“ONE TEACHER AT A TIME”: PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON COACHING AND MENTORING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

by

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Coaching and mentoring are prominent approaches to supporting quality in early childhood education. Many models exist for coaching and mentoring Pre-K teachers, but few models detail what actually occurs during the coaching and mentoring process or utilize the perspective of the mentors and coaches. The Early Educator Support (EES) Program is a relatively new model of mentoring and coaching support for non-public Pre-K teachers. This study examined the lived experiences of 12 mentors and evaluators serving in the EES program through individual interviews that focused on their experience of providing support to teachers. Common themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis, including the coaching and mentoring process, strategies that support the process, and barriers, motivators, and facilitators that influence this process. The findings of this study can inform future mentor training process, assist in program development, and lend insight into the best practices that can be utilized in coaching and mentoring.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There is a general consensus among researchers, parents, teachers, and other professionals that quality in early childhood education is essential to the learning and development of children (Egert, Fukkink, & Eckhardt, 2018; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019; Melhuish et al., 2016; Pianta, Downer, & Hamre, 2016). Accumulating evidence has strongly suggested links between high-quality early education programs and teacher education level, with this link leading to positive long-term outcomes for children and families (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019). The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has identified that for lead teachers in state funded Pre-K programs, a bachelor's degree with a specialization in early childhood was one of the most important parameters of quality (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019; Weisenfeld, Frede, & Barnett, 2018). In North Carolina, that translates into lead teachers having a four-year degree and licensure in birth through kindergarten (BK) education, or a teacher who is working towards a BK license while in a lead teaching position at a state funded NC Pre-K program. These NC Pre-K teachers, who are identified as initial or continuing, are supported by other qualified personnel (called mentors and evaluators) to improve their teaching skills and gain confidence in teaching practices. By utilizing a robust conceptual framework that was founded on the knowledge and practices of coaching and mentoring, these NC Pre-K teachers are supported throughout their teaching journey (Taylor, Vestal, Saperstein, Stafford, & Lambert, 2017). In the present study, I am seeking to examine how this coaching and mentoring model is implemented, the model's effectiveness in promoting quality early childhood education, and its challenges from the perspective of both mentors and evaluators. In the next section, I discuss how coaching and mentorship has been utilized as an effective model within various early childhood settings, in both national and international contexts.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The understanding that teachers and their subsequent interactions with children will have a considerable impact on quality and long-term outcomes necessitate effective models of improvement for the educators (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Pianta et al., 2016). Coaching and mentorship, when executed effectively, can provide an accelerated means of improving teacher practices, and thus, overall early education quality (Dağ & Sarı, 2017; Schachter, 2015; Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014).

Coaching has been defined, conceptualized, and implemented in a variety of ways. Coaching has been conceptualized as a means to provide professional development in-context for early childhood professionals (Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). Six elements have been specified as integral in facilitating effective coaching. These include professional relationships, an understanding of data and evidence, substantive conversation, collaborative school improvement, purposeful instruction, and reflective self-development (Gill, Kostiw, & Stone, 2010). Other additional characteristics of effective coaching include providing support, offering performance feedback, practicing reflection, and engaging in modeling or role play (Artman-Meeker, Fettig, Barton, Penney, & Zeng, 2015).

Similarly, mentorship has been conceptualized as an individualized approach to professional development. Mentoring can be defined as a partnership, founded on learning and improvement, within the context of occupation (Dağ & Sarı, 2017; Peterson, Valk, Baker, Brugger, & Hightower, 2010). Of course, many creative approaches to these components, and a lack of well-articulated definitions, have resulted in a variety of coaching and mentoring models, with interesting variation in intensity, fidelity, goals, objectives, and outcomes.

International Coaching and Mentoring Models in Early Childhood

Across the world, early childhood educators have engaged in a variety of coaching and mentoring models. In both New Zealand and England, mentoring frameworks were employed to support new teachers (Doan, 2016). However, international literature has spoken to the complexities of mentorship in that context (Langdon et al., 2016). In Australia, a model was designed specifically to enhance early literacy teaching skills, which was combined with an instructional tool and coaching component for the teachers. This method of literacy coaching was found to be effective, as it promoted lasting change in knowledge and practice for teachers (Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). Specifically, in Victoria, coaching for teachers has gained considerable momentum at the state level. A user-friendly document was developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that could be utilized by coaches in many disciplines but required some prior knowledge if it was to be used effectively (Gill et al., 2010). In the previously mentioned studies, the roles and experiences of coaches and mentors were not well-articulated. Further, little to no information about the operationalization of coaching and mentoring was included. Without better clarity in roles, definitions, and operationalization, it becomes quite a difficult task for researchers and professionals in the field of early childhood education to generalize research findings, or to replicate the models.

Coaching and Mentoring Models in Early Childhood within the United States

In general, American models of coaching and mentoring shared similarities with international models, but also had anomalous concepts and suggestions to offer. Some American models were designed to promote general teaching quality, as others were designed to focus on one particular aspect or skill. Likely, the variations in model types and goals would explain the differing results and effectiveness.

Coaching and mentoring models have been implemented frequently in Head Start settings across the United States. One mentoring program for Head Start teachers, called Individualized Learning Intervention, utilized a three-stage model, and was then scrutinized through the lens of intensity. The researchers found that the intensity of the mentoring program was related to increases in levels of specific child outcomes (Lambert, Gallagher, & Abbott-Shim, 2015). Another mentoring model used in a Head Start setting was the CAMP Quality model of professional development. This utilized components of workshops, classroom videotaping, teacher reflections, peer coaching, and mentoring. Head Start teachers who received this professional development showed statistically significant improvements on domains of behavior management, productivity, quality of feedback, and language modeling, compared to their co-workers who did not receive the intervention. The study also found that both degreed and non-degreed teachers showed identical improvements in their teaching skills, as a result of the professional development (Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014).

Coaching and mentoring models have also been utilized in other non-Head Start settings. For example, a coaching model utilized emails to communicate performance feedback to teachers. This method was found to be effective, but raised generalizability concerns (Barton, Fuller, & Schnitz, 2016). A mentoring program, named the Early Education Mentoring System (EEMS), was researched with a goal of understanding the social and emotional pieces of mentoring. The conclusions of the study focused on the necessity of relationship building between mentor and mentee, as well as the benefits of clear role definitions (Peterson et al., 2010). An exploratory study attempted to investigate what took place during coaching conversations. Observational data were used to review and code behaviors using the Early Childhood Coaching Conversations (ECCC) coding system. The results found substantial

variability in what takes place during coaching conversations and highlighted many of the nuances in coaching relationships (Jayaraman, Marvin, Knoche, & Bainter, 2015). While coaching and mentoring show great promise for the future of early childhood education, it seems that empirically, more research is needed to understand and effectively utilize coaches and mentors with early education professionals.

Early educator support program (EES). In North Carolina, a relatively new model has gained momentum, which needs further examination. It is a robust model of professional development, mentorship, evaluation, and coaching for teachers working in non-public school settings, such as state funded preschools or developmental day programs. The model was created to support lead teachers who need to obtain or keep their continuing NC Birth-through-Kindergarten (BK) License. The BK license is required in North Carolina to teach in public preschools and kindergartens, as well as in state funded Pre-K programs, located in private childcare centers. Licensed teachers follow and utilize the NC Education Standards in their teaching practice. Teachers holding the BK license are qualified to work with children from birth to five years of age, including at-risk children, and children with diagnosed disabilities (Division of Child Development and Early Education, 2019)

As teachers pursue their BK licensure through the assistance of the EES program, they are distinguished by either an initial or continuing license. That distinction dictates what services the teacher will receive from the EES program. An initially licensed teacher would be placed into the Beginning Teacher Support Program and would work on improving teaching skills and gaining confidence in teaching practices. To assist with those goals, the teacher is assigned a mentor, is observed four times by a trained evaluator, and is given a Summative Evaluation at the conclusion of the school year. The teachers gain an understanding of North Carolina's

Professional Teaching Standards and become familiar with the evaluation process. These supports are in place for the initially licensed and lateral entry teachers during their first three years of licensure, before converting to a continuing license. The teachers must be rated as proficient on all of the five teaching standards. Once all requirements of the Beginning Teacher Support Program have been met, the teachers become eligible to convert their license into a continuing license. Teachers with this license only receive three evaluations by a trained evaluator, and that evaluator also serves as a coach. Summative Evaluations at the end of the year are performed. The continuing license must be renewed after five years, and in order to be eligible, teachers must again receive ratings of proficiency on all five teaching standards (Vestal, Saperstein, Stafford, & Taylor, 2018).

The mentors and evaluators in the EES program provide the indispensable support services that assist teachers in their pursuit of licensure. A mentor role in the EES program encompasses coaching, performing peer observations, participating in post conferences, performing demonstrations, offering technical assistance, supporting and reviewing Professional Development Plans, providing resources, participating in Professional Learning Communities, and facilitating professional development. An evaluator role includes overseeing team agreements, observations, debriefing, conferences, monitoring Professional Development Plans, and facilitating professional development in a variety of settings (B. Brehm, personal communication, September 16, 2019). Evaluators use standardized rubrics to assess the teachers. These rubrics include all five teaching standards, with each standard separated into several elements. The standards encompass a teacher's leadership capabilities, ability to create a diverse and respectful environment, knowledge of the content they teach, ability to facilitate learning, and ability to reflect on their practice (Taylor et al., 2017). Evaluators are trained to assess the

standards and subsequent elements, and then rate their teachers as developing, proficient, accomplished, or distinguished. Evaluators make use of check boxes, comment sections, and artifacts to support their ratings for the teacher. Based on the evaluations, plans are then formulated to best suit the needs of each individual teacher, as they work to improve their teaching skills and provide best teaching practices to all of the children in their classroom (B. Brehm, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

While the roles of a mentor and evaluator are distinct, most individuals working in the EES program are cross-trained. Essentially, individuals are trained to serve in both roles, and may function in either role for different teachers in their caseload simultaneously. Currently, sixteen individuals from the EES office are working in a dual role as both a mentor and evaluator (D. Saperstein, personal communication, January 2, 2020).

North Carolina was divided geographically into an eastern and western region to better serve teachers across the state. One university located in the eastern part of the state and the other located in the western part of the state currently serve as the two main hubs for the EES program (Taylor et al., 2017). The professional model employs a hierarchical team, comprised of the leadership team, regional leads, mentors, and evaluators that serves 386 of teachers in the eastern region of North Carolina (D. Saperstein, personal communication, October 1, 2019). Through a program of evaluations, coaching, mentorship, and professional development for teachers, both continuing and initially licensed teachers are supported to gain proficiency on designated teaching standards. EES has developed a conceptual model that informs the work evaluators and mentors are doing in the field. Coaching and mentoring teachers is a crucial piece of this model's design.

The conceptual framework. A conceptual model, shown below in Figure 1, was developed to articulate the processes and work conducted by EES. The model is represented by a home, with each piece of the house representing a different part of the process. The foundation of the home represents the guiding principles that ground the work of the EES Office. The stairs portray the evaluation tools and resources that mentors and evaluators use in their work with teachers. The

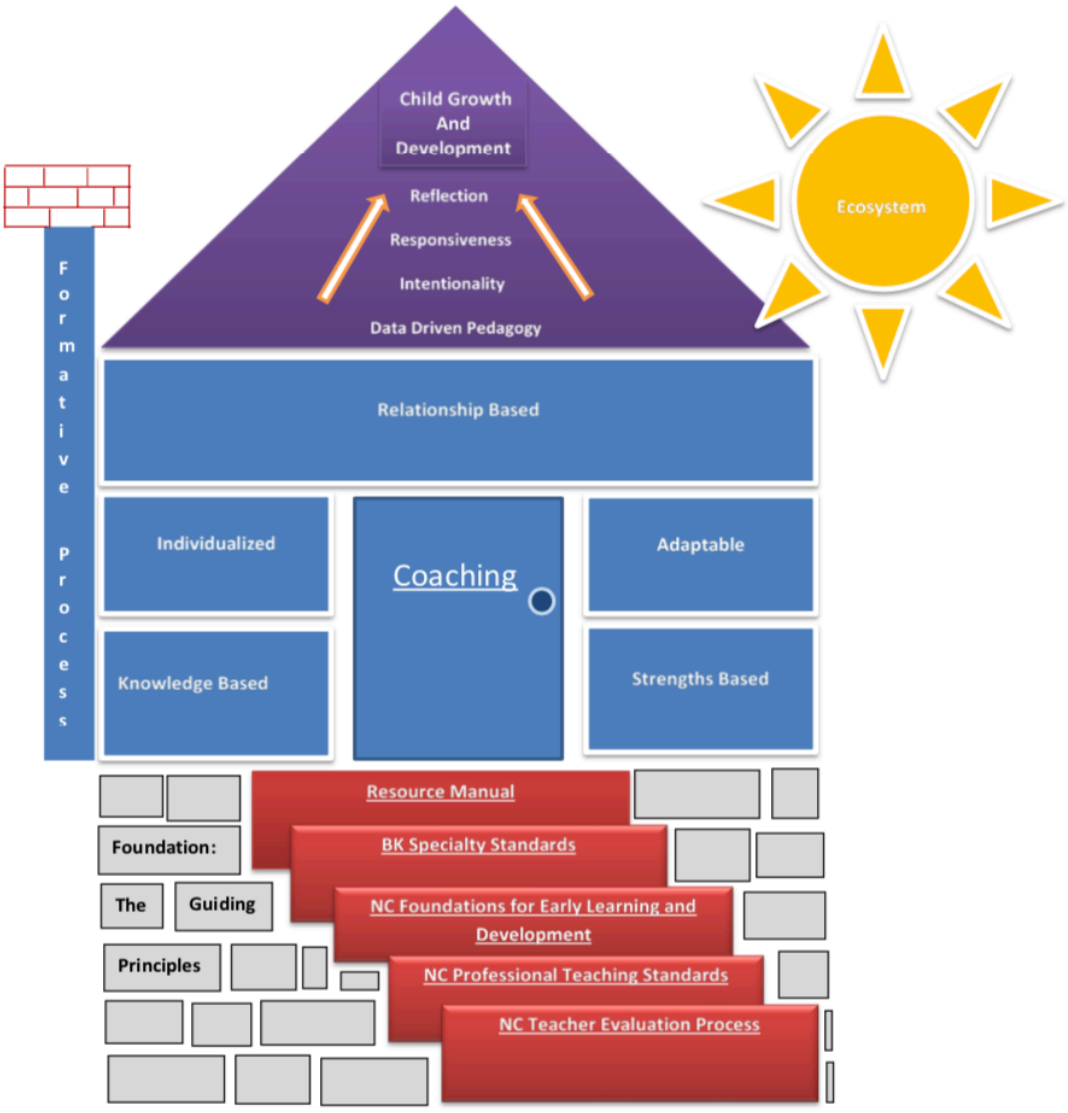

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Early Educator Support Office (Taylor et al., 2017, p. 5).

