

5-18-2007

## Implementing Peer Coaching in a State Funded Pre-Kindergarten Program: An Autoethnography

Darilyn Mercadel Butler  
*University of New Orleans*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

---

### Recommended Citation

Butler, Darilyn Mercadel, "Implementing Peer Coaching in a State Funded Pre-Kindergarten Program: An Autoethnography" (2007). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 546.  
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/546>

This Dissertation is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Dissertation in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Dissertation has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uno.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uno.edu).

Implementing Peer Coaching in a State Funded Pre-Kindergarten Program:  
An Autoethnography

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Curriculum and Instruction

by

Darilyn Mercadel-Butler

B.A. University of New Orleans, 1996  
M.F.A. University of New Orleans, 1999  
M.Ed. University of New Orleans, 2000

May 2007

## Dedication

To my beloved children, Jason, Jeanay, and Kendall

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to God for many blessings. The blessings of strength, courage, and determination have been crucial in allowing me to do many things in my life. I hope to use the gifts that He has bestowed upon me to make a difference in the world.

Thank you, Dr. Judith Keiff, my major professor, whose kindness, generosity, wide breadth of knowledge, and patience has guided me through this process, one that began years ago. With your contagious enthusiasm spilling over and encouraging me to do all that I can do, and your endless support after Hurricane Katrina, I was able to finish this research. Thank you, for both housing me and feeding my soul after the storm.

Many thanks to my committee: Dr. Casbergue for opening my eyes to the world of emergent literacy, Dr. Bedford to autoethnography, and to Dr. Barnitz, Dr. Gifford, and Dr. McHugh, your assistance in this process has been appreciated.

I will be forever grateful to my family. Sincere gratitude goes to my husband Bradford. I truly appreciate your encouragement. To my children, Jason, Jeanay, and Kendall, I love you and thank you for your patience and impatience, assisting me in completing this process and pushing me to reach one of my lifetime goals. I am also thankful to my mother and father, Yvonne and James Mercadel, as well as my sisters, Tamara, Natalie, Lauren and Cecily. Thanks for the loving, engaging sisterly conversations. Genuine thanks also go to very special friends.

Finally, I am grateful to the teachers who participated in the study. Their work with young children inspired me to work harder. And last but not least, very special thanks go to Charles Tate, Ashley Collins, Petrouchka Moise, Courtney Pitts, and Dr. Emily Smith; they have endlessly supported the students, teachers, and my efforts during this study.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	vii
Chapter 1 The Introduction .....	1
Definition of Terms.....	14
Chapter 2 The Connection .....	16
Research Related to Student Access to Print.....	23
Research Related to Adult Child Shared Storybook Reading .....	27
Research Related to Literacy Enriched Play Areas .....	30
Implications for Teaching Practices and Emergent Literacy.....	31
Peer Coaching .....	32
Peer Coaching as a Viable Professional Development Process.....	32
Peer Coaching as Professional Development .....	35
Functions and Principles of the Peer Coaching Process .....	36
Types of Peer Coaching .....	38
Research Related to Peer Coaching.....	39
Implications of Peer Coaching and Early Childhood Education .....	43
Further Discussion .....	44
Chapter 3 The Interpretation.....	47
Qualitative Research .....	51
Autoethnography.....	52
Autoethnographic Coding and Themes .....	55
Purpose.....	57
Participants.....	57

Who Were These Teachers .....	59
Access.....	59
Instrumentation .....	60
The Coaching Effectiveness Profile.....	60
Early Language and Literacy Observation Toolkit.....	61
The Literacy Environment Checklist .....	62
The Classroom Observation and Teacher Interview.....	62
The Literacy Activities Rating Scale .....	63
Professional Development Activities.....	64
Analysis of Numeric Data.....	67
Limitations.....	68
Summary.....	68
Chapter 4 The Realization.....	70
Teachers Building Strong Relationships.....	70
Teachers Engaging in a Change of Instructional Practice .....	72
Table 4.1 – Teachers Peer Coaching Competencies.....	73
Table 4.2 – Literacy Environment Checklist .....	74
Table 4.3 – Literacy Activities Rating Scale .....	75
Teachers Committed to Professional Growth .....	77
Chapter 5 The Explanation .....	80
Implications.....	82
Summary.....	82
Further Research .....	84

Chapter 6 The Reflection .....	85
Conclusion.....	86
References.....	89
Appendices.....	99
Appendix A – Letter of Consent.....	100
Appendix B – Peer Coaching Communication.....	102
Vita.....	104

## **ABSTRACT**

This autoethnography - rooted in the qualitative tradition of field research, explored the life experiences of the researcher which subsequently led to the preparation, implementation, and analysis of a professional development program. The purpose of this study was to reflect upon whether or not a peer coaching program would enhance the development of pre-kindergarten teachers' emergent literacy strategies in the Greater New Orleans area. This autoethnography employed the author as the research tool in order to understand the researcher's personal self within the context of the professional development. The guiding question of this study is as follows - 'does utilizing peer coaching increase teachers' emergent literacy development strategies in a pre-kindergarten program?'

This research will not only add to the body of early childhood research in the area of professional development, but also distinguish autoethnography as a viable, emerging, qualitative research method; this is because it acknowledges the link between the personal and the cultural. The study will give information relating to the effectiveness of the peer coaching program as a means to provide professional development for teachers. More importantly, students in the classrooms may benefit from the newly implemented professional development, as teachers may improve emergent literacy in the classroom.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

*Let me introduce myself. I'm Darilyn Butler, your presenter for today. I am the monitor of the four year old program within this area of the state. I have been working with this program three and a half years. I am from here in New Orleans. (pause) I completed the program for a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction, specializing in Early Childhood Education from the University of New Orleans and attended one of the schools with this program, actually kindergarten through to eighth grade... So that makes me very familiar with the schools and families and all that we deal with here in New Orleans as teachers. Well, (scanning the room), I do see some familiar faces, Ms. XYZ, Ms. THT, Ms. JKN. But don't worry, as you can see from the agenda, we have plenty of time to get to know one another. Welcome to this professional development workshop.*

My four sisters and I were raised in a small house in the ninth ward of New Orleans, Louisiana. I always loved the fact that there were five of us, never once wishing to be an only-child. I remember us always being together and playing a lot. We lived one block away from the Desire-Florida Housing Development, a really rough Housing Development. We heard and saw many things, yet I felt as though we were happy kids growing up; that is, until I turned thirteen and my parents divorced.

Then, things changed drastically. We could no longer afford food, clothing, or many of the things we enjoyed when they were together. We attended Catholic school when they were married but, after the divorce, we had to change to public school. We felt like and had become children of a single parent. To us, my mother's greatest (and only) wish at that time was that we all graduate from high school; lucky for us, her constant nagging about homework and boys kept us on the straight and narrow. She would always say, "You girls need to know how to take care of yourselves." She challenged us at every turn and a day never went by when she didn't discuss something about college. She would always mention things that could happen 10 or 15 years later, as if we really had academic futures. At the time, we couldn't see that far.

Of course, New Orleans is a city loaded with character and tradition – and my family was really grounded in that tradition. Even now as we live in different parts of the United States, we almost always eat red beans and rice on Mondays, fish or some type of seafood on Fridays, and we "make groceries" instead of "purchasing" them like most other Americans. Interestingly, with all of the wonderful cultural traditions we honor and celebrate we carry with us many other idiosyncratic tendencies that haunt us as well. For instance, we carry a thick accent (hard to mask at times), a tendency to enjoy an overabundance of seafood and other rich, sauced foods and, like many other families in Louisiana, ours is very religious – Catholic, to be specific. My mother was undeniably afraid to dissolve her marriage through divorce for fear of being excommunicated from the church, even though the relationship was an abusive one. Thank goodness she did though.

*As you can see from the agenda, our topic for today's professional development workshop is Peer Coaching. But, before we discuss the topic, I would like for you to give me information about yourselves. I would like to know how you feel about your skills as coaches before we begin this professional development process this year. On your tables, you will find the Coaching Effectiveness Profile. Please take a moment to answer the survey.*

After the divorce, my mother enrolled in nursing school. She hadn't worked while she was married to my father. She promised that she would not become dependent on anyone again, making sure to stress this to us throughout our lives. She taught us to cook, clean, wash our clothes, use indoor and outdoor tools, repair appliances, cut grass, and pay bills; furthermore, she insisted that we handle business transactions very early in our lives. It drove us crazy at the time and, with six women in the house, we would all say to her, "Whoa mom, we don't need to know this kinda stuff right now!" And she would always reply, "You never know." Her precedent took hold with the older girls though, as we would often share what we knew with the younger kids, passing along the knowledge for survival.

We learned to live with my mother (without my father) and visited my father and stepmother during summers in Mobile, Alabama. My mother's family – one full of brothers and sisters, were not very optimistic about our futures. A woman alone with five children in the 70's was not enviable to most in that environment. They did not appreciate her tenacious need to prove independence. This totally isolated us from her family though and, oddly enough, at the time we did not know we were a part of the woman's liberation movement.

High school was uneventful and difficult to complete. I was really bored and ready to move on. My mother's wishes began to come true as my older sister graduated from high school and then I did, a year later. I was two years younger than she but skipped the third grade because I was a precocious student. This wasn't apparent in high school though, as I was not motivated whatsoever; this is partially because we moved to the eastern part of New Orleans and I unhappily attended three high schools within four years, one of them twice in alternate years. I was not at all proud of myself academically and did little to nothing to change my performance. If I knew one thing for sure during high school, it was that I wanted leave New Orleans as soon as I could. I applied to college in Georgia and was accepted at an all women's college in Atlanta. I was thrilled.

*Thank you. You have completed your Coaching Effectiveness Survey. It is important to know that our professional development affects the students in our classrooms. According to a theorist, Urie Bronfenbrenner, each person is significantly affected by interactions among a number of overlapping systems. For me, it is his ecological systems theory that is influencing these professional development activities. If you notice, on the diagram, the student is at the center of the microsystem. The Microsystems are the systems that intimately and immediately shape human development.*

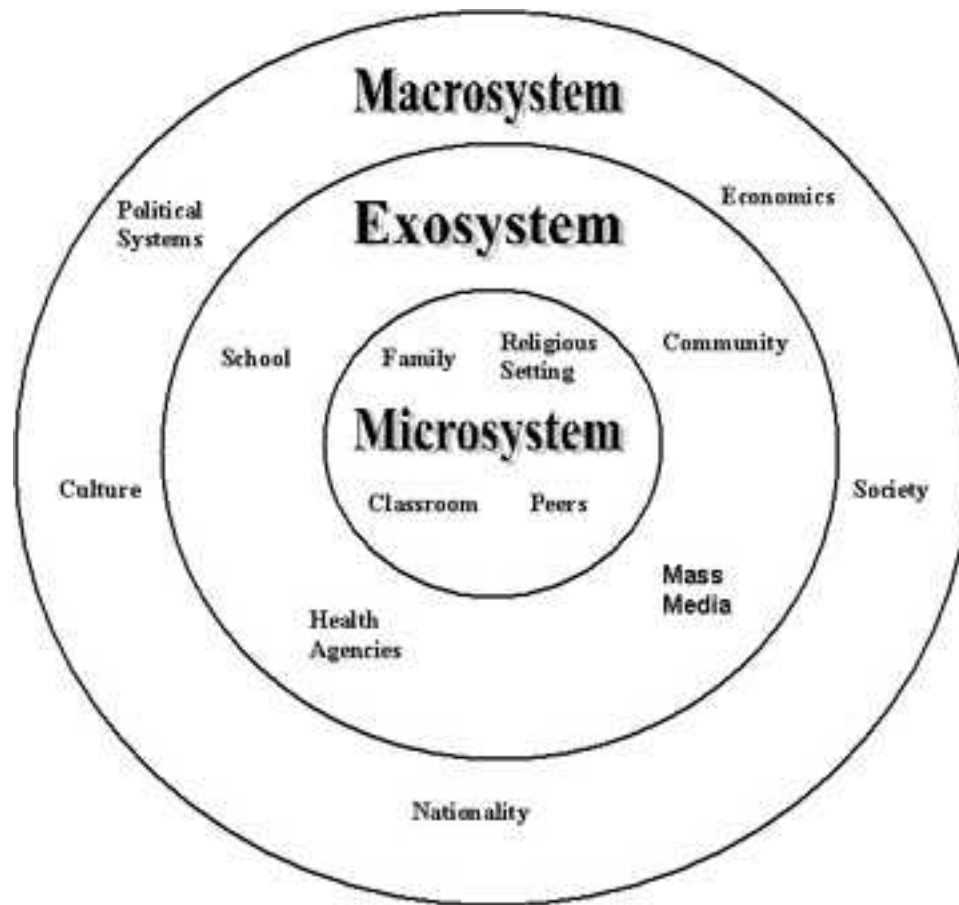


Table 1.1

(Berger, 2000)

*According to Bronfenbrenner's theory, pre-kindergarten teachers and their practices have a direct impact upon the individuals in their classrooms via the Mesosystem. The Mesosystem actually entails the influences between Microsystems and relates to constructs such as family experiences, school experiences and those of family to peers, and the social institutions. Together, the systems describe the social context of human development, (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Now, what we do in the classroom, the experiences, opportunities, and environments created by us (teachers and schools) within and among young children's mesosystem, are crucial to their micosystems and as a result important to the total development of young children. Your volunteering here today shows your understanding of the impact that you have on the students in your classrooms.*

Atlanta was liberating for me. I was seventeen and felt as though I was ready to take on the world. I had successfully entered my freshman year, but personally wallowed over the lack of a focused academic path, even though I quickly learned the city and made friends easily. I soaked up the rich African-American history that was provided as a part of the college environment and was unbelievably inspired by the legacy of Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement – something quite permanent in Atlanta. It was in Atlanta that I discovered the immense class differences within the African-American community, my desire to assist with community action, and my ability to help people. My sense of spirit began to take shape in Atlanta as my environment in New Orleans had not exposed me to issues of very different perspectives.

I lived in Atlanta three years. The cost of college there was more than what our family could handle without major financial assistance, and on top of it, I was not a stellar student. I knew that my mother did not have the funds to support my less than par education, so I headed back to New Orleans. I began to work at a mall, and in a gynecologist's office where my mother was an office manager; I was deeply unhappy about my schooling and my future. She had my three younger sisters to get through high school and stressed that I had to take care of myself. I did want to finish college, but I also had the need to see more of the world. I worked long and hard enough to buy a car, and I hit the road. Ironically enough, my travels included visiting friends at college campuses throughout the US. I traveled back to Atlanta often, and to Montana, Colorado, North Carolina, Washington, DC, Texas, California, Mexico and many other places. Oddly enough, it was while in Grambling, Louisiana at a football game at Grambling State University where I met my husband; from there, things completely changed.

*You have been randomly paired with a peer coaching partner. You and another person share a quote about education that is written on the back of an index card in your packet. Right now you will have time to match up quotes, get to know one another, and... (pause) please, please exchange personal information. Along with your quotes, you will find ice breaker questions that you may ask your peer coaching partner in order to get to know him or her. You have forty minutes.*

A year after marrying my husband, we had our first child. A year after having our son, we had a daughter. My life slowed, yet sped up at the same time. My travels changed too, as I was determined to provide my children with a loving home and a positive environment in which to grow. This included their daily care and/or day care environments. I decided I would become a stay-at-home mom rather than work outside of the home; instead of road trips to Southeastern Conference basketball games, they became ‘during the night trips’ to the children’s hospital with my son’s chronic ear infections and daughter’s seasonal asthma attacks.

With one running and both in diapers, I got the fever for adult conversation and serious intellectual stimulation. I did the “Mommy and Me” programs with the children and frequented the zoo, aquarium, and children’s museum weekly. Yet I felt like I was missing something, that I was not making progress towards my own life. I woke up one morning and compiled a list of things that I had always wanted to accomplish - graduating from college was at the very top of that list. I enrolled in the undergraduate program at the University of New Orleans and majored in communications. After earning a bachelor’s degree, I enrolled in graduate school. The university became a positive environment that aided my children’s development. They were enrolled at The Children’s Center, affording me peace of mind, as I knew that they were in a safe, nurturing, and educationally stimulating environment. So I kept on going!

