Coaching as a Strategy for Improving Early Learning Program Quality

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

As professionals and governments increasingly recognize the role early learning programs play in the young child’s learning and development, agencies and governments alike are trying to determine effective strategies for enhancing program quality. While coaching has gained popularity as a method to improve program quality, there has been little research on coaching within the licensed early learning and care sector in Canada.

The current study utilized a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, to better understand how a quality improvement process and the use of coaches support changes to program quality. The quality improvement process provided a structure for educators to examine practices, set goals, and implement changes while the coaches provided support and guidance to educators engaged in the process.
The main quantitative method utilized the Early Childhood Education Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) to evaluate program quality before and after the implementation of the process. While the results were not statistically significant, there were some indicators that the process and the use of coaches might support program quality improvements.

The analysis of qualitative data (from survey questions and interviews) resulted in themes regarding both the quality improvement process and the value of coaches. The strongest overarching themes regarding the implementation of the process were: 1) Need for Time and 2) Importance of Reflective Practice. An additional theme was - Process Results in Positive Outcomes. The overarching themes regarding coaches were: 1) Coaches Provide Resources, 2) Coaches Provide Clarity/Insight, 3) Coaches are Mediators/Facilitators, and 4) Coaches Help Educators Complete the Process.

The limitations of the study (e.g., small sample size, use of volunteers) restricted generalizations, but the results did highlight the need for more research and provided some implications for agencies and governments looking to improve program quality.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge all the volunteers who participated in the study or dedicated their time to create the quality improvement process used in it. Without the support of the local early childhood education community, this study would not have happened.
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

As brain research over the past few decades has consistently identified the link between a child’s early experiences and future health and well-being, researchers, educators, parents and governments have all looked at ways to positively support the young child’s development. Globally, people are becoming more aware of the importance of providing positive supports for children during their early years, and this is reflected in UNICEF’s statement regarding early child development:

Good nutrition and health and consistent loving care and encouragement to learn in the early years of life help children to do better at school, be healthier, have higher earnings and participate more in society. … A good foundation in the early years makes a difference through adulthood and even gives the next generation a better start (UNICEF, 2013).

Part of this “good foundation” is the child’s ability to engage in play - a right that has been recognized since 1989 when the United Nations ratified Article 31 of The Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Although professionals in the field of early childhood education have long recognized the importance of caring, supportive relationships and play, consistent findings from early years brain research has led to policy changes within Canadian provinces and territories.

During the past decade the Ontario government has listened to the messages of researchers such as Fraser Mustard (2007) and Charles Pascal (2009). Recognizing the importance of the early years, the government implemented several initiatives, including: the College of Early Childhood Educators; full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten; and new legislation for the early years (Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014). Early years programs were also moved under the care of the Ministry of Education. The Ontario Ministry of Education has recently released pedagogies for both full-day kindergarten programs within the school system and licensed early learning and care programs (e.g., child care and preschool). The pedagogy for licensed early years programs
and EarlyON Child and Family Centres, found in *How Does Learning Happen (2014)*, and the pedagogy for the kindergartens, found in *The Kindergarten Program (2016)*, recognize the importance of relationships and play in the early years.

As the Ontario government creates systemic changes within the early learning sector to better reflect the knowledge gained from research on both the brain and the early years, it is educators who must interpret the impact of these changes on their current practices and determine what modifications they need to make to programs.

When I meet with educators in the community they will often state that their goal is to provide quality programs for children, but it is a struggle to incorporate the new expectations coming from a rapidly changing field. Most licensed early learning and care centres are not part of large organizations, such as school boards, which provide ongoing learning and networking opportunities for their staff. This results in many educators working to implement changes with very limited support from early learning professionals who have more expertise in these areas. If the government and society want to see improvements in quality, supports may be necessary. Coaching is one type of ongoing professional support that could be provided to the early learning and care sector.

### 1.2 Context of the Study

“Remarkable progress in neuroscience, molecular biology, and genomics has provided rock-solid knowledge that underscores the role of positive early experiences in strengthening brain architecture, along with compelling evidence that “toxic” stress can disrupt brain circuits, undermine achievement, and compromise physical and mental health” (Shonkoff J. P., 2009, p. 79). Brain research results support earlier research that indicated poor quality programs for young children result in negative outcomes while high quality programs result in positive outcomes (OECD, 2012; Shonkoff, 2012).

The growing body of research indicating a link between early learning experiences and a child’s long-term development means that policy makers, as well as educators, must carefully examine
programs being offered to young children and implement practices linked to positive outcomes for children. As Shonkoff (2012) states, “Extensive evidence that personal experiences and environmental exposures are embedded biologically (for better or for worse) and the cumulative knowledge of more than four decades of intervention research provide a promising opportunity to mobilize evolving scientific insights to catalyze a new era of more effective early childhood policy and practice.”

In Ontario, research has led to changes in legislation regarding the early years. The Ontario government has moved away from child care legislation that mainly emphasized physical health and safety because they recognize that these components of early learning programs are not enough to ensure program quality. Although the new legislation (Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014) continues to recognize the importance of both health and safety regulations, it also recognizes that play-based early learning is an important component.

Research findings have also resulted in changes to Ontario government policies. Beginning with Ontario’s “Best Start Plan” in 2004, government policies have continued to evolve to better support program quality. In 2013 the government introduced the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework, which emphasized “high-quality, accessible, and increasingly integrated early years programs and services that contribute to healthy child development…” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 2), and in 2017 Ontario’s Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework was published. In 2014, guided by both policy and ongoing research, the Ontario government also introduced a new pedagogical approach to the licensed early learning and care sector. While this new approach is important, it can not be effective if educators do not understand or implement this pedagogically sound approach within their programs.

1.3 Government and Community Support for Quality in Early Learning Programs

Using data provided by provincial and territorial governments, Friendly, Grady, MacDonald, and Forer (2015) identified that the majority of Canadian parents with young children work outside
the home and require early learning and care programs for their children. Numerous studies (Barnett, 2008; Belsky, Vandell, Burchinal, Clarke-Stewart, McCartney, & Owen, 2007; Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn, 2010; Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Friendly, Doherty, & Beach, 2006; Vandell, Belsky, Burchinal, & Vandergraft, 2010) have shown that the long-term impact of quality early learning and care programs can benefit children (e.g., improved literacy, higher success rate in school, poverty reduction). It is important, therefore, that centres provide quality programs and that educators receive the support they need to ensure quality.

Vandell (2004) reviewed the literature on child care over the previous 20 years and found that many studies had the following conceptualization of quality: “High-quality child care was conceptualized as involving supportive interactions with caregivers, positive interactions with peers, and opportunities for cognitively stimulating play, whereas poor-quality care was conceptualized as involving negative interactions with caregivers and peers and aimless wandering” (p. 391). Similar indicators of quality which emphasize the importance of relationships and positive learning experiences continue to be identified in more recent reports (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011; OECD, 2015).

Although policy and regulatory changes are being made to better support quality in early learning and care programs, Canada still has work to do. The report, Investing in Quality: Policies, Practitioners, Programs and Parents (Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources, 2007) provided a review of the state of Ontario’s regulatory environment and funding for child care services. It indicated that “The current regulatory environment focuses primarily on child health and safety, rather than on the quality of early learning and care programs or the qualifications of practitioners” (p. 7). The research by Goelman, Doherty, Lero, LaGrange, and Tougas (2000) indicated that fewer than half the preschool programs in Canada were providing quality programs. “The children’s physical and emotional health and safety are protected, but few opportunities for learning are provided” (p. ix, x). These findings were also apparent in the 2004 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) country report on Canada, which reviewed Canadian early learning and care programs. Similarly, a 2008 UNICEF
study comparing 25 OECD countries on the proposed international minimum standards for early childhood care and education placed Canada last, along with Ireland. Out of the ten minimum standards, Canada was able to meet only one. Japel and Welp (2009) identified that Quebec, with its affordable and accessible approach to early learning and care, fared better than other areas of Canada, but still failed to meet even half of UNICEF’s benchmarks for early childhood education and care. Clearly, Canadian early learning programs need to improve.

In its response to the U.N.’s 2002 special session on children, the Canadian government highlighted the importance of the early years and early learning opportunities. A Canada Fit for Children (Government of Canada, 2004) states, “A comprehensive system of early learning and child care programs based on principles of inclusion, affordability, accessibility, quality and parental choice can provide the positive stimulation and nurturing in the early years that lay the foundation for learning, health and behaviour throughout a person’s life” (p. 17). However, a change in government resulted in little support from the federal government, and provincial/territorial governments were left with the role of developing and funding any changes to support quality improvements within the licensed sector.

In the ten to fifteen years since these reports were written, the Ontario government has made some significant changes in the early years sector— the most noticeable one being the implementation of full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten programs that emphasize play-based learning. Changes are also occurring in the early learning and care sector; however, the implementation of changes in these programs has been slower than changes in the school system. Although an early learning framework was published in 2007 (Early Learning for Every Child Today), Ontario’s pedagogy for early years’ programs was not introduced until late 2014. As well, although there has been some funding to improve the wages of individuals working in the sector (Friendly et al., 2015), many would argue that there hasn’t been sufficient governmental support for increased wages or other major changes that are needed to support quality early learning (e.g., non-contact time to plan for and document learning).

Although progress is slow, all provinces and territories are making changes. Reflecting a process that is prevalent throughout OECD countries, most Canadian provincial and territorial
governments have developed early learning frameworks to support the delivery of quality early learning and care programs. Only Nunavut and the Yukon do not have early learning frameworks in place (Akbari & McCuaig, 2017).

These frameworks reflect each province’s and territory’s unique philosophy and pedagogy regarding early learning programs. British Columbia published the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* (British Columbia Early Learning Advisory Group, 2008), which “describes in broad terms a vision, principles, and areas of early learning for British Columbia. It is designed to be put into practice in different ways depending on the circumstances of individual children, families, and communities” (p. 2). In the same year, Saskatchewan’s *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* (Krentz, 2008) was published, and like the other frameworks “affirms the importance of high quality experiences for all Saskatchewan children during their preschool years” (p. 1). More recently, in 2013 the Northwest Territories published *A Framework for Early Childhood Development in the Northwest Territories*, and in 2014 Alberta published *Play, Participation and Possibilities*. As with the other frameworks, the Alberta publication acknowledges that quality early learning is complex. It is influenced by the interactions and relationships children have with adults and other children, by the learning experiences that emerge through their play, and by the social and cultural contexts of the community in which they live.


As with other frameworks, Ontario’s is designed to support educators’ understanding and implementation of quality early learning and care, and to provide some guidelines around assessing and evaluating their professional practices. While the framework is a necessary starting point, and while it includes examples demonstrating how to implement the guiding principles, educators often require additional supports to help them create changes, assess children’s learning, and evaluate their programs.
In Ontario, other initiatives were also implemented to support the profession and raise expectations regarding quality early learning. In 2011 the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) published their *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*. Although this document (revised 2017) outlines minimum professional standards, it also informs educators of the various performance areas required to provide quality programs for young children. In addition, the early years division in the Ontario Ministry of Education revised legislation/regulations around early learning and care and provided some funding to support the early learning and care sector. However, the level of government funding remains low and funding increases have been too limited to sustain affordable, high-quality early learning and care programs for all, or even a majority of children (Kaplan, Perlman, Jamison, Varmuza, & White, 2018). In addition, even though research consistently links educator training with quality early learning programs (OECD, 2012), the government still requires only minimal training for many individuals working with young children (Friendly et al., 2015).

Ontario’s early learning framework and its pedagogy for the early years, along with other initiatives, are designed to help create quality programs for young children and to help the public understand the government’s vision of quality early learning and care. Unfortunately, these tools are inadequate unless systems are in place: not only to monitor how well programs are implementing the policies, but also to support educators who may need time to enhance their skills, understand current practices, and improve their programs. While governments in some countries have instituted processes designed to support and monitor quality, most governments in Canada have not moved in this direction. In Ontario, the lack of a province wide system to support educators and evaluate programs has resulted in a number of local initiatives to improve quality.

1.3.1 Improving Quality in Licensed Early Learning and Care Programs

In the current era where there is an ever-greater emphasis on accountability, governments and the public want to be assured that the funding of early learning and care programs results in quality programs for children. At the same time, professionals working in the early learning sector have
also sought to improve program quality by developing voluntary quality improvement processes. In various countries (e.g., New Zealand, U.S., U.K., Australia), early learning professionals, along with governments, have attempted to develop system-wide processes that will result in improved program quality.

In 1993, Australia created a country-wide accreditation system for the early learning and care sector known as the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS); in 2012, they implemented a more extensive national quality assessment system (Taylor, Ishimine, Cloney, Cleveland, & Thorpe, 2013). Similarly, in the United States, states are implementing tools to both rate and improve quality in early learning centres (e.g., Quality Rating and Improvement Systems). As Goffin and Barnett (2015) state, “More than half of all states have QRIS, and the remaining have them in development” (p. 179).

Sweden is an example of a country that approaches quality assurance without using a rigid assessment system like the QRIS. Although the Ministry of Education and Science does not have a specific tool for assessing quality, the Education Act and revised preschool curriculum requires preschools “to work systematically with quality issues to discern, evaluate, and improve aspects of preschool that are important for children’s wellbeing, play, learning and development” (Sheridan, Williams, & Sandberg, 2012, p. 125).

As with early learning frameworks, quality assurance strategies in Canada vary from province to province. Since 2004, Alberta has implemented an accreditation process for licensed early learning and care programs to “promote excellence in child care settings and help families choose the best care for their children” (Government of Alberta, 2013, p. 5). Although the process is voluntary, it is offered province-wide and supported by the provincial government with additional funding for centres that are accredited. In other jurisdictions, such as Quebec, quality assurance is being addressed by non-governmental agencies.

In Manitoba, the province funded training of early childhood educators on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised (ECERS-R) and the Infant Toddler Environmental rating
scale (ITERS). Both of these are validated assessment tools frequently used to assess program quality in early learning and care programs (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005).

The ECERS-R consists of 43 items, each containing demonstrable quality indicators ranging from interactions to administration, while the ITERS consists of 39 items containing quality indicators. In Manitoba, the ECERS-R was used as a tool to support and improve quality in early learning programs. Child care coordinators integrate the ECERS-R into their work with licensed early learning and care programs (Government of Manitoba, 2009). Although it was initially a mandatory process, the government indicated that it was moving towards a centre-based process of assessment and goal setting which will see the implementation of the ECERS-R or ITERS as optional.

The ECERS-R, along with ITERS, has been used in other Canadian jurisdictions including Quebec and Ontario. In the early 1990s, the Ontario government provided ECERS training for individuals in the early learning and care sector and encouraged its use to evaluate program quality and inspire program quality improvements.

Currently, the ECERS-R is being used by programs in various communities across Ontario. The implementation of this assessment tool may be part of a larger quality improvement strategy (e.g., centres in Hamilton), or it may be used as a stand-alone process by licensed early learning and care centres to review how they are doing (e.g., centres in Ottawa). Hamilton’s quality improvement strategy, Raising the Bar, combines the use of ECERS-R with other criteria linked to indicators of quality (e.g., professional development of staff). This approach is similar in nature to the initiative studied by Ackerman (2008) which used the ECERS-R and additional criteria to support improvements in preschool settings.

Since its development, Raising the Bar has spread to several other communities in Ontario. Anecdotal evidence indicates that educators think it makes a difference in quality; however, research by Darisi, Buettgen, and Sprague (2010) evaluated the effectiveness of the program and did not find a statistically significant relationship between participation in the program and program quality when measured by ECERS-R. One recommendation from this study was that
more ongoing, onsite support for both administrators and staff be implemented. Since the study, the Hamilton organization responsible for Raising the Bar has incorporated more mentoring into the program.

Like Hamilton, the Halton region in Ontario also developed a process to assess and support quality improvement that incorporates pre-existing validated tools into the process. Unlike Hamilton, this region uses a combination of tools: ECERS-R (Harms et al., 1998), The Caregivers Interaction Scale (Arnett, 1986), and SpecialLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale (Irwin, 2011) when completing assessments.

Other Ontario municipalities (e.g., Toronto, Sudbury, Thunder Bay) have supported the development of tools to assess quality which may be used to determine municipal support such as subsidies or to encourage programs to implement quality improvements.

For years, the City of Toronto has used a quality assessment tool to evaluate programs that received subsidies. Like the ECERS-R, Toronto’s tool utilizes a Likert scale, with observable descriptors to assess the quality of a program. The Toronto Operating Criteria (T.O.C.) process traditionally used city employees to act as both coaches and to evaluate the programs. However, when the City of Toronto undertook the process of validating the tool, one recommendation was that coaches and assessors be different individuals (Falenchuk and Perlman, 2009). As a result of these research findings, the City of Toronto implemented changes to their process. The most recent version of the now validated tool is The Assessment for Quality Improvements 2017 (AQI) (City of Toronto, 2017). In this revised tool the coaching and assessments are done by different staff to help ensure reliability of the results. Toronto’s process is the only validated tool used in Ontario. While developed for the City of Toronto, other municipalities have expressed interest in it, and Durham region has received permission to use it.

The Thunder Bay region in Ontario emphasized quality improvement and put into place a system which uses a coaching model to work with educators to improve program quality. Like Toronto, Thunder Bay was using its locally developed assessment tool to determine the type of support programs received, but unlike Toronto’s new process, Thunder Bay has the individual supporting
centres also completing assessments. Recently this community has moved to implement Toronto’s tool- The Assessment for Quality Improvements 2017.

In Sudbury, Ontario, the Program Quality Indicators (PQI) document outlines a process and includes an evaluation tool to assess quality. Developed by the Early Learning and Child Care Supervisors Network sub committee (2006), this process has been used by the city to ensure that purchase of service agreements are signed with programs that the Supervisors Network and the City have identified as providing quality early learning and care. This process includes unannounced visits by the Program Quality Coordinator (PQC) to observe and assess the program. If a program does not meet the required criteria level, the program supervisor and the PQC meet to determine an action plan, and then the staff implements the plan. If the program meets the criteria, the results can be used to help with quality improvement, but it is not required.

The Niagara region in Ontario took a different approach in an attempt to raise program quality. Recognizing that the research indicates education plays an important role, Niagara focused on educator training and professional development rather than the development of a specific process for assessing quality and encouraging program improvements.

The City of Ottawa has also developed a voluntary quality improvement process whereby administration and staff evaluate their program, reflect on their evaluations, discuss findings, set goals, and then develop and implement an action plan. Educators in the community had indicated that they would appreciate having third party evaluators also provide feedback to the centres, but due to funding issues, this aspect of the process was not implemented. Just before the current research was undertaken the Ottawa early childhood education community began to look at utilizing coaches in the process.
### Ontario Quality Improvement Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Initiative</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality First</td>
<td>Halton</td>
<td>Developmental model based on <em>ECERS-R</em>, the <em>Caregivers Interaction Scale</em>, and <em>Inclusion Practices and Principles Scale</em> In order to assess current quality and determine actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising the Bar</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>Process that provides implementation strategies on several levels (1. engaging, 2. strengthening capacity, and 3. continuous commitment to excellence). Requires participants to engage in professional development including communities of practice; provides resources and mentorships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Child Care</td>
<td>Niagara</td>
<td>Program provides professional development to enable ECEs to perform basic developmental, behavioural, speech and language screening, as well as environmental screens. There is not a structured process that programs go through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance Program</td>
<td>Thunder Bay</td>
<td>Locally developed Quality Assurance Tool Kit: Measuring Performance, Early Childhood Recommended Inclusive Practices, Self-Assessment Checklists for ECE's, RT's, Supervisors &amp; Cooks. Results used to encourage programs to improve quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Quality Indicators</td>
<td>Sudbury</td>
<td>Locally developed tool and process: The major focus is on interactions within the program (i.e. staff/child, child/child, staff/parent, parent/child) which overall captures the complete program and is used to help allot the City’s purchase of service agreements. Process in place to guide programs that did not meet the minimum level of quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment for Quality</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>City developed assessment too which address various quality components and uses a one-five rating scale. Results are used by city staff as they support educators</td>
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Improvement (AQI) in making improvements to quality and determine subsidies. This is the only validated tool in Ontario

<table>
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<th>Quality Benefits</th>
<th>Ottawa</th>
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<td>Children</td>
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Locally developed process that incorporates a community developed assessment tool that educators use to guide their reflections and team discussions. Eight Quality standards sub-divided into criteria and evidence for each Standard. Recent interest in incorporating the use of coaches to help guide assessments and support quality improvements

1.3.2 Changing Concepts Regarding Professional Development

The presence of assessment programs and strategies to help improve quality in the early learning and care sector often look at and/or encompass professional development opportunities (Lero, Brophy, & Irwin, 2009; Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014). Ongoing professional learning is seen as key to quality improvement, and as a result many programs provide such opportunities. Professional learning has traditionally been met through activities such as workshops, but research has shown that sustained interactions that are content specific, ongoing, and allow for interactive approaches are more likely to result in changes to practices (Desimone, 2011; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Zaslow, Tout, & Halle, 2010).

Descriptions of the characteristics of effective professional development often make reference to the use of coaches/mentors/facilitators to support the learning process. Frequently, coaching or mentoring has been identified as a potential strategy to help improve the quality of teaching within the school system (Brady, Gillis, Smith, Lavalette, Liss-Bronstein, & Low, 2009; Onchwari & Keengwa, 2010; Peterson, Valk, Baker, Brugger, & Hightower, 2010). Coaching/mentoring is also being identified as an effective way of improving quality within the early learning and care profession (Neuman & Cunningham, 2008; Peterson et al., 2010; Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009; Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014; Zaslow, Tout, Halle, Whittaker, & Lavelle, 2012).
Zaslow et al. (2012) indicated that coaching reflects emerging evidence that in order to translate what is learned through professional development into high-quality practices in work with young children, early childhood educators need the opportunity to see examples of specific practices being implemented in everyday settings by skilled role models and to implement these practices themselves with supportive feedback (p.4).

In Ontario, early childhood educators are recognizing that coaching may be a more effective method of creating changes to program quality than attendance at traditional workshops or conferences. As a result, some municipalities have begun to incorporate either coaching or mentoring into their quality improvement processes even though the provincial government has not specifically asked them to do this. While there is evidence from research that coaching supports quality improvement, it is important to acquire additional evidence to determine if coaching is effective as part of a quality improvement strategy and to examine what role it might play in the process.

1.3.3 Purpose of the Current Study

In Ontario, although both the provincial government and municipal organizations have implemented a number of strategies to improve program quality (e.g., HDLH, Ontario’s Child Care and Early Years Act, Toronto’s AQI), ongoing coaching is not a required aspect of these projects. Since research indicates that strategies which incorporate coaching may be one of the more effective ways to create sustainable improvements (Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015; Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014; Zaslow et al., 2010), the current study seeks to examine the impact of coaching on program quality when used in conjunction with a locally developed quality improvement process, and better understand if and how coaches add value to quality improvement processes.

Recognizing that the provincial government has not committed to funding coaches and that most early learning and care programs have limited resources and need to look at the cost
effectiveness of improvement strategies, the study will also compare quality improvement outcomes and educators’ perceptions of the process in centres with coaches and without coaches.

1.3.4 History of the Local Quality Improvement Process

In 1999, the Ottawa Child Care Council identified the need for a quality improvement strategy within the licensed early learning and care sector. This community, like many North America communities, saw quality programs as being linked to positive outcomes for children and identified that both structural and process aspects of programs should be included in a quality measure.

A sub-committee was established to review current quality measures to incorporate into a quality improvement strategy. After reviewing the available tools, the committee made the decision to create a local strategy based on the National Association of Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) accreditation manual, the Canadian Child Care Federation’s (CCCF) Occupational Standards, and current research. This strategy included a manual that allowed educators to individually assess their program’s quality and use their findings as a starting point for team discussions, goal setting, and the development of an action plan. In the development of the manual the committee ensured that the expectations went beyond provincial requirements for the licensed early learning and care sector.

The initial manual was piloted and then launched to the community in early 2007. At the time of the initial launch, the community thought that feedback from third party evaluators would be valuable, but cost factors made this impractical.

The document has since been revised to incorporate the professional community’s feedback and changes in the profession. At the time of this study, the CECE’s Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (2011) and the ELECT (2007) document had been incorporated into the manual. More recently, the changes in legislation (2014), CECE’s revised Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (2017), and HDLH (2014) have resulted in additional edits to the manual.
Since 2007, the manual has been voluntarily used by centres as a program assessment tool and action plan guide. As governments press for more accountability and program quality, educators have shown renewed interest in the process. Along with this renewed interest, there has been an increased interest in the use of coaches to support the process.

The committee was aware that attending workshops or talking to colleagues may not be the most effective professional development methods (Raikes, 2005; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006). They were also aware that coaching may be more effective, since it provides the team of educators in the classroom with ongoing, concrete feedback, guidance, and encouragement from an experienced and knowledgeable individual in the profession (Dennis & Horn, 2014; Desimone, 2011; Zaslow, et al., 2010). As a result of this interest, the City of Ottawa provided limited funding to help support a pilot to determine the effectiveness of the quality improvement strategy with coaching as part of the process.

The current study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the effectiveness of coaching as part of a quality improvement process and to gain insight into educators’ perceptions of the process. Recognizing that most early learning and care programs have limited resources and need to look at the cost effectiveness of improvement strategies, the study also compares quality improvement outcomes and educators’ perceptions in programs with and without coaches to help understand if coaches add value to a quality improvement process.

1.3.5 Research Questions

When studying the value of coaches as part of a quality improvement process, it is important to examine both quantitative changes in program quality that occur with and without coaches, and to examine educators’ perceptions regarding coaching and the coaches’ roles during the process. As a result, the following overarching question and four sub-questions guided this mixed-methods research.
Will a structured quality improvement process that includes coaching result in improvements to program quality and, if so, will these improvements be greater than those that might occur in programs with the structured process alone and/or programs without any structured process?

1. When educators are supported by a coach, will they view the process more positively and perceive it as being easier than those who participate in the process without the support of a coach?

2. What are educators’ perceptions regarding the usefulness of coaches in a quality improvement process?

3. What do educators perceive as the important elements of a quality improvement process?

4. What do educators perceive as outcomes of a quality improvement process?
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

In order to understand coaching in relationship to quality improvement strategies, it is important to include information regarding how quality early learning is viewed within the context of Canada and the early learning sector in Ontario, as well as understanding how coaches can be used to improve program quality. The first part of the literature review examines both quality and measures of quality to identify what should be assessed and how to measure it. The second section addresses coaching and how it is defined within the educational (and more specifically the early learning and care) sector. The third section examines the use of coaching as a strategy for professional development and quality improvement, and whether or not it appears to be an effective strategy for creating immediate and sustained improvements. The last section addresses coaching: how it is perceived by educators, and whether it tends to influence the educators’ perceptions of quality improvement strategies.

Most of the research was confined to the ten years prior to the implementation of the study, although some earlier literature was included due to the relevance of the content. In addition, I continued to review the literature during the two years of research and the follow-up period when the findings were being analyzed. Relevant articles, reports, and books were located by conducting database searches using strategic terms (e.g., professional development, coaching, quality improvement) and by examining references of relevant articles, reports, and books. Scholars Portal and a variety of other search engines, including Google Scholar were used in the search. In addition, government websites (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, U.S Department of Education), and the websites of relevant organization/agencies that address the needs of young children (e.g., Center on the Developing Child: Harvard University, Childcare Resource and Research Unit) were searched.
Because the focus of the literature review is on coaching and program quality improvement, the articles were not limited to research within the licensed early learning and care sector. The research includes studies within the educational system if the setting was play based. These settings included school-based preschools and kindergarten programs and occasionally a grade one environment. Research on educational coaching that encompassed higher grades was deemed irrelevant due to the different structure of the teaching environment.

2.2 Defining Quality in Early Learning Programs

Quality in early learning and care programs has been an issue of debate for many years, with some prominent researchers such as Peter Moss questioning the term and concepts typically linked to it. Moss and Dahlberg (2008) specified that if one is to discuss quality, it must be done with the recognition that what constitutes quality is the product of a “particular nature and nurture” (p. 5). In other words, the political and cultural perspectives and values of a society will influence one’s definition and expectations. A review of the literature by Friendly, Doherty, & Beach (2006) also concluded that “the approach in any society is the product of its particular values and history, its social, economic and political context and its conception of what childhood is and its ideas about the purpose of ELCC programs” (p. 3). What is concerning for researchers like Moss is that with globalization and the global use of English, the Anglo-American perspective is often reflected in definitions of quality.

