacy before commencing their roles as coaches. The entry into the literacy coaching domain also varied. Several participants reported linking their coaching practices to specific programs, such as the Australian Government's initiatives: Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan (LNAP) or Early Access for Success (EAfS) program. Some participants also identified a few of the coaching theories that impacted their literacy coaching practice. The theories mentioned were GROWTH

coaching, instructional coaching, the Helen Timperley method, and the NLP method. These theories highlight the importance of a theoretical grounding in coaching.

4.3.2 How Participants Describe the Coaching They Implemented

Four (4) major themes were induced from the data in response to how designated literacy leaders described the coaching they implemented. These were:

1. A love for coaching others
2. Challenges with coaching others
3. Coaching as part of school culture
4. Being coached versus coaching others

4.3.2.1 Theme 1 – A Love for Coaching Others. Many participants recounted positive experiences with coaching others, with several expressing their enthusiasm using some form of the verb "love" to describe these interactions. Rebecca credited her positive feelings to being more experienced as a coach as well as having more knowledge about literacy. *I do love the role, and I love being able to coach other staff and giving them tools, skills, tips, and even just support so that they feel confident and empowered* (interview 1). She found that coaching *came naturally* because she had been given opportunities where she was *helping others or, you know, teaching others or guiding others* (interview 2). Rebecca also found it *quite easy to adapt* to coaching in a school environment.

Renee *really loved* coaching others and suggested that *it's probably been my favourite part of the job* (interview 1). She described her enjoyment of working with teachers who engaged in their coaching experience and who left coaching sessions to experiment with what they had discovered. She continued that they often returned to share reading discoveries and actions they had taken. Renee described that teacher testimonies about their coaching experiences with her are *a bit like wildfire that spreads, and then everyone else gets really keen and interested in*

[coaching]. However, she is particularly pleased about how coaching has grown the culture of her school. The school was once a place that she described as *really toxic, where teachers would be in the same room as other teachers, and there was a lot of unprofessional behaviour and different wars*. Coaching has helped change a toxic culture into a healthy one. It is because of the impact of coaching that Renee invests her time, money, and efforts into literacy coaching, which she loves.

Similarly, Portia (interview 1) narrated that what she *loved about the coaching approach* was that it gave *teachers agency and ownership of their professional learning* and transformed her school for both students and teachers. Previously, there had been several issues around professional learning, and it was challenging to have teacher commitment and engagement until the introduction of coaching using partnership principles. Portia explained that these partnership principles meant that teachers understood that *we were not there to judge them, to tell people what they were doing. It was all very confidential and safe.* Since then, Portia reported that coaching had *transformed* her school. She declared coaching as the most rewarding aspect of her job.

Fiona *really* [does] *enjoy* coaching because it is her *passion* to *make sure that the students are the best that they can be, but also the teachers, the best that they can be* (interview 1). She continued that her focus is on what others achieve through coaching and not on what she can achieve. Fiona summarised that with coaching, *you improve your own practice; you pick up other things that you haven't thought about, and you see with a different set of eyes.* In this way, the coach ends up benefitting anyway. Fiona is not paid for her role, and although sometimes she would like to be remunerated for coaching, she continues to do the role because she likes coaching.

In summary, many participants shared positive experiences with coaching others, with

several expressing strong affection for their coaching roles. They mentioned the personal satisfaction and professional growth resulting from supporting coachees. Participants noted that coaching improved school culture and transformed professional learning. Some mentioned the rewarding aspects of their roles, benefitting both themselves and others.

4.3.2.2 Theme 2 – Challenges With Coaching Others. Most participants chronicled challenging experiences they had while coaching others in literacy. These challenges span a multiplicity of roles, gender and age, attitude, time constraints, building relational trust, and the coronavirus interruption.

Role-related challenges. Holly shared four different challenges of coaching that she experienced. First, because coaching was not the only role she held at her school, she expressed that the coachees did not always feel *completely free* with her as their coach because they knew she was *also responsible for their performance and their performance feedback* (interview 1). However, she said that although this was an issue theoretically, it had never been a problem, and there was only one *awkward* (interview 2) situation where coaching was attached to poor performance. Second, convincing staff inexperienced with coaching about its value was quite challenging. The issue involved convincing staff that coaching was *not a personal attack* (interview 1) to highlight their professional or personal performance. Holly expressed that the staff needed to understand that the coach was there because of *shared values* towards *better outcomes for all students* and support for staff. Third, some coachee teachers were *resistant* during class observation visits and complained they felt *spied on* because of the detailed notes she took. Holly explained to them the purposes for the notes, that it was not to make judgements of them, and that they would receive copies of the notes. Fourth, Holly described coaching as *a bit of a lonely experience.* This is because of the struggle to meet the expectations of leadership while simultaneously keeping the coachee's confidence. Holly elucidated that under such

situations, the coach needs to be *adaptable to your people and to the space.* The loneliness is a result of *holding a lot of confidence*, which she believes is important.

Portia, too, set out that having additional roles—teaching one class and being head of literacy—besides coaching meant that she had limited coaching time which she complained was *dwindling away*. She explained:

> *I'm a coach in demand, in particular, because of the fact that I'm a literacy coach and literacy is one of the key target areas of the school. But what I find is I just don't have time to do coaching, or what I have found is I can't do coaching as well as I want to because I just don't have the time*. (Portia, interview 1)

Since the first interview, Portia's role has changed to a full-time instructional coaching position. Although she is no longer primarily responsible for coaching in literacy, she remains involved since literacy is part of her school's strategic direction. She reported that now she has more time for coaching she felt *much more relaxed and focused* (interview 2). This has allowed her to become more impactful as a coach.

Following the first interview, Shannon also gained more time to coach when her role changed, and she began to target only a few staff members and the executive team. She has described this new situation as making coaching different as it is now more focused on staff professional learning.

Attitude. Several participants described attitudinal issues while coaching others. Both Rebecca and Fiona experienced struggles with coaching older coachees. When describing coaching older team members, Rebecca said *it was harder to coach* [them] . . . *I guess partly because I am a female*. She felt another reason was her age and because she was coaching *a group of teachers who were, honestly, almost three times my age, who were leaders themselves, who were leading their own faculties* (interview 1). Rebecca also discussed the difficulties she

had with a particular male coachee who was her peer in terms of age and who had graduated from university at the same time. Their differences in working styles and her being female were partly responsible for the challenges she had with coaching him. Rebecca reported that despite these differences, she was supported by her coach in coaching him and, through this, was able to keep the relationship professional and collaborative.

The attitude of older coachee teachers was characterised as *really challenging* by Fiona, who offered that in such cases, the coaching approach had to change to reach them. She began by inviting these older coachees to share their experiences and described having to change her language when communicating with them.

> *I'm hearing what you're saying, so how could we use this in your classroom? So I changed my language so that it's not you have to do this . . . 'I've got a couple of ideas I'd like to share with you; watch me do it kind of thing'. That's why I model a lesson and then work it gently in that way. And I found that was more successful for one of our teachers because she was extremely resistant because she didn't want to do it . . . She started to call in sick on my observation days; that's how anti the process she was. Yeah, and it had nothing to do with me being an instructional leader. It has to do with the attitude . . . she was so hesitant. And it took me six months for her to finally come around.* (Fiona, interview 1)

Paula (interview 1) described the biggest challenge as *the assumption that literacy is something that only English teachers do.* She explained that trying to convince them otherwise is *another thing I have to do on top of an already full-on workload* and reported how challenging it was to affirm them and not let them feel belittled during the coaching sessions. Similarly, Cate related how the negative attitude showed itself in the lack of staff growth. The issue was highlighted when external consultants from the LNAP program gave feedback to some staff

members about their progress in the program. The staff members did not receive this feedback positively. She related what happened next:

> *And so then our coaching session, the goal of that, I guess, was to try and support those staff in growing in that space. But they weren't willing to grow within that space. So that was a huge challenge to try and say, 'hey, we're here to support you . . . So how can we help you?' And some of the staff members would be like, 'oh, but I don't need it, I don't think I need them.' Like yeah, we think you do, we didn't want to - because we had quite a good, I would say, relationship—almost friendship— with those staff members that we didn't want them to feel as though the coaching session was turning into a you must do this. But at the same time, we wanted them to grow professionally, so that was probably the greatest challenge. Having the too-awkward conversations, but eventually we got to the point that they trust us, and that's what's really nice*. (Cate, interview 1)

Real and genuine willingness to engage in coaching was what Tahnee saw as an initial hindrance. She found that potential coachees would come forward *but then when you try to help them and support them and whatever, they show that they're not actually willing* (interview 1). She described how she used her master coaching training to change the situation but admitted that

> *it's been a little bit frustrating because I would always go in with high hopes that things will work out really well, but time can get in the way. The enthusiasm can get in the way. There are barriers that can come up. The attitude can get in the way . . . So sometimes it just felt a little bit frustrating trying to coach someone through something that they've said they needed help with when there's been those barriers that have come up*. (Tahnee, interview 1)

Issues with building relational trust. Several participants recounted their experiences with relational trust when they were coaching others. During the interview, Rebecca (interview 1) advised against creating a *divide* between the coachee and the coach. She explained that relational trust required mutuality and questioned, *If you are coaching a team and there is no trust, then what is the foundation of that relationship?* She emphasised the importance of relationships, stating that *without it, coaching would become a difficult job.* Relational trust is a two-way process where the coach must also trust the coachee, respecting that *they are leaders in themselves.* Rebecca further explained that building relational trust is a process that involves allowing coachees the space to request help on their own instead of the coach micromanaging them. She continued that she balanced trust with coachee accountability *regardless of the relationship . . .* [because] *. . . at the end of the day, I need to trust them.* Rebecca recounted that when she was being coached, *there was so much* trust between her and her coach that she felt *comfortable* and *supported* in asking any questions and never felt *judged for not knowing.* This was achieved through what she described as *honest conversations.* However, Rebecca had a different experience when coaching others. She found it easier to build trust with people with whom she was already acquainted. She found it more challenging to build trust with older, experienced teachers with traditional teaching styles and ways of thinking. Rebecca strongly believes in building relational trust but said it was not always reciprocated. Her approach includes communicating clearly and holding coachees accountable for their actions or inactions. Rebecca also expressed that building trust sometimes took time, where persistent and consistent work was necessary. It involved supporting coachees *in a non-judgemental way* and being there for them in real time.

For Cate, trust is essential in building a supportive relationship. Therefore, a coach who is *open and vulnerable . . . builds that trust* (interview 1). She talked about the challenge of

managing the expectations from the administration to meet deadlines while remaining supportive of the coachees. Cate expressed the challenge of maintaining neutrality. In such instances, she recognises that *trust is so important and it can easily go out the window,* so she keeps the coachee's confidence regardless of leadership's demands. The fear is that once trust is lost, the coachees will no longer confide in her or be vulnerable with her. Cate highlighted that *if you want to support someone, they need to trust you in order for that to be effectively done.* She detailed that trust is *hugely important* in coaching because it is about providing a feeling of safety and respect for staff.

Portia detailed that employing Jim Knight's partnership principles led to trust between coach and coachee because time was spent building a relationship. She credited elements of the partnership principles such as choice, confidentiality, and reciprocity without judgment *have resulted in trust in the coaching program* at her school (interview 1). She explained that it is difficult for coachees to be vulnerable and allow coaches to observe them in their classrooms and examine their data. Therefore, the relationship is *completely based on trust.* Portia pointed out that she cannot *coach someone effectively until they completely trust* [her], and both parties must make efforts to get to know each other. She narrated what happens whenever a new staff member begins working at her school:

> *I spend up to six months working with them on building relationships, like helping them out. Just 'how can I help you?', going out for coffee, learning all about them, having them visit my classroom – all of those things.* (Portia, interview 1)

She takes these intentional actions to build relational trust, although she recognises that not every school can afford to pay for a coach to spend time building relationships. However, she reinforced that is the reason coaching is successful at their school.

For Fiona, supporting coachees— *literally holding their hand* — and assuring them of the

coach's support was what built trust (interview 1). One way she accomplishes this is to model lessons for coachees so they do not become overwhelmed by being required to demonstrate a lesson early in their coaching. Fiona then said that during the post-lesson discussion that follows, she would ask the coachee to give her feedback. She becomes vulnerable so they can *see* [coaching] *in action*. For her, this is an experience of trust building so that *I'm not monkey do; I do the walk and I do the talk because I think that's important.* Fiona pointed out that it is *quite stressful being observed* because *you feel like you're being judged.* The only way to overcome that she said is to build trust and *let the coachee know that you are accompanying them on the coaching journey*, *you're not forcing them to do the journey.* Fiona also stressed that the relationship between the coach and coachee must be mutual. *I make sure that that relationship is a two-way street, and I acknowledge what they bring to the table as well and I act on it. I don't just sit there and go, 'I am perfect'.* In this way, Fiona is advocating for a reciprocal relationship between coach and coachee, a balanced relationship, and recognising and valuing everyone's contribution.

Shannon shared the challenges she faced trying to build trusting relationships with teacher-coachees, especially those she felt did not appreciate being coached. She explained that for those who are more accepting, she was able to *build that relationship and have a really good working relationship* where there was mutual learning (interview 1). She advised that to reach this level of relationship, there must be openness on the part of the coach. The coach must be able to say *I didn't think of that; that's a really good idea rather than going, 'no, this is where we said we're going and this is what you have to do'.* In other words, the coach must be receptive to new ideas and willing to adapt their approach based on the coachee's input.

Holly (interview 1) related an experience about a male teacher with whom she struggled to build a trusting relationship. The teacher felt threatened and judged by her at the start of the

coaching relationship. She narrated that it took a considerable amount of time to develop a *positive, trusting relationship.* Much of the effort involved specific actions on her part, such as *being consistent, modelling lessons,* [and] *trying to do things the way he does.* Holly acknowledged that she sometimes lives in her *ivory tower of academia* and that the teacher's more grounded, authentic approach to interacting with students taught her valuable lessons.

Coaching during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. All nine participants revealed that COVID-19 affected their coaching of others. Cate recounted that coaching was already a challenge before the pandemic began because the coaching team struggled to find the time to meet with everyone. During lockdown, coaching activities changed from setting goals to providing emotional support and from face-to-face sessions to sessions on Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Cate described that, along with her co-coach, the check-ins became about how coachees were coping with online teaching and *their emotional side, . . . because we felt that there was a greater need there at the time than just focusing on literacy and growing in that space.* She related that coachees shared their concerns about the effect on children not being able to cover all the elements of literacy during this time. Cate said coaching during the coronavirus pandemic allowed for teachers to be coached around paring back the curriculum and being more direct and focused on teaching literacy skills. In the end, the experience was beneficial. However, with online coaching, Cate utilised group coaching based on stage or grade level and convenience because she and her co-coach were both teaching and coaching online. She felt it was more difficult to connect with coachees online than in person. Also, group coaching proved challenging because coachees with dominant personalities were more communicative than those who were a bit shy.

COVID-19 interrupted the *great trajectory* of coaching at Fiona's school (interview 1). Fiona expressed her disappointment, explaining that she had *just made that major breakthrough*

with one particular coachee when coaching had to end. She worried that the coachee would likely regress. Her concerns also centred around post-COVID issues such as the perceived difficulty with getting students back into the routines of learning, teacher burnout, and gaps in learning. She warned that the enormity of the situation would *require a massive mental and well-being program to be in place for students and teachers.* She recommended paring back the curriculum for the sake of both teachers and students. Fiona also related that her school experienced several lockdowns, and there was *no coaching during that time.* She was able to check in with some coachees, but there were so many disruptions that coaching became impossible. Similarly, Renee (interview 1) recounted that her school *hadn't done coaching as such* since the last lockdown due to multiple lockdowns. She supported teachers in planning their professional learning but had to set aside *those traditional coaching conversations* once the pandemic began.

When coaching became remote because of the coronavirus pandemic, Holly said the content of coaching had to be changed. Teachers were having difficulties connecting with students because of issues with technology and the unique challenges of working within a transient, at-risk community. For these reasons, during the height of the pandemic, Holly was *tailoring the coaching supervision sessions to what each individual needs* (interview 1). Some coachees elected to be coached on professional learning, while others focused on the practical aspects of their job, such as certain aspects of literacy. As a result, Holly paused classroom observations, whether online or face-to-face, unless invited by a coachee. However, coachees reported that they missed the visibility. Restrictions on movement meant that classroom visits were also not happening onsite. She explained that the coaching done was not the typical *proactive, directive type* but rather based on what her staff needed.

For Paula from South Australia, COVID-19 affected the approval process and caused a

delay in policy creation around a whole school approach to literacy. She explained that the pandemic *definitely derailed some ideas . . . definitely put some brakes on . . . our literacy implementation* (interview 1). However, she admitted there were also other interpersonal issues that affected the process. Paula explained that face-to-face coaching meetings were cancelled, but *our coaching was fine . . . that stayed the same.* Only the process of implementation was affected. She found that it was more challenging to determine coachee participation during online coaching sessions, which were via Zoom.

Similarly, Tahnee, also from South Australia, concurred that the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on coaching was limited. She was able to meet with coachees as usual because there were no *massive restrictions* (interview 1). However, there were changes in how meetings with staff were conducted, such as the number of people who could gather, which affected the sharing of ideas.

Portia recounted that despite two years in lockdown in Melbourne, Victoria, the pandemic had *minimal detrimental impact* on coaching at her school because *everyone embraced these kinds of Zoom and remote discussions* (interview 1). She admitted that some of her coachees became a little distracted, were Zoom-fatigued, had issues with focusing, and changed their goals. However, she insisted that *apart from that the coaching has just continued as usual.* Portia emphasised that the coronavirus had changed nothing about her coaching and had *not had a detrimental effect on my ability to coach.* She believed that it was easier in some cases to coach because coaching was more accessible and was a source of relief for some coachees teaching from home. Portia detailed that she created a new habit of emailing each coachee in the morning to ask if they wanted to be coached that day. This proactive approach resulted in consistent engagement.

Rebecca went online during the pandemic and did coaching via Zoom. She explained that

she also did virtual visits to her coachees' classroom pages and felt that technology kept them connected. She did not think COVID-19 affected her coaching experience much and recalled that, in some ways, *it is kind of a little bit better than face-to-face . . . because it's not so confronting to the teachers that you actually need to have an honest conversation with* (interview 1). However, the pandemic has affected the way they check in with one another and have casual conversations, which would inform Rebecca about how her coachees are doing. Coaching was primarily conducted in a group setting, with one-on-one Zoom sessions provided for specific teachers when needed.

Shannon also conducted coaching online via Zoom when the coronavirus pandemic began. She related that she thought that *it was good in some ways* because she could include beginning teachers whom she said found coaching *invaluable* (interview 1). Shannon claimed the benefits of coaching during COVID-19, such as supporting her team, but saw the lack of face-to-face contact as a disadvantage. She explained that during the pandemic, coaching was directed and *really, really focused where before I might have allowed a bit of airy fairy*. In other words, coaching became more structured and focused, whereas before, it may have been more relaxed and flexible.

In summary, the participants narrated the challenges they experienced while implementing literacy coaching in their schools. They explained role-related challenges, including difficulties with completing multiple roles that sometimes competed with each other for time and allegiance. Convincing staff inexperienced with coaching of its value was challenging, as it required assuring them that coaching was not a personal critique but a shared effort to achieve better student outcomes and support for staff. Some teachers were uncomfortable with their coach's presence during classroom visits. The coaches also said they experienced loneliness in their roles. Issues with coachees included convincing them to

participate in literacy coaching and overcoming gender and age barriers. Many participants also described issues with building trust. Simultaneously, they underscored the importance of forming trusting relationships and related some strategies used to build trust. The coronavirus pandemic also brought along its own unique challenges, such as time constraints and offering the support coachees needed. This often meant making significant changes to how coaching had been done pre-pandemic.

4.3.2.3 Theme 3 – Coaching as Part of School Culture. During the interviews, most participants described the obligations surrounding coaching at their schools. As categorised in Table 6 below, five (5) participants reported that coaching was mandatory at their school. One (1) participant reported that coaching would soon become mandatory, another participant said coaching was not mandatory, and two (2) participants did not mention the obligations around coaching at all. The words mandatory and compulsory are used synonymously to indicate that coaching was required at the school.

Table 6

Mandatory Versus Voluntary Coaching

Participants	Holly	Fiona	Cate	Renee	Rebecca	Portia	Paula	Tahnee	Shannon
Mandatory?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Not yet	N/A	N/A

For just over half of the participants, coaching existed as a mandatory part of their school's culture even before they joined the school. In some of these cases, coaching was embedded into the school's culture from recruitment or as part of professional development. For others, the coaching they received was required under the Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan (LNAP).