*Wow! You all got to talking right away! This is great! I hope that you have exchanged information. We are having this type of professional development because of a few reasons. (1) Many of you have asked me personally for a way that you teachers can get together and discuss classroom strategies in an interesting way without the schools' administration guiding the professional development. (2) You also asked that I assist you in organizing a way that you could collaborate with teachers in the different schools in this program. And (3), I believe the fact that training and educational experiences of early childhood teachers and staff varies dramatically and that quality ecological interactions would require continual training and education as well as ongoing support networking. My hope is that this professional development, which includes peer coaching, will fulfill what you have requested, assist you in gaining new skills, and allow you to share what you learn with one another, and with the students in your classrooms.*

I began my graduate education at UNO while volunteering in the elementary school classrooms of my children. My participation in an early childhood education course focused my thoughts specifically to early childhood education. After funds from a grant ran out, I returned to the country's home workforce; specifically, I began teaching pre-school while working on my graduate studies. But I experienced my first actual year of teaching within the public school system in New Orleans. I was fresh out of the classroom and ready to share what I had learned in grad school, but was floored when I met with the principal and she passed me a box of chalk across her desk. I was in her office to ask about classroom materials and supplies. As she gave me the box of chalk, she said that that was all she had been given when she began teaching; she then said, 'good luck', and left me for the day. I was flabbergasted.



*I now want to introduce you to our presenter on peer coaching and the Coaching Effectiveness Profile. She will work with us on a variety of activities so that we will have the necessary peer coaching competencies to work and share with one another. Later, the classroom strategies that you will work on while peer coaching will be determined. I have heard many concerns from you about a number of issues and have asked you to write them down on paper and give them to me. The topic to be discussed, while you are peer coaching, will come from **your** questions, concerns, and comments. Once again have a great peer coaching workshop and, good luck!*

There were a few books in the classroom, hardly any materials and supplies that were of substance, nothing like the veteran teacher's materials next door. She suggested that if I was really nice to the principal, eventually I would get "stuff" as well. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. How could she have so many materials and I not have anything?

I thought, at first, that maybe it was things — books, play materials, puzzles, paint, puppets — which were from her veteran teacher supply that she has kept over the years. But it was not; it was, however, from newly purchased items from Title 1 funds. How did I know? I knew this because I peeked at the inventory tags that were posted on the items. I couldn't believe it. What about the children? There were twenty five in my class and twenty five in the other... were they not the same kids? I was naïve.

I had the classroom at the very end of the building; but that was not the reason for my feelings of isolation. I was feeling unsupported and, eventually, resentful because of the school's administration that pit new teachers against veteran teachers, principal's friends against non-friends, and gossip that was both unproductive and suffocating. It became really tough when the

principal began to question my developmentally appropriate teaching practices. Yet I was intent on finishing out the academic year. She began to come to my classroom *often* to see what was happening inside. She was adamantly against my learning or activity centers in the classroom and, after having donations of materials, supplies, and literature brought in, she was livid. She asked that I share the materials with the veteran teacher, and I refused. This made her very angry. But after I stood my ground and declined to share, she didn't bother me *as much*. I finished the year at the school because of the wonderful students and the families I had grown to really appreciate.

When the tumultuous first year of teaching ended in May 2003, I responded to a request for proposals issued by a nonpublic pre-kindergarten program. The request was a solicitation for qualified persons to provide program monitoring services in the state of Louisiana. I issued a response in the form of a proposal and was awarded the contract to serve the Orleans and Jefferson Parish regions of the state. My capacity in this venture was to monitor a pre-kindergarten program, ensuring that the private and parochial schools' administrations, and teachers, were serving the four-year-old population of students in the appropriate capacity. Also included was the obligation to provide technical assistance, albeit limited, and to promote opportunities for professional development and growth with the faculty, staff, and administrations.

While working with the nonpublic pre-kindergarten program of 25 schools and approximately 50 classrooms in the years 2004-05, the overall goal of providing students a high quality early childhood education was often a challenge. While a few teachers were knowledgeable about early childhood education, many of the teachers working with the program were not. Many were bachelor degreed but not certified by the state to teach early childhood

education. Many were not knowledgeable about best practices or strategies in four- year old preschool programs. It was a necessity that I observe the classrooms while working with the schools. Often, the observations were not positive. I consulted with the program staff, sharing information related to the schools and early childhood. Consequently, this led to changes in the guidelines of the program, particularly with teacher qualifications and classroom materials and supplies.

An interesting turning point came during the 2004-05 school year, when the new guidelines were established. It was the cost of the mandatory requirements of classroom furniture, materials, supplies, and literature that had all of the administrators at their wits end. The teachers were also at their wits end; not sure what *to do* with all of the classroom materials they had received. The director of the program set the mandatory requirements of classroom furniture, literature, materials, and supplies, but only after multiple consultations with staff, the other program monitor and myself. Previously we (the program staff) had nicely asked the schools to comply, but implementation of the new guidelines was just not occurring. It became necessary to think of other alternatives to refining the teachers' strategies. Slowly, hesitantly, but surely, the schools began purchasing the classroom items. Unfortunately, many of the teachers did not know how or what to do with the new resources.

Relaying the theories, practices, and reasoning behind the materials, supplies, and literature to the teachers of many different educational backgrounds had become frustrating and tedious. The administrators at the schools were insisting upon an explanation of every item's usage because of the cost, and the teachers were baffled by the abundance of materials, supplies, and literature. Though the questions were very interesting, the sheer number of them made me

realize that the teachers should discover, reflect, and discuss them on their own. Subsequent to their number, they were also varied, such as:

“How do I arrange my classroom? How many learning or activity centers should I have? Do I have to display all of the play materials? Do I have to have a sand and water table? Should we have a reading corner *or* a writing center or both? How many tables can I have in my classroom? What in the world do we do with all the books? Why so many books? Where do we store them? Which books should I display? How many do we display at one time?” As I mentioned earlier, these were great questions with great answers, and I wanted to talk with every single teacher and assist with every single classroom and every single question - but I couldn't. It was not physically or mentally possible to do so, and this bothered me.

I was bothered because the teacher training for the school year had already occurred in August where the teachers were to gain all program information, information relating to planning, classroom environment, activities, and assessment. Unfortunately, the August teacher training did not answer the questions the teachers were asking about the newly acquired materials, supplies, and literature. I had to find suitable professional development that would remove me from the process as much as possible. This had to be a process for the teachers that would have a life of its own; coupled with the pre-kindergarten program work and my family, I knew that I needed to work on my dissertation even though it would be quite difficult.

One day, while visiting Dr. Kieff - my major professor and advisor, in order to hash out concerns about my role as a monitor in the schools, she suggested that I look into mentoring. I left her office and began to research articles related to teachers and mentoring, and came across the concept of peer coaching; I was fascinated. Peer coaching, as it was described in the literature, involved everything I was trying to accomplish as a monitor. First, the teachers were

totally involved in their own process of professional development. Second, I could assist in the structure of the program, but not be involved as an evaluator or monitor. Third, the teachers, on their own, would initiate the inquiry and the dialogue. Fourth, if the peer coaching was successful, by showing an increase in the teachers' practices and strategies, the director of the program were likely to regard peer coaching as a viable option for the teachers development. Finally, the information gained could assist other early childhood education providers, teachers, or researchers by adding information to the early childhood education body of literature.

Through monitoring and observing classrooms, I witnessed the way in which teachers development of literacy practices was very inconsistent. Students' access to literacy, access to materials, and interactions within certain environments were highly differentiated. I also realized the scoring on the state's assessment instrument showed an increase in the area of emergent literacy when the teachers had some type of early childhood education. This scoring was also consistent when the teachers' assessed themselves. I equated the differences of emergent literacy practices to the variation of education and training of early childhood staff. I thought, if the training and educational experiences of early childhood staff varied this dramatically in these classrooms, in order to improve ecological interactions through emergent literacy development with students, teachers would need continual training and education as well as ongoing support networks. It appeared that peer coaching emerged as a valuable process to get the teachers involved in this action.

Interesting... could this also be suitable research for my dissertation? I began to see that I had similar purposes for both monitoring and dissertation research. Things were coming together as one. The guiding question of this study would be "does utilizing peer coaching increase teachers' emergent literacy development strategies in a pre-kindergarten program?"

The purpose would be to reflect upon whether or not a peer coaching program would enhance the development of pre-kindergarten teachers' emergent literacy strategies in an early childhood education program in the Greater New Orleans area. This could possibly be a significant contribution to professional development as the teachers would, in essence, direct their own growth as professionals. It was utterly fascinating to me.

Accordingly, while developing these ideas, the following terms surfaced, some of which are explained here:

### **Definition of Terms**

**Autoethnography** – A qualitative method of inquiry where the use of self as a data source is prominent, personalized research using highly personalized accounts to extend an understanding of a particular discipline or culture (Holt, 2003).

**Emergent Literacy; Emergent Literacy Development** – The precursory knowledge about reading and writing that children acquire prior to conventional literacy instruction and that they bring to the task of learning to read (Justice & Pullen, 2003).

**Emergent Literacy Practices; Strategies** – Teachers' use of materials, supplies, literature, instruction, that supports the development of young children's reading, writing and language

**Dyads; Pairs** - The pairing of teachers to work together in peer coaching

**In Service** – Teacher professional development activities

**Peer Coaching** – Collegial coaching and cognitive coaching seeking to improve existing teacher practices by refining techniques, developing collegiality, increasing professional dialogue, and assisting teachers to reflect on their teaching (Ackland, 1991; Becker, 1996).

**Professional Development** - Teacher's professional education while engaged in teaching; extension of teachers' education

**Writing** - Method of inquiry; choice cultural reflection, making use of experiences on paper

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Connection

*Welcome Back!! According to Robbins (1991), peer coaching provides an avenue for you to tailor a staff development plan for yourselves. This supports your desire to be self-directed. As you now know from this peer coaching workshop, you can become action researchers in your own classrooms and investigate the connections between your own planning, your teaching behaviors, and the consequences or outcomes for students. (Robbins, 1991). I have reviewed the questions and comments you've submitted. Many of you had questions related to the wide variety of children's literature, materials, and supplies that have been stocked in your classrooms. Other questions and comments are related to emergent literacy development. As you may already know, in 1969, Piaget theorized that students learn best by interacting with their environment, which means, while you are peer coaching, you will be discussing emergent literacy development within the students' environment, utilizing the materials and supplies within the pre-kindergarten classrooms. We will attempt to see what we can do to work with the materials, using them to the greatest benefit towards developing emergent literacy. I hope you will enjoy discussing this topic with one another! The idea is that you exchange strategies, methods, or manners of support for literacy, utilizing the peer coaching competencies. You will also have access to an assessment instrument to work with during the observation of one another's classrooms.*



*It is called the ELLCO, the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool Kit (Smith, Dickerson, Sangeorge, & Anastasopoulos, 2002). This tool kit will equip you with observational tools to go along with your coaching. Dr. Brown will work with us on the ELLCO training right now. Let's have fun!*

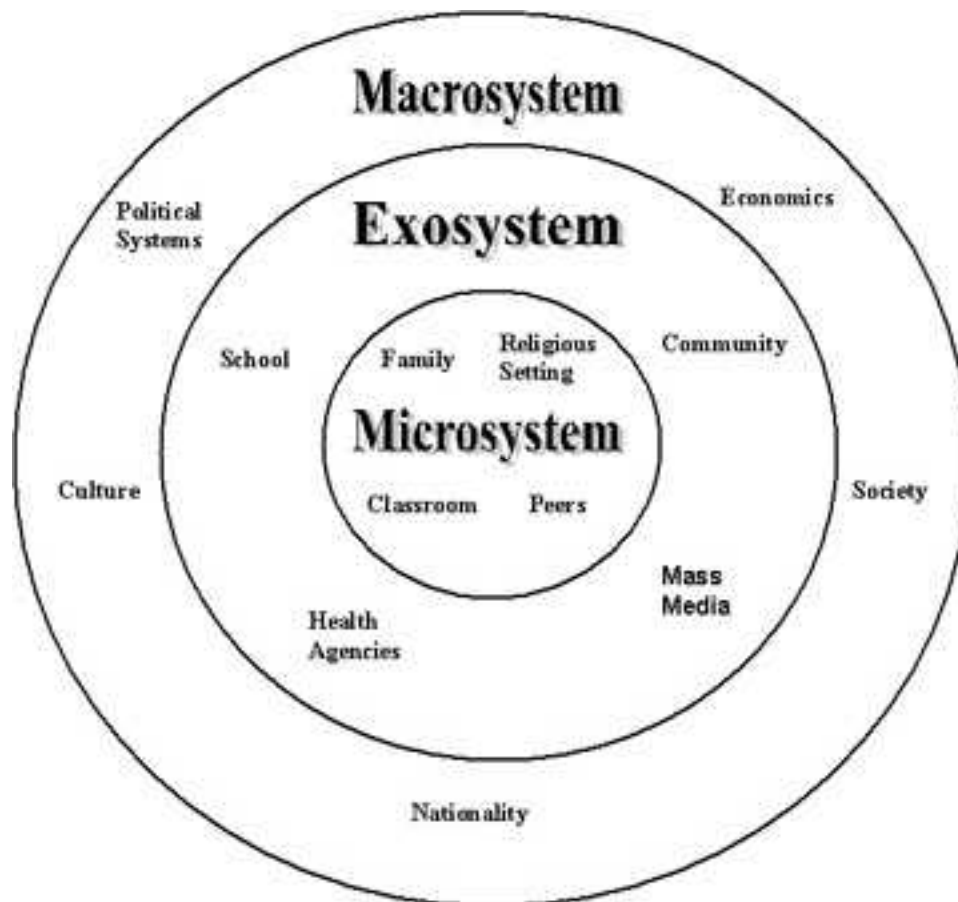
Once I realized the teachers' commitment to the professional development process, the guiding question of the research became clear, "does utilizing peer coaching increase teachers' emergent literacy development strategies in a pre-kindergarten program?" I also understood my purpose - to assess whether or not a peer coaching program would enhance the development of the teachers' emergent literacy strategies. Naturally, I was led to ground this research in supportive theory and research. I was confident that the research of Piaget (1969) and Vygotsky (1978) would provide a solid theoretical foundation for the development of the teachers' questions and comments. I also knew that it would be Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory that would influence the professional development plan and entire research project.

I had perused personal research I completed years ago. I once authored a literature review related to state and federal policies regarding their affect on children and families. The paper highlighted how state and federal legislators could be creating and implementing policies that may have a negative affect on the people whom they are serving. As I observed this policymaking, via an internship at a nonprofit organization, I felt the need to review literature in that area. It was while discussing this disconnect - between public policy and children and families, that Dr. Judith Kieff and Dr. Patricia Snyder suggested I take a look at research by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). I did.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory reviews how a child at the center of the model is significantly affected by interactions among a number of overlapping systems. The interactions intersect across the various layers (*see table - 2.1*). It was my intent, like Bronfenbrenner’s (1979), to maintain policies, administrators, family structures, schools, classrooms, teachers, and people connected to the child, all affect the child’s development. Consequently, it is also Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory that helped to build a research foundation for this project. In the same sense, I believe the teachers in the classroom and the classroom environment have a direct impact on the child.

Table – 2.1

(Berger, 2000)



In *The Ecology of Human Development*, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains the microsystems are the systems that intimately and immediately shape human development and the primary **microsystems** for children include the family, peer group, classroom, neighborhood, and sometimes a church, temple, or mosque as well. The interactions among the microsystems, as when parents and teachers coordinate their efforts to educate the child, take place through the **mesosystem**. Bronfenbrenner continues to theorize that, surrounding the microsystems, is the **exosystem**, which includes all the external networks, such as community structures and local educational, medical, employment, and communications systems that influence the microsystems; and, influencing all other systems is the **macrosystem**, which includes cultural values, political philosophies, economic patterns, and social conditions. Together, these systems make up the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Bronfenbrenner also wrote about the underlying importance of developmental relations between an active individual and his or her integrated, complex and changing ecology. He discussed theory developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky's theory posits that the creation of a zone of proximal development is an essential feature of learning. That is, learning "awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.90). A more capable adult or peer help create the child's zone of proximal development, highlighting "those functions (in the child) that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state... Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement" (p.86).

While my kids were growing and during my early childhood education coursework, I had come to believe children's independent developmental achievement provides a critical foundation for any subsequent cognitive development. A child's learning and development cannot be considered separate from the individual's social environment - their ecocultural niche (Neuman & Celano, 2001). That said, I was clearly aware of how the early environments of poor and low-income children might not support optimal cognitive development or emergent literacy (Neuman, Celano, et. al, 2001). It was both from the teachers' questioning and my observations in many of the classrooms in the city where I internalized these beliefs. Also, the experiences in my life illustrated how students' emergent literacy development was greatly affected by socio-economic advantage or disadvantage.