Despite concerns regarding quality and indicators of quality in early learning and care programs, several studies and reports (Friendly et al., 2006; OECD, 2006; Pramling, Sheridan, & Williams, 2006; Sheridan at al., 2009) indicate that there are commonalities across cultures regarding quality early learning programs. Pramling, et al. (2006) compared the preschool curricula associated with different cultures and found that, regardless of the country, there was a common core of values and objectives. These core values could be identified as elements that help children get off to a good start in society. These elements relate to being able to communicate and interact with others, being able to reflect and problem solve, and letting children be active.
Although the demonstration of these indicators may differ among societies, they are elements that should be incorporated into a quality assessment process. In another study by Mathers, Singler, & Logan (2012) the researchers examined whether or not educators and parents had similar views regarding quality. The results indicated that although the language used to describe quality differed between the two groups, the concepts regarding quality were similar. Both parents and educators indicated that the educators’ relationships/interactions with children are primary, although the structural processes are also important.

When reviewing the use of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) in countries outside of the U.S., Clifford, Reszka, & Rossbach (2010) found it had been adapted for use in research and program improvement processes in countries as different as Canada and Korea. The authors also indicated that, with minor adaptations, the tool produced reliable and valid ratings in the different countries and was linked to positive child development outcomes. Although results of this study were interpreted to suggest that quality indicators span different cultures, researchers like Peter Moss and Gunilla Dahlberg would postulate that the results were indicators of the globalization of the Anglo-American perspective.

Despite the fact that consensus regarding quality is elusive, and the Anglo-American perspective may have too large an influence on the criteria used to determine quality, there are studies and literature reviews that support the concept of core indicators of quality (Friendly, Doherty, & Beach, 2006; Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2008; Ishimine, Taylor, & Thorpe, 2009; Ishimine, Taylor, & Bennett, 2010; OECD, 2006; Vandell, 2004).

Two components of quality—structural quality and process quality—are frequently cited in the research (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner, & Hestenes, 2009; Ishimine, et al, 2010; Perlman, Zellman, & Le, 2004; Zellman, Perlman, Le & Setodji, 2008)). Structural quality refers to aspects such as staff qualifications, adult to child ratios, group sizes, resources, etc., while process quality refers to the interactions and relationships occurring among educators, children, peers, and families. Both types of quality are considered necessary for excellence in early learning and care programs.
A 2006 study by the OECD divided quality into more discrete areas. Seven components of quality were identified, however each type of quality can be linked to either the structural or process qualities outline above. The OECD components of quality are: interactions (quality of interactions in the program), child outcomes (e.g., children’s learning), parent/community involvement (e.g., outreach, involvement in program), orientation quality (e.g., legislation and policies), structural quality (e.g., environments, staff qualifications), educational concepts and practice (e.g., early learning frameworks and pedagogies) and operational quality (e.g., administration of programs). While identifying seven components of quality, the OECD also indicated that not all countries will place the same amount of attention on each component. The culture and values of a society will influence their focus.

As the OECD report indicated, researchers have identified common quality indicators, and educators need to ensure that any assessment tool they use is based on these indicators. Such a tool allows the program to assess their current program quality so that they can reflect on their findings, set appropriate goals, and implement quality improvement. Researchers should ensure that the tools they use to assess program quality or program quality improvements are validated tools.

2.3 Evaluating Program Quality

Studies designed to examine program quality generally utilize validated instruments, comprised of items linked to various components of quality (both structure and process) (Campbell & Milbourne, 2005; Cassidy et al., 2009; Falenchuk & Perlman, 2009; Palsha & Wesley, 1998).

In the literature the ECERS-R, which has been tested for reliability and validity, (Clifford, et al., 2010) is the instrument most widely used to measure preschool program quality (Perlman, Zellman, & Le, 2004; Vermeer, van Ijzendoorn, Carcamo, & Harrison, 2016). This validated tool consists of 43 items used to assess quality in center-based early learning care programs. It is an observational instrument, and each observable item is rated from one (inadequate) to seven (excellent). The scale is comprised of seven subscales: Space and Furnishings (eight items),
Personal Care Routines (six items), Language Reasoning (four items), Activities (ten items), Interaction (five items), Program Structure (four items), and Parents and Staff (six items). A score can be obtained for each of the subscales, and an overall score is created by determining the average of all of the items. A program with an overall score of one-two is considered inadequate, a score of three-four is minimal quality, five-six is good quality, and seven is excellent quality. This measurement tool continues to be revised to better reflect both structural and process elements of quality with the most recent version being ECERS3 (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014).

Since the 1990s, ECERS-R and its sister rating scale, the Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS), have been used in studies in North America and around the globe to evaluate programs’ general quality (e.g., Ackerman, 2008; Campbell & Milbourne, 2005; Falenchuk & Perlman, 2009; Vermeer, van Ijzendoorn, Carcamo, & Harrison, 2016). Although developed in the U.S., it has been adapted and translated for use in other countries (Clifford et al., 2010; Pramling et al., 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009).

A study by Sheridan et al. (2009) used two national adaptations of ECERS to compare quality in South Korean and Swedish preschools. Although the tool was modified to address differences between the two countries, the tool was considered valid for both and was able to measure quality. Cryer and Tietze (2004) used the Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale–Revised (ITERS-R) to evaluate program quality in a study that compared the quality of German and U.S. early learning and care programs. Mather et al. (2012) also utilized ECERS-R to measure program quality. As part of this study the content of ECERS-R was compared to stakeholders’ (parents, educators, administrators) views of program quality with the results indicating that the views of the different groups corresponded to various items on the ECERS-R, although each group focused on slightly different content areas.

Biersteker, Dawes, Hendricks, and Tredoux (2016), examining the quality of early child care and education programs in South Africa, utilized both ECERS-R and ITERS-R as the assessment instruments due to the fact that they required a tool that was “reliable, valid, and widely used, and cover domains relevant for South African norms and standards for ECCE facilities” (p. 337).
In the U.K. Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sammons, Melhuish, Elliot, and Totsika (2006) used ECERS-R to determine if early learning program quality could be a predictor of developmental readiness for school and found that children from programs where the ECERS-R assessment indicated good quality were more likely to be ready for school.

Cassidy et al. (2009) used the ECERS-R as the program quality assessment instrument when examining the relationship of educator ethnicity and global program quality. Once again the instrument was used because it is a valid assessment tool, it was already being utilized by many programs to assess program quality, and in this particular U.S. state it was a tool the state government had implemented as part of a quality improvement program.

Although ECERS-R has been adapted for use in other countries, Ishimine and Taylor (2014) questioned whether or not this is appropriate, since it was developed and normed using a U.S. population. They indicated that more research was needed, and appropriate adjustments made, to ensure that the adapted measure is suitable for the different cultural context.

Increasingly, studies are using more than one instrument to assess the global quality of a program (e.g., Abreu-Lima, Leal, Cadima, & Gamelas, 2013; Jeon, Buettner, & Hur, 2014; Rentzou, 2010). In many of these situations the focus is more specific than assessing global program quality. Rentzou (2010) administered both the ECERS-R and the Association of Childhood Education International’s (ACEI) Global Guidelines Assessment (GGA) instrument to determine the quality of Greek preschools; however, the research was also used to compare the two instruments with results indicating a great similarity between the tools. Abreu-Lima et al. (2013) used both the ECERS-R and the Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation tool to assess program quality and link quality to specific areas of development (literacy skills, math skills, and behavior). Similarly, Jeon, Buettner, and Hur (2014) compared programs participating in a state initiated Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to non-participating centres. The researchers wanted to assess whether or not the QRIS, which focuses on structural quality, could also affect process quality in programs. Because their focus was on a specific type of quality, they chose to use the ECERS-R along with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and the Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation tool in order to provide
more detailed analysis of the interactions between educators and children. Zellman et al. (2008) also indicate that the focus of ECERS-R is on process quality and that key elements of QRIS include structural quality (e.g. adequate funding; educators’ training; appropriate structure and oversight).

Denny, Hallam, and Homer (2012), in a study on preschool classroom quality, utilized three tools to assess quality. These tools were ECERS-R, CLASS, and the Early Childhood Rating Scale–Extension (a tool designed to supplement ECERS-R and assess curriculum and pedagogy). In this study, not only did they examine program quality, they studied the correlation between the measures. While the results indicated there was a high correlation among the three tools in their assessment of quality, the scores for ECERS-R were higher than the other tools. In conclusion, it identified that using only one tool might limit one’s understanding of quality and could have implications for supporting quality improvements.

Dennis and O’Connor (2013) combined ECERS-R with the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES) and the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Elementary Schools (OCDQ-RE). These two additional instruments focus specifically on the workplace environment and allowed the researchers to delve more deeply into a program’s organizational climate and its impact on program quality.

Several Canadian studies used ECERS-R in conjunction with other evaluation tools. These additional tools varied according to the focus of the study. A study by Goelman, Forer, Doherty, Lero, & LaGrange (2006) used ECERS-R and the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) to evaluate changes to program quality. They used ECERS-R to evaluate the environment and CIS to rate educator-child interactions in the room. Doherty, McCormick Ferguson, Ressler, & Lomotey (2015), examining the relationship between a training and mentoring program for program directors and the improvements in global program quality, used the Program Administration Scale (PAS) along with ECERS-R to assess changes to program quality. Lero and Irwin (2008) used the ECERS-R and the SpeciaLink Inclusions scales to assess changes in global program quality and inclusion effectiveness in Nova Scotia centres.
Although ECERS-R dominates studies addressing global program quality, some research into program quality have not employed the ECERS-R. Belsky et al. (2007) conducted research on the long-term effects of early child care. In this study, the researchers utilized the Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE) to determine quality. This tool is published by the US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and focuses on the caregivers’ frequency and quality of interactions with children. Like Belsky et al.’s (2007) study, Burchinal et al. (2010) focused on teacher-child interactions when examining program quality and their link to children’s learning outcomes. In this study CLASS was used as a stand-alone tool to assess program quality in order to determine the association of quality interactions with child outcomes.

In the majority of studies using ECERS-R, researchers have questioned whether or not it should be used as a stand-alone tool or even if it’s an appropriate tool to assess program quality. Dickinson (2002) identified that commonly used assessment tools like ECERS-R were developed when there were different expectations for preschool programs. She indicated that current ideas regarding quality include an emphasis on the development of pre-academic skills, which were not a focus of preschool programs when the tools were developed. Since the tools have not been re-aligned with current values she hypothesized that the assessment tools might not assess attributes of classrooms that contribute to pre-academic outcomes for children. More recent researchers Duncan and Magnuson (2013), also questioned whether or not current quality assessments are focused on the aspects of early learning that support long-term positive outcomes in children. In the United States, one of the most commonly used outcomes to assess quality is early literacy skills due to governmental policies that emphasize these skills as a way to provide future success in school (Keys, Farkas, Burchinal, Duncan, Vandell, Li, & Ruzek, 2013). Other studies, while focusing on specific outcomes, have tried to expand the breadth of the outcomes by including more than one type. Abner, Gordon, Kaestner, and Korenman (2013) assessed cognitive, behaviour, and health outcomes in children and also used the ECERS-R to determine if interventions were more effective when they were aligned more directly to a specific outcome than to global assessments of program quality. The results of the study showed that the interventions linked to types of child development outcomes (e.g., children in centre-
based programs were better able to self-regulate than those in home child care), but there was little evidence that a more global program quality assessment (ECERS-R) was associated with the specific child development outcomes.

Linking program quality to specific learning outcomes is common in the United States and Canada, and is influenced by American values (Warner & Prentice, 2013), but this increased emphasis on specific learning outcomes is not endorsed by all researchers. It is seen by researchers such as Peter Moss (2008) as an example of the Anglo-American emphasis on quality as a technical ‘fix’ to a given problem. Quality is seen as something that can result in economic benefits and is a good return on one’s investment. Moss (2008) states that this type of program quality … offers a compelling narrative of how social and economic problems can be eliminated by early childhood services, delivering predetermined outcomes through early intervention with powerful technologies; of workers as competent technicians; and of children as redemptive agents, able if given the right start to rescue society from its problems (p. 3).

The results of the research on quality are mixed. While some researchers argue that current views regarding quality are reflective of western culture and values, others argue that, while culture and values will influence one’s views on quality, there are measurable indicators of quality that span cultures.

The literature review also indicated that the tools used to measure program quality will be influenced by the aspect of quality a community or society has identified as being important to measure. Communities choosing to assess the quality of their early learning programs or implement quality improvement strategies must reflect on what both they and researchers understand quality to be and the purpose of their initiatives. If the focus is on school readiness, then assessment tools must be able to identify how children are doing on specific outcomes linked to school readiness (e.g., early literacy skills, behavioural skills). In such a case the ECERS-R may not be the best assessment tool, or it may need to be implemented in conjunction with another tool. If the purpose is to support more global program quality, then the tool must be linked to these indicators; researchers continue to use the ECERS-R/ECERS-3 to do this. Even
though there are some concerns with the ECERS-R’s ability to effectively assess program quality, a recent review of the literature (Brunsek, Perlman, Falenchuk, Fletcher, & Shah, 2017) indicates that the tool is capable of measuring quality.

2.4 Coaching as a Method to Improve Program Quality

Regardless of one’s specific goal regarding program quality, the use of coaches and mentors to aid and support individuals developing new skills and strategies to improve quality has become more common within the early learning and care sector (Abell, Arsiwalla, Putnam, & Miller, 2014; Doherty et al., 2015; Shidler, 2009; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). However, before exploring the literature on coaching and quality improvement one must first determine if research in the early learning and care sector has defined coaching or differentiated between coaching and mentoring.

2.4.1 Defining Coaching

Ackerman (2008) highlighted the need to consider key elements that lead to effective coaching practices. This research was undertaken after an initial study which was designed to use coaching strategies to improve teaching practices revealed that “despite receiving coaching and financial aid, almost two-thirds of ECE programs participating in the first two years of the pilot did not improve their QRIS score” (p. 1). A review of the study revealed that there were no specific coaching strategies identified. Recognizing that a lack of consistency in the coaching process (as well as other factors) may have affected the outcomes, Ackerman surveyed coaches working with teachers and directors in centres that were involved in the Quality Rating and Improvement System. Each of the programs in the project had been evaluated both before and after participation in the QRIS program using the appropriate Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS, ECERS, or FDCRS). The findings indicated that, aside from no consistent coaching techniques, there were a number of uncontrollable factors that could have influenced the outcomes (e.g., lack
of motivation). In their conclusions they indicated that the majority of research on coaching as a tool to increase program quality does not identify the specific coaching strategies used or indicate that there were specific elements of coaching that had to be incorporated into practice. The authors stated that this lack of control may help to explain some of the mixed results regarding the effectiveness of coaching and recommended that key elements of effective coaching be identified.

Curtis, Humbarger, and Mann (2011) described coaching as building positive relationships: observing and providing feedback to teachers, and helping teachers see the connection between their actions and outcomes. They also described the importance of communication, support, and a sense of partnership when coaching. Dunst and Raab (2010), studying effective in-service training for preschool teachers, indicated that coaching involves coaches observing practitioners’ teaching, giving demonstrations, and providing feedback to practitioners. The importance of on-site training was highlighted.

Kretlaw, Wood and Cooke (2011) studied coaching as part of a process to improve a teacher’s ability to utilize direct instruction techniques to support at-risk students. Although the authors did not provide a precise definition of coaching, they did give examples of coaching components, which included one-on-one training, demonstrations, side-by-side modeling, and feedback.

Doherty et al., (2015) developed a mentoring program for supervisors to enhance program quality. In their description of mentoring they mentioned the expertise of the mentor, feedback from the mentor, the mentor’s ability to support reflective practice, and the on-site visits. Abell et al. (2014), in their study on mentoring as a method to enhance program quality in family home care environments, explained mentoring as a process that: creates positive relationships, provides expertise through a collegial relationship rather than through mentor as expert, assists providers in identifying specific behaviours and practices to improve on, provides weekly on-site visits to model and support appropriate practice, connects providers with community resources, etc. It also identified that part of the mentoring process involved coaching and focused on modeling/demonstrating appropriate practice. Weiland and Yoshikawa’s (2013) study on improving prekindergarten learning outcomes indicated that coaching was an ongoing process
where coaches modeled best practice, observed teacher practice and provided constructive feedback. Likewise, Dunst and Raab (2010) indicated effective professional development for teachers required ongoing opportunities to see demonstrations, engage in onsite practice, and receive feedback from coaches.

In another study, Cain, Rudd, & Saxon (2007) described a process that supported the development of a relationship between the coach and the teacher; created opportunities for the coaches to observe the teacher in the classroom, and provided opportunities and a process for coaches to give feedback to the teachers. In addition, the coaching process was not a quick fix but was a sustained method of providing support—occurring several times over the course of three months. Similarly, Gardenswartz, Cherbosque, and Rowe (2010), when referring to the coaching process discuss the need to develop positive relationships along with “feedback, good dialogue, and conversations without retribution … so people can communicate without hurting each other” (p.81).

The literature review in the article by Carlisle and Berebitsky (2010) differentiated between collaborative practice among teachers and the use of individuals with expert knowledge to guide and support teachers. The study did not, however, differentiate between mentors, coaches, and consultants; instead they were grouped together as individuals with expertise. As part of this study they surveyed coaches in order to solicit their ideas on important elements of the coaching process. The results indicated that coaches viewed their primary responsibilities as: meeting with the teacher, modeling, acting as a resource, visiting/observing in the classroom, and working with the administration.

Gallagher, Abbott-Sim, & VandeWiele, (2011), in their review of the literature on mentoring, indicated that “mentoring programs, guided by an understanding of teacher learning and embedded in a culture of collaboration and inquiry, are one of the fastest growing and most promising forms of professional development today” (p. 58). Within the preschool or school context, the terms coach or mentor were usually used to refer to more knowledgeable individuals who helped other educators/teachers improve their teaching practices—teaching practices linked to improved program quality or specific outcomes for children. These terms (mentor/coach)
often refer to similar support strategies. Studies that incorporate mentors or coaches both describe strategies such as modeling, observations, and conversations. Onchwari and Keengwe (2010), in a study involving a Head Start preschool, referred to the process being implemented as the mentor-coach initiative.

One difference that did appear between studies on coaching and those on mentoring is that studies using the term mentor often matched a mentor to one mentee/protégé (e.g., Gallagher et al., 2011) while studies using the term coach often link the knowledgeable individual to several mentees/protégés (e.g., Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010; Kretlow, Wood, & Cooke, 2011; Onchwar & Keengwa, 2010).

The document by Zaslow, Tout, & Hall (2012) identified that The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA) in 2011 proposed the following to differentiate between coaching, mentoring and consultation:

> Coaching is provided by someone with specific expertise working with an early educator on implementing specific practices; mentoring is provided by someone more senior in the same role, working over a period of time to guide the overall professional development of an early educator, and consultation involves joint problem-solving focusing on a specific issue (Zaslow et al., 2012, p. 5).

These definitions are recommendations only and are not reflected in all the research completed since 2011. Since researchers have failed to embrace the definitions differentiating the two terms, and because the review shows that descriptions of coaching and mentoring are comparable when included in studies, there is little reason to eliminate studies using the term “mentoring” to describe a coaching process.

Regardless of whether a researcher uses the term coach or mentor, a description of the role usually includes: developing positive working relationships, modeling/demonstrating strategies, observing, and providing feedback to teachers/educators (Carlisle and Berebitsky, 2010; Doherty et al., 2015; Kretlow et al., 2011; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Peterson et al, 2010; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). Descriptions of both coaches and mentors contain elements that require interactions with and professional support for the individual/s being coached or mentored.
Coaches and mentors are described as knowledgeable individuals who, through a variety of interactions, help educators become more reflective and address the hard questions about their teaching practices. The coaching or mentoring process requires sustained relationships and interactions rather than a brief encounter with the individual accessing the support. Because the literature does not clearly differentiate between the two terms, I included articles on both in this literature review.

2.4.2 Effectiveness of Coaching

Research on coaching as a strategy to support positive changes to program quality has been gaining momentum in the early learning sector (Neuman & Cunningham, 2008; Peterson et al., 2010), and this interest has been further strengthened in the U.S. by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This act was the impetus for early learning educational reforms to improve outcomes for children, and many of the strategies developed to improve early learning outcomes include coaching. The report by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (IMNRC) stated that “professional development that include workshops, coaching, and professional development communities can improve teachers’ understanding and use of more effective instructional practices, which in turn result in greater learning for children in their care” (p. 398).

2.4.3 Coaching and Global Program Quality Improvement

Creating quality improvement processes that include coaching or mentoring may be gaining in popularity, but have they been proven to be effective at enhancing program quality or improving outcomes for children? Campbell and Milbourne (2005) conducted a study on mentoring that indicated mentoring might support program quality. This study looked at the impact of an on-site consultation/mentoring program on quality within a program. Using the ITERS and the Arnett Caregiver Interactions Scale, the study’s findings indicated that small changes in quality occurred in the consultation group, whereas quality decreased in the non-consultation group.
Several other studies examining the impact of coaching and improvements to global program quality lend credence to the idea that educators working with young children would benefit from having a coach. Abell et al., (2014) hypothesized that coaching would improve global program quality in home child care settings. In that study The Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS: (Harms & Clifford, 1989) was used to assess changes to program quality. The results showed significant improvements in the pre- and post-assessment scores on the FDCRS; however, the assessments were done by the mentors who worked with the caregivers, thus introducing a possible bias that could have affected the assessments.

In an early study on coaching and program quality improvements, Palsha and Wesley (1998) assessed global program quality before implementing the coaching process, after the intervention, and again twelve months later. In this study the coaches worked with the teachers as they analyzed the first assessment and then set goals and action plans to improve their practices and the environment. At the end of the intervention there were significant gains to program quality; 12 months later the gains remained. Results supported the hypothesis that coaches will enhance global program quality and indicated that these results may be sustainable.

Doherty et al., (2015) implemented a mentoring program for supervisors of early learning and care programs to support program quality improvement. Recognizing the role supervisors play in the quality of programs, this study hypothesized that helping supervisors improve their skills could result in global quality improvement. Utilizing the ECERS-R to assess programs both before and after implementation of the mentoring program, the researchers found a significant improvement in global program quality.

Boller et al. (2015) included coaching as part of a six-month quality improvement system for child care. Using experimental and control groups of family and centre based child care programs, researchers administered the ECERS-R before and after the implementation of the program to assess global changes in program quality. The results showed that programs in the experimental group had significant overall gains while those in the control group did not; however, coaching was only one aspect of the system that also included training and financial benefits. In addition, the researchers did not design the study to determine if the different
components of the quality improvement system had differing amounts of influence on the change.

A literature review in *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015) identified that coaching can also be effective when combined with other elements such as peer study groups, networks, and sustained professional learning activities. Although some of the studies reviewed within this report clearly indicated that coaching supported quality improvements, other studies could only offer limited support since specific coaching elements could not be linked to the improvements. Unlike many of the previous studies, Ackerman’s (2008) research on coaching and program quality improvements found that coaching did not always result in improved scores on the ECERS-R measure. At the same time, Ackerman also acknowledged that there were no specific expectations placed on the coaches other than the number of hours they were involved in the program, and that the coaches’ differing practices might have been partially responsible for the inconsistent results.

2.4.4 Coaching and Quality Improvement in Specific Learning Areas

The above studies, when measuring the success of the professional development strategies that include coaches, used tools that assessed changes to global program quality; however, the literature review indicates that the majority of studies implementing a coaching process to improve quality do not assess global program quality. Increasingly, studies on coaching in early learning programs have assessed the children’s level of improvement in specific learning areas or the changes in teacher practices to determine program quality. This emphasis is one of the results of the No Child Left Behind Act which has supported reforms which enhance skills linked to school readiness (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010).

Onchwari and Keengwe (2010) developed a mentor–coach initiative to support early literacy. Their purpose was to examine possible links between mentoring and children’s early literacy development; the results showed significant differences between the children in classrooms with
a mentor and those in the control group. Children in classrooms where the teacher had been involved in the mentoring program performed significantly better in listening, speaking, and reading. They indicated that this research supports earlier work by Cruikshank (1998) which also showed that mentoring programs can positively impact children’s learning.

Carlisle and Berebitsky (2010) also studied coaching and the development of literacy skills. They compared the use of professional development strategies with and without coaches on specific learning outcomes and found a positive link between coaching and learning outcomes. In the study, positive outcomes were determined by administering subtests of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and analyzing the results of the children’s performance on Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) rather than a global program quality tool such as ECERS-R.

Gallagher et al. (2011) studied the effectiveness of a structured mentoring program for Head Start teachers. This study paired experienced teachers who had participated in mentor training with new teachers. The experimental group used the mentoring strategies outlined in the Individualized Learning Intervention tool (ILI) to support the less experienced teachers and each other. In the control group, the less experienced teachers were also assigned mentors, but the mentors for the control group were given no specific approach to use while mentoring. At the beginning of the year—and at the end—a variety of tools designed to assess literacy skills and other learning behaviours were administered to the children. The results indicated that children in classrooms where teachers had both mentors and a structured mentoring program did better than the control group with mentors but no structured program.

Teacher education, positive interactions, and curriculum are all related to program quality. Therefore, several studies that used coaches to improve quality focused on improving teacher skills rather than global quality or learning outcomes for children. Kretlow et al. (2011) researched the use of coaching along with in-service training to improve kindergarten teachers’ strategies for teaching math concepts. In this study researchers examined teaching practices before and after the training and coaching. Results indicated that, after training, all the teachers demonstrated improvements in their delivery of instruction with additional improvements occurring after coaching. There were, however, major limitations to the study. The study did not
use a control group for comparison, and the participants involved in the intervention consisted of only three teachers, therefore it is difficult to generalize the findings. A much larger study by Neuman and Cunningham (2009) also examined professional development using coaching to improve teaching around early language and literacy. Like Kretlow et al. (2011) the results showed that there were benefits from coaching. In this study, a professional development strategy was implemented with and without a coach and included a control group. Although teachers in both experimental groups showed significant improvements in their teaching practices, the teachers with coaches demonstrated greater gains.

Attempting to improve teaching practices that support social competence in children, Fox, Hemmeter, Snyder, Binder, & Clarke (2011) created a teacher training process that included both coaching and workshops. Using the Teaching Pyramid Observational Tool (TPOT), the study examined changes in the teaching practices of three preschool teachers (A, B, and C) at three different times: 1) after the workshops, 2) after additional coaching, and 3) during a follow-up phase where coaching was no longer available. In all teachers they found some improvements after the coaching sessions and for teachers A and B (who were able to reach the desired teaching criterion) the changes remained during the follow-up period. Although this is a very small study and teacher C encountered personal factors that probably influenced the outcomes, the results reflect those of other studies which indicate that coaching can result in improved teaching practices.

The push to use outcomes linked to school readiness in many American studies is apparent, but other researchers continue to examine coaching in light of less academically oriented outcomes and identify the value of coaching in this sphere of quality. The research by Cain et al. (2007) focused on professional development and coaching designed to improve the amount of joint attention occurring between the young child and the caregiver. The findings were significant; the teachers with the training and coaching showed significantly more joint attention engagement, duration, and total bids for joint attention than teachers without the training and coaching. A more recent studied by Zan and Donegan-Ritter (2014) also looked at teacher-child interactions. They examined the outcomes of a professional development process (included coaching) that was designed to increase the quality of teacher-child interactions. CLASS was used both before
and after intervention to assess the interactions, and the experimental group showed significantly more quality improvements than did the control group.

2.4.5 Effectiveness of Professional Development With and Without Coaching

As the above studies illustrate, coaching in the early learning and care sector is usually implemented as part of a multi-technique approach to quality improvement, the premise being that the combination of different types of professional development will result in teachers’ improved understanding and use of more effective instructional practices, which, in turn, will result in greater learning for children in their care.

When researchers analyze the results of these studies, the impact of coaching may not be differentiated from the other techniques being used (Abell et al., 2014; Algozzine, Algozzine, Kissel, Spano, & Foxworth, 2011; Moller, Yun, Carter, & Kasak, 2009; Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014), making it difficult to assess the unique impacts of coaching.

Algozzine et al. (2011) examined coaching as part of a professional development process that also included training sessions on early literacy development. In this study,

> Coaches supported a learning community that provided professional development extended over time, shared experiences and discourses around shared texts, and facilitated using data about student learning to improve instruction. The intensity of all levels of coach support was determined by the experience, need and continuous monitoring of the performance of the teacher. Relationships between coaches and teachers were established previously as part of normally occurring interactions (p. 249).

The findings showed that children in the preschool classrooms participating in the professional development program made significantly greater improvements in early literacy skills than children in regular classrooms, but the research design did not attempt to assess the professional development process with and without coaches to determine if the coaches were essential to the process. Similarly Abell et al.’s (2014) study of quality improvement initiatives in family day cares and Mohler, Yun, Carter, & Kasak’s (2009) study on the effect of coaching and literacy
curriculum on pre-kindergarten children’s literacy achievement also resulted in significant improvements, but failed to examine whether coaching was crucial for achieving these outcomes.

