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## Curriculum Coaches: Pre-Service Teachers Opinions and Perceptions within the Field of Education

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Curriculum Coaches: Pre-Service Teachers Opinions and Perceptions within the Field of  
Education

By

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Early Childhood Education

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Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
In the HTC Honors College at  
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## **Introduction**

Preservice teachers begin their journey in the field of education from the moment they take their first education course at a college or university. This journey continues throughout their careers as they advance in their understanding of pedagogy, development, and communication. Consequently, as teachers advance in their careers, they are able to better recognize the support that is available to them. However, if this knowledge of assistance that is available to teachers is known and accurately perceived from the beginning of one's educational career, teachers would be positively impacted early-on and empowered to continue their efforts of teaching for many years to follow. Because of the continual transformation that occurs within each educator, teaching can often become overwhelming and confusing, especially for new teachers (Jones, year). It is important that this topic is addressed and improved upon by politicians, school administration, teacher resources/organizations, and (specifically) teachers themselves.

The first step to obtaining support from others is understanding the support that is available. Often times, the support for struggling teachers is found in the teacher's grade level team that meets to plan lessons together, a mentor teacher who is assigned to assist new teachers thrive, or the school curriculum coach. A curriculum (or instructional) coach is a "professional who is trained in how to help teachers become more effective in the classroom" by providing professional development opportunities to teachers, researching and providing new information about teaching, and modeling (or co-teaching) strategies for teaching (Top Education Degrees, year, 1). In addition to all of these practices, curriculum coaches also provide instructional feedback regarding the effectiveness of lessons, collaborate with professionals from school districts to acquire new information, and advocate for teachers. The impact that this assistance

has on teachers and their educational practices is profound. Through these modes of support, curriculum coaches have the ability to further mold teachers into effective educators in a dignified, meaningful way.

The importance of this aid can be easily overlooked, nonetheless, because teachers are often unaware of the type of support that is available to them. To identify the validity of this statement, a survey was conducted to understand the perceptions that preservice teachers have concerning curriculum coaches in a professional setting.

### **Methods**

In this study, the researcher investigated pre-service teachers' perceptions of curriculum coaches to better understand how incoming teachers understand the role of coaches in schools and how these instructional coaches impact teachers. Additionally, this study was conducted to determine the education that pre-service teachers receive on the topic of support and assistance available to them as professionals, whether formally or informally, prior to becoming certified as educators. The researcher used Google Forms to create a survey that was composed of 10 questions. The questions included short response, multiple choice, and ranking. All questions were required of the participant to answer to complete the survey. After compiling the questions into a survey, it was then sent to all of the Spadoni College of Education professors to share with their classes. A convenience sample was utilized to complete the survey, as all participants were students at Coastal Carolina University.

### **Participants**

This study was conducted through the use of an online survey format. Participants of the study shared their major and year in school with the researcher. Of the 107 participants, three were not yet admitted into the professional teaching program, 49 were in their first semester of

Junior year, 32 were in their first semester of Senior year, 18 were in their second semester of Senior year, and five were graduate students. Of the three pre-professional program students, two were majoring in elementary education and one was majoring in early childhood education. Of the 49 first-semester Juniors, 15 were special education majors and 34 were early childhood majors. There were 32 first-semester Seniors who participate in this study, of which 15 were majoring in elementary education and the remaining 17 were majoring in early childhood education. The study included 18 second-semester Seniors who were all early childhood majors and five graduate students who were all focusing on degrees in secondary education. The study did not require or collect any information that would identify participants.

### **Data Collection**

The survey was conducted over a three week time period. Throughout this time, the study was available to participants to take whenever they were able to do so. Because the survey was sent to professors of all levels of education (early childhood, elementary, special, middle, and secondary) to share with their classes, there was a variety of inclusion in the study. The questions were strategically asked in a way for the researcher to determine commonalities in responses to address misconceptions about the topic.

### **Data Analysis**

Upon each completion of the survey, responses would be recorded and stored for the researcher to review. Because Google Forms compiles the information from all survey responses into charts and graphs, this was one less step that the researcher had to complete. At the end of the three week time period, the link to the survey was cancelled to prevent any new responses and the completed surveys were downloaded to the researcher's computer to be further analyzed and organized by response.