While witnessing the differences of economics and support for emergent literacy in the classrooms, I recognized and understood the enormous responsibility of the teachers. As expressed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), the experiences, opportunities and environments created by the teachers and schools within and among young children's mesosystem, are crucial to their microsystems, and as a result, important to their cognitive development and the development of emergent literacy. More often than not, I noticed teachers lacked the literature, materials, and supplies necessary to facilitate good emergent literacy development; and many times, even after the teachers had gained or acquired the literature, materials, or supplies that it takes for optimal emergent literacy development within the classroom environment, the teachers did not know what to do with them.

In a book edited by Strickland and Morrow (1989), Morrow describes how children from literacy-rich environments learn to read before coming to school. She mentions key practices that occur in those homes to promote literacy: (1) supportive parents, (2) environments rich with

literacy materials, (3) adults responding to children's literacy based questions and comments, (4) parents providing experiences that help them learn to read, and importantly (5) parents read to them, help them to write and read, and read themselves. For students outside of literacy rich environments though, the burden then lies with the schools, teachers, and classrooms to provide supportive emergent literacy and language environments (Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan, & Colton, 2003; Taylor, Blum, & Logsdon, 1986; Morrow & Rand, 1991; Vukelich, 1990; 1994; Neuman & Roskos, 1992; 1993; and 1997). Similarly, if early childhood programs practice similar processes or key practices, such as those described by the researchers and that of parents in literacy rich environments, teachers could be successful at serving children who do not come from literacy rich environments.

The research states, for most children, much of emergent literacy is gained during the preschool years before formal schooling (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001; Watkins & Bunce, 1996). Emergent literacy opportunities associated with these accomplishments should include: print awareness, word awareness, graphic awareness, and metalinguistic awareness (Justice & Ezell, 2001). Children who live within literacy rich environments gain these broad elements of emergent literacy prior to formal schooling. Quite possibly, as literacy rich homes give students opportunities to nurture emergent literacy development, preschools could as well (Dickinson, D. & McCabe, A., 2001). The teachers of the program could assist one another through peer coaching, as a means to create opportunities and environments to support the students' emergent literacy.

Like Piaget, I believe children acquire knowledge by interacting with the world and the environment (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). If teachers construct their own knowledge about environmental practices that would promote emergent literacy, they (the teachers), could then

become successful at promoting emergent literacy development. Justice & Pullen (2003), state three approaches show the most promising effectiveness as emergent literacy interventions; (a) adult-child shared storybook reading, (b) literacy enriched play settings, and (c) teacher-directed structured phonological awareness curricula (p. 99). Important to the emergent literacy development process is frequent, informal, and naturalistic interactions with written and oral language with supportive and mediated opportunities with adult caregivers (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002; Watkins & Bunce, 1996). I accepted these approaches as useful and necessary strategies and decided to include them within the professional development; but because each teacher utilizes a different type of curricula to promote phonological awareness, albeit important, the peer coaching professional development program highlighted the adult child shared storybook reading and the literacy enriched play settings.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory posits that the creation of a zone of proximal development is an essential feature of learning. This became essential to my planning as I developed an understanding of how important teachers' professional development is to implementing quality emergent literacy practices within a classroom setting. It is quite possible for students to gain meaningful accomplishments in print awareness, word awareness, graphic awareness and meta-linguistic awareness with appropriate practice strategies in place. For the purpose of this research, and to assist the teachers with the professional development of peer coaching, this study involved the teachers working towards improving students' access to print in the environment, adult-child shared storybook reading, and creating literacy-enriched play settings. This involved the teachers creating, working, and assisting one another within their zones of proximal development.

## Research Related to Student Access to Print in the Classroom Environment

I understood how important the influence of literacy in the environment had become. Years ago, the impact of how literacy environment was structured, had not been considered by researchers with such depth. Though recent evidence suggests that such considerations are critically important (Atwell, 1987, Graves, 1983; Justice & Pullen, 2003; Morrow & Weinstein, 1986, Neuman & Roskos, 1997), careful attention should have been and should now be paid to the physical arrangement of the classroom and with the selection of literacy and play materials. There is a true need to maximize literacy goals in the classrooms by creating literacy-enriched play settings. According to the literature, the environment should be rich with different forms of text; this includes utilizing print and print resources in the classroom, as they are essential to instructional success (Casbergue, R., McGee, L., & Bedford, A. *in press*; Morrow & Rand, 1991).

I reviewed more research by Susan Neuman, coming upon a study in 1999 wherein she examined the impact of an intervention program designed to flood over 330 child care centers with high quality children's books and provided 10 hours of training to the child care staff. The program targeted centers of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It is described as a formative experiment, systematically sampling 400 three and four-year-old children randomly selected from 50 centers across 10 regions and 100 children from comparable child care centers not involved in the study. Fascinatingly, children's early literacy skills — receptive language, concepts of print, environmental print, letter name knowledge, concepts of writing, and narrative competence, were assessed before and after the study.

Throughout her study, Neuman assessed child-care practices by photographing the physical environments. Literacy-related interactions were assessed between teachers and children in sample classrooms as well as storybook reading activity in both the treatment and control groups. The results indicate enhanced physical access to books, greater verbal interaction around literacy, and more time spent reading and relating to books. Neuman (1999) concluded that with greater access to literacy materials, children in the intervention group scored statistically significantly higher than the control group on four of six assessment measures, with gains still very much evident six months later in kindergarten. She also notes that her findings provide powerful support for the physical proximity of books and the psychological support to child care staff on children's early literacy development (Neuman, 1999).

In 2001, similar findings are described in the manuscript, *Access for All: Closing the Book Gap for Children in Early Education*, by Neuman, S., Greco, A., Celano, D., & Shue, P. This document provides a comprehensive overview of information relating to students' access to print. The authors talk about how children learn a wide array of language competencies related to literacy development through books. Critical to a young student's literacy development is the access to literature in the classroom and school environment and, because books play such a central role in children's literacy development, Neuman et al. reveals extensive statistics outlining the overview of the consumer book market, and disclosing which families buy books. According to the authors of this study, households with incomes above \$30,000 represent what the authors call book-buying families. As we might expect, education influences book purchasing, as adults with a high school degree and above are more likely to purchase books than those with less education (Neuman et al., 2001). Nevertheless, the acquisition of books requires purchasing power, and this leads to lack of access for children from families of low income.



Along with the other studies, Neuman et al. (2001) utilized a fast response survey of pre-kindergarten classrooms to examine the issues of: (1) the approximate number of books per classroom, (2) the average budget and sources of funding for book purchases, (3) the major source for acquiring books, and (3) the condition and quality of books in the collections. According to the survey, there is reason for concern. The results indicated that book collections in early childhood classrooms averaged from mediocre to poor and without efforts to reverse the trend, early childhood programs will not close the book gap for children from low-income families (Neuman et al., 2001). The survey found that 60% of the centers buy less than 50 books per year although they are likely to enroll more than 65 children each year. Budgets were found to be particularly low for books; over 38% of the books come from donations and, only 26% of the books in the collection are in good condition, 49% adequate, and 25% described as in poor condition.

As I read through the studies, the importance of children having access to books became clear - access is crucial to literacy development. Without access to books, children may be denied the very experiences most essential to vocabulary development, word analysis skills, fluency, and comprehension in the early years (Neuman et al., 2001). Even with limited access to books, the students are also likely to lack experience with different genres, storybooks, informational texts, and poetry, among others, which prepare them for reading for different purposes (Duke, 2000). Research also indicates young children can learn much about how the world works from informational books. Background knowledge and experience, along with the processing of expository text, are critical to continued success in reading (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

In research examining book access and the environment, Neuman and Celano (2001) discuss students' access to print in low income and middle-income communities through an ecological study of four neighborhoods. They examine print in two low income and two middle income neighborhoods in a large industrial city and document the availability of print in these communities. The study focuses on resources considered to be influential in a child's development as a writer and reader. This information was gained from the year-long study which showed large differences between neighborhoods with access to print. Neuman and Celano (2001), along with a multicultural team, devised a theory of community influences that might have an impact on children's early literacy development.

They define community access as: the quantity and selection of children's books that parents can conceivably purchase in the neighborhood, environmental print (signs, labels, logos), the public areas where children might observe people reading, the quantity and quality of books in the child-care centers they would most likely attend, the quantity and quality of books in the local elementary school library, and the collections in the local public library (p.13).

In this quantitative study, a research team surveyed the communities, using census boundaries to account for the number of places likely to have reading materials, signage, public spaces for reading, and books in child care centers; they also surveyed the school and public libraries. The results of the data indicate that there were minor differences in access to print materials; while there were noticeable differences between neighborhoods of similar income, there were major and striking differences at almost all levels between neighborhoods of different income (Neuman & Celano, 2001).

According to the research, “children from middle-income neighborhoods were likely to be deluged with a wide variety of reading materials; however, children from poor neighborhoods would have to aggressively and persistently seek them out” (p.15).

### Research Related to Adult-Child Shared Storybook Reading

I realized that a critical look at getting books into students’ hands propels the discussion of teacher-student interaction with the literature. Circle time often occurs in early childhood classrooms with many teachers unaware of its true significance. Teachers include the storybook session within their daily plans as a ritual without really knowing its value to students. Very frequently, teachers are only vaguely aware of the many cognitive and social dimensions of story-time and, therefore, might not make the most of it (Strickland & Taylor, 1989). In recent years, educators have learned a great deal about the acquisition of reading and oral language development, and much of this knowledge helps us to explain why adult-child shared storybook experiences are important to early language and literacy development (Justice & Pullen, 2003; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). According to Mason, Peterman, and Kerr (1989), storybook reading provides students with information and influences students’ retelling ability; Morrow (1988) also found that one-on-one reading to children in day care improved their ability to talk about stories.

While reviewing the literature, I found a few studies that examined the *number* of adult-child shared storybook reading. According to Susan Neuman (1999) adult-child interactions have never been described as particularly rich in early childhood settings. Neuman discusses this research – that of Bruner (1980), Helburn (1995), and Wood, McMahon, and Cranstoun, (1980), which documents information that the small amount of adult-child talk that does occur in early childhood settings tends to be brief and adult-dominated, with children’s roles often confined to

following teacher directives and imperatives. Currently, researchers acknowledge that this could be detrimental to the literacy learning process, because listening to and responding to books is viewed as a vital resource for building background knowledge, fostering language development, linking reading to writing, developing a sense of story, and building positive attitudes about books and print (Strickland, 1987; Taylor & Strickland, 1986). As stated by Watkins & Bunce (1996), shared adult-child storybook reading is definitively powerful because it is an interactive context that is contextualized, authentic, meaningful, interesting, and motivating to the young student.

In my personal experience, I witnessed, everyday, early childhood teachers spending a great deal of time with whole group instruction, yet forgetting the one-on-one interaction needed to encourage students' literacy and language attempts. Kieff and Casbergue (2000) suggest once teachers have planned for classroom themes, projects, and centers and have carefully selected appropriate materials, their role must become that of an active participant in children's language and literacy learning. More often than not, in my opinion, this was not occurring in the classrooms where I observed. Language and literacy should occur, not as a result of solitary exploration of things in the classroom environment, but from the rich interactions that should infuse every part of the curriculum (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000). Teachers can facilitate the process of literacy and language development by facilitating students' language through dramatic play and play in center areas within the classroom. Teachers can also encourage students' verbalization and writing attempts by elaborating on children's oral and written attempts.

David Dickinson and Miriam Smith (1994) researched the long term effects of preschool teachers' book readings on low-income children's vocabulary and story comprehension. They examined, through a longitudinal study, whether or not there are identifiable patterns of teacher-child interaction during book reading and if the ways in which teachers read books to four-year-olds have effects on children's language and literacy development that can be detected one year later. Twelve of the subjects were participants of Head Start, while thirteen of the remaining sample were in similar programs for children of families with low income.

The primary data from the study came from videotaped book reading sessions and supporting data from general classroom observations, teacher interviews, children's spontaneous language use, and target children's scores on outcome measures. The authors ask a central, core question in this research, "are there ways of characterizing approaches to preschool book reading that reveal long-term effects on children's literacy-related skills?" In fact, Dickinson and Smith (1994) found distinctive patterns of book reading and striking evidence that the type of interaction, as books are read, has enduring effects on the vocabulary and story understanding skills of four-year-olds. This study supported the need for the teachers to improve on those interactions and book reading sessions.

Interestingly, after making physical changes to the classroom environment, Susan Neuman (1999) noted changes in literacy-related interactions between the teacher and student. She found that after the physical changes, teachers were engaging children more in talking about stories, using song books, counting, and rhyming books interactively for skill development, and providing more one-on-one or small group interactions around books. Encouraging children to interact with books should be the key way in which children experience print in the early childhood classroom (Teale & Sulzby, 1989).

In terms of language and literacy development, teachers' assistance may take many forms. It can entail simply providing language to accompany play, encouraging verbalizations and written language attempts, elaborating on those attempts, and structuring interactions with print (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000). Having literacy rich materials and play areas that create opportunities for literacy and language to occur will assist the teacher with developing students' emergent literacy. Consequently, preschool and kindergarten children are likely to engage in more voluntary literacy behaviors during free-play periods when literacy materials are introduced and teachers guide children to use those materials (Morrow & Rand, 1991).

#### Research Related to Literacy Enriched Play Areas

Earlier, I mentioned Jean Piaget and how he theorized children acquire knowledge by interacting with the world or the environment (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). I also mentioned Vygotsky(1981) and how he theorized a more capable adult or peer can help create the child's zone of proximal development. Teachers, as I observed, generally want to honor and promote emergent literacy development as an integral part of the total school curriculum as they enhance the environment creating zones of proximal development (Morrow, 1989). These teachers, by their questions and comments, wanted to place Piaget's theory into practice by allowing space, time, and materials for students to actively engage in literacy activities in the environment. They were willing to arrange space in the classroom, work with the materials, create activities across all early childhood developmental domains, time to allow moments of expression, engagement, interaction and encouragement, and provide the literacy materials to extend the range of opportunities.

Studies related to emergent literacy activities indicate the physical environment as essential to supporting and actively influencing literacy learning (Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan, & Colton, 2003; Taylor, Blum, & Logsdon, 1986; Morrow, 1987; Morrow & Rand, 1991; Morrow & Weinstein, 1986; Neuman & Roskos, 1992; 1993; 1997 and Vukelich, 1990; 1994). As I often discussed with teachers while monitoring, an early childhood curriculum should not isolate literacy as a separate part of the curriculum but integrate literacy and language into the total program. Following, Strickland and Morrow (1989) state, “in reality, the focus should not be on a literacy curriculum per se. Instead, literacy should be an integral part of the overall curriculum” (p. 7). The acquisition of literature, play materials, and supplies in children’s hands could address the ecological and sociological underpinnings of emergent literacy development.

#### Implications for Teaching Practices and Students’ Emergent Literacy

The first part of this literature review describes my utilization of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory as the theoretical underpinnings for this research. Included is a discussion of Piaget (1969) and Vygotsky (1978) and how settings lacking literacy enriched play areas and adult-child shared storybook reading, tend to be the same environments to produce less than quality emergent literacy development experiences in the classroom. The classrooms within settings of low socioeconomic status also tend to lack the resources to acquire books, play materials, literacy rich materials, and lack appropriate space for students to have access to literacy enriched play settings. The second part of this discussion, or literature review, highlights peer coaching as a feasible professional development program to enhance the literacy learning in the pre-kindergarten classroom as it focuses on empowering the teachers.

## Peer Coaching

Gaining information related to peer coaching required me to examine adults' and teachers' need and/or desire for professional development. I personally felt the need for the teachers *to want to* be in on their own process, utilizing the principles of adult education that I later describe by Gordon (2004). As I explored the principles of peer coaching and the various types, I committed to the idea of peer coaching as a feasible method for the teachers to build their own strategies and to make connections. Because of my understanding of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory related to how teachers have an affect on students through the various systems, I was relying on peer coaching as a workable method to build a solid foundation of professional development.

### Peer Coaching as a Viable Professional Development Process

In the state of Louisiana, early childhood education is inclusive of programs that have great variability of instruction and environment when meeting the needs of young students. The education and experience of people working in these settings vary greatly. In some places, the requirements to work as early childhood teachers range from a high school education to teaching certification/licensure and/or graduate coursework. Yet, the goals of most programs are the same in the attempt to provide excellent developmentally appropriate classroom instruction. Even though the education and experience of teachers differ, classroom instruction and the environment in which early education occurs play a vital role in quality.



In order to bridge this gap, administrators and organizers of programs seek to provide sources of professional development opportunities for teachers through teacher trainings, professional development workshops, and/or supervised observations. Because we are in this intense age of school reform, there is an increasing need for teacher training or professional development. Policymakers and education leaders are just beginning to recognize the need for quality professional development in order to support school reform efforts. Five areas of practice, according to Gordon (2004) — shared governance, transformational leadership, student-centered teaching, teacher collegiality, and cultural change, are critical to school improvement; however, there are school attributes beyond what Gordon has mentioned. In addition, work toward improving these attributes will be more successful if combined with professional development (Gordon, 2004).