large door in the middle of the model corresponds to the coaching work that mentors and evaluators engage in. The roof of the house illustrates the peak of the office's work, by representing children's growth and development. Finally, the home's chimney represents the formative process involved in assessment and evaluation for teachers (Taylor et al., 2017).

The focus of the EES Office on coaching requires particular interest in the door portion of the model. Strategies to be used by the mentors and evaluators in their coaching work were outlined, to include intentionality in thinking and decision-making, forming personal connections with the teachers they serve, and coaching with a purpose of facilitating a teacher's continued learning. Characteristics and dispositions for effective coaching were also outlined by the model, with a particular focus on mindfulness and a strengths-based position. Further, a specific goal of the coaching style described by the EES Office was identified as promoting both independence and interdependence with the teachers served. Independence, for teachers, meant becoming a reflective, life-long learner. Interdependence referenced the idea of professional learning communities and encouraged teachers to engage with leaders and colleagues to continually learn, reflect, collaborate, and improve their work. Through the conceptual model, the work of mentors and evaluators has been articulated and described (Taylor et al., 2017).

Rationale for Research

Without empirical evaluation of the model, it is unclear how the experiences of mentors and evaluators align with the specified coaching style. The intent of the EES program is to facilitate and augment quality in early childhood settings by providing teachers with coaching and mentoring support, which is informed by the conceptual model. However, this model has never been researched, scrutinized, or appraised. The model is well-intended, but the coaching and mentoring component needs to be empirically evaluated such that it can inform change and

solidify elements of the model that are working well. Additionally, this evaluation can provide the resources and support that early childhood education professionals in eastern North Carolina desperately need. Thus, the main purpose of the study is to examine the experiences of the mentors and evaluators with coaching and supporting teachers. Specifically, the goal is to examine what aspects of coaching and mentoring are working well, what aspects need improvement, and how that informs future professional development. To that end, our research questions are: (1) How does coaching and mentoring work through the lens of experienced mentors and evaluators in the EES program? (2) From the perspective of mentors and evaluators in the EES program, what are the motivators, facilitators, and barriers to coaching and mentoring initial teachers in North Carolina?

CHAPTER 3: THEORIES

To begin deciphering the model, its theoretical underpinnings must first be considered. The EES model of professional development is grounded in two frames of reference that employ theory in supporting its goals. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provided the first framework for conceptualizing the influences of a variety of systems on a child's development (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013). As the theory posited, the interaction of a child's systems, unbeknownst to the child, can exert considerable effect on growth and development across the lifespan. With an understanding of the relationship between teaching practices and children's long-term outcomes (Egert et al., 2018; Kilinc, Kelley, Millinger, & Adams, 2016), it is clear that educational quality has been well integrated into a child's systems. As pieces of a child's system are manipulated, a ripple effect of influence can be observed. Mentors and evaluators affect change within a child's microsystem, though their work is not always directly with the children. The support and development of the educators, as facilitated by the mentors and evaluators using coaching and mentoring practices, likely contributes to the successes of the whole child. While the focus of professional development in early childhood education is to improve teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices, the purpose of professional development is to offer more children the opportunity to reap the benefits of high-quality early education, ably supported by a highly qualified and well-prepared teacher. Bronfenbrenner's interconnected systems theory gives an exceptional picture of how professional development in the workforce has the potential to positively impact children and their families.

The constructivist theoretical approach allows for a second unique theoretical perspective on the teacher's continued learning to be observed. This framework has been utilized by several previous research studies in the context of professional development, mentoring, and coaching in

early childhood education (Askell-Williams & Murray-Harvey, 2016; Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Gregoriadis, Papandreou, & Birbili, 2018; Hsu, 2008). Constructivism allows the teachers' ongoing learning processes to be the central focus within professional development. This provides the mentors and evaluators a conceptualized perspective of the teachers' learning as a continuing process, as teachers combine newly learned information with what is already known (Frey, 2018).

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

For the purposes of this descriptive study, a phenomenological methodology will be employed. In qualitative research, phenomenology has been used to articulate the lived experiences of individuals, as they experience a common phenomenon (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). Phenomenology has previously been utilized in early childhood settings to understand the experiences of early childhood teachers, and their perception of what is needed to be successful in the classroom (Kinkead-Clark, 2018). Phenomenology has also been used to understand the experiences of workplace mentors in a clinical nursing environment (Wareing, 2011). Therefore, in the context of early childhood and in the context of mentoring relationships, phenomenology has yielded success in gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Thus, a phenomenological approach to understanding the experiences of mentors and coaches within early childhood education appears well suited to accomplish the study's goals.

Procedure for Data Collection

For the current study, it will be essential to understand the experiences of mentors and evaluators in the EES program, as it relates to their own practices and the conceptual model. Purposive sampling will be utilized to recruit the participants for this research. For participation eligibility, an individual must be a mentor and evaluator in the EES program, be serving initial teachers, and have a minimum of three years of experience working in the program. After Institutional Review Board approval has been gained, the EES coordinator will be emailed to obtain contact information for the mentors and evaluators. Email addresses will then be used to contact the mentors and evaluators to recruit for participation in the study. After expressing willingness to engage in the research and providing consent, the interviewer will email a

demographic questionnaire and consent form using REDCap, schedule an interview time, and request a phone number to call the participant for the interview. In-depth, semi-structured phone interviews will then be conducted and recorded using the Rev Call Recorder app. The interviewer will bracket her personal experiences before beginning the interviews and memo throughout the duration of the interviews to continually reflect on the information gathered. Data saturation in qualitative research continues to be a moving target, but can be conceptualized as a point of redundancy, at which time new ideas are not emerging, and comments become repetitive (Saunders et al., 2018). In light of that, experts have recommended a minimum sample size of ten participants for phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007). Because of the EES program's cross-training and individuals serving in both roles, we believe that it is not possible or necessary to view mentors and evaluators as separate populations. Thus, our goal is to acquire twelve individuals who serve in a dual role as a mentor and evaluator in the EES program.

The EES program at ECU provides services to the four regions across eastern North Carolina, with each mentor and evaluator assigned to a specific region. The three remaining western regions are served by a separate institution that employs a different framework. Figure 2 depicts the current breakdown of regions. We would like to interview three dual role mentor-evaluators from each of ECU's four regions, amounting to twelve total interviews. We see value in intentionally sampling from each region, as there is considerable economic diversity within the four regions. North Carolina's Department of Commerce released the yearly tier rankings for each of the one hundred NC counties, shown below in Figure 3. The EES program at ECU serves approximately half of the counties in North Carolina, while the western hub serves the remaining counties. The given county rankings were based upon unemployment rates, median household income, population growth statistics, and property taxes. Tier One counties are the most

distressed, with Tier Two being in the middle, and Tier Three referencing the least distressed counties. Mentors and evaluators in regions one and four serve a relatively even distribution of counties from each tier. Region three serves five Tier One counties, along with one county from Tier Two, and one county from Tier Three. Most disproportionately, region two serves nineteen counties from Tier One, five counties from Tier Two, and one county from Tier Three (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2018). Given the striking economic disparities in the counties served by each region, we believe it will be advantageous to interview the mentors and evaluators that represent each of the four regions that ECU serves.

The interview guide was created using an iterative process. From discussions with an experienced research team, the grant's principal investigator, consideration of relevant literature, and the conceptual framework, interview questions were developed. The guide is intended to stimulate open conversation, while utilizing distinct probes to clarify responses and ensure the correctness of the interviewer's understanding. The design of the guide was based on Resor, Hegde, Stage, & Yeh's interview guide for exploring the experiences of pre-service teachers in early childhood education with nutrition education (2019). The current interview guide will examine the lived experiences of mentors and evaluators from the EES program, with specific focus on the motivators, facilitators, and barriers in their work. The guide will be piloted with two individuals from the EES program prior to beginning data collection, and those piloted interviews will not be part of the sample.

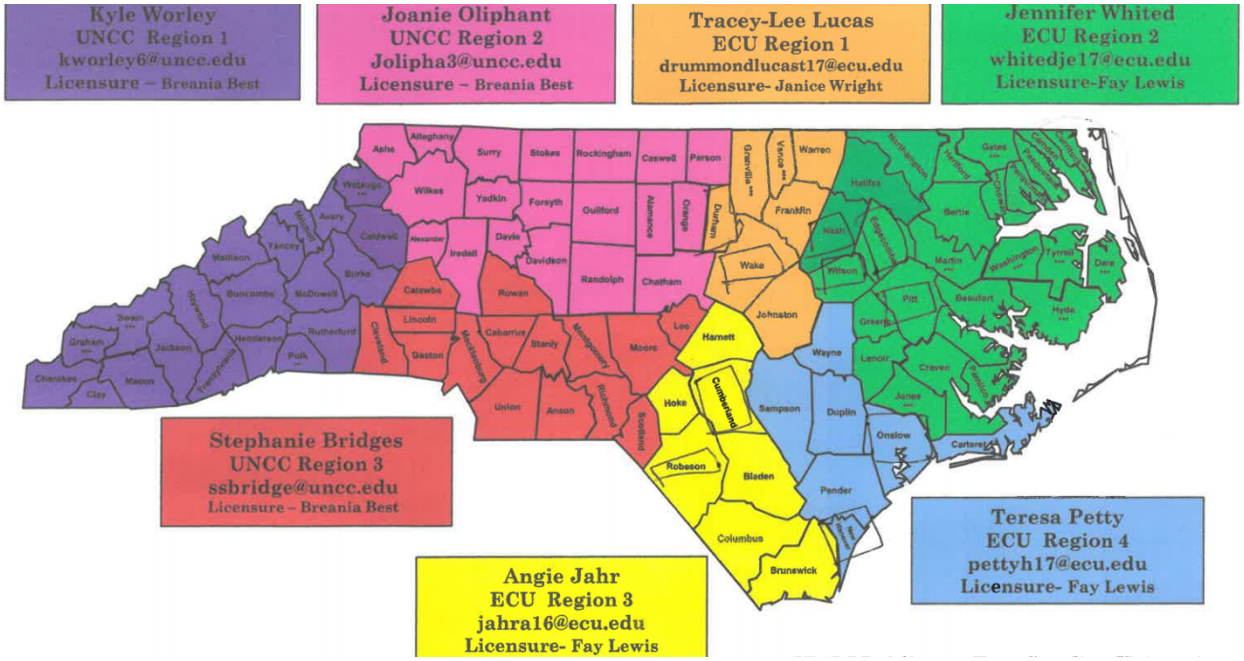

Figure 2. Map of Region divisions for the Early Educator Support Office.