Most studies addressing coaching (like those above) have focused on whether or not a professional development strategy that includes coaching results in significant improvements to program quality or learning outcomes for children. Some of the studies utilized a treatment group and a control group while others have only looked at changes in the treatment group, but few investigated if professional development without a coach can be as effective as the same process with a coach. As discussed earlier, both Campbell and Milbourne (2005) and Neuman and Cunningham (2009) implemented studies that made this comparison when examining the effectiveness of coaching. The results of both studies indicated that the use of coaches resulted in greater improvements. This result is also reflected in the study by Carlisle and Berebitsky (2010). In this study all participants took part in a professional development strategy to improve their early literacy teaching techniques. In addition to the general professional development, some of the participating teachers had the support of early literacy coaches. The findings indicated that teachers with literacy coaches showed significantly more improvement in their teaching skills than did teachers without a coach. In contrast to the three previous studies, Lonigan, Farver, Phillips, and Clancy-Menchetti (2011), using a sample of 48 preschools, examined the impact of preschool curricula combined with professional development on children’s development. Each preschool classroom was randomly assigned to a control group or one of two experimental groups. Both experimental groups were provided with a literacy focused curriculum and workshop and one was also provided with in-class mentoring. Using a variety of validated assessment tools, the children were assessed both before and after the intervention to determine their language and literacy skills. Unlike the previous studies, this study’s findings showed only minor and statistically insignificant improvements with either type of professional development.

2.4.6 Sustainability of Coaching Outcomes

While much of the research on coaching indicates that it is effective at creating positive changes to program quality (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Doherty et al., 2015; Neuman & Cunningham,
is it an approach that is likely to create sustainable results? In reviewing the literature there appear to be few studies looking at the effects of coaching over time, and those that do appear to be limited to lengths of 12 months or less (Dunst & Raab, 2010; Fox et al., 2011; Hsieh, Hemmeter, McCollum, & Ostrosky, 2009).

Palsha and Wesley (1998) looked at the impact of coaching on early childhood programs. Using ECERS to evaluate the program before intervention, immediately after intervention, and 12 months later. The researchers found that significant improvements in program quality were still present 12 months after the intervention. Dunst and Raab (2010) also reported more sustainable outcomes when teachers had coaches. They found that after six months, teachers who had participated in professional development involving on-site coaching were significantly more likely than other teachers to report that the professional development was continuing to make a difference to their teaching practices. Fox et al. (2011), in a very small qualitative study, found that changes in teaching practices could be sustained over the course of the school year. Similarly, Hsieh et al. (2009), in a study using coaches to help teachers improve their emergent literacy teaching practices, found that after the interventions teachers continued to maintain higher levels of practice for the remainder of the school year.

2.4.7 Educators/Teachers’ Perceptions of Coaches and Coaching

Some learning theories (e.g., Social Cognitive Theory) would indicate that an educator’s perception of coaches and coaching may impact the success of the process, and may affect whether or not an individual will even attempt to engage in the process. In reviewing the literature, I found that there is very limited research in this area. One study that did address the issue was Carlisle and Berebitsky’s (2010) study, which included a research element on teacher perceptions of coaching and other professional development models. As well as studying the effectiveness of coaching on learning outcomes, they also looked at whether or not teachers perceived coaching more positively than professional development without coaching. The results showed no significant differences in attitudes towards the non-coaching and coaching forms of
professional development, even though the coaching resulted in significantly greater improvements in children’s early literacy skills.

Dunst and Raab (2010) conducted a survey to gather information on four different professional development approaches. The participants were 255 preschool teachers who took part in professional development designed to improve classroom practices. The participants had attended one of the following types of professional development: conference, workshop, week long in-service training, or on-site training with a coach. The teachers were then randomly selected to complete the survey—either one month or six months after completion of the training. The survey results showed that the on-site coaching approach was rated significantly higher than other training methods. Vesay (2008) conducted a survey of educators to identify what types of professional development they prefer. The results indicated a preference for workshops rather than ongoing in-house support like coaching. However, because the survey did not specifically identify coaching, and because the educators’ descriptions of previously undertaken professional development did not include coaching, it is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the educators’ perceptions of coaching.

Due to the minimal research available and the conflicting results, no conclusions regarding teachers’ perceptions can be made at this time; however, this is an area that could benefit greatly from additional studies. Regardless of how well a professional development strategy is grounded in theory and pedagogy, perceptions can affect the number of individuals willing to participate in it and put in the effort needed for improvements to occur. This concept is reflected in the results of Ackerman’s (2008) study. Ackerman tried to identify some of the reasons why programs did, or did not, improve their level of quality, and the findings indicated that a lack of motivation in the director and/or staff might present problems to the successful implementation of a mentoring program. A lack of commitment was also cited as a factor limiting success in a paper presented by Lero, Brophy, and Irwin (2009).
2.5 Summary

In order to study the effectiveness of coaching with respect to program quality improvements, one must decide what constitutes quality within the Canadian context, identify a valid assessment tool/s that could be used to measure quality improvements in early learning settings, and determine what constitutes coaching.

My starting point for the research was identifying quality within the Canadian context, since without this understanding it would be impossible to proceed. Although “quality” is a word that results in discussions and disagreements among researchers, there is a body of research that identifies some key elements of quality in early learning and care programs (Friendly et al., 2006; Mathers, et al., 2012; OECD, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009). Having identified key elements linked to quality early learning and care programs both within and outside of Canada, it is important to determine if there are validated tools that will measure these quality indicators in licensed early learning programs.

In the review of the literature it was evident that there are a variety of ways one can measure quality, but ECERS-R is the most widely used measure of global program quality for early learning programs. Although there are several different tools designed to evaluate global quality (e.g., Global Guidelines Assessment, Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment), the majority of the studies on preschool programs have used the ECERS-R.

While the tool was developed in the U.S., it has been frequently adapted for use in other countries (e.g., South Korea, Sweden). In recent years, however, some researchers have questioned if ECERS-R should be used by other cultures due to a possible Anglo-American bias regarding quality and concerns that adaptations made to reflect other cultures may be compromising its validity.

In Canada, the ECERS-R has been used in several studies, including the You Bet I Care! Study that assessed predictors of program quality (Goelman et al, 2000, 2006). It is a tool that has been previously used in Ontario—both to determine if a professional development strategy (e.g.,
mentoring supervisors) resulted in changes to program quality (Doherty et al., 2015), and to determine if a tool developed by the City of Toronto successfully measured quality (Falenchuk & Perlman, 2009).

Increasingly, researchers are assessing early literacy, math, and social skills to determine if preschool programs provide quality, and are ignoring some of the structural components (e.g., group size, adult/child ratios) that have been linked to program quality (Lero et al., 2009) and traditionally incorporated into quality measures such as ECERS-R.

While the debate regarding the value of various quality measures is an ongoing one, it is evident that the majority of researchers measuring global program quality (as opposed to school readiness) continue to use the ECERS-R. In addition, most studies examining coaching in relation to global program quality improvements use ECERS-R either on its own or in combination with other measurement tools such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) or the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS).

The literature on coaching addressed the use of coaches to improve global program quality, specific learning outcomes, and teaching strategies. The results of these studies are mixed, but the majority of studies found that coaching resulted in significant improvements regardless of the focus, and none of the results found that coaching negatively impacted quality. In addition, there is some research, which indicates that these improvements may be sustainable, although more research on long-term sustainability is required. When analyzing the mixed results, some researchers indicated that the lack of clear descriptions of the coaches’ roles may account for some of the inconsistencies among studies. In addition, it must be noted that the small sample sizes of some studies limit one’s ability to generalize from the results.

In almost all of the studies, coaching was combined with other professional development techniques such as courses or workshops, and in most of these studies the results were based on the strategy as a whole rather than separately analyzing the various components. A few studies did, however, compare the same professional development strategy with and without coaching—with mixed results. While Neuman and Cunningham (2009) and Carlisle and Berebitsky (2010)
both found coaching to result in significant improvements when compared to strategies without coaching. Lonigan et al. (2011) found small differences that were insignificant.

The literature also suggests that various coaching elements built into a professional development strategy that includes training can help ensure positive outcomes. Several studies identified these elements while others did not, but regardless of whether or not specific coaching strategies were outlined, most of the studies still demonstrated significant improvements to program quality or learning outcomes. A couple of studies also indicated that, when coaching is not successful, the lack of success might be due to circumstances beyond the control of the coach, such as a lack of educator motivation or funding (Ackerman, 2008; Lero et al., 2009). Due to limited research examining the effectiveness of different coaching elements, more study is required. Future research should address elements of coaching that might support quality improvements as well as elements beyond the control of coaches that might limit the success of the coach.

Much of the research on the quality of early learning and care programs, and almost all of the available research examining the effectiveness of coaching as a method to improve quality in early learning and care programs, was conducted in America. In Canada some larger studies and reports have examined the quality of early learning and care programs (Doherty, Friendly, & Beach, 2003; Goelman et al., 2006; Lero et al., 2009), but few Canadian studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of coaching to improve quality (Darisi, Buettgen, & Sprague, 2010; Doherty et al., 2015).

This literature review showed that, despite the shortage of Canadian studies on coaching in the early learning and care sector, the studies that have been done, along with findings from American studies indicate coaching may be an effective strategy to enhance program quality. This literature review also indicated that the ECERS-R is widely used by researchers to evaluate global program quality. Although, some researchers question the value of using this tool and question the ability to measure quality, most researchers considered it to be an effective measure either on its own or combined with other tools.
While there is research on coaching, this literature review showed limited research around the specific role that coaching plays in connection with a quality improvement process. The current study is designed to help increase our understanding of coaching and its role in such a process.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Context of the Study

In eastern Ontario, several municipalities worked together to determine an effective way to help licensed centres improve the quality of the programs they offer children. In the early 2000s a committee reviewed existing tools that could be used to help educators evaluate their programs and support quality improvements. After reviewing the literature on quality improvement processes and tools to measure quality, the committee recommended using a variety of sources to develop a local manual. This was done to ensure that the expectations regarding quality went beyond Ontario’s regulations for licensed programs, met Canadian/Ontario standards of practice, reflected the needs of the local early childhood education community, and highlighted educator/child and educator/parent interactions.

In the development of the quality improvement process and manual, the local quality improvement committee was given permission to use information from both the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s accreditation process and the Occupational Standards originally developed by the Canadian Child Care Federation. The manual and process were designed and reviewed by members of the early childhood education professional community. The purpose of the manual was to create a structure that educators could use to assess their programs, provide starting points for reflections and conversations, identify quality improvement goals, and determine an action plan for improvement.

Even though many educators within the community were intrinsically motivated to make program changes, these same educators identified that having individuals from outside the centre provide objective assessments of the program would encourage greater change. Initially, the local community discussion centered only on the inclusion of third party assessors to determine if centre changes had resulted in improvements to quality, but eventually the discussion also focused on the importance of coaching to effect changes in quality. These ideas reflect the findings in Zwart, Bergen, Bolhuis, and Wubbeis’s (2009) study. In this study on coaching the results showed that outsiders can make a difference; the teachers’ intrinsic motivation played a
part in change, but outsiders also played a role. One motivator for change was the pressure teachers felt to use the new methods because they knew the coach was coming to see them. Another motivator was the opportunity to discuss their experiences with the coach.

As a result of discussions around coaching, and in reviewing feedback from educators using the manual, the Quality Improvement Committee revised the manual and pursued the idea of using coaches to support educators going through the process. Although there was considerable enthusiasm for the inclusion of coaches in the quality improvement process, the Committee decided that the benefits of both coaching and the process itself should be examined before encouraging municipalities to move forward. With this in mind, the Committee approached the local municipalities within the Ontario Eastern Region to garner support for a pilot study to determine if the locally designed process—with and without coaches—will result in program quality improvements. The current study is part of the committee’s ongoing assessment of the quality improvement process. Although there are both French and English language programs in the region (and the program assessment manual is available in both French and English) the current study was undertaken with English language programs only. A smaller qualitative study was designed for the Francophone community; however, this study has not been implemented.

3.2 The Quality Improvement Process Being Utilized

The current study utilizes the locally-developed quality improvement process and manual. The manual used is *Quality Benefits Children* (Ottawa Child Care Council, 2007). It provides indicators of quality in a variety of areas which go beyond the Ontario regulations for licensed early learning and care programs. Once developed, the tool was piloted as part of a program quality improvement process and then provided to centres in some Eastern Ontario municipalities for use as a self-study guide. The *Quality Benefits Children* manual has been available to centres since 2007. While not validated, it is designed to help educators assess their program. On an ongoing basis, the manual is updated to reflect new expectations for the early learning sector (e.g., Ontario College of ECE’s Standards of Practice, MOE’s *How Does*...
Learning Happen? the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014). The most recent edition was completed in 2016. The purpose of the manual is to reinforce the importance of reflective practice. It provides a process whereby educators observe various aspects of the program for quality, reflect on current practices, discuss reflections with team members, and work together to identify potential techniques to improve quality throughout their program. Once the educators have implemented changes they again observe and reflect to determine next steps.

3.3 Research Questions

While there is not a large body of research in the Canadian early learning and care sector regarding the effectiveness of coaching as a method to improve program quality, the existing research, along with research on the use of coaches in the school system, reinforces the importance of the overarching research question and sub-questions.

The focus of the overarching research question was on the use of coaches to improve program quality and is as follows:

Will a structured quality improvement process that includes coaching result in improvements to program quality and, if so, will these improvements be greater than those that might occur in programs with the structured process alone and/or programs without any structured process?

Within the context of the overarching question, several sub-questions required examination in order to better understand how coaching might facilitate improvements to program quality.

1. When educators are supported by a coach, will they view the process more positively and perceive it as being easier than those who participate in the process without the support of a coach?

2. What are educators’ perceptions regarding the usefulness of coaches in a quality improvement process?

3. What do educators perceive as the important elements of a quality improvement process?

4. What do educators perceive as outcomes of a quality improvement process?
3.4 Study Design

This study utilized a mixed methods approach to determine if coaching, combined with a local quality improvement process, is an effective method of improving program quality and to gain insight into the perceived benefits and challenges of the process and use of coaches within the process.

An experimental method was used to obtain data for the overarching research question. This method is appropriate for the quantitative examination of the effectiveness of coaching as it provides data that can be used to compare changes to program quality between the control and experimental groups both before and after implementation. All educators participating in the study volunteered to be part of it. Although programs were randomly assigned to either a control group or treatment groups, there were a number of variables that could not be controlled (e.g., the educator to child ratio in each program, staff turn-over). These and other design limitations will be identified at the end of this chapter.

The study design also included surveys (which combined both quantitative and qualitative elements) and interviews to provide more in-depth qualitative data regarding coaching (e.g., what elements of the process and coaching are viewed by participants as useful). I used thematic analysis to identify themes that arose from both the surveys and interviews. Unlike grounded theory where “the goal of the analysis is to generate a plausible – and useful – theory of the phenomena that is grounded in the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8), thematic analysis is more flexible. While the analysis must be rigorous, and themes emerge from the data, these results can be used in a variety of ways rather than being theoretically bound (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Researchers using thematic analysis “need not subscribe to the implicit theoretical commitments of grounded theory” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8). Since the qualitative analysis in this study was to gain some insights into the value of a quality improvement process and coaching rather than develop a theory from the data, thematic analysis was the more appropriate tool to use.
3.5 Participants in the Research Process

3.5.1 Coordinator

Due to the number of individuals involved in the study and the number of items that needed to be made available to the participating programs and individuals, a coordinator was designated to work with me in order to support the flow of information (e.g., emails reminding participants of the deadline to complete the program assessment) and materials (e.g., emailing the surveys, assessment documents, action plan template). This coordinator is active in the local early learning and care sector, is the chair of the local quality improvement committee, and has been a member of the committee since its inception. She was the initial email contact for the programs and evaluators. She also received all mailed documents and kept them (unopened) for me to collect and analyze.

3.5.2 Educators

Participating programs were drawn from two adjoining eastern Ontario municipal regions and consisted of English-speaking, licensed full-day early learning and care preschool programs. These licensed programs were part of group-based centres that fall under the regulations of Ontario’s Child Care and Early Years Act and are often referred to as child care programs. Because there could be no mandatory requirement for programs to participate in the project, emails were sent to 307 English early learning and care centres in Ottawa and Prescott-Russell. The centres consisted of: 71% not for profit, 20% for profit, 4% head start programs, 4% municipal centres, and 1% indigenous. In addition, 21% of the centres were connected to large (non-profit, for profit, or municipal) agencies while 79% were stand alone programs or had one only one satellite centre. The email (see Appendix A) outlined the study, identified what would be required of individuals from participating programs, and solicited preschool program participation. Due to the low number of centres initially volunteering to participate, a second request was sent out highlighting the possible benefits of participation and, once again, soliciting participation.
Educators in 27 centres volunteered or were requested by their larger agency to volunteer for the pilot (three centres from one large agency fell in this category). 26 of the centres in the study were from a large municipality (population ~ 870,000) while one centre was located in a smaller community (population ~ 3,700). All the centres were licensed and had subsidy agreements with their municipalities. The centres represented non-profit (stand-alone, 13 and larger agencies, 2), for-profit (stand-alone, 4 and larger agencies, 1), municipal (4), Head Start (2) and indigenous programs (1).

Once all the centres had agreed to participate in the pilot, they were randomly divided into one of three groups: group A (control), treatment group B (no coaches), treatment group C (coaches). This was done through the simple method of identifying a group (e.g., control) and then pulling names out of a hat until I had nine centres assigned to the group. Once nine centres were randomly assigned to the group, another group was identified and the process repeated. After all centres had been randomly assigned to a group, I looked at the composition of each group. Non-profit, for-profit, and municipal centres were represented in each group; however, the number of Head Start and indigenous programs participating in the study were insufficient for this to occur (two Head Start programs, one indigenous program).

Within each centre, the participants consisted of the educators working in the preschool program and the supervisor/director of the centre. All participants were registered early childhood educators (RECEs), and all signed consent forms (Appendix B). These forms outlined the study, the expectations of participants, explained the right to withdraw from the study, and how to withdraw. If, during the course of the pilot, an educator left the program and a new educator was hired, that individual was asked if she/he would participate. If the person agreed to participate, a consent form was completed. All individuals working in the preschool programs agreed to be part of the pilot. In the majority of the centres, the participants consisted of two to four educators (working in the preschool room) and one supervisor (majority of supervisors also worked directly with the children). However, there was one centre where the two educators in the room participated but the supervisor did not. There were also three centres where all the children were preschoolers and the rooms were used for different experiences (e.g., art activities, block
building, dramatic play) rather than for different age groups. In these three centres all the educators in the centre and the supervisor were involved in the process.

3.5.3 Coaches

The coaching role required individuals who had the expertise and skills to support the educators’ work on improving the program quality. As indicated in the literature review, coaching is ongoing support which involves observing, providing feedback, facilitating discussion, providing resources, and giving demonstrations when necessary (Cain et al., 2007; Curtis et al., 2011; Dunst & Raab, 2010).

In the current study the coaching was provided by a local non-profit organization that employs trained advisors to work with educators in licensed early learning centres to facilitate inclusive practices. Because of their background, these individuals were already comfortable developing positive relationships with educators, observing practices, facilitating discussions, and modeling effective strategies. The coaches in the study had years of experience advising and coaching individual educators and teams of early childhood educators. At the time of the study, every coach had been in their job a minimum of ten years. Because the employer could not provide complete release for one or two individuals, the organization provided four coaches, three of whom worked with two centres and one who worked with three centres (necessary to cover all nine centres in experimental group C). To help achieve objectivity, the coaches were not assigned to any program with which they had worked or were currently working.

Although the coaches knew the content of the Quality Benefits Children (Ottawa Child Care Council, 2007) tool and worked with centres in an advisory/coaching role, all the coaches undertook a one-day training session led by myself and two other Quality Benefits Children committee members who had been involved in the development of the process and the orientation session for the centres. Before the training session the coaches were required to review the manual and the process and bring questions or concerns to the training session. The training session consisted of a section by section review of the manual and the steps in the
process. They were provided with an overview of their role in the process and given the opportunity to discuss their role (e.g., expectations regarding when and with whom the coaches needed to meet, general content of the initial meetings, reflecting on possible challenges, identifying strategies for addressing potential challenges). Along with specific training for the coaches, the coaches also attended the training workshop provided to treatment groups B and C.

In addition to the initial training, the coaches scheduled monthly team meetings which were attended by the coaching team, the project coordinator, and myself. This was done to answer any questions that might arise and to help ensure consistency in coaching. The coaches also agreed to set aside time during their regular team meetings to discuss coaching. Both types of meetings were used to update their interactions, discuss challenges, identify solutions, and provide support for each other. This support of the coaching team reflected research around coaching (Abell et al., 2014; Gallagher et al., 2011).

3.6 Data Collection and Assessment Methods

As previously indicated, the research design called for both quantitative and qualitative research methods. At different times during the study quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized. Rather than describing the methods as they appear chronologically in the study, all the quantitative methods will be discussed first, followed by the qualitative methods.

3.6.1 Quantitative Methods

An experimental approach was the main quantitative method used. After receiving confirmation from 27 programs that the preschool educators were willing to participate in the study, an ECERS-R evaluation was done on each of the programs. Only after the evaluation was completed were the centres randomly assigned to group A (control), treatment group B (no coaches) or treatment group C (coaches). The quantitative components of the study used these three groups (chart 2) to assess the effectiveness of the quality improvement process.
Programs in the control group (group A) received no intervention strategies and were asked to continue with their current practices. They also received information explaining when the other two ECERS-R evaluations would take place. Educators in treatment group B received training on the quality improvement process and information regarding the timeframes in which they were expected to complete the program evaluation, create an action plan (based on their assessments, reflections, and brainstorming sessions), and implement the action plan. They also received information explaining when the other two ECERS-R evaluations would take place as well as when the third-party assessment would occur. In addition to the initial explanation of the timelines, the coordinator sent out reminders of the completion dates a couple of weeks before each one occurred. Like educators in treatment group B, educators in treatment group C received training on the quality improvement process, information regarding both the ECERS-R and third party evaluations, and information regarding the timeframes in which they were expected to complete the program evaluation, action plan, and implement the action plan. Like treatment group B they also received reminders from the coordinator regarding completion dates a couple of weeks before each one occurred. In addition, they were provided information on the role of a coach and assigned a coach to support them through the process.

Chart 2:  
**Control and Treatment Groups: A Comparison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control - Group A: (no coaches; no training)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Educators and supervisors in this group continued with their current practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They were informed that the program would be evaluated using the ECERS-R 10 months later, and again at the end of 16 months (from start of study). When the date of the second and third ECERS-R evaluation was changed, they were notified of the change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment Group B: (no coaches; training)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Educators implemented the quality improvement process without the use of coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Educators and supervisors in this group received the <em>Quality Benefits Children</em> manual (Appendix C)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A day-long training session on quality improvement process; the use of the manual for evaluating the program and developing an action plan process, and information regarding third part validators.

Informed that the program would be evaluated using the ECERS-R 10 months later, and again at the end of 16 months (from start of study). When the date of the second and third ECERS-R evaluation was changed, they were notified of the change.

Treatment Group C (coaches; training)

- Educators and supervisors in this group received the support of a trained coach; the manual *Quality Benefits Children* manual (Appendix C)

- A day-long training session on the use of the manual for evaluating the program and developing an action plan process, and information regarding third part validators

- Informed that the program would be evaluated using the ECERS-R 10 months later, and again at the end of 16 months (from start of study). When the date of the second and third ECERS-R evaluation was changed, they were notified of the change.

- Introduced to their coach

- Were provided information concerning the various roles of the coach

To measure the changes to program quality improvement in each classroom, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-revised (ECERS-R) was used. This assessment tool consists of seven subscales (space and furnishings, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interaction, parents and staff, and program structure). The ratings of individual items are then totaled and averaged to determine the overall score for the program. ECERS-R assessments were done at the beginning of the study to obtain a baseline quality rating score (ECERS-R #1) after educators had completed all of the following: program assessment and reflections, development of an action plan based on the assessment and reflections, implementation of the action plan (ECERS-R #2), and approximately 6 months after the structured quality improvement process had ended (ECERS-R #3).
The ECERS-R tool was selected to measure the program’s quality because, as the literature review indicated, it is a validated tool frequently used in early learning programs to evaluate global program quality (Campbell & Milbourne, 2005; Clifford, R., Reszka, S., & Rossbach, H., 2010; Pramling et al., 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009).

As the study depended on volunteers, and because the evaluations needed to be completed in a timely fashion, the ECERS-R was implemented by a total of six individuals. Each individual was assigned to evaluate four or five programs and was responsible for all three evaluations of a program. All evaluators were early childhood educators with extensive experience in the field. They were all familiar with the tool although not all had used ECERS-R to evaluate a program before this study. The evaluators were required to participate in an intensive two-day training session led by a qualified ECERS-R trainer. The training included a detailed study of the tool (and how to use it) along with sessions designed to ensure inter-rater reliability. At the end of the two-day training period, the trainer reviewed the results of the inter-reliability testing and identified that all evaluators had achieved at least an 85% agreement level and half had achieved a 90% agreement level or better. In order to help maximize objectivity, none of the ECERS-R evaluators were told to which group any of the centres had been assigned.

During the course of the pilot, two evaluators had to drop out before completing all three evaluations (due to illness and other personal factors), and other evaluators from the group stepped forward to complete these assessments.

3.6.1.1 Post-Pilot Survey

In order to supplement information from the experimental approach, a post-pilot survey was given to participants when the evaluator arrived at the centre to complete the second ECERS-R evaluation. It consisted of a Likert type scale combined with open-ended questions (Appendix D) and was designed to determine if perceptions of the quality improvement process differed between participants in treatment group B and treatment group C.
The scale encompassed three types of questions. One group of questions (five through eight) addressed the training process and manual. These questions were designed to elicit information that the Quality Benefits Children committee needed to continue their work. These questions were not analyzed as part of the research study.

The second group of questions (nine through 13) were designed to be answered by both treatment groups. They addressed perceptions regarding the process. The results for these questions were then analyzed for general trends and a two independent samples t-Test was used to determine if there were any significant differences between the perceptions of individuals in treatment groups B and C.

Finally, questions 16 through 19 were answered only by participants who received the support of a coach (group C). These questions were directed specifically at how useful the participants found the coach when going through the quality improvement process. The data from these questions were tallied and analyzed to see what the majority perspective was regarding the usefulness of coaches.

3.6.2 Qualitative Methods

Several different qualitative data collection tools were used to expand on information acquired from the quantitative data. The various qualitative data sets were used to provide insights into how coaching supported quality improvements and how perceptions might influence the process. The qualitative data was collected from a pre-pilot survey, post-pilot survey, and interviews. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data and identify themes regarding the process and coaching to provide insight not captured by the quantitative data. Although the data collection was guided by some general questions linked to the initial research question, an inductive approach to the thematic analysis was utilized in an attempt to capture varied themes that might emerge. This inductive approach was used rather than a deductive approach because I wanted the themes to come directly from the data rather than being bound by pre-existing parameters. Despite this attempt to be open to all themes that might emerge from the data I recognize that
“researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 12).

The analysis of the data was based on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) description of the phases of thematic analysis which consists of: “data familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the reports” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach is similar to one outlined by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) in their article addressing rigor in thematic analysis and the use of both inductive and deductive thematic analysis within the same study.

After recording the interviews, I initially listened to the recordings and transcribed them. The transcription process resulted in frequent review of the data to ensure accuracy and was the beginning of the familiarization phase. Once the transcriptions were complete, additional familiarization of the data occurred. After the familiarization phase, the initial coding was done. This was followed by the identification of possible themes, reviewing and modification of themes, and definition of the themes.

Unlike the thematic analysis of the interviews, the analysis of qualitative data from the written surveys did not encompass all of Braun and Clarke’s phases because the survey questions were more specific in nature (e.g., What have the educators done in your program that you believe have resulted in improvements to program quality?), and because their purpose was to determine if data outside of the main interviews might lend additional support to the themes emerging from the interviews. At the time these data were analyzed, themes from the interviews had been reviewed and defined; therefore, the analysis of the survey data contained both inductive and deductive approaches. I initially read the answers to familiarize myself with the data, followed by general coding and reviewing the initial code in light of themes from the interviews or themes that emerged from the coding. Once this was done, I also introduced simple numerical analysis to determine the percentage of respondents whose answers contributed to a particular theme. As a result, in the discussion of the qualitative findings I combine both narrative and numerical results.
While recognizing that the identification of a theme is not dependent upon it being present in a specific proportion of the data set, given that the goal is to identify key patterns emerging from the data my analysis of the qualitative data does include the frequency with which data supporting a theme occurred. As Braun and Clarke (2006) stated,

Ideally there will be a number of instances of the theme across the data set, but more instances do not necessarily mean the theme itself is more crucial. As this is qualitative analysis, there is no hard-and-fast answer to the question of what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme (p.82).