How many times do teachers sit through what they consider useless ‘in service’ meetings? While professional development is becoming evident as a means to shape school improvement, quality and effective professional development is not occurring in most schools. Many schools and school entities do not support high quality sustained professional development that include follow-up and provide a conceptual basis for program planning. Few programs of professional development contain substance that individualizes teacher activities according to the needs of teachers and staff. Some professional development has actually been a *deficit* in philosophy, and a remediation of teacher shortcomings (Hargreaves, 1994), rather than recognizing their expertise as the school's greatest resource (Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 1994); and, while collaboration to deliver professional development among systems is generally discussed, it does not often occur because it requires teachers to desert their traditional norms of isolation and individualism.

How many times as a teacher did I have opportunities to participate in professional development? Development I would have chosen for myself? Often, teachers lack meaningful opportunities to participate in professional development activities. Very few moments of significant collegial interaction occur in many school settings, and teachers are often isolated and lack opportunities to exchange information with colleagues. It is very difficult to find activities that are stimulating and inviting where teachers are in the position to guide their practice. Through a review of the literature relating to adult learning, Gordon (2004) highlights several principles that apply to professional development:

- Adults are motivated to learn when the learning will meet a need or interest they are experiencing in their personal or work lives.
- Adults bring considerable life experience and prior knowledge to the learning situation.
- Adults learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process.
- Adults have widely varying learning styles.
- As adults develop personally and professionally, they have an increasing need to be self-directed.
- Adult learners have affiliation needs. (p. 52)

Many times, without consideration of the adult learner, professional development, or activities that occur at schools often leave teachers unfulfilled and uninterested. Many schools have not taken seriously the principles of adult education. Staff participation surrounding the entire process is usually limited, if any participation occurs at all. The remaining part of this discussion, or literature review, highlights peer coaching as a feasible professional development program to enhance the literacy learning in the pre-kindergarten classroom as it focuses on empowering the teachers.

## Peer Coaching as Professional Development

I believed that peer coaching emerged as a viable process of inquiry and professional development because of the constructs of encouraging and improving shared governance, transformational leadership, student-centered teaching, teacher collegiality, dialogue, and cultural change. Robert Ackland (1991), in a review of the peer coaching literature, quoted Killion and Valencia as defining peer coaching as “the process where teams of teachers regularly observe one another and provide support, companionship, feedback and assistance.” As I discovered, several definitions used in books and articles also describe peer coaching in a similar fashion. Peer coaching is traditionally referred to as a confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expanding, refining, and building new skills; sharing ideas; teaching one another; conducting classroom research; or solving problems in the workplace is defined by Pam Robbins in 1991. It originally appeared as an approach to professional development that has a consideration of improving schools while incorporating the principles of adult learning.

In 1982, Joyce and Showers were among the first to use the term ‘coaching’ in connection with teachers learning new skills. They described a term like ‘supervised practice’ had too many hierarchal connotations and were drawn to the idea that athletic coaches develop a relationship that facilitates transfer of skills and information. So they coined the term coaching. Earlier articles written by them referring to coaching did not mention the term ‘peer’ (Ackland, 1991). Showers added the term in 1984 when training teachers to be peer coaches because they were not using staff developers to work with the teachers (Ackland, 1991). The word ‘peer’ was emphasized as equal.

## Functions and Principles of the Peer Coaching Process

Through the years, peer coaching has encouraged a number of articles, books, and research, discussing its impact on teacher instructional skills and strategies. The studies and articles highlight peer coaching as essential to professional development when discussing specific classroom activities, teacher performance, teaching behaviors, feedback, teacher responsive statements, teacher experiences, and complex instructional arrangements. Although several models of peer coaching have been developed over the decades, nearly all of the models subscribe to the following key principles:

- Peer coaching is non-evaluative.
- Peer coaching is collegial in manner.
- Peer coaching is classroom based.
- Peer coaching makes use of classroom observation data.
- Peer coaching is nonjudgmental.
- Peer coaching is based on a trust relationship among peers.

(Gordon, p 52)

These principles of peer coaching interchange with the principles of adult learning as described by Gordon (2004). These principles also parallel with that of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory where the experiences, opportunities, and environments created by the teachers and schools for and with young children are not in isolation but cross systems. Nias (1998) states,

The welfare of the children [is] intimately bound up with the well-being of the adults who worked with them. If the latter did not feel accepted as people in the staffroom, they would not be fully at ease in the classroom. Besides, it [is] philosophically inconsistent to treat children as 'whole' and 'individual' but to ignore the personhood of their teachers.

(Nias, 1998, p. 1262)

Camaraderie through peer coaching can create an avenue in which to generate dialogue, exercise internal contemplation, and make changes in the way teaching methods, practice or curriculum are delivered. Peers can help revise our knowledge by focusing our attention on information that we would not otherwise consider and force us to question or explain our views (Azmitia, 1997). Peer coaching also can create an avenue for teachers to gain a sense of themselves in the classroom through observation, feedback, and dialogue with partners; in agreement, Gordon (2004) states that all participants are treated as professionals and equals.

By examining the literature, I recognized that peer coaching extends into the classroom by affecting teachers' beliefs, values, and learning styles by making use of observational data to serve as feedback to improve classroom strategies; in some cases, as Showers (1985) points out, "the 'teacher' experiments with a new lesson while the 'coach' observes, and the

experimentation continues with a new cycle of analysis, study, hypothesis-forming, and testing” (Ackland, 1991). Through the use of the observational data, peer coaching emerges in the literature as a process that assists in developing knowledge and skills to be taught as the teachers are actively engaged in the process. According to Robbins (1991), peer coaching also provides an avenue for teachers to tailor a professional development plan for themselves. This supports teachers’ need to be self-directed. They can become action researchers in their own classrooms and investigate the connections between their own planning, teaching behaviors and the outcomes for learners’ consequences (Robbins, 1991).

As teachers’ beliefs, values, and learning styles all affect classroom strategies, peer coaching touches upon teacher thinking by creating an avenue in which teachers participate in a process of companionship and collegiality. This allows an opportunity for them to engage in meaningful interactions. Teachers are also provided a means to address instructional issues or problems with the benefit of working smarter and not harder. Many teachers who had participated in peer coaching commented on how learning from one another often helps in dealing with the multitude of demands on the teacher’s role and saves time, too (Robbins, 1991).

### Types of Peer Coaching

Peer coaching programs can be divided into two basic forms: coaching by experts and reciprocal coaching. The difference of the two forms lies in how the coaching is done and by whom. Ackland’s (1991) review of the peer coaching literature describes coaching by experts as specifically trained teachers with an acknowledged expertise who observe other teachers to give them support, feedback, and suggestions; reciprocal coaching is more observational. As teachers observe and coach each other, they jointly improve instruction. Gordon (2004) describes expert

coaching in the same manner, “expert coaching as one way coaching *and* reciprocal coaching as all receive training in coaching and, if relevant, in specific instructional skills” (p. 58). While these are considered the two basic forms of peer coaching, peer coaching is as individual and as unique as the people who engage in it and in whatever form, the focus is on the teacher as the learner (Robbins, 1991). Reciprocal coaching is the focus of this review of the literature.

### Research Related to Peer Coaching

Peer coaching creates a variety of opportunities for researchers to examine its effectiveness as described in this not so brief review. According to the literature, peer coaching is found to be a positive process suitable for research and experimentation. Six studies mentioned in this paper examine peer coaching quantitatively through the reciprocal model of coaching (Englert & Sugai, 1992; Kohler, McCollough, & Buchan, 1995; Morgan, Guftafson, Hudson & Salzburg, 1992; Morgan, Menlove, Salzburg & Hudson, 1994; Sparks & Bruder, 1987; Tschantz & Vail, 2000). One study is mentioned describing professional coaching quantitatively from the expert model of coaching (Miller, Harris, & Watanabe, 1994), and another study discusses peer coaching through a form of action research (Lam, Yim, & Lam, 2002). A descriptive study of peer coaching is also included (Wynn & Kromrey, 2000).

Kohler, McCullough, and Buchan, (1995), examined teachers’ development and refinement of classroom activities utilizing an ABA design to compare three experimental conditions. Four teachers planned and conducted their activities independently during an initial phase and evaluated the impact of their efforts with a structured checklist. These tasks were completed with a partner during a coaching phase, as teachers observed one another’s classroom activities and collaborated in the process of appraising their activities and planning new teaching

episodes. These exercises were again conducted independently during a final maintenance phase. A variety of outcomes were examined including each teacher's procedural changes or refinements, the corresponding measures of children's participation, teachers' appraisals of their own activities, and teachers' satisfaction with the peer coaching procedure.

Tschantz and Vail (2000) conducted similar research using a multiple probe design, thus evaluating the effectiveness of peer coaching on the rate of responsive statements made by general education preschool teachers. Three Head Start teachers who served students with special needs in their inclusive classrooms participated with an early childhood special education teacher while conducting peer coaching sessions. The results indicated that all Head Start teachers increased their rate of responsive teacher statements and that peer coaching was useful to the participants and not very time consuming.

Research by Morgan, Guftafson, Hudson, and Salzborg (1992) analyzed the effectiveness of peer coaching through the participation of trainees and low-performing pre-service teachers. Morgan, Guftafson, Hudson, and Salzborg (1992) studied the effects of peer coaching with five teacher trainees who were having difficulty learning the required instruction skills in their practica. In this instance, peer coaches provided immediate feedback to trainees on teaching behaviors during reading instruction. Effects of peer coaching were analyzed in a multiple baseline design across trainees. Results indicated that effective teaching behaviors increased and ineffective behaviors decreased with peer coaching for all of the five trainees.

The effects of peer coaching were analyzed side-by-side when Morgan, Menlove, Salzberg, and Hudson (1994) conducted their research. They examined the method of supervising pre-service teacher trainees who were learning to deliver direct instruction procedures to small groups of elementary age students with mild disabilities. The effects of peer



coaching were also examined in a multiple baseline design across trainees. Again, the results indicated that peer coaching increased the effective teaching behaviors of the five trainees.

Likewise, in 1993 twenty pre-service special education teachers participated in a study with Englert and Sugai (1993); it examined the effects of the combined technique of peer observation with observation systems technology on the teaching performance of teacher-trainees. The subjects were divided into an experimental group and a control group, wherein the experimental group trainees used well-defined observation systems to collect teacher/pupil data for the provision of feedback to peers, and control trainees developed their own systems of anecdotal report. Results showed that the experimental group maintained a higher level of pupil accuracy during direct instruction, maintained a brisker presentation and correct rate, and tended to prompt correct responses less often than the control group.

Shelly Bruder and Georgia Sparks implemented a peer coaching program in two schools in Michigan (Sparks & Bruder, 1985). All of the teachers in this study completed rating-scale questionnaires before and after the peer coaching process and an outside evaluator interviewed 36 teachers. In spite of some differences at the beginning, the outcomes reflected by questionnaires and interviews indicate that teachers in both schools became comfortable with the peer coaching process and found it useful in improving collegiality, experimentation, and student learning (Sparks & Bruder, 1985).

A descriptive study (Wynn & Kromrey, 2000) examined and documented concerns of paired peer participants in a peer coaching program of practicum students. The study offers data from students' observations, feedback, and reflections on their teaching experiences. Themes from the information collected during the study supports the developmental growth of the practicum students across a continuum of concerns. In *Transforming School Culture: Can True*

*Collaboration Be Initiated?* Lam, Yim, & Lam (2002) - based in China, used an action research paradigm to secure a niche for peer coaching in the practice of professional development and to ward off contrived congeniality. In the study, they utilized numerous strategies to combat difficulties of achieving collaboration and imposition from administrators. They chose two schools to agree to participate in peer coaching. Three phases were observed: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. Members of the action research teams created action plans and researchers facilitated the workshops. Data was collected for the study through regular meetings, professional development workshops, semi-structured interviews, questionnaire surveys and observations. At the start of the project, teachers were invited to complete anonymous questionnaires and to rate statements on a seven point scale with “1” for strongly disagree and “7” for strongly agree. At the end of the year the teachers were asked to rate the statements again in another questionnaire survey.

In both workshops, the teachers reported time constraints and psychological pressure as the most outstanding difficulties for their participation in peer coaching. The action research team attempted strategies to relieve those pressures. Consequently, the researchers and participants encountered many difficulties but described the experience as mostly positive, stressing that the action research paradigm and the emphasis on collaboration in the peer coaching process assisted with the difficulties.

I have documented well in this literature review; specifically, that peer coaching has a positive impact on teacher behaviors, techniques, performance, instruction, skills, and activities. Lacking is documentation of peer coaching that utilizes autoethnography as a method of inquiry.

The utility of the autoethnography, especially as a self-reflective approach to document the peer coaching process, is nearly absent from the literature. I have, as the researcher of this study, explored this method of inquiry to describe the experience of implementing the professional development program.

### Implications of Peer Coaching and Early Childhood Education

Peer coaching is considered to be a collaborative way to meet the professional development needs of teachers and staff. I have employed this process of professional development with teachers in this research process because it is a non-threatening approach to the exchange of information and education through observation and feedback. To me, it had become clear that it also offers a method of developing plans to improve teaching strategies. This form of professional development is practical in the world of early childhood education based upon the constructs: shared governance, input in the school improvement process, and the development of plans to improve teaching strategies. Quite possibly, peer coaching could lead to greater communication among teachers and staff, thus improving leadership among teachers and staff.

Considering the fact that early childhood programs are staffed with adults who are not all familiar with child and family development, peer coaching could provide a means to facilitate meaningful information from the informed to the uninformed. According to Vail, Tschantz, and Bevill (1997), the minimal educational and experience requirements for early childhood teachers range from a high school education with no experience, to a teaching certificate based on undergraduate coursework.

By understanding this variance as it relates to education and experience with teacher preparation, many teachers could use collaborative support from early childhood special educators and early childhood general educators to meet the needs of their students.

Judging from my own experience and observations in pre-kindergarten classrooms, teaching in the world of early-childhood is an experience unlike teaching at other grade levels. In order to provide a quality early childhood education, teachers need to be supported, from planning and discussions with colleagues, to collaboration among them. Concerns about curricula, activities, facilities, classroom materials and supplies, in conjunction with the teaching strategies highlighting the developmental concerns of students, are just a few reasons why. Early childhood education requires a common understanding of literature and language related to the area. I committed to peer coaching as a viable method to support this necessary professional development on the part of teachers who have not had formal training in specific early childhood teaching techniques (Tschantz & Vail, 2000). I believed peer coaching could assist in shared governance by creating an avenue for early childhood educators to collectively discuss issues, strategies, and common concerns. Sparks and Bruder (1985) astutely state that, if we want to ensure the success of school improvement and professional development, creating school norms of collegiality and experimentation is crucial.

### Further Discussion

Most of the results from the studies related to peer coaching indicate peer coaching is effective in improving teaching behaviors and that the new skills were maintained and generalized to new settings. Joyce and Showers (1982) found that a good many teachers could transfer the skills they had learned into the teaching situation. This is important in the age of

school reform where professional development is crucial to improving student outcomes and supports the need to influence students' ecological systems as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Continuing studies of peer coaching and its effect on teaching strategies of pre-kindergarten teachers could close a gap in the literature.

As I mentioned earlier, it was after researching peer coaching that I realized my work and dissertation had met one another. I had presented quite a bit of diverse information at teacher workshops, trainings and seminars, but the dissertation stemming from my work with the teachers had not come to mind until the extensive review of peer coaching. I loved the idea the teachers would work with each other and possibly work on the practices we were discussing over and over again. I was hoping they would share information with one another on a professional level. And this would be a way the information could be internalized, could stick without me hovering over them with unannounced visits to their classrooms and lengthy technical assistance discussions. I was also hoping that if the teachers could discuss the information with one another that it would be more accepted than if it were me discussing it with them. I was again hoping they would work within their zones of proximal development as described by Vygotsky (1978).

I worked to provide two workshops, one to assist the teachers with gaining the competencies of peer coaching and another to introduce a topic related to their questions and comments. I was introduced to the ELLCO, toolkit by Dr. Casbergue, a member of my committee, and thought it would assist with the observation of the classrooms during the peer coaching. I added the training of the ELLCO toolkit to the second workshop.

I was finally feeling like I could assist the teachers in a meaningful way without them feeling the pressure of being evaluated, and I could engage in a topic of professional development in early childhood that I found very meaningful to explore with my dissertation.