Holly described being coached as a condition of working at the school. When she began there as a classroom teacher, coaching was already an established part of school culture and was

connected to the recruitment and professional development processes. She explained that *there is no opt-out of the coaching . . . it is a condition for working here* (interview 1). During the recruitment process, applicants are advised that coaching is *a compulsory part of the teaching and learning program*. New applicants to the school are questioned during the interview stage about their openness to being coached. It had been established that way by the founding principal so that every staff member would have a shared vision that revolved around students being entitled to receive an excellent education. For Holly, being coached had already begun in her Teach for Australia program *so it was not new* to her, and she looked forward to meeting with her coach for 45 minutes each week. Holly stayed on at the school and became a coach there. She summarised the impact of a mandatory coaching school culture:

> *Everyone who works at the school, has ever worked at the school, has been extremely united in their vision, and it's a relatively young school . . . the vision is consistent. And the vision is such that everyone really firmly believes that every student is entitled to the highest quality of education.* (Holly, interview 1)

Holly mentioned that she had noticed a trend where people were electing to work at her school *because they have compulsory coaching.* Coaching remains a mandatory part of the school's culture, and non-teaching staff are also coached.

Fiona, Cate and Renee had mandatory coaching because of their school's involvement in LNAP through the Early Action for Success (EAfS) funding. Coaching was an important element of the program and the schools used the opportunity to create a coaching culture that centred on the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Coaching has been happening at Fiona's school for the past five years due to the funding received. She described the coaching culture at her school in this way:

> *No, it's not an opt-in. It is an expectation of the school that every staff member will be a*

> *practitioner of explicit instruction, . . . that is our focus in increasing the literacy and numeracy outcomes of our students. (*Fiona, interview 1)

During the second interview one year later, Fiona opined her fear that the coaching culture at her school might change after funding ceased in the coming year. Staff attrition rates had already left only two original coaches and coachees.

For Cate, coaching had already become a part of the school's culture when she joined the school's coaching team.

> *It was mandatory, but kind of not forced. Like I wouldn't say you have to come to a coaching session, but we definitely—like the way in which we structured it was that they were given time off class to come. So, it was mandatory in the sense that they had to turn up for that session, but it wasn't like you must do this, and you must talk about this.* (Cate, interview 1)

She described the experience as being personally *really, really good and it pushed me to new boundaries to try new things.* She described how coaching had changed the way she and her peers defined goals: starting from broad goals to specific ones.

In Renee's initial encounter, coaching was provided as part of her school's professional learning but for leaders only. Renee described this experience as *some of the best professional learning I've ever had because it was just very personalised to me, it was very much driven by where I was going* (interview 1). However, coaching was not available school-wide until the EAfS funding was secured. Then, an instructional leader was appointed to coach literacy leaders to become literacy coaches. Renee described this experience as *a waste of space* because although it focused on literacy, she felt it was not evidence-informed practice. She complained she had *learned absolutely nothing, and if anything, it just actually was that anything we did learn was all wrong.* She explained that she also was not taught *how to actually work with*

teachers and had to enrol in a GROWTH coaching program to help with that aspect. Through EAfS funding, coaching in literacy became part of the school's culture, and Renee described a positive change to school culture in terms of improvement in data analysis.

Rebecca was coached early on in her teaching career – in her first year of teaching. Soon, the need to improve students' literacy skills became apparent, and she began coaching in this area while being simultaneously coached. She explained (interview 2) that coaching currently occurred during professional learning time *for half an hour per fortnight, that was a mandatory gathering . . . and then within that the coaching occurred.* Coaching seems to be a developing part of the school's culture.

For Portia, coaching occurred following a schoolwide personnel change that happened after she had been teaching for over two decades. The new school leadership thought coaching would be *a very effective approach to professional learning* and selected some staff to undergo training with Growth Coaching International. Soon after, Portia applied for and gained the position of literacy coach at the school. Together with the school's leadership, Portia set out to create a coaching culture built around Jim Knight's *partnership principles* because they felt that if people were *coached rather than coerced into being coached, they owned the coaching journey. No one has to be coached. There's no one saying, 'this person must be coached, and this is what they need to be coached on'* (interview 1). Portia explained that sometimes leadership would recommend someone to be coached but stressed that *we have had to push back at times because . . . if* [the person] *doesn't want it then we can't do it.* In line with the partnership principles used at the school, choice is important, so coaching is voluntary and not mandatory. Portia summed up that *now the board and the leaders in our school know that our coaching program is brilliant and so they are very happy to defend the partnership principles now* (interview 1). Portia characterised that her school has a *great culture* (interview 2) of coaching,

which was attracting teachers to her school. Over the past seven years, Portia's school has developed their own unique coaching culture. The school now supports and guides other schools that are implementing coaching as part of their professional development.

Paula works at a school where she is trying to develop a coaching culture as one does not currently exist. Her first encounter with coaching was at her current school, and the focus was on leadership training with a few elements of peer coaching with other coachees from outside of her school. However, she indicated that leadership had approved for coaching to become mandatory.

> *So, everyone knows that it's going to be compulsory next year, and now they've started making some moves towards it, but they haven't really done heaps on it because it doesn't start 100% compulsory until next year when it's going to be embedded into our programs and subjects.* (Paula, interview 1)

To encourage a coaching culture, Paula tries to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of the coachees, build teacher efficacy and confidence, and listen well.

Two participants – Tahnee and Shannon – did not mention whether or not coaching was mandatory at their schools. Tahnee related that at her school, there is *no label of you being coached,* and therefore, some coachees might not know they are being coached (interview 2). She further explained that *most of them, I think, see it as in the bucket of professional development*. Tahnee explained that because she has not been asked to use the language of coaching, she refrains from doing so. Neither Tahnee nor Shannon is remunerated for their coaching role. Although Shannon's school received EAfS funding, she explained that only some staff receive coaching. She also coaches school leaders.

In summary, the findings revealed that mandatory involvement in coaching was embedded in the culture of most of the schools where the participants work. In these instances, literacy coaching was either a requirement of recruitment or part of staff professional

development. The study highlighted diverse approaches to coaching within school environments. Each approach shapes the school culture in unique ways, influencing professional development and the attitudes of teachers towards coaching practices.

4.3.2.4 Theme 4 – Being Coached Versus Coaching Others. The participants discussed their expectations of coaching compared with being coached. Some went into the experience with no expectations, while others were more focused on what they wanted to achieve. Each participant related that the way they were coached had some impact on how they currently coach others. Some now coach the way they had been coached because of, for example, the practical applications they learned (Paula, questionnaire; Rebecca, interview 1) and because it was necessary for some of the coachees (Fiona, interview 1). Some deviated from their own coaching experience because they disliked certain elements of the way they were coached (Shannon, questionnaire; Renee, interview 1; Holly, interview 1). Others now set clear expectations for coachees where they had had none (Cate, interview 1; Tahnee, questionnaire) or adapted a more casual approach than the serious, structured way they had been coached (Portia, questionnaire).

Paula did not mention having any expectations before or while being coached. She now coaches using the knowledge she gained through professional development courses and sessions. Similarly to how she was trained, she focuses on the practical applications of strategies in the coachee's subject areas. Paula is particularly keen to coach towards embedding literacy across different subject areas towards whole school implementation.

Rebecca (interview 1) described being coached as *a lot easier and was more of what* [she] *expected than being put in a coaching role, coaching others*. She felt that her expectations of being coached the first time were fulfilled and even exceeded because she had an excellent coach. That is why she coaches her team *in the same way* she was coached (questionnaire). She

begins by establishing relational trust, mirroring the coaching style she herself received, and pragmatically addressing the challenges her coachees encounter.

Fiona intended to approach coaching differently from how she was coached, but in the end, found she had to [default] *to how* [she] *experienced it in the early days of LNAP* (interview 1). She explained the expectations she had were focused on the outcome of her team and their results, which she expected to be *incremental.* Fiona emphasised that her coaching differed from how she was coached because she works collaboratively with her team to set program-specific goals. She also uses data to inform teaching decisions. Fiona offers scaffolding and team teaching opportunities, actively promoting, acknowledging, and valuing coachees.

Shannon did not come into the coaching role with any expectations because coaching was *just something* [she] *fell into* (interview 1). This means she became a coach by chance. She emphasised that her coaching differed from how she was coached. She was not given a choice. Instead, she was *told this is how to do it, or how we do it here.* Now, her style is to provide information that is *relevant to teachers and links to the school's Strategic Improvement Plan* (questionnaire). She also collaborates with her team and provides one-on-one support, focusing on achieving better student outcomes.

Renee explained that her coach used GROWTH coaching with her but that she now used *a very different style* when she coaches (interview 1). She described her coach as allowing her to lead, which she found *frustrating* because she needed more *input from somebody as well*. She felt that the coaching she received was *a little bit sterile . . . not like a conversation.* She also did not have any expectations when she was being coached, but she liked the relationship-building aspect. She emphasised that her coaching differed from how she was coached because although being coached *was very open, very much led by* [her], her current coaching style *is more aligned*

to instructional coaching (questionnaire). This means she is more directive in her style and provides specific guidance to her coachees.

Holly did not mention having any expectations before or while being coached. She did, however, expect her staff to *use good evidence and think critically about the evidence and then focus on implementation* (interview 1). She emphasised how her coaching differed from how she was coached in the following way:

> *My focus is much more on the 'expert other' (coach) explicitly showing (teachers) how to do teaching. The person who coached me let me identify my own goals, but in hindsight, I can see that I did not know what I wanted or needed to learn, and would have benefitted greatly from having someone else be quite directive and explicit about it.* (Holly, questionnaire)

Where her coaching experience initially allowed her to set her own goals, she now realises she would have benefitted more from a coach who provided clear, direct guidance on teaching methods and objectives.

Cate did not have any expectations when being coached because she had *never really been a part of anything like that before* (interview 1). Now, as a coach, she has expectations, for example, that *people will come to us and they'll openly share about what they need to grow in the literacy and numeracy space*, *and we can run with that*. However, the reality is that the conversations are *a bit more of an emotional support thing*. This resulted in her having to set *clear expectations around what coaching is for staff members*, so they do not believe it is a counselling session. She emphasised that her coaching differed from how she was coached because

> *the way in which I try to coach others is to not offer solutions to a particular area that they may have identified as an area in which they would wish to go but rather guide them*

to come to this conclusion themselves. (Cate, questionnaire)

Cate advised that coaching should be guided by the individual seeking coaching.

While coaching others in literacy, Tahnee offers a similar depth of support to staff as she had received when she was being coached. However, she emphasised (questionnaire) that her way of coaching others differs in important ways. The coaching she received lacked consistency because it was incidental and unplanned, driven by immediate needs and availability. Now, she uses a structured approach, which she described in the following way: *I prefer to have a particular focus on assisting staff members and like to provide regular updates and check-ins and opportunities for staff members to work together to assist each other with monitoring their professional learning and progression.* When she coaches, Tahnee involves herself in specific activities to ensure consistency and structure.

Portia did not mention having any expectations before or while being coached. However, she emphasised having a more *casual approach* to coaching others compared with the way she was coached. She described her current coach as *much more serious and structured,* [someone who] *plays by the book, so to speak* (questionnaire), just like her previous coach, who later relaxed his style while coaching her. Her coaching is different because she has *a lot of experience and very strong relationships* with her coachees.

In summary, the findings showed that, in some cases, the coaching styles of the participants were influenced by their experiences of being coached. Some adopted similar methods, which they believed worked for them, while others altered their approach to establish clearer expectations, avoid disliked elements, or provide a more relaxed atmosphere. Some participants had no expectations going into coaching.

4.3.3 How Being Coached Was Organised

This section reports the major themes of the study that relate to research sub-question 2: **What does coaching in literacy look like in Australian schools?** For clarity, this question will be outlined under two headings: **i) how being coached was organised ii) how coaching others was organised.** The themes were generated inductively through thematic analysis of the interview and questionnaire data that followed Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2006; 2019a) and Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle (Heidegger, 1962).

Two key themes were induced from the data in response to how designated literacy leaders described the organisation of the coaching they received. These were:

1. Frequency of coaching
2. Coaching activities

4.3.3.1 Theme 1 – Frequency of Coaching. The findings revealed that the frequency of the coaching received varied among participants and changed over time. For instance, Fiona explained that during the first year of the Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan (LNAP), through which she received coaching, she was coached once per fortnight and then once per term. Coaching lasted for five years. However, Cate, who also received coaching via LNAP, was coached a minimum of once per term for one to two years. Paula was coached for six to eight months for one hour at least once per month.

Portia, Renee, Tahnee, and Shannon all received varying degrees of coaching in workshop settings, for instance, via Growth Coaching International (GCI). Portia had three to four days of coaching and then assignments for a year; she also participated in two separate two-day instructional coaching workshops with Jim Knight. After attending GCI coaching workshops, Renee received coaching once per term and then sometimes a phone catch-up halfway through the term. Shannon received two to three sessions of Timperley coaching and

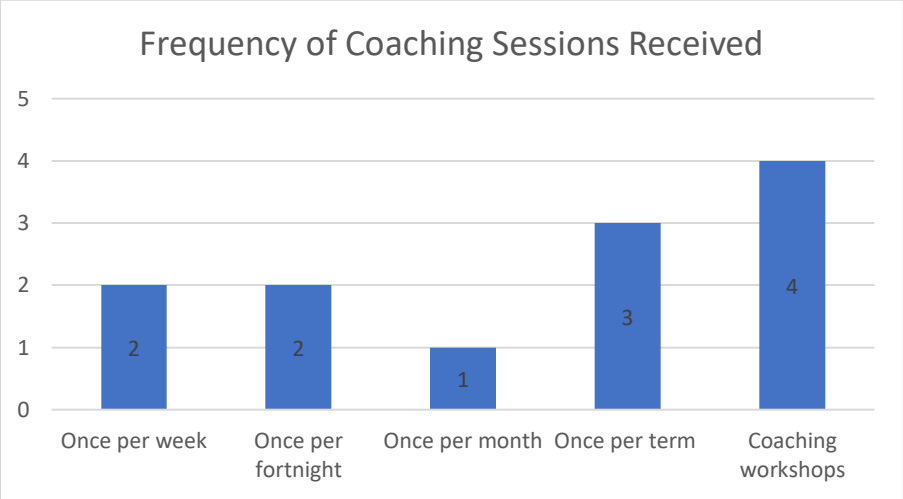
participated briefly in GCI. She did not reveal any details about the frequency of the coaching she received through LNAP.

Holly was coached once a week for forty-five minutes. Rebecca received weekly coaching for one year before it was changed to fortnightly sessions with another coach. She also received an unspecified length of coaching from a third coach.

The column chart below (Figure 7) provides a visual representation of how often participants engaged in coaching sessions – weekly, fortnightly, monthly, termly, or via workshops that lasted between one and three days.

Figure 7

Frequency of Coaching Sessions Received



In summary, the findings demonstrated that coaching workshops, which were used by four participants, were the most frequent ways of receiving coaching. Coaching sessions held once per term were also popular with three participants. Monthly coaching sessions were the least frequently utilised, with only one participant reporting this.

4.3.3.2 Theme 2 - Coaching Activities. The findings reveal participants were engaged in a range of coaching activities, showcasing both similarities and differences in their coaching experiences. Holly described having weekly classroom observations followed by critical

feedback. She was also required to submit lesson plans the Friday before the week for the coach to review. This structured approach focused on discussions related to lesson plans, classroom observations, and interpersonal skills. Comparably, Fiona also underwent classroom observations, received feedback, and participated in explicit lessons.

Rebecca's coaching sessions initially focused on the coachee as an individual, the literacy program, and team dynamics. This aligns with Portia's experience, who told of being involved in workshops, completing assignments, and participating in phone coaching. Both Rebecca and Portia's coaching approaches involved broader discussions and conversations about pedagogy, behaviour management, and professional growth. Rebecca described her experience with her coach as being particularly helpful because *if I was stuck on something and I needed someone at a higher level to assist me, she would be that person* (interview 1). She mentioned other coaching activities such as team-coaching of literacy teachers, responding to reflective questions sent with meeting notes, and learning walks, also described as observational walks, which fostered a collaborative approach to coaching and ensured visible learning. Portia described two distinct coaching approaches: facilitative coaching and instructional coaching. Facilitative coaching involves activities aimed at developing specific skills, such as listening, paraphrasing, questioning, and facilitating conversations. Instructional coaching, based on Jim Knight's partnership principles, emphasised a partnership between coach and coachee to share knowledge and learn strategies.

For Renee, coaching activities revolved around goal-setting, questioning, and conversations based on the GROWTH coaching approach. She described the coaching received as sometimes feeling *like a counselling session* (interview 1), indicating a more personal and supportive coaching style. There were also infrequent phone calls mid-term. Cate's coaching activities also included goal-setting, classroom observations, and coaching sessions, during

which the coach and coachee would discuss what was observed and then develop a plan for the coachee to grow professionally. Notably, Cate's coach conducted role plays to enhance listening skills and emphasised questioning to identify focus areas, whereas Renee's description did not include these activities.

Shannon's coaching activities were described differently depending on the type of coaching she received. During GROWTH coaching, she related being involved with goal-setting, checklist ticking, data conversations, classroom observation, and feedback. In contrast, the Timperley coaching method focused on identifying needs through classroom observations and participation in discussions. Additionally, Shannon mentioned collegial discussions and informal coaching as supplementary activities, emphasising a more collaborative and supportive approach to coaching.

Tahnee and Paula described their coaching experiences in more informal terms. Tahnee recounted that she received guidance and mentoring from experienced teachers, particularly around teaching pedagogy. Paula's informal coaching activities were not described in detail. However, she mentioned that during her leadership training, she would be engaged in group peer coaching, during which participants discussed projects and addressed school-related issues.

In summary, the findings from the participants' descriptions of their coaching activities demonstrate both commonalities and variations. Holly, Cate, Fiona, and Shannon reported commonalities in activities that focused on the practical application of teaching techniques and strategies. These included classroom observations, feedback and discussions. Similarly, Holly, Rebecca, Cate and Shannon all mentioned engaging in various types of discussions or conversations that covered their teaching practice, such as lesson planning, behaviour management, pedagogy, and professional growth. Conversations allowed for reflection, goal-setting, and collaborative problem-solving. Notably, the most popular coaching activities

mentioned were discussions and conversations, classroom observations, and goal-setting. Section 4.3.4 examines the organisation of the coaching provided to others.

4.3.4 How Coaching Others Was Organised

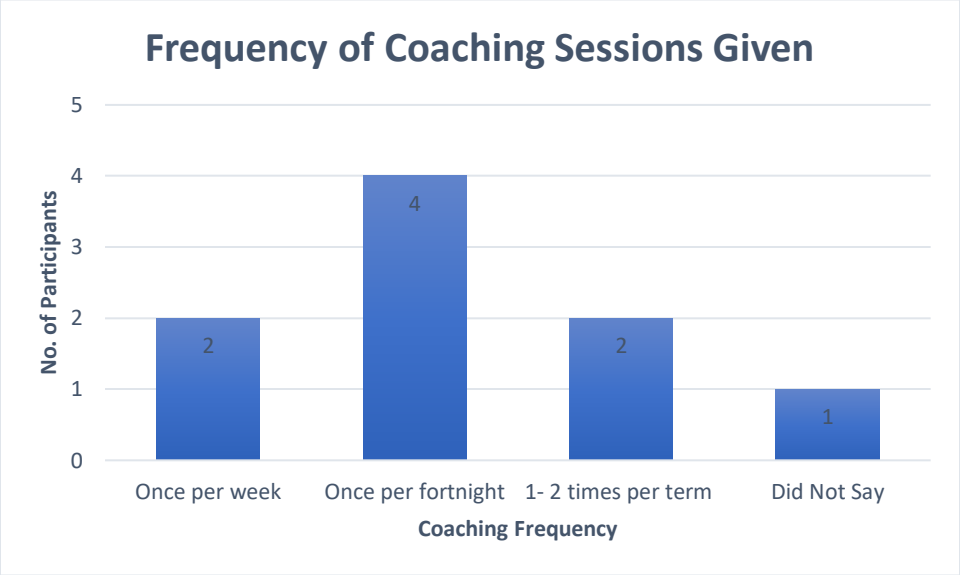
Three (3) major themes were induced from the data in response to how designated literacy leaders described how they organised their coaching of others. These were:

1. Frequency of coaching
2. Coaching activities
3. Documents used to organise coaching in literacy

4.3.4.1 Theme 1 – Frequency of Coaching. As shown in Figure 8, the participants reported a range in the frequency of coaching they implemented.