3.6.2.1 Pre-Pilot Survey

At the start of the study, pre-pilot surveys were delivered to all participants (Appendix E). In order to ensure confidentiality, each survey was delivered inside an envelope that could be sealed once the survey was completed. When the ECERS evaluators came to complete the first ECERS-R assessment they also collected the sealed survey envelopes. The evaluators then dropped off both the ECERS-R assessments and the sealed surveys to the project coordinator who then held them for me to collect. Educators were not individually linked to the surveys, but there was an identifier on the survey for the program they were associated with in order that later analysis of influencing factors could occur.

This survey was designed to obtain information on some factors that might influence the research outcomes. The pre-pilot survey allowed participants to identify if they had volunteered to participate or if they were they told to participate by a supervisor. It also solicited participants’ views regarding the current quality of their programs and if they thought there would be any benefit to participating in the study—factors that might influence one’s commitment to the process (Ackerman, 2008). The data were first analyzed using simple statistics to determine if an educator’s initial introduction to participation (e.g., collaborative decision-making vs directive decision-making) impacted their perceptions regarding the project. If the findings showed differences, thematic analysis would be done to identify possible categories.
3.6.2.2 Post-Pilot Survey

Initially, two post-pilot surveys were planned. The first survey was delivered to educators at the time of the second ECERS-R evaluation and the final survey was delivered after the third ECERS-R evaluation. Due to the extremely low return rate for the final survey, it was replaced by interviews. As a result, all references to post-pilot surveys are referring to the first survey.

Questions 14, 15, 20, 21, and 22 on the post-pilot survey were open-ended questions designed to elicit a greater understanding of the quality improvement process and coaching. These questions were answered by the treatment groups (B and C). I used thematic analysis to identify themes emerging from the responses. I also noted the frequency of responses that supported these emerging themes.

3.6.2.3 Final Survey and Interviews

A final survey (see Appendix F) was emailed to all participants at the same time that programs were notified of the third ECERS-R evaluation. This notification was sent out approximately six months after the educators had completed the pilot. The survey was designed to provide additional insight into the educators’ thoughts regarding the program quality improvement process, the value of third party validators as part of the process, the value of coaching as part of the process, and the effectiveness of different types of coaching supports. I received only three responses out of a possible 67 from the educators in the treatment groups (groups B and C). As a result of the low response rate, the project coordinator sent two additional emails out to the programs over the course of three weeks, asking them to complete and return the survey. When the supplementary emails yielded no additional survey returns, it was decided that interviewing participants might be a more effective method of obtaining this information.

During the first week of January I contacted all of the treatment programs to request an interview and arrange for it to take place. The content that was originally designed to be solicited through surveys was now translated into interviews. This was done by identifying the topics from the
surveys and incorporating them into a semi-structured interview process. I outlined the type of information the interview needed to address and then encouraged the educators to simply speak to the process they were involved in. I would ask questions, as needed, to redirect the interviewees to missing content that had been highlighted in the introduction to the interview.

While a group interview might influence the results (statements made by one interview could influence what another’s answer), I thought it imperative to accommodate the needs of the programs. As a result, I conducted either individual or group interviews as requested by the educators in the program. These group interviews often included both educators and supervisors which could influence the content because educators might defer to their supervisors. However, due to the relatively small size of the typical early learning and care program and the fact that almost all the supervisors in the study spent some of their hours working side by side with the other educators, the hierarchical nature found in many organizations was less apparent in the participating early learning and care programs.

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, I used thematic analysis to identify themes that emerged regarding both the process as a whole and coaching as a strategy for quality improvement in early learning programs.

3.7 Procedure

After the initial ECERS-R evaluations were made, all participants completed a pre-pilot survey. Once these were completed, treatment groups were identified and training for educators within the treatment groups was conducted. After these procedures were completed, the study consisted several distinct phases.

During the first phase, educators assessed their program quality, reflected on their findings, and set goals to improve quality. In the second phase, the educators prioritized goals, decided on strategies to meet goals, and implemented their strategies. In the third phase, outside validators assessed program quality. Shortly after their assessment, the validators returned to meet with the
educators and discussed their findings regarding the program’s quality. During the third phase, the ECERS-R evaluators also returned and assessed program quality. While educators in both treatment groups followed the same general procedures, those in treatment group C also had coaches facilitating the process. At the end of this phase educators were asked to complete a post-pilot survey. The final phase occurred approximately six months after the third phase. At this time a final ECERS-R assessment was done on each of the programs. After the final assessments were completed, I then contacted each of the treatment programs and arranged to interview participating educators at their centre.

While educators in the treatment groups were engaged in the various phases of the study, educators in the control group continued to engage in their traditional quality-improvement strategies.

3.8 Study Timeline

Once programs and educators had been recruited to participate, the study was implemented over a two-year period. The following chart highlights the timeframe for different aspects of the pilot study.

Initially, the timeline for the project was 18 months and included various expectations and deadlines during that timeframe. However, the actual time line was closer to two years due to challenges encountered by centres and because the final mail-out survey was changed to an onsite interview due to low response rates. The following table provides the general timelines in the project; short descriptions of the project tasks are included within each section.
Chart 3: Timeline for Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spring 2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Training of ECERS-R evaluators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recruitment of centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessment of all programs using ECERS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Random assignment to control or treatment group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pre-pilot survey sent to all participating programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training on the quality improvement process for all programs in both treatment groups (process with no coach, process with coach)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summer and Fall 2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Educators in treatment groups use the <em>Quality Benefits Children</em> manual to complete individual assessments which are brought back to the team for discussion, reflection, and goal setting. Programs with coaches receive visits from the coaches who observe, clarify the process (if necessary), facilitate discussion, and provide feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coaches meet once a month as a group To discuss challenges and share strategies</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• As programs complete the identification of goals, goal-based action plans are developed and implementation begun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recruitment of qualified individuals to conduct third party assessments using the <em>Quality Benefits Children</em> manual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2012 to March 31, 2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Programs complete the implementation of their action plans. By the end of March all programs are required to contact the coordinator and set a date for a third-party assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coaches are available to support implementation of the action plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early winter 2013

- Third party assessors are trained on how to use the *Quality Benefits Children* manual to complete a program evaluation

Late winter to early spring 2013

- Third party assessments completed on the treatment programs
- As soon as the third part assessment is completed the ECERS-R evaluators return to the program to re-evaluate it (all ECERS-R evaluations done within two weeks of the third-party assessment)
- Post-pilot survey delivered to all participants

Spring 2013

- Third party assessors return to the program to review their findings, facilitate a discussion on the findings, and make recommendations for the program

Late fall 2013

- Final ECERS-R assessment done on the program to determine if any improvements had been sustained
- Final survey emailed to participants

Winter 2014

- Centres contacted for permission to conduct interviews. Done to replace Final survey.
- Interviews conducted with participating treatment programs (the interviews replaced the final surveys due to an extremely low return rate)

Once programs were recruited, a pre-pilot survey (Appendix E) was given to educators in each of the programs, and programs were told to save the date for a possible training session. Educators were asked to complete and return the surveys immediately because the surveys had to be returned before educators found out if they were assigned to the control or one of the treatment
groups. The surveys were collected by an evaluator on the same date the evaluator completed a quality assessment of the classroom using ECERS-R. This was done in order to establish a baseline regarding program quality. Because not all the educators had returned a completed survey, the project coordinator sent out another request for the surveys a week later. 110 educators were sent surveys and 43 surveys were returned. This resulted in a survey return rate of 39.1%, with returns from some programs at 100% and other programs having no returns sent in. Once the completed surveys had been collected educators were notified as to which group they had been assigned (control group A, treatment group B-no coach, treatment group C-coaches).

The next step consisted of educators in the treatment groups being asked to attend a training session. A minimum of two educators from each program attended the training session. During the session educators received training on the quality improvement process and were made aware of the resources available to each of the treatment groups (group B and group C). Because not all participating educators attended the training session, those in attendance were asked to share their knowledge with the other staff. In programs with coaches the educators could ask the coach to do this additional training.

After groups B and C had received the training, they were expected to complete their observations, reflections, and program assessment within four months. By the end of four months they were to have used the information from their observational assessments and their reflections/discussions to develop an action plan designed to improve quality.

Educators and supervisors were expected to implement the action plan they developed, or as much of it as possible, over the following six months. Because the purpose of the study was to determine if the process and the use of coaches resulted in improvements to overall program quality (rather than to determine how action plans supported specific improvements in quality), the action plans were not analyzed to identify how the items on an action plan linked to particular assessments items.
At the end of the six months that were allotted to the implementation of the action plan, each treatment program was assessed by a third party. These validators were experienced ECEs in the community who were already familiar with the *Quality Benefits Children* (Ottawa Child Care Council, 2007) manual. Despite their familiarity with the manual, the validators received an intensive, two-day training session. This training addressed both the use of the manual to evaluate the program and inter-rater reliability. When conducting the program assessment, the validators spent two days observing, reviewing documents, and asking questions of program educators. None of the third-party assessors were also ECERS-R evaluators.

Due to the extended period for each assessment, there were four teams of two validators, with each team assessing three or four programs. The validators worked together to ask questions of the educators and ensure that all desired documents were located or identified as missing, but all observations were done individually. Immediately after the assessment was completed the validators sat down to discuss what each of them had observed. As the validators discussed their observations and reviewed data from documents and interviews, they developed the assessment report that would be received by the program educators.

At the time of the second ECERS-R evaluation a total of six centres had withdrawn from the study. Shortly after the study began, three centres withdrew. At the time of the second ECERS-R evaluation, three additional centres were no long part of the study. In two programs, they stopped responding after the validators came to their program but before the second ECERS-R evaluation. In the third program, when the third-party validators arranged to come it was discovered that the director of the program—despite repeated emails from the project coordinator—had not passed on information to the educators and had failed to support the completion of the process. Due to this failure to complete the process, the program was removed from the study.

After this assessment was completed, the validators contacted the coordinator who, in turn, informed the appropriate ECERS-R evaluator that they needed to complete the second evaluation of the program. Within two weeks of the validators’ assessment, the ECERS-R evaluator returned to the program and completed their second evaluation. At no time did ECERS-R
evaluators have contact with the validators or know who any of the validators were. This was done to maximize the objectivity of the ECERS-R evaluators.

When the ECERS-R evaluator went to the program for the second evaluation, they gave the educators in the program the second survey along with a self-addressed envelope and asked them to complete and return the survey to the project coordinator. It was requested that the educators complete and return the surveys within a week, so that the coordinator would have them before the third-party follow-up session. This request was made so that the third-party validators’ report would not influence the educators’ perception of the process they had just completed. Out of a possible 84 responses (6 programs had withdrawn at this time), the coordinator received 42—a response rate of 50%. Of these responses, 18 were from the control group, 12 from treatment group B and 12 from treatment group C.

Once the ECERS-R evaluation was completed, the sealed envelope was given to the project coordinator. The coordinator then contacted the validators to let them know that they could arrange a follow-up meeting with the educators in the program in approximately two weeks time.

As part of the quality improvement process, the third-party assessors had to arrange a time to meet with the participating educators and share their findings and possible recommendations. The timing of these follow-up meetings varied due to the need for the ECERS-R evaluators to arrange a second evaluation of the program before the third-party validators shared their findings and recommendations.

Although the timelines were clearly outlined in the training session, and the project coordinator sent updates to all the centres reminding them of the timelines, several centres encountered difficulties in meeting the deadlines. This was due to changes in staff/administrators, illnesses that resulted in supply educators working in the centre for extended times, and summer schedules at some centres that resulted in no team meetings for two months during the program assessment period (meetings to discuss and reflect on observational assessments were required). As a result of the challenges faced by the centres, the deadline for the assessment period was extended by a month. This meant that the timing of the second ECERS evaluation was also moved back.
Instead of taking place at the end of 10 months from the start of the study, it was now 11 months before the third-party assessments and second ECERS-R evaluations were done.

The third phase of the study began after the second ECERS-R evaluation took place, and continued for an additional six months. This phase signaled the end of the structured process. Educators were free to continue working on improvements which they might have begun earlier, but none of the programs received additional support from the coaches. This phase ended with a final ECERS-R assessment. At the time of the final ECERS-R evaluation educators in the treatment groups were also provided with a final survey, which they could complete either online or as a hard copy (Appendix F). This survey used open-ended questions to solicit information about the overall process, changes they thought occurred, and their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the process. As mentioned previously, an extremely low response rate (3 out of 67) resulted in my decision to ask for interviews with the hope that the educators would be more willing to talk about the process than to write down their thoughts.

In early January, I approached all of the programs in the experimental groups and requested an opportunity to interview them about the process. Initially 11 of the 14 programs agreed to be interviewed in January or early February. Three of the programs did not respond to the initial request but, when approached a second time, all three expressed an interest in being interviewed. However, although they agreed to an interview, they also identified that, for various reasons, they would not be immediately available. The last three interviews took place five to six months after the completion of the final ECERS-R evaluation. The gap between the end of the project and the interviews resulted in educators frequently indicating that they could not remember the specifics of what happened, while also indicating that they thought the process was valuable and helped the program. Due to the time lag between the earlier and later interviews (2-3 months) and the limited recall of individuals being interviewed at the later dates, the content of these interviews was not included in the analysis.

While the third phase of the pilot was occurring, two other centres withdrew from the study. After receiving their third-party assessment reports, these programs stop responding to emails or other attempts to contact them. Although they did not officially withdraw from the study, the
programs did not receive the final ECERS-R evaluation due to their failure to respond to requests for access to the program.

3.9 Use of Coaches

During the study, every coach was expected to visit each of their assigned centres a minimum of once every two weeks for the first four weeks, and then once per month until the centre had been evaluated by the third-party validator. During the first visit the coach was expected to observe the program and get an overview of the environments, interactions, etc. They were also responsible for determining how the educators were assessing the program and provide clarification if needed. Coaches were also expected to ensure that a process was in place for educators to meet and reflect on the findings. In the following visits, coaches incorporated much of the above but also provided additional support and guidance as required. Coaches frequently led, and participated in, the team meetings where educators reflected on/discussed their observational findings. During these discussions the coaches encouraged educators to look objectively at what the findings indicated and provided guidance while the educators tried to determine what the findings meant for their program. Most coaches participated in the meeting(s) that educators held to create an action plan from the assessment data, although a couple of programs did not think they needed the coach at that meeting. During the implementation of the action plan, the coaches checked in with the educators, provided feedback on changes they observed, and participated in discussions around challenges the educators were encountering.

In addition to coach-initiated visits, the program participants could also initiate additional interactions/meetings with the coach. Each program had coaches available to them—up to a maximum of 20 hours of coach-initiated and educator-initiated time combined.

The actual number of hours used by educators in the nine centres varied. Educators in some centres used the maximum number of hours, while those in other centres had hours left at the end of the study. One centre initiated only a few hours of coaching because they repeatedly told the coach they were quite confident completing the tasks on their own and thought they were on
track with their changes. Several programs asked coaches to join them as they physically changed environments, while others simply asked for input before and after the implementation of changes. Even after using the maximum number of hours available, one centre asked a coach if she could continue to visit the centre and support them. Although the coach indicated that she would have liked to help, she did ensure that she stopped coaching the program once she reached the maximum 20 hours.

3.10 Summary of Program Withdrawals during the Process

Over the course of the pilot, several participating programs withdrew from the study. Initially there were 27 participating programs, but between the first ECERS-R evaluation (baseline) and the second ECERS-R evaluation (occurring after the programs had completed the self-evaluation and implemented actions plans), six centres had withdrawn or been withdrawn. Three of these centres withdrew shortly after the pilot was implemented. In one of the programs there were several educators who became quite ill, and the supervisor did not want to participate with temporary staff. In another program there was a change in directors, and the new director thought that the legislated requirements for programs were sufficient to ensure quality. In the third program, the director simply indicated that they were not interested in continuing to participate.

At the time of the second ECERS-R evaluation, the programs had finished implementing their action plans and had just been visited by third-party validators. At this point in time, three additional programs had left the pilot. I eliminated one because, although they were in group B and required to complete the process, they had forgotten to do so. Another program in group B failed to respond to repeated requests by the ECERS-R evaluator to visit the program and complete the evaluation, but eventually contacted the pilot coordinator to indicate that they would no longer participate. After repeated attempts to contact the third program (in the control group), they indicated that, due to program changes, they’d have to withdraw.

Before the last ECERS-R evaluation was administered (six months after the second evaluation and the conclusion of the improvement process), two additional programs withdrew. One
withdrew due to the fact that they had moved and changed their program to accommodate changes in the community, and another because they had changed from a preschool to a toddler program. The result of the various withdrawals of programs from the study meant that, while there were initially 27 participating programs, at the time of the second ECERS-R assessment the study consisted of 21 programs, and by the third and final ECERS-R assessment (20 months after the pilot began) there were only 19 participating programs. Of the 19 programs, six were left in the control group, six in treatment group B, and seven in treatment group C.

The 19 remaining centres consisted of 12 non-profit centres (11 stand-alone, one large agency), one for-profit centre (stand-alone), four municipal centres, two head start centres, and one indigenous centre. The study did not require exist interviews.

3.11 Limitations of the study design

The current study was undertaken in the context of a local early learning and care community that wanted to determine if the use of coaches with the locally designed quality improvement process would be an effective method to increase program quality. As an initiative of the professional community rather than the local municipalities, there was minimal funding for the study, and although the municipalities supported the concept of the initiative, there was no mandate for programs to participate in the pilot.

The sample size, the use of volunteers, and the number of evaluators and coaches are some of the limitations to this study. Within the research findings there are data that address some of the limitations. These findings will be discussed in Chapter Four; however, a full discussion of limitations—both design and unexpected—will occur in Chapter Five.
Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The findings from the study addressed both the research questions and some of the study’s limitations. The overarching research question examined in this chapter is, “Will a structured quality improvement process that includes coaching result in improvements to program quality and, if so, will these improvements be greater than those that might occur in programs with the structured process alone and/or programs without any structured process?”

In addition to the above question there are also four research sub-questions to be examined:

1. When educators are supported by a coach will they view the process more positively and perceive it as being easier than those who participate in the process without the support of a coach?

2. What are educators’ perceptions regarding the usefulness of coaches in a quality improvement process?

3. What do educators perceive as the important elements of a quality improvement process?

4. What do educators perceive as outcomes of a quality improvement process?

Because the analyses of data from both the ECERS-R and the interviews contain findings that link to several of the research questions, an overview of these findings is presented in section 4.2 and 4.3 after which the individual research questions are examined. When examining each research question, the relevant data from both quantitative and qualitative methods will be discussed.

While a full discussion of the study’s limitations will occur in Chapter Five, data collected during the study linked to some of the limitations. At the end of Chapter Four I will present the findings from these data.
4.2 General Analysis of ECERS-R Data

Although the ECERS-R rating scale is divided into various subscales, the items from the subscales are combined to create an overall score which is used to rate the overall quality of a program. The overall score for each program in the pilot was determined each time an ECERS-R evaluation was completed. This meant that each program had three ECERS-R overall scores. #1 was the baseline score, #2 was the overall score taken at the end of the quality improvement process, and #3 was the overall score taken approximately six months after the quality improvement process had finished. Once the overall scores for each program had been calculated, these scores were listed with the overall scores of other programs from the same group and the mean and standard deviation for each group were determined. These results are listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The data and results are from the 19 programs that finished the pilot.

After calculating the mean and standard deviations for each group, the data were then analyzed to determine changes in the scores from one evaluation to the next (see tables 4–6). The results presented in the above mentioned tables provide information that will be analyzed in more detail under the relevant research questions.

4.3 Analysis of Interviews

Thematic analysis was carried out on the interview data to determine emerging themes that might provide insights into the effectiveness of both the quality improvement process and the use of coaches.

Semi-structured interviews with participants from the treatment groups were used to obtain data regarding ongoing quality improvements, as well as insights into the effectiveness of both the general process and the use of coaches.
Table 1

Group A: ECERS-R overall scores; mean; standard deviation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group A Control programs</th>
<th>Overall score ECERS-R #1</th>
<th>Overall score ECERS-R #2</th>
<th>Overall score ECERS-R #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>6.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>5.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>5.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>5.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.067</td>
<td>5.153</td>
<td>5.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>0.56510766</td>
<td>0.85915462</td>
<td>0.90639212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Group B: ECERS-R overall scores; mean; standard deviation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group B Programs without coaches</th>
<th>Overall score ECERS-R #1</th>
<th>Overall score ECERS-R #2</th>
<th>Overall score ECERS-R #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>6.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>6.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>5.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>6.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>5.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.266</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>5.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>0.62912638</td>
<td>0.35172432</td>
<td>0.49946972</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

**Group C: ECERS-R overall scores; mean; standard deviation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group C Programs with coaches</th>
<th>Overall score</th>
<th>Overall score</th>
<th>Overall score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECERS-R #1</td>
<td>ECERS-R #2</td>
<td>ECERS-R #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>6.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>5.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>5.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.599</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>5.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>1.25175115</td>
<td>1.17389462</td>
<td>1.30844328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

**Group A: Changes to ECERS-R overall scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group A Control programs</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECERS-R #1 to ECERS-R #2</td>
<td>ECERS-R #2 to ECERS-R #3</td>
<td>ECERS-R #1 to ECERS-R #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>0.377765359</td>
<td>0.306180774</td>
<td>0.35466416</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5

**Group B: Changes to ECERS-R overall scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group B Programs without coaches</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECERS-R #1 to ECERS-R #2</td>
<td>ECERS-R #2 to ECERS-R #3</td>
<td>ECERS #1 to ECERS #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>0.431960646</td>
<td>0.407970587</td>
<td>0.55959807</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6

**Group C: Changes to ECERS-R overall scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group C Programs with coaches</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
<th>Change in score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECERS-R #1 to ECERS-R #2</td>
<td>ECERS-R #2 to ECERS-R #3</td>
<td>ECERS #1 to ECERS #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>0.43340276</td>
<td>0.338723092</td>
<td>0.542814535</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When the programs were contacted at the beginning of January, educators in 11 (six treatment group B, 5 treatment group C) of the 14 treatment groups agreed to be interviewed in January or early February. Of the 11 programs, two programs had only one educator participate in an interview. This was due to staff attrition or staff phoning in sick on the day of the interview. One program had each person interviewed separately, for a total of three interviews. In this program, the second interview was conducted immediately following the first interview, and the third interview occurred immediately after the second interview. In each of the remaining eight programs, the educators indicated that they would prefer to be interviewed together during a lunch break or the children’s sleep time. Of these eight programs, two had three educators participate in the interview, and six had two educators participate. The total number of interviews was 13.

Although the total number of individuals participating in the interviews was small (20 people; 13 separate interviews), Guest et al. (2006) indicate that the saturation point for interviews can occur around 12 interviews. They indicate that “if the goal is to describe a shared perception, belief, or behavior among a relatively homogeneous group, then a sample of twelve will likely be sufficient” (p. 76). Since the goal of the current study was to determine if any consistent themes would emerge from interviews conducted with a fairly homogeneous group (full-day preschool educators who had participated in the quality improvement process), it was assumed that the number of interviews would be adequate to reach the saturation point.

The interviews were conducted in the centres where the educators worked, and were recorded for transcription and analysis. The focus of each interview was two-fold: it was designed to encourage interviewees to provide their thoughts on how the quality improvement process went (positive and negative), and it was also meant to obtain the educators’ views on the usefulness of coaches. My questions were very general. The educators were simply asked to tell me about the coaching or the process. If their answers did not delve deeply enough, I would follow-up on the initial question. For example, if they simply stated that the coach was effective, I would follow this up by asking them to tell me specific things coaches did that were or were not effective, or if they had additional thoughts regarding the topic.
After all the interviews were completed, I transcribed each interview, frequently returning to the recorded copy to ensure that the transcription was accurate. Everything said by an interviewee was transcribed verbatim; however my questions to encourage more in-depth answers were not transcribed verbatim. Each interview transcription was filed separately. This was done in order to determine if emerging themes could be attributed to educators in all programs or only some programs, and to determine if the themes were attributable to educators in both treatment groups or to educators in only one of the treatment groups.

Once the transcriptions had been completed, the interviews were read and reread to familiarize myself with the data and highlight key ideas/views the interviewees appeared to stress and/or return to and discuss in more detail.

After familiarization with the data, the highlighted features were reviewed. An initial coding was done to capture the key ideas of a specific statement while creating a label which would also be appropriate for similar statements. As the analysis moved from one interview to another, and as new data illustrated or were closely linked to the key ideas already coded, the codes that had been created were either used “as is” on the new data or the code was modified to better reflect both the previous and new data. As the data produced additional key ideas, new codes were developed to reflect them.

Once the coding was completed, I reviewed the coding in light of the original statements found in each transcript to ensure that the various codes still clearly represented the ideas/views that different interviewees had emphasized. Having confirmed that the coding clearly reflected the original data, the coding was re-examined to identify initial themes that might be emerging across all data sets or some data sets. Finally, the emerging themes were re-examined to determine if the patterns constituted a single theme or an overarching theme composed of sub-themes. From this analysis, a number of themes emerged regarding interviewees’ key thoughts on the quality improvement process and on coaching.

During the thematic analysis, it was important to take into account the fact that educators in six of the programs did not have coaches. These interviewees were likely to discuss
coaches/coaching only when asked, and their responses would be hypothetical in nature. Due to this lack of experience with coaches, it was anticipated that some themes might only emerge from interviews with educators who experienced coaching as part of the quality improvement process.

When the data were analyzed, some of the themes that emerged were mentioned frequently within individual interviews and across all the interviews (e.g., time, reflective practice). Other themes may not have been mentioned as frequently within each interview but still came up across all the interviews (e.g., the process provides a concrete evaluation of the program) or were linked clearly to one treatment group and not another. When using thematic analysis, it is recognized that both strategies for identifying themes are important because both types of frequencies can indicate an emerging theme. As Braun and Clarke (2006) stated, “more instances do not necessarily mean the theme itself is more crucial” (p. 82).

Since thematic analysis does not rely on a quantified measure to determine the prevalence of a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and instead focuses on “identifying and analyzing patterns in qualitative data” (Clarke & Braun, 2013 p. 120), it was not necessary for the analysis of the interviews to identify a number, percentage, or quantifier such as “the majority of participants” when determining the emerging themes. However, once I had identified various themes interwoven throughout the interviews, I returned to the data from individual centres and recorded the number of times each theme was addressed. On completion of this compilation, I created tables (see Tables 7 & 8) to illustrate the differences between centres. This was done to provide additional insight and support for the emerging themes.

From the results of the thematic analysis, several themes emerged with respect to both the process and the coaches/coaching. Three overarching themes addressed the effectiveness of the process (see Table 7). They were: 1) need for time; 2) reflective practice is important; and 3) the process promotes positive change. A total of four overarching themes emerged from the data on coaches/coaching (see Table 8). The overarching themes were: 1) coaches provide resources; 2) coaches bring clarity to the process; 3) coaches serve as mediators and facilitators; and 4)
coaches help process completion. None of the coaches/coaching themes were limited to interviewees from centres with coaches.

The data for each of the emerging themes included patterns that often resulted in sub-themes. Most of the emerging themes contained within them several sub-themes. These sub-themes reflected different elements of the overarching theme that was emerging (e.g., the emerging theme “Need for Time” has a sub-theme of “Funding for Non-contact Time”). These sub-themes, along with their overarching themes, will be examined in more detail under the relevant research question.

4.4 Overarching Research Question

The previous section provided an overview of the analyses and findings for the quantitative and qualitative data which addressed more than one research question. In the following sections, each research question will be examined utilizing the results obtained through the analysis of relevant data.

The overarching research question was, “Will a structured quality improvement process that includes coaching result in improvements to program quality and, if so, will these improvements be greater than those that might occur in programs with the structured process alone and/or programs without any structured process?” The findings from the quantitative data provided some mixed results regarding this question.

When the data from the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised were compiled, the results showed that 12 out of the 19 programs had scored at a five or better on the baseline assessment (out of a seven-point rating scale) and only two centres had scored at three or lower (see Tables 1-3).
### Table 7

**Emerging Themes Regarding the Quality Improvement Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes regarding the quality improvement process</th>
<th>Program 1</th>
<th>Program 2</th>
<th>Program 3</th>
<th>Program 4</th>
<th>Program 5</th>
<th>Program 6</th>
<th>Program 7</th>
<th>Program 8</th>
<th>Program 9</th>
<th>Program 10</th>
<th>Program 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for Time</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Reflective Practice</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Promotes Positive Change</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # of responses</th>
<th>% of centres identifying theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Emerging Themes Regarding Coaches

**Table 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes regarding coaching</th>
<th>Program 1 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 2 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 3 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 4 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 5 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 6 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 7 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 8 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 9 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 10 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 11 (no coach)</th>
<th>Total # responses</th>
<th>Percentages of programs identifying theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaches Provide Resources</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches Provide Clarity/Insight</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches Act as Mediators/Facilitators</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches Help Process Completion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
According to ECERS-R (2005) a score of five or better indicates a good quality program, while scores of three indicate minimal quality; those rating less than three have inadequate quality. At the beginning of the study the average overall rating for the control group was 5.067, treatment group B (no coach) was 5.266, and treatment group C (coach) was 4.99. The two programs with the lowest baseline scores were both part of treatment group C. Centre #1 had a score of 3.00 and centre #2 had a score of 2.78 (see Table 3). After treatment, centre #1 showed large gains on the overall score for the ECERS-R (+1.26), while centre #2 went up slightly from the first to the second evaluation (+.15) but then dropped below the baseline score (-0.24) by the time of the third evaluation (see Table 3).