*After the workshops were complete, the teachers coached and assessed one another with the ELLCO Toolkit twice, completed a pre and post Coaching Effectiveness Profile, and then mailed all of the instruments to a confidential location. The next phase, I thought, was going to be quantitatively analyzing the data, reporting the findings and concluding the study. But, things changed. Hurricane Katrina happened and many other things in life changed, too.*

## CHAPTER THREE

### Interpretation

*Autoethnography? The word was rolling around my head, bouncing from side to side. I could hear the committee talking but thoughts were traveling through my mind a million miles an hour. I initially had planned on analyzing the data quantitatively: crunch the numbers with SPSS, describe my findings and that's it. The numbers from the instruments should show whether or not the teachers increased their strategies, right? But as Dr. Bedford explained, the study, as described by me, (my story) should be written because it actually **means** something and could possibly influence others. I found myself saying out loud, "Yes, I get it." "You do?" asked Dr. Kieff, my major professor. I looked at her oddly for a moment, when she added, "You look white." White? Me? "I'm black," I'm thinking, confused not understanding what she is saying. Again she says, "You look flushed, pale, are you ok?" "Yeah, I think am ok." Wrapping the idea of autoethnography around and around in my head, "I am ok."*

It was September 2005, a week after Hurricane Katrina when I realized most of my early childhood literature, books, and important data from the peer coaching workshop would not be salvageable. Because of his job, my husband did not leave New Orleans until the Saturday before the hurricane. I remember saying, "Honey, two things you cannot forget; the briefcase with the insurance papers and deed to the house, AND the box that says "DISSERTATION." We were all so frantic after the storm to find loved ones that it wasn't until everyone had been accounted for with both families that we understood all that was drowned inside the house. I was fortunate enough to have taken birth certificates and pictures (learning from previous

evacuations). We went back to the city earlier than what was allowed to try and salvage what we could, but the briefcase and the box met us at the door. They had floated from the office where they had been forgotten.

At the time, other things were more important, like, The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the insurance company. It was a nightmare. The house and the totality of it all were exhausting and consuming; on top of it, not only was the house a total loss, but the pre-kindergarten program was wiped out - reduced to five schools instead of twenty-five. My livelihood as the monitor of a pre-kindergarten program was no longer important. Getting teachers back to the city, to get classrooms open, so that kids can return, was.

I wrote on web-blogs, posted my email address, contacted news stations, all to let families and teachers know that five of the schools were open and that we were working on more. Communication was very limited and posted signs fared better than the telephone or television. Power was nonexistent in most areas and landline telephones were out of the question. But, little by little, teachers began to email asking about their classrooms, jobs, and my family. I was ecstatic to hear from them and asked about their loved ones, too. We grew used to the questions, "How much water did you get? How high was the water in your area? Is everyone ok?" Everyone had been through quite a bit and at the time had not realized that it was just the beginning. But, primary things became important early on: housing, jobs, and schools for children.



Schools in our program were beginning to reopen and, similar to the changes from the hurricane, the pre-kindergarten program had gone through some major changes as well. During the 2005-06 academic school year, the teachers working with the pre-kindergarten program had to be certified specifically in the area of early childhood or hold an elementary education degree, have passed Praxis I by Louisiana scores, and have plans to take Praxis II within the year in order to teach with the program. This sent ripples through administrations of the schools because they feared they wouldn't be able to find qualified teachers. Essentially, teachers with the program prior to the storm were no longer considered qualified to teach with the program. As time passed, slowly but surely, the classrooms began to reopen and because the public school system in the area was struggling to re-establish itself, certified, qualified teachers found their way to us. I say certified, qualified teachers because, in my opinion, holding a teaching credential didn't necessarily mean a teacher was/is qualified in every sense of the word.

I began monitoring the schools again in March, 2006. We gained approximately six more schools which brought the total to twelve. I couldn't believe the schools were stocked with certified teachers, mostly all with kindergarten, pre-kindergarten, and nursery school certificates. I did miss many of the 'old' teachers, but was thrilled about having teachers with qualifications - at first. Yes they were qualified on paper, but because this is a *nonpublic* school program, many retired *public* school teachers (in their most traditionalist fashion) were hired. The availability of these teachers came from the fact that they were forced to either retire or made to resign from the public school system because the hurricane left no available positions. I was not complaining - we needed schools to open to get families back to the city. We needed classrooms to open to get kids back, and we needed teachers to teach the kids; however, while working to make these things happen, my role shifted from monitoring many classrooms to assessing the viability of

sites for classrooms and actual classroom environments. It was important to know where schools were going to place the students if they had to relocate from their original damaged sites. After Katrina, environment meant everything.

It was after things settled a bit that I began (again) to think about the teachers' strategies and practices after the storm. My own senses began to return. I was gaining feeling again in my brain, and I began to look back at the professional development needs of the teachers. Yes, this time the teachers acquired after the storm had come with standard qualifications and certificates, but lacked the familiarity with the program and camaraderie with teachers in now different settings. They were used to different administrative, curricula, and environmental components and, like many of us, they lacked the ability to regroup so soon after the storm. I asked myself, "Would a peer coaching program assist with the classroom issues that we are dealing with now after the storm?" Yet, I didn't know. I first had to know if the peer coaching was at all purposeful the first time around. Immediately, I discussed the loss of data with Dr. Kieff, my major professor, resurrected the archived Peer Coaching Effectiveness Profiles and ELLCO toolkits from the program's office, attempted to find teachers and information linked to the year before the dissertation research, and resurrected the study. Did the prior year's peer coaching program increase the teachers' use of emergent literacy development strategies? I then began to crunch the numbers.

## Qualitative Research

Before the hurricane, it was not my initial thought to qualitatively analyze the data gathered from this research project. I was totally expecting to quantify the results of the surveys and summarize the findings in a quantitative manner. I was working within the framework of a traditional paradigm. I was reasoning I would be objective, remain distant, control for bias, omit my values, report the facts with informal, impersonal language, and use a deductive form of logic, testing with theories and hypotheses.

Fortunately, with credit given to my dissertation committee, the qualitative method of autoethnography is positively employed with this research project. The purposeful use of my self extends the understanding of this discussion, the teachers' professional development, and my work with them. The mode of inquiry, the use of self-awareness, attention to one's feelings, thoughts, experiences, and what is 'real' is made through the interaction and observation of others, propelled me forward with this method of research. As Creswell (1994) states, multiple realities exist in any given situation; the researcher, those individuals being investigated, and the reader or audience interpreting a study. I enlisted in this method of inquiry to explore these multiple realities. In a qualitative method, researchers interact with the participants they are studying and admit to holding bias and expressing values. The language of the researcher is personal and informal. In qualitative research, inductive logic prevails. This type of research is meaningful and exciting in that only human beings, depicting slices of their own lives in their own language, terms, and visions, can recreate reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

## Autoethnography

*After discussing the research with my committee, I headed out of the door to gain as much information about the methodology as I could. After it was suggested I explore my research as an autoethnography, Dr. Bedford suggested I read an article that would give me a sense of the autoethnographic construction. When I received the article via email, Heartful Autoethnography (Ellis, 1999), I printed it and read it over and over again. I was awestruck by the conversational tone of the article, felt a connection with the doctoral student and totally respected the emotion and self-reflection in the writing. I associated with her as a fellow doctoral student and became familiar with a new methodology as a result of reading the article. I began to research more articles related to autoethnography and pulled together a sense of the criteria necessary to employ this new method of inquiry. Most of the articles began by discussing the “writing.”*

One criteria necessary for the employment of autoethnography is evocative writing. Sparkes (2000), states that writing is now to be seen as a method of inquiry, a way of knowing, a method of discovery and analysis. It is the writing that provides the understanding of the humanistic experience. Autoethnographers utilize the evocative writing to share personal stories of experiences and use the writing to extend an understanding of particular social issues (Foster, McAllister, & O’Brien, 2006). The intent of the writing is to create a link between the researchers’ personal and cultural existence through a form of expression. Because the researcher is the data and the data collection tool, the use of personal writing in autoethnography may be seen as providing personal accountability for the researcher’s work (Ellis & Bochner,

2000) and rather than using the abstract and impersonal language of traditional academic writing, the researcher 'owns' her voice within the text (Foster, McCallister, & O'Brien, 2006).

*The committee stated, "Darilyn, don't you see? You are part of the research."*

Another understanding of autoethnography is the researcher as 'not neutral'. With autoethnography, the researcher is subjective and is to be reflexive and self-conscious about how he/she constructs the meaning within the research. Autoethnography is a self investigation in which the research includes what the researcher deems worthy of investigation. In an article by Foster, McAllister, & O'Brien (2006), social constructivists argue that an exclusive pursuit of objectivity, quantification, logic, and reason has resulted in depersonalizing and reducing the view of humanity, so that inner worlds and differences between groups remain poorly understood. With the researcher-participant relationship in autoethnography, subjective perceptions, personal knowledge, and uncertainty are, therefore not only valid but also should be expected (Clandin & Connelly, 1987). Philaretou and Allen (2006) state autoethnographic self-investigation unavoidably delves into the personal lives of the researcher and his/her significant others to bring to the surface answers to questions that would be hard to obtain through conventional research methods.

*I have at this point embraced the fact that I am now a part of the research. I suddenly realize that while concretizing the practice of autoethnography, I will have to look over and over at myself to analyze the data! Whoa!*

The next consideration of autoethnography is the 'self'; specifically, as the subject for analysis and understanding. Various researchers have used their personal experiences to embody the use of the researcher's vulnerable self as an extension of ethnography so that it includes the "heart" and artistic writing (Ellis, 1999). Ellis has used experiences in her writing such as the death of her husband and abortion. According to Foster, et al (2006), Berger (2001) recounted her own experience of being Jewish as well as her disclosure of her feelings and experiences with participants, while conducting fieldwork in an ethnographic study of a Jewish Messianic Congregation. Other examples of researchers locating their "selves," according to Foster, et al (2006), include: Halley (2003), a doctoral student who wrote of her experiences of childhood trauma; Frank (1991), a sociologist and academic who wrote of his experiences of cancer; Vickers (2002), who told of her experiences of illness while working as an academic; and Sparkes (2000), an academic who wrote on his experiences of injury as a sportsman. Richardson (1994) argues that in writing evocatively on personal experience, academic research becomes more accessible to a wider public audience than that of the academic world.

*I recognize I must critically discuss deep, sensitive, and complex experiences. This is clear to me now! Like the teachers, I am the researcher and the research, according to Ellis & Bochner (2000), autoethnography is action research for the individual.*

An important aspect of gaining information through self-reflection is the ability to critique one's 'self'. The key in turning personal experiential knowledge into professional academic knowledge is to allow the person/researcher to become not only a keen observer of the surrounding social phenomena but, above all, a legitimate person with enough authority to

elevate the construction of self-knowledge to a worthy status in the eyes of the social-science community (Kracauer, 1993). It is through self-critique that one becomes capable of sculpting the amorphous stone of personal, experiential knowledge into the well-defined and detailed statue of professional social-science knowledge (Philaretou & Allen, 2006). The self reflection, sometimes considered therapeutic, could possibly be controversial, sensitive in nature, but potentially can provide valuable academic knowledge. “Through the various personifications of the researcher as subject, and by offering an account of the subjective research process, autoethnographic research writing can bring lay and professional people alike into the back stage messiness of academic inquiry (p. 75).”

### Autoethnographic Coding & Themes

#### *Therapy.*

The hurricane damaged more than many can imagine: homes, families, personal belongings, slices/chunks of who we are/were. After the storm, I felt guilty because I had not lost as much as some people and was, at times, filled with anger because, in theory, I thought that I lost more. How could I replace data from a dissertation that took time to collect? Again, with credit given to my dissertation committee, the qualitative method employed with this research project, autoethnography, included the purposeful use of self in the most significant and poignant manner. This method was used after Hurricane Katrina, when I had trouble expressing myself orally for fear of crying when speaking. It wasn't until just recently that I have been able to talk about the city without at least tearing up. Automatically, the frog would jump into my throat, and I'd have a hard time with what I'd want to say. This autoethnography gave me the opportunity to express my thoughts and recollections privately, then openly to my committee, and then as a completed research project.

This autoethnography extends the understanding of the discussion of early-childhood professional development with teachers and with myself. The mode of inquiry, the self awareness, attention to others and my feelings, thoughts, experiences, what was real, the interaction and observation of others, is all chronicled here through personal recollections, conversations, observations, letters, self statements, self-revelations, and reflected perceptions from significant others. All of it provided sources of data to be included within the narrative account of this autoethnography.

As an autoethnographer, I read and reread a very personal document (my journal, which was in my possession after the storm). Certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, ways of thinking, and events repeated themselves over and over and stood out (Philaretou & Allen, 2006). While reading and rereading my journal, memories and events were triggered; I recorded them. I had a specific selection process of what was to be included. A number of meaningful scenarios ultimately prevailed and became actualized (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998). I selected the data and wrote through the narrative form. I found myself also reading and re-reading this narrative account. It was within this constant searching and perusing through the data where themes became evident. Words or phrases were organized into coded categories and then referred to by themes. The themes represented identified significant topics. Descriptive data was sorted and grouped together. Findings were reflected upon in the form of a descriptive narrative. The findings are now a construction of my experiences and the meanings I have attached to them.

The process of coding and organizing themes was eventful in a way not expected. As a blast from the past, it enveloped my consciousness. The places and people I knew to be true were no longer there as they were all known pre-Katrina. The process of reading and rereading the



journal and recollections triggered many emotions I had held inside. The writing allowed me an avenue to examine strategies, practices, and many other things that must be rebuilt or resurrected. In turn, the examination of my descriptive data inspired me to think, reorganize, and ready myself for change.

### Purpose

This autoethnography reflects upon the implementation of a peer-coaching program in a state-funded nonpublic pre-kindergarten program during the 2004-2005 academic school year. Initially, one purpose of this study was to determine the contribution of peer coaching by measuring the teachers' coaching effectiveness. The other purpose was to investigate the teachers' use of emergent literacy practices in the kindergarten classroom while examining whether peer coaching had an effect on teachers' use of emergent literacy practices in the classroom. When the autoethnography emerged as a more conducive form of inquiry, the actual purpose of this study became the revealing of the experiences, events and consequences, which led to the preparation, implementation, and analysis of this research project.

### Participants

Ten teachers volunteered to participate in the newly implemented peer-coaching program that began during the 2004-2005 academic school year. The teachers completed a pre and post competency-based diagnostic instrument related to coaching effectiveness, participated in peer coaching dyads, and twice completed an observation instrument related to teachers' use of emergent literacy practices in the pre-kindergarten classroom.

The numeric data utilized in this study is regarded as archival data which was gained from the peer coaching program of ten pre-kindergarten teachers in urban nonpublic schools in select parishes in Louisiana.

The classrooms of these teachers were established as a pilot voucher program throughout the state of Louisiana in 2000. This non-public pre-kindergarten (pre-k) program is state-funded and targets children from families of low income; it has now been in existence for six years. The students in this pre-kindergarten program are considered to be 'at-risk' because they reside in households with low income and are eligible to receive free and reduced-price meals. Pre-kindergarten instruction, before and after school care, breakfast, snacks, and field trips, are provided for the students through this program at no cost.

Only two of the teachers in this study are currently working with the program. Because of Hurricane Katrina, and the newly implemented teacher requirements, many of the teachers did not return. Of the teachers in the program and in the study, 98% are African-American. Teacher participation in the program averages two and a half years. At the time of this study, ten percent of the teachers held the standard state certificate in the area of early childhood, another ten percent held degrees in the area of early childhood, but did not hold a standard state certificate in the area of early childhood education. In the area of elementary education 47% held bachelor's degrees, while 29% held bachelor's degrees in other areas unrelated to early childhood education.

The teachers instruct twenty students per classroom; each teacher works with a teacher assistant. Information from the teacher assistants is not included. The teachers in the program must, according to the program's guidelines, participate in a minimum of eighteen professional development hours for continuing education in early childhood education. The professional

development hours mandated by the program guidelines require teachers to participate in professional development. This professional development should include information related to the education and care for children four years through five years of age.

### Who Were These Teachers?

*The best part about autoethnography, for me, is that I can give my impressions as to what things were like.*

The teachers in the study were genuinely interested in improving classroom strategies, practices, and life skills. Of those ten teachers, only two had passed the Praxis Examination. The other eight, like many others in the program, were on the verge of not being retained by their employing schools. This propelled these teachers to work harder to prove to the administrators that they could work hard and improve themselves. These teachers had the most thought-provoking questions when I observed their classrooms and exhibited more energy than the typical teacher in the program. I would have classified these teachers as risk-takers and would have hired most of them if I were a principal. Through my recollections, I found the teachers who participated were the teachers that scored the highest on the assessment instrument used to evaluate the classrooms.