Figure 8

Frequency of Coaching Sessions Given



Most participants reported coaching once per week, with sessions ranging from 30 minutes to 60 minutes for individual coaching. For instance, Fiona coached weekly for approximately six hours but did not mention the duration of the coaching cycle. Tahnee,

however, coached weekly for an hour, but that was after she had given intensive coaching for five hours per week for two weeks to *set them up for the particular focus that we've got* (interview 1). There were several coaches offering fortnightly coaching sessions with varying durations. Rebecca (interview 2) said she usually coached once a fortnight for an hour, but sometimes that time had to be pushed back to monthly sessions because *things would come up* at school. Similarly, Portia coached for 30 minutes to 60 minutes a fortnight per coachee on a needs basis. She also said that in the junior school coaching lasted for half an hour per fortnight and could extend to an hour in the secondary school. Renee said she timetabled her fortnightly sessions for an hour with each staff member, but *sometimes things get in the way* at school. She reserves approximately six hours per week for coaching (interview 2).

Holly spent approximately eight hours per week coaching ten staff members individually but did not say how long each session lasted. Paula coached once or twice per term and more frequently when plans were being made, while for Cate, it was two times per term. Cate was timetabled to coach two days per week as part of the LNAP/instructional coach shared role. She explained that at the start of the term, the focus is to support and, at the end, to reflect. She also provided a special group coaching session when the coachees appeared stressed about elements of their work.

In summary, the findings demonstrated that fortnightly coaching, as reported by four participants, was the most frequent way of coaching others. Weekly and termly sessions were also used equally by four participants. One participant did not mention how often they implemented coaching at their school.

4.3.4.2 Theme 2 – Coaching Activities. Participants reported being engaged in a variety of coaching activities when they were coaching others. For Holly, the coaching process was merged with supervision to become a holistic professional development offering at her school.

The coachees are involved in several coaching activities such as lesson modelling, explicit instruction, shared expectation, informal (walk-ins) and formal (planned and agreed) classroom observations, professional reading, professional development (compulsory homework such as reading or watching something, discussing, thinking about it, implementing it), and reading short papers to learn how to establish a trusting relationship.

> *When we're on-site, as the coach, I can walk into any class at any time to just sit and watch, but if I want to take notes it has to be at a pre-agreed time. So that is a distinction between formal and informal observations* (Holly, interview 1).

Holly explained that other coaching activities involved her working on the school-wide strategy around teaching and learning programs, including the instructional model, scope and sequence, assessment, data analysis and presentation, teaching resources and learning materials (questionnaire).

Rebecca described activities that were done mainly with coachees in a group setting, where *everyone's voice is welcome* (interview 1). One-on-one sessions were done with teachers experiencing challenges in their classrooms. These coaching activities included sitting face-to-face in a room around a table together, presenting an agenda with things that needed to be discussed, coaching on upcoming assessments and using situations and scenarios to coach. There were also learning walks *to observe the classes and assist where needed* (questionnaire).

Renee's coaching activities centred around the school's professional learning journey in literacy (the science of reading/effective reading practice) in a process that began with an examination of data followed by coaching conversation with questioning. She followed an unplanned structure and used an exercise book for notetaking and recording the responses to coaching questions. Example questions include: *What's happening for your kids at the moment? How are you feeling within what we're learning in professional learning?* (interview 1).

Clarifying questions were asked throughout the coaching conversation, for example: *What you said is this, and what I can hear is this. Is this right?* In this way, the coach ensures that there is clarity at each step of the coaching process before moving on to the next part. Next, the coach would share the evidence gathered: *This is what I'm noticing in the classroom . . . or more specifically I'm noticing that you're breaking content down, but you're not checking for understanding.* This is followed by coaching conversations *to kind of develop that idea of what the goal is going to be and usually, to be honest, that goal-setting at the beginning when I first start working with somebody takes a long time to get the goal. To land on the goal, it takes a while*. Toward the end of the coaching session, there is a goal or action setting for what the coachee would focus on next. Other coaching activities included talking about norms during coaching conversations, summarising the coaching session and emailing the summary to the coachee, visiting classrooms, explicit instruction, and teacher-directed goal-setting. Goals were broken down into small, actionable steps that lead to visible, tangible, measurable success. *It very much kind of comes back to teachers being able to see their impact* (interview 1). She also explained that weekly coaching activities involved data analysis, collaborative planning, in-class support (including demonstration lessons, lesson observations, and data collection), delivering face-to-face professional learning, planning for professional learning, coaching, administration, and student wellbeing (questionnaire).

For Cate, coaching activities involved lesson observations that were not recorded unless requested, and an observation form or sheet checklist from the AIS was completed. Observation involved how the goals were being met, followed by written and verbal feedback. During coaching feedback, reference is made to professional learning that the coachee participated in: *We really liked how you did this or maybe think about this. Remember how we did that PD and they said this? Well, try including that* (interview 1). Other coaching activities included data

collection and analysis, testing for LNAP students, modelling explicit lessons, organising professional development and accompanying resources, scheduling dates and times of testing and assessments, liaising with AIS Consultants, and professional goal identification sessions (questionnaire).

Portia listed her coaching activities as coaching meetings with coaches and coachees, visiting classrooms and observing lessons, team teaching, demonstrating strategies, and collecting data (questionnaire). Similarly, for Fiona, coaching activities involved sitting with coachees and getting a class profile – highs, lows, mediums – and examining the data. There is visiting classrooms and observing lessons (interview 1), modelling, meeting for feedback weekly to reflect on practice, setting goals and planning towards successful implementation (questionnaire).

Paula's coaching activities included professional development on aspects of literacy, including expert guest speakers and small group targeted coaching on how to implement aspects of literacy. Groups were sometimes organised based on year levels, with coachees and coaches sitting at one big table using a whiteboard or a shared Google document, but as part of a collaborative process. There was also informal coaching, during which she described talking with coachees and making suggestions about how they can improve their literacy skills. Paula's other activities included conducting literacy research, working collaboratively with other faculty coordinators and the leadership team, and planning for professional development sessions with all staff around literacy in whole groups, small groups and one-to-one coaching.

Shannon spoke about classroom observations so she could *go in and see the kids* and sit down with the coachee and share goals with them. She emphasised that *this is the goal, this is what we want to achieve* (interview 1). Coaching activities also included team teaching, for example, in reading groups, which was followed by feedback. *We have chats around what I saw*

that day or that week or that fortnight just to give feedback and some ideas to apply or not. (Shannon, interview 1). She would also be *working shoulder to shoulder with K-2 class teachers during literacy blocks* (interview 1). There were also data conversations that led to tailored professional learning (questionnaire).

For Tahnee, coaching activities involved having informal conversations when coachees sought help, unpacking the curriculum with them, allowing coachees to come and observe her teaching, and planning together. She also described asking the coachees to point out areas of challenge, whether around what or how to teach. She would then plan how to support them. Other activities included coaching conversations and questioning. For instance, when coachees come with a problem, the coaching conversation would include questions such as: *Why do you believe it's impossible? Is that actually really true? And how could it become possible for you?* (interview 1). There were also intensive coaching sessions for a couple of weeks at the start of the year, followed by weekly check-in meetings in Term One. From Term Two, coaching sessions were done when needed.

In summary, the findings from the participants' descriptions of their coaching activities demonstrate both commonalities and variations. Commonalities in coaching activities include classroom observations, goal-setting, and professional development. The professional development activities referred to include professional reading, discussions, and attending workshops. Notably, two of the three most popular coaching activities implemented by the participants were similar to the coaching they had received: classroom observations and goal-setting. Participants reported variations in the frequency and structure of coaching activities, the type of coaching, individual versus group, and the consideration of school-wide priorities.

4.3.4.3 Theme 3 – Documents Used to Organise Coaching in Literacy. The coaches reported using a variety of documents to organise literacy coaching in their schools. As shown in

Table 7, eighteen (18) different documents were identified by seven (7) participants. Two participants reported they had no documents because *they do not exist at the moment* (Paula, interview 1), and *we didn't actually have anything that I could find* (Tahnee, interview 1). Renee pointed out that her school used few documents to coach teachers and explained that *we're not really given anything that goes 'this is the way you need to do it'. It's kind of like just free for all* (interview 1). It was similar for Cate who shared that *there's no paperwork . . .* [it's] *just a discussion-based thing* (interview 1). One participant, Rebecca, utilised the broadest range of documents, employing a total of six documents, while another participant, Cate, had the most limited range, relying on just one document. This variation underscores the diversity in the number of documents employed by participants during coaching sessions.

There were a few commonalities identified in the range of documents used, with one notable instance where the documents served similar purposes despite having different names. The five (5) documents reportedly used in common by no more than two participants were minutes, weekly planner/coaching summary, GCI questions, observation sheet checklist, and coaching data notes.

Table 7

Types of Documents Used in Coaching

Participants/Documents	Holly	Rebecca	Renee	Cate	Portia	Fiona	Shannon
Role description	✓						
Supervision template	✓						
Scope & sequence		✓					
Minutes		✓					✓
Literacy meeting agenda		✓					
Literacy meeting notes		✓					
Learning walks		✓					
Weekly planner/email coaching summary		✓	✓				
GCI questions			✓				✓
Professional learning norms			✓				
Observation sheet checklist				✓		✓	
Playbook with checklists					✓		
Coaching data notes					✓		✓
Coaching training workshop - PowerPoints					✓		
Jim Knight's The Impact Cycle					✓		
Google document						✓	
Class data analysis plan							✓
Timetable							✓

Five participants provided samples of the documents they used to organise coaching in literacy in their schools. Table 8 contains a brief description of each document provided for analysis. Other documents that were only mentioned by participants but not provided nor described by them are not included.

Table 8

Document Description

Participant	Document type	Document description
HOLLY	1. role description 2. supervision template	1. The role description contains four categories of responsibility: instructional coaching, curriculum coordination, school leadership and team management. The sections are context-focused for Holly's school and uses the school's name throughout the document. The instructional coaching section includes information such as the number of teachers/coachees and information regarding the coordination of professional support. The curriculum coordination section includes information such as compliance and teacher planning. The school leadership section includes information such as collaboration responsibilities around literacy data analysis and school improvement initiatives. The team management section includes information about coordinating professional learning and performance development plans. 2. The supervision template is in the form of a table with information about what happens during a supervision session. The template begins with check-in and ends with feedback and includes professional development plans and coaching. There are two columns for information about discussion and actions.
PORTIA	1. playbook with checklists 2. coaching data 3. coaching training workshops - PowerPoints 4. Jim Knight's The Impact Cycle handout	1. Portia shared her school's playbook which is a guide for teachers about the teaching and learning program of the school. The playbook includes all literacy content to be covered. There are six literacy categories covering differentiation, formative assessment, writing strategies, writing development, spelling and reading comprehension strategies. There are checklists that ensure essential areas are covered in each category. 2. Coaching data is prepared to evaluate aspects of the coaching program using past and current data. 3. The coaching workshop document covers the school's approach to instructional coaching and includes information such as skills needed, information about the partnership principles, and facilitative coaching. 4. The impact cycle handout is a resource used to identify the coaching needs of the teacher and helps the coach to take teachers through the stages of the impact cycle towards improvement.
REBECCA	1. learning walks 2. literacy meeting agenda 3. literacy meeting notes 4. weekly planner	1. The learning walks document is a one-page information sheet that explains the purpose of learning walks, questions to ask in the classroom, separated by stage levels, with corresponding evidence source. There is also a reflection section. 2. The agenda contains a goal statement, date and time information and attendee details. The main section has the agenda items to be covered. 3. The meeting notes document contains information from Rebecca's meeting with her coach about a coachee teacher. It includes information such as next step actions and biggest concerns of the coachee, feedback and aims, and plan for the next week's session. A second meeting notes document outlines how the coach should organise the coaching sessions – purpose for attendance and the agenda.

Participant	Document type	Document description
		4. The weekly planner is a detailed individualised summary of the last coaching session and contains detailed information about the date, personnel involved, area discussed/of focus and next step.
RENEE	1. GROWTH coaching questions 2. professional learning norms 3. email coaching summary	1. This is a list of pre-prepared questions with several questions under headings of the acronym GROWTH. 2. A specifically prepared set of three learning norms that guide the professional learning at Renee's school. 3. The coaching summary is a detailed individualised summary of a coaching session and contains detailed information about the date, personnel involved, area of focus and next step.
SHANNON	1.data notes 2. GROWTH coaching questions 3. class data analysis plan	1. The data conversation notes is a document that lists areas of literacy intervention. The document itemises what the data is showing under each area, such as reading and writing. There is an accompanying document that notes the general focus of these data meetings – discussing class data, examining assessment data and programming. 2. This is a list of pre-prepared questions with several questions under headings of the acronym GROWTH. 3. The class data analysis plan is a table that lists the three literacy skill areas of reading, comprehension, and writing. Students are categorised against these skills to determine whether they are on target. There is a second table that identifies students requiring intervention.

In summary, the findings showed that schools used a variety of documents to organise their literacy coaching. These included role descriptions, supervision templates, scope and sequences, minutes, literacy meeting agendas, literacy meeting notes, learning walks, coaching summaries, GCI questions, professional learning norms, observation sheet checklists, playbook with checklists, coaching data notes, workshop PowerPoints, Jim Knight's Impact Cycle, Google documents, class data analysis plans, and timetables. The documents reportedly used by more than one participant were minutes, coaching summaries, GCI questions, observation sheet checklists, and coaching data. Not every school reported using documents, and just over half of the participants provided samples of the documents used in their schools.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter is a report of the main findings that were generated from an analysis of the data. The data analysis process involved triangulating findings from three sources: a questionnaire, two interviews, and documents provided by participants. The findings provided a strong response to the main research question: **What are the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in Australian schools?** and the two sub-questions: **1) How do designated literacy leaders describe the coaching they receive and implement in Australian schools? 2) What does coaching in literacy look like in Australian schools?**

In response to how participants described the coaching they received and implemented (sub-question 1), there was a total of seven (7) key findings. These findings revealed that the presence or absence of a supportive coach had an impact on the way people described their coaching experience. Similarly, when recounting the challenges they faced when being coached, participants recounted issues related to goal-setting, bonding, and their coach's engagement and training. Participants' descriptions of the coaching they received were influenced by their prior experience and exposure to, or lack of, theoretical knowledge of literacy and coaching.

The findings illustrated that, despite positive experiences, participants faced several challenges when coaching others. These challenging experiences were varied and included contextual issues, such as relational trust, and external issues, such as the coronavirus pandemic. Another key theme identified in the findings was the place of mandatory coaching in building a school's culture. Every participant related some impact of the way they were coached on how they currently coach others. The findings also revealed what coaching in literacy looked like (sub-question 2) and illustrated that the frequency of coaching sessions and coaching activities was significant when receiving and implementing coaching. For those coaching others, the

findings showed a variety of documents were used; however, a few coaches reported they did not utilise any documents at all.

The next chapter, Chapter Five, provides a discussion of the key findings in relation to existing literature. The chapter also includes implications of the original contribution of this study to the knowledge and practice of coaching in literacy education as a professional learning option.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

I think really the other thing that's important for me is just feeling like by helping them, I can actually help the outcomes for the students as well - Tahnee

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the participants' experiences set out in major themes induced from the findings. Themes were drawn from the experiences of the participants in the study using a combination of Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010; Heidegger, 1962) and a thematic analysis approach popularised by Braun and Clarke (2006) as the methods of interpretation. These experiences were analysed for commonalities and unique understandings in order to answer the main research question: **What are the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in Australian schools?** To gain insight into the research findings and provide a uniform response to the research question, the discussion in this chapter presents possible interpretations of the findings in relation to existing research, theory, and practice examined in the literature review.

The rationale for this study was that Australian students are lagging behind their international peers from similar OECD countries, as evidenced by declining literacy test scores. One of the ways identified by the government-commissioned Gonski report to stymy this trend was to employ instructional leaders, also known as instructional coaches, in schools who would work alongside principals to transform literacy practices. This embedded professional development approach would signal more collaborative, dynamic learning opportunities that differ from common traditional approaches. This study purposed to specifically seek to gain insights from how these coaches describe their lived experiences of both receiving and implementing coaching in schools. By examining and interpreting these stories, the aim is to

provide stakeholders with a fuller and more balanced understanding of how coaching in literacy in schools works as they determine the implementation of coaching in their schools.

In this chapter, the main components of the research findings are discussed and interpreted. The discussion begins with the unanticipated findings of the study and, in this way, sets out the contribution to the literature that this study has attained. There is also a discussion of other key findings that support existing research.

5.2 Counterproductive Effects of Early Goal-Setting: Evidence of Dissatisfaction

Coaching in education is complex (Lofthouse, 2019a) and highly contextualised (Bennett, 2022; 2019); therefore, participants were expected to have a variety of converging and diverging ways of describing their experiences. It was expected that participants might also have some aspects of the coaching experience that they would describe as satisfying and other parts as dissatisfying. The first unexpected finding of the study is that goal-setting at the start of the coaching process can be a dissatisfying experience that is counterproductive if done too early. As discussed below, the findings of this study showed that goal-setting may remain an important step in the coaching process, but to avoid dissatisfaction, coaches must remove any pressure from coachees to set early definitive goals.

An analysis of the participants' dissatisfaction with the goal-setting process reveals that the key factor was the expectation to be able to devise one's own goal at the onset of the coaching experience without being upskilled with the knowledge or skills in goal-setting. It is important not to be too fixated on goal-setting at the start, but to allow this area to develop along with the rest of the knowledge and skills. Although none of the participants related that goal-setting should be abolished, some alluded to their confidence being affected because they were asked to set their goals too early in the coaching process. Responses indicate that there is a negative effect of goal-setting when done early in the coaching process that can become a barrier

to acceptance and, ultimately, performance. After all, if someone believes they are incapable of achieving the goal, they might be reluctant to try, or their attitude may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Goal-setting Theory (Latham & Locke, 2013; Locke & Latham, 1990) suggests that a person's perception of their ability to perform a goal depends on the processes involved in setting that goal. Allowing time for a specific rather than a generalised goal to develop is necessary for attaining higher levels of performance. Through this theoretical lens, the enormity of the task of setting one's own goals is evident, and the dissatisfaction with the process, when done too early during coaching, can be better understood. Outside of education, goal-setting has long been promoted as an essential part of the coaching process, with long-term, continuous studies conducted on the correlation between goal-setting and performance (Locke & Latham, 2002; Locke et al., 1986; Welsh & Ordóñez, 2014). Furthermore, goal-setting has been fundamental to many of the popular coaching models used in education, such as the GROW model. The findings in this study challenge the dominant opinion of John Whitmore, who popularised the GROW model framework and promoted goal-setting as the first step in the coaching process. Although admitting to the strangeness of setting goals before examining the reality of the situation, Whitmore (2017) insisted that it was limiting to do otherwise. To his credit, Whitmore admitted that "you may only be able to define a vague goal until you have examined the reality in some detail" (p. 99). The implication of the statement is that setting a vague goal is acceptable as long as it serves as a starting point, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the situation at a later time. Whitmore's admission has led me to believe that although coaches may be aware of the challenges and the potential counter-productiveness of early goal-setting, it is still being promoted by some coaches as best practice. Coaches must understand that while initial vagueness in goal-setting is a natural starting point of the coaching process, it can and must be refined and clarified through a detailed examination of the reality.

Therefore, to avoid dissatisfaction with setting a goal, coaches must remove any pressure from coachees to set definitive goals early. The idea is to avoid setting goals blindly and instead engage in a process of understanding the situation before finalising and committing to specific goals.

The findings indicate that much of the pressure to set early goals, leading to dissatisfaction with this part of the process, came out of certain coaching models. One such model is Whitmore's (2017) GROW model, where the G stands for Goal and is the non-negotiable first step in the coaching session structure. Jinks and Dexter (2012) observed the GROW model as "just too simplistic in process to be able to manage the complexity of human motivation" (p.103). In a blog post, Somers (2019) highlighted some problems that hinder the effectiveness of the GROW model, which the author states should be referred to as a sequence rather than a model. These problems include a perceived lack of flexibility due to the linear structure of the model that does not allow deviation from a strict sequence. This makes it difficult to adapt to the coachee's needs. Another problem highlighted is that the model may not provide clear guidance for unexpected or challenging coachee responses, leaving the coach unsure of how to proceed effectively. Similarly, the author pointed out that the GROW model can create the misconception that coaching is primarily about asking questions, although listening and observation are crucial components of the coaching process.