The initial analysis of the changes in mean scores from the baseline assessment (ECERS-R #1) to the last assessment (ECERS-R #3) showed some differences between the control group and the treatment groups. As seen in Table 9, four out of the five programs with the most improvements came from treatment group C (coaching), while one came from treatment group B (no coach) and none from the control group. However, when one looks at the five programs with the least amount of change (see Table 10), three of them came from the control group, one from treatment group B, and one from treatment group C.

It must also be noted that the ECERS-R authors indicate that a change on the average score of 1.00 is considered a meaningful improvement. As table 9 indicates treatment group C contains two centres with meaningful improvements and treatment group B contains one while there are none from the control group.
Table 9

*Programs with the Most Improvement in ECERS-R total score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Change in ECERS-R score from 1st to 3rd assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group B: #4</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C: #1</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C: #3</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C: #6</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C: #4</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

*Programs with the Least Improvement in ECERS-R total score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Change in ECERS-R score from 1st to 3rd assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A: #1</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C: #2</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group A: #3</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group A: #4</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B: #1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When comparing the mean changes from the beginning of the study to 6 months after the quality improvement process ended (see Graph 1), there is also a difference between the control and treatment groups. The control group’s mean change in the ECERS-R overall score is less than .1
point (.083) on a scale of one to seven. At the same time, both the treatment groups have mean changes greater than .5 in their ECERS-R overall scores. There is no significant difference between the results of group B and those of group C, but group B (.575) slightly outperformed group C (.551). It was postulated that treatment group C (with coaches) would demonstrate greater improvement than treatment group B (no coaches). However, though the difference in changes to scores between the two groups is extremely small, the data show that treatment group B had greater—though not statistically significant—changes in quality.

Figure 1:
*Mean Change in ECERS-R scores from Assessment 1 to Assessment 3*

![Bar chart showing mean change in ECERS-R scores for groups A, B, and C.]

While there appeared to be a tendency for the treatment groups to demonstrate more positive changes to quality than the control group, it was important to examine the data to determine if the differences were statistically significant. In order to do this, a two independent samples T-test was used. This type of test was required because there were two groups being compared in each of the tests and the sample sizes were extremely small (group A, six programs; group B, six programs; group C, seven programs). Using T-Tests to compare changes in ECERS-R scores between the control and treatment groups from the first to the second assessment, and then again
from the first to the last assessment, resulted in no statistically significant differences (see Tables 11 & 12).

Table 11

Comparison of mean changes from ECERS-R #1 to #2 (control and treatment groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>Variable 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.086666667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>0.142706667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesized Mean Difference</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
<td>-1.572377047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) one-tail</td>
<td>0.072082281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical one-tail</td>
<td>1.795884819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</td>
<td>0.144164562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical two-tail</td>
<td>2.20098516</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>Variable 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.086666667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>0.142706667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesized Mean Difference</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
<td>-1.871054579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) one-tail</td>
<td>0.045425181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical one-tail</td>
<td>1.812461123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</td>
<td>0.090850362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical two-tail</td>
<td>2.228138852</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12

*Comparison of mean changes from ECERS-R #1 to #3 (control and treatment groups)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Changes Group A and C</th>
<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>Variable 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(ECERS-R #1 to #3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.551428571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>0.13572</td>
<td>0.294647619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesized Mean Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
<td>1.774577197</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) one-tail</td>
<td>0.051805538</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical one-tail</td>
<td>1.795884819</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</td>
<td>0.103611076</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical two-tail</td>
<td>2.20098516</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Changes Group A and B</th>
<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>Variable 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(ECERS-R #1 to #3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>0.13572</td>
<td>0.31315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesized Mean Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
<td>-1.73663658</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) one-tail</td>
<td>0.058232527</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical one-tail</td>
<td>1.833112933</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</td>
<td>0.116465054</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical two-tail</td>
<td>2.262157163</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.1 Post-Pilot Survey Results

ECERS-R provided data regarding program quality improvements based on environmental assessments, but the post-pilot survey contained a question addressing quality improvement from the perspective of the educators. When asked if quality improvements had occurred, 91.65% of the educators in treatment group B (no coaches) indicated they’d been somewhat or very successful at improving quality, while only 58.33% of the educators in treatment group C (coaches) indicated this (see Table 13). Since the ECERS-R results indicated that the changes were not statistically significant and that only two programs in group C and one in group B had meaningful improvements, the survey findings would seem to indicate that educators in treatment group C were more likely to have perceptions that aligned with the ECERS-R results than did educators in treatment group B.
Table 13

Successfully Improved Program Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #13 from survey</th>
<th>% of answers identified as somewhat successful or very successful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How successful do you think you were at improving the quality of your program?</td>
<td>Group B (no coaches)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data from the ECERS-R, when combined with the post-pilot survey, provided mixed results for the overarching research question. The findings regarding changes to the mean scores of the ECERS-R for all three groups indicated that there were no statistically significant differences regarding quality improvement. Educators’ perceptions regarding their success at creating change also showed no statistically significant differences between the two treatment groups although educators with coaches are less likely to perceive that they were successful.

At the same time, ranking the programs according to the largest increases in program quality resulted in four of the five programs with the most improvements (see Table 9) coming from treatment group C (with coaches). This data would appear to indicate that implementing the structured process with the support of coaches may result in more quality improvements than implementing the structured process without coaches or relying on programs to address quality improvements using any strategy they think will work (e.g., workshops).

Although all the results are statistically insignificant, these conflicting findings make it impossible to draw any clear conclusions regarding the overarching research question.

4.5 Research Sub-question One

Analysis of the data obtained from both quantitative and qualitative collection methods provided results addressing the first research sub-question. This question asked, “When educators are supported by a coach will they view the quality improvement process more positively and
perceive it as being easier than those who participate in the process without the support of a coach?"

4.5.1 Post-Pilot Survey Results

Immediately following the completion of the quality improvement process and the assessment visits by the third-party assessors, the educators in all participating programs were asked to complete a survey (Appendix D). Forty-two completed surveys were returned from the 21 programs that remained in the study. Eighteen of the surveys were from the control group; 12 surveys were from treatment group B, and 12 were from treatment group C. The control group had the highest response rate at 56.3%; while treatment group B’s (process without coaches) response rate was 50%, and treatment group C’s (coaches) response rate was 42.9%. Although the return rate was highest for the control group, educators in this group did not answer the survey questions addressing this sub-question because they were not involved in the quality improvement process.

The post-pilot survey questions relevant to this research sub-question addressed educators’ perceptions regarding the quality improvement process and determined if they might view the process as easier than educators with coaches (see Table 14). The analysis of the data indicated that educators in programs without coaches (group B) responded more often than educators with coaches (group C) that it was very easy to determine goals and develop action plans. They also responded more frequently than educators in group C that it was very easy to implement the action plan. When the number of responses for the “somewhat easy” and “very easy” options were combined, the educators without coaches (group B) were still more likely than educators with coaches (group C) to indicate that the process was easy.

This data provides a partial answer to the first sub-question, “When educators are supported by a coach, will they view the process more positively and perceive it as being easier than those who participate in the process without the support of a coach?” Since all the findings from the post-pilot survey indicate that educators without coaches perceive the process as being easier than
educators with coaches, the survey findings do not support the idea that educators with coaches will view the process easier. Other data will have to be used to determine if educators with coaches perceive the process more positively.

Table 14

*Educators’ Perceptions of Process (Post Process Survey)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#9 How easy was it to determine your program goals?</th>
<th>not at all easy</th>
<th>not very easy</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>somewhat easy</th>
<th>very easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group B (no coach)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C (coach)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#10 How easy was it to develop an action plan?</th>
<th>not at all easy</th>
<th>not very easy</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>somewhat easy</th>
<th>very easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#11 How easy was it to begin implementing the action plan?</th>
<th>not at all easy</th>
<th>not very easy</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>somewhat easy</th>
<th>very easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#12 How easy was it to stay motivated?</th>
<th>not at all easy</th>
<th>not very easy</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>somewhat easy</th>
<th>very easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#13 How successful do you think you were at improving the quality of your program?</th>
<th>not at all successful</th>
<th>not very successful</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>somewhat successful</th>
<th>very successful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4.5.2 Interview results

While the data from the post-pilot survey only addressed how easy it was to complete the process, data from the interviews also contained information regarding how positively educators viewed the process.

During the analysis of the interviews, the emerging themes around coaches appeared to support the idea that educators with coaches might view the process more positively and perceive it as easier. Table 15 shows that educators in both treatment groups viewed coaches as individuals who could support educators in a variety of ways. Under the emerging theme “Coaches Help Process Completion” educators in programs with coaches frequently mentioned that coaches motivated them during the process. In fact, one educator indicated that they would have quit without a coach. This and similar statements provide support for the idea that having a coach might help educators see the process more positively.

Other themes regarding coaches also indicate that having coaches might make the process easier—which contradicts the survey results. Educators in both treatment groups indicated that coaches would provide resources and provide clarity/insight into the process. These themes appear to indicate that educators with coaches might find the quality improvement process easier, although the educators did not directly identify that these supports would make the process easier to complete. Similarly, several educators stated that the coach was key to completion of the process, but failed to indicate if this made the process easier or if it just made them more motivated to complete the process.

The emerging themes around coaches provide some support for the idea that coaches might help educators view the process more positively and that coaches might make the process easier. However, despite the many positive comments regarding coaches and their ability to clarify,
Table 15

*Emerging Themes Regarding Coaches*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes regarding coaching</th>
<th>Program 1 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 2 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 3 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 4 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 5 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 6 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 7 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 8 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 9 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 10 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 11 (no coach)</th>
<th>total # responses</th>
<th>Percentage of programs identifying theme</th>
<th>% of all programs</th>
<th>% of programs with coaches</th>
<th>% of programs without coaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaches Provide Resources</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches Provide Clarity/Insight</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches Act as Mediators/ Facilitators</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches Help Process Completion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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motivate, and support task completion, none of the respondents stated clearly that having this support made the process any easier. Since the post-pilot survey also compared the perceptions of educators with and without coaches, and findings indicated that educators without coaches perceived the process as easier than those with coaches, there are mixed results for this research sub-question.

4.6 Research Sub-question Two

“What are educators’ perceptions regarding the usefulness of coaches in a quality improvement process?” is the second sub-question to be examined, and both quantitative and qualitative methods produced relevant data.

4.6.1 Post Survey Results

On the second survey, one section was completed only by those educators who had coaches assigned to work with them throughout the quality improvement process (treatment group C). The questions in this section attempted to discover how useful educators thought coaches were in supporting them at various times during the process (see Table 16). As the table shows, there are slight variations in the answers, but when educators were asked how useful coaches were during different aspects of the process the most common answer was “very useful”. The second most common was “somewhat useful”. When the results of these two answers are combined, the results show that 75% of the educators indicated that the coaches were useful during the self-evaluation process; 83% found coaches useful when developing an action plan, and 75% found them useful during the implementation of the plan.

The one answer that differed was in response to a question that asked educators how important it was that the coach touch base once a week. This question resulted in 50% of respondents seeing this as useful while the other 50% opted for the neutral response for this item.
Table 16

Usefulness of Coaches in a Quality Improvement Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Useless</th>
<th>Not very useful</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#16 How useful was the support offered by the coach during the program self-evaluation?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#17 How useful did you find the support offered by the coach in developing your action plan?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#18 How useful did you find the support offered by the coach during the implementation of the action plan?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#19 How important was it that coaches touched base with the program a minimum of every other week?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.2 Interview Results

One objective of the interviews was to determine the educators’ perceptions regarding the usefulness of coaches, therefore educators were asked what their thoughts were regarding coaches. From the interviews, four themes emerged related to the educators’ perceptions around the use of coaches in a quality improvement process. Although all the themes were supported by educators in both treatment groups, some themes were more likely to emerge from interviews with educators in programs with coaches than those without coaches (see Table 15).

In the following sections, the data results for each emerging theme and its sub-themes are examined. Both direct quotes from the interviews and numerical data are used to illustrate support for the emerging themes addressing educators’ perceptions regarding the usefulness of coaches.
4.6.2.1. Emerging Theme: “Coaches Provide Resources”

Interview data supporting the emerging theme “Coaches provide resources” was found in all the interviews (see Table 17). This theme encompassed both the idea that a) coaches provide knowledge and resources, and b) coaches need to be current in their knowledge and provide up-to-date resources. Although both these sub-themes are linked to the provision of resources, the first sub-theme looks only at whether or not coaches provide knowledge regarding the field and professional resources educators can access; the second sub-theme emphasizes the currency of their knowledge and/or the resources.

The findings indicate that educators, regardless of whether or not they had access to coaches, highlighted that coaches would provide knowledge and resources. An educator who had the support of a coach said,

She also had great resources. When we asked, she’d say look here, or, maybe you’ll find that there. ... I found, when she came, it was relaxing it wasn’t like she was there to judge. She was there to support us; there to be a resource.

Programs without coaches also made statements identifying that they would benefit from having a coach because of the knowledge and resources coaches could provide. One educator said, “Feedback is always important. I think that that’s what I’d hope to find in a coach is giving constructive criticism, and what we’re doing well”, while at another centre an interviewee thought that, “… having someone to ask for information, if you need, it would be helpful.”

Subject matter expertise, access to concrete resources, and knowledge of training opportunities available in the community were some of the resources which educators indicated coaches provided. Even when educators did not think they required extra resources, they cited the provision of resources by coaches as a benefit. “I think for the action plan having a coach help with resources might help, but even then … I didn’t feel like we’re lacking in resources” (they did not ask the coach for resources). In another interview, an educator, while mentioning the advantages of having coaches provide resources, indicated that some programs might benefit more than others. “In centres where the centre is stand alone or where the director isn’t connected to the community they may be struggling more because they just don’t have the
resources to go to when they need the help.” While the idea that educators find a coach’s knowledge and resources useful was stressed by many interviewees, the currency of the knowledge coaches provided was another aspect that emerged from the data. The sub-theme regarding the currency of resources reflects the importance some educators placed on this issue. When compared to the references for the first sub-theme, the comments for the currency of the coaches’ knowledge/resources were less likely to be expanded on and were briefer but the message was still clear.

In one program the reference is simply part of a larger comment regarding the usefulness of coaches. “… we were very lucky to have someone from CISS [the coach] because they have a lot of resources and know what's happening in the field, which is great...” In a program without a coach an educator identified that she does research information but concluded with a statement implying that coaches could make it easier finding current information. “I know we go, and we research and ask, and I’m always on the internet checking out things. But I think a coach would have helped.” One interviewee indicated that the coach’s knowledge about the quality improvement process, and where the program was at within the process, was vital.

I was on maternity leave for part of it, we had some staff changes and the coach did have to work with all that, and when I came in half way, she brought me up to date. I’m just glad that ---- she was able to give us kind of hints and suggestions (regarding the process).

Although mention of the second sub-theme occurred less frequently and was discussed in less detail than the first sub-theme, it was still evident that educators thought current knowledge was important.

When the data from the interviews were compiled in terms of the frequency with which educators made comments associated with this theme (see Table 17) it became more apparent that the information from the interviews supports both the overall theme and the sub-themes. Interviewees in all programs made statements reflective of the sub-theme, Coaches Provide Knowledge and Resources, and it was referenced a total of 48 times in the course of the 13 interviews. While the sub-theme Knowledge and Resources must be Current was not mentioned by as many interviewees, there were still a total of 22 references; 80% of the programs with
coaches made reference to the idea that currency of knowledge is important. In total, 70 references were made during the 13 interviews regarding the theme, Coaches Provide Resources. These data, along with the statements provided by interviewees, provide strong evidence that this is an emerging theme.

As identified earlier, the post-pilot survey (see Table 16) responses indicated that educators thought coaches were useful but the questions did not identify specific types of support. As a result, it is not clear whether the survey data reflected this theme or whether it referred to support that’s better reflected in one of the other themes regarding coaches (e.g., Coaches Provide Clarity/Insight).

4.6.2.2. Emerging Theme: “Coaches Provide Clarity/Insight”

When I asked interviewees to provide their thoughts on the use of coaches during the quality improvement process, educators stated a variety of ideas that merged into the theme Coaches Provide Clarity/Insight. Most interviewees, whether they were from a program with a coach or not, indicated that coaches could help them gain clarity or insight on various issues they were facing. The thoughts and opinions related to this theme can be divided into two sub-themes (see Table 18). These sub-themes address different types of clarity or insight that were seen as important to the process. Data for the first sub-theme were comprised of interviewees’ comments regarding a coach’s ability to provide educators with a different perspective or to help them understand the perspectives of others. The second sub-theme emerged from statements educators made regarding a coach’s ability to help them better understand the process.

During the interviews, one recurring comment was that coaches would offer educators a different perspective which could help create positive changes. One interviewee stated that the advantage of having a coach is that you have “…a different set of eyes. We don’t get out often and see what’s going on in a lot of places.” In a program without a coach one educator said,
### Table 17

**Emerging Theme: Coaches Provide Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaches provide resources</th>
<th>Program 1 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 2 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 3 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 4 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 5 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 6 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 7 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 8 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 9 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 10 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 11 (no coach)</th>
<th>total # responses</th>
<th>Percentage of programs identifying theme and sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>% of all programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 1: Provides Knowledge and Resources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 2: Knowledge and Resources must be Current</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of references for emerging themes</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 18

**Emerging Theme: Coaches Provide Clarity/Insight**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaches Provide Clarity/Insight</th>
<th># Responses from interviewees in each Program</th>
<th>Percentage of programs identifying theme or sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program 1 (coach)</td>
<td>Program 2 (coach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 1: Coaches Provide Different Perspectives</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 2: Coaches Improve Educators’ Understanding of Process</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # references for emerging themes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maybe a coach could give ideas from an outsider’s point of view, and then we could try it and see if it worked or didn’t work, but when you’re kind of living it, you don’t really know how to start the process, and maybe they could come in and help rearrange things.

The educators recognized that they may need an outsider’s viewpoint to help them see their program more objectively and determine possible changes. This sentiment was reiterated throughout the various interviews and is reflected in this statement by an educator in a program with a coach: “We needed to tweak the program … and she [the coach] was able to sit there, and observe how our program was, and was able to make some recommendations.”

The second sub-theme under Coaches Provide Clarity is Coaches Improve Educators’ Understanding of Process. According to interviewees, orienting new employees to the process—helping educators better understand the quality improvement process or guiding them through the process—were tasks where having a coach was or would be very useful. While most educators enthusiastically discussed the value of coaches in these areas, support for this sub-theme was higher in interviews where educators had coaches than in those where educators did not have coaches. All interviews in centres with coaches made reference to this sub-theme, but this was not the case for centres without coaches (see Table 18).

Many interviewees sited staff changes as a challenge and several interviewees from programs with coaching indicated that coaches helped them guide new participants through the process. As one educator stated,

\[
\text{The initial training took place and then the staff switched. So there was a whole kind of a staff retraining process that was done by me which is why [the coach] was so invaluable because she was able to come in and guide them more than myself because she obviously has way more information than me.}
\]

Even in programs where there were no new hires, interviewees indicated that a coach would help if staffing changes became an issue. One individual in this situation said, “I can see if you had all new staff you might need the coach more.” Although educators acknowledged that a coach would be useful when there were new hires, they also indicated that everyone required this type of support at least some of the time. An educator without access to a coach said,
I do feel like a coach would have helped in that sense [implementing the process]; we felt a little lost; we felt a little on our own, where maybe just having a coach who’s a bit more knowledgeable or experienced would guide us better.

Educators also spoke of different situations when they were not sure about a particular task and indicated that coaching would or did help their understanding. An educator in a program with a coach stated that the coach provided clarity and successfully helped them understand issues that arose during the process.

When we were trying to figure out how to implement actions plans, there were a couple of problem solving issues that she came on site for. I didn’t know how to go about doing something, and she was able to give us some ideas.

In another program, an interviewee explained how the coach helped clarify the process of developing an action plan. “Talking it through with [the coach] made it really easy to prioritize and have very realistic goals.” The ability of coaches to help clarify the process and keep educators on track continued to emerge from the various interviews, as seen in the following statement:

… then (the coach) helped enhance the conversation and make it branch off, so we were able to kind of really develop a plan of attack on how to do things and where we wanted our priorities. When all the sections were done we looked at the ones where we got really low, and (the coach) kind of pushed us in the right direction because we'd go, well this one really needs work but (the coach) would go, but in that one you have 78 and this one you have 40, which one do you think you need to work on? And then we’re like well we don’t know where to start on that one, so she had to kind of guide us in that way which was really great.

The ability of coaches to support the educators’ understanding of the process and to provide different perspectives was mentioned frequently in interviews, resulting in the emergence of both the sub-themes and the overarching theme Coaches Provide Clarity/Insight. Educators indicated that, when a coach provided a different perspective, they obtained clarity and insights which might not have been reached without the coach’s comments. By helping educators understand various aspects of the process—ranging from reviewing the steps to explaining the meaning of a quality indicator—coaches provided additional clarity and insight. This theme was seen by both treatment groups as a valuable role for coaches. As one person said,
A coach would just clarify things. We did very well without the coach and doing things on our own, but the coach would clarify things. When we put our minds to something, we’re pretty motivated to get it done and to do it, but I think a lot of places would have really benefited even more from a coach.

While the statements by individual educators clearly show the usefulness of coaches as providers of clarity and insight, the numerical data (see Table 18) also supports this theme by demonstrating the prevalence of these ideas regarding coaches.

Within the 13 interviews, 44 comments included references reflecting the concepts encompassed by the overarching theme. As Table 18 indicates, interviews in all programs made at least one reference to this theme. When reviewing the data for the first sub-theme, Coaches Provide Different Perspectives, there were a total of 22 references made in support of the sub-theme, with the comments being evenly split between programs with and without coaches. Unlike the first sub-theme, the second sub-theme, Coaches Improve Understanding of the Process, was supported mainly by interviewees in centres with coaches. Fifteen out of 22 references came from this treatment group while only seven references came from interviews in centres without coaches. While 100% of the centres with coaches mentioned this sub-theme, only 66% of the centres without coaches mentioned it.

4.6.2.3. Emerging Theme: “Coaches are Mediators/Facilitators”

Educators work in a team environment, and commonly some members will be more assertive than others. These differences among coworkers can create problems when making changes, since coming to an agreement or compromising may be required. In these situations, mediation may be necessary. While many comments indicated that coaches acted as mediators, other comments indicated that coaches acted as facilitators to help educators solve problems they encountered when completing the process.

Interviewees who had access to coaches frequently indicated that coaches were useful as mediators/facilitators during the process and helped ensure successful outcomes. Interviewees in
centres without coaches, however, were much less likely to make statements regarding the value of coaches as mediators or facilitators. The theme, Coaches are Mediators/Facilitators (see Table 19), encompasses the coach’s ability to mediate when there were conflicts between educators and to facilitate the implementation of the process. Unlike the previous themes, this emerging theme does not have any sub-themes.

In programs where educators observed the coach playing the role of mediator or facilitator, the interviewees made very positive statements when referring to the coaches’ interactions with the team. As one educator said,

[The coach] was a mediator. During those meetings she kept us on topic and kept us moving along, and when there were some kind of hot spots, she was able to sort of say, okay that’s the way they’re feeling, you need to respect the way they’re feeling, and the way you might perceive it, and you know, I felt she was very good.

An educator at another centre had this to say:

She was a very good mediator. Instead of agreeing or disagreeing she’d pose another question. This was good because we definitely have different approaches and philosophies within the centre.

Still another educator said:

She knew how to ask the right questions for us to come up with the answers. She even said she wanted it to come from us. I’m not going to tell you what to do because then it’s not going to work for you necessarily. Yeah, she was awesome… and she called in to see how things were going and to make sure that we knew if we needed anything to call her.

Many interviewees mentioned coaches as mediators/facilitators in relation to meetings where educators had to discuss their observations with each other. It was in these meetings that many issues were discussed and problems resolved—problems that included listening to team members, respecting opinions, and identifying areas for improvement. Often the interviewees identified that the coach helped solve problems and that this facilitated the completion of the process:

The meetings were very helpful and the coach was helpful because she was a great mediator and was able to direct the discussion and focus on what the real question was. She was able to redirect questions and conversations that were off on tangents and bring
us back. So she [the coach] knew what we were going to talk about, or how things were going to develop, or how she’d seen it go. She’d give us suggestions on what she felt we should try and do because we did need a lot of coaxing and a lot of suggestions to keep us going.

Educators working directly with the children were not the only individuals identifying the value of coaches as mediators. A supervisor in one program said,

The coach provided an added buffer for conflict. I know my staff have very strong personalities this way and that way and there are certainly strong, strong viewpoints, and I’m sure we would have had fireworks if we hadn’t had this wonderful marriage counselor with us. It was really nice having her with us. It allowed each staff member time to listen to others without cutting them off because just having her present was supportive of listening and supportive of your teammates. Creates a respectful environment.

Often problem-solving can be difficult when the problem is linked to your administration. Faced with this situation, an interviewee discussed the importance of having a coach to mediate and help solve the problem:

We’d never looked at admin. We’ve had issues with how our evaluations were done and issues with you know those things, and it was sort of that stepping stone to being able to talk about it, and you know, having [the coach] there was a key, was really key. She was that middle ground. It’s hard to tell your boss that this wasn’t working, right?

While many interviewees clearly indicated that an important role for coaches was to act as mediators or facilitators—and were quick to provide examples—other general comments were made that also led to the emergence of this theme. Interviewees’ reflections regarding coaches often emphasized roles for coaches which supported the theme Coaches Act as Mediators/Facilitators. Some examples of this are: “Coaches could give you some kind of guidance”, “maybe just a coach who’s a bit more knowledgeable or experienced would guide us a bit better”, “[coach] was so invaluable because she was able to come in when there were challenges and guide them more than myself”, and “maybe with some programs the coach should be available for the first three or four meetings and then come back again for the action plan and could help them implement it.”
**Table 19**

*Emerging Theme: Coaches act as Mediators/Facilitators*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaches are Mediators/ Facilitators</th>
<th>Program 1 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 2 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 3 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 4 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 5 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 6 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 7 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 8 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 9 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 10 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 11 (no coach)</th>
<th>Total # responses</th>
<th>% of all programs</th>
<th>% of programs with coaches</th>
<th>% of programs without coaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total references regarding theme</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

103
Although the numerical data for this theme provide additional support for the idea that coaches act as meditators/facilitators, there is a clear difference in responses from interviewees with coaches and interviewees without coaches. While interviewees in most programs with coaches made several references that reflect this theme—and all programs with coaches made at least one reference—those without coaches were less likely to make any comment which could be linked to the theme. Only 50% of the interviews from centres without coaches made comments regarding coaches as mediators/facilitators; out of a total 46 references regarding this theme, only six of them came from interviewees in centres without coaches.

Data from the interviews demonstrate that many educators supported by coaches found coaches invaluable as mediators and facilitators. These participants were able to clearly identify why and when this aspect of coaching can be so important. Although the numeric data lends additional support, it is the words of the educators that truly lend credence to the theme. Terms like: invaluable, awesome, coaches are key, and the statement “we would have had fireworks if we hadn’t had this wonderful marriage counselor with us” point to the need to include Coaches Act as Mediators/Facilitators as one of the themes emerging from the study.

4.6.2.4 Emerging Theme: “Coaches Help Process Completion”

The last theme to emerge regarding the usefulness of coaches is Coaches Help Process Completion. This theme is closely linked to the previous theme of Coaches Act as Mediators/Facilitators. Although this theme appears to require coaches to be facilitators/mediators, it was identified as a separate theme due to the emphasis interviewees placed on task completion rather than on problem solving or dealing with potential conflict. For example, interview comments regarding the sub-theme Coaches Motivate Educators did not indicate how coaches motivated the educators. Frequently educators simply stated that they would have quit working on the quality improvement process if they had not had the coaches there to motivate them. At other times interviewees indicated that just knowing the coach was coming motivated them to complete the process; it was the presence, not the skills, of the coaches that created the motivation.
Through the analysis of the data from the interviews, key ideas emerged that collectively formed the emerging theme, Coaches Help Process Completion (see Table 20). These ideas could be
group into two sub-themes, 1) Coaches Motivate Educators, and 2) Coaches Keep Educators on Task. Both sub-themes reflect the overarching theme but illustrate two different perspectives on the theme. Although motivation may be linked to task completion, it is not the same as keeping educators on task. One often motivates others by showing enthusiasm and getting them enthused
(Kim & Schallert, 2014), while keeping people on task often involves redirecting their energies and refocusing them.