### Access

I gained permission from the director of the program to use the data from the Peer Coaching Program. Only the information from the teachers who volunteered to participate in the peer-coaching program was included in the study. The numeric data sample was one of convenience. At the beginning of 2004-05, the teachers were informed of the peer coaching

professional development program and were informed that the topic of discussion would be literacy-related. The teachers volunteered to participate. At the first workshop, dyads were formed randomly. Each teacher received a random motivational quotation about education on an index card that matched with a partner's quotation at the beginning of the workshop. The teachers matched like quotes. Five teachers worked in pairs.

### Instrumentation

#### The Coaching Effectiveness Profile

Two instruments were used with the professional development program. The first instrument - the Coaching Effectiveness Profile, (Warner, 2002), was used to analyze teachers' skills and abilities in the area of peer coaching. It was a competency-based diagnostic instrument designed to help assist individuals with determining their ability to coach others effectively. The questionnaire was a self-scoring assessment in a Likert scale response format composed of seven competency areas. Each competency area represented skills involved in effective coaching: (a) empathizing ability, (b) listening skills, (c) capacity to confront and challenge, (d) problem-solving ability, (e) feedback skills, (f) capacity to empower, and (g) mentoring skills. Each area had questions which teachers answered by selecting the 1,2,3,4, or 5 rating that best represents their response to each question. The scale, represented by numbers from 1-5, extended from 'almost always' or 1 on the left, to 'almost never' or 5 on the right. Once completed, the total score divided by 12 represented the effectiveness of the teachers' coaching in that competency area. The teachers then totaled all 7 competency areas by adding the aggregate scores and then divided them by 7. The final score reflected the teachers' coaching effectiveness.

I selected this instrument because it was a very useful source of professional development information, as well as a valid survey instrument. I believed the questions to be in line with Gordon's principles of professional development. The questions also allowed the teachers to gain skills in the specific coaching areas and score one another on observed coaching practices. The teachers expressed positive feedback on the time and ease it took to complete the survey. They also felt scoring of the instrument was void of complication or difficulty, something the teachers were hoping.

#### Early Language & Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit

The second instrument - the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit (ELLCO), (Smith, Dickerson, Sangeorge, & Anastasopoulos, 2002), was composed of three research tools - the Literacy Environment Checklist, The Classroom Observation and Checklist, and the Literacy Activities Rating Scale, and was designed to assess the extent to which teachers in classrooms provide students with optimal support for their language and literacy development. The three components of the instrument were designed interdependent of one another. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Dr. Renee Casbergue, a member of my committee, informed me of the ELLCO's existence. I found this instrument to be a very useful and reliable instrument. The indicators in each of the areas also provided the opportunity for understanding and improving teaching practices. Feedback from the teachers regarding the ELLCO was much like the Coaching Effectiveness Profile; the teachers expressed the ease and lack of complication as something they desired, although the ELLCO required double the time to complete with an observation.

### The Literacy Environment Checklist

The first component, the Literacy Environment Checklist, was completed as a method to gain familiarity with the organization and contents of the classroom. Its use was intended to give inventory of literacy-related items in the classroom; it is comprised of 24 items that were divided into 5 categories: 1) the book area, addressed the arrangement of the classroom's book area; 2) book selection, gave observers the opportunity to make note of the number, variety, and the condition of books; 3) book use, 4) the arrangement, placement, and accessibility of books in the classroom, and 5) writing materials, addressed the variety of writing tools available for students' use. The scores were summed to provide a subtotal. The variables for the Literacy Environment Checklist included the books subtotal, the writing subtotal, and the total score.

### The Classroom Observation and Teacher Interview

The second component of the ELLCO toolkit was the Classroom Observation and Teacher Interview. It was designed to provide specific criteria about language and literacy practices in the classroom. The items of the second component are grouped into two categories; 1) General Classroom Environment, and 2) Language, Literacy, and Curriculum. The two items were related to support provided by the teachers that was associated with reading and writing.

The item 'General Classroom Environment', included the following items: organization of the classroom, contents of the classroom, patience and use of technology, opportunities for child choice and initiative, classroom management strategies, and classroom climate. The item, 'Language, Literacy and Curriculum' included the following items: oral language facilitation, presence of books, approaches to book reading, reading instruction, approaches to children's

writing, writing opportunities and instruction, approaches to curriculum integration, recognizing diversity in the classroom, facilitating home support for literacy, and approaches to assessment. Both areas, the Classroom Observation area, General Classroom Environment, and Language Literacy and Curriculum, were associated with a 5 point Likert scale with descriptive statements. The statements contained strong key words that indicated a level of evidence that was necessary for the scoring criteria. The higher number indicated an exemplary level of performance and the lowest described a deficient level of performance. The scale uses the following representations by numbers to classify the language and literacy environment: 5 - exemplary, 4 - proficient, 3 - basic, 2 - limited, and 1 - deficient.

Teacher interviews were conducted in order to explain different components of the observation. The protocol and suggested prompts were broad questions to gain information for more than one area at one time. In accordance with the ELLCO Toolkit, not all items may be observed during a classroom visit; thus, the Teacher interview questions were asked when it was impossible to assign a score to a Classroom Observation item with confidence. The variables for the Classroom Observation and Teacher Interview were the general classroom environment subtotal, the language, literacy, and curriculum subtotal; and the total score.

#### The Literacy Activities Rating Scale

The Literacy Activities Rating Scale was the third component of the ELLCO, completed in conjunction with the other parts. The rating scale was used after the other components of the ELLCO were completed. The rating scale was designed to gather information related to the number of book reading sessions and writing activities that took place during the observation and visit. The data collected from these questions was recorded in two ways - as subtotal amounts

and as scores. The information from these questions were recorded by signifying the number of book reading and writing activities that occurred during the visit. The variables for the Literacy Activities Rating Scale were the full-group reading subtotal, the writing subtotal, and the total score.

### Professional Development Activities

The teachers began working with peer coaching in the fall semester. For each of the workshops I acquired a facility, worked out lunch arrangements, and prepared the materials. An introductory meeting was conducted where the teachers completed a baseline Coaching Effectiveness Profile. The data was collected in order to gain information about the teachers' coaching effectiveness skills. The teachers then participated in a peer coaching workshop to gain effective peer coaching skills.

During the spring semester, the teachers were involved in a workshop related to emergent literacy development and the use of the ELLCO Toolkit. The training provided the opportunity for the teachers to learn to administer the ELLCO. The workshop also included information related to the effective instructional practices associated with teachers' support of students' emergent literacy development as well as support for the pre-kindergarten literacy environment. At the end of the workshop, the teachers were given an ELLCO Toolkit to be completed during the first session of peer coaching. The teachers observed one another and completed the initial peer-coaching visits and administered the ELLCO Toolkit within the classrooms. The ELLCO instrument alone required approximately one and one half hours.



The entire peer-coaching segment - including the initial visit, the teachers' observations of one another, the scoring of the instrument, and the coaching of one another, required approximately four and one half hours to complete. The teachers were given a self-addressed and stamped envelope in which to mail the completed instrument back to the program's monitor. After the first peer-coaching session and administration of the ELLCO, the teachers met on at least two other occasions where they exchanged ideas, feedback and coached each other on related information that was recorded from the previous observations. Six weeks later, after the initial workshop, the teachers re-administered the ELLCO within each other's classrooms, and then mailed the completed forms to a confidential location. The peer-coaching sessions on teachers' use of emergent literacy practice ended with the teachers completing a final Coaching Effectiveness Profile and mailing this with the ELLCO to myself as program monitor.

## Professional Development Activities:

Peer Coaching Effectiveness Workshop - 01/05/05

ELLCO Professional Development Workshop - 01/05/05

1<sup>st</sup> Peer Coaching Session (Classroom Observation) - 02/01/05

2<sup>nd</sup> Peer Coaching Session - (Classroom Observation) - 03/10/05

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - PEER COACHING

At the school sites, the initial peer coaching sessions included the administration of the ELLCO in one another's classrooms and took approximately 1 ½ hours per teacher to complete. Additional hours, determined by the participants, were utilized to coach one another. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of peer coaching, teachers assessed one another with the ELLCO Toolkit. The assessment was completed in approximately 1 ½ hours. Teachers also participated in additional coaching hours and then mailed the ELLCO Toolkit and a completed Coaching Effectiveness Survey to the researcher.

#### Participants Time Allocated:

- ❖ **Workshops – 1) 3 hours**, Introductory meeting/Participants Voluntarily committed to Peer Coaching, Completed Coaching Effectiveness Survey – 15 minutes; Participated in Peer Coaching Skills Workshop. **2) 3 hours**, Training of ELLCO Toolkit.
- ❖ **1<sup>st</sup> Peer Coaching Session – 1) 1 ½ hours** Completed ELLCO, **2) 3 hours** Peer Coaching: Observed in Peer's Classroom, Mailed Completed ELLCO self-addressed envelope 15 minutes.
- ❖ **2<sup>nd</sup> Peer Coaching Session – 1) 1 ½ hours** Completed ELLCO, **2) 3 hours** Peer Coaching: Observed in Peer's Classroom, Completed Coaching Effectiveness Survey 15 minutes. Mailed Completed ELLCO and Completed Coaching Effectiveness Survey, self-addressed envelope 15 minutes.

### Analysis of Numeric Data

The early language and literacy classroom observation instrument was analyzed by gaining descriptive statistics for the Literacy Environment Checklist, primarily computing the books subscale, writing subscale, and the Literacy Environment Checklist's total score. The data was then analyzed comparing the differences of the mean scores for the pre-test and post-test. Computations for the area of Classroom Observation and Descriptive statistics were gained by first computing the general classroom environment subtotal, language literacy and curriculum subtotal, and finally the classroom observation total score. The data from this area was also analyzed to compare the differences of the mean scores for the pre-test and post-test. Descriptive statistics were computed for the last area, Literacy Activities Rating Scale, in the same manner as detailed in the above paragraph. The areas were divided into a full-group reading subtotal, writing subtotal, and the literacy activities rating scale total score. The data from this area were also analyzed to compare differences of the mean scores for the pre-test and post-test.

The instrument to determine teachers' coaching effectiveness was analyzed by examining descriptive statistics in each of the competency areas: empathizing ability, listening skills, capacity to confront and challenge, problem-solving ability, feedback skills, capacity to empower, and mentoring skills. The data from the seven areas were analyzed to compare differences of the mean scores for the pre-test and post-test.

### Limitations

Personal disclosure of information through the autoethnographic inquiry could implicate the personal lives of others. But withholding information might compromise the gaining of scientific knowledge. Accordingly, explicitness of personal information can be toned down through self-censorship by rewording or rephrasing to be less threatening to significant people. According to Philaretou & Allen, (2006) the dilemma of self-censorship can be resolved by attributing real people's thoughts or behaviors to pseudonymical characters. In this study the names of schools, and significant persons were given pseudonyms where necessary.

### Summary

Initially, this study was designed to research a question that required a quantitative method of study. The methodology was designed to evaluate the teachers' peer coaching effectiveness in a teacher development program by numerically assessing data gained from the teachers' activities. It was also designed to investigate the effect of peer coaching on teachers' use of emergent literacy practices in the pre-kindergarten classroom. The Coaching Effectiveness Survey measured the teachers coaching effectiveness by assessing the different competencies that were essential to good coaching: empathizing ability, listening skills, capacity to confront and challenge, problem-solving ability, feedback skills, capacity to empower, and mentoring skills. In addition, the ELLCO Toolkit measured teachers' use of emergent literacy practices within the pre-kindergarten classroom by utilizing the Literacy Environment Checklist, the Classroom Observation and Teacher Interview, and by using the Literacy Activities Rating Scale. This chapter of methodology *now* describes the qualitative research engaged by the

researcher - autoethnographically. The tools of autoethnography were utilized, and the components useful to this study, autoethnographic coding, themes and purpose, participants, access, instrumentation, professional development activities, numeric data, limitations, and summary were included.

This autoethnographic inquiry reflects upon the implementation of peer coaching as a method to provide professional development for pre-kindergarten teachers. The interpretation of the experience is documented by portraying my observation of the issues involved. This autoethnography reflects events, accounts, and my general state of mind with people whom I have interacted with over a life-course perspective. The peer coaching was implemented to fulfill teachers' desire to self direct their own professional development, collaborate with peers, and to share and maintain strategies within the classroom. It was also implemented to fulfill my desire to provide professional development that would be meaningful and useful, and my personal need for the teachers to be self directed. The program was placed into action to assist teachers with the use of emergent literacy practices, a general goal for all involved. This chapter described the qualitative research as my interpretation of autoethnography.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Realization

The importance of chapter four is the analysis of data and the presentation of findings. This autoethnography was born from a combination of my personal recollections, conversations, observations, informal interviews, letters, self statements, self-revelations, reflected perceptions from significant others, account making, contents of personal documents, personal reflections, and expressions of my thoughts. This research has been a methodological journey that not only explored the teachers' professional development through peer coaching, but also the experiences that made it all possible for me as well. The data, selected and written in a narrative form, was read and re-read several times; repetitive words, phrases, and expressions were noted when evident and further coded. The themes became topics and the findings were then reflected upon in this narrative. Topics, such as, teachers building strong relationships, enlisting in a change of instructional practice, committing to professional growth, convey the significance of this professional development experience.

#### Teachers Building Strong Relationships

When analyzing the baseline coaching effectiveness profiles, completed before the workshops began, it was clear the teachers' strongest competency area was their empathizing ability (*see table 4.1*). This area remained strong even after the peer coaching workshop and sessions. According to the profile, this suggests the teachers generally liked people and enjoyed building strong and rewarding relationships. It also states that the teachers were likely to make a sincere effort to understand other people's issues and challenges, and therefore tune in to the

underlying feelings about a subject or issue. I knew each of the teachers that participated in the peer coaching and I personally agreed with the findings that most all of the teachers shared that empathizing capacity in one way or another.

I remember once at a workshop a teacher approached me, “Mrs. Butler, do you know if there are positions open in any schools close to my school?” Ms. Red asked. “How Come?” I wanted to know if Ms. Red was leaving her school. Finding teachers right now is really tough. “Not for me,” she says. “Ms. Blue is having some problems with the principal. She is making her work at 6:00 in the morning with the before school care until 5:00 with the after school care for the children. That’s ridiculous. And they’re not paying her!” I thought for a moment, well that sure is nose of Ms. Red to discuss Ms. Blue’s business, but I know these teachers function as though they are in a sorority. They identify with and understand each other’s feelings and difficulties. “I will look into it Ms. Red, I will have to talk with everyone to get all of the information.” She was satisfied.

Interestingly, after the peer coaching, the teachers whom were paired together remained friends. After the hurricane, a few of those teachers were displaced and have decided to remain in the cities where they evacuated. I am aware of this information because they stay in communication with the teachers they were paired with and with myself via telephone or email. These teachers probably would have done so under many other circumstances, but I credit peer coaching for the relationships that were made with teachers are other schools sites, in other locations, and avenue with which to have dialogue without consequences.

## Teachers Engaging in a Change of Instructional Practice

Overall, there was an improvement of peer coaching competencies as reported by the teachers after the peer coaching sessions. I deemed this to show the teachers' acceptance of the competencies of peer coaching by improving their skills as coaches. I also found this to indicate the partners collaborated effectively during that time by utilizing the competencies and implementing them. This was in agreement with the comments I was receiving from the teachers as they worked through the peer coaching process. One teacher said, "Ms. Butler, I've enjoyed talking with Ms. XYZ, we have actually become friends. We meet on Saturdays to have coffee. We talk about other things!" Another teacher said, "It was sort of hard to open up at first, but we have shared quite a bit of information." When monitoring in the schools during that time, it was evident the teachers were becoming more comfortable with one another. Because they were conversing so much, it had become harder and harder to rally their attention during our discussions!

It appeared that the peer coaching allowed the teachers the opportunity to guide their own practice. I tailored the professional development towards their interest of emergent literacy which was shaped by their questions and comments. The workshops were provided so that they can have autonomy with the observations and discussion of the topic, but I chose the instrumentation. They were actively involved in the professional development process and gained a sense of collegiality and camaraderie. We implemented Gordon's (2004) principles that apply to professional development and were successful. *See Table-4.1*



**TABLE: 4.1 - Teachers’ perceptions of their coaching effectiveness competencies before and after the peer coaching program**

<i>Peer Coaching Competencies</i>	Before the Professional Development (n = 10)	After the Professional Development (n = 10)
1. Empathizing Ability	1.89	1.43
2. Listening Skills	2.05	2.15
3. Capacity to Confront and Challenge	2.63	2.28
4. Problem-Solving Ability	2.53	2.14
5. Feedback Skills	2.06	1.89
6. Capacity to Empower	2.47	2.25
7. Mentoring Skills	1.97	1.69

*Note:* These competencies represent the skills involved in effective coaching. The respondents indicated their agreement to the statements related to the competencies on a 5-point scale, 1 for ‘almost always’, 2 for very frequently, 3 for frequently, 4 for occasionally, and 5 for ‘almost never’.