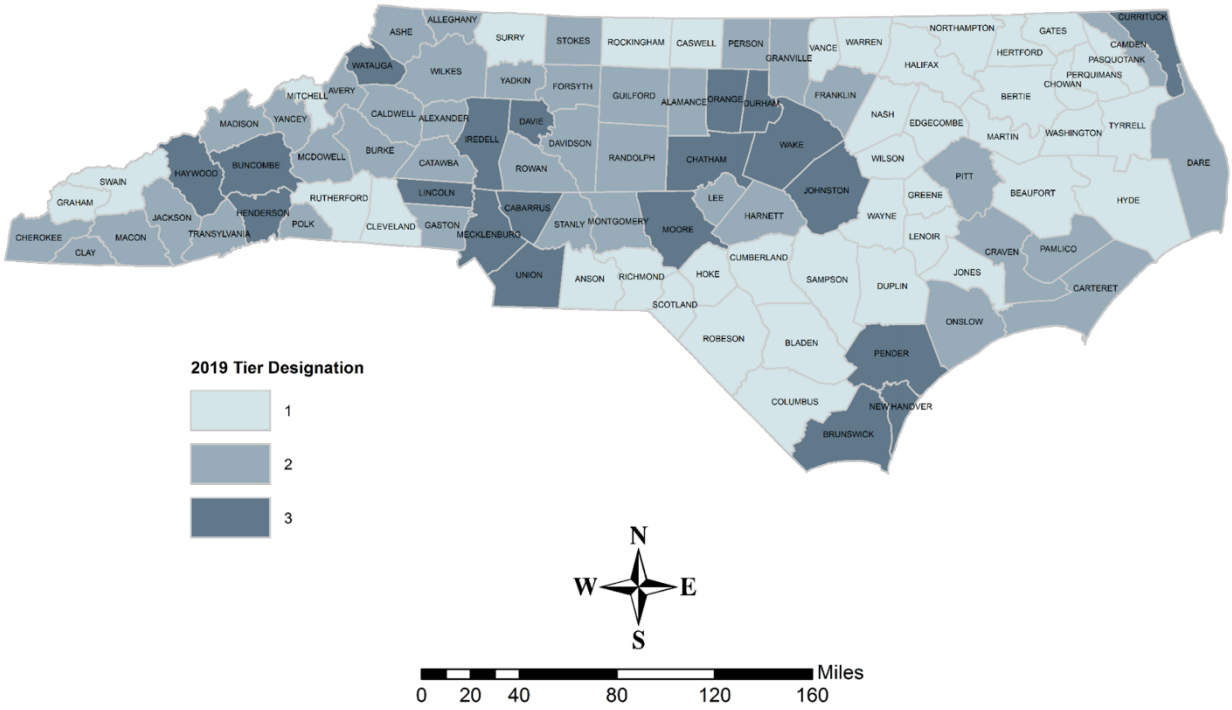

Figure 3. Map of 2019 North Carolina Tier Designations (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2018).

Procedure for Data Analysis

After data collection is completed, the interviews will be transcribed and coded. Interviews will be transcribed verbatim through a transcription service embedded into the Rev Call Recorder app. Transcriptions will be completed as the interviews conclude, to ensure that the data achieve saturation. Transcriptions will utilize the audio-recordings verbatim and will be checked by the researcher for accuracy. After completing the transcriptions, the process of coding will begin by training two coders. The two coders will bracket their knowledge and experiences before beginning the coding process, in order to understand their presuppositions and maintain a non-judgmental position. The coders will also memo throughout the coding process to reflect on their own feelings, thoughts, and perceptions in relation to the data. Then, the coders will read the transcriptions individually to become familiar with the data. The two coders will then begin to engage in phenomenological reduction by extracting units of meaning and forming their initial codes with descriptions. The coders will meet together to create the codebook, which includes reaching a consensus on the codes and subsequent definitions by working through the transcriptions one line at a time. Codes will then be grouped together to form larger ideas, or themes, that describe the participants' thoughts and lived experiences. The themes will then be reported with relevant quotations from the participant interviews, and then be used to create an essence, which will be an in-depth, synthesized description of the participants' experiences (Groenewald, 2004).

Approach and Trustworthiness

The approach to be utilized for this descriptive, qualitative study is phenomenology. In qualitative research, trustworthiness is comparable to validity and reliability in quantitative studies. There are many strategies available that assist in increasing trustworthiness. These

include triangulation, debriefing sessions, member checks, a thorough examination of previous research, recognized and appropriate research methods, and an in-depth description of methodology to allow the study to be replicated (Shenton, 2004). We plan to employ many of these throughout the research to increase the trustworthiness of this work. For example, the research team has selected to utilize the recognized methods of phenomenology to increase rigor. At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewer will conduct member checks to ensure an appropriate understanding of the conversation and allow for clarification as needed. The interviewer will also debrief with a member of the research team after interviews conclude, in addition to memoing on her own to document thoughts, feelings, and perceptions related to the interviews.

Prior to beginning the research, the interviewer and coders will be trained using an adapted version of Goodell, Stage, and Cooke's (2016) qualitative research strategies training. The model includes a training in ethics, reviewing qualitative methods, and series of mock interviews. For the purposes of this study, the interviewer and coders will complete an ethics training and review the basic research methods associated with qualitative research before beginning the research. Upon completion of those tasks, the interviewer will begin a series of mock interviews. First, the interviewer will gain familiarity with the interview process and practice summarizing skills through listening to a recorded interview. The interviewer will then conduct a mock interview with an individual from the research team to work through the flow of the interview guide. Finally, the interviewer will hold two more mock interviews with individuals associated with the target population (Goodell et al., 2016). Once the interviewer has completed these training stages, interviews will begin. Similarly, coder training will involve reviewing basic methods of qualitative data analysis. Further training will include reviewing the

specific procedures related to this project, while emphasizing the use and creation of the codebook, as well as memoing expectations. The coders will jointly practice using the codebook to eliminate discrepancies, increase comfort with the process, and refine the codebook (Goodell et al., 2016). Upon completion of these trainings, coders will begin to analyze the data.

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CHAPTTER 6: "ONE TEACHER AT A TIME": PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON COACHING AND MENTORING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Introduction

There is a general consensus among researchers, parents, teachers, and other professionals that quality in early childhood education is essential to the learning and development of children (Egert, Fukkink, & Eckhardt, 2018; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019; Melhuish et al., 2016; Pianta, Downer, & Hamre, 2016). Accumulating evidence has strongly suggested links between high-quality early education programs and teacher education level, with this link leading to positive long-term outcomes for children and families (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019). The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has identified that for lead teachers in state funded Pre-K programs, a bachelor's degree with a specialization in early childhood was one of the most important parameters of quality (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019; Weisenfeld, Frede, & Barnett, 2018). For North Carolina, that translated into lead teachers having a four-year degree and licensure in birth through kindergarten (BK) education, or a teacher working towards a BK license while in a lead teaching position at a state funded NC Pre-K program. These NC Pre-K teachers, who are identified as initial or continuing, are supported by other qualified personnel (called mentors and evaluators) to improve their teaching skills and gain confidence in teaching practices. By utilizing a robust conceptual framework that was founded on the knowledge and practices of coaching and mentoring, these NC Pre-K teachers are supported throughout their teaching journey (Taylor, Vestal, Saperstein, Stafford, & Lambert, 2017). In the present study, I am seeking to examine how this coaching and mentoring model is implemented, the model's effectiveness in promoting quality early childhood education, and its challenges from the perspective of both mentors and evaluators. In the next section, I discuss

how coaching and mentorship has been utilized as an effective model within various early childhood settings, in both national and international contexts.

Literature Review

The understanding that teachers and their subsequent interactions with children will have a considerable impact on quality and long-term outcomes necessitate effective models of improvement for the educators (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Pianta et al., 2016). Coaching and mentorship, when executed effectively, can provide an accelerated means of improving teacher practices, and thus, overall early education quality (Dağ & Sarı, 2017; Schachter, 2015; Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014).

Coaching has been defined, conceptualized, and implemented in a variety of ways. Coaching has been conceptualized as an avenue for providing professional development in-context for early childhood professionals (Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). Six elements have been specified as integral in facilitating effective coaching. These included professional relationships, an understanding of data and evidence, substantive conversation, collaborative school improvement, purposeful instruction, and reflective self-development (Gill, Kostiw, & Stone, 2010). Other additional characteristics of effective coaching included providing support, offering performance feedback, practicing reflection, and engaging in modeling or role play (Artman-Meeker, Fettig, Barton, Penney, & Zeng, 2015).

Similarly, mentorship has been conceptualized as an individualized approach to professional development. Mentoring can be defined as a partnership, founded on learning and improvement, within the context of occupation (Dağ & Sarı, 2017; Peterson, Valk, Baker, Brugger, & Hightower, 2010). Of course, many creative approaches to these components, and a

lack of well-articulated definitions, have resulted in a variety of coaching and mentoring models, with interesting variation in intensity, fidelity, goals, objectives, and outcomes.

International Coaching and Mentoring Models in Early Childhood

Across the world, early childhood educators have engaged in a variety of coaching and mentoring models. In both New Zealand and England, mentoring frameworks were employed to support new teachers (Doan, 2016). However, international literature has spoken to the complexities of mentorship in that context (Langdon et al., 2016). In Australia, a model was designed specifically to enhance early literacy teaching skills, which was combined with an instructional tool and coaching component for the teachers. This method of literacy coaching was found to be effective, as it promoted lasting change in knowledge and practice for teachers (Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). Specifically, in Victoria, coaching for teachers has gained considerable momentum at the state level. A user-friendly document was developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that could be utilized by coaches in many disciplines but required some prior knowledge if it was to be used effectively (Gill et al., 2010). In the previously mentioned studies, the roles and experiences of coaches and mentors were not well-articulated. Further, little to no information about the operationalization of coaching and mentoring was included. Without better clarity in roles, definitions, and operationalization, it becomes quite a difficult task for researchers and professionals in the field of early childhood education to generalize research findings, or to replicate the models.

Coaching and Mentoring Models in Early Childhood within the United States

In general, American models of coaching and mentoring shared similarities with international models, but also had anomalous concepts and suggestions to offer. Some American models were designed to promote general teaching quality, as others were designed to focus on

one particular aspect or skill. Likely, the variations in model types and goals would explain the differing results and effectiveness.

Coaching and mentoring models have been implemented frequently in Head Start settings across the United States. One mentoring program for Head Start teachers, called Individualized Learning Intervention, utilized a three-stage model, and was then scrutinized through the lens of intensity. The researchers found that the intensity of the mentoring program was related to increases in levels of specific child outcomes (Lambert, Gallagher, & Abbott-Shim, 2015). Another mentoring model used in a Head Start setting was the CAMP Quality model of professional development. This utilized components of workshops, classroom videotaping, teacher reflections, peer coaching, and mentoring. Head Start teachers who received this professional development showed statistically significant improvements on domains of behavior management, productivity, quality of feedback, and language modeling, compared to their co-workers who did not receive the intervention. The study also found that both degreed and non-degreed teachers showed identical improvements in their teaching skills, as a result of the professional development (Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014).

Coaching and mentoring models have also been utilized in other non-Head Start settings. For example, a coaching model utilized emails to communicate performance feedback to teachers. This method was found to be effective, but raised generalizability concerns (Barton, Fuller, & Schnitz, 2016). A mentoring program, named the Early Education Mentoring System (EEMS), was researched with a goal of understanding the social and emotional pieces of mentoring. The conclusions of the study focused on the necessity of relationship building between mentor and mentee, as well as the benefits of clear role definitions (Peterson et al., 2010). An exploratory study attempted to investigate what took place during coaching

conversations. Observational data were used to review and code behaviors using the Early Childhood Coaching Conversations (ECCC) coding system. The results found substantial variability in what takes place during coaching conversations and highlighted many of the nuances in coaching relationships (Jayaraman, Marvin, Knoche, & Bainter, 2015). While coaching and mentoring show great promise for the future of early childhood education, it seems that empirically, more research is needed to understand and effectively utilize coaches and mentors with early education professionals.

Early educator support program (EES). In North Carolina, a relatively new model has gained momentum, which needs further examination. It is a robust model of professional development, mentorship, evaluation, and coaching for teachers working in non-public school settings, such as state funded preschools or developmental day programs. The model was created to support lead teachers who need to obtain or keep their continuing NC Birth-through-Kindergarten (BK) License. The BK license is required in North Carolina to teach in public preschools and kindergartens, as well as in state funded Pre-K programs, located in private childcare centers. Licensed teachers follow and utilize the NC Education Standards in their teaching practice. Teachers holding the BK license are qualified to work with children from birth to five years of age, including at-risk children, and children with diagnosed disabilities (Division of Child Development and Early Education, 2019)

As teachers pursue their BK licensure through the assistance of the EES program, they are distinguished by either an initial or continuing license. That distinction dictates what services the teacher will receive from the EES program. An initially licensed teacher would be placed into the Beginning Teacher Support Program and would work on improving teaching skills and gaining confidence in teaching practices. To assist with those goals, the teacher is assigned a

mentor, is observed four times by a trained evaluator, and is given a Summative Evaluation at the conclusion of the school year. The teachers gain an understanding of North Carolina's Professional Teaching Standards and become familiar with the evaluation process. These supports are in place for the initially licensed and lateral entry teachers during their first three years of licensure, before converting to a continuing license. The teachers must be rated as proficient on all of the five teaching standards. Once all requirements of the Beginning Teacher Support Program have been met, the teachers become eligible to convert their license into a continuing license. Teachers with this license only receive three evaluations by a trained evaluator, and that evaluator also serves as a coach. Summative Evaluations at the end of the year are performed. The continuing license must be renewed after five years, and in order to be eligible, teachers must again receive ratings of proficiency on all five teaching standards (Vestal, Saperstein, Stafford, & Taylor, 2018).