In his discussion on coaching session structures, Grant (2011) identified that models fall into two broad categories: (1) those that commence with goal-setting followed by an examination of the current situation and (2) those that commence with an exploration of the current situation leading to subsequent goal-setting. Grant emphasised the importance of coaches being attuned to the individual needs of the coachee rather than strictly adhering to a particular structure. This implies that neither establishing goals nor refraining from setting goals at the start of the

coaching process constitutes best practice. Instead, the emphasis should be placed on addressing the coachee's needs. Grant (2011) advocated for the perspective that models are merely tools to be applied sensibly and flexibly, not strictly followed to the detriment of the coachee. Models are "methodologies to be used, not ideologies to be rigidly adhered to!" (Grant, 2011, p. 122). In other words, these frameworks or models are meant to guide and assist coaches instead of constraining them. This understanding underscores the flexibility and adaptability required in coaching in schools, reminding coaches in literacy to prioritise responsiveness to the unique circumstances of their school contexts and coachee needs. The findings of this study suggest that within any discussion around the sequencing or structuring of a coaching model, the place of goal-setting should be considered for its impact on coachees. Careful consideration must be given to determine whether, in the drive to build teacher capacity in literacy, coachees are not being required to set goals too soon before they have had the chance to figure out what their students' needs are, what their own needs are, or where exactly a gap is to be filled.

Somers (2019) further advised that it is time to "shift the focus . . . onto working with coaching principles" (para. 21) that are focused on raising awareness, generating responsibility, and building trust. In this proposed shift, it is observed that goal-setting loses its ranking, and there are different motivators that drive the coaching process. Locke's Goal-setting Theory (Locke, 1991) implies that goals, like needs and values, can motivate an individual's behaviour. Furthermore, a limited understanding of these elements may lead to a mechanical approach to goal-setting that coachees find of little worth. This general opinion is captured in the following quote by one participant about the model used at her school: *The GROW method to me is sort of a set thing, and you tick the little boxes off, and I can't miss the O, R in it because then I won't grow. As an adult and an adult learner is that what I need to do?* (Shannon, interview 1). This finding underscores the importance of a thorough and thoughtful exploration of the coachee's

present and future needs before embarking on the goal-setting process. It suggests that coaches should invest both quality and quantity time in understanding the coachee's situation, aspirations, and challenges. This knowledge is then used to build the coachee's capacity to set meaningful, relevant, and achievable goals. This process must not be rushed, and coaches must acknowledge its complexity by taking intentional steps to avoid feelings of ineptitude. The findings indicate that one of the best ways to achieve this in schools is to develop a partnership with the coachee.

Having a partnership relationship is essential to the goal-setting process because it will remove fear. Wheatley and Hawkins (2022) advised that goal-setting can be a joyful occasion when done in partnership. This is because neither the coach nor the coachee sets goals on their own, but instead begin and end that process together. As an adult learner with agency and autonomy (Knowles, 1984), it is important that coachees participate fully in the goal-setting process and take ownership of that process. This includes being able to make the decision about when those goals should be set. Coachees do not need goals set and defined by others. Even so, the challenges and consequences of the goal-setting process must not be overlooked. Höpfner and Keith (2021) conducted a study that integrated research on failure with goal-setting theory and achievement goal theory. The study showed that failing to achieve a high and specific goal can negatively impact self-related aspects such as emotions, self-esteem, and motivation. If such failures occur repeatedly without resources to mitigate the effects, the long-term consequences can be severe. Jinks and Dexter (2012, p.103) explained that "when asked to visualise a perfect future [some coachees] become distressed because although they have that vision it appears so utterly impossible." Therefore, setting a goal within a coach-coachee partnership is important to alleviate coachee stress around their efficacy in this area and prevent or minimise dissatisfaction. This study supports the understanding that only after an in-depth exploration of needs and capacity building has taken place in a partnership relationship should goal-setting begin.

It is worthwhile to consider Renee's approach to goal-setting, which came out of her own struggles with setting goals when she was being coached. Renee, a NSW primary school EAfS instructional leader, explained in her first interview that the first step in goal-setting with her literacy coachees is to have a conversation with them about the data from their classrooms. In this way, Renee is exploring the coachee's needs for their specific literacy classroom context. That conversation is not directive but done in a way that gives constructive feedback about what is noticed – both things that are being done well and possible areas for improvement. She then uses GROWTH coaching questions to support the coachee with coming up with goals and mentions that this is a necessarily time-consuming process. Renee explained that *it takes a long time to get the goal. To land on the goal, it takes a while.* However, she reflected on how meaningful this process is because it leads to *measurable improvement* (interview 1).

The process of goal-setting in coaching assumes that both the coach and the coachee possess the pedagogical expertise necessary to identify effective strategies for improving literacy outcomes within a specific classroom context. However, this assumption does not always hold true. When coaches and coachees lack sufficient pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), goal-setting may become superficial or misaligned with actual instructional needs. Shulman (1986) conceptualised PCK as an integration of content knowledge and the pedagogical strategies necessary to convey it effectively. When this foundation is absent, coaches may unintentionally reinforce ineffective practices, a risk highlighted by the Peter Effect (Applegate et al., 2014; Peter & Hull, 1969), where one cannot impart knowledge they do not possess. Premature goal-setting assumes a clarity of instructional direction that may not yet exist, potentially limiting the depth of reflection or misdirecting teacher effort.

Early goal-setting, particularly when undertaken before a shared understanding of instructional practice has been established, may obscure more pressing pedagogical issues or

lead to the pursuit of goals that are not contextually appropriate. Instead, coaching should first prioritise collaborative inquiry and diagnostic conversations that build understanding before moving into targeted goal-setting. This is particularly important in literacy coaching, where research shows that content-specific coaching has a greater impact than general pedagogical coaching (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). Pre-service teacher education plays an important role in preparing future teachers – and potential coaches – with the requisite PCK; however, in the Australian context, coaching remains underutilised within initial teacher education programs (Stahl, Sharlin, & Kehrwald, 2017). Embedding coaching earlier in teacher education could help ensure that goal-setting is not only well-timed but also grounded in sound pedagogical understanding, ultimately leading to more effective teaching and improved student outcomes.

To summarise, this finding supports the integral role of goal-setting in literacy coaching in schools. However, the finding underscores the importance of providing coachees with the necessary support and upskilling in goal-setting to avoid dissatisfaction and ensure the development of clear, specific, and relevant goals. The research suggests that inadequate support in goal-setting can hinder the ability to achieve higher levels of performance. Therefore, it is imperative to allocate sufficient time for the organic development of specific goals. The finding serves as a cautionary note against a rushed approach to improving literacy outcomes in schools, emphasising the need for teachers to have the time to discern where to begin and when and where to set goals while being coached. Moreover, the research encourages a shift in focus from adhering strictly to the structure of a specific model to embracing coaching principles that take a more holistic approach. To this end, establishing a partnership relationship before setting definitive goals is a key element of the finding. In a true partnership, a coach collaborates with the coachee, avoiding the imposition of goals but rather working together to identify and shape

them. This finding contributes to the existing body of knowledge of goal-setting by underscoring the significance of these prerequisites in the goal-setting process.

5.3 Insufficient Knowledge of Coaching Theories and Literacy Theories

The study revealed a noticeable gap in participants' understanding of and exposure to coaching and literacy theories. This gap in knowledge is an unexpected finding that is an original outcome of this study. Theories, developed over "decades and even centuries" (Williams, 2006, p. 49), form the foundation upon which models are built. Dating back to the philosophical and psychological learning theories, these historical foundations have shaped coaching and literacy practices. However, models are not theories in and of themselves. The lack of this foundational understanding by some participants has led me to believe there is a need for greater emphasis on introducing literacy coachees to established theories to enrich their understanding of the underlying principles guiding literacy coaching practices. Throughout this section, I will discuss the three main ways the gap in knowledge was perceived in this study. First, I will examine its impact on understanding the distinction between models and theories. Next, I will explore its perceived lack of usefulness and then address the probable cause, which is related to qualifications and training.

Lack of familiarity leads to confusion between literacy and coaching models and theories. The findings highlight a recurrent misunderstanding among participants who often regarded explicit instruction and inquiry-based learning as literacy theories, despite these being teaching methods or pedagogical approaches. Explicit instruction and inquiry-based learning are valuable approaches informed by educational theories. However, it is crucial to distinguish between teaching methods and broader educational theories when discussing foundational knowledge in the context of coaching and literacy leadership. Notably, the aforementioned teaching methods are based on constructivism, a learning theory reflecting the influence of

educational theorists such as Vygotsky, Piaget, and Dewey. Similarly, participants often equated coaching models or approaches, such as GROW(TH) coaching and instructional coaching, with coaching theories. It is essential to clarify that these models serve as structural frameworks for the coaching process but do not inherently constitute explanatory theories of coaching phenomena. While coaching theories may still be evolving, encouraging coaches to explore existing theoretical frameworks and critically analyse their relevance to specific coaching contexts can foster a deeper understanding of the field. This finding suggests a need for intentional exposure to coaching and literacy theories during literacy coaching programs. By incorporating explicit training on these theories, literacy coaches can develop a more comprehensive and informed approach to their professional practice. Such foundational knowledge would enable designated literacy leaders to make well-informed decisions tailored to the unique needs of their learning environment, ultimately contributing to improved student learning outcomes.

The significance of a foundational understanding of theories can be attributed to the works of scholars such as Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978). In these works, one can see how knowledge of constructivist theories may impact and inform classroom practice. This understanding can provide insights into the diverse ways in which literacy coachees approach learning, mediate knowledge and skills, and apply acquired insights after coaching sessions (Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Handsfield, 2018; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Lauterbach et al., 2019). Grounding coaching strategies in constructivist theories can guide coaches in tailoring their strategies to cater to an individual coachee's learning needs and preferences. Ultimately, this practice leads to more effective student literacy outcomes because it eliminates the guesswork. Therefore, if the intention is to make the best use of limited resources and consequently transform student literacy outcomes, a foundational understanding of theories is

crucial to the promotion of coaching in literacy as a professional development option in schools. By grounding coaching practices in established educational theories, schools will also be optimising their return on investment in literacy because their literacy coaches will be equipped with a solid theoretical foundation to inform their instructional decisions. This alignment between coaching and instructional practices will likely lead to a more supportive professional environment where coaching becomes an integral part of the school's culture.

The dynamic nature of literacy coaching, as noted by Larson and Marsh (2005), suggests that literacy coaching is not static or fixed but subject to adaptation, growth, and modification as the coach's theoretical knowledge is transformed. Lofthouse (2019a) suggested that the practice of coaching likely undergoes continual evolution. This understanding provides coaches with confidence that they are applying evidence-based concepts and established theories into their practice rather than conjecture. The ongoing integration of theories into practice enables coaches to evolve and improve their coaching methods based on new insights and research findings. Notably, the theoretical basis for coaching under both the GROW(TH) and instructional coaching models, for instance, is closely linked to constructivism (Bandura, 1977; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978) and Adult Learning Theories (Kessels et al., 2014; Knowles, 1978; Mews, 2020). As Gouthro (2019) noted, "we need theories to help us to make sense of a constantly changing and increasingly complex world" (p.63). In other words, living in a society with complexity and continual change requires support to make sense of the challenges encountered. Theories offer this support, which makes the knowledge of educational theories significant.

Orchard and Winch (2015) highlighted the significance of theory in teaching. They emphasised that teachers require both strong subject knowledge and a theoretical foundation "that supports their practical skill in such a way that it can be applied to their day-to-day professional decision-making and actions" (Orchard & Winch, 2015, p.16). The authors

described such theoretical knowledge as conceptual, empirical, or normative, offering a rationale for the execution of teaching practices. As the knowledge gap finding of this study shows, the emphasis on the intersection between theory and practice is equally relevant to coaching in literacy. According to Orchard and Winch (2015), conceptual knowledge helps teachers understand the underlying principles and ideas behind instructional strategies. This knowledge equips teachers with more confidence to critically analyse the changing landscape of teaching and develop independent professional judgment. Empirical knowledge provides teachers with evidence-based perspectives into effective teaching methods, which are valuable when assessing the effectiveness of a teaching practice such as literacy coaching. Finally, normative knowledge is focused on ethical guidelines and professional standards that guide the teacher's decision-making process. Overall, the authors emphasise how a theoretical framework provides teachers with the opportunity to intersect theory and practice in a way that results in informed choices and engaging, reflective teaching practices that will lead to improved student learning outcomes. Designated literacy leaders with a strong theoretical foundation can draw upon conceptual knowledge of coaching theories to help them navigate the complexities of the coaching process and tailor their approach to different coachees and contexts. Similarly, empirical knowledge of theories can be used to assess the effectiveness of coaching in literacy and make evidence-informed decisions. A strong normative knowledge will help coaches navigate ethical dilemmas and ensure ethical and professional standards are upheld throughout the literacy coaching process.

The acquisition of conceptual, empirical, and normative theoretical knowledge can be understood within the context of critical literacy theories. The works of Freire (1985), Luke (2012), and Luke and Freebody (1997) demonstrate that literacy education goes beyond acquiring the basic skills of reading and writing. This concept highlights how a literate populace

can affect the functioning of society and how language can be used to empower and disempower individuals, to promote social justice and equity for all. Therefore, the implication is that literacy coaches have the opportunity and influence to ultimately develop critically aware and socially responsible learners. The findings indicate that the ability to link theories to practice during a literacy coaching session is an important foundational skill. While participants possessed some background knowledge that shaped their understanding of coaching and literacy, the lack of familiarity with actual theories appeared disadvantageous. Arguably, this dearth potentially impacted, at least in part, the effectiveness of the coaching program and hindered the ability to gain staff engagement beyond viewing coaching as a mandatory form of professional learning. The acknowledgement of this knowledge deficit suggests that addressing and bridging this gap through targeted professional development can mitigate resistance to literacy coaching and enhance overall staff engagement. Rebecca's opinion, articulated in her comment below, captured the frustration caused by this lack of foundational knowledge:

> *It would have been helpful to have those theories presented to me to work with, to read about, and to gain knowledge . . . What do I have to fall back on besides experience? So having the educational theories to rely on, to read, to understand would be beneficial* (interview 1).

Rebecca's statement underscores the value of having access to theoretical frameworks to inform and guide the coaching in literacy process. Her plea for educational theories as a reliable foundation highlights the need for a systematic approach to introducing and integrating coaching and literacy theories into professional development programs. Furthermore, the statement implicitly suggests that relying solely on experiential knowledge may not be sufficient. A theoretical underpinning is essential to complement the practical experience. The understanding here is that when coaches base their practice on established theories, they are working from a

point of evidence that gives a clear approach and justification for achieving their goals within their context. Theories can then act as a basis from which to obtain commitment when there is reluctance or scepticism from teachers. Similarly, theories can be a point of reference for other stakeholders who may be unfamiliar with literacy coaching or who question its efficacy in schools. Furthermore, having "a firm grasp" of theories will allow for engagement in rigorous discussions when practices are contested (Orchard & Winch, 2015, p. 30). The ability to draw on well-established theories can provide coaches with the confidence and ability to articulate and defend their positions. Importantly, having a knowledge of coaching and literacy theories and their intersectionality takes the guesswork out of literacy coaching. Coaches who are well-versed in coaching and literacy theories can make more intentional and informed decisions during their coaching sessions. Likewise, designated literacy leaders can draw upon established theoretical frameworks to design coaching that aligns with specific literacy goals and desired outcomes.

Coaches who understand the theoretical basis for coaching are better equipped to help coachees develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need in their personal and professional lives. By drawing upon constructivist and Adult Learning Theories, coaches are better equipped to help their clients learn and grow. These coaches are empowered to tailor their coaching approaches to suit the unique needs of their coachees within a learner-centred coaching environment. For instance, constructivist theories (Handsfield, 2017) emphasise the importance of learners actively constructing their own understanding of the world around them. The implication is that learners are not passive recipients but rather active participants in their own learning. Similarly, Adult Learning theories (Knowles, 1984; Kolb, 1984; Merriam et al., 2007; Mews, 2020) suggest that adult learners are self-directed and have a wealth of life experiences that they can draw upon in their learning. In the educational context, theories serve as valuable tools to help us understand, interpret, and respond effectively to the changes and needs in our

schools. However, teachers, as coaches and coachees, must have a firm grasp of key educational concepts and, where these are contested, engage in theoretical debates about them. Furthermore, literacy coaching practices must have an identifiable theoretical basis regardless of the coaching model being utilised.

The importance of understanding the theoretical basis for coaching that underpins any model being used is exemplified by the experiences shared by Cate during the first interview. Cate revealed that she was able to learn to become a coach by observing and working alongside two coaches, one of whom was a peer. While she found this experience of being both an observer and being observed useful, she also recognised that not having the background knowledge (theory) to inform the reason for doing things the way she was doing them was a significant limitation. This experience highlights the need for coaches to undergo comprehensive training based on theoretical foundations, allowing them to make informed decisions and understand the rationale behind their literacy coaching practices. A thorough knowledge and understanding of coaching and literacy theories can provide coaches with a sense of direction in their coaching sessions. Gouthro (2019) called for a continued discourse on theory to enrich the practice of adult education, wherein coaching in literacy falls. The author admitted that theories are challenging for learners due to several reasons, including the extensive range of theories to contend with, a perceived lack of practicality, and time constraints. However, the author argued for investing time in learning theories to support critical reflection and meaning-making in education.

> Teaching adults is complicated, regardless of the subject matter or context, and accessing a wide range of theoretical knowledge to inform this work can only be beneficial. Theory helps educators make sense of the problems and challenges that they face in their work

> and understand better the social, political, cultural, and economic factors shaping their learning contexts. (Gouthro, 2019, p. 69)

Coaches should be encouraged to engage in ongoing professional development to deepen their knowledge and understanding of coaching and literacy theories and reflect on how these theories inform classroom practices. In this way, coaches can continuously refine their skills and remain aligned with the evolving field of literacy coaching. Without a theoretical understanding of the coaching models and learning theories that underpin coaching practice, coaches may lack the ability to make informed decisions and guide coachees in a way that maximises their learning potential. Therefore, it is useful to establish a theoretical understanding between the coach and coachee regarding self-directed learning, the place of prior knowledge and experience, and the importance of self-determined goals. By linking coaching models to constructivism and adult learning theories, coaches can help their coachees engage in meaningful and transformative learning experiences. By understanding these theories, coaches can help coachees identify their strengths and weaknesses, set meaningful goals, and develop strategies to achieve those goals.

Perceived lack of utility of theoretical knowledge. The findings also reveal a general lack of concern about the usefulness of coaching and literacy theories in the coaching process for literacy development. The study highlights that not only were many participants unable to identify or apply theoretical knowledge, but some did not see its efficacy in literacy coaching. This can be seen in participant Fiona's comments when she describes coaching theories as *not overly significant* while acknowledging that *there are elements that you need to learn* (interview 1). Fiona's dismissiveness overlooks the benefits of reducing the theory-practice gap in teaching and learning highlighted by Furman Shaharabani and Yarden (2019). Similarly, focusing only on the practice of coaching ignores the merits of the interplay between theory, research, and practice, as pointed out by van Nieuwerburgh (2018). Van Nieuwerburgh (2018) delineated the

importance of the interplay between theory, research and practice in coaching, explaining that coaching relies on continuous reciprocity to be an effective alternative to traditional professional learning. This emphasis on continuous reciprocity displays the dynamic nature of literacy coaching, where knowledge and insights flow between theory, research, and practice in an ongoing feedback loop. Coaches who adhere to this dynamic approach can continuously refine and improve their coaching practices based on new research findings and theoretical insights. Van Nieuwerburgh was expressing that coaching is most effective when it incorporates an iterative process where feedback is regularly given, received and acted upon. This ongoing cycle involves the reciprocal flow of knowledge and insights between these three elements, therefore leading to continuous improvement. The implication is that where one of these is lacking, the coaching experience will not be as effective as it could be. The balance and effectiveness of the coaching process will be disrupted.

The interplay between these elements is crucial in ensuring that literacy coaching remains relevant, evidence-based, and effective in promoting professional learning and development. The integration of these three elements creates a synergistic effect that enhances the overall impact of coaching on professional learning and development. By staying connected to the latest research and incorporating evidence-based practices, literacy coaches can ensure that their approaches are up-to-date and aligned with best practices. Therefore, coaching should not be viewed as a static, one-dimensional process but rather as a dynamic and evolving approach that relies on the continuous exchange of information and insights among theorists, researchers, and practitioners. Understanding this interplay can also help coaches develop more effective coaching strategies and approaches that are grounded in sound theoretical principles and empirical evidence, leading to better outcomes for the coachees. In a school environment, theory and research can help teachers make sense of and inform their classroom practice (Furman Shaharabani & Yarden,

2019). Similarly, designated literacy leaders who coach teachers should have a strong theoretical foundation in both coaching and literacy theories. It is also reasonable to assume that the coaching these designated literacy leaders provide would intentionally include a way to meaningfully relate theory to practice.