After gaining the information related to the peer coaching, it was important to look at the area or topic of observation the teachers worked with while peer coaching. Did the peer coaching have any impact on the emergent literacy practices of the teachers in the classroom? Two areas of the ELLCO were examined to note whether or not there was a positive impact on the teachers’ emergent literacy practices. The Literacy Environment Checklist and the Literacy Activities Rating Scales were calculated to gain scores from the teachers’ observations of the different sub areas. The mean scores of the initial session were compared to the mean scores of the final session to gain a sense of any changes in teacher practices.

**TABLE: 4.2 - Teachers’ observations of the literacy environment in peer coaching partners’ classroom; initial and final sessions**

<i>Literacy Environment Checklist</i>	Initial Peer Coaching Session (n = 10)	Final Peer Coaching Session (n = 10)
8. Book Area	3.0	3.0
9. Book Selection	7.0	7.1
10. Book Use	4.8	6.2
11. Writing Materials	6.8	6.7
12. Writing Around the Room	7.9	9.1

*Note:* Subtotals were summed on the scoring sheet to provide a final score. Scorers compared and checked their ratings to establish interrater agreement. Highest scores that could be obtained in the area: Book Area – 3, Book Selection – 8, Book Use – 9, Writing Materials – 8, Writing Around the Room – 13.

After both sessions of the peer coaching, the book area scores remained the same (*see table 4.2*). The score was the highest possible and it was consistent after the coaching. The book selection had only a slight increase. It is the area where teachers display books that range in difficulty, make books available to children, and display books that convey factual information. There was an increase in the area of book use - this was very encouraging. I credit the use of the ELLCO and its’ self assessment usage that allowed the teachers to reflect upon their own practices while observing other classrooms. The ELLCO highlights information related to emergent literacy in a manner that is easily understood and able to implement in the classroom without difficulty. There was a slight decrease in the use of writing materials, but writing around the room improved dramatically. I wondered if the teachers were actively replenishing the writing utensils, giving students the opportunity to use the writing materials.

**TABLE: 4.3 - Teachers’ observations of the literacy activities occurring in peer coaching partners’ classroom; initial and final sessions**

<i>Literacy Activities Rating Scale</i>	Initial Peer Coaching Session (n = 10)	Final Peer Coaching Session (n = 10)
12. Book Reading	5.8	6.7
13. Writing	3.1	3.4

*Note:* Subtotals were summed on the scoring sheet to provide a final score. Scorers compared and checked their ratings to establish inter rater agreement. The book reading score ranges from a low of 0 to a high of 8. The writing subscale ranges from 0-5.

Both book use and book reading showed a dramatic and interesting increase in scores. This was interesting to note because Lesiak (1997) states that children who have fewer literacy experiences in preschool tend to be poorer readers later in school. I couldn’t help but think - Susan Neuman would be proud! Her theories’ regarding access to books is crucial to literacy development. Without access to books, children may be denied the very experiences most essential to vocabulary development, word analysis skills, fluency, and comprehension in the early years (Neuman et al., 2001). I have to say that it was gratifying to see an increase in this area of access to books. When visiting classrooms I am always stunned when the teachers say their books are located in another area of the school, shared by multiple classrooms, or the administrator does not want them to be destroyed (how silly). “Books are meant to be used,” I say. “Please build libraries in your classrooms. Could you please make it a major project this year, and please allow the students to have access to them.”

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, I strongly believe in order for students to gain success with ecological interactions as discussed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), the environment must be facilitated by the teacher and maintained with appropriate materials, strategies, and practices. I did have faith, and with good reason. The results from my observations, the ELLCO, and teacher discussions, showed the teachers' practices or strategies, actually focused on students' access to print, teacher-child interactions with book reading, and the creation and maintaining of quality play areas with literacy rich materials. It is highly plausible we had positive interactions across systems as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

The professional development workshops, including the peer coaching observations and discussions, illustrated how teachers implemented the emergent literacy practices within their classrooms. I saw this with my own eyes as the student writing samples increased as they were displayed on the walls, in the newly created writing centers and in the students' assessment portfolios. I also witnessed more book reading interactions with teachers and students. It was strange observations to me because I was still monitoring classrooms of teachers who were not participating in the peer coaching program. The differences among the classrooms were staggering. The environments of the classrooms not participating, in my opinion, lacked the placement of books in activity centers and around the room. Those classrooms also did not have the displays of student writing or small group book reading. The differences were like night and day. Ms. Apple said to me, "Mrs. Butler, come and see how I've organized my books! I'm so excited. I labeled them, categorized them, and bought a new shelf!"

It was incredible to be a part of such changes. Concurrently, I realized that peer coaching may not be the only reason such changes occurred. I understand that these changes could be due to other factors, such as ancillary professional development activities or teachers engaged in self-

directed discovery. At any rate, the results of the peer coaching profile and the ELLCO assessment instruments were gratifying. This information along with the letter that I received from the teachers suggested the peer coaching provided them an avenue to enhance the emergent literacy environment. I, too, felt as though the climate in those classrooms had really changed. The teachers appeared to have more confidence with the placement of books, writing materials, and I witnessed more instances of teacher assistants reading to small groups of children.

### Teachers Committing to Professional Growth

One of the participating teachers wrote me a letter and slipped it into the assessments:

May 10, 2005

Dear Ms. Butler,

I am writing this to wish you God's Blessing in all that you do. May he always guide and protect you. I have enjoyed being under your guidance and support. Remember all of us in your prayers. Blessings to you and to your family. Thank them for sharing you with us.

Best Wishes,

Ms. PBC

This surprised me; at the time, I was not sure if the peer coaching was a hindrance to the teachers with time constraints or administrative issues. I only had information from what they would relate to me. They generally stated that everything was fine and they enjoyed the process. But, as stated earlier, I wasn't sure if this was to pacify my needs because I was the monitor of the program. On two occasions I did receive phone calls from teachers asking that I speak with the administrator of the school site because they were not allowed additional time for peer coaching. The teachers had utilized the time already allocated by the principal, but wanted more time to reflect and discuss. I told them I would speak to the administrator. The administrator of the school wouldn't budge on additional time, but the teachers and I came to the agreement they could meet outside of official school time. I was impressed by the teachers' commitment to the peer coaching program, and ultimately, to their own professional development.

The weakest area of the profile was the teachers' listening skills. This area remained weak after the peer coaching sessions as well. This might suggest that the teachers' are not generally sought out as coaches because people may fear that what they have to say might not be fully valued or given the attention needed for guidance or advice. They might also be distracted and or impatient. I found this to be surprising. I had to look at the findings from the perspective of the monitor. Did I consider them great listeners because they felt as though they were being evaluated? Were they genuine in the conversations? Consequently, to the benefit of their peer coaching partners, their abilities to become more empathetic listeners increased at the end of the peer coaching sessions. They maintained their commitment to their professional growth.

As I struggled through to find the place where my life, work and education merged, I found it was all one in the same. Much like the teachers struggling to find their own answers with some assistance, I struggled much the same way. I was given strengths early on to do

things myself, but it wasn't until later I realized the benefits of working with people through camaraderie and collegiality. My implementation of the peer coaching program was my attempt to empower those teachers much like I was empowered early on. I realized all of the participants were women. I am not sure if the outcome would have been different if the group was partially or solely made up of men.

I am forever grateful to my committee for steering me in the direction of autoethnography. Through my reflections, writing, conversations, understanding, and perspectives, I have come full circle with this research project. For my purpose as a monitor, the analysis of the peer coaching profiles and ELLCO signifies peer coaching as a viable method of professional development. However, it wasn't until the qualitative analysis, the writing, and the examination of myself, did I clearly see that this topic had to be discussed, talked about, and relived for it to be appreciated and then implemented again. Through autoethnography, I figured it out. Now, I get it!

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Explanation

Emergent literacy is seen as a continuous process, beginning in infancy with exposure to oral language, written language, books, and stories, with branches extending to other environments (Strickland and Morrow, 1989). I realized, long ago, that the early years are the formative ones, the time to gain the prerequisite skills that will fully support emergent literacy development; and, I now understand how crucial literacy achievement is to later accomplishment. However, I am realistic, and am fully aware there are huge challenges as well; because even though teachers exert best efforts and major commitment, a great proportion of students, particularly in urban environments, continue to fail to gain quality emergent literacy experiences that will increase their chances of educational growth, quality of life, and future accomplishment. The challenges include students in lower socio-economic communities having less access to print, fewer experiences of teacher-child interactions with book reading, and a stronger likelihood to exist in environments that lack literacy rich play materials and literacy rich play areas. Without a doubt, in early childhood education, I recognize that *teachers* are expected to provide the appropriate environment and opportunities for students to get off to a great start and gain positive emergent literacy development.

While teachers are expected to provide these literacy rich environments and experiences, this is very complex as materials, access, and interactions are highly differentiated. I have observed the major differences and seen them emerge from the variants methods of education.



Consequently, I now have an in-depth understanding of early literacy, and see that by increasing students' chances of exposure to print, adult-child reading, and reading experiences within literacy enriched play settings, the chance of success is increased, as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Because training and educational experiences of early childhood staff varies dramatically, quality ecological interactions require continual training and education as well as ongoing support and networking with other teachers; and while professional development is becoming accepted as a means to support these interactions, quality and effective early childhood professional development is still not a standard goal in most schools. Very few professional development programs contain the 'substance' that individualizes activities according to the needs of teachers and staff. In fact, many teachers in these programs are unable to consult or collaborate with other professionals or gain quality professional development experiences. Some teachers even experience feelings of isolation; I know, because I was one of them.

I understand though that, in a few fortunate high quality pre-kindergarten programs, it is through professional development, such as peer coaching, that teachers gain valuable information. The teachers then transfer this information into heightened classroom instruction. Consequently, peer-coaching programs, in many respects, are implemented to allow a creation of dialogue and solidarity among the teachers without risk. These programs, such as the one in this study, are tailored for all teachers, but will specifically help those that lack access to assistance, support, and experimentation.

## Implications

Most of the results from the studies related to peer coaching did indicate peer coaching as effective in improving teaching behaviors; in addition, the new skills were maintained and generalized to new settings more so than with other methods. Joyce and Showers (1982) found that a good many teachers could transfer the skills they had learned into the teaching situation. The teachers worked within what Vygotsky (1978) calls their 'zone of proximal development', where they interact with their peers and internalize valuable developmental processes. This was evident in this study. Unfortunately, environments lacking access to literacy, materials, and teacher-student interaction also tend to be the same environments lacking quality professional development to produce quality experiences in the classroom; but, if schools focused on collaboration, collegiality, and quality professional development (specific to teacher needs) - such as peer coaching, they might be more likely to assist teachers with specific issues and provide quality early experiences for young students at the same time.

## Summary

To summarize, peer coaching as described in the literature, did apply to everything I was making an effort to accomplish at the start of this research. The teachers were totally involved in their own process of professional development. From the moment they submitted questions and comments (thus introducing themselves informally), they took ownership of their own professional development. On a positive note, teachers inquired for information from one another throughout the workshop. The teachers completed the coaching effectiveness profiles and the ELLCO observation instruments with ease and with minor complications.

The instruments were returned to an undisclosed location without error. The teachers organized and planned the peer coaching sessions themselves and determined their own course of action.

I did assist in the structure of the peer coaching program, supporting it with theory and framework, but was not involved as an evaluator or monitor. I did my best to not interfere in the discussions of the teachers with conversations related to the subject matter. At the workshops, when asked a question about how they should accomplish something, I would smile and say, “That’s a great question to explore while you are peer coaching.” It was actually a relief to have them make decisions on their own, and that “I” was not “telling” them what to do.

The inquiry and dialogue was created and sustained entirely by the teachers. They were responsible for calling one another and pushing the process forward. They were also excited to have time set out of their day to visit other schools, all in the name of professionalism; in fact, most continued to organize in their own time. I honestly believe the peer coaching was successful; because they ‘owned’ the session, they formulated new communication strategies that were not only innovative, but personal, which suggests that they will work.

It was my recommendation to the director of the pre-kindergarten program to recognize peer coaching as an option for the teachers to gain professional development hours in the future. Unfortunately though, recognizing the hours would be a monitors’ function and might take away from the fact that it should be non-evaluative and without risk. I was hoping maybe the schools’ administrators would take on the professional development and possibly keep abreast of the time committed - but that, of course, was wishful thinking.

### Further Research

I hope that the information gained from this autoethnography will assist other studies within the field. More research in the area of peer coaching in early childhood education would provide an encompassing view of its benefits. In this research project, I saw an increase in teacher strategies and with overall book access and book reading]. Research related to peer coaching and other teaching practices such as teachers' use of specific genres, such as nonfiction, would also add to the literature. I also found autoethnography to be a huge research benefit and a viable methodology. This form of qualitative analysis should be employed with other studies within the area of early childhood education. It would be worthwhile to have access to other teachers'/researchers' stories. These collected stories would help build knowledge gained from the work of others.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Reflection

*At the end of this study I thought, it's one thing to want to implement something like peer coaching with supporting theory, another to put it into practice and then discuss it.*

Even before crunching the numbers and analyzing the data, I knew I would embark on this type of professional development again. I was satisfied with the discussion of the teachers' observations of one another, the results of the surveys, and more than anything, I was pleased with the camaraderie that had been forged. The teachers actually had a chance to leave the classroom and visit other schools, something I was sure had never been accomplished prior to the peer coaching.

This study served to fulfill multiple roles in my life. It propelled me to enlist in a nontraditional method of professional development for the teachers whose classrooms I monitor, engage in a dissertation research topic of academic and emotional importance, all while enhancing my understanding of theory as a program evaluator, researcher, and human being. In my mind, the peer coaching was successful because we all gained an opportunity to construct our own knowledge. The teachers constructed their knowledge while engaged in the peer coaching of one another, and I constructed knowledge of the process through the construction of the professional development activities and the research.

When I engage in this type of professional development again I will be mindful of teachers' concerns related to time. "Hello," I answered the phone, "Mrs. Butler?" "Yes, this is she", "Ms. Butler, this is Ms. Sun, I was told by Ms. Earth that she can't find someone to hold my class so that I can leave and peer coach. Is there something you can do? Can you call her?"

I think for a moment. Reflecting on the fact that all of the administrators involved said they supported the professional development and felt a dire need for it, I replied, “Ms. Sun, I will call Ms. Earth in the morning. I am not sure what can happen if she can’t find a substitute, but I will work with you on this issue. I will call you back. Thanks for participating.”

Some administrators were unwilling to approve time for the teachers to do the peer coaching discussions. I had to call and talk with them in order to convince them to do so. I will, in the future, enlist the administrators support prior to the professional development in order that they are more understanding of the process. As earlier implied, I was a bit naïve regarding the motivations and actions of principals and administrators; specifically, that they are, sometimes, uncooperative with the teachers’ scheduling. I had been told of their support for such professional development early on, and they signed off on the teachers’ participation; but when it came to gaining qualified substitutes to place in the classroom when the teachers were away peer coaching, it was a different story.

### Conclusion

This study autoethnographically explored whether or not a peer coaching program would be feasible professional development to enhance literacy practices in an early childhood education program. The teachers asked me to assist them with ways in which they could utilize the literature, materials, and supplies they were receiving in the classrooms. Rather than assist with a single/solitary approach of discussing practices and strategies again and again with the pre-kindergarten teachers one on one, with help from my major professor, peer coaching was the best suggested method recommended to assist the teachers in working with one another to accomplish their and my goals. Rather than quantitatively analyze the numerical data and report

findings, a qualitative approach was used to explore the understanding of the author/researcher within the study and to analyze and discuss the information provided by the participants.

In the area of early childhood education, the exploration of peer coaching and its effect on specific teaching strategies, as completed as an autoethnography, was completely absent from the literature. I was guided to this methodological revelation by way of my committee and would not have wanted it any other way. The writing, the process of writing, and my understanding of my writing assisted me in far more ways than what can be described. When I struggled to find order in my life after Hurricane Katrina, the research allowed me the opportunity to align my thoughts with what was and what the world has become, for me and for teachers in this program. I gained much clarity and much hope.