## Results

The results of this survey were overwhelmingly similar, with some discrepancies present as well. Participants in each year in school and each major agreed that curriculum coaches are available to teachers as a source of assistance when needed. Seventy-five percent of participants recognized this major role of instructional coaches as providing assistance to all teachers when needed. Of the remaining 25% of participants, the responses were split almost equally between three less satisfactory responses. These responses included the concept that the main goal of instructional coaches is to report information to principals, plan lessons for teachers, or gauge how focused students are during instruction. While all three of these responses may include a portion of what curriculum coaches do, these three responses would not be considered their “main goal[s]” (See Figure 1).

The vast majority of participants also shared positive thoughts on curriculum coaches stating in their descriptions of these professionals that they are “helpful”, “supportive”, and “organized”. Of the 107 responses, only four responses did not mention a synonym of these words. The words used for these four responses were either “overwhelming” or “administration”. When asked to provide information on the relationship that a curriculum coach has with a teacher, approximately 23% (25 of the 107) of the sample group of preservice teachers were unsure of the correlation of these two professions and could not describe the support that instructional coaches provide to teachers.

Participants were also asked how often instructional coaches should be in an individual classroom. Results of this question were heavily varied. While 49% of responses indicated 1-2 times per month, 47% of participants selected 1-2 times per quarter of the school year, 3%

selected 1-2 times per year, and 1% created his/her own response that stated “as many times as necessary to promote a successful learning environment (LRE) for every student” (See Figure 2).

Two similar questions of this study focused on the educational background of curriculum coaches. Of the 107 participants, 101 (or 94%) indicated that instructional coaches need to have classroom teaching experience while the remaining 6 participants did not believe this was necessary. (See Figure 3.) Similarly, 93 of the 107 participants (87%) agreed that there is additional education and training involved in becoming a curriculum coach (See Figure 4).

To gauge the personal feelings that preservice teachers felt towards curriculum coaches in the classroom, the researcher asked the participants to rank on a 1-5 scale (one being not at all, five being extremely) how intimidated they would feel if they were to be observed by a curriculum coach in their field placement class. While 10 participants chose the ranking “not at all intimidated”, 9 chose “slightly intimidated”, 43 chose “moderately intimidated”, 28 chose “very intimidated”, and 17 chose “extremely intimidated” (See Figure 5).

### **Discussion**

These results indicate that although preservice teachers recognize the support that is provided to them through a curriculum coach in a school setting, they do not fully understand the ways to maximize this support. The results in Figure 1 and Figure 2 provide evidence that preservice teachers can identify the purpose of instructional coaches and the necessity of them, but that they are unable to connect this to their own personal journey of teaching. Because preservice teachers are able to explain the support and role of a curriculum coach in a positive light, it can be assumed from the data that these professionals are viewed as mentors. Though this is true for many of the participants who stated this view-point, many other respondents shared their view of coaches being “administrators” who report findings about teachers’

instructional practices to school administration. This misperception, even if only believed by few, holds these preservice teachers back and prevents them from accepting support, guidance, and professional development opportunities that will benefit their teaching practices.

When teachers (and preservice teachers) understand the benefits provided by an effective instructional coach, they (and their students) are more likely to thrive (Louden, year). The way to provide this understanding is through education. Though teachers spend four years obtaining a degree in education, and countless hours preparing and testing for certifications, no required courses inform teachers of the support that is available to them. This ultimately leads to incoming teachers who are unaware of how to succeed and balance all aspects of teaching during their first few years of teaching. As a result of this lack of awareness, “one of the difficult aspects of the teaching profession is the isolation many teachers experience” (Louden, year). To avoid this, professional development sessions and college courses can be used to provide preservice, incoming, and veteran teachers with resources and information about how to form meaningful, professional relationships with instructional coaches.



### **Resources**

- Jones, L. (2018, September 19). The Necessity of Instructional Coaching: Helping New Teachers Thrive. Retrieved November 23, 2019, from <https://www.teachingchannel.org/tch/blog/necessity-instructional-coaching-helping-new-teachers-thrive>.
- Louden, K. (2019, October 29). Why Even the Best Schools and Teachers Need Instructional Coaches. Retrieved November 23, 2019, from <https://schoolleadersnow.weareteachers.com/instructional-coaches-needed/>.
- Top Education Degrees. (2017). What is an Instructional Coach? Retrieved November 23, 2019, from <https://www.topeducationdegrees.org/faq/what-is-an-instructional-coach/>.
- Wolpert-Gawron, H. (2016, June). The Many Roles of an Instructional Coach. Retrieved November 23, 2019, from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/jun16/vol73/num09/The-Many-Roles-of-an-Instructional-Coach.aspx>.