Not being sufficiently grounded in coaching and literacy theories may significantly impact practice and performance. This impact will likely extend beyond the immediate coaching process. For instance, a coach who is unfamiliar with coaching and literacy theories may lead coachees into ineffective coaching practices which result in suboptimal outcomes in literacy that continue well after the coaching process has ceased. If coaches struggle to apply effective and evidence-based practices in their coaching sessions, this can negatively impact the coaching process. A lack of application can limit the effectiveness of the coaching sessions and ultimately impact the literacy development of the individuals being coached. Therefore, given the significance of literacy development for teachers, students, and society as a whole, it is crucial that designated literacy leaders possess a foundational understanding of coaching and literacy theories. Without this foundation, they may struggle to identify and apply evidence-based coaching strategies that can promote effective literacy development. As Rebecca pointed out, *having educational theories to rely on, to read, to understand would be beneficial . . .*(interview 1). Theories provide explanations for practice (Brinegar et al., 2022), and "support the process of meaning making" (Gouthro, 2019, p. 65). A theoretical grounding enables coaches to connect the **why** behind their literacy coaching practices, fostering a deeper understanding of the coaching process for both coaches and coachees. As a result, the overall coaching experience will be enhanced, and coaches will be able to make more meaningful connections between their learning and real-world applications.

Furthermore, the absence of theoretical grounding may impede the ability to adapt to new developments and challenges in the field of literacy coaching. This could potentially limit the growth and development of the literacy field as a whole, limiting its ability to innovate and improve literacy coaching practices over time. A strong theoretical foundation may provide coaches with the flexibility to adapt their practice to changing contexts and emerging research findings. This adaptability will allow for coaching practices to remain relevant and effective in addressing the evolving literacy needs of teachers and students. Additionally, theoretical grounding may provide continuous scrutiny of literacy coaching practice, which is essential for this phenomenon to stay at the forefront of educational advancements. Since literacy is across all curriculum areas, this grounding helps in understanding and implementing the school curriculum well. Therefore, embracing coaching and literacy theories as a basis for continuous improvement can drive progress and lead to more impactful literacy coaching initiatives in schools.

Lack of theoretical knowledge is linked to inadequate qualification and training. A possible insightful link to the finding about insufficient knowledge of theories was that despite great interest in literacy, the designated literacy leaders were largely not formally trained in literacy in order to carry out their roles. This lack of formal training in literacy can impact their practice as literacy coaches. Rebecca summed up the need for knowledge: *You can be an excellent, fabulous coach if you know the stuff* (interview 1). In this way, Rebecca implies that one cannot be labelled a competent coach unless they have a theoretical grounding in literacy and coaching. Without suitable qualifications and training, leaders may not have been sufficiently exposed to the theories and research that underpin effective literacy coaching. Establishing a system with a strong theoretical foundation could lead to those assuming literacy leadership roles having the necessary knowledge to effectively support teachers and students in their literacy development through coaching. In Australia, where there is a lack of a standardised

system, one can observe the varying levels of qualifications and expertise among designated literacy leaders. The result could be limited knowledge and confidence in implementing evidence-based coaching practices.

One US study reported that most literacy coaches are highly knowledgeable in literacy instruction and pedagogical experience when assuming their roles, with around 78 per cent possessing a master's degree in reading, a reading certification, or a state reading endorsement (Marsh et al., 2008). Among those without suitable qualifications, the study reported they were working towards endorsement or gaining relevant knowledge through professional development. This is a positive aspect that highlights the importance of having qualified and trained literacy coaches who possess a deep understanding of literacy theories and instructional practices. By contrast, in this study, just over half of the participants did not receive any specific coaching in literacy, with only one coach identified as having a specific qualification in literacy – a master's degree. This raises important questions about the effectiveness and impact of literacy coaching in Australia without adequate training and qualifications. A recent examination of literacy units within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses at Australian universities conducted by Buckingham and Meeks (2019) indicated a potential deficiency in literacy knowledge among student teachers. The review suggests that this lack of literacy proficiency may be traced back to insufficient preparation provided by teacher educators who themselves lack the necessary expertise in literacy. Literacy is a fundamental skill important for academic success across subject areas (ACARA, n.d.-b). A deep understanding of literacy theories and coaching theories to embed instructional practices is crucial for coaches to provide meaningful guidance to teachers. Through this understanding, there is reassurance that this guidance is comprehensive and aligned with current research and best practices in literacy instruction.

Moreover, the findings reveal that not every participant received coaching focused on teaching literacy – some received leadership coaching. The coaching they received was not based on literacy, yet the coaching they implemented was expected to be on literacy. This mismatch between the coaching received and the coaching expected places designated literacy leaders in a challenging position. To address this, specific coaching in literacy is recommended as a part of comprehensive training programs, tailored to the literacy coaching context. As discussed in the literature review, one way to address this lack of formal qualification is through micro-credentialing courses (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019; French & Berry, 2017). These courses have been gaining momentum in Australia, for instance, with La Trobe University's popular Science of Learning and Reading (SOLAR) Lab offering short courses in literacy (Gibson, 2020).

The implication of the lack of formalised training and qualifications is that although literacy is recognised and funded in Australia (Gonski, 2011; NSWDEC, 2017; OECD, 2022; Wyatt, 2017), perhaps we are not sufficiently focusing our professional learning and training on the targeted areas of need. This raises concerns about the alignment between professional learning opportunities and the priorities in literacy education. Adequate attention and resources should be directed towards developing the expertise of literacy coaches as leaders who will effectively drive improvements in literacy instruction and student outcomes. If the people who coach classroom teachers in literacy are not prepared well, how can one expect improved student learning outcomes? How can coaches be expected to coach others in literacy well when they were not coached in this area at all or were coached insufficiently? Effective coaching requires a high level of competence and expertise on the part of the literacy coaches. A lack of literacy-focused coaching for designated literacy leaders can result in a lack of confidence and proficiency in coaching others in literacy-related matters. Therefore, if literacy coaches themselves are not adequately prepared and trained, it may hinder their ability to properly

support teachers in improving literacy instruction and achieving positive student outcomes. Where the resources for gaining qualifications and training are not provided by the school, coaches may have to supply their own.

The historical trajectory of literacy instruction in Australia provides an important context for understanding the revealed gaps in teachers' theoretical and pedagogical knowledge. Over the past several decades, literacy education in Australia has been shaped by fluctuating paradigms rather than a consistent, research-informed approach. From the 1980s to the early 2000s, Australian classrooms were dominated by whole-language approaches, underpinned by constructivist theories that prioritised meaning-making over explicit instruction (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005; Buckingham, Wheldall & Beaman-Wheldall, 2013). Programs such as Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985) were widely utilised, despite mounting evidence of their limited impact on literacy achievement (Chapman & Tunmer, 2025; Shanahan, 2022). The program's reliance on levelled readers and its underemphasis on phonemic awareness and decoding suggests that many teachers were not adequately equipped with the theoretical knowledge required to teach foundational literacy skills effectively. This pattern of weak theoretical grounding persisted with the introduction of the Language, Learning and Literacy (L3) program in the 2000s. Critics noted that the program failed to meet its intended outcomes (Neilson & Howell, 2015), reinforcing concerns that teachers' instructional practices were often based on pedagogical trends rather than research evidence.

Over time, broader educational and policy developments have shaped the evolution of literacy pedagogical content knowledge, creating ongoing challenges and opportunities for professional growth. Despite sustained reform efforts, gaps remain in the integration of theoretical knowledge into classroom practice. These gaps are better understood as systemic in nature rather than solely reflective of individual teacher capacity. In the absence of sustained

support and professional learning, it can be difficult for educators to develop the deep theoretical understanding needed to recognise and apply evidence-informed literacy instruction effectively.

Considering that five of the nine participants of this study have been teaching for 19 years or longer (see Table 5), the impact of the legacy of these outdated models can be better understood. Now that both Reading Recovery and L3 have been discontinued (Baker, 2020), calls for the integration of the Science of Reading into teacher education (Buckingham, 2020a; NSWDEC, 2022) underscore the urgent need to strengthen literacy-specific pedagogical content knowledge. Addressing these gaps requires more than updating curricula or resources; it calls for a fundamental reconsideration of how teacher knowledge is developed and supported over time. Integrating research-based literacy instruction into pre-service education, as recommended by the Stronger Beginnings report (Teacher Education Expert Panel, 2023), is one crucial step. Ongoing professional development, particularly through embedded, collaborative models like coaching, may offer a powerful mechanism for developing teachers' literacy pedagogical content knowledge. Joyce and Showers (2002) emphasise the importance of embedding theory into coaching interactions so that the coaching sessions become more than just a skill transfer but deep, sustainable professional learning.

For some participants of this study, it became necessary to engage in their own learning to build coaching knowledge, specifically around literacy. While all the participants received some level of coaching training, the general consensus was that the literacy aspect was inadequate. This demonstrates the value of and need for continuous professional development (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2002; Gore, 2021; Mizell, 2010) and self-directed learning (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019; French & Berry, 2017; Horn & Goldstein, 2022) for literacy coaches. Seemingly, coaches who are proactively engaged in their own learning can fill the gaps in their knowledge and develop their expertise in literacy coaching. Research by leading experts in

literacy should also inform the development of comprehensive literacy coaching training programs in Australia.

To summarise, the findings indicate that insufficient knowledge of coaching theories and literacy theories can undermine the practice of literacy coaching. When coaches are unclear about these theories, this can lead to confusion and suboptimal performance. The consequences can be far-reaching, affecting student outcomes which is the ultimate goal of this professional development offering. However, through continuous professional development opportunities, including acquiring appropriate qualifications and training, the gap between theory and practice can be diminished. In this way, coaches can acquire the necessary knowledge, understanding, and skills to perform their roles effectively.

5.4 Significant Variance in How Schools Organise Coaching in Literacy

Coaching activities. Unsurprisingly, the findings of the study demonstrate that a variety of coaching activities are typically used to organise literacy coaching in schools. The three most common activities that participants reported they engaged in were classroom observations, goal-setting, and coaching conversations. Participants reported engaging in formal and informal classroom observations, collecting data during these observations, and providing feedback based on the observations. The data suggests this activity is worthwhile for enabling real-time assessment and contextual feedback, thus serving as immediate professional development. Goal-setting was identified as another common coaching activity, whether related to professional development, instructional improvement, or specific actions to enhance teaching practices. In these ways, the findings indicate that goal-setting as a coaching activity can enable measurable progress. Similarly, coaching conversations stood out for their significance in addressing challenges, discussing teaching practices, and providing support to coachees. The findings also revealed variations in coaching activities among the participants.

The findings reflect an adaptive approach to addressing the diverse needs of coachees, as evidenced by the variations in certain activities. For instance, the emphasis on specific activities such as role plays, collegial discussions, and individualised coaching sessions demonstrates an understanding that effective coaching models must be adaptable. In the example given, this adaptability involves determining whether a group activity or a one-on-one activity is more appropriate. Adaptability was particularly evident during the coronavirus pandemic. For instance, coaches like Cate, Rebecca, and Holly reported making the decision to adapt to the situation by offering modified online sessions instead of face-to-face contact. These variations highlight the diverse approaches to coaching in Australian schools and support Desimone and Pak's (2017) assertion that coaching activities are diverse and can occur in various settings.

The coaching activities outlined in this study align with the comprehensive set of coaching activities identified by Denton and Hasbrouck (2009). This alignment underscores the consistency in coaching practices and provides a foundation for the continued exploration and refinement of coaching practices in schools. It shows that, despite the uniqueness of coaching within each school setting, coaching activities share common elements that reinforce the notion that coaching is adaptable to diverse school settings and allows for comparative studies.

Frequency. Another important element revealed in the study relates to the frequency of coaching practices within schools. The findings reveal a significant variation in the frequency of coaching in schools, whether the individual is receiving coaching or coaching others. Valuable insights emerged, highlighting that schools used different approaches to support the professional development of their coaches and coachees.

The findings emphasise the need for flexibility and responsiveness to the unique needs of a particular school setting. As pointed out earlier, "every school has established a unique version of coaching" (Lofthouse et al., 2010, p.16). This uniqueness may also be based on how often

coaching is practised. Given the varied frequencies preferred by participants, it can be inferred that, where possible, schools should consider providing a range of coaching frequencies to cater to different preferences and schedules. There is implied merit in tailoring coaching programs to meet the unique needs of the coachees and their respective school contexts rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. As the findings of this study show, preferences may vary significantly, from weekly and fortnightly coaching sessions to infrequent workshop formats. The assumed reasons are insightful. For instance, the preference for fortnightly sessions suggests a need for ongoing support and feedback, while workshops provide concentrated, intensive learning opportunities. In both instances, it seems that participants value regular, structured interaction. Similarly, the equal preference for both weekly and termly sessions among those coaching others underscores the need to be adaptable to the specific context and needs of the participant. Some contexts and individuals may require more frequent support, while others are successful with more reflective yet less frequent coaching sessions.

The varied preferences for coaching frequencies reflect Malcolm Knowles' (1984) principle of andragogy because participants are seeking coaching that aligns with their individual learning needs and schedules. It is important that adults' wishes are taken into consideration when professional development opportunities are being decided (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019; Horn & Goldstein, 2022). Even in schools where coaching is mandatory, it is fair to assume that the frequency of coaching sessions suggests the individual's learning preferences and their context are taken into account. Similarly, the varied coaching frequencies and session regularity provide ongoing opportunities for engagement in reflective practice and allow time for the application of new knowledge and collaboration. These are important elements of constructivist theories (Handsfield, 2017) as well as effective professional development that allows new ideas to be translated into practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In association with frequency, time was identified as an important element of effective coaching. The findings imply that the effectiveness of coaching is influenced by the availability and management of time within school settings. Participants mentioned the need to postpone coaching sessions to accommodate other work priorities. This highlights a crucial challenge: the lack of intentionally setting aside and protecting that time for coaching. When coaching sessions are consistently postponed, it is reasonable to infer that the quality of interaction between the coach and coachee can suffer. The allocation of scheduled time for coaching so that coachee teachers have uninterrupted opportunities for professional development is well-supported (Eisenberg et al., 2017; Lofthouse et al., 2010). This might include creating a structured timetable where coaching sessions are given priority and are not easily overridden by other tasks. Despite the time constraints that schools may face, the findings imply that consistent and regular coaching sessions are necessary for effective coaching outcomes.

In addition to time, Lofthouse et al. (2010) put forward the idea that "coaching is most productive when it is offered as a cycle" (p.16). The concept of a coaching cycle implies a structured approach that allows for ongoing support, development, and refinement. This perspective aligns with the understanding that coaching is a dynamic and iterative process that extends beyond isolated instances. In this study, the reported duration of the coaching cycle varied from 6 months to 5 years, with coaching sessions most frequently taking place on a fortnightly basis. Desimone and Pak (2017) brought some attention to this issue of time management by pointing out that coaching frequency varies, ranging from infrequent sessions by an external coach to regular sessions. Although consistent with findings from this present study, there is a dearth of research on the frequency and duration of coaching in schools.

Documents used. Unexpectedly, the study revealed a significant variance in how schools organise coaching in literacy in terms of the types of documents used. Although some

differences in how schools approach literacy coaching were expected, the extent of the variance in the documents was surprising. The lack of consistency has prompted a deep reflection on the potential implications for student learning outcomes and educational equity. An analysis of the diversity in documents used across schools indicates that while documents can be useful, they are not a substitute for the theoretical basis and practical skills that are essential to effective coaching. The insinuation is that the use of documents can enhance the coaching process, but they should complement, not replace, the expertise and skills of the coaches. In fact, relying too heavily on documents and other resources risks leading to a mechanical and rigid approach to coaching that fails to account for the unique needs and goals of individual coachees. Coaches who rely too heavily on pre-existing documents and resources may miss important nuances in the coaching process, leading to suboptimal outcomes for their coachees. The implication seems to be that effective coaching requires a combination of a solid understanding of the underlying theories, practical application, and adaptability to the unique needs of the coachee and the school environment. In other words, documents are just part of the process, not the process itself.

The findings regarding documents prompted further consideration about whether some standardisation is necessary. In particular, will standardisation ensure that all teachers engaged in coaching as well as those providing coaching to others in literacy, have equitable access to high-quality resources throughout their coaching practice? The reflection extends to exploring how standardisation could be a catalyst for elevating the overall quality of literacy coaching. The analysis shows that standardisation of coaching in literacy documents can contribute to fostering a more equitable educational landscape, where students, regardless of their background or the school they can attend, can receive a consistently high-quality literacy education. Further research could yield deeper insights into whether or how standardising coaching documents would be beneficial for literacy coaches.

This finding is also indicative of a structured coaching process that is supported by the use of different types of resources within a particular school context. These documents can serve multiple purposes within the coaching process, including broad categories such as guidelines, templates, and frameworks. These resources help to guide the various coaching activities, record the outcomes of the coaching process, and ensure that coaching aligns with the school's goals. One such document highlighted in this study is an 'instructional playbook' or 'playbook' which is described as "a concise, precise document that summarizes the essential information about evidence-based teaching strategies that instructional coaches use to support teachers and students" (Knight et al., 2020, p. 5). This document provides a structured framework for consistent decision-making, clarity on expectations, and streamlined operations (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2018). The assumption here is that this will lead to better collaboration between the literacy coach and coachee.

Structure through documentation demonstrates that coaching is not a random or ad-hoc effort in schools but is intentionally designed to enhance the effectiveness of coaching in schools. Documents like instructional playbooks acting as guidelines, templates, or regulatory frameworks go beyond being mere organisational tools within schools. They can form integral components that contribute to the coherence, transparency, and success of schools. Knight et al. (2020, p. 7) revealed that a well-crafted playbook holds significant importance in mitigating the theory-practice gap within professional learning by providing "explicit [and] actionable" strategies. By outlining clear policies and practices, playbooks transform professional learning into tangible and practical approaches that are useful for both coaches and coachees. Portia's school has developed such a playbook. She acknowledges the success of this guide for teachers about the teaching and learning program of her school.

However, the use of structured documents like instructional playbooks was notably limited in this study. Instead, there was a lack of consistency in the documents used across schools, demonstrating the possible need for a more consistent approach to coaching. First, inconsistency could lead to confusion or inefficiencies in the coaching process. Without standardised documents, even coaches within the same system or school may interpret guidelines differently, leading to variations in the application of coaching strategies. This lack of uniformity may impact the overall effectiveness of coaching programs within the same school or school system. Second, a lack of standardisation in documents can make it difficult to compare and evaluate the effectiveness of coaching programs within and across different schools, even within the same system, and may also make it challenging for coaches to collaborate and share resources effectively. Therefore, standardised documents could provide a common basis for the evaluation of the coaching process, allowing for a more accurate comparison of outcomes. This would be helpful in understanding what works well and what needs to be improved in literacy coaching practices.

Furthermore, a lack of consistency in the documents used across Australian schools may be indicative of a broader issue with the coaching process itself. If coaches are not using standardised documents, or following a consistent approach to coaching, it may be more difficult to ensure that coaching is being implemented in a manner that is in tandem with a school's established goals and objectives. To address this issue, it may be helpful to develop more standardised documents and resources that can be used within and across different schools and coaching programs. This would help to ensure that coaches are all working from a common set of guidelines. It would also be easier to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching programs across different schools and school systems. However, due to the unregulated nature of coaching in

Australian schools (Spence et al., 2006), achieving consistency in documentation may remain an issue for the foreseeable future.

The issue of unregulated coaching in schools has been noted as concerning (Spence et al., 2006). This has resulted in qualification entry points for literacy coaches varying widely, with the majority entering the field with undergraduate degrees from a variety of areas and few with a literacy focus (Blamey et al., 2008; Frost & Bean, 2006). Without a consistent set of qualification requirements, coaches may have varying levels of knowledge and skills. Additionally, as already discussed, coaches who lack the necessary qualifications may not be aware of the theoretical basis and practical skills required for effective coaching, which can further exacerbate the issue of unregulated coaching. Furthermore, the lack of regulation in coaching can make it difficult to establish a consistent set of documents and resources that can be used within and across schools. However, this is not to suggest that standardisation in documents should come at the expense of flexibility and adaptability. Coaching is not to be seen as a one-size-fits-all approach. After all, coaches must still be able to adapt their approach to fit the unique needs of their coachees. Standardised documents and resources can be a useful starting point rather than a definitive guide.