Although few interviewees in programs without coaches indicated that coaches would motivate them to complete the process, the majority of educators in programs with coaches identified specific instances when a coach’s ability to motivate them kept them engaged in the process. In one program where educators had access to a coach, an individual indicated that the coach was the person who motivated them to continue:

I know there was some talk that we weren’t going to do it anymore; we were going to quit, and I think she played a big part in saying don’t give up, you can do it. It would have been a lot easier to say we’re done; we’ve tried; sorry it didn’t work for us, but (the coach) was great at keeping us motivated through it all.

In another program with a coach, an interviewee emphasized the emotional connections that are important for motivating others:

It’s that we’re not alone. Sometimes we're doing this, and we're quite anxious and stuff, and she (the coach) took some of that anxiety away. She said, “It’s okay. It’s okay to call me. It’s okay to need support and encouragement and to know that you’re going in the right way with this.

A coach’s ability to motivate others to continue by making connections also comes across in the following statement from a different educator:

She was really the key! If you come away with anything form this meeting, we need a coach! Like for us it was really huge! I really, really feel she held it together, she kept it moving forward, and she, you know, she was a key player.
Table 20

**Emerging Theme: Coaches Help Process Completion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaches Help Process Completion</th>
<th>Program 1 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 2 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 3 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 4 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 5 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 6 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 7 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 8 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 9 (coach)</th>
<th>Program 10 (no coach)</th>
<th>Program 11 (no coach)</th>
<th>Total # of responses</th>
<th>% of all programs</th>
<th>% with coaches</th>
<th>% of without coaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 1: Coaches Motivate Educators</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 2: Coaches Keep Educators on Track</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of references regarding emerging themes</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>33</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Along with motivating individuals to continue with the project, interviewees mentioned that a role of coaches was to keep educators on track. One educator said, “[The coach] was great. She kept us on the mark because we knew she was coming, so we had to have things done.” This quote provides some evidence indicating that just the presence of the coach can help to keep educators on track. The following excerpts also illustrate how educators thought their coach helped make sure deadlines were met and helped them stay on track:

I felt she was very good, and she kept it going, having the meetings helped keep us on track.

[The coach] was good at booking future times when she came into see us. In the summer she sent emails to make sure we were doing our part especially because the meeting in September was to look at two sections. Emails work best for communication.

A supervisor in a program without a coach recognized the potential value of a coach with respect to task completion. This supervisor indicated that educators in her program were able to complete the tasks and keep on track because she tended to be a bit of a taskmaster but identified that programs without someone good at keeping track of timelines would need a coach.

The numerical analysis of the 13 interviews resulted in a total of 63 references to this theme (see table 20). However, interviews in programs with coaches were more likely to provide comments on this theme than interviews in programs without coaches (60 vs. 3). Of the 60 references, one program accounted for almost 52% of the references. It must be noted that this program requested three separate interviews, while the rest of the programs requested joint interviews of educators. When analyzing the data from only the programs that delivered joint interviews, the references to the theme were still much more frequent in programs with coaches (27) than programs without coaches (3). It must also be noted that references to the overarching theme were found in all of the interviews from centres with coaches but only 33% of centres without coaches.

The idea that coaches are resources, clarifiers, mediators/facilitators, motivators and supporters of task completion were frequently supported by interviewees, but a cautionary note was also provided by an interviewee from one of the programs. She stated that coaches were only useful if the educators bought into the idea of creating changes to improve quality. “When people aren’t
interested in that [assessing programs and identifying changes to improve quality] or centres aren’t buying into that, then having a coach isn’t going to change their mind.” While this statement is supported by some researchers (Ackerman, 2008; Lero & Irwin, 2008), data from interviews indicated that in at least one program the coach helped the educators overcome this hurdle. Comments from the educators indicated that their lack of buy-in had the potential to prevent the process from creating positive change. At the same time, they also indicated that the commitment of the coach was what kept them from simply going through the motions of assessing, reflecting, and making changes. As one educator stated,

So there was no buy-in, no engagement, it was—we’re filling out those questionnaires, but it was her [the coach’s] skills and abilities that made us realize that it’s our centre, and we need to take some pride in what we do.

In conclusion, the findings relevant to Sub-question Two indicate that educators perceive coaches to be useful and can identify various ways in which this is demonstrated. These findings were supported by data from both the post-pilot survey and the interviews. These perceptions were also found in both treatment groups.

4.7 Research Sub-question Three

The data which addressed the research question “What do educators perceive as the important elements of a quality improvement process?” arose mainly from the interviews, with some additional information found in the pre and post-pilot surveys.

4.7.1 Post Survey Results

Once the pilot was finished, educators were asked to complete the post-pilot survey to elicit thoughts on the process they had just completed. The first four questions, which were open-ended, were answered by educators in all three groups. The remaining questions were answered by the treatment groups and are discussed in other parts of this chapter. A total of 42 out of 67 surveys were returned which was a response rate of 64%. Out of the 43 surveys, 18 (42.8%) were
from group A (control); 12 (28.6 %) from group B (no coaches); and 12 (28.6%) from group C (coaches).

Question four on the survey asked educators what additional resources would help them implement a quality improvement process. Except for one response (indicating that they needed nothing), all responses from all three groups could be classified into three general categories: funding, time, and networking (see Figure 2). However, the three general categories are not isolated from each other. Many educators indicated that they needed time for professional development. Although this item is part of the category “time”, professional development is also part of networking because it provides educators with opportunities to network, and part of funding because most of the professional development mentioned required funding. The chart below indicates how each of the three categories are reflected in the total number of responses made in each group.

Figure 2:

*Educators’ perceptions of resources required for quality improvement process*

The results of this survey suggest that funding, time, and networking are important to educators when implementing a quality improvement process. The first two categories (funding, time) are also reflected in the interview results under the emerging theme Need for Time while the last one
(networking) may link to the emerging theme Importance of Reflective Practice. Both these emerging themes are discussed next.

4.7.2 Emerging Theme: “Need for Time”

As shown in Table 21, the Need for Time was one of the emerging themes that addressed sub-question three. Educators clearly thought that time was an important element of the quality improvement process.

The theme Need for Time is defined as the requirement for additional time and/or funding to provide educators with time to complete tasks. Unlike some themes, the Need for Time emerged very quickly as a key idea because so many educators made direct references to it. Educators frequently mentioned the need for time to complete tasks required to both assess their programs and to make quality improvements, as well as funding to provide non-contact time. Some educators made broad statements (e.g., “need time to complete the process”, “make sure there’s time”), while others identified specific tasks that required time (e.g., “time to meet with the team”). In addition, funding was often linked to a need for non-contact time (e.g., “We need non-contact time for sure. Funding would be good for employers; it (non-contact time) could be expensive”).

Time was an issue that all interviewees linked to one or more aspects of the process and identified several times during the interviews. Time was stressed by so many of the interviewees that even during the familiarization stage of analysis I was aware that this was an important issue for the educators in all the experimental centres.

When interviewees mentioned time, general comments such as “it was very time consuming” referred to the process as a whole but other comments linked time to the ease with which they were, or were not, able to address the tasks required of them. For example, many educators discussed the time required to complete observations on the program and to locate administrative
### Table 21

*Emerging Themes Regarding the Quality Improvement Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes regarding the quality improvement process</th>
<th># of responses from interviewees in each centre</th>
<th>Total # of responses</th>
<th>% of centres identifying theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for Time</td>
<td>Program 1: 10</td>
<td>Program 2: 6</td>
<td>Program 3: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Reflective Practice</td>
<td>Program 1: 11</td>
<td>Program 2: 6</td>
<td>Program 3: 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 22

**Emerging Theme: Need for Time**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Theme: NEED FOR TIME</th>
<th># Responses from interviewees in each Program</th>
<th>Percentage of programs identifying theme and sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#1 coach</td>
<td>#2 coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Time to Complete Process</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Funding for Non-contact Time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # references to &quot;Time&quot;</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
materials. Other educators indicated that they were meeting on their own time to discuss their observations and reflect on what was happening, identify goals, develop action plans, make changes to the classroom, etc. These comments indicated both the need for time to complete tasks and that finding time was a challenge.

While commenting on the need for time, one supervisor mentioned the extent to which all the educators in the centre took extra time to ensure success:

I found it good that my staff is really flexible because we had night meetings; they weren’t paid because we don’t get overtime. All my staff came in on their own time. I mean you have buy into something to be able to say this is important enough, to me - to all of us, to get together and do this whether or not we’re getting paid; whether or not it’s on our own time. We had to be flexible with all these things (otherwise) it wouldn’t have been accomplished. If you had a centre that was regimented on its time and not being flexible on giving their own time, I don’t think it would have worked. Because we spent three hours at night working here. We close at six, and then we spent three hours until nine o’clock before we got out, and we ate on the fly-by because it was so important to us, and not once did anyone say, “No!” They all said, “I’ll be here. I’m here to support my team and make the daycare a better place.” Non-contact time would be helpful but we don’t get it.

When analysing data which referred to time, two sub-themes began to emerge. These sub-themes differed in that one addressed “providing time”, whereas the other addressed “the need for funding to provide educators with time” (see Table 22). When expressing thoughts regarding time, educators usually started by discussing the various aspects requiring time (e.g., observations, meetings) and the funding comments would be follow-up remarks. Not all educators mentioned the need to fund non-contact time, but those that did usually became very animated as they talked about the need for funding to effectively address the time issues. One educator even indicated that the government should mandate non-contact time if educators are going to be able to successfully deal with ongoing quality improvement.

Statements such as “[the other educator] and I went to do these things [meetings] on our own time….Writing up the action plan I did it on the weekend at home because I didn’t have the time at work to do it”, and “it [the process] was very time consuming” clearly indicated that the need for time was a key element for the process to succeed. The numerical data complements the statements made by educators—the numbers illustrate how important this theme is. The data in
Table 22 shows that when one combines the two sub-themes, time is mentioned 121 times during the course of the 13 interviews and is mentioned more than once in all interviews. Whether the statements were general (e.g., process was time consuming), specific (e.g., needed time to meet and discuss) or related to funding (e.g., we need money to fund non-contact time) educators clearly saw the need for time as a crucial aspect of implementing the quality improvement process.

The Need for Time appeared not only in the interviews, but in both pre- and post-pilot surveys. One of the questions in the pre-pilot survey asked educators what they thought could be potential drawbacks of the quality improvement process. Eleven respondents out of a total of 42 (26%) answered that they had concerns regarding the amount of time the process would require.

As previously discussed, educators responding to the post-pilot survey also identified time as important to the quality improvement process. When asked to identify additional supports, 29% specifically mentioned time and 79% of the respondents specifically mentioned the need for funding to complete various tasks.

In conclusion, the emerging theme of Need for Time is supported not only by the amount of time interviewees spent addressing issues around time but also by data from both the pre- and post-pilot surveys. Time is needed if educators are going to engage in reflections, discussions, goal setting, and the implementation of an action plan. In addition, the educators clearly identified that additional funding is required to provide the time to engage in these activities. In all the interviews the educators repeatedly highlighted the importance of this overarching theme. Their statements clearly identify their thoughts regarding the link between time and the quality improvement process: “… change does take time, and we need the time to put into it.” “We do a lot on our own time but just to give [us] some support; we need non-contact time for sure.”
4.7.3. Emerging Theme: “Importance of Reflective Practice”

When discussing the need for time, most interviewees indicated that time to meet was vital. They went on to explain that the meetings were important to reflect on what educators had observed and to discuss changes needed: “It [meetings] helps with figuring out where we're supposed to be going.” “It was helpful whenever you had questions and conversations. It was helpful to see maybe something that you hadn’t recognized as a problem.”

The above comments, along with similar ones found throughout the interviews, coalesced into an overarching theme of Importance of Reflective Practice. This theme is comprised of three sub-themes, each of which addressed different aspects of reflective practice. They are: 1) View Program Critically and Accept Others’ Perspectives, 2) Understand What Works and Changes Needed, and 3) Reflections are Positive and Support Team Building (see Table 23).

The first sub-theme was supported by interviewees in all programs and addressed the need to critically assess the program on your own and with others. As one educator put it,

> We looked at it on our own, and then we’d come together, so we’d have some ideas, and I found that each time we met we were more comfortable with the process, and how to do it, and it helped us beforehand to know I’m going to think about it. What are my ideas, and we came together more prepared, and I thought we were more productive and people were a little more open.

This sub-theme included statements regarding the need to be aware of—and to be open to—the perspectives of others as well as the need to look at one’s own ability to make objective reflections regarding the program. Sometimes interviewees incorporated more than one of these concepts into a single statement. For example,

> Behaviour guidance is always something you’re working on or even setting up the classroom. To see it through someone else’s eyes. You always see it through your own eyes, (but) then seeing someone else’s style; it helps you see what you need to do to help (make the program better).

Educators often pointed out that the meetings provided the venue for discussion and reflection, indicating that one of the benefits of the meetings was a new awareness of others’ perspectives.
### Table 23

**Emerging Theme: Importance of Reflective Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Theme: Importance of Reflective Practice</th>
<th># Responses from interviewees in each Program</th>
<th>Percentage of programs identifying theme and sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program 1 (coach)</td>
<td>Program 2 (coach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. View Program Critically and Accept Others’ Perspectives</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Understand What Works and Changes Needed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reflections are Positive and Support Team Building</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # references</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We all have different perspectives (coming into meetings). For example, I used to live with migraines, so I found the sound in the main room very noisy but the other two didn’t, and it was great just to have others say, yeah I know what you mean. So it’s funny how everybody has a different perspective, so a lot of times some people were scoring items really low (score on the rating scale), and some people were really high, and we looked at that and we tried to jot notes when we were filling it out to help with that; so it was good to have different perspectives.

In another program an educator said, “It [meetings] gives you insight into other peoples’ perspectives. Could it just be habit? Is it just something you do and you never questioned yourself? Which a lot of time is the case.” Statements such as “[Meetings] opened up the dialogue for us to have those conversations [around perspective],” and “I really liked that. It helped me understand why they [other educators] did things this way or that way” made it clear that reflecting on observations which includes listening to others was an important aspect of the quality improvement process.

The first sub-theme focused on reflective practice as important, in order to view the program more objectively and from different perspectives. The statements related to the second sub-theme looked at how reflective practice provides insights necessary for program improvements. Like the first sub-theme, the second sub-theme also had strong support from the interviewees. One educator stated,

You know, what it was good for, in fact, was to open the discussion because one person would say you know I’m not very good at that, and I’d say I know, what are we going to do about it?

In a different interview an educator stated,

I think key for us was the ability to provide enough time for the discussions, time to be meeting, to be reviewing each other’s sort of score, and you know, and how we should do this or that, and coming to consensus through discussions. … but I think that was key, that whole piece, that the discussion piece have time.

Although this statement also emphasized the need for time, the educator recognized that it was through the discussions that educators identify changes required for improving the program’s quality. Part of the improvement process was to identify goals and develop an action plan. Like the educators quoted above, many interviewees highlighted the importance of the discussions for
determining necessary changes. While educators seldom indicated that they were engaging in reflective practice, their statements indicate that this is what was happening.

In both the first and second sub-themes, many comments emphasized meetings/reflective practice as an important part of the process while including specific references to either critical analysis of observations or required changes. The third sub-theme reflects the educators’ general thoughts regarding how discussions supported not only the process but also team building. The supervisor of one program identified that educators did not always go into meetings with enthusiasm but that the learning arising from them was valuable. “They went into it with some hesitation and concerns, but they came away feeling it was worth their time.” Interviewees’ comments from other programs also highlighted the importance of meetings. One educator said, “Team meeting time is the most important. I mean you can talk here and there but to sit down and look at something or prepare [without a distraction] is important.”

Often the team-building aspect of the sub-theme emerged indirectly through comments that demonstrated the educators pulling together as a team. This can be seen in the statement “We asked the questions in our meetings, and going through everything and helping each other and figuring out how to take action ...” Although the educator did not mention team building by name, she did identify that the educators helped each other through the process. In a different interview, after discussing what happened in meetings, the educator summed it up by saying, “Those meetings were important and we had to do them together.” A statement that, once again, demonstrates how important it was to develop the ability to work together. Many statements supporting this sub-theme came from one centre; due to the importance those educators placed on the theme it must be included.

The number of statements interviewees made which were linked to the theme Importance of Reflective Practice provides some concrete evidence as to the importance of this theme (see Table 23). When the data from all three sub-themes are combined, references supporting the theme occurred 131 times during the course of the 13 interviews and is mentioned more than once in all interviews. All 13 interviews provided statements stressing the importance of reflecting on the program to help you view things more critically and value the perspectives of
others. Slightly fewer programs made reference to the sub-theme addressing the importance of reflective practice to help educators determine necessary changes (80% of centres with coach; 100% of centres without). Still fewer specifically indicated that reflections were positive and supported team building (40% of centres with coach; 67% of centres without).

The post-pilot survey also provides some limited support for this emerging theme. When educators were asked about supports needed in the process, some educators in both treatment groups identified the need for meeting time and networking. However, the survey did not ask responders to elaborate on their answers so it was not possible to clearly determine if educators saw networking and meeting times as opportunities to reflect on their practice, or to get different perspectives on what is happening in their programs.

The data from the post-pilot survey, along with the numerical data from the interviews and the strong statements from interviewees, provide support for this theme. Statements such as “Team meeting time is the most important” or “I think key for us was the ability to provide enough time for the discussions…” effectively express the importance of this theme.

In conclusion, the data indicate that the opportunity to engage in reflective practice is important when engaging in a quality improvement process. Educators indicated that an effective quality improvement process cannot consist of individual educators completing a rating scale alone to determine what has to be done to improve quality. Opportunities to reflect on and discuss their observations as a team are essential. Through this reflective practice educators develop a better understanding of others’ perspectives regarding the program and what is needed to improve program quality. Reflective practice requires educators to critically think about and discuss key issues. It is an essential element of the quality improvement process.

4.8 Research Sub-question Four

Requiring educators to go through a quality improvement process is only valuable if the educators are able to identify positive program changes because of the process. Therefore the
final research question was: “What do educators perceive as outcomes of a quality improvement process?” Both the interviews and part of the post-pilot survey provided data which addressed this research question.

4.8.1 Post Pilot Results

The first question of the post-pilot survey asked respondents to identify quality improvements that the program educators had engaged in over the past six months. Almost all the responses indicated that educators had done things to improve the quality of the program during this time period. The only exceptions were two respondents in group C who indicated that they had only recently been hired and did not feel qualified to answer the question.

Because educators wrote what they thought the improvements consisted of, there were a total of 19 distinct answers (e.g., reduced length of circle, changed interactions with families, renovating the room) and many educators indicated several different improvements. Due to the diversity of answers, the numbers for each tended to be very small, with the largest number of responses indicating that quality improved as a result of reorganizing the room or making curriculum changes. In the control group (group A), changes that could be categorized as renovating/reorganizing the environment were the most frequently cited quality improvements. In treatment group B, these environmental changes tied with curriculum as the most frequently cited quality improvements. In treatment group C, curriculum changes were most frequently cited; renovation/reorganization of the environment was second. Figure 3 illustrates the similarities and differences between the three groups with respect to the most frequently identified improvements.

Although educators in all groups identified changes that could be linked to curriculum (e.g., implementing the most recent government pedagogy, changing the curriculum approach to be more child centred and emergent) more responses in group C linked improvements to curriculum than the other two groups. In group C, 47% of the comments around recent improvements to
quality involved some aspect of curriculum. These type of comments only accounted for 23% of the responses in group B and 16% in group A.

The third-most-frequently-cited category of quality improvement outcomes addressed the addition of materials/resources. The addition toys, loose-parts, or equipment was more commonly identified by both group A (19%) and group B (17%) than by educators in group C (6%).

Figure 3:

*Educators’ top 3 responses regarding quality improvement outcomes*

Unlike the interviews, the data from the survey included responses from educators in the control group. Even though they did not participate in a structured quality improvement process, they still indicated that quality improvements had occurred and cited many similar outcomes. The perceptions of the educators in both control and treatment groups indicate that quality improvement outcomes may result in a reorganization of the environment, curriculum changes, or changes in the materials educators provide the children.
4.8.2. Emerging Theme: “Process Promotes Positive Change”

One of the results of the analysis of the interviews was the overarching theme Process Promotes Positive Changes. This is the most complex of the emerging themes regarding the quality improvement process. It is comprised of six sub-themes, each of which identify specific types of changes that occurred (see Table 24). In addition, many interviewees made general comments regarding positive changes without identifying specific outcomes.

The overall reaction of educators to the quality improvement process indicated that it was a positive experience regardless of whether or not the educator had a coach assigned to their program. Most interviewees were very expressive and enthusiastic about the process, providing a variety of positive comments regarding the experience. Participants made statements such as “I think it was really a great experience for this centre.”; “It just opened up our eyes to how far behind we were in our thinking, and how we could develop and enhance the program better.”; “Some things hadn’t changed in 10 years and it’s hard; you get into a rut, and it was nice that this process allowed us to look at these things”, and

Well worth it. It forced us to do things that had been on our to-do list for, like 9 years. Or in fact that we should be doing but had kind of fallen away, like we might have started but were really busy and then stopped.

An educator at a centre with a coach had this to say regarding the role the process had in improving program quality:

As a parent and as an early childhood educator, I really feel that we need this at our centres and other programs. It’s very valuable. It makes the level of standard better. It makes us better. Daycare centres are going to be better because of this, and the care that the children get. We’re going to be meeting their [the children’s] needs not just the Day Nursery Act, and it’s way more than that [the Day Nursery Act], and good for the educators themselves. I’m the perfect example, I’ve been in the field a long time, and it’s helped me grow and be like—this is the door to opening and changing this centre.

Comments such as those found in the quotes provide strong support for the theme, Process Provides Positive Change. Whether indicating that it opened their eyes, or that they made changes needed for a long time, they clearly saw the process as resulting in positive outcomes.
One educator effectively summed up this feeling of positive change as she made the following statement:

We’re in the process of growing. It’s very motivating which is great—to feel motivated again. When you’re motivated you come to work happier and excited. It’s not going to be, you know; it’s not, oh, what did we do last year, but now it’s good. I’m really growing.

Having made these broad statements, some educators then continued on and described specific outcomes that were considered positive. Six sub-themes were identified with each one addressing a different outcome. They are as follows: 1) Team Improvements, 2) Program Evaluation, 3) Improved Curriculum, 4) Improved Environments, 5) Improved Policies/Documents, and 6) Improved Communications/Interactions.

Data from the first sub-theme showed that the majority of interviews contained references identifying that the quality improvement process resulted in team improvements—including team building. One educator stated,

What we really liked, as a team, was we thought it made us really close. It made us stronger as a team. I think just all being on the same page, having so many goals for our program and working together to complete those goals, we felt like it really bonded us and brought us closer together as a team.

In another program, one educator stated, “It was a team building activity” and her fellow interviewee agreed with her but added that “everybody was focused on what we were doing as a group.” An educator in a program with a coach commented not only on teambuilding but also on the role the coach played in this process. “It was a huge team builder. I think it would have been just as team building without the coach too, but the coach provided an added buffer for conflict.”
Table 24:

Emerging Theme: Process Supports Positive Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Theme:</th>
<th># Responses from interviewees in each Program</th>
<th>Percentage of programs identifying them or sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process Supports Positive Changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Team Improvements:</td>
<td>Program 1 (coach) 3</td>
<td>Program 2 (coach) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Program Evaluation</td>
<td>Program 4 (coach) 4</td>
<td>Program 5 (coach) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Improved Curriculum</td>
<td>Program 3 (no) 3</td>
<td>Program 4 (coach) 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Improved Environments</td>
<td>Program 2 (no) 2</td>
<td>Program 3 (no) 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Improved Policies/Documentation</td>
<td>Program 1 (no) 1</td>
<td>Program 2 (no) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Improved Communications/Interactions</td>
<td>Program 5 (coach) 5</td>
<td>Program 6 (no) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General comments on how process helped:</td>
<td>Program 1 (no) 1</td>
<td>Program 2 (no) 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # references</td>
<td>Program 1 (coach) 18</td>
<td>Program 2 (coach) 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although references regarding team building were also made under the theme Importance of Reflective Practice, (see Table 23), those interview statements were very specific in linking reflective practices to team building rather than linking team building to the overall quality improvement process. Due to the different contexts in which team building was discussed, it is necessary to include team building within both overarching themes.

Along with references to team building as a positive outcome of the process, the sub-theme Team Improvement includes educators’ beliefs that staff empowerment and staff training are positive outcomes of the process. These last two aspects of the sub-theme may not have been mentioned as frequently as team building, but the comments were enthusiastically made. One supervisor indicated that staff began to see their roles differently. “And they came away thinking maybe it’s not just their [administrator] job, we can say something. There was a sense of empowerment!” Another stated, “They took the leadership in completing it.”

Other programs mentioned that staff training/professional development was a positive outcome of the process. Although there was only a total of five references made to this outcome, educators who commented on this outcome were very passionate regarding its value. In one program, educators expressed excitement because the process had resulted in their employer providing training on the Ministry of Education’s newest curriculum document; in another, educators identified that they benefited from being given time to visit and learn from other early learning and care programs.

The second sub-theme that emerged was program evaluation. Interview statements that identified program evaluation as being a positive outcome/change occurred in all programs. Regardless of whether or not a program had a coach, educators indicated that the process provided them with a concrete evaluation of their program, which led to changes. Interviewees identified that the process resulted in educators being able to concretely evaluate their program and to do so in a more objective way. Educators pointed out that the process helped them identify what worked, what was wrong, and what changes were required. Many educators made statements similar to the following ones: “It helps you know what you’re doing [in the program], why you’re doing it, and what you’re not doing. It made me look at that.” “It makes us look at what works; what’s
wrong; see changes needed.” One educator summed up the role of the process with respect to evaluation and the resulting changes by saying,

As we were going through each section we looked at what numbers were lower, and who thought what could be improved, and we talked, discussed it and (came up with possible changes), and “E” took it down and put what section it was in and what the action plan was and when we should have it implemented.

The quality improvement process did not stop with an evaluation of the program. Once the program had been evaluated, educators were expected to develop an action plan. This required the team of educators to decide on specific tasks and set goals for task completion. The action plans led to various changes within programs, which educators identified as encompassing some or all of the following: curriculum, environments, policies/documentation, and communications/interactions.

The sub-theme Improved Curriculum covered all curriculum changes, but the interview data shows that curriculum changes varied from program to program. When making changes, different programs chose—based on their evaluations—to work on different aspects of the curriculum. One interviewee stated, “There’s now science all the time and free art all the time. They’re just things we’re implementing in our program now”, while at another program educators commented that the process helped them focus on the different areas of the program and make a variety of positive changes—one of which was changing their curriculum approach. “Really, when we did the emergent curriculum that was a really big change for the children. You know, really free choice for the kids, when we used to do it for them.” In still another program an educator said, “There was so much change because our program was so different; it was theme based, and it was old school. It’d been like this since I started, so it’s changed miraculously.”

Educators made references to the sub-theme addressing improvements to the physical environment less frequently than references to curriculum but were just as enthusiastic. Educators in several programs were very excited about the changes they had made to their environments and, at the time of the interview, asked me to come see what they’d done. From these various comments, and the excitement with which they were expressed, the sub-theme
Improved Environments emerged. These changes ranged from small changes to the room (e.g., providing art materials rather than crafts) to entire make-overs that looked at the utilization of a space as well as materials. For example, one educator said, “The room is way more organized, and children have more access to toys, etc., and that was a huge thing. We’re doing little bit by little bit, as much as we can.”

Although educators in programs with coaches and educators in programs without coaches both discussed improvements made as a result of the process, educators with coaches often mentioned how having a coach resulted in greater changes to the environment. “She was really helpful because we were trying to change our environment, and she came to a night meeting and helped us to physically change the environment which for years never occurred to us, and it was awesome.”

In some centres, interviewees identified that one positive outcome was the review and/or development of policies and handbooks. As part of the assessment and reflection process, several centres realized that they were missing, had poorly written, or had poorly organized documents (e.g., volunteer handbook). After assessing the program, some centres chose to update their documents and were very pleased when this task was completed. As one educator said,

I took each section and broke it down to every policy and document that’s needed. This has become a great tool because it’s all in one place... it’s a reference tool I’ll use forever because everything’s now in one place not four.