The mentors and evaluators in the EES program provide the indispensable support services that assist teachers in their pursuit of licensure. A mentor role in the EES program encompasses coaching, performing peer observations, participating in post conferences, performing demonstrations, offering technical assistance, supporting and reviewing Professional Development Plans, providing resources, participating in Professional Learning Communities, and facilitating professional development. An evaluator role includes overseeing team agreements, observations, debriefing, conferences, monitoring Professional Development Plans, and facilitating professional development in a variety of settings (B. Brehm, personal communication, September 16, 2019). Evaluators use standardized rubrics to assess the teachers. These rubrics include all five teaching standards, with each standard separated into several elements. The standards encompass a teacher's leadership capabilities, ability to create a diverse

and respectful environment, knowledge of the content they teach, ability to facilitate learning, and ability to reflect on their practice (Taylor et al., 2017). Evaluators are trained to assess the standards and subsequent elements, and then rate their teachers as developing, proficient, accomplished, or distinguished. Evaluators make use of check boxes, comment sections, and artifacts to support their ratings for the teacher. Based on the evaluations, plans are then formulated to best suit the needs of each individual teacher, as they work to improve their teaching skills and provide best teaching practices to all of the children in their classroom (B. Brehm, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

While the roles of a mentor and evaluator are distinct, most individuals working in the EES program are cross-trained. Essentially, individuals are trained to serve in both roles, and may function in either role for different teachers in their caseload simultaneously. Currently, sixteen individuals from the EES office are working in a dual role as both a mentor and evaluator (D. Saperstein, personal communication, January 2, 2020).

North Carolina was divided geographically into an eastern and western region to better serve teachers across the state. One university located in the eastern part of the state and the other located in the western part of the state currently serve as the two main hubs for the EES program (Taylor et al., 2017). The professional model employs a hierarchical team, comprised of the leadership team, regional leads, mentors, and evaluators that serves 386 of teachers in the eastern region of North Carolina (D. Saperstein, personal communication, October 1, 2019). Through a program of evaluations, coaching, mentorship, and professional development for teachers, both continuing and initially licensed teachers are supported to gain proficiency on designated teaching standards. EES has developed a conceptual model that informs the work evaluators and

mentors are doing in the field. Coaching and mentoring teachers is a crucial piece of this model's design.

The conceptual framework. A conceptual model, shown in Figure 1, was developed to articulate the processes and work conducted by EES. The model is represented by a home, with each piece of the house representing a different part of the process. The foundation of the home

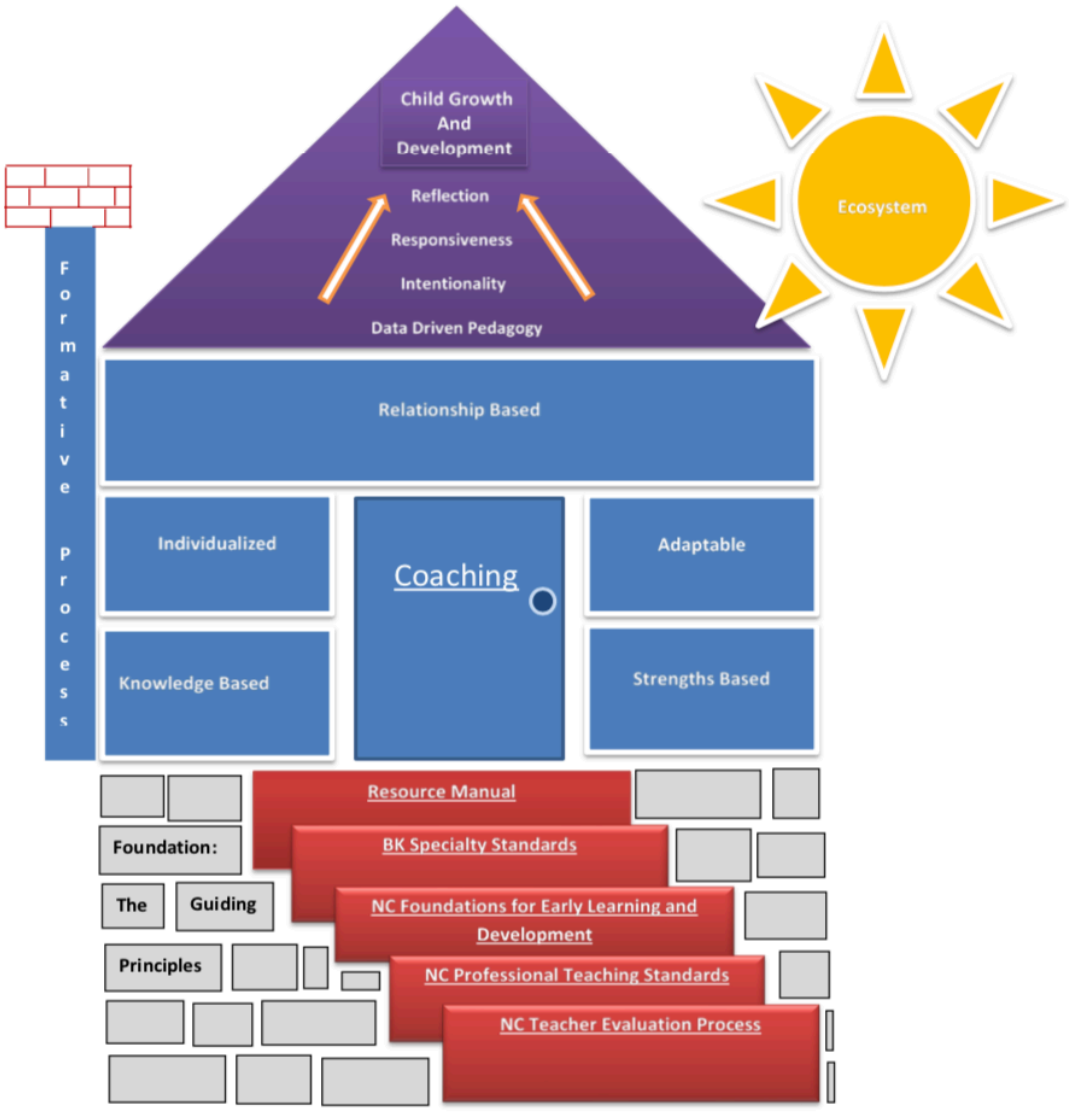

Figure 4. Conceptual Framework for the Early Educator Support Office (Taylor et al., 2017, p. 5).

represents the guiding principles that ground the work of the EES Office. The stairs portray the evaluation tools and resources that mentors and evaluators use in their work with teachers. The large door in the middle of the model corresponds to the coaching work that mentors and evaluators engage in. The roof of the house illustrates the peak of the office's work, by representing children's growth and development. Finally, the home's chimney represents the formative process involved in assessment and evaluation for teachers (Taylor et al., 2017).

The focus of the EES Office on coaching requires particular interest in the door portion of the model. Strategies to be used by the mentors and evaluators in their coaching work were outlined, to include intentionality in thinking and decision-making, forming personal connections with the teachers they serve, and coaching with a purpose of facilitating a teacher's continued learning. Characteristics and dispositions for effective coaching were also outlined by the model, with a particular focus on mindfulness and a strengths-based position. Further, a specific goal of the coaching style described by the EES Office was identified as promoting both independence and interdependence with the teachers served. Independence, for teachers, meant becoming a reflective, life-long learner. Interdependence referenced the idea of professional learning communities and encouraged teachers to engage with leaders and colleagues to continually learn, reflect, collaborate, and improve their work. Through the conceptual model, the work of mentors and evaluators has been articulated and described (Taylor et al., 2017).

Rationale for Research

Without empirical evaluation of the model, it is unclear how the experiences of mentors and evaluators align with the specified coaching style. The intent of the EES program is to facilitate and augment quality in early childhood settings by providing teachers with coaching and mentoring support, which is informed by the conceptual model. However, this model has

never been researched, scrutinized, or appraised. The model is well-intended, but the coaching and mentoring component requires empirical evaluation such that it can inform change and solidify elements of the model that are working well. Additionally, this evaluation can provide the resources and support that early childhood education professionals in eastern North Carolina desperately need. Thus, the main purpose of the study is to examine the experiences of the mentors and evaluators with coaching and supporting teachers. Specifically, the goal is to examine what aspects of coaching and mentoring are working well, what aspects need improvement, and how that informs future professional development. To that end, our research questions are: (1) How does coaching and mentoring work through the lens of experienced mentors and evaluators in the EES program? (2) From the perspective of mentors and evaluators in the EES program, what are the motivators, facilitators, and barriers to coaching and mentoring teachers in North Carolina?

Theory

To begin deciphering the model, its theoretical underpinnings must first be considered. The EES model of professional development is grounded in a frame of reference that employs theory in supporting its goals. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provided the framework for conceptualizing the influences of a variety of systems on a child's development (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013). As the theory posited, the interaction of a child's systems, unbeknownst to the child, can exert considerable effect on growth and development across the lifespan. With an understanding of the relationship between teaching practices and children's long-term outcomes (Egert et al., 2018; Kilinc, Kelley, Millinger, & Adams, 2016), it is clear that educational quality has been well integrated into a child's systems. As pieces of a child's system are manipulated, a ripple effect of influence can be observed. Mentors and

evaluators affect change within a child's microsystem, though their work is not always directly with the children. The support and development of the educators, as facilitated by the mentors and evaluators using coaching and mentoring practices, likely contributes to the successes of the whole child. While the focus of professional development in early childhood education is to improve teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices, the purpose of professional development is to offer more children the opportunity to reap the benefits of high-quality early education, ably supported by a highly qualified and well-prepared teacher. Bronfenbrenner's interconnected systems theory gives an exceptional picture of how professional development in the workforce has the potential to positively impact children and their families.

Methods

For the purposes of this descriptive study, a phenomenological methodology was employed. In qualitative research, phenomenology has been used to articulate the lived experiences of individuals, as they experience a common phenomenon (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007).

Recruitment

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who served in the Early Educator Support (EES) program at a university in eastern North Carolina. Only individuals serving in a dual role as a mentor and evaluator in the EES program were invited to participate in this study. Additionally, participants were required to have a minimum of two years of experience working in the program to be eligible to participate. Based on that criteria, there were 20 individuals eligible for study participation. Institutional Review Board approval was gained from the researcher's institution prior to beginning recruitment. All participants were recruited via email by the researcher.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection comprised of a demographic questionnaire and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants self-reported demographic information through REDCap prior to their scheduled interview. Interview length varied substantially between participants (M = 77.11 minutes; SD = 32.37). Interviews were conducted over the phone due to the geographic locations of the participants and the research team, and as a precaution related to global health concerns (COVID-19).

For the present study, the interview guide was developed after reviewing the methodology of a study that explored the experiences of early childhood pre-service teachers' views on nutrition education (Resor, Hegde, Stage, & Yeh, 2019). The guide was reviewed by a member of the research team with expertise in early childhood education and professional development. The interview guide consisted of six main questions. It was piloted with one member of the research team and one individual from the target population. After piloting the guide, small adjustments were made to the wording and order of the questions. Once the guide was piloted and refined, interviews with the participants began. Each question in the guide was intentionally asked twice, so that the participants could answer once from their perspective as a mentor, and once from their perspective as an evaluator (see Table 1). Each interview was audio recorded, and then transcribed verbatim. For the purposes of this research, saturation has been described as the point at which the data is no longer producing new information, codes, or themes relevant to the research questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Preliminary open coding was used during data collection to monitor saturation (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). Following interview 7, no more new codes emerged. However, only four codes were added after interview 5, suggesting that the majority of the concepts were uncovered at that point. Thus, saturation was

achieved at 8 interviews; however, data collection continued to twelve interviews in accordance with recommended sample sizes in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007), as well as to ensure that saturation was reached.

Data analysis began with the two trained coders independently listening to the interview recordings and reading the interview transcripts. The transcriptions were also reviewed for accuracy by the interviewer. Once both coders had gained familiarity with the transcripts, the coders independently developed short codes with descriptions in reaction to reading the transcripts. Coders used the method of 100% consensus coding by meeting to review each transcription line by line, to reach agreement on both the codes and their subsequent definitions (Creswell, 2007). This process resulted in the creation of the codebook. Throughout that time, coders also engaged in horizontalization by identifying quotes, called significant statements, that described how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Along with the codebook, the significant statements were used to develop themes. These were then used to write an essence which articulated both what and how the participants experienced coaching and mentoring practices in early childhood education.

Table 1

Major Interview Questions in Semi-Structured Interviews with Mentors and Evaluators (n = 12)

Major Interview Questions	**Major Probes**
What motivated you to become a [mentor/evaluator] in the EES program?	Is there anything in addition to what you have mentioned?
Will you describe your interpretation of the role you play as a [mentor/evaluator]?	Is your role informed by the training you have received on the EES team on coaching, mentoring and evaluation? Do you know of the EES conceptual model?
Tell me about your experiences as a [mentor/evaluator]?	What positive/negative experiences have you had? How have these experiences changed how you interact with your teachers?

Tell me about your [mentoring/evaluating] strategies. What is [mentoring/evaluating] really like in the classroom?	What strategies do not work for you?
Discuss the barriers you have experienced in your work as a [mentor/evaluator].	Think about people or things (e.g. time, resources). State your biggest barrier among the list of things you just mentioned.
What supports do you need to better perform your work as a [mentor/evaluator]?	Think about people or things (e.g. training, resources).