Finally, the discovery of a lack or absence of relevant documents has significant implications for the adequacy of support and guidance provided to schools in crafting coaching in literacy resources. The findings acknowledge that when faced with this void, coaches are compelled to create their own documents. However, the effectiveness of this approach may vary based on the individual coach's skills and knowledge, potentially resulting in years of trial and error. Alternatively, coaches may find themselves dependent on resources supplied by their coaching providers, which introduces another layer of considerations, such as the quality and appropriateness of these externally sourced materials. Providing coaching resources can be

expensive, and not all schools have the financial ability to access these resources. The study recognises the complex dynamics involved in this reliance on external resources. However, there is an obvious need for a comprehensive examination of the support structures in place for coaches to navigate the challenges associated with crafting coaching resources. While the flexibility to create one's own resources for literacy coaching or purchase from existing providers has its merits, some schools may lack access to necessary resources. Also, some schools may not have the training or budget required to develop effective literacy coaching documents. This is a concern because coaching documents can play a crucial role in guiding the coaching process, recording outcomes, and ensuring coaching aligns with the school's goals. To counteract this issue, schools should consider providing resources to coaches to support the development of coaching documents and establishing guidelines for schools to follow in creating literacy coaching resources. However, any efforts to provide support and guidance must balance the need for flexibility and adaptation to ensure that coaching approaches are effective and responsive to the needs of coachees.

In summary, the study's findings have revealed significant variances in how Australian schools organise their coaching activities and the types of documents used. Despite classroom observations, goal-setting, and conversations being common coaching activities identified in the study, the findings indicate schools generally use an adaptive approach. In this way, the coaching activities selected can better meet the diverse needs of the coachees. Similarly, when it comes to how often coaching occurred, flexibility and responsiveness to the unique needs of the school setting were the main standards used. The study also revealed that schools use a variety of documents to organise their coaching. An instructional playbook was highlighted as a useful document to help coaches and coachees collaborate well with each other. The study highlights

the benefits of using such standardised documents while warning against becoming too inflexible or reliant on them.

5.5 Having a Supportive Coach Can Lead to Whole-School Transformative Impact

The findings of this study suggest that coaching goes beyond individual skill development; it shapes a culture of support, collaboration, and continuous improvement within schools, impacting both staff and students. This finding shows some consistency with other international research on the impact of coaching on school staff (Bennett, 2022; Knight, 2018; Lofthouse, 2019b; Marzanno & Simms, 2013) and students (Hammond & Moore, 2018; Kelsen, 2011; Shidler, 2009). The narratives shared in this study consistently validate the transformative power of coaching in teacher professional development already highlighted by other researchers (Duron-Lara, 2019; Hammond & Moore, 2018; Lofthouse, 2019a). Notably, the transformative journey is not portrayed as a solitary endeavour but as a collaborative effort within a supportive coaching relationship. As a result, coaching relationships become more than just instructional but are characterised by collaboration, partnership, and a shared commitment to professional growth (Knight, 2018).

The analysis reveals that having a supportive coach can help meet both the affective and performance needs of those involved in literacy coaching. In this way, coaching can be both personally and professionally impactful. Being coached in a supportive environment seems to lead to feelings of comfort, connectedness, and safety, which can provide affective experiences that leave recipients feeling better about themselves. Rebecca's description of her first experience with being coached in a supportive way provides evidence of this. She described feeling *extremely supported* and feeling able to ask for anything she needed, which she found *comforting.* Her declaration that she *felt safe* further amplifies the affective benefits of a supportive coaching relationship as revealed in this study. Affective experiences describe the

basic feelings of pleasure or displeasure that may affect a teacher's confidence, motivation, teaching practice, and general work performance (Hargreaves, 2000; Klassen & Tze, 2014; Seo, 2003). A literature review conducted by Sutton and Wheatley (2003) concluded that teachers' affective experiences significantly influence their teaching practices. Positive experiences enhance the teacher's ability to create a supportive learning environment and lead to better student outcomes. Rebecca explained that she became a better coach due to her positive experiences. As revealed in this study, positive affective experiences can result in renewed commitment, increased interest, and a greater willingness to participate in the professional learning community. These experiences are what ultimately result in a more proficient practitioner. Conversely, negative affective experiences can lead to reluctance, a lack of genuine participation in the coaching process, and frustration. These, in turn, hinder student learning outcomes due to the decreased effectiveness of teaching practices and the less engaging learning environment.

The contrast in affective experiences was highlighted in this study when participants described positive affective experiences such as improvement in self-confidence, becoming more resilient, and being able to build capacity through collaboration and discussion. The impact, therefore, extends beyond individual professional development to influence broader school outcomes. Coaching is not viewed in isolation but is seen as a catalyst for positive outcomes at the school level. For example, in this study, participants described improvements in literacy results, increased competitiveness of the school, and the establishment of a coaching culture that extended beyond individual professional development. Fiona described *game changing* results in student literacy outcomes at her school because coaching had metaphorically provided coachees with the *tools to put in their toolbelts*. Moreover, the narratives reveal a benefit in the transition from being recipients of coaching to becoming coaches. Positive coaching experiences motivate

teachers to take on coaching roles, contributing to the continuity of a supportive coaching culture within schools. It was her experience of being well-supported that made Cate decide to become a coach herself. She revealed that she *fell in love with this idea of* coaching and has enjoyed supporting others. Conversely, individuals expressing negative affective experiences described being dissatisfied with the coaching due to goal-setting requirements, lack of focus on literacy, and a perceived lack of coach input. An examination of these differences shows that every participant who shared positive affective experiences also acknowledged negative experiences. From this, it could be inferred that encountering negative affective experiences does not necessarily preclude a successful coaching experience, especially when done within a generally supportive environment. In other words, the study suggests that the presence of a generally supportive context can mitigate the impact of negative affective aspects on the overall effectiveness of coaching. The study did not aim to delve into a more profound exploration of these affective experiences. This poses a limitation on the comprehensive exploration of the emotional aspects related to the coaching experiences of participants. It is recommended that future research explicitly incorporates an in-depth investigation into the nuances of affective experiences within the coaching context in schools, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of both positive and negative dimensions.

The findings of the study further indicate that one cannot altogether separate the personal from the professional in the coaching experience due to coaching's dynamic, interpersonal nature. Participants, when recounting their experiences, consistently highlighted the impact of coaching conversations and questioning on them becoming better practitioners. This interconnectedness challenges the notion of a rigid separation between the personal and professional dimensions of the coaching process. Portia's testimonial (interview 1) serves as an illustrative example of this intertwined nature. This example demonstrates that a supportive

coaching experience can yield not only personal growth but also initiate a transformative shift within the entire school. Portia described the shift as transforming her school from a state of being *mediocre* to one that is *flourishing*. Such a profound transformation underlines the potential for coaching to transcend individual development and catalyse systemic improvements. Furthermore, the study shows that improvements in literacy outcomes and grades serve as tangible evidence of positive results. This highlights the broader impact that a supportive environment can have. These outcomes underscore the significance of fostering a supportive professional learning environment through coaching (Aguilar, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al.; Gormley & van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; Knight, 2011), not only for the practitioners directly involved but also for the entire school community.

The idea that coaching operates at the intersection of the personal and professional is further supported by participants' descriptions of thriving through coaching conversations. These conversations, marked by supportive questioning and dialogue, emerged as catalysts for individual growth. The coaching process, in essence, becomes a platform for educators to reflect on their practices, receive constructive feedback, and collaboratively explore ways to enhance their professional skills. The implication of these findings extends beyond the immediate participants and suggests that coaching has the potential to create a ripple effect within schools. The interconnectedness of personal and professional growth, as facilitated by coaching, contributes to the establishment of a collaborative and supportive learning culture. This culture, as exemplified by Portia's school transformation, can have far-reaching consequences for overall educational outcomes. Future research could delve deeper into the specific mechanisms through which coaching influences both personal and professional aspects, offering insights for refining coaching practices and maximising its effect.

In recounting their experiences with coaching, participants of the study consistently stressed the importance of having a supportive coach, aligning closely with existing research findings. As emphasised throughout this study, coaching has been recognised as a valuable asset in teacher professional development (Bennett, 2022), contributing to enhanced student learning outcomes (Hammond & Moore, 2018), fostering wholesome teacher conversations (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2018) and positively influencing whole school functioning (Reid, 2022). The recurrent emphasis on a supportive coach is striking because coaching extends beyond imparting knowledge or skill. Coaching encompasses building a relationship based on trust – a theme echoed in the data. The participants collectively convey that trust is the linchpin of a supportive coaching relationship. It involves mutuality, openness, vulnerability, consistency, and intentional efforts to understand and support the coachee. The participants' narratives illuminate trust as a dynamic and multifaceted element that is foundational to the success of coaching interactions. When teachers perceive their coach as a source of support, they are more inclined to take risks, experiment with novel instructional strategies, and engage in reflective practices regarding their teaching methodologies. This, in turn, leads to improved student learning outcomes. The converse also holds: without trust, the coaching relationship will be fraught with conflict (Finkelstein, 2016). Coaching can also facilitate meaningful and constructive conversations among teachers, which can help build a culture of trust, collaboration, shared learning, and continuous improvement (Finkelstein, 2019; Knight, 2011). The significance of trust in the coaching relationship will be further discussed in section 5.6.

The analysis of the participants' use of emotive language suggests that providing personal support is the foremost way coaches can impact coachees for change. This influence is not construed in a therapeutic sense but rather revolves around establishing an environment where coachees can embrace professional risk-taking. In other words, it seems coaches need to first win

coachees over in a personal way – making them feel comfortable, connected, and safe - before attempting to impact the way coachees perform their job roles. This approach underscores the importance of the interpersonal dynamics in coaching relationships. However, the identified risk lies in the possibility of boundary crossing – where the coaching relationship transcends the professional domain and inadvertently enters therapeutic territory. This becomes particularly concerning when coaches operate beyond their level of competence and outside of the scope of the workplace. The blurring of boundaries raises ethical considerations and points to the need for careful navigation within the coaching profession. Braun's (2022) call for further research into this intricate connection highlights the evolving nature of coaching relationships and the need to understand the implications, especially regarding potential ethical dilemmas for practising coaches. The unregulated nature of coaching (Blamey et al., 2008; Frost & Bean, 2006; Lofthouse, 2019a) amplifies the significance of these concerns. Without standardised guidelines and clear frameworks, coaches may find themselves in ambiguous situations, potentially compromising the integrity of the coaching process.

While the use of emotive language points to the undeniable impact of personal support on professional change in coaching, it simultaneously signals a cautionary note. Coaches must tread carefully to maintain the delicate balance between fostering a supportive environment and avoiding unintended excursions into therapeutic realms. It is crucial to note that coaching, though impactful, is not a panacea for all problems in teacher professional development or school improvement. However, when coaching is complemented by other forms of professional learning, is context-specific, and tailored to the individual needs and goals of the coachee, it can be a powerful and effective tool for enhancing teacher professional development and, subsequently, student learning outcomes.

To summarise, having a supportive coach has been found to be impactful on both the individual as well as the whole-school level. Having a supportive coach has been described as leading to positive affective experiences such as improved self-confidence, a sense of connectedness, comfort, and safety for individuals. These experiences can also lead to professional growth for the coachee as well as transformation within the entire school, including positive literacy outcomes for students.

5.6 Coaching as Part of School Culture

Following a literature review on coaching cultures, Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh (2014) identified that "a coaching culture exists within an organisation when it has embedded a coaching approach as part of its strategic plans in a transparent way" (p.99). The understanding here is that a coaching culture within an organisation is established intentionally in a clear and transparent manner. This calls for a seamless integration of the principles and practices of coaching into the organisation's strategic plans. In this case, coaching is not an isolated activity but part of the organisation's strategy, becoming a fundamental and visible part of how the organisation operates. After examining the available research, Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh (2014) concluded that building a coaching culture can lead to better and more supportive environments in organisations, benefitting both individuals and the organisation's overall success. The authors also discussed extant literature on coaching cultures in educational settings, highlighting the characteristics of effective coaching within a coaching culture to promote learning and personal responsibility across the school community. Trust was identified as vital to introducing a coaching culture. Similarly, successful implementation of coaching is linked to establishing a clear vision: clear goals, allocated resources, leadership support, and a shared understanding of why coaching is being introduced.

The findings of this study support existing literature regarding the pivotal role of trust in coaching (Eisenberg et al., 2017; Finkelstein, 2016, 2019). Trust is not only crucial in the context of individual coaching relationships but also plays a significant role in building a coaching culture within schools (Gormley & van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; van Nieuwerburgh & Passmore, 2012). At the individual level, trust is portrayed as co-dependent, where both the coach and coachee need to trust each other. Here, trust becomes a foundational element in the coach-coachee relationship, creating a safe space for open communication and mutual vulnerability. As Cate explains, *if you want to support someone, they need to trust you in order for that to be effectively done.* Participants stress trust building involves coaches being open, vulnerable, and willing to acknowledge their own imperfections. This openness fosters an environment where coachees feel safe to seek help and share their challenges without fear of judgment. Fiona describes this approach as *a two-way street* where both sides show their vulnerability and there is no illusion about the coach being *perfect.* The narratives in the study also highlight the importance of mutual learning, acknowledging what coachees bring to the table, and avoiding a one-sided, hierarchical approach. Inherent in this is the understanding that coaches and coachees are adult learners who come to this coaching relationship with agency, autonomy and prior experiences (Knowles, 1984). An acknowledgement of this is, therefore, likely to build trust and provide the building blocks necessary to create a school coaching culture.

The assertion by Anderson and Wallin (2018) that "relationships built on trust and respect will help teachers and students" (p.56) emphasises the broader positive impact of trust in school settings. As Rebecca rhetorically inquired: *If you are coaching a team and there is no trust, then what is the foundation of that relationship?* Ensuring coachee teachers feel supported and empowered is integral, and establishing trust with their coach is an important element in achieving this. However, as the participants of this study reported, there are challenges with

building trust, especially with experienced teachers who have traditional teaching styles they do not believe need to be altered. The process may also take longer for those who are less acquainted or resistant to coaching. Building trust, therefore, may take time, persistence, and consistent effort. Strategic approaches to establish and maintain effective coaching become necessary. The findings of this study support the intentional use of trust-building strategies such as spending time with coachees. For instance, both Portia and Holly related that they had to spend a considerable amount of time becoming acquainted with new coachees in order to build trust with them. Intentional activities ranged from coffee meetings and classroom visits to seriously reflecting on one's own practice and making changes. Other strategies highlighted in the study included offering clear communication, balancing trust with coachee accountability, using Jim Knight's partnership principles, modelling lessons, and being consistent. This finding aligns with research carried out by Finkelstein (2019), who offers a four-pronged process of building trust. This process involves the coach focusing on student outcomes instead of teacher performance, encouraging a non-hierarchical relationship structure, utilising a non-judgemental approach to providing feedback, and ensuring there is balance when offering guidance. These trust-building strategies purportedly result in coachee growth and progress within a literacy coaching cycle.

Trust-building is portrayed as an ongoing process that is crucial for the success and impact of coaching initiatives, such as creating a coaching culture in schools. An analysis of the findings of this study indicates that building a coaching culture in schools is a multifaceted endeavour. Integral to building a school's coaching culture is offering coaching as a dynamic approach to professional learning that revolves around a shared vision for school improvement. Being united in vision means that there is an intentionality of purpose that brings the whole school community together, providing the foundation for establishing and maintaining a

coaching culture. For instance, at Holly's school, through coaching, *everyone who works at the school, has ever worked at the school has been extremely united in their vision*. As established by its founding principal, this shared vision promotes an excellent education for all students and embeds a coaching culture to achieve this.

One interesting observation is that the path to embedding coaching within a school's culture can be quite varied and unique. Schools tend to develop their own distinct brand of coaching (Lofthouse et al., 2010), shaped by their specific context and challenges. Consequently, the integration of coaching can take different forms tailored to the school's individual circumstances. However, this study shows that beneath this diversity lies a commonality that seems to be an effective approach: having a set of principles that guides the shared vision of the school. Jim Knight's (Knight, 2007) partnership principles serve as an illustrative example of such guiding principles. These principles offer a structured framework for effective coaching by emphasizing equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, and praxis as foundational values. They promote collaboration, respect, and a growth-oriented mindset as vital components in cultivating a coaching culture for professional growth and improved student outcomes. Another notable instance of cultural transformation occurred within a Maryland-based school in the United States, catalysed by the visionary leadership of its new principal (O'Brien, 2010). Despite the absence of a formally instituted coaching culture at that school, the integration of key elements, such as meticulous data analysis and targeted professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing instructional competencies, led to improved outcomes across the entirety of the school community – among teachers, students, and parents.

This study indicates that the success of integrating coaching into a school's culture hinges on the understanding that while the guiding principles of coaching remain consistent, the approaches employed can vary substantially from one institution to another. The research

findings shed light on a significant point: the development of a coaching culture within a school is achievable whether coaching participation is a mandatory or voluntary requirement for teachers. Nonetheless, Knight (2016) thought that the imposition of mandatory coaching within schools may result in only superficial compliance and a low level of commitment among teachers, essentially rendering coaching a de facto voluntary professional learning option. He contends that a more effective strategy is to establish professional development as an imperative for teachers, requiring their active engagement in self-improvement endeavours but without stipulating its type. Difficulties can arise when teachers are compelled to partake in particular professional development, such as coaching, as a mandatory directive. As a general rule, teachers should be given the opportunity to choose their professional growth paths, rather than be coerced (Knight, 2016).

In both scenarios, whether mandatory or voluntary, certain common elements play a pivotal role in fostering a coaching culture. One of these critical factors is the level of leadership commitment and support (Knight, 2016). This project's data suggests that in instances where coaching is mandatory, more is achieved when leaders exemplify their commitment to coaching by participating in coaching themselves. This demonstrates coaching's value to the institution beyond words and sends a strong message to the entire school community. In this way, leadership's involvement serves as a catalyst for establishing a coaching culture, making it clear that coaching is an integral part of the school's professional development and growth strategy. Likewise, in the context where coaching is voluntary, leadership support remains paramount for teachers to feel empowered to explore this type of professional development without fear of repercussions or judgment. This support may take various forms, including the allocation of time, resources, space, and a coach.

Furthermore, the findings of this study provide evidence that when teachers unite around student-focused outcomes in literacy and receive coaching to help them achieve these outcomes, the result is significant capacity-building in teachers that ultimately leads to improved student outcomes. What is particularly noteworthy is that this capacity-building effect is not confined solely to the domain of literacy but extends into other areas of professional learning and development within schools. This underscores the effectiveness of coaching as a tool for fostering a strong and unified foundation or vision within a school community. This conclusion is in line with previous research (Gormley & van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; van Nieuwerburgh & Passmore, 2012) that illustrates the idea of a coaching culture where coaching becomes integrated into various aspects of an organisation's practices. The success of coaching in this context can be attributed to its alignment with the needs of adult learners who are typically self-driven and seek a personalised professional learning experience. This alignment fosters a strong and unified culture within the school community, where teachers are not only enhancing their own skills but also working together cohesively to meet school-wide objectives and improve student outcomes. This understanding of a coaching culture resonates with the concept of "parallel commitment" (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005, p. 19), which emphasises integrating coaching through a dual focus on organisational goals and the personal growth of people within that organisation. The obvious result is that every stakeholder ends up benefitting from the coaching experience.

In essence, the findings of the study align with the theories of andragogy and constructivism, which are important understandings for how to provide effective professional learning experiences to adults (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Knowles, 1984; Liu & Matthews, 2005). Andragogy, as proposed by Malcolm Knowles (1984), emphasises self-learning and recognises that adult learners bring a wealth of life experiences and prior knowledge

to their learning. Coaching aligns with these principles by catering to the individualised needs and motivations of adult learners. Furthermore, constructivism underscores the importance of active, hands-on learning experiences and the construction of knowledge through reflection and interaction. Coaching embodies these principles by facilitating dialogue, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving among teachers, thereby allowing them to construct knowledge and skills in a context that is directly relevant to their roles and goals. These attributes highlight coaching as a powerful approach to professional development and a powerful tool for building a coaching culture in schools that enhances both teacher professional growth and student achievement.