*My life has come full circle. School and work for me have become one under this research project. I believe my study revealed how, as people, we have a need to come together to build homes, schools, and lives. I attempted to build a structure of development for the teachers to own. I honestly believe I accomplished this goal. I would do it again. I live in North Carolina now with my husband, kids, and our dog Louie, (short for Louisiana). My mother lives in North Carolina and is graduating this May 2007 with a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. We are extremely proud of her. After she supported all of us through college, dental school, business school, graduate school, and assisted with the rearing of the grandchildren, she then enrolled in college.*

*The kids miss home but they know we can't return to live in New Orleans until we rebuild. We are getting acclimated to North Carolina, but nothing, in our minds and hearts, can take the place of New Orleans. We crave the music, the food, the laissez faire atmosphere. We live in North Carolina, but our lives are in New Orleans. I fly back and forth every week to work in Louisiana; I get to soak up some of what I miss. I could very well work in North Carolina. That would be easier. But if I felt like I was needed before Hurricane Katrina, I definitely feel like I am needed now, after the storm.*



## References

- Ackland, Robert. (1991). A review of the peer coaching literature. *Journal of Staff Development*, 12, 22-27.
- Anderson, R. (1995). *Research foundations for wide reading*. Paper presented at the Invitational Conference of the Center of Reading, Urbana, IL.
- Anderson, R. C., Heibert, E. H., Scott, J. A., and Wilkinson, I.A.G. (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers*. Center for the Study of Reading, National Institute of Education, and National Academy of Education. Champaign, IL.
- Atkinson, P. (1997). Narrative turn or blind alley? *Qualitative Health Research*. 7, 325-344.
- Atwell, N. (1987). *In the middle*. Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH.
- Azmitia, Margarita. 1997. Peer interactive minds. Developmental, theoretical, and methodological issues. (Chapter 11). *From Learning relationships in the classroom*. Edited by Dorothy Faulkner, Karen Littleton, and Martin Woodhead.
- Becker, J. M. (1996). Peer coaching for improvement of teaching and learning. Teachers Network, <http://www.teachnet.org/TNPI/research/growth/becker.htm>.
- Berger, E. (2000). *Parents as partners in education*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, Allyn & Bacon.
- Bodgan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allen & Bacon.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32, 513-531.

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA.
- Bruner, J. (1980). *Under five in Britain*. High Scope Press. Ypsilanti, MI.
- Casbergue, R., McGee, L., and Bedford, A., (in press). In L. Justice and C. Vukelich (Eds.). *Every Moment Counts: Achieving Excellence in Preschool Language and Literacy Instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Clandin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (1987). *Narrative, experience and the study of curriculum*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 306 208 (Report No. SP 031 094)). Edmonton: Alberta Advisory Committee for Educational Studies.
- Creswell, J. W. 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches*. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Day, D. (1983). *Early childhood education: A human ecological approach*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Duke, N. (2000). 3.6 Minutes per day: The scarcity of informational texts in first grade. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35(2), 202-204.
- Ehri, L. (1994). Ruddell, R., Ruddell, M.R., & Singer, H. (Eds.). Development of the ability to read words. *Theoretical models and processes of reading*. 4, 323-358.
- Elley, W. (1989). Vocabulary acquisition from listening to stories. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 24, 174-187.
- Ellis, C. (1999). Heartful Autoethnography. *Qualitative Health Research*. 9(5), 669-683.
- Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal, narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In: N. K. Denzin & Lincoln (Eds). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 733-768. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Englert, C.S. & Sugai, G. (1993). Teacher training: Improving trainee performance through peer observation and observation system technology. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 6, 7-17.
- Feitelson, D., Kita, B., & Goldstein, Z. (1986). Patterns of book ownership and reading to young children in Israeli school oriented and non-school oriented families. *The Reading Teacher*, 39, 924-930.
- Foster, K. McAllister, M., O'Brien, L. (2006). Extending the boundaries: Autoethnography as an emergent method in mental health nursing research. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*. 15(44), 44-53.
- Frank, A. W. (1991). *At the will of the body: Reflections on illness*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Goodman, Y. (1984). H. Goelman, A. Oberg, and F. Smith (Eds.). The development of initial literacy. *Awakening to literacy*. Heinemann Educational Books, Portsmouth, NH.
- Gordon, Stephen. 2004. *Professional development for school improvement. Empowering learning communities*. Pearson Education, Inc. Boston, MA.
- Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH.
- Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). *Effective Evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Halley, J. (2003). To speak of my mother. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 9, 49-56.
- Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. Cassell: London.
- Helburn, S. (1995). *Cost, quality, and child outcomes in child care centers*. Department of Economics, Center for Research in Economics and Social Policy, University of Colorado at Denver.

- Holt, N. (2003). Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(1), 1-22.
- Ingham, J. (1981). *Books and reading development*. London: Heinemann.
- Ingvarson, L. (1997). Teachers matter most. *Unicorn*, 23(3), 31-35.
- Jencks, C. & Phillips, M. (Eds.). (1998). *The black-white test score gap*. The Brookings Institute, Washington D.C.
- Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1982). The coaching of teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 40, 4-8.
- Juel, C., Griffith, P.L., & Gough, P. (1986). Acquisition of literacy: A longitudinal study of children in first and second grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 78, 243-55.
- Justice, L.M., Chow, S., Capellini, C., Flanigan, K., & Colton, S. (2003). Emergent literacy intervention for vulnerable preschoolers: Relative effects of two approaches. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 12, 320-332.
- Justice, L.M. & Pullen, P.C. (2003). Promising interventions for promoting emergent literacy skills: Three evidence-based approaches. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 23, 99-113.
- Kracauer, S. (1993). The challenge to qualitative content analysis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 16, 631-642.
- Kieff, J. & Casbergue, (2000). *Playful learning and teaching: Integrating play into preschool and primary programs*. Allyn & Bacon. Needham Heights, MA.
- Kohler, F.W., McCullough, K.M., & Buchan, K.A. (1995). Using peer coaching to enhance preschool teachers' development and refinement of classroom activities. *Early Education and Development*, 6(3), 215-239.

- Lam, S., Yim, P., Lam, T. (2002). Transforming school culture: can true collaboration be initiated? *Educational Research*. 44(2), 181-195.
- Miller, P.S., Harris, C., Watanabe, A. (1991). Professional coaching: A method for increasing effective and decreasing ineffective teacher behaviors. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 14, 183-191.
- Morgan, R. L., Guftafson, K. J., Hudson, P.J., Salzberg, C. L. (1992). Peer coaching in a preservice special education program. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 15, 249-258.
- Morgan, R. L., Menlove, R., Salzberg, C.L., Hudson, P. (1994). Effects of peer coaching on the acquisition of direct instruction skills by low-performing preservice teachers, *The Journal of Special Education*, 28(1), 59-76.
- Morrow, L. M. (1987). Promoting innercity children's recreational reading. *The Reading Teacher*. 41, 266-274.
- Morrow, L. M. (1988). Young children's responses to one-to-one story readings in school settings. *Reading Research Quarterly*. 23, 89-107.
- Morrow, L. M. & Rand, M. (1991). Promoting literacy during play by designing early childhood classroom environments. *The Reading Teacher*. 44(6), 396-402.
- Morrow, L.M., & Weinstein, C.S. (1986). *Encouraging voluntary reading: The impact of a literature program on children's use of library corners*. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21, 330-346.
- Natriello, G., McDill, E., & Pallas, A. (1990). *Schooling disadvantaged children*. Teachers College Press, New York, NY.

- Neuman, S. B. (1999). Books make a difference: A study of access to literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34, 3.
- Neuman, S. B. & Celano, D. (2001). Access to print in low-income and middle-income communities: An ecological study of four neighborhoods. *International Reading Association*, 36, 8-26.
- Neuman, S. B., Greco, A., Celano, D. & Shue, P. (2001). Access for all: Closing the book gap for children in early education. *International Reading Association*. Newark, DE. [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org).
- Neuman, S. B. & Roskos, K. (1990). Play, print and purpose: Enriching play environments for literacy development. *The Reading Teacher*, 44, 214-221.
- Neuman, S. B. & Roskos, K. (1992). The influence of literacy-enriched play settings on preschoolers' engagement with written language. In J. Zutell & S. McCormick (Eds.). *Literacy theory and research: Analyses from multiple paradigms* (41<sup>st</sup> yearbook of the National Reading Conference), p. 179-187. National Reading Conference. Chicago, IL.
- Neuman, S.B., & Roskos, K. (1993). Access to print for children of poverty: Differential effects of adult mediation and literacy-enriched play settings on environmental and functional print tasks. *American Educational Research Journal*, 30, 95-122.
- Neuman, S. B. & Roskos, K. (1997). Literacy objects as cultural tools: Effects on children's literacy behaviors in play. *International Reading Association*, 31, 203-225.
- Nias, J. (1999). Teachers' moral purposes: Stress, vulnerability, and strength. In R. Vandenberghe & A. M. Huberman (Eds.), *Understanding and preventing teacher burnout: A sourcebook of international research and practice* (pp. 223-237). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Pappas, C. (1991). Young children's strategies in learning the "book language" of information books. *Discourse Processes*, 14(2), 203-225.
- Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B. *The psychology of the child*. Basic Books, New York, NY.
- Philaretou, A. G., & Allen, K. R. (2006). Researching sensitive topics through autoethnographic means. *The Journal of Men's Studies*. 14(1), 65-78.
- Pumfrey, P. (1988). A three-year longitudinal study of children's reading behaviors: What has been learned. *Educational Researcher*. 30, 162-175.
- Reed-Danahay, D. (2002). Turning points an textual strategies in ethnographic writing. *Qualitative Studies in Education*. 15(4), 421-425.
- Richardson, L. (1994). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 516-529. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Robbins, P. (1991). *How to plan and implement a peer coaching program*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandria, VA.
- Showers, B. (1985). Teachers coaching teachers. *Educational Leadership*,42(7), 43-48.
- Smith, M.W., Dickinson, D.K., Sangeorge, A., & Anastasopoulos, L. (2002). *Early Language & Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit*. Brookes Publishing Co. Newton, MA.
- Snow, C. E., Burns, E., M. Susan, & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. National Research Council. Washington, D.C.
- Sparkes, A. (2000). Autoethnography and narratives of self: Reflections on criteria in action. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 17, 21-43.
- Strickland, D. S. & Morrow, L. M. (Eds.). Harste, J. & Woodward, H. C. (1989). *Emerging literacy: Young children learn to read and write*. Newark, DE. International Reading Association, Inc.

- Strickland, D. S. & Morrow, L. M. (Eds.). Morrow, L. (1989). Designing the classroom to promote literacy development. *Emerging Literacy: Young children learn to read and write*. International Reading Association. Newark, DE.
- Strickland, D. S. & Morrow, L. M. (Eds.). Strickland, D. & Taylor, D. (1989). *Emerging literacy: Young children learn to read and write*. Family storybook reading: Implications for children, families, and curriculum. International Reading Association. Newark, DE.
- Strickland, D. S. & Morrow, L. M. (Eds.). Teale, W. & Sulzby, E. (1989). Emergent literacy: New perspectives. *Emerging literacy: Young children learn to read and write*. International Reading Association. Newark, DE.
- Strickland, D. S. & Morrow, L. M. (Eds.). Teale, W., Sulzby, E., & Kamberelis, G. (1989). Emergent writing in the classroom: Home and school connections. *Emerging literacy: Young children learn to read and write*. International Reading Association. Newark, DE.
- Strickland, D. S. (1987). Sharing books with young children. *Pre-k Today*. 1(4), 14-16.
- Taylor, N., Blum, I., & Logsdon, D. (1986). The development of written language awareness: Environmental aspects and program characteristics. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21, 132-149.
- Taylor, D., & Strickland, D. S. (1986). *Family storybook reading*. Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH.
- Teale, W.H., & Sulzby, E. (Eds.). (1986). *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading*. Ablex. Norwood, NJ.



- Tschantz, J. & Vail, C. (2000). Effects of peer coaching on the rate of responsive teacher statements during a child-directed period in an inclusive preschool setting. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 23(3), 189-201.
- Twardosz, S., Roskos, K., & Lenhart, L. (2003). *Optimizing learning opportunities in classrooms: Arranging the resources of the environment to support early literacy instruction in pre-K-2*. Paper presented at the 48<sup>th</sup> annual convention of the International Reading Association. Orlando, FL.
- Vail, C., Tschantz, J., & Bevill, A. (1997). Dyads and data in peer coaching: Early childhood educators in action. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, Nov/Dec, 11-15.
- Valencia, S.W. & Killion, J. P. (1988). Overcoming obstacles to teacher change: Directions from school-based efforts. *Journal of Staff Development*, 9, 2-8.
- Vickers, M. H. (2002). Researchers as storytellers: Writing on the edge-and without a safety net. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 8, 608-621.
- Vukelich, (1990). Where's the paper? Literacy during dramatic play. *Childhood Education*, 66, 203-209.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of psychological processes*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA.
- Warner, Jon. (2002). *Coaching Effectiveness Profile*, HRD Press, Amherst, MA.
- Watkins, R. V. & Bunce, (1996). Natural literacy: Theory and practice for preschool intervention programs. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*. 16, 191-212.
- Whitehurst, G. J., Epstein, J., Angell, A., Payne, A., Crone., D., & Fischel, J. (1994). Outcomes of an emergent literacy intervention in Head Start. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 86, 542-555.

Wood, D., McMahon, L., & Cranstoun, Y., (1980). *Working with under fives*. High Scope Press. Ypsilanti, MI.

Wynn, M., & Kromfrey, J. (2000). Paired peer placement with peer coaching to enhance prospective teachers professional growth in early field experience. *Action in Teacher Research*. V22, n2A, 73-83.

## Appendices

## Appendix A

### Letter of Agreement for Research Study: Utilizing Peer Coaching to Increase Pre-Kindergarten Teachers' Emergent Literacy Practices Through the Assessment of the Emergent literacy Environment

Dates of the Study: September 1, 2004—May 1, 2005

I am granting Ms. Darilyn Butler access to the program evaluation information from the teachers and classrooms of twenty five Pre-kindergarten classrooms in the Pre-kindergarten Program.

Darilyn Butler will use this information from the teachers and classrooms as the sample of her researcher project.

I have reviewed Darilyn Butler's research procedures. Now I am approving these procedures: The teachers will participate a 3 hour workshop in which they will be administered the Coaching Effectiveness Survey to pre-examine teachers' coaching skills. Through the workshop the teachers will be trained on the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit (ELLCO). And, the teachers will be introduced to effective literacy and language strategies throughout the workshop and discuss the emergent literacy environment.

The teachers will be given the ELLCO toolkit to be administered to one another during the peer coaching sessions. The teachers will be given a stamped addressed envelope to return the completed ELLCO to the researcher. Two sessions per peer coaching partner will be required in order to assess the literacy environment. One initial session will be required soon after the workshop another session will be required after four weeks. The teachers will be mailed an ELLCO Toolkit and a Coaching Effectiveness Survey to be completed at the end of the four weeks. They will again be given a self-addressed envelope in which to return the completed ELLCO and Coaching Effectiveness Survey.

My approval of the procedures is based on the premise that Darilyn Butler will gain the written consent from the participating staff of participating students. My approval of the procedures is also based on the premise that Ms. Butler will carefully protect the confidentiality of the study by disguising the names of the schools, the classes, the staff, in any publication or report of the findings and keeping all data collected in a secure place.

---

Charles Tate Director

---

Date:

## Appendix B

### Peer Coaching Program

# **Early Childhood Development Program**

If teachers at your school are participating in the Peer Coaching Program this Spring, it is important that they RSVP as soon as possible. Participation in the workshop is voluntary.

The teachers will participate along side a peer coaching partner.

Please complete the attached form and fax it to:

(504) XXX-XXXX. This will secure your place in the peer- coaching program for the spring semester. Participation is voluntary. The forms must be faxed by January 11, 2005.

If you have any questions regarding the Peer Coaching Professional Development Program please call Darilyn Butler, (504) XXX-XXXX. Thank you.

Peer Coaching Professional Development Program

Spring Semester 2005

Please Complete and Fax to: (504) XXX-XXXX

Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to RSVP to participate in the Spring Peer Coaching Program related to early childhood and literacy. I understand that participation is voluntary, and must be completed with peer coaching partner.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

Darilyn Butler is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Drama and Communications from the University of New Orleans, a Master of Fine Arts degree in Film and Television Production in 1999, from the University of New Orleans, and a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction in 2000, also from the University of New Orleans. Darilyn is the sole proprietor of the consulting firm: ECE – Professional Development & Consulting, and has been contracted by the Louisiana Governor’s Office of Community Programs since 2003. Due to Hurricane Katrina, she resides in both Charlotte, North Carolina and New Orleans, Louisiana.