Sample

The final sample (n = 12) consisted of all females. Ten of the participants reported being White, and the other two participants reported being American Indian/Alaskan Native. Six participants had completed graduate degrees, and the remaining six had completed some graduate coursework. Participants reported an average of twenty years of experience in early childhood education (M = 20.08), ranging from 12 to 29 years (SD = 5.38). Participants varied in age (M = 43.67 years; SD = 6.96). Participants were recruited from each of the four regions of eastern North Carolina, depicted in Figure 2. Four participants served ECU Region 1, two participants served ECU Region 2, five participants served ECU Region 3, and one participant served ECU Region 4. In addition to serving in dual roles as mentors and evaluators, two of the twelve participants also served as Regional Leads in the EES program. Of the possible sample, 60% were interviewed.

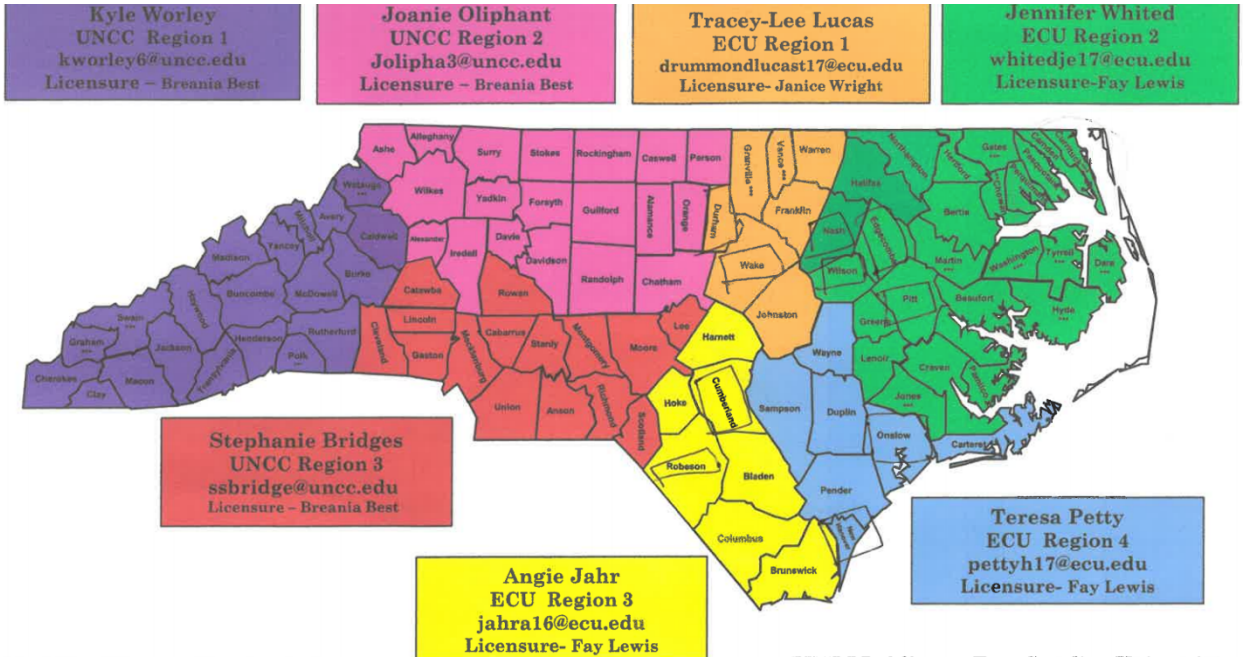

Figure 5. Map of Region divisions for the Early Educator Support Office.

Trustworthiness

Measures were taken throughout the study to align with phenomenological practices and increase trustworthiness. Steps included bracketing prior to beginning data collection, training the interviewer and coders, memoing throughout the interview and coding processes, and member checks following interviews (Shenton, 2004). The research team used the recognized research methods of phenomenology throughout the study to increase rigor. The interviewer first bracketed their own thoughts and experiences with coaching and mentoring practices in early childhood education in order to understand their presuppositions and maintain a non-judgmental position. The interviewer and coders were trained using an adapted version of Goodell, Stage, and Cooke's (2016) qualitative research strategies training. The interviewer training involved reviewing relevant qualitative research strategies and completing mock interviews. One mock interview was conducted with a member of the research team. An additional mock interview was later completed with an individual from the target population who was not included in the

sample. The coder training involved an overview of qualitative analysis methods, followed by a specific review of relevant coding strategies. As data collection began, the interviewer used memoing as a tool to engage in continual reflection of their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the data. Similarly, the two coders also memoed throughout data analysis. These memos later became important points of discussion within the research team. During the interview process, the interviewer also debriefed with a senior member of the research team with expertise in early childhood education and professional development programs. Prior to the conclusion of each interview, member checks were used to ensure the correctness of the interviewer's understanding. The interviewer reread each question to the participant one at a time, summarized what they had previously discussed, and then allowed for corrections, additions, or clarifications to the interviewer's understanding as needed.

Results

Qualitative analysis revealed three major themes related to mentor/evaluators' experiences with coaching and mentoring teachers in early childhood education, which included (1) the coaching and mentoring process, (2) strategies to support the coaching and mentoring process, and (3) barriers, motivators, and facilitators to the coaching and mentoring process. Themes, subthemes, and additional quotes are presented in Appendix D.

Theme 1: The Coaching and Mentoring Process

The process of coaching and mentoring described by mentor/evaluators provided insight into how their work is completed. Both mentors and evaluators used this process to support teachers, though occasionally, tasks in the process were a responsibility for only the mentor role, or only the evaluator role. Thus, subthemes of (1) the general process and (2) role-specific tasks are presented below.

The General Process

The structure of a visit was described by mentor/evaluators to include planning prior to the visit, a warm greeting by the mentor/evaluator upon arrival, a brief follow-up on items from a previous visit, talking through the purpose of the current visit, having the visit, providing feedback on the day, and then identifying next steps for the following visit. While this was the basic organization for the mentor/evaluators, the busy nature of early childhood education also required flexibility and versatility in the planning and execution of their work.

The coaching and mentoring process started with planning and organization. Mentor/evaluators first needed to prepare prior to visits or evaluations, organize notes and documentation, and relay plans to teachers. Planning for visits often included finding or developing a resource, incorporating feedback from previous evaluations, scheduling, and reviewing details from previous sessions. Upon arrival to a classroom, mentor/evaluators began with a friendly greeting to ease the teacher's inevitable nerves. Teachers were always greeted with, "a big warm smile," as one participant described it. Mentor/evaluators stressed the importance of being intentional in developing and sharing the purposes of their visits, as it allowed the teachers to better understand the intent of the program. One participant said, "If you have that purpose and you make it a priority, it really helps the teacher understand why you're there and it helps them see things they wouldn't see otherwise." Thus, a mentor/evaluator communicating plans at the start of a visit created an intentional learning experience for the teacher.

Mentor/evaluators also discussed their personal systems for taking notes and organizing information. Their preferences ranged from sticky notes and small notebooks to online note-taking apps. One participant spoke specifically about making note of small details on how each

teacher is best supported, and then using that information to jog their memory prior to a visit. This practice also assisted mentor/evaluators in follow-up, where they would discuss previously set goals or steps to provide accountability to teachers. Essentially, the importance of noticing, remembering, and documenting details in their work with teachers was a point of consistency. Throughout a visit, mentor/evaluators interacted with the children in the classroom when appropriate. This provided greater insight into the classroom and also created opportunities for impromptu modeling by the mentor/evaluator. At the conclusion of a visit or observation, mentor/evaluators debriefed and provided feedback to their teachers. This involved highlighting strengths from the day and identifying areas for future improvement. Based on the feedback, a short and manageable list of next steps was developed in conjunction with the teacher. These steps were intended to provide clear direction for the teacher as he or she worked to enhance subsequent teaching practices. Mentor/evaluators approached the development of such steps as a combination of areas the teacher must develop on the teaching standards rubric and areas of interest to the teacher. One participant explained the conversation about developing baby steps with a teacher accordingly:

> We talked about a lot of things. What are your priorities? What are two things that you want to work on first? And, and how can we support you in doing so? So... they'll say, "Well, I really need a resource in this," or... whatever they need to help them meet the goals that we've discussed and that they've wanted to prioritize.

At that point, mentor/evaluators generally began finding or developing resources to support their teachers as they worked through the specified baby steps. Then, the planning for the next visit or observation would begin.

Role-Specific Tasks

The coaching and mentoring process outlined above included shared responsibilities for both mentors and evaluators, though additional responsibilities were generally facilitated by one specific role. *Modeling* was a practice that was regarded as highly important to the work mentors did with teachers but was rarely used by evaluators. Modeling encompassed the demonstration of techniques or practices in the classroom for a teacher to watch and learn from. It could be either implicit or explicit, was sometimes planned, but also occurred spontaneously in response to classroom situations. One participant explained:

> When you walk into a classroom as the mentor, you put down the pad of paper, you put down the clipboard... Whether it's implicit modeling where the teacher is kind of seeing you out of the corner of her eye working with a group of children, or you're really going in to do some explicit modeling, you have to get in there and get in the trenches with the teacher. The teacher sees that it's more than just words, you're going to take action and really work with them.

The hands-on nature of modeling provided a unique, tailored experience that mentors saw as invaluable to a teacher's learning. Evaluators, then, took on the task of *defining* the evaluation rubric for teachers. This included helping teachers understand how the rubric works, where teachers scored on the rubric, and how to improve their current status. This was sometimes difficult, as teachers occasionally believed their practices should have been ranked differently than an evaluator concluded. Through *in-depth explanations of best practices* in early childhood education, evaluators were able to use the rubric as a tool to improve teachers' practices. One participant said, "To me, the biggest part of it [evaluating] is not the markings on the rubric but sharing the information with the teacher." *Sharing information* related to the rubric was a major contribution by evaluators to facilitating growth in their teachers. Through the role-specific tasks

utilized by mentors and evaluators, the coaching and mentoring process was streamlined to best serve each teacher's need.

Theme 2: Strategies to Support the Coaching and Mentoring Process

The process of coaching and mentoring, as outlined above, was supported by two specific strategies. These included two subthemes: (1) establishing communication lines (2) and building effective relationships.

Establishing Communication Lines

When beginning work with a teacher, mentor/evaluators discussed the importance of establishing lines of communication. They specifically asked questions regarding how teachers preferred to be contacted, and what worked best for them. Many teachers preferred a text message or phone call, rather than an email. This allowed mentor/evaluators to tailor their teacher's experience and communicate in a manner that was easiest for the teacher to reciprocate. As mentor/evaluators established communication lines, they also set intentional boundaries with their teachers. These boundaries typically involved suspending communication during late evening hours or the mentor/evaluator's family time. One participant said, "My phone may ring, I'm like, I just can't do that. I have family time right now... But be very diligent in returning that message or that phone call during your time that you are working." Communication boundaries were protective for mentor/evaluators and teachers, alike. As the mentor/evaluators and teachers operated within the established communication boundaries, open conversations were facilitated. Rather than a mentor/evaluator lecturing a teacher, they focused on creating an environment that encouraged active participation from both sides. One participant said, "I make sure that I give [teachers] plenty of time to engage in the conversation. It's not just me giving them information, but, pulling information from them. Really letting them feel like that is a conversation at the

post-conference." Communication as a strategy to support the coaching and mentoring process also necessitated a degree of personable communication. Mentor/evaluators discussed doing frequent check-ins with their teachers and allowing the conversation to go beyond the classroom. This communication delicately balanced being professional and personal but was largely important in gaining the trust and respect of the teachers. One participant said:

> I think making those connections and being personable with your [teacher] on a professional level, obviously... But having those connections and knowing that they're each a different person. It's not just some teacher that I mentor. This is so and so, who I know, who I care about, and who I want to succeed.

Through the use of boundaries, encouraging two-way communication, and being amicable in communication, the coaching and mentoring process was enhanced. Mentor/evaluators were able to get to know their teachers more quickly when using this strategy, which thus facilitated the process and speed of their work.

Building Effective Relationships

Mentor/evaluators consistently reported that building relationships with teachers was the most important strategy used in their work. Some went as far as suggesting that their work would not be possible without an effective relationship with their teacher. One participant said:

> If you don't have a relationship with that teacher, it doesn't matter what kind of resources you have, it doesn't matter how great your strength may be to help that teacher, because they won't hear it. So the first thing you have to do is just really get to know that teacher so that they trust you, and when they trust you, anything and everything you bring to the table is game.

The benefits of having a relationship with their teachers were tremendous, according to mentor/evaluators. Teachers became open, willing to listen, and bought into the process when a relationship was appropriately nurtured. A relationship also allowed mentor/evaluators to better understand their teachers, and thus, better serve them. One participant said:

> When it comes to supporting and giving them [teachers] feedback and things like that, you need to know your teachers. If you have a teacher that's gonna just completely shut down the first time you say anything with some critical feedback or constructive feedback, then you need to know how to word that right. You kind of have to change who you are, just a little bit, to make sure that you're getting through to your teachers.