While some of the interviewees discussed the changes they made to manuals and other administrative documents, others discussed how they began to document the learning and provide this documentation to parents. In one program where the educators started displaying documentation for parents to see as they came in, an excited educator commented that “We’re really showing the parents the education side of everything, now!” Both types of activities led to the emergence of the sub-theme Improved Policies/Documentation. Although fewer interviewees mentioned this type of change, those that did were very happy that it occurred.

The final sub-theme under the theme Process Provides Positive Changes is Improved Communication/Interactions. Several interviewees indicated that they were interacting more
positively with families as a result of the process, and it was the most important outcome for at least one program.

Yeah, and the biggest piece, I think, that we took from it was sort of the parent involvement and what that means because we didn’t want it to mean parents come in and go on a fieldtrip. It’s more than that, so we talked to the whole staff about that and brought it to our retreat, and that was the focus of the retreat, and we’re still talking about it. Because parent partnership is huge; it can mean so many things.

Educators in another program also indicated that the development of a better partnership with parents was an important outcome of the process. They increased communications with parents through the development of child portfolios, intake interviews, and regular parent-teacher meetings.

One of the things we’re doing, this is for each child in the preschool program; I’m doing a portfolio. And one of the other things we’ve initiated is intake interviews. We never did it before. I did a two page form to get some background on the child and we looked at it with the parents and that was directly from the project. So we sat down with all of the families before they started and went over their expectations, their goals, you know any particular family situations, and, actually, now I’m just starting to have midterm meetings with the parents.

As Table 24 indicates, a total of 159 statements regarding the theme The Process Provides Positive Outcomes were made by the interviewees. Considering that there was a total of 13 interviews, the number of times the educators mentioned positive outcomes that occurred as a result of the quality improvement process indicates that this theme touched a cord with all the interviewees. As well, given that each sub-theme addressed one very specific component of the theme, the fact many of the sub-themes contained 15 or more quotable references lends further support for the emerging theme Process Supports Positive Change.

Although the references to this theme are many and varied, it is important to note that educators often made it clear that outcomes should not be the end of the quality improvement process.

Many of the changes will continue. Like observations are ongoing and documentation. Much of what we’re doing, we’re going to continue. A lot of this isn’t, okay we’ve done this. Training for staff on interactions with children is scheduled but you’ll need to keep it up.
The data from the post-pilot survey resulted in answers that were very similar to the comments made in the interviews that took place nine months later. Unlike the results for many of the research questions where the findings were mixed, both data sets related to research question five indicated that educators had similar perceptions as to the outcome of a quality improvement process. Although the quantitative findings indicated that changes to quality after the quality improvement process were not significant, the qualitative findings indicate that educators think improvements have been made and clearly identify those improvements. These conflicting findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.9 Data Addressing Some Limitations of the Study

The nature of the research meant that there were some inherent limitations (e.g., the use of volunteers). Other limitations occurred during the course of the study. Both types of limitations can influence findings and need to be examined.

One possible limitation was that educators who were actively involved in the decision to volunteer for the study might have different attitudes towards the quality improvement process than would those who were not actively involved in the initial decision to volunteer. When the director of an organization identified that their preschool program had volunteered to participate in the project, it was not clear if the educators in the preschool program participated in that initial decision. Would educators, who were told by supervisors that they were participating, view the project more negatively? Would these initial perceptions influence their motivation to participate in the process?

In order to address these concerns, the pre-study survey (Appendix E) asked participants to identify if they had been told by their supervisor, or if they were involved in the decision to participate. This question was then followed up with questions regarding their perceptions of the project. These questions provided insight into factors that might impact the results of the study.
Once directors had identified that their centres would participate all the educators who would be involved were contacted. Now, educators were told it was their decision to be involved in the project and that they could withdraw at any time. All the educators agreed to participate, at which time they were provided the survey to complete.

Out of a possible 108 surveys, 43 (39.8%) completed surveys were submitted. Of the completed surveys, 26 the respondents indicated they been told by their supervisor or other manager that the centre was going to participate (group T- Told to participate), while 17 respondents indicated that their supervisor or other individuals had presented them with the information and asked if they would be willing to participate (group V – Volunteered to participate).

When asked what their general thoughts were about the project, a large majority of responders in group V provided answers that could be labelled as very positive. 16 of the 17 individuals (94.1%) either said they were excited to participate and/or indicated that the process would be useful or help improve quality in their program. In this group, there was only one differing response: that person indicated that they did not have any real thoughts on the project but hoped it would result in positive outcomes.

The responses from educators in group T (told they were volunteering) were mixed but a large majority were positive in nature. Three respondents indicated that it would be great to participate but did not elaborate. 15 respondents indicated that it would help create improvements to quality, and four respondents indicated that it would be good to get new ideas/perspectives. When these three different-but-positive remarks were combined they accounted for 84.6% of all responses.

Unlike group V, group T also included responses indicating apprehension regarding the project. Two responders thought the timing was wrong (e.g., staff changes), while one was worried the director could use the information in a negative way. In this group, one individual also indicated a need to know more about the project before they could comment on it. While two educators raised concerns about the study, a large majority of educators in both groups gave positive comments (94.6% group V, 84.6% group T). These findings indicate that regardless of the recruitment process in centres initial perceptions are similar.
When asked specifically what they saw as the benefits of the project, both groups had very similar thoughts. In both groups, the most common responses indicated that the educators thought there would be an improvement in program quality (76.5% group V, 53.8% group T). Other responses were provided that could be combined under the heading “new ideas and new perspectives/ feedback”. Two responses from group V (11.8%) and eight responses from group T (30.8%) fell under this heading. In group T, one educator indicated that a benefit might be “teachers putting more thought into planning and interactions” and another educator indicated that a benefit might be “learning and growing as educators”.

In group V, individual educators included a couple of responses more closely linked to the research side of the project: “increased awareness of quality” and “assisting in research and defining quality standards; raising profile of early learning”. Another difference in responses between the two groups were that two respondents in group T indicated that they were not sure what the benefits might be, while no-one in group V provided a similar response. Despite the two educators in group T expressing some concerns regarding the benefits of the process, the overall results indicated that the majority of educators in both groups perceived the project to be beneficial and had positive perceptions of the project.

The initial pre-survey questions encouraged educators to express their general view of the study and to think about potential benefits, but it was also important to ascertain if the educators would express more concerns if asked. As part of the pre-study survey, respondents had an opportunity to identify what they saw as potential drawbacks.

The responses to the question regarding their concerns were analyzed to identify potential differences in perceptions between the two groups. The two responses that occurred most often were found in both groups. In group T, nine respondents (34.6%) did not see any drawbacks while six (23.1%) thought the amount of time the process required could be a problem. In group V, four respondents (23.5%) did not see any drawbacks while five (29.4%) thought the amount of time the process required could be a problem. Responses that fell into these two categories were the most common, but there were a variety of other responses that were identified by only one, two, or three individuals. Other individuals thought stress could be in issue. One educator
indicated that participating might cause stress because “Educators already have busy programs and challenging behaviours”. Both groups had a participant who was concerned that management might blame educators if the process indicated a program area (e.g., curriculum) that needed considerable work.

One difference between the two groups is that two educators in group T were worried that “evaluators and coaches won't necessarily see what's really happening since they only drop in” and “people coming into the program could disrupt it”, while no educator in group V mentioned these concerns. Some educators in group V did, however, mention that they were concerned that “it may be difficult to accept feedback from others”, “money may be needed to make changes”, and “there may be no follow through to make the changes that need to happen”.

Overall, despite being asked to identify possible drawbacks to the process, 30% of educators indicated that they saw no drawbacks. The most frequently mentioned drawback identified was time with 26% of respondents indicating that a lack of time could be a problem. As identified in the preceding paragraph these responses were found in both groups of educators.

When responses to all three questions were examined to determine if differences occurred between group T and group V it was apparent that, regardless of whether educators were told to participate or volunteered, the educators’ perceptions of the process and concerns were very similar. Although not all educators made comments that could be summarized as positive the most frequent responses were positive in nature (e.g., “it’ll improve the program”, “it’ll help quality”). The majority of educators in both groups, when asked to provide their thoughts on the project, provided responses that were positive. In addition, when asked to identify potential drawbacks the most frequent response in group T was that there were no drawbacks. In group V this was the second most frequent response.

Another limitation, which the study tried to assess and respond to, was related to the perceptions of program quality before the study began, since one’s perceptions regarding program quality may either decrease or increase an educators’ motivation to engage in quality improvements (Ackerman, 2008). The pre-pilot survey included a question on educators’ perceptions regarding
current program quality. It asked the participants to identify, on a scale of 1–5, what they saw as the present quality of their program. Regardless of whether or not they were told to participate, the majority of educators who responded thought that their programs were already good or excellent (see Table 25). 80.8% of educators who were told by their supervisors that they were participating in the research (group T) and 88.2% of educators who freely volunteered to participate (group V) felt their programs were either good or excellent. None of the educators felt their programs were of poor quality. Because no one thought their centres had poor quality programs, and because the majority of educators viewed their programs as good or excellent, one may assume that the motivation to improve quality may also be similar among the educators.

Table 25

Educators’ perceptions of pre-pilot program quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Program</th>
<th>% of Group T (told)</th>
<th>% of Group V (volunteered)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to determine whether or not the centres in the control group engaged in some unstructured quality improvements during the time of the study, both control and treatment groups—as part of the post-pilot survey—were asked to identify what they had done, if anything, since the beginning of the pilot to improve program quality. All three groups indicated that they engaged in some quality improvements. Although there were similarities among the three groups regarding the types of improvements, there were also variations (see Figure 3). The data clearly show that educators in group A (control) thought they had engaged in some form of quality improvement during the course of the study and that the improvements they identified were similar to those identified by educators in the treatment groups.
4.10 Summary of Findings

Different data sets from the pre-pilot survey, the ECERS-R evaluations, the post-pilot survey, and interviews addressed different aspects of the research. The findings from the analyses of the data help provide answers to the research questions.

4.10.1 Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study was, “Will a structured quality improvement process that includes coaching result in improvements to program quality and, if so, will these improvements be greater than those that might occur in programs with the structured process alone and/or programs without any structured process?”

The ECERS-R was used to collect quantitative data that addressed the overarching question. The analyses of the data indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the treatment groups and the control group. Even though there were no statistically significant differences, the data did show a tendency for both treatment groups to reflect greater positive changes (as measured by ECERS-R) in quality than did the control group. On the ECERS-R scale of quality, with seven being the highest mark possible, the control group showed a mean change in their score of less than .1 mark (.083). The experimental groups showed mean changes of .575 (no coach) and .551 (coaches).

While the tendency for both treatment groups was to show greater quality improvements than the control group, the largest positive change in mean scores from the first to the third ECERS-R evaluation was .575, and it was found in treatment group B (no coaches) rather than treatment group C (coaches). The highest mean change to the ECERS-R score was also found in the group without coaches rather than the group with coaches. At the same time, the results showed that four out of the five programs with the largest increases in their ECERS-R scores were from treatment group C (coaches).
The first research sub-question asked if educators with coaches will view the process more positively and find it easier than educators going through the process without a coach. The post-pilot survey results revealed no statistically significant differences between the two treatment groups, but the analysis also revealed that educators without coaches had a slightly more positive attitude with respect to a number of the quality process components than did educators with coaches. For example, when asked how easy it was to determine goals, 91.7% of educators without coaches found it somewhat or very easy while 83.3% of educators with coaches gave these responses.

When analyzing interview data, it was clear that educators in both groups expressed very positive attitudes towards the process and the use of coaches in the process. The interview findings indicated that coaches were useful in a number of different ways (e.g., help process completion, provide clarity of the process). Such comments appear to support the idea that educators with coaches would perceive the process more positively and find it easier than educators without coaches. However, as indicated above, the post-survey results showed that educators without coaches found the process easier than those with coaches. Once again, the findings were not conclusive regarding this sub-question.

The usefulness of coaches when engaging in a quality improvement process was the focus of the second sub-question; both interviews and the post-pilot survey addressed this. From the interview four themes emerged which relate to the usefulness of coaches. The themes (see Table 8) identified that coaches a) Provide Resources, b) Provide Clarity/Insight, c) Act as Mediators/Facilitators, and d) Facilitate Task Completion. References to all four themes occurred in both treatment groups, although the last two themes were less likely to be mention by educators in programs without coaches. In addition, four questions on the post-pilot survey directly asked educators with coaches how useful coaches were during specific phases of the process. 75% or more answered that coaches were useful during the following: a) program evaluation, b) development of action plan, and c) implementation of plan. Only when asked about the usefulness of having the coach touch base weekly did the educators’ answers drop to 50% of educators finding this useful.
Data addressing research question three came mainly from the interviews. When asked to discuss the process, the responses resulted in two overarching themes that addressed key elements of a quality improvement process. In turn, each of these themes contained two or three sub-themes. The two overarching themes were: a) Need for Time and b) Importance of Reflective Practice. I found that both these themes received very strong support from the interviews. As the numerical data in Table 21 indicates, the themes were supported both by the strength of the educators’ statements made in interviews and the number of times the themes were mentioned (100+ comments).

When discussing the theme Need for Time, educators identified that they needed time to assess, reflect, discuss, develop quality improvement action plans, and to implement their action plans. Data outside of the interviews also provided support for this theme. Both pre- and post-pilot survey results mention the need for time when completing a quality improvement process.

The second theme to emerge was the Importance of Reflective Practice. Educators found it important to reflect on what they had observed, to discuss observations and possible improvements with others, and to plan for change. Although this theme was supported by numerous interview comments, there was no clear support from other sources of data. Educators’ comments in both the pre- and post-pilot surveys did not mention this concept. Although educators may have been alluding to reflective practice in some answers, the responses were not clear regarding reflective practice.

The final research sub-question focused on what educators perceived as outcomes of a quality improvement process. The analysis of the data resulted in the emerging theme Process Supports Positive Change. This theme (and its various sub-themes) indicated that the process resulted in positive changes and that positive changes happened with or without a coach. These changes were diverse in nature and included outcomes such as program evaluation, curriculum changes, and team building. Similar outcomes were identified six months earlier when educators completed the post-pilot survey. The post-pilot survey results identified quality improvements that educators thought they had accomplished. Unlike the interviews, the survey also collected information from educators in the control group. Despite the lack of a structured quality
improvement process, educators in the control group identified program quality improvements similar to those identified by educators in the treatment groups (e.g., when reviewing the data from the surveys, the biggest difference in identified outcomes between the groups is that educators with coaches were more likely to indicate improvements to the curriculum than were educators in either the control group or treatment group B. Clearly, educators in both control and treatment groups had similar perceptions of quality improvement outcomes and indicated that they’d implemented changes to attain them.

In conclusion, the findings provided some mixed results. The quantitative data showed that there were no significant changes to quality after completion of the process, and yet the qualitative data seem to run counter to this, with the perceptions of the educators indicating that quality improvements had occurred and that coaching is a valuable resource.

The results for the research questions addressing educators’ perceptions are also mixed. Through the interviews—and some of the post-pilot survey questions—educators with coaches indicated that coaches were useful and helped them successfully complete the process. In fact, one interviewee had tried the process without a coach several years earlier and was now in the unique position of being able to compare the experience with and without a coach. The educator’s comments lend some credence to idea that coaches can play an important role in ensuring that tasks are completed, helping educators solve problems, and bringing clarity to the process. In the interview she said,

Having participated (seven years ago) on our own and then having the coach with the smaller group it was just such a better experience. The first one was - got kind of ugly you know and this one was pleasant all round. … So as a group without a coach or any specific help, it was really a bit of a mess.

On the other hand, results from the post-pilot survey appear to contradict this statement and indicate that educators without coaches saw the process as easier and felt they were more successful at creating positive changes. The next chapter will discuss some factors that may be contributing to these mixed results along with recommendations for further research.
4.10.2 Limitations

The participants in this study were educators working with a number of licensed early learning programs, and the recruitment process required that I go through the director or executive director of the centre. One of the concerns going into the study was how centres might recruit individual educators to participate, and how this might influence attitudes and the participants’ willingness to participate.

Although the results indicated that many of the volunteers had originally been told their program was going to participate in the study, all of the educators voluntarily signed the participant agreement form. In addition, educators in group T (told they were participating) and those in group V (volunteered to participate) had similar perceptions of the study. How their centre recruited them did not appear to strongly influence their perceptions and willingness to participate in the study.

There was also concern that the educators’ pre-study perception of their program’s current quality might influence the level of participation in a quality improvement process. Although there are various factors motivating individuals, the research results indicate that most educators started with similar perceptions regarding quality in their programs. Most educators indicated that their program demonstrated a good level of quality or high level of quality.

When setting up the study, I could not prohibit programs in the control group from accessing traditional professional development which might improve quality. This could be considered another limitation. In order to determine if educators in the control group had worked at improving program quality during the time of the study, all educators who remained in the study were asked, in the post-pilot survey, what quality improvements they had worked on over the past six months. Both control and treatment groups indicated that quality improvements had occurred and identified similar outcomes (e.g., improvements to the environment).
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The study resulted in a number of mixed findings. This chapter will discuss the findings, look at the implications for coaching as 1) part of a quality improvement process, 2) the process itself as a strategy to improve quality, and 3) possible avenues for future research. The chapter will begin with a discussion of findings with respect to the research questions, followed by the discussion of the major limitations.

5.2 Overarching Research Question

Will a structured quality improvement process that includes coaching result in improvements to program quality and, if so, will these improvements be greater than those that might occur in programs with the structured process alone and/or programs without any structured process?

The findings from the ECERS-R led to several discussion points, even though the results showed no significant differences in mean changes to overall quality among the various groups in the study. Since it was previously identified that the small sample size was extremely unlikely to yield significant results, a discussion of interesting trends is the focus.

When the mean change in the overall ECERS-R score was calculated for each of the three groups (control, treatment group B, treatment group C), there was almost no mean change in quality for the control group from the first to the third assessment (< .1 mark), while the two treatment groups clearly showed greater mean changes (> .5 mark). On the ECERS-R’s rating scale of one to seven a change of over half a mark may seem significant, but with such a small sample size it is not possible to make that statement, and, as the ECERS-R authors indicate, a change of 1.0 or better is considered a meaningful change. As the literature review indicated, several larger
studies have indicated that coaching can result in quality improvements (Boller, et al., 2015; Campbell & Milbourne, 2005). With this in mind, a study similar to the current one—but on a much larger scale—should be undertaken to determine if the tendencies shown in the current study may prove to be statistically significant. The goal of any quality improvement process is to create meaningful change, and processes that can move programs towards this goal are important.

The mean changes in ECERS-R scores that occurred between the second and final assessment are also worth discussing. As seen in Figure 4, while the two treatment groups continued to show improvements this was not the case for the control group. Because there appeared to be a tendency for the treatment groups to show greater quality improvement, and to continue the improvements after the structured process had ended, one must ask what there was about the process that might have supported this trend. Along with observations, assessments, reflections, and discussions, the process included the development and implementation of an action plan. The action plans, which emerged from the reflections and discussions, may at least partially explain the differences between the control and the treatment groups. The timelines for the process had educators working on tasks from their action plan during the period leading up to and, sometimes past, the second ECERS-R evaluation. During the interviews that occurred after the third evaluation, several educators indicated that the action plan was still being implemented.
and that the changes to the program were ongoing. For example, at the time of the interviews educators in one program said, “We set dates to complete the tasks; we’re still working on it.” Changes that support quality improvements can require time. These variations in completion dates could also have implications for determining the sustainability of the changes.

In order to determine if the improvements remain six months or even a year after the process has been completed, one has to know when the actual implementation of the process ends. Clearly it did not end for all the programs within the six-month implementation timeframe they were given. Perhaps in future studies the second evaluation should be completed when the program thinks they are finished rather than at a set time. The third evaluation would then occur six months to a year later. By ensuring that the process in each program had been completed for a designated amount of time before a final evaluation occurred might provide more insight into how effective the process was and how sustainable the changes were. At the same time, such a study could introduce other limitations.

Although findings concerning the mean changes in ECERS-R scores revealed some tendencies supporting the idea that the quality improvement process would create positive changes, the same tendencies failed to support the notion that programs with coaches would show greater improvements than programs without coaches. Because the review of literature (e.g., Boller et al., 2015; Doherty et al., 2015) generally supported this notion, one must ask why the quantitative results showed no evidence of this. The small sample size could have had an impact, but if it was simply sample size I would have expected to see some indication that programs with coaches were more likely to have quality improvements than programs without coaches.

Although the mean change in the ECERS-R score differed only slightly between the programs with coaches and those without, it was actually the treatment group without coaches that improved the most. Were these results due to the quality of coaching? Were they due to the measure used to assess quality?

In order to better understand the impact of coaching on quality improvements, additional research on various coaching techniques and how the requirements of the program influence the techniques used should be undertaken.
Despite the apparent lack of support from the general comparisons of results, when one examines other quantitative data, there are indicators supporting the effectiveness of coaching. Four of the five programs with the largest improvements to quality are from group C while one is from group B. Of the lowest performers, three are from the control group (group A), one from group C, and one from group B. Is it possible that these data more accurately reflect what would happen if a large sample size was used? Further research is required to determine what data truly reflect the effectiveness of coaches with respect to changes in program quality.

Examining the data from a different perspective appears to make a difference in one’s interpretation, but there are other factors that could also play a role in the final results. At the beginning of the study, the programs were randomly assigned to one of the three groups, and an initial measure of program quality was done on all programs using the ECERS-R. Although the small sample size could affect the distribution of programs, one would expect the range of the initial ECERS-R scores to be similar across all three groups. Since programs were allowed to withdraw from the study, and the data from those programs were then deleted, only data for programs that remained in the study were included in the final analysis. A study by Zellerman, Perlman, Le and Setodji (2008) included an examination of the centres that left the study. Their findings indicated that those centres that left had lower ECERS-R’s scores as well as other indicators of poor quality.

Tables 1–3 show the baseline ECERS-R scores for programs in each group. The scores for the control group ranged from 4.22 to 5.66, indicating that the programs had satisfactory to good program quality. The scores for treatment group B range from 4.26 to 6.08, which also indicate that these programs had either good or very good quality. On the other hand, the scores for treatment group C range from 2.78 to 6.1, which means that this group had centres ranging from inadequate quality to good quality. The scores, along with the lack of data from programs that chose to withdraw, raise questions that require answers before concluding that, as long as there is a quality improvement process in place, coaching is not required.

The first question addresses whether centres with poor quality ratings are more likely to withdraw from a quality improvement process. Because there are no poor-quality programs in
the control group or treatment group B, but there are in treatment group C, is it possible that the support coaches provided helped keep educators from all programs motivated to continue with the study? The answer to this question is important and requires further study. A quality improvement process is only useful if it can encourage all programs to work towards quality and complete the process. If a process is implemented, but only higher quality programs successfully implement it, the needs of all children and families are not being met. If coaches can provide the support poorer quality programs need to improve, then coaches are an essential element of any quality improvement process. As governments and agencies develop quality assurance strategies, they need to investigate this aspect of coaching and incorporate coaching into any strategy.

A second question that arises from the data regarding low initial ECERS-R assessments is, “Is it harder to or does it take longer to improve the quality of programs that start with a lower ECERS-R rating?” If the answer to the question is yes, it would have influenced the results. If these programs were given additional time to complete the process, the results might have been different and the results higher for programs with coaches. Is it possible that the smaller change to mean scores that occurred in treatment group C simply resulted from weaker programs taking longer to improve?

Both questions need additional research to provide more insight into the importance of coaches. If the answer to either of them is “yes”, it may provide support for the use of coaches. With respect to the first question, it would indicate that the presence of a coach helps educators—especially those most likely to find the process difficult—continue on and complete the process rather than quitting. With respect to the second question, it would indicate that the coaches may help with the improvement process, since the mean change between Group B and Group C was extremely small.

While there were some programs whose baseline ECERS-R were low (poor), most of the programs participating in the study had ECERS-R baseline scores that were categorized as good or and a couple as very good. These scores suggest that the programs involved in the pilot may not reflect typical early learning and care programs (UNICEF, 2008; Japel, 2009). Although one could conclude that the ECERS-R evaluators simply marked high and skewed the results,
another possible explanation is linked to the fact that the programs in the pilot had all volunteered to participate. Are educators in higher quality programs more likely to volunteer? If this is the case, governments that want to improve the overall program quality within the early learning and care sector must create strategies that require the participation of all programs.

Because the majority of baseline scores were between 4.0 and 6.5, could this have influenced the results? Are educators in stronger programs, regardless of the type of support that they receive, more likely to look critically at what they are doing and identify strategies to improve program quality? Is it more difficult to locate tasks that will result in large changes to quality in a relatively short period of time (six months)? Is it more difficult to complete quality improvement tasks that allow you to continue to move up on the ECERS-R scale when a program is already performing well? A large comprehensive study may be able to answer some of these questions.

While the findings from the ECERS-R data showed some interesting tendencies that provided possible answers to the overarching research question, the results created several questions that need to be answered through future research. Much larger studies are required to address these questions and to discover if the findings are actually more than just possible trends. Not only must the studies be larger, the studies also need to encompass the breadth of licensed, centre-based programs (rather than only volunteer centres) to better understand what is happening and what this means for quality improvement programs.

Along with the results of the ECERS-R, the post-pilot survey contained findings that linked to the overarching research question. One of the items specifically asked educators how successful they thought they were at improving the quality of their program. In treatment group B, 91.65% of educators identified that they were successful or very successful at improving quality, while only 58.33% of educators in treatment group C indicated this. Like the ECERS-R findings, these results run counter to the idea that the use of coaches will result in greater quality improvements. While these results show the educators’ perceptions rather than actual improvements to quality, they do appear to support the quantitative findings with respect to the mean changes in program quality. Those findings showed that the mean changes in program quality improved more in treatment group B (programs without coaches) than in group C (programs with coaches). On the
other hand, those quantitative findings are not supported by the rankings of individual programs. As mentioned previously, four of the five most-improved programs were from treatment group C, while only one was from treatment group B. One possible explanation of these differences is that the educators in treatment group C who thought they’d made improvements were less likely to answer the survey. Other possible explanations could be that educators with coaches tackled more complex tasks that were harder to complete in the timeframe of the pilot, or that the process of completing quality improvements is easier without the presence of a third party who might question some of the decisions being made. Clearly, more research is needed to better comprehend these issues.

5.3 Research Sub-question One

_When educators are supported by a coach, will they view the quality improvement process more positively and perceive it as being easier than those who participate in the process without the support of a coach?_

The findings related to this question came from the post-pilot survey which was delivered to educators immediately following the completion of the second ECERS-R. Like the ECERS-R data, the number of participants was small enough that the findings were unlikely to show statistically significant differences between the two experimental groups (12 responders in each group). In addition, the unevenness of the return rate could also have impacted the findings. In some programs, all of the educators completed and returned the surveys, while in other programs none of the educators completed the surveys, creating additional challenges when trying to interpret the findings.

Despite the limitations of the post-pilot survey data, there were some possible trends that emerged that should be discussed. The quantitative sections of the survey used a Likert scale to determine if various aspects of the quality improvement process were, or were not, easy to complete. Most educators in treatment group B and treatment group C identified the items as somewhat easy or very easy (see Table 15); however, the tendency was for educators in group B to find the process easier than educators in group C. These findings did not support the notion
that educators with coaches would find the process easier than those without coaches. However, the nature of a Likert scale does not allow educators to explain what made the process easy, and this missing information may be required to truly understand the results. Providing a comment section for each of the Likert questions or developing a more open-ended survey may help future researchers gather data that explains why these results occurred.

Even though the results from the post-study survey indicated that educators with coaches found the process more challenging than educators without a coach, one cannot automatically infer that coaches are not beneficial to the process. Is it possible that educators with coaches did not find it as easy because coaches were more likely to challenge their thinking? Was it more difficult for educators with coaches because coaches made sure that educators engaged in the more challenging aspects of the process (e.g., engaging in difficult reflections, prioritizing action items that may be more difficult to implement)? Was it more challenging for educators because coaches managed to help educators complete the process even when they found the process difficult?

Another interesting result comes from question 12 on the survey. It asked, “How easy was it to stay motivated?” This question is important to discuss because motivated individuals may be more likely to view the process positively. In group B, 75% of educators indicated that it was easy to stay motivated, while only 41.67% of educators in group C indicated it was easy. These results indicate that coaches may not provide the support educators need to successfully complete a quality improvement process and appear to contradict some of the previous research on coaching (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015).