The findings of this study suggest that the absence of a unified approach to coaching can impede the formation of a coaching culture within schools, leading to consequences both in terms of its effectiveness and its sustainability. Where coachees may not have been aware they were being coached, this lack of cohesion compounded the difficulties associated with cultivating a coaching culture. For instance, this resulted in widely varying coaching practices across different parts of the school. Some literacy teachers may unknowingly receive coaching, while others may not receive coaching at all. This inconsistency would likely lead to an undermining of any overarching goal of a coaching program. Furthermore, the data indicate that when coachees are unaware that they are being coached, they may miss valuable opportunities for professional growth. When teacher-coachees are unaware, they may not actively engage in the reflective and growth-oriented processes that coaching offers. Coaching is, therefore, most effective when it is an intentional and collaborative process aimed at supporting teachers to improve their practice.

Similarly, a lack of transparent communication about the coaching process can leave teachers uncertain about the purpose of coaching. This may fuel scepticism or resistance, as

coachees may wonder why they are being observed or engaged in coaching conversations without a clear understanding of intended outcomes and benefits. Coachees may feel that their autonomy and privacy are being violated, leading to discomfort or resistance to coaching. As was made clear in this study and others, trust and transparency are fundamental to any coaching relationship, and their absence can erode the efforts to build a coaching culture in schools.

To summarise, the findings suggest that building and maintaining a school's coaching culture is an ongoing process that is built on trust and a shared vision. Furthermore, whether coaching is mandatory or voluntary, leadership commitment and support are vital if a coaching culture is to be established. This commitment and support must include, among other things, allocated time, resources, and space. Schools do best to employ an adaptive approach that ensures coaching practices continue to align with the shared vision for school improvement, evolving alongside the changing needs and circumstances of the school community.

5.7 Coaching During Critical Times

Undoubtedly, at the best of times, schools operate under challenging circumstances (Anderson et al., 2022; Masters, 2016). In the first quarter of 2020, the world was hit by the novel coronavirus popularly named COVID-19 (Cook et al., 2020; Mahase, 2020). The pandemic, disrupting normalcy worldwide, affected every sector, with the education system being one of the most severely impacted. Schools faced unprecedented disruptions to learning (AITSL, 2021; Fray et al., 2023; Gore et al., 2021; Gore et al., 2020) that necessitated rapid adaptation and innovation. Schools and other educational institutions had to quickly pivot from traditional modes of teaching to remote and online formats (Gore et al., 2021; Kerr-Sims & Baker, 2021; Maher, 2021). This study was conducted during the height of the pandemic from 2020 to 2022, and presented some unique challenges to PhD researchers (Cahusac de Caux et al.,

2022), including psychological distress (Grant-Skiba, 2022). Importantly, the pandemic shed light on the enduring nature of coaching to adapt during times of crisis.

This study found that coaches adapted to the new normal by adjusting their coaching methods and support to focus on the emerging needs of the coachees. With schools shifting to remote or hybrid learning, coaches explored innovative ways to provide support to teacher-coachees based on individual needs. In such instances, coaches fulfilled a variety of roles. For instance, these designated literacy leaders became technology coaches, supporting teachers as they navigated virtual teaching classrooms. Similarly, although coaching was still being provided in the area of literacy, there were adjustments to cater for the coachee's emotional well-being. These findings correlate with research evidence from a recent self-study of three literacy coaches who described their experiences of coaching during the coronavirus pandemic (Ciampa et al., 2023). These literacy coaches revealed that their roles shifted so that they could adapt to three essential functions brought on by the coronavirus. First, they maintained their traditional role and, as academic coaches, supported teachers in literacy development. However, they also helped teachers and students with the shift to online learning, essentially becoming technology coaches. Finally, they acted as a type of socio-emotional coach, supporting the mental health needs of both teachers and students who had been adversely affected by the pandemic (Ciampa et al., 2023). Emerging trends place a heightened emphasis on the need for teachers to receive trauma-informed support (Brown, 2021; Howard, 2019) that recognises the critical environments within which they work.

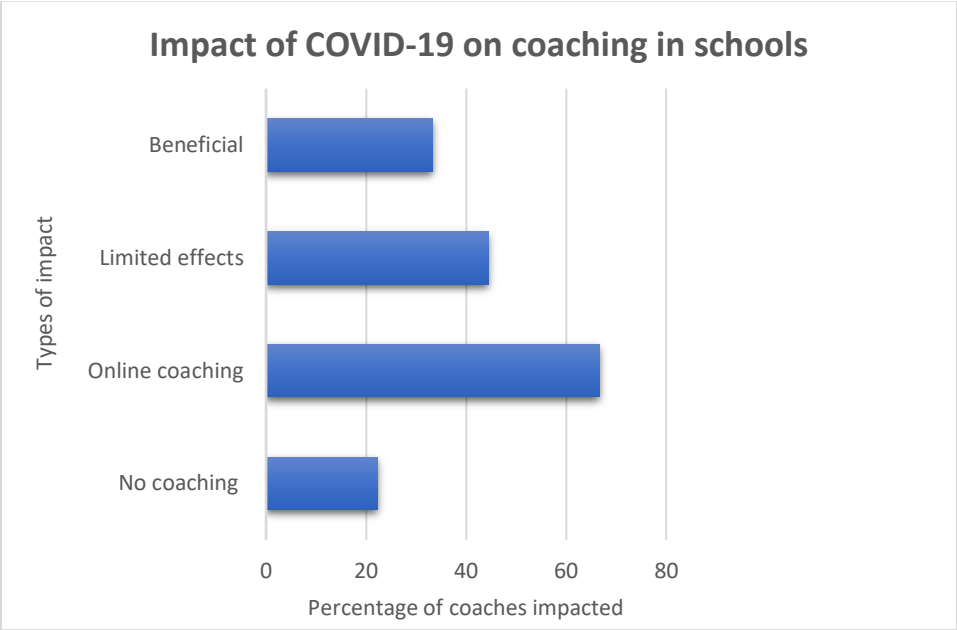
An analysis of the findings underscored the pivotal role of coaching in supporting teacher-coachees as they grappled with the distinctive emotional and coping demands brought about by the challenges of the pandemic. As Cate explained, *we felt that there was a greater need there at the time than just focusing on literacy and growing.* However, caution must be

taken to ensure that coaches in schools are not being expected to fulfil roles for which they are ill-equipped. Rice et al.'s (2023) recent research highlights the critical need for increased awareness of the social and emotional aspects inherent in instructional coaching. Through their self-study conducted amid the pandemic, the authors noted a lack of recognition for the "intense emotional labour" (Rice et al., 2023, p.595) involved in instructional coaching, particularly in crisis situations like during a pandemic. The authors advocated for greater flexibility, emphasising the importance of allowing coaches to adapt their support for teacher-coachees, considering the present impact of external challenges on the coaches themselves.

The findings further exemplify the adaptability of coaching, revealing instances where literacy coaches modified their approaches to address various challenges. As illustrated in Figure 9, coaching programs in some schools were affected in different ways. Some schools temporarily suspended coaching sessions, some went online, others were minimally affected, and some were positively impacted. This diversity in impact during a crisis period demonstrates how adaptable coaching can be when it is necessary. Also, the findings highlight minimal negative effects of the pandemic on coaching when coaching goals were modified or technology was swiftly integrated into coaching practices. Interestingly, the findings also reveal that certain adjustments prompted by COVID-19 had a positive impact on coaching. These adjustments were seen as making coaching more accessible for coachees, providing a source of relief, reducing confrontations, and fostering more honest conversations. This demonstrated adaptability not only underscores the resilience of coaching but also emphasises its continued relevance, even in times of crisis.

Figure 9

Impact of COVID-19 on Coaching in Schools



The analysis of the findings reflects an uptake in the use of technology in coaching practices during the pandemic. The participants uniformly shifted from face-to-face coaching to online platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Notably, individual coaching sessions demonstrated adaptability by transitioning to online group sessions, which in specific scenarios, were conveniently done in stages or grade levels. This strategic shift allowed for a broader reach, enabling more coachees to receive valuable support. However, challenges with online coaching emerged, including scheduling issues due to coaches also being engaged in teaching. There were also difficulties with arranging classroom observations. Other challenges included relational difficulties, managing dominant personalities in online group coaching sessions, and coachees experiencing distractions from digital fatigue.

The findings highlight the crucial role of technology in maintaining connections between coaches and coachees. While acknowledging the drawbacks brought about by a lack of face-to-face contact, the data demonstrate the positive impact of involving other teachers in remote

online coaching sessions, showcasing technology's potential to facilitate broader participation in coaching initiatives. For instance, the evidence indicates that coaching outcomes are more impactful when support is tailored to the individual needs of the coachee rather than strictly following planned coaching activities. This approach proved more responsive to the specific challenges and requirements of each coachee. The study's findings show consistency with a growing body of Australian research on the impact of technology-assisted remote learning during the coronavirus pandemic and the increasing reliance on digital tools (Baxter et al., 2023; Bower et al., 2023; Ewing & Cooper, 2021; Gore et al., 2021). This intersection of technology and coaching strategies not only signifies an immediate adaptation to coaching under critical circumstances but also highlights the potential for lasting changes in the way coaching is approached and delivered. A global coaching survey found that 98.3% of coaches in schools engaged in online coaching during the pandemic (Passmore et al., 2023), underscoring the universal nature of this shift. Passmore et al. (2023) emphasised the widespread adoption of online coaching during the pandemic resulted in challenges and benefits similar to those highlighted in this study. The significance lies in recognising online coaching as a paradigm shift in the educational landscape, with lasting implications for coaching practices, technology integration, and the potential for more inclusive and accessible coaching initiatives. Understanding and leveraging these insights can inform future educational strategies, ensuring that coaching remains a dynamic and effective tool for professional development in an ever-evolving school environment.

To summarise, the findings of this study demonstrate coaching's ability to be responsive to critical circumstances occurring in society, such as pandemics, that may affect how schools operate. The findings support existing research that proves coaching to be adaptable to meet the coachee's needs. Zoom and Microsoft Teams were shown in this study to be useful platforms to

accommodate the shift to online coaching during critical times when face-to-face contact between coach and coachee was not possible.

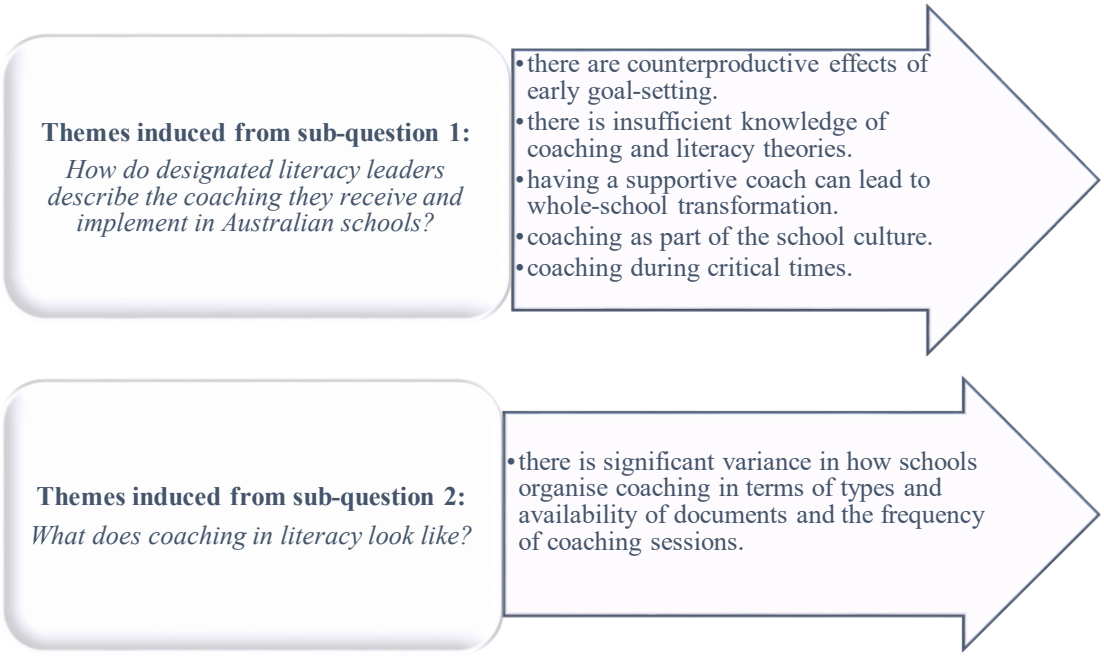
5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a discussion of the key findings of the study in relation to previously published research. The primary research question addressed the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders receiving and implementing coaching in Australian schools, with two (2) sub-questions guiding the inquiry. The first sub-question delved into how these leaders described the coaching they received and implemented, while the second sub-question aimed to understand how coaching in literacy was organised within Australian schools. The results of this study uncovered key insights from the experiences of nine (9) instructional coaches in literacy.

The data analysis induced six (6) major themes, summarised and illustrated in Figure 10. The first unexpected finding revealed is that goal-setting at the start of the coaching process is counterproductive and leads to dissatisfaction. Another key finding highlighted a surprising lack of knowledge about coaching and literacy theories. It revealed that the majority of coaches of literacy do not have a coaching in literacy background. The third unexpected finding indicated a significant variance in documents used in schools to organise coaching in literacy. The other findings supported extant literature that demonstrates that having a supportive coach can be transformative and lead to developing coaching as part of a school's culture. Coaching being used positively during times of crisis was also highlighted.

Figure 10

Major Themes in the Study



Chapter Six, the concluding chapter, serves as the thesis' culmination, offering a conclusion to the study. Within this section, the research's purpose is revisited, and the main points are summarised, emphasising their significance and implications. The aim is to provide a synthesis of the study's findings and their broader context relevance.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

I really do enjoy [coaching], *but I think for me because it is such a passion of mine to make sure that the students are the best that they can be, but also the teachers, the best that they can be - Fiona*

6.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter revisits the study's aim, rationale, and methodology. The chapter also provides a synthesis of the main findings, offering commentary on their significance in relation to existing research and discussing the implications arising from these discoveries. The chapter culminates with a summary of the responses to the main research question, followed by an exploration of the research's limitations. There are also recommendations for future research.

6.2 Summary of the Aim, Rationale and Methodology

This qualitative study began with the desire to critically explore the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who received and implemented coaching practices in Australian schools. The integration of coaches into school settings has evolved into a crucial component of professional development initiatives, particularly in the pursuit of improving student learning outcomes through the systematic development of teacher capabilities (Bean et al., 2010; Desimone & Pak, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018). The decision to incorporate coaches in Australian schools was influenced by a commissioned report (Gonski, 2011) that recommended instructional leaders be employed to support teachers in addressing the diminishing literacy performance of 15-year-old Australian students (Echazarra & Schwabe, 2019; OECD, 2022).

With the objective of contributing knowledge to the current body of research on coaching in schools, a qualitative research methodology was chosen as the most fitting to delve into the lived experiences of the participants. Following Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic phenomenological perspective allowed for the uncovering and understanding of deeper insights within the lived experiences of literacy coaches in Australian schools. The participants'

descriptions of their literacy coaching experiences conveyed a nuanced and broad understanding of the challenges and impact of literacy coaching on professional development in schools. The phenomenological perspective facilitated an exploration of the phenomenon, revealing themes that might not have been generated through other methodologies.

Data were collected through the administration of a questionnaire, conducting interviews, and analysing relevant documents provided by the participants. Each of the nine participants from three Australian states was required to meet specific criteria to be considered for the study. The triangulation of the data collected from the questionnaire, interviews, and documents confirmed that coaching in schools is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that is gaining traction as an alternative to traditional forms of professional learning. The findings revealed an insightful response to the main, overarching question: *What are the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in Australian schools?* The findings illustrated the importance of examining the lived experiences of coaches in Australian schools.

6.3 Summary of Findings

The findings from this study make a significant contribution to the teaching profession, in particular, and to educational research, in general. How, or whether they contribute to extant literature is briefly summarised in this section.

Research Sub-Question 1: How do designated literacy leaders describe the coaching they receive and implement in Australian schools? Findings from two rounds of interviews with nine participants (18 interviews) and a questionnaire revealed two significant original contributions to knowledge. Additionally, other significant findings corroborate or add to existing literature.

One, the designated literacy leaders described the coaching they were engaged in as demotivating if goal-setting was required too early in the coaching process. They revealed that when goals were prematurely defined, there was a risk of negative consequences due to coachee dissatisfaction. The study highlighted the importance of the coachee being prepared to independently set goals and the value of time and a partnership-relationship between the coach and coachee before definitive goals are set. This finding holds particular significance as it challenges current literature and coaching practices that prioritise goal-setting as the first and foremost step in the coaching process. This finding makes a significant original contribution to knowledge and addresses a key research gap in literacy coaching.

Two, the designated literacy leaders described the coaching they were engaged in as providing an inadequate background in literacy and limited knowledge of coaching and literacy theories. The coaches' narratives revealed that only a minority of coaches had a background in literacy in terms of qualifications and training, although they were employed to coach other teachers in this area. Moreover, these coaches pointed out that the coaching they had received seldom focused on literacy. Importantly, the coaches' experiences demonstrate a paucity of knowledge concerning the identification, application, and efficacy of coaching and literacy theories. This resulted in coaches not having a theoretical foundation upon which to base their practice when challenged by coachees. This finding makes a significant original contribution to knowledge and addresses a key research gap in literacy coaching.

Three, the designated literacy leaders described the transformative impact of coaching at both an individual and whole-school level when coaches feel supported. The participants related that their experiences with supportive coaches led to both personal and professional growth. In these instances, they perceived that their affective needs were met, leading to improvement in self-confidence and other positive outcomes. In terms of professional growth, coaches described

becoming better teachers - changing from mediocrity to flourishing. Importantly, these transformations persisted even when confronted with challenging situations while being coached. Moreover, participants stated that the positive change extended beyond the individual, influencing the entire school environment and contributing to improvements in students' literacy outcomes. This finding corroborates existing research about the role of coaches in impacting whole-school transformative change.

Four, the designated literacy leaders explained that trust is essential for building a coaching culture in schools. Trust-building is complex and requires mutuality, transparency, and intentional strategies. The research showed that creating a coaching culture is possible, regardless of whether participation is mandatory or voluntary. However, successful coaching cultures must align with the school's vision, be adaptable to the school's unique context, and have leadership support. The study highlights that while approaches to creating a school culture may vary, a unified vision and trust are fundamental for sustainability and effectiveness. This finding corroborates existing research about the role of trust in building a coaching culture in schools.

Five, the designated literacy leaders disclosed that coaching proved particularly beneficial and necessary during times of crisis, such as during the recent coronavirus pandemic. In such challenging times, coaches showed their adaptability by assuming diverse roles, such as providing emotional and technical support to teachers. They also adapted by adjusting their approaches to meet challenges, including the transition to online coaching. This finding adds to existing literature on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on schools and the roles coaching played during those challenging times.

Research Sub-Question 2: What does coaching in literacy look like in Australian

schools? Findings from the documents review and interviews provide valuable insights into how Australian schools organise their literacy coaching, revealing significant differences in how schools across Australia organise literacy coaching. Despite these variations, in terms of coaching activities, the findings reveal some commonalities across schools. Three coaching activities were identified as being most popularly used: classroom observations, goal-setting, and coaching conversations. These commonalities indicate a shared understanding of effective coaching practices, even as specific activities are adapted to meet diverse needs, supporting existing literature.

The study also found a lack of uniformity in the frequency of coaching in schools. The evidence showed much flexibility in how schools respond to the coaching needs of their teachers. However, the importance of providing scheduled time for coaching was highlighted. This finding is significant as it addresses a gap in the existing research on the frequency of literacy coaching and provides a starting point for further research to determine the most effective coaching cycle.

Additionally, the data revealed diversity in the types of documents used in literacy coaching and a surprising lack of commonality in documents used across different schools and systems. The lack of commonality raises the question of standardisation and its role in achieving quality and equity. Standardised documents could provide a common basis for evaluating literacy coaching effectiveness and ensure that coaching is structured rather than ad hoc. This finding is significant as it identifies a research gap in literacy coaching and contributes to the understanding of how standardisation can impact the quality and equity of coaching practices.

Overall, these findings make a significant original contribution to knowledge by showcasing the diverse approaches to literacy coaching in Australian schools and identifying

areas where further research and standardisation could improve coaching effectiveness and equity.

6.4 Implications of the Study's Findings

The potential theoretical, practical, and policy implications of this study's findings are presented in this section. These implications aim to guide stakeholders in leveraging the study's findings to enhance literacy coaching practices and contribute to a more supportive and effective school environment.