With the benefits of having an effective relationship with a teacher in mind, mentor/evaluators dedicated intentional time to create and sustain the relationships. Mentor/evaluators highlighted the teachers' strengths, worked collaboratively rather than from a position of power, interacted with children in the classroom, were personable with the teacher, encouraged reflective thinking, and frequently checked in with the teacher. Each of those actions communicated to the teacher that the mentor/evaluator cared about them and their success and allowed specific aspects of their relationship to develop. Teachers were predominantly eager and willing to engage in a relationship with mentor/evaluators, but some teachers proved more difficult to engage. One participant shared about a teacher who was largely skeptical and defensive at the start:

> I showed up the first day and you could tell that there was definitely a wall up there. She really was just kind of checking me out... And I would work with her and she would ask lots and lots of questions. She'd contact me all hours of the day at the start. Well, once I saw that was happening, we set boundaries...You know, not sending messages at 1:00 in the morning or all hours of the day. So... this is several months later halfway into the

> school year, and the same teacher who was drilling me from the start, she literally like hugged me when I walked in the room and she said, you know, "I used to ask everybody about you. But now, I'm telling everyone about what a wonderful mentor and the best fit for me of being so detailed," and all of these things.

Through persistent effort, the mentor/evaluator was able to form an effective relationship with a teacher who was initially quite difficult to engage. The mentor/evaluator went on to share that the teacher experienced tremendous growth in teaching practices, which was regarded as a direct result of their relationship. In another difficult situation, a participant described their approach to relationship building:

> For her [teacher], what it really took was I had to go in and just throw off any mentor role and just go play with the children. I just go into her classroom and sit on the floor and play and, you know, read stories with them and just be another body in the classroom. And we had to let go of the idea of I have a role that's over you. And so once she saw that, we ended up with a good relationship.

Through multiple scenarios, mentor/evaluators described their creative approaches to building relationships with teachers who were initially uninterested in the support. Rather than using one particular strategy for difficult teachers, mentor/evaluators used cues from the classroom, their knowledge of the teacher, and their own creative ideas to create a teacher-specific approach that lead to an effective relationship. While some relationships proved more difficult to foster than others and strategy varied, the importance of building effective relationships was a point of consistency for mentor/evaluators. One participant captured this idea, saying: “The foundation of every single teacher I serve is trying to build a relationship.” Through relationship building

strategies, mentor/evaluators were able to support their work in the coaching and mentoring process.

Theme 3: Barriers, Motivators, and Facilitators to the Coaching and Mentoring Process

The preceding analysis of the coaching and mentoring process provided insights regarding areas to continue strengthening, as well as areas needing improvement within the process. Such insights have been organized into barriers, motivators, and facilitators.

Barriers

The barriers identified by mentor/evaluators are presented below. Subthemes included (1) resources, (2) time, and (3) site administrators.

Resources

When providing services to teachers, mentor/evaluators reported having limited access to resources to provide to their teachers. Resources mentioned included actual materials to be shared with teachers, video demonstrations, children's books, technology, and supplies that corresponded with elements a teacher was working on. The lack of resources posed a difficult situation for mentor/evaluators, as they often had to remedy the issue or step outside of their role to fully provide services to their teachers. One participant said:

> I definitely would have liked to be able to share children's books with the teachers that weren't just my own, maybe a book that I could leave with them. I would have loved to be able to have little math materials and create more math games that I didn't have to go to the dollar store as well.

Mentor/evaluators reported providing teachers with resources from their own personal stash, and sometimes reported spending their own money to purchase resources for their teachers to address the disparity of resources. Technology, though, was not a resource mentor/evaluators were able

to pull from their personal stashes or purchase from personal funds. The lack of technological resources in the centers created a barrier of accessibility. One participant said:

> We really are eastern North Carolina when they talk about rural, you know, impoverished areas and so that provides some unique challenges with our teachers, access to even basic materials and internet. I have a couple of sites that I go to, they don't have internet access. So that's tough, you know, now that they're being moved towards using the teaching strategies online of their Assessment Program. Some of our teachers are either doing that on their cell phone, which is very, very difficult to navigate, or they have to do it at home, um, because they have no other choice.

Another participant shared:

> I'm working with a teacher on technology and we're asking her, you know, to really want to incorporate [technology] and she's not able to meet proficiency because...she has zero access to any technology, not any. I'm talking about like digital. But she wants to be proficient in that area, but it's not even a - it's not a possibility, because she doesn't have access to that resource.

This lack of access to necessary resources created difficulties for mentor/evaluators that hampered their efforts in the coaching and mentoring process, and thus slowed or halted the progress of their work.

Time

An additional barrier reported by mentor/evaluators was the general problem of time. This encompassed concerns with time spent traveling to visits, time spent educating teachers on how to use technology instead of engaging in the coaching and mentoring process, lack of adequate hours in the day to meet the needs of each teacher, difficulty finding time to prepare for

visits, extended time completing paperwork, difficulties scheduling visits or evaluations, and general feelings of not having enough time to spend with teachers to facilitate effective growth. Essentially, the demands of the coaching and mentoring process surpass the amount of time that can be dedicated to the work. One participant said:

> Time is probably the biggest barrier because, yes, I might visit the classroom, and yes, I can meet with them, but, some of them have very limited time. I might get to meet with them up to an hour, but if you think about the fact that if I'm only seeing them once a month, that's only an hour out of the month. So that can make it...hard in itself because I feel like I have a lot to cover in an hour.

Another participant said:

> They want to be able to spend more time, especially more face-to-face time, with teachers. And that just isn't possible with the caseloads that we have necessarily, you know? And a part of that just comes from the fact that we have staff that really just wanna do their very best and help teachers the most they can. But they always feel like, if I had more time, you know, I could do more.

Participants repeatedly echoed the same issues, saying, “So there's never enough time in the day. I mean, I'm just gonna say that,” and “There's probably never enough time to do it as much as we, you know, as much as we'd like to.” While adding hours to the day is not a feasible means of alleviating the concerns of time, some concerns may be potentially remedied through careful attention to specific issues related to time. For example, mentor/evaluators reported spending sometimes entire visits helping their teachers navigate online systems. This was problematic because it is outside the role of mentor/evaluator, and thus meant the teacher did not actually receive coaching and mentoring services. One participant explained:

> A lot of them aren't able to like navigate the online teacher evaluation system. So, and if they're not able to do that, then you spend a lot of your time helping them do that. And so that takes away from the time that you're able to actually do things related to, you know, the things you want to work on with them. It just kinda takes away from that because you're spending a lot of time helping them try to get on to finish their PDP because they're not sure how to do it in the system. And the technology is a huge barrier for not all of them, but a good number of them need help with that because it's not something that they do all the time.

With the strain on the time of mentor/evaluators, it is unclear what parts of the coaching and mentoring process might be inhibited.

Site Administrators

As part of the EES program, site administrators have specific, limited requirements for their involvement in the process of coaching and mentoring. However, mentor/evaluators expressed frustration with administrators who appeared uninterested, too busy, or simply preferred not to be involved in the coaching and mentoring process. They reported that many administrators often do not uphold their responsibilities in the program, which has created a difficult and uncomfortable situation for mentor/evaluators to manage. One mentor evaluator said, “Not having a site administrator that is willing to communicate and cooperate is a huge barrier. You know? Like that affected my whole year with that one teacher.” While mentor/evaluators were quite frustrated with this breakdown in the process, they reported that it was the teachers who inevitably lost the most. Site administrators have unique access to teachers on a daily basis and can provide an additional layer of support for teachers. With many site

administrators not upholding their responsibilities with the EES program, mentor/evaluators have become frustrated, but ultimately the learning and growth of the teacher is most hindered.

Motivators

Mentor/evaluators consistently communicated that the nature of their work supporting teachers and helping them to grow was inherently motivational to them. Knowing that the services they provided to teachers was an integral part of each teachers' growth continually motivated mentor/evaluators to continue their work. One participant said:

> I think the thing that keeps me going is I see that we are making a difference. Like I'll step back sometimes and I'll say, "Would this teacher be in this spot if we weren't working with them?" And most of the time, I can honestly say no, so that's a huge motivator to keep going.

Fostering teacher growth was a big facet of understanding mentor/evaluators' motivations, but for many, teacher growth was a means to impact children, which became the highest motivation. One participant said:

> In order to leave the classroom or leave a role working with children, you truly have to believe that you're going to make an impact with even more children by working with teachers. That's kind of what lets you walk away from the classroom when it's something you're very committed to and so that was where I was. I wanted a role where I could impact even more children by working with teachers.

Another participant, discussing teacher growth, said:

> Immediately I start thinking of now think about how many kids that's going to impact, because this year she has 18 [children]. But next year, she's going to have 18 and then 18,

> and 18, and 18. So like that's the best part of it, is knowing like that ah-ha moment for her isn't just for her. It's for all the kids that she's ever going to teach again.

It was certainly clear that mentor/evaluators were motivated by the growth their teachers showed, but also understood the positive implications that the growth would have on the children in each classroom. In some cases, the implications of teacher growth expanded beyond the children to include classroom assistants. One participant shared:

> Several of the teacher assistants have decided to move on an get their Pre-K license also. So they've seen how the process works and seen how much growth that the teacher has made...and throughout the process, they've then decided, "Oh, this, this is a really great thing. I'm gonna go back and get my degree myself." So I think that's been wonderful too.

Essentially, the mentor/evaluators find meaning and motivation in the growth they see in their teachers, which extends sometimes to include teaching assistants, but always includes the children. One participant summed it up, saying:

> I truly believe that what we do matters. You know, we've kind of adopted this slogan of "Improving Outcomes for Children, One Teacher at a Time," and that really is what it comes down to. The relationships that we are able to form with teachers do change lives for children, maybe not as much as we wish they would, maybe not in every instance like we wish they would, but it does and I think for every mentor and evaluator in our program, that is the driving force. Every time we hit a wall and we feel like, you know, we're not making enough of a difference, or there are too many barriers, then we have a success story...that kind of keeps pushing us forward. And, you know, really, while there could be those improvements that we talked about, and there are obstacles that we have to overcome, we do good work, and we really are a lifeline for a lot of these teachers and,

> you know, I hope that we continue to get the support needed to continue to be that lifeline.

Through firsthand experiences seeing and helping teachers grow in their practices, mentor/evaluators were consistently motivated to continue their work in the coaching and mentoring process.

Facilitators

The facilitators identified by mentor/evaluators are presented below. Subthemes included (1) training/learning opportunities and EES Support, (2) classroom coverage, and (3) site administrators.

Training/Learning Opportunities and EES Team Support

Mentor/evaluators spoke highly of the training and support they received from the EES program. It was clear through conversation that the EES program offers many regular opportunities for training, and that these opportunities aid mentor/evaluators in their work. One participant said:

> I enjoy the face to face training that allow us to then apply - we go back and then we'll apply what we've learned and then come back together as having that additional time to come back together and debrief. I really feel like it's important for us to be able to come together as a team.

Another said, “The training has been extremely helpful.” In addition to training opportunities, the EES program also facilitates a buddy system that incorporates new mentor/evaluators shadowing experienced mentor/evaluators. The assigned buddies remain in contact to provide an additional layer of support for each other throughout the year. One participant said:

> I think, beyond formal training, one thing that the EES does is every new person is paired up with a buddy. So we have a buddy program. So your first year, you have someone that you're paired with, and they're your go-to person that you ask questions and so before you ever step into a classroom to mentor, you get to go observe your buddy mentor and how they approach the classroom and talk to the teacher and all of those things.

Another participant shared:

> We did a lot of shadowing at first too, when I first started...which was really helpful. And then, also, our first year, we had a buddy, so somebody who was already in the program, who had already been working for EES. And, you know, every month, or even more frequently than that, you kind of connect with that person to talk about, "Okay, so here's what I'm doing, do you mind, um... can you come and shadow me for this?" or, you know, something like that. I actually serve as a buddy now to somebody else.

The buddy and shadowing system were a specific means of support for mentor/evaluators that encouraged and supported their work, but it also seemed that support came generally from EES leadership and staff. Participants repeatedly shared that they felt they received excellent support from their coworkers. One participant shared, “Our regional leads and everyone is just so supportive...I can just imagine what we would be like if we were in a building all together working together.” Another participant said:

> I have a regional lead that I can talk to. I have fabulous coworkers that I can bounce ideas off with. I have my own buddy that I was hooked up with last year, you know, who really supported me.

Through the training and staff support provided by the EES program, the work of mentor/evaluators is made easier and pushed forward.

Classroom Coverage

Another facilitator of the work of mentor/evaluators was classroom coverage, sometimes referred to as floaters. This allowed the teachers to spend intentional time communicating with the mentor/evaluator during a visit, as well as occasionally be able to step away from the classroom for meetings or evaluations. While classroom coverage is not needed at every single visit, it certainly made for less stressful and more effective time usage during sessions. One participant said:

> Sometimes you want to sit and meet with that teacher, and it's hard because a lot of centers don't have a floater, so they don't have somebody that will cover for the teacher while you're meeting with them sometimes. So you are fly on the go with 20 something kids in the room trying to make it happen without over talking to the teacher, cause she can't hear you when she's worried if somebody's gonna, you know, need something or have to go to the bathroom.