When reviewing these results in light of other data, such as the baseline evaluations of program quality, it appears that the results from one part of the study may not tell the whole story, and that the answer to the question may not be as simple as initially thought. Could it be that the initial quality of a program has an impact on the educators’ ongoing perceptions regarding the process and motivation to complete the process? If a coach helped educators who experienced
difficulties and low motivation complete the process, the results from the post-pilot survey, although accurately reflecting perceptions, fail to show that the coaches helped keep educators working on changes despite challenges. In fact, as mentioned in the findings section, one educator clearly stated that they would have quit without the support of the coach. Perhaps the educators in treatment group B who found the process difficult or experienced motivational challenges simply dropped out of the study, while coaches were able to keep educators in group C motivated enough to complete the process. If this is true then it’s an indication that coaches are especially important to programs where educators are struggling. While further research into these complex issues is required, these findings provide some implications for the training of coaches. If coaches are especially important for educators who are struggling, then coaches need to be trained on early identification of challenges such as a lack of motivation.

5.4 Research Sub-question Two

*What are educators’ perceptions regarding the usefulness of coaches in a quality improvement process?*

The results addressing this question came mainly from the interviews, although some data was also collected from the post-pilot survey. As the interviews revealed, educators with coaches were usually very passionate when describing the usefulness of coaches. Meanwhile, educators without coaches discussed coaches in a more objective way but still highlighted benefits of having a coach. Because all of the interviewees were volunteers who had completed the process, one must ask if the opinions expressed were representative of all the pilot’s participants or just some of them. The themes which emerged from these interviews may represent the thoughts of the interviewees, but without obtaining interviews from all participants my ability to generalize is limited. The question that this raises is, how different would the interview findings be if educators from all the programs that began the pilot had been interviewed? Further research needs to be conducted that includes exit interviews to better understand why some programs complete a quality improvement process while others quit, and to understand perceptions regarding the process of those who quit.
When examining the emerging themes regarding coaches, one interesting result was that the themes Coaches are Resources, and Coaches Bring Insight/Clarity were strongly supported by both treatment groups. While educators in programs with coaches were able to identify how the coaches helped in these areas, educators in programs without coaches clearly recognized the need for this type of support. Both of these themes provide insight into why coaching would be a useful component of a quality improvement process. At the same time, this implies that individuals in coaching positions require a certain level of expertise and a strong knowledge base in order for coaching to be effective. This expectation of coaches is supported by other studies (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010; Zaslow, Tout, & Halle, 2012) and indicates a need for governments and other organizations to closely examine the knowledge and qualifications of individuals who might be used as coaches. In addition, any system which incorporates coaching needs to regularly examine the ongoing training that coaches require. Both themes indicated that coaches add value to the quality improvement process, but providing coaches with the necessary knowledge and skills could be costly. In addition, coaching itself is a labour-intensive process that adds to the cost of the process. While the comments from the educators regarding the above themes indicate that using coaches may be a positive way to support educators going through a quality improvement processes, it would be important to conduct additional research to determine if coaching is the most effective way to provide resources and clarity.

Although the above themes regarding coaches were strongly supported by interview data linked to both treatment group B and treatment group C, there were also strong themes emerging from treatment group C that were not addressed as often by educators in treatment group B. Themes emerging largely from Group C interview data raise some concerns around validity, since the small sample size may indicate that data saturation did not occurred.

One of these emerging themes was Coaches Act as Mediators/Facilitators. It only emerged from a small group of interviews, but interview statements regarding the theme indicated how strongly some educators felt about it (e.g., “I’m sure we would have had fireworks if we hadn’t had this wonderful marriage counselor with us. It was really nice having her with us”). As Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated, qualitative research is not dictated by numbers but by how deeply individuals are committed to the ideas, and the above theme appears to clearly illustrate this
point. The passion of those educators who experienced coaches as mediators, when compared to the number of interviewees who did not mention this role, would seem to indicate that this coaching role may not be considered until it’s needed—then it’s seen as very important.

Although programs without coaches had some comments that alluded to conflict, there was no mention of a need for mediators/facilitators. In programs with coaches, educators had the opportunity to use a mediation process that is usually unavailable to them. Did this theme emerge as a result of these experiences? If educators in programs without coaches had experiences with outside mediators, would it make them more aware of the role of coach as a mediator/facilitator?

The above theme raises more questions than it answers, and my literature review regarding coaches in early learning programs did not uncover this aspect of coaching. However, early childhood educators typically work in team-based environments, and the interactions of the team members could influence the outcome of a quality improvement process. Clearly, more research is needed in this area to determine the usefulness of coaches as mediators. If future research lends support to this aspect of coaching, governments and agencies will need to fund mediation training for coaches. Although many professionals in the early learning and care profession have expertise in a variety of areas, mediation training is not traditionally implemented.

The theme Coaches Help Process Completion, like the previous theme, emerged mainly from interviews in centres with coaches. While these interviews provided strong support for the theme, results from the post-pilot survey seemed to contradict it. Results from the post-pilot survey indicated that educators without coaches found tasks easier and thought they were more successful at completing quality improvements than those with coaches. This difference may be partially explained by revisiting some of the quantitative findings. As mentioned previously, at the end of the pilot group C was the only group that had participating programs whose initial ECERS-R scores were identified as poor quality. Since the programs were randomly distributed, one would expect the other groups to also contain poor-quality programs. If there were poor programs in each group at the beginning of the study, why are there no poor-quality programs present in groups A and B at the end of the study? If this difference is a result of withdrawals, then what was happening in group C that kept these programs in the study? Comments from the
interviewees would indicate that coaches may have played a role (e.g., “I really, really feel she held it together, she kept it moving forward, and she, you know, she was a key player.”; “I felt she was very good, and she kept it going, having the meetings helped keep us on track.”) If coaches are able to motivate educators to continue to work on quality improvements and complete tasks, then coaches play an important role in the quality improvement process. If educators in poor-quality programs are more likely to complete the process when a coach is present, then the coach’s role is even more crucial.

Although this theme was not frequently mentioned by educators in programs without coaches, there were comments made that hinted at the above. As one educator said, “I think that centres or programs that don’t have a strong team base or a strong support system like the larger agencies would struggle without a coach.” Not only does this statement hint at weaker centres being more vulnerable, it also hints at some of the factors present in higher quality programs that might allow them to complete the process without the support of a coach. Further studies are required that clearly examine the roles and the impact of coaches when supporting educators in programs with different levels of quality and in-house support.

5.5 Research Sub-question Three

What do educators perceive as the important elements of a quality improvement process?

The findings for this question emerged from the interviews with educators in both treatment groups. The Need for Time, and Importance of Reflective Practice were two very clear themes highlighting important elements of the quality improvement process. Although clearly distinct themes, both themes were often discussed in relation to each other. Many educators thought that meetings to reflect on and discuss current practices and possible improvements were invaluable, but at the same time they acknowledged that time was required to support the delivery of the meetings.

While reflective practice was often linked to the theme of time, time was often referred to in other contexts, such as time to create changes that would improve quality. In the sub-theme
Funding for Non-contact Time, educators acknowledged that funding may be necessary to provide educators with the time needed—a concept strongly supported in the post-survey findings as well as in the interviews. Although the interviewees were only those individuals who had completed the quality improvement process, time began to emerge at the beginning of the study. Even before the pilot began some educators had concerns regarding time. In the pre-pilot survey, time was mentioned as a possible factor linked to the successful completion of the process. When reviewing the literature, time was not mentioned as an important element of quality improvement, although items were discussed that implied time was needed (e.g., receiving feedback from coaches). Is it possible that research that looks at coaching as an effective method of quality improvement is providing participants with time to engage in the various components of the process? If so, what are the implications if one decides to implement such a process across the sector or throughout a community? Further study is required to look at time and the challenges of providing time to implement quality improvements within the community at large.

The themes involving time and reflective practice resonated throughout all the interviews. The statements were very clear and consistent, regardless of whether individuals were interviewed together or separately. Because of the passion interviewees often exhibited when discussing these themes, and because many participants reiterated these ideas several times, these themes were clearly important to them. The numerical interview findings simply provide additional support for the themes.

Even though all interviewees were volunteers from centres that had completed the process, these results indicate that agencies wanting to support quality improvements should find ways to address the issues of time and reflective practice. Providing educators with non-contact time may be essential if governments and agencies want to see improvements to program quality. Non-contact time is necessary for educators to assess and reflect on the program, discuss what is happening, and determine necessary improvements.

Funding is necessary for the above to happen. Governments will need to provide funding as well as safeguards to ensure that the funding is used to address these issues. If these themes reflect
important elements of a quality improvement process, governments need to make changes that will allow programs to incorporate these elements into an ongoing quality improvement process.

5.6 Research Sub-question Four

*What do educators perceive as outcomes of a quality improvement process?*

This final research question was addressed through one of the themes that emerged from the interviews and through the component of the post-pilot survey that focused on the educators’ perceptions regarding improvements that had occurred during the period of the study.

When asked in the survey, all three groups indicated that they had made quality improvements to their programs during the past six months and offered a variety of examples to demonstrate the types of improvements made. The results of this survey run contrary to the ECERS-R assessments that indicated no statistically significant changes. Although this research question addressed perceptions rather than assessed changes, one must ask why clear discrepancies exist between the educators’ perceptions and the concrete assessments of the program, since many of the identified changes appear to be ones that could be measured by ECERS-R. One exception to this would be the curricular changes—changes which were more frequently mentioned by educators in the treatment group with coaches. Future research is required that uses ECERS-R in conjunction with other tools that focus more on curricular and interactional changes.

When looking at the survey results, I also need to consider that the improvements identified in the survey may not be representative of all the programs; in some programs no educators responded to the survey, while in other programs all the educators responded. Is it possible that the educators who made positive changes were more likely to respond to the survey, whereas those in programs that were not successful at making noticeable improvements were less likely to respond? If this is true, it would help explain the apparent differences between the perceptions and the ECERS-R results. To more fully understand the apparent gap between the educators’ perceptions regarding quality outcomes and the ECERS-R results, further mixed method studies
need to be undertaken to provide a detailed look at both perceptions regarding program improvements and the measurement of quality improvements in programs.

The above results reflected the educators’ perceptions immediately after completion of the process, but the interviews took place seven to nine months later. Did they continue to support the initial thoughts on quality improvements?

When interviewing the educators, one emerging theme addressed the educators’ perceptions regarding positive outcomes. The theme Process Supports Positive Change emerged from the analysis of all of the interviews. All interviewees mentioned a variety of improvements that had been undertaken. Many educators spoke enthusiastically about some of the changes they had carried out, and several commented that the changes made a difference to quality. Many of the interview statements reflected the comments from the post-pilot survey, showing consistency in the educators’ perceptions. Not only were the messages consistent across both treatment groups, they also reflected aspects of quality that have been identified by other researchers (OECD, 2006). These findings indicate that educators are aware of concrete changes that can improve program quality. Therefore, governments and agencies need to determine what they can do to help all educators utilize their knowledge and skills.

While educators spoke of positive changes, the ECERS-R results did not support the interview data. Because of the discrepancy I have to ask if the responses given by educators reflect: a) what actually happened in the classroom or b) an awareness that one should be in line with current expectations regarding program quality. The enthusiasm with which the educators spoke of the changes, and the fact that several took me to see what they had done, leads me to believe the first scenario may be the correct one. Perhaps a larger sample size would have provided both quantitative and qualitative results supporting quality improvements. If a larger study still indicated a disconnect between educators’ perceptions and the quantitative data, it raises questions that require additional research. Do educators assume that, by taking part in an improvement process, they have made positive changes? How do educators determine that their actions have resulted in improvements to program quality?
Within the theme Process Supports Positive Change, was one unanticipated sub-theme. When I asked interviewees to discuss the process, I anticipated that educators might discuss changes they made to their environments or curriculum but did not anticipate discussions around changes to the team or themselves. Though unexpected, the emergence of team improvement as a sub-theme could be an outcome of the reflective practices educators engaged in. The process required educators to critically reflect on their observations and then meet with their team members to further discuss their reflections. Both the meeting preparations and the discussions themselves facilitated listening skills, an understanding of different perspectives, and a respect for other team members. All of these could, in turn, lead to a greater sense of team. In addition, many educators indicated that working on shared goals brought people closer together, and some action plans included professional development. The idea that these types of engagements might support team building also occurred in Lero and Irwin’s (2008) study. Additional research is needed, but this sub-theme lends further support for the recommendation that agencies provide time for educators to reflect on what’s happening and as a team, problem solve, set goals, and implement change.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

While analysis of the data provided some interesting findings, there were several limitations that restrict my ability to make generalizations. By developing an understanding of these limitations future research can counter these challenges.

5.7.1 Sample Size

The first limitation to be discussed is sample size. One of the methods used to examine program quality improvements was an experimental method, but, as mentioned in the chapter on methodology, I only had access to centres where educators were willing to volunteer. This resulted in the sample sizes for the control and treatment groups being much smaller than anticipated and reduced the probability of the data analysis resulting in statistically significant findings. Regardless, it was hoped that the results would indicate some tendencies regarding the
use of coaches and provide ideas for further research and development. As discussed earlier, despite the sample size, the findings contained trends supporting the main research question and indicating a need for further research on coaching early childhood educators.

During the study, the number of participating centres decreased from 27 to 19. The Letter of Consent to Participate did not require educators in programs to take part in an exit interview, so none were conducted. Exit interviews might have provided additional insight into both the quality improvement process and the effectiveness of coaches.

5.7.2 Use of Volunteers

Because the study used educators who volunteered to complete the quality improvement process, they may not be a representative cross-section of educators working within the licensed early learning and care community. Were they willing to volunteer because they were confident their program already demonstrated quality and, therefore, were less concerned about outsiders coming into their program? Are educators in these programs more open to change and motivated to create change? Only utilizing volunteers will always limit one’s ability to generalize findings to the larger population.

Were educators who volunteered more likely than other educators to identify program quality as an important priority? If so, were they more motivated to work towards this, regardless of whether or not they were assigned to a control or experimental group? As Ackerman (2008) stated, “individuals involved in a change process must therefore perceive any modification as a significant priority, or the short-term personal costs of a new activity or approach might appear to outweigh the long-term benefits.” Such motivation could help account for the findings that showed no significant differences in quality improvement between the control and treatment groups or between the two treatment groups.

It was recognized that not all centre supervisors will approach the recruitment of volunteers in the same way. In some instances, a supervisor made the decision to volunteer and then told the educators they would be involved in the study; in other programs the decision to participate was done jointly. If the initial introduction to the study was made for them, the educators’ attitudes
toward the study could have been more negative and their commitment to the process may have been weaker. Recognizing this, going into the study I attempted to determine how much this might affect the educators by asking (in the pre-pilot survey) how they came to participate in the pilot and what they thought of the pilot. Because there was very little difference between the attitudes of educators who had been actively involved in the decision to participate and those who had not, this may not have been as strong a limitation as initially thought. To help determine the potential impact of recruitment on motivation, future research would benefit from having educators participate in an exit interview whenever a program withdraws from the study. This might provide insight into whether or not the way educators in programs were asked to volunteer makes a difference with respect to commitment to the process.

5.7.3 Measuring Quality

Another limitation was that only the ECERS-R was used to assess quality. The focus of this tool is on a program’s environmental indicators, with less emphasis placed on other types of quality indicators. Although there are items that address communication with families and interactions between educators and children, they comprise a relatively small component of the evaluation.

While many researchers continue to use the ECERS-R as a stand-alone tool, others have combined the ECERS-R with other tools to mitigate this limitation (Denny et al., 2012; Jeon, Buettner, & Hur, 2014). When reviewing the literature, I recognized that the study could benefit from using a tool—such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)—along with the ECERS-R in order to assess quality but lacked the resources to implement both. Although the use of ECERS-R on its own has some limitations, the literature would indicate that if only one tool is used to assess global program quality in preschool programs it is usually the ECERS-R. In addition, a recent literature review has indicated that the ECERS-R is able to assess general program quality (Brunsek et al., 2017).

In Canada, the ECERS-R has been used in several studies measuring program quality (Doherty et al., 2003; Doherty et al., 2015; Falenchuk & Perlman, 2009; Goelman et al, 2000). In the Canadian study by Falenchuk and Perlman (2009), researchers used the ECERS-R to evaluate
the City of Toronto’s quality assurance tool and then to validate the City’s revised tool (now known as the AQI).

Despite the frequent use of the ECERS-R tool to assess overall program quality, it is possible that the quality improvements made in some programs were ones that were not adequately measured using the ECERS-R. In programs where educators chose to focus on improvements to the curriculum rather than the environment, CLASS may have measured changes more effectively than the ECERS-R. When educators were asked about program quality improvements at the end of the pilot, educators with coaches were more likely to identify curriculum changes, whereas educators from the control or treatment group without coaches were more likely to identify environmental changes. If the educators’ statements reflect what happened in the program, then the programs with coaches may have increased program quality, but it might not have been adequately reflected in the ECERS-R overall score. Further research needs to occur that incorporates quantitative assessments addressing all aspects of quality in early learning programs. This may produce different outcomes that might provide more support for the idea that coaching is an effective method to improve program quality.

Because the study relied on volunteers to administer the ECERS-R, there were several ECERS-R-trained individuals evaluating programs rather than just one or two people completing all the assessments. Despite the fact that all six ECERS-R evaluators were trained by qualified ECERS-R trainers and received the training in the same session (which included inter-rater reliability), the number of evaluators could have created limitations. This occurred because inadequate funding required the use of volunteer evaluators who had to juggle their work schedules with their volunteer hours for the study. In future studies, sufficient funding to reduce the number of evaluators required might help mitigate this limitation.

As well, the evaluators had to complete three ECERS-R assessments for each program, with 10 to 11 months between the first and second evaluations and an additional six to seven months between the second and third evaluations. This time lag could have had an impact on the consistency of the assessments, not only among the various evaluators but also in an individual’s own evaluations. Ishimine and Taylor (2014) state that along with the initial training evaluators
receive on the assessment measure there should be “checks throughout the data collection to ensure that the fieldworkers establish and retain their consistency. Periodical retraining or drift checking is desirable to maintain individual reliability, especially as observational measures often collect data from over a timespan” (p.283). The lack of funding and the volunteers’ limited availability meant that retraining or drift checking was not done. In addition, two evaluators had to stop their participation in the study (for personal reasons). This meant that a different evaluator took over their duties and completed their final program assessments. Although the other evaluators agreed to take on the extra assessments, it did mean that the final assessments for two programs happened later than the others. All of these factors could have resulted in lower intra-rater and inter-rater reliability. This, in turn, could have influenced the quantitative findings. Although one cannot guarantee that evaluators starting with a study will be able to remain for the duration of the study, periodic retraining can reduce the impact of this limitation. Future research needs to ensure additional funding is obtained so that fewer evaluators are needed for the study and so that retraining and drift checking can be done.

In order to help ensure unbiased evaluations, the evaluators were not told if the programs they evaluated were in the control or experimental groups, and educators in programs were asked to keep this knowledge from the evaluators. However, when evaluators arrived to complete later evaluations, educators occasionally revealed the program’s status, and it is possible that this could have influenced the evaluation and, therefore, the final results. Because evaluation tools such as the ECERS-R require some interactions with participants, it is difficult for researchers to completely prevent these types of comments. Future research will need to continue to acknowledge this challenge and provide sufficient training for participates as well as evaluators to try and mitigate it.

5.7.4 Selection and Training of Coaches

Just as there were multiple individuals completing the ECERS-R evaluations, there were four individuals acting as coaches to the centres. All four coaches worked as integration advisors for a large agency. All of them had 15 plus years working as advisors and had similar training coming into the pilot. At the beginning of the pilot these individuals received additional training
regarding their roles as coaches. This training included general expectations of coaches, education regarding the use of the manual, the number and purpose of initial visits, how many hours were available for each centre, and how these hours could be used. Given that the regular work of the individuals who were used as coaches already included the coaching of educators, and given that each centre and group of educators had unique needs, coaches had some discretion regarding when and how to interact with the educators in each program. Despite the training, over the course of the pilot, it became apparent that some coaches spent more time with programs than others and that their interactions differed with respect to the amount of hands-on involvement with the program. It is possible that these inconsistencies could have influenced the amount of change shown in the results. However, coaching will always vary from centre to centre since effective coaching is dependent upon the needs and personalities of the educators involved in the process. As the literature review indicated, the development of positive relationships, along with modeling and feedback, are important aspects of coaching or mentoring (Abell et al., 2014; Doherty et al., 2015; Kretlow et al., 2011). There will always be inconsistencies in the delivery of coaching which may not negatively impact outcomes. In fact, the qualitative data contained numerous comments indicating that coaches were valuable. Comments such as “The coach was so beneficial” or “the coach made the difference” were common and were made by educators in all programs with coaches. Although it is possible that the differences in coaching strategies may negatively impact outcomes, it is also possible that the differences may help create positive outcomes by meeting the different needs of educators. Perhaps the key is to ensure that those relationships develop and that coaches provide the kind of supports that educators’ value regardless of how it is done. Future research needs to address both the relational piece of coaching in the early learning and care sector and the specific supports individual coaches can provide in order to better understand effective coaching.

5.7.5 Policy Context and Staffing

The need to orient new employees turned out to be an unexpected challenge for most programs. One of the identified study limitations was that during the period of the study the Ontario Ministry of Education was implementing full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-old children, and many educators were leaving the licensed sector to take jobs with school boards.
As a result of this upheaval in the system, many of the programs participating in the project had large turnovers in staffing. These staffing issues meant that centres had to ask new hires to participate in the process, and this request had to be followed up with training on the quality improvement process being used. This factor was clearly beyond the researcher’s control—or the control of the programs—but may or may not be a contributing factor to the lack of statistically significant quantitative results. For example, a new hire requires time to know the children and integrate into a new work environment. This, in turn, could limit the amount of time spent thinking about and implementing quality improvement strategies. On the other hand, educators new to the program may be very interested in quality improvements and may be more objective about the program’s current practices, which, in turn, could result in greater changes. Therefore, one cannot predict what the actual impact was on the findings.

Whenever there was a change in staff, the new staff member was assured that it did not matter whether or not they participated in the study. Although all new staff volunteered to join the study, it is possible that they felt they should participate even if they lacked any real interest in the study. This could have influenced their motivation and commitment to the quality improvement process.

The number of new hires varied from program to program; some programs experienced a turnover rate of 100%, while others had no new hires. This inconsistency in staffing, and the fact that new educators were hired at various times during the process, could have influenced the quantitative outcomes that occurred in the program as well as the qualitative outcomes. If they were hired after the action plan had been decided but were expected to implement it without any opportunity to reflect on the decisions that had been made, they may not have developed the same buy-in to the changes as the educators who participated in the entire project. Because new hires missed the initial training and explanations, they may also have had a more limited understanding of the process than others, which could have affected their commitment to the process and their motivation for implementing. Quality improvement must be a priority if educators are going to make it through the additional work (Ackerman, 2008), or, as Carlisle and Berebitsky (2010) stated, “Professional development programs are not likely to be effective in
changing instruction and student achievement unless the teachers view the program as beneficial” (p. 794).

Despite the fact that staffing changes could have impacted the outcomes of the process, this is a factor that can never be eliminated, and any process will have to implement strategies to try and mitigate its impact. The reason this factor plays such an important role in the current research is simply the scale of the staff turnovers. As one supervisor said, “So it was challenging for us because there was no consistency. It was just a weird time for us because we don’t have a high turnover. The turnover is really low, the staff that left had been here nine years or more, and this was our first foray into that. That consistency [in staff] was lacking on our part”. This high turnover may also help account for the low number of post-pilot survey responses. If the new educators had not been engaged in most of the process, they may not have been motivated to complete the surveys, or may have thought that they did not have the knowledge to answer the questions.

Since staff turnover required training of the new employees on the process, another limitation was introduced into the study. The original training was completed by me, the project coordinator, and another member of the local committee, while the training of new hires varied from centre to centre. Some new staff were trained by the director of the centre, while others were trained by coaches working with the centre. Regardless of how knowledgeable the new trainer was, teaching variations would have occurred that could have resulted in different interpretations of the process and the role of coaches.

These inconsistencies in understanding also affected educators from the beginning of the study. The initial training consisted of a one-day workshop to identify the expectations of the quality improvement process and to help the educators understand how to complete the various steps required in the process. Because there was very limited funding for the workshop, most centres could not send all of their participating educators to it. One or two people from each centre attended, and then they returned to their programs to explain it to the team. During the interviews, some educators indicated that explaining the process to others was difficult for them. If messages relayed to other team members differed from what was explained in the original
workshop—and led to different understandings of how to complete the process—then the quality improvement outcomes may have been affected. For example: when training additional staff, educators could have simplified the process which could result in fewer and simpler changes—leading to no statistically significant findings for the quantitative data.

Changes in educators’ understanding of the process could also have affected the qualitative results. If educators had different expectations of the quality improvement process, it might affect their perceptions of the process and the outcomes they were working towards. In order to mitigate this in future studies, researchers should provide trainer/s who would be responsible for ensuring all participants had a solid knowledge of the process. Since consistency is required between both the initial and in-process training, further funding is likely to be required.

5.7.6 Survey Issues

A different type of limitation came from the post-pilot survey. The use of a Likert rating scale as part of the post-pilot survey made it easy for respondents to complete the questionnaire but resulted in questions that did not provide much detail regarding the topic being rated. For example, question 17 asked educators to rate how useful they found the support offered by the coach in developing their action plan. While this type of question allowed the educators to indicate “level of usefulness”, it did not allow for details that would tell what specific supports educators found useful. Although the rating system was augmented with some very open-ended questions, the additional comments did not necessarily provide these details. If a Likert rating scale was to be used in future research, the survey should include some open-ended questions designed to solicit more specific information regarding types of supports coaches provide.

An additional issue was the inconsistency in response rates. In some programs all educators responded while in other programs none of the educators completed the survey. In order to make generalizations regarding the survey data a more representative response rate is better.

5.7.7 Interview Sampling
The interviews conducted as part of the study presented their own limitations. There is literature indicating that data saturation can occur with as little as 12 interviews; some researchers indicate that strong themes may require as few as six (Guest et al., 2006, Bowen, 2008). However, other experts recommend larger sample sizes (Marshall, et al.; 2013). In this study the total number of educators involved in interviews were 20, with the total number of interviews being 13. Seven of these interviews were with educators from the treatment group with coaches, and six of the interviews were with educators from the treatment group with no coaches.

Despite the small number of interviews, there is some research indicating that these numbers could be sufficient to meet the criteria for data saturation, and the results would seem to support this. In their review of the literature, Marshall et al. (2013) indicated that research using grounded theory should generally contain 20-30 interviews in order to ensure data saturation. They also stated, “we think the maximum should be where additional interviews fail to produce substantial new insight” (p. 20). While the purpose of the qualitative data in the current study was not to develop a grounded theory, the review provides additional support for the concept of the saturation point having been met in the interviews I conducted. In the current study, the key ideas and insights from the 13 interviews began to show similarities very quickly, with comparable thoughts being emphasized throughout the interviews.

Perhaps a greater study limitation is linked to who was interviewed. Not all educators who participated in the process were interviewed. This means I must question whether the results would have been the same if I had been able to interview everyone. The enthusiasm expressed by the interviewees may have been countered by other educators. To mitigate this limitation, one would have to include exit interviews for all participants of the project, but even with this strategy, educators would still have the right to refuse the interview. The result is that, from an ethical standpoint, one can never truly eliminate this problem. Despite the inability to eliminate the problem, exit interviews with educators leaving part-way through the process could provide additional insight into what educators thought of the process and coaching up to that point.

Even when educators were present at the end of the pilot, not all of them participated in an interview session. The educators were interviewed in the staff room or director’s office to avoid
disrupting the children’s program, and I lacked the funds to pay for supply educators. As a result, it was often difficult for all participating educators to join in the interview session, and most programs requested that the interviews be conducted during a lunch break. This, in turn, meant that the educators usually opted to be interviewed together. Because most of the interviews were conducted with several educators, it is possible that one interviewee could influence what other interviewees said. This could result in one educator dominating the conversation or introducing most or all of the ideas regarding a topic. At the same time, the other educator/s might simply elaborate on or agree with the other educator but contribute few original thoughts. Although there were times in most interviews when one person would simply agree with the person who first commented on a topic, other educators would frequently elaborate on the topic (indicating that they saw it slightly differently) or completely disagree with the assessment made by the first educator. In only one interview session did it appear that most of the ideas originated from the same person while the other individual repeatedly agreed with those ideas.

While I cannot deny that group interviews are a limitation, the way the interviewees responded and interacted with each other indicates that this was a minor limitation of the study. Further support for this conclusion appears to come from the centre where the educators were interviewed separately. Although separate interviews occurred, the comments from each of the three interviews were similar to each other and, in turn, were similar to comments made by educators in the group interviews. Despite the easy rapport apparent in the group interviews and the similar content in both group and individual interviews, there is still the possibility of educators influencing each other’s answers both overtly and covertly. In future research, one could further mitigate this limitation by obtaining funding to provide supply educators while interviewing participants. This is the only way one could expect to complete individual interviews in licensed early learning programs.

In most of the group interviews, one of the interviewees was the supervisor, and it’s possible that this could also have affected what the other educator/s said. As mentioned