Theoretical implications:

This study highlights the importance of grounding coaching practices in established theories of literacy and coaching. The findings suggest that a strong theoretical foundation allows coaches to evaluate and theorise their practice effectively, contributing to the broader understanding of literacy coaching in schools. The study also underscores the importance of centring the coachee within the coaching process, a concept informed by adult learning theories and constructivist theories (Handsfield, 2018; Knowles, 1984).

Practical implications:

Implications for school leadership. School leaders can use these findings to design comprehensive coaching programs that address the gaps in knowledge of literacy and coaching theories. As one of the study's participants implied, a foundation in theory can serve as a type of cushion or something to *fall back on* (Rebecca, interview 1). A micro-credential course could potentially be used to provide a strong theoretical foundation in literacy coaching. Carbaugh et al. (2022) described micro-credentialing for teachers as a "competency-based approach to professional learning" (p. 3). Like coaching, micro-credentials issued by universities offer an opportunity to upgrade one's knowledge and skills as part of one's professional development (Orman et al., 2023). Therefore, credentialling is suitable for equipping teachers with advanced

knowledge and skills in a targeted and personalised manner (Carbaugh et al., 2022). This perspective aligns with the general purpose of this proposed course on literacy and coaching theories.

Another implication is that school leaders should provide ongoing professional development for both coaches and coachees to ensure their comprehensive understanding of the coaching process, its alignment with school goals, and its contribution to their professional growth. Furthermore, school leaders should promote consistency in coaching practices, providing and respecting the scheduled time for coaching sessions. This will help to create supportive coaching cultures, build trust, and gain commitment from all stakeholders.

Implications for coaches. Coaches should align goal-setting with the readiness of coachees, exposing them to the relevant theories to provide a strong foundation for literacy coaching. The findings also imply that effective coaches will demonstrate adaptability by customising coaching approaches based on the unique needs of coachees and school priorities. This flexibility, this study shows, is essential, especially during crises like pandemics. Coaches should also advocate for dedicated and protected time to perform literacy coaching, ensuring consistency in core principles, documentation, and coaching methods used throughout their school.

Implications for coachees. The study advocates for a relationship built on a foundation of trust and a strong partnership relationship. The implication is that coachees will not achieve the full benefit of coaching if they do not feel they can rely on their coach or that he/she is acting in their best interest. Similarly, coachees are adult learners with intrinsic motivation towards self-development and possess expertise in their area; they require and deserve a well-paced goal-setting process that acknowledges their past experiences. Furthermore, any coaching experience offered must acknowledge flexibility in frequency and duration, recognising that even coachees

within the same school may have varying needs and require a coaching experience that satisfies their individualised needs.

Implications for training providers. Literacy coaching training programs should be designed with a focus on bridging gaps in coaches' knowledge of literacy and coaching theories. This will provide coaches with a strong theoretical foundation upon which to build their practice. Furthermore, learning from the coronavirus pandemic, coaching providers should integrate crisis-responsive coaching strategies into professional development offers to equip coaches with the necessary skills during challenging times. The study highlights the diverse range of documents used by coaches, reflecting their unique approaches to coaching and the specific needs of their schools. Training providers could promote the advantages of creating and utilising standardised documents, such as instructional playbooks, to encourage a structured yet flexible and effective coaching approach within a particular school setting.

Policy implications:

The study implies that when formulating policies related to professional development, policymakers should intentionally address how coaching can be transformed to provide support during times of crisis. This includes developing guidelines for creating and using coaching documentation to ensure structure, equity, and comparability within and across schools.

6.5 Limitations

There are several limitations in this research study. By addressing these limitations, future research can take steps to address them.

When asked to describe the literacy and coaching theories that underpin their literacy coaching practices, several participants needed a definition of theories or requested reassurance. Although I provided a basic definition and reassured participants there were no judgments made about their responses, these actions indicate that participants' responses might not accurately

reflect their actual knowledge of literacy and coaching theories. As a result, this potentially skews the findings related to theoretical application in coaching and provides a potential limitation of the study.

As explained in section 1.4, my positionality as an insider introduces a potential bias in the study's outcomes. My previous experience as an instructional coach in a school could have shaped the way the research was approached and conducted. However, as detailed in section 3.6, upon becoming aware of these potential biases, I took intentional steps to manage them.

Another potential limitation of the study is that despite purposeful sampling, the study lacks a male perspective. This is significant because it means that the findings are narrow and may not be representative of the experiences and views of all literacy coaches. The absence of male participants could, therefore, lead to an incomplete understanding of the dynamics and effectiveness of literacy coaching across genders, potentially overlooking gender-specific challenges and insights.

The use of phenomenology as the methodological approach could be limiting. Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of participants, which means the study relied heavily on subjective accounts. While this approach provided deep insights into the experiences of individual literacy coaches, it also means that the data is highly personal and variable. Further, this could have introduced inconsistencies in the data and might limit the generalisability of the findings.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations that emerged from this research study. The first recommendation for future research concerns goal-setting. The findings from this study demonstrated that while goal-setting is a fundamental aspect of coaching, goal-setting too early in the coaching process can be counterproductive and can lead to dissatisfaction. Looking ahead,

researchers might investigate whether the frequency and regularity of goal-setting within coaching sessions contribute to sustained professional development and enhanced literacy teaching practices. Furthermore, future research focusing on the comparative analysis of the structures of coaching, with particular emphasis on goal-setting, could offer valuable practical insights for educators, school leaders, and policymakers.

The findings from this study highlighted the importance of further research into the extent and nature of foundational theoretical knowledge among designated literacy leaders. The study revealed a significant gap in understanding, with participants often mistaking coaching models for theories and demonstrating a lack of familiarity with literacy theories. To address this gap and enhance the effectiveness of literacy coaching programs, future research could delve deeper into the specific theoretical foundations that literacy coaches need to possess. This investigation could explore the sources of their theoretical knowledge, such as formal education, professional development programs, or self-directed learning. A graduate or postgraduate level course, such as a micro-credential course, could be developed to address this gap in knowledge on a practical level.

Additionally, researching the impact of the intentional integration of coaching and literacy theories into professional development programs would provide valuable insights into improving the preparation and training of literacy coaches. Understanding the current landscape of theoretical knowledge among designated literacy leaders will contribute to the development of targeted interventions aimed at bridging the identified gap and ultimately improving the quality of literacy coaching in schools.

Further research could explore the impact of standardised documents on coaching practices, delving into aspects such as their influence on effectiveness, consistency, and alignment of goals. Additionally, an investigation into the experiences of both coaches and

coachees regarding the use of standardised documents could provide insights into the perception of their effectiveness in different educational contexts.

The study, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted the resilience and adaptability of coaching in schools during times of crisis. Future research could explore the lasting effects and outcomes of coaching implemented during critical times, considering their impact on teacher professional development and student outcomes. The field would also benefit from investigating collaborative coaching approaches that involve interdisciplinary collaboration, where coaches work alongside mental health professionals, school leaders, and other support systems to create a comprehensive network of support during crises.

Finally, future research would benefit coaching by considering how the frequency and duration of literacy coaching could help establish effective coaching cycles for optimal outcomes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Call for Participants

Research Participants Needed!

Call for participants!

Are you responsible for creating and/or managing the literacy vision for your school? Does this role involve coaching other teachers as part of their professional learning?

Who you are

If you answered yes to the questions above, you are probably the designated literacy leader at your school and have one of these (or similar) titles - instructional leader/coach, literacy leader/coach, learning specialist, leading teacher for literacy, or leader of pedagogy.

I need you

If so, I am interested in hearing about your experiences with performing your role. Would you be willing to participate in a questionnaire and interview, and provide any available documents on how you organise your work?

About the project

Please click and read this Information Letter to learn more about the project and exactly what is being asked of you.

Please click and read this Consent Form if you agree to participate in this research. Don't worry about signing it. Instead, click on the Questionnaire where you will be able to check a box to give your consent.

Thank you for considering participating in this project!

Appendix B: Information Letter

Information Letter





TITLE OF PROJECT
An examination of the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who received and implemented coaching in schools.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT
This project aims to examine the lived experiences of lead teachers who have been specifically trained to maintain formal one-on-one coaching relationship with classroom teachers to improve these teachers' literacy teaching ability and impact students learning outcome. These designated literacy leaders/coaches, work in Australian K-6 or K-12 schools and may also be known as instructional leaders/coaches or literacy leaders. This research uses the term 'designated literacy leader' to focus specifically on literacy teachers instead of both literacy and numeracy teachers as the term instructional leaders encapsulate within the Australian context. The researcher is particularly interested in finding out how designated literacy leaders describe their experiences of being coached and then coaching others.

INVITATION
You are invited to participate in this research study which is being conducted by Dawn Grant-Skiba, a doctoral candidate from Avondale University.

PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THIS RESEARCH
The purpose of this study is to understand and gain insights around the experiences of coaching from the perspective of designated literacy leaders who both receive and implement coaching in Australian schools. The findings of the research will provide a deeper understanding of coaching as professional learning by going to the people who are initially impacted by the phenomenon. To achieve its purpose, the study will focus on responses to two guiding research questions:

- How do Australian schools manage literacy through coaching?
- How do designated literacy leaders describe the coaching they receive and implement?

WHO IS BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?
Teachers who hold the position of leader in literacy at their school, regardless of the title assigned to the role – instructional leader, instructional coach, literacy leader, literacy coach, et cetera. However, you must meet the following three (3) criteria:

- Must currently occupy the role of a designated literacy leader (instructional leader/coach, literacy leader/coach, et cetera) at a K-6, 7-12, or K-12 Australian school, **and**
- Must have completed or be currently engaged in coaching in education, **and**
- Must coach other teachers who teach literacy.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Complete an online questionnaire about your experience with coaching. The questionnaire will consist of five (5) open-ended questions, via Microsoft Form, and should take a maximum of 30 minutes.
- Provide institutional documents that guide how coaching is implemented in your school. These documents may include, but are not limited to, procedures, policies, program proposals, meeting minutes, and reports. Time taken to collate these documents will depend on accessibility.
- Participate in two online interviews via Zoom. During the first 60-minutes interview, you will be encouraged to speak freely about your experience with coaching. You may be provided with prompts where additional information is needed based on the interview as well as data from the questionnaire and documents. Prior to the second interview you will be provided with a transcribed copy of your first interview, which will also be held online. This will be a follow-up interview of about 20 minutes in length to provide any clarification from the first interview, including additions and omissions/deletions the participant may want to make. The researcher's mobile phone with in-built recording application will be used to audio record both interviews which will then be electronically transcribed by the researcher.

HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE?

The questionnaire is anticipated to take no more than 30 minutes to complete, the first interview approximately 60 minutes and 20 minutes for the second. The interviews will be conducted after school hours to avoid work disruptions as both the participants and the researcher are likely to be full-time teachers. Time spent collating the data for the document analysis will vary based on availability. The researcher aims to collect the data within a three-month period but acknowledges the process may take up to two years should unforeseen circumstances arise.

POSSIBLE RISKS OR INCONVENIENCES

There are minimal risks involved in taking part in this study; however, they are no greater than those encountered in everyday life. These risks are limited to the recorded interview being accessed by someone other than the researcher and will be managed through passwords known only to the researcher. There is also the risk of potential breach of confidentiality and/or discomfort during the data collection process, and you are reminded that you may opt out of any questions you do not wish to answer. Inconveniences include the time taken to complete the online questionnaire, gather institutional documents, and participate in the online interviews.

BENEFITS

There is no perceived benefit to participation in this study except the opportunity to be involved in research whose published findings may help you in your own evaluation and reflection process regarding coaching in literacy.

CONFIDENTIALITY, ANONYMITY AND DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

The data gathered for this study will be kept private and confidential, accessible only by the researcher. All responses will be assigned codes rather than actual names or other information to identify you. In any publication or sharing (for example with supervisors), the information will be written to make it impossible to identify you and your institution. In data from the questionnaire and interviews where participants are quoted directly, codes will be assigned to de-identify you and ensure anonymity. Data will be stored securely in cloud storage for five years. At the end of the storage period and research study, whichever is later, all online storage will be permanently deleted.

USE OF INFORMATION COLLECTED

It should be reasonably expected that the data collected will be analysed and reported in a variety of forms including scholarly journals and reports, both in print and other media forms. The researcher guarantees that regardless of the publication type, the information will be written to make it impossible to identify you or your institution.

FREEDOM OF CONSENT

Participation in this study is voluntary. It is entirely your decision whether to participate or not. If you decide to participate, you are free to opt out of any questions you are not comfortable with answering or withdraw from the entire process at any time without giving a reason. Only people who give their informed consent will be included in the study. If you work for Seventh-day Adventist Schools (Greater Sydney) Ltd or Seventh-day Adventist Schools (North NSW), your employer has approved and provided the researcher with your contact details. If you are a teacher with the NSW Department of Education, email confirmation exists that SERAP approval is not required, only teacher consent, as recruitment is not done through your school. If your contact details have been made available via Growth Coaching International, this means you gave initial approval to be contacted and, if your employer is not named here, the researcher is prepared to gain their initial approval before the data collection begins. However, despite institutional approval, the final consent – in all cases – lies with the participant.

Please read this information letter carefully and contact the researcher conducting this study, Dawn Grant-Skiba, to ask any questions you have. She can be reached by email: s14093304@student.avondale.edu.au or by mobile phone: 0459 562 582 weekdays after 3 p.m.

If you consent to participate in the study, including the audio-recording of the interview, please read and sign the attached consent form with an electronic signature and return by email to s14093304@student.avondale.edu.au . You will then receive access to the online questionnaire.

If you have a complaint or concern about this research project or the way it is conducted, contact Avondale's Research Services Office at PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone +61-2-4980 2121, or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au. You may also wish to discuss your concerns with the researcher.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Signed by

Dawn GrantSkiba

Researcher
Dawn Grant-Skiba, PhD candidate

S.Hattingh

Research Supervisor
Dr Sherry Hattingh, principal supervisor

Appendix C: Consent Letter

Consent Letter

TITLE OF PROJECT

An examination of the lived experiences of designated literacy leaders who receive and implement coaching in schools.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

This project aims to examine the lived experiences of lead teachers who have been specifically trained to maintain formal one-on-one coaching relationship with classroom teachers to improve these teachers' literacy teaching ability and impact students learning outcome. These designated literacy leaders/coaches, work in Australian K-6 or K-12 schools and may also be known as instructional leaders/coaches or literacy leaders. This research uses the term 'designated literacy leader' to focus specifically on literacy teachers instead of both literacy and numeracy teachers as the term instructional leaders encapsulate. The researcher is particularly interested in finding out how designated literacy leaders describe their experiences of being coached and then coaching others.

Researcher

This project has one researcher – Dawn Grant-Skiba from Avondale University.

- I agree to participate in the above research project, and I give my consent freely.
- I have read and understand the information provided in the Information Statement.
- I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Letter, a copy of which I have been given to keep,
- I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing. I understand that I will not be disadvantaged in any way by withdrawing.
- The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.
- I consent to complete one online questionnaire, provide documents for a document analysis where available, and participate in two interviews over the next one to two years.
- I understand that my identity and personal information will remain confidential and anonymous.

Please email electronically signed consent form as .pdf to s14093304@student.avondale.edu.au.

Name **signature (electronic)** **Date**

Appendix D: Questionnaire Questions



Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect data about your experiences as a designated literacy leader who receives and implements coaching in a school. The researcher is particularly interested in finding out how you describe your experiences of being coached and then coaching others. Thank you in advance for your valuable time!

Confirmation of Consent

Please be reminded of the eligibility requirements to complete this questionnaire:

- You must currently occupy the role of a designated literacy leader at a K-6 or K-12 Australian school, and
- You must have completed or be currently engaged in coaching in education yourself, and
- You must coach other teachers who teach literacy.

1. I have read the information sheet.
   - o Yes
   - o No
2. I confirm that I have read the consent form and willingly give my consent to participate in this project.
   - o Yes
   - o No

Demographic Information

3. Full Name

4. Contact Details (mobile number and email address)

5. Gender
   - o Male
   - o Female
   - o Non-binary
6. School Type
   - o State/Public
   - o Independent
   - o Catholic

AND

   - o K-6

- 7-12
- K-12

7. Teaching & coaching qualifications

8. Your School's ICSEA Number (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage)

Respond to questions 9-13 with as much or little detail as you like. You will be able to expand your responses during the interviews.

9. Explain how you meet the three criteria for this research study as outlined in the information letter and written above.

10. Tell me about how you became involved with coaching and with literacy. How did your story begin?

11. Describe what a typical fortnight in your role as a designated literacy leader is like. (Include the actual job title used by your system/school e.g. instructional leader/coach, literacy leader/coach, etc. to identify that position.

12. How would you compare the way you coached to the way you coach others?

13. Explain what you most want to achieve for yourself and others through your coaching in literacy experience.

What's Next

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Soon, you will receive an email reminding you about the next step in the data collection process for this research. The email will ask you to provide any available documents that guide how coaching is implemented in your school. You may wait for the email reminder or forward the documents now by email to the researcher at: s14093304@student.avondale.edu.au

You can print a copy of your answer after you submit it.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I will begin by introducing myself. As stated in my information letter, my name is Dawn Grant-Skiba, and I am a PhD student at Avondale University. I am also a secondary school teacher employed with the NSW Department of Education, but I am here in my role as a doctoral student. The purpose of this study is to understand and interpret the experiences of coaching from the perspective of designated literacy leaders who both receive and implement coaching in Australian schools.

You have been selected for this interview because you completed a questionnaire in which you clearly demonstrated that you meet the three criteria essential to this study. First, you currently occupy the role of a designated literacy leader at a K-6 or K-12 Australian school; secondly, you have completed or are currently engaged in coaching yourself; and thirdly, you coach other teachers in literacy.

Through this study, I hope to better understand your experience of being coached and being a coach of literacy teachers. No one has done research like this before when they are focusing entirely on your experience in relation to yourself rather than your students or anyone else. I am entirely interested in your experience of coaching as you are living it and that is why I would like you to tell me everything you can about that experience. I will not interrupt you when you are speaking but I might ask you to provide further explanation of what you say today or something from the questionnaire and documents you have provided.

Please note there are no right or wrong, desirable, or undesirable answers. The most important reason why we are here is to learn about your lived experiences with coaching in literacy. So, please feel comfortable with saying what you really think using whatever language you are comfortable with. Before we continue, I would like to remind you that you have agreed to the audio recording of today's conversation which I am doing to ensure that I capture everything you have to say. Be reassured that all responses will remain confidential and collected data will be coded and kept in a secure place. I will be the only person with access to the recordings and notes; the audio recording will be deleted once they are transcribed, and five years of storage have occurred.

Do I still have your permission to record this interview?

Thank you. The recording will begin now.

Interview Questions

Interviewee background question

1. Tell me about your journey in education/teaching, from the beginning to now.

<u>Possible prompts if participant struggles to begin:</u>

- What motivated you to get into teaching?
- Why are still in teaching?

Research questions

2. Tell me everything you can about your experience with coaching in a school.

<u>Possible prompts if participant struggles to begin:</u>

- Tell me about your experience of receiving coaching.
- Tell me about your experience of coaching others.

- How does your experience of coaching compare with your expectations?

3. Can you describe with as much detail as possible what theories about literacy and coaching, if any, you were exposed to during your coaching training?

Possible prompts if participant struggles to begin:

- How do you perceive that the absence/presence of an exploration of coaching and literacy theories during the coaching process affected/affect the way you coach others in literacy?
- How do you understand the significance of coaching and literacy theories to the way you coach literacy teachers?

4. You have provided (or not) some documents about how coaching in literacy is organised at your school. Can you tell me more about this?

5. How has Covid-19 affected the coaching in literacy experience?

Appendix F: Sample Email Request for Documents

Hello [participant],

THANK YOU again for sharing your rich experience with me yesterday. I really value the time you gave to me and your contribution to such an important area of research is invaluable. The value you have added is phenomenal and I am sincerely grateful.

Find attached a copy of the transcript of the interview. I would appreciate you going through it and confirming these are your words and intentions. I will be happy to make any changes in our follow-up interview and apply any corrections you would like to make prior to analysis. Could you please send through any documents as soon as you are able to, and definitely before our follow-up interview? This way, I will know if I have any additional questions for you about the document(s).

Please let me know when is a good time for me to contact you again for that follow-up interview, which will take no more than 30 minutes. I will also take the liberty of contacting you in 2-3 weeks if I have not heard from you because I do understand how busy you are. Just a reminder that everything you share with me, in written or verbal form, is held in the highest confidence and is not accessible to anyone else.

Best regards,

Dawn Grant-Skiba
PhD Candidate in Education
Avondale University