## Appendices

Figure 1:

What do you believe is the main goal of a curriculum coach?

107 responses

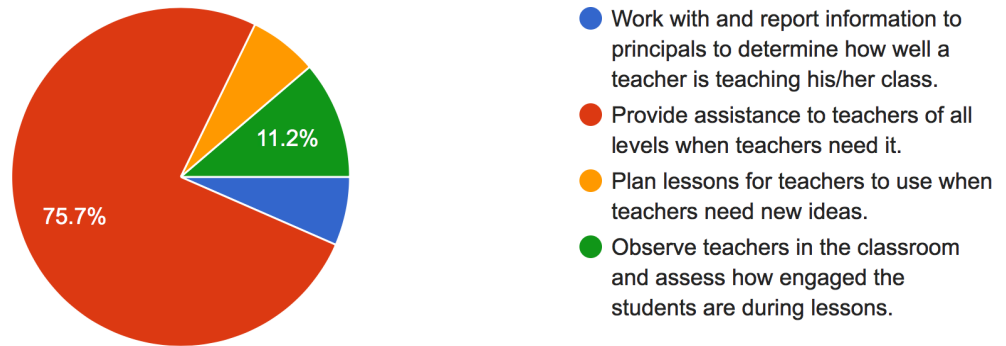


Figure 2

### How often should a coach be in an individual classroom?

107 responses

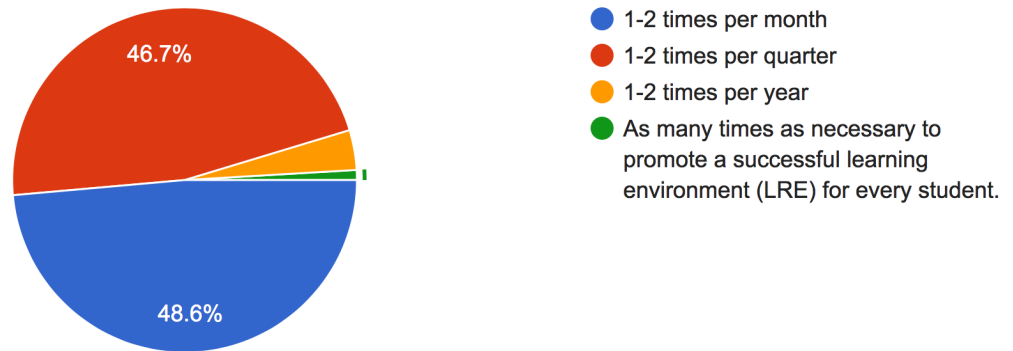


Figure 3

Does a curriculum coach need to have classroom teaching experience?

107 responses

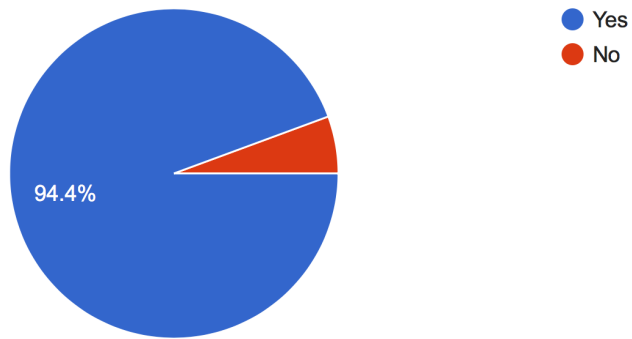


Figure 4

### Does a curriculum coach require additional education or training?

107 responses

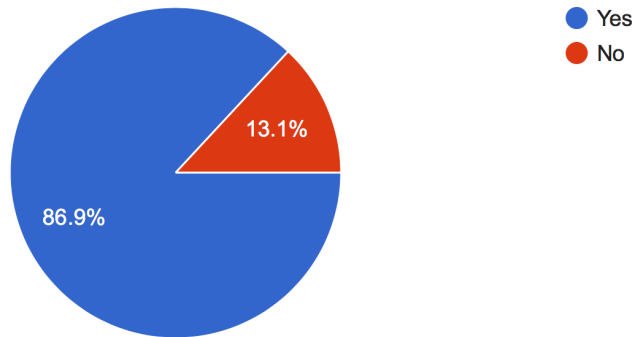


Figure 5

How intimidated would you be if a curriculum coach were to observe you teaching a lesson in your field placement?

107 responses