Another participant shared that many centers do not have floaters, but it is a largely helpful commodity when available. They said, “Some of these centers have a floater. No, maybe three of the 25 centers have a floater, you know, but it's like amazing when they have that.” Centers with coverage are unfortunately not the norm in the experience of the mentor/evaluators in this study. One participant shared that the barrier of time, however, can be slightly eased through coverage. They shared, “They [the teachers] are, you know, very fortunate in their site that they have that coverage, you know, during that outside time or what have you where I can talk to them.” With an additional adult available to meet the needs of the children in the classroom, the teacher is able to focus on the intentions of the mentor/evaluator’s visit, thus making the job of the mentor/evaluator less complex.

Site Administrators

Site administrators who were willing and active participants in the EES program were reportedly few. However, mentor/evaluators spoke highly of site administrators who upheld their responsibilities within the program and truly provided an additional layer of support for their teachers. This was particularly important for struggling teachers on monitored plans. One mentor/evaluator described a site administrator's involvement with a struggling teacher as being the most influential and important part of her success. Involved administrators could hold teachers accountable, provide assistance in managing difficult behaviors of the children in a classroom, occasionally offer classroom coverage during visits, and general availability to help teachers meet their learning goals. One mentor/evaluator said:

> It makes a world of difference. I mean, even the little things like if a site administrator sits in our meeting, and they hear that a teacher has to implement a certain strategy or they have to do an assessment system or how time consuming doing something is, then they get that support. Those site administrators might say, "Oh, I didn't know that you were doing all your lesson planning at home. What can we do?" When the teacher receives support, you can see it not only in what the teacher is able to achieve, but you see it in the attitudes of the teacher and the longevity of whether or not they stay.

The involvement of enthusiastic administrators made the work of coaching and mentoring seamless, but perhaps most importantly, it facilitated the learning and growth of teachers.

Theoretical Model

A theoretical model was developed to visually depict elements of the phenomenon and how it works together (see Figure 6). The strategy of establishing communication lines is used at the forefront of the process, and then proceeds to planning for visits. The process and elements of

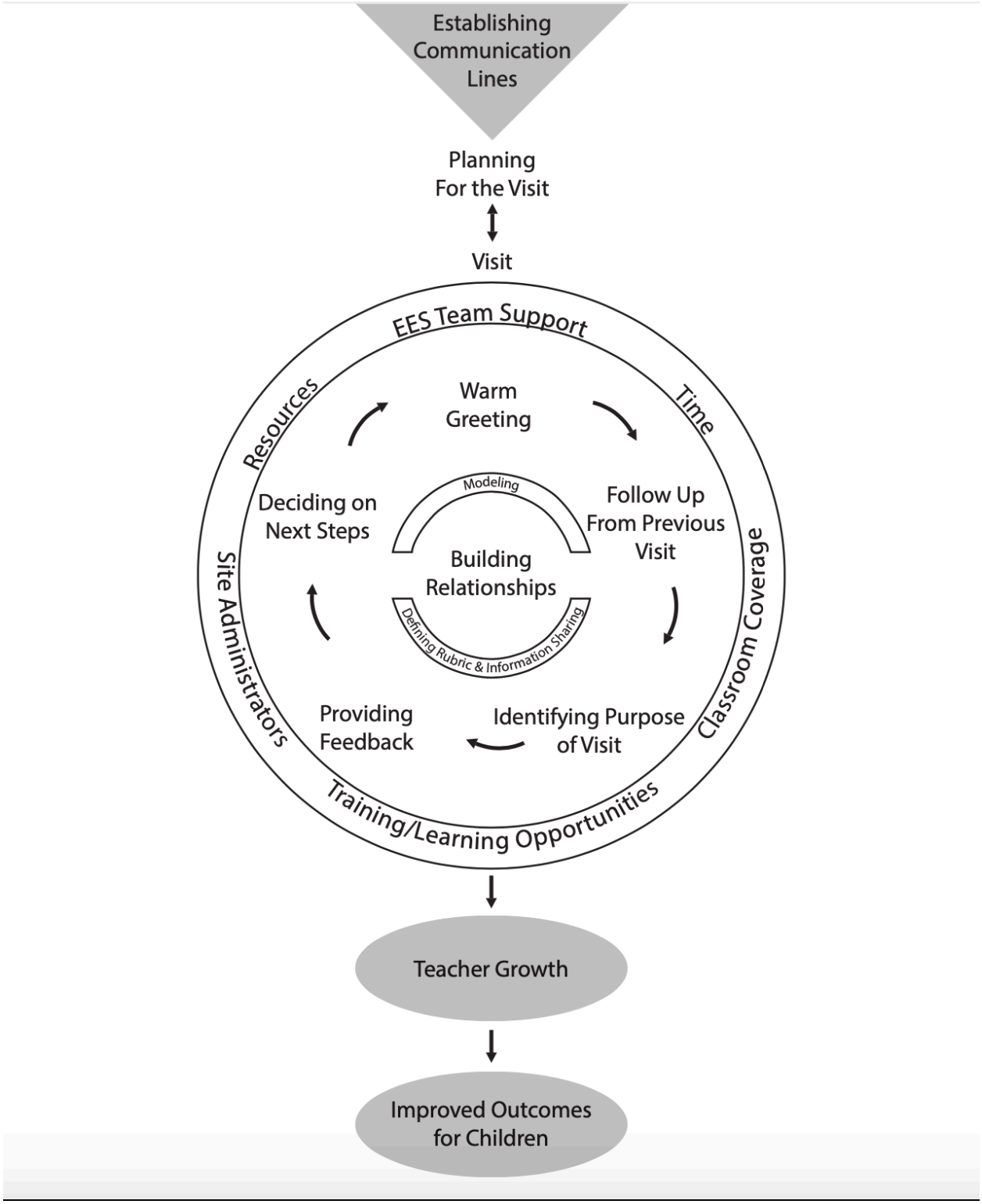

Figure 6. Theoretical Model

the visit are depicted within the circle. At the center of model is the strategy of building relationships, which was understood to be extraordinarily important to the process of coaching and mentoring. Role-specific tasks are depicted within semi-circles, as they occur throughout the process and are used appropriately to suit the learning needs of teachers. The outermost circle holds conditions that influence the process of coaching and mentoring. When conditions are positive for coaching and mentoring, resources are plentiful, there is adequate time for responsibilities, classroom coverage is available, site administrators are involved, support from the EES program is in place, and training opportunities are incorporated for mentor/evaluators. Results of the study indicated that support from the EES program and training opportunities are the only two positive conditions that are consistently in place. Unfortunately, many of the other conditions varied, or appeared as a negative condition. This was evidenced by conditions such as resource barriers, limited time, limited classroom coverage, and variability in administrator support. Even so, mentor/evaluators worked through the various conditions, leading to teacher growth, and thus improved outcomes for children. This fundamental visual representation describes the phenomenon explored in this study. However, there may be additional factors to consider regarding the coaching and mentoring process.

Discussion

The current study focused on understanding coaching and mentoring, specifically from the perspective of the individuals providing the services. This offered a different viewpoint on phenomenon, as the focus remained on the lived experiences of mentors and evaluators providing support to teachers through the EES program. Previous studies have documented many types of coaching and mentoring models, both nationally and internationally (Doan, 2016; Lambert et al., 2015; Peterson et al., 2010; Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018; Zan & Donegan-

Ritter, 2014). However, the EES program and conceptual framework remains comparatively unique.

Previously identified elements of effective coaching and mentoring included relationships, a foundation of learning, purposeful instruction and feedback, reflection, and modeling, all within the context of occupation (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Dağ & Sarı, 2017; Gill et al., 2010; Peterson et al., 2010). These strategies and types of relationships were observed throughout themes of the coaching and mentoring process and supportive strategies, and in subthemes of relationship building and establishing lines of communication. It appears that previous understandings of coaching and mentoring strategies align to some extent with the experiences of the current participants. One topic noted throughout interviews with mentor/evaluators was the EES program's focus on tailoring support to each teacher's individual needs. While individualizing support was occasionally a facet of other studies on mentoring and coaching, it was rarely given the priority that mentors and evaluators spoke of in the current study (Garner et al., 2015; Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). Though this has not been a focus in coaching and mentoring literature thus far, individualized support was featured in the EES conceptual framework. Individualizing support to meet the specific learning needs of teachers seemed to be particularly productive for teacher growth and learning. A one-size-fits-all approach to coaching and mentoring may yield benefits for some teachers, but an individualized approach to support may offer greater opportunities for teacher growth. Previous studies on mentorship programs that utilized a tailored approach to support yielded promising results (Garner et al., 2015; Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). The results of the current study may point to future developments of mentoring and coaching programs that prioritize flexibility and

individual learning needs, while simultaneously highlighting the EES conceptual framework that addresses the importance of individualized support.

Interestingly, the findings related to motivators for mentor/evaluators aligned well with the proposed theoretical foundations of the study. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provided a lens for viewing the growth of the teacher, through the work of mentor/evaluators, as potentially influential to a child (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The finding that mentor/evaluators are motivated by teacher growth harmonizes with this systems theory perspective. It was clear that mentor/evaluators discerned their place within a given child's system, were motivated by the potential impacts of their efforts, and understood the positive implications of a teacher's growth for children's outcomes. This mindset for mentor/evaluators was embodied by the participants, but was perhaps said best by one, who said, "We are improving outcomes for children, one teacher at a time." The positive implications of their work became exponential in considering the number of children that one growing teacher may impact throughout their teaching career. Thus, the ecological systems theory aligned with the study findings, suggesting improved outcomes for children through use of intentional coaching and mentoring techniques.

Addressing Barriers

While the barriers noted by mentor/evaluators might be difficult to resolve, addressing two barriers to streamline their work may yield benefits. Barriers that includes time and resources require further consideration. The lack of time could potentially be addressed by targeting tasks mentor/evaluators take on that are outside of the coaching and mentoring process. Providing teachers with additional technology training that takes place outside of their mentoring and evaluating sessions may be a potential way to alleviate some time concerns. In a study that utilized online professional development modules for early childhood educators, participants'

level of comfort with utilizing technology was taken into account and trainers were utilized to facilitate some technological components with success (Stone-MacDonald & Douglass, 2015). Similar processes may be useful in the EES program. An additional concern was mentor/evaluators' frustrations with scheduling for visits. One said, "In general I think scheduling, whether it's scheduling, rescheduling, or figuring out how to be at more places than one are all challenges." This is a multilayered issue, as scheduling requires cooperation from several different individuals in each case. Working to ease the difficulties and reduce wasted time associated with scheduling may require creative thinking and innovative solutions. However, reducing the amount of time mentor/evaluators waste on tasks outside of the coaching and mentoring process could potentially contribute to enhanced services provided to teachers. In regards to resources, it was unclear if this disparity was a concern that the mentor/evaluators should be tasked with remedying on their own. It certainly hampers their work, as the provision of appropriate resources for their teachers is an integral part of the coaching and mentoring process. Thus, mentor/evaluators have attempted to stand in the purported resource gap, through use of their own items or personal funds. Individualized mentoring programs are understood to require adequate financial support (Fullan, 2007; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Howe & Jacobs, 2013). Thus, such a financially demanding barrier may be more appropriately addressed by the EES program through the provision of additional funds, creation of a resource library, or directly through working with individual centers.

Site Administrators

Given that there were notable discrepancies in the discussion of site administrators, it was included as both a barrier and facilitator. It appeared that a mentor/evaluator's experience with each individual administrator varied and thus, so did the outcomes for the teachers. When site

administrators are not well versed with the EES program, their availability as a learning resource for teachers might be limited. Teachers then miss out on additional learning and support opportunities. Mentor/evaluators were largely appreciative of involved administrators, and expectedly frustrated with uninvolved administrators. Unfortunately, it seemed that mentor/evaluators dealt most often with the latter. Difficulties aside, mentors and evaluators were vocally sympathetic to the many demands placed on site administrators. The complexities of administration in early childhood education are vast, including those who transition into administrative roles without proper training (Larkin, 1999). Recent research has investigated mentorship models for novice elementary and middle school principals (Messer, 2020). Early education administrators may have similar needs for mentorship and support, but further research will be necessary in order to understand their specific needs. Administrators may benefit from some type of training session provided through EES that expands upon the role of an administrator within the coaching and mentoring process. However, while administrative support may be beyond the current scope of the EES program, mentor/evaluators would certainly benefit from some type of training, support, collaboration, or policy that guides their interactions with administrators as they work together to support teachers.

Conclusion

Through twelve qualitative interviews with mentors and evaluators in the Early Educator Support Program, this study highlighted their experiences in providing support to teachers in non-public Pre-K settings. Mentor/evaluators reflected on their adventures in navigating the coaching and mentoring process, using strategies to support the process, and the barriers, motivators, and facilitators in their work. The perspectives and experiences of mentor/evaluators

provided suggestions and considerations for the development of future mentoring programs for teachers in non-public early childhood education settings.

Implications and Future Research

Fully understanding the experiences of mentors and evaluators in supporting teachers is essential to promoting quality in early childhood education. Understanding what their experience is and how they approach the work provides a fuller picture of the coaching and mentoring process. This explorative study began to unpack the techniques, strategies, relationship building methods, and daily efforts that combine to impact teacher practice, and at large, student learning outcomes. This understanding of how mentor/evaluators do the work of supporting teachers can inform future mentoring training, program development, and best practices in coaching and mentoring. Future research is needed to continue broadening the understanding of a mentor's role, to make it definable and replicable, and to better understand facilitators and barriers to their work. If high quality mentorship could be accessible to all teachers in early childhood education, the prospective impact on child outcomes would be monumental.

Strengths and Limitations

The exploratory nature of this study contributes to the field by probing into the lived experiences of mentors and evaluators in serving teachers within non-public Pre-K settings. The study utilized purposive sampling methods and had strict criteria for inclusion and exclusion. This limited the sample, and thus, limits the generalizability of study results. Further, participants' variation in years of experience in the program (two years versus more than 10 years) may serve as a limitation regarding the reflections of mentors and evaluators on different components of the program.

In accordance with phenomenological methods, efforts to increase trustworthiness included bracketing to acknowledge the researcher's experiences with the phenomenon and memoing throughout analysis to continually reflect on the data. Continuing interviews beyond the point of saturation also added rigor. While mentoring practices are not a new area of research, little attention has previously been given to the perspectives and experiences of the individuals firsthand providing the support. Focusing this study on the program and process through the lens of mentor/evaluators highlights nuances and insights that might be overlooked from any other perspective.

In this study we utilized one method of data collection (in-depth qualitative interviews), thus, prospective studies may benefit from the use of archival data or observations to study this phenomenon in greater depth. Future research on this topic should be focused on sampling individuals from other geographic areas as well as from programs with differing structures to provide greater generalizability.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · **rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/**

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Lyndsey Graham
CC: Archana Hegde
Date: 2/21/2020
Re: UMCIRB 19-003394
Coaching and Mentoring in Early Childhood Settings: How Does It Work?

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 2/20/2020. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Demographic Questionnaire Lyndsey Graham.docx(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Demographic Questionnaire Lyndsey Graham.docx(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Exempt Consent Lyndsey Graham.doc(0.03)	Consent Forms
Interview Guide Lyndsey Graham.docx(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Interview Guide Lyndsey Graham.docx(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Lyndsey Graham Thesis Proposal(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Recruitment Email - Lyndsey Graham.docx(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

For research studies where a waiver of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(2)(ii) has been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

OPENING

Hello, [participant's name]. My name is Lyndsey Graham. I am a student at East Carolina University. We've been in contact via email recently about this study, so it is nice to speak to you over the phone!

I wanted to take a minute to remind you about this study and why I am interviewing you. I hope to learn about your experiences and perspectives as a mentor or evaluator in the Early Educator Support program. As an experienced mentor or evaluator, you are a perfect fit for this study!

You have previously consented to participate in this study in the online platform. As a reminder, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are able to stop participating at any time without penalty. Today's interview will last about 30-45 minutes and will be audio-recorded so that I can refer to our conversation when I complete my research report. Do you mind if I record this interview session?

1. (NO, I DO NOT MIND.) Thank you.
2. (YES, I MIND.) Okay. However, for research purposes we need to audio record this interview. Because of that, you will be unable to participate in this interview today. Thank you for your time!

Before we begin, I'd like for you to provide a pseudonym for yourself. That means I would like for you to make up a name for me to call you, so that your actual name is never recorded. What name would you like for me to call you? _____
Great, I will now begin the recording.

(Begin audio recording.)

The recording is on, and you are now being recorded.

GENERAL INFORMATION & DIRECTIONS

To begin, I am interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions about your experience as a mentor or evaluator in the Early Educator Support Program. Questions will ask you to reflect on these experiences, as well as how they have influenced your coaching and mentoring practices.

Please provide descriptive examples and tell stories when possible. However, when telling a story, please do not refer to the individuals by their real names. You can make up a pseudonym or refer to them by their relationship to you.

Keep in mind that this is all about what you think and your experiences. It is okay if you are unsure or do not know how to answer some questions. At the end of our talk, I will recap our conversation and give you a chance to add to or correct anything that is said during our talk today. I will be taking notes throughout our conversation, so I may pause from time to time to finish writing. Since we are on the phone, please be sure to stop me and ask me to repeat anything that you cannot hear.

Do you have any questions before we begin? (*Answer any questions.)* Great! Let's get started.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – AS A MENTOR

QUESTION 1:

To begin our conversation, will you tell me what motivated you to become a mentor in the EES program?

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
Is there anything in addition to what you have mentioned?	*Can you explain this more?*
	Can you give me an example?
	Can you think of anything else?
	Why or why not?

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 2:

Will you describe your interpretation of the role you play as a mentor?

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
*What do you think your role **is** or **should** look like?* *Is your role informed by the training you have received on the EES team on coaching, mentoring and evaluation?* *Do you know of the EES conceptual model?*	*Can you explain this more?*
	Can you give me an example?
	Can you think of anything else?
	Why or why not?

How does it inform your role as a mentor/evaluator?	

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 3:

Tell me about your experiences as a mentor.

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
What positive experiences have you had? *What negative experiences have you had?* *Have these experiences changed how you interact with your teachers?* *Have you noticed differences in working with initial versus continuing teachers?*	*Can you explain this more?* *Can you give me an example?* *Can you think of anything else?* *Why or why not?*

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 4:

Tell me about your mentoring strategies. What is mentoring *really* like in the classroom?

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
What strategies do you often use with your teachers? *What are your thoughts on these specific strategies?*	*Can you explain this more?* *Can you give me an example?* *Can you think of anything else?* *Why or why not?*

• *Intentional thinking and mentoring practices with the teacher* • *Forming personal connection* • *Coaching with a purpose* • *Facilitating teacher's continuous learning* *What strategies do not work for you?*	

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 5:

Discuss the barriers you have experienced in your work as a mentor.

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
Think about people or things (e.g. time, resources) *State one of your biggest barriers among the list of things you just mentioned.* *How do these barriers impact your work as a mentor?*	*Can you explain this more?* *Can you give me an example?* *Can you think of anything else?* *Why or why not?*

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 6:

What supports do you need to better perform your work as a mentor?

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
Think about people or things (e.g. training, resources)	*Can you explain this more?* *Can you give me an example?* *Can you think of anything else?*

	Why or why not?

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

***CHANGING DIRECTIONS* –** Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences about being a mentor in the EES program. Now, please consider your experiences exclusively as an evaluator for the duration of the interview!

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – AS AN EVALUATOR

QUESTION 7:

Will you tell me what motivated you to become an evaluator in the EES program?

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
Is there anything in addition to what you have mentioned?	*Can you explain this more?*
	Can you give me an example?
	Can you think of anything else?
	Why or why not?

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 8:

Will you describe your interpretation of the role you play as an evaluator?

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
*What do you think your role **is** or **should** look like?*	*Can you explain this more?*
	Can you give me an example?
	Can you think of anything else?
Is your role informed by the training you have received on the EES team on coaching, mentoring and evaluation?	*Why or why not?*

Do you know of the EES conceptual model? *How does it inform your role as an evaluator?*	

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 9:

Tell me about your experiences as an evaluator.

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
What positive experiences have you had? *What negative experiences have you had?* *Have these experiences changed how you interact with your teachers?* *Have you noticed differences in working with initial versus continuing teachers?*	*Can you explain this more?* *Can you give me an example?* *Can you think of anything else?* *Why or why not?*

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 10:

Tell me about your coaching strategies. What is coaching and evaluating *really* like in the classroom?

REQUIRED PROBES	GENERAL PROBES
What strategies do you often use with your teachers?	*Can you explain this more?* *Can you give me an example?* *Can you think of anything else?* *Why or why not?*

What are your thoughts on these specific strategies? • *Intentional thinking and mentoring practices with the teacher* • *Forming personal connection* • *Coaching with a purpose* • *Facilitating teacher's continuous learning* *What strategies do not work for you?*	

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 11:

Discuss the barriers you have experienced in your work as an evaluator.

REQUIRED PROBES	**GENERAL PROBES**
Think about people or things (e.g. time, resources) *State one of your biggest barriers among the list of things you just mentioned.* *How do these barriers impact your work as an evaluator?*	*Can you explain this more?* *Can you give me an example?* *Can you think of anything else?* *Why or why not?*

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 12:

What supports do you need to better perform your work as an evaluator?

REQUIRED PROBES	**GENERAL PROBES**
	Can you explain this more?

Think about people or things (e.g. training, resources)	*Can you give me an example?*
	Can you think of anything else?
	Why or why not?

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

QUESTION 13:

Do you have any final remarks on the mentoring or evaluating before we review and close the interview?

REVIEW:

Now, I would like to take a few minutes to review what you have said. After each question, I'm going to ask you if I understood correctly and if there is anything you would like to add. This is a very important step in the process to make sure I have the right information. Feel free to stop me at any point to add anything that I may have missed.

(Review each question with the participant.)

REVIEW PROBES
Did I get that right? *Do you have anything else to add?*

CLOSING & THANK YOU

This concludes our interview. Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today! I have learned a lot from you and enjoyed our conversation. This research would not be possible without you. I ask that you do not share any information about the interview with other mentors or evaluators who are participating, as we want each of you to have the same interview experience. Thank you again, and have a lovely day!

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

- Age:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Education level:
    - Did not complete high school
    - High school diploma
    - NC Early Childhood Credential/CDA
    - Some college coursework, less than 30 credit hours
    - 1 Year community college diploma
    - 2 Year AA degree
    - 2 Year AAS degree
    - 4 Year early childhood or child development degree
    - 4 Year degree in related field (specify: _____)
    - 4 Year degree in other field (specify: _____)
    - Some graduate coursework
    - Graduate degree
- Currently held licensure (select all that apply):
    - Birth to Kindergarten
    - Elementary
    - Special Education
    - CDA
    - Other (specify: _____)
    - No Licensure
- Experience:
    - Years of experience in Early Childhood Education:
    - Years of experience with the EES program:
- Region served:
    - 1
    - 2
    - 3
    - 4
- Current caseload:

APPENDIX D: THEMES AND ADDITIONAL QUOTES

Major themes from semi-structured interviews with Mentors and Evaluators (n = 12)

Themes	Subthemes	Examples
The Coaching and Mentoring Process	The General Process	"You are there to support them, but also, to take all of the requirements that are being thrown at them from a million different direction and help them learn how to make that manageable and to learn how those requirements actually are meaningful because it will make them a better teacher."
	Role Specific Duties	"Most of the time I model everything for the teacher. So I am very interactive with the children. I would say modeling is a very large percentage of what I do, when I mentor mainly because I don't want to just give them something to do and not show them the expectations or outcomes." "So as you work through the professional teaching standards with a teacher, you're showing them their strengths, you're showing them their needs, showing them what their next steps for growth are, but you're also, you know, the professional teaching standards basically are best practice. And so you're showing them that through doing those things, they're going to be doing the best things that they can do for children, and so really I think that, you know, in a nutshell, the role of an evaluator is to use the teaching standards to guide teachers towards best practice."
Strategies to Support the Coaching and Mentoring Process	Establishing Communication Lines	"I always try and enlighten the spirit and really just lighten the mood by having conversations with them and asking questions and giving them that opportunity to explain why they might be doing something or, you know, what questions they have."
	Building Effective Relationships	"One of the things that I wanted to do was to make sure that she felt comfortable, being able to reach out when she felt like that she needed help. So that she understood that I wasn't there to pass judgment or anything. So it's just very intentional in

		developing that relationship with her from the beginning to let her know that I was there as a person for her to reach out to as a resource and as a coach."
Barriers, Motivators and Facilitators to the Coaching and Mentoring Process	Barriers – Resources	"You know, their ability to use technology sometimes or the support that I need to provide for them with technology sometimes can be a barrier."
	Barriers – Time	"I also think time is a barrier, whether you're a mentor or an evaluator that, you know, you have X amount of time. You know, you don't wanna spend more than an hour in their classroom because you wanna be respectful of the fact that you're in there, you're watching them, they feel like they're a little nervous.
	Barriers – Site Administrators	"I have some that just don't participate in the post-conferences or in the whole evaluation cycle like, you know, they're supposed to." "Administrators are supposed to shadow us at least once, and participate in post-conferences whenever possible. That is a huge barrier for me. It's hard for me to get people to participate when they don't want to, and so I always invite administrators but a lot of times they just do not participate."
	Motivators	I think one of the biggest things of satisfaction is looking and seeing a teacher move across the rubric during the course of a year. Or sometimes it's more than a year. Sometimes it takes them more than one year to move from developing to proficient. So that's one [motivating] thing, is when you have that teacher who is right there with you and trying their very best."
	Facilitators - Training/Learning Opportunities and EES Team Support	"The biggest source [of support] for me is just having those colleagues that I can reach out to that share their ideas, share their thoughts." "Then those trainings that we've gotten through EES, especially the mentor beginning training, you know, when you first start. I believe it's a couple of days of training, and really go through it piece by

		piece. And you're there with other people, other mentors, who have this experience too.
	Facilitators – Classroom Coverage	"I have been real fortunate with my teachers in both of the centers that I can get together with them at rest time or most of them usually the way their classroom structure is set up that after their group time in the morning and their center time, they go into outside time, and so they are able to find coverage during that time so that we can chat and debrief."
	Facilitators – Site Administrators	"Her biggest thing was support from her administration. When she had some big support from her administration, she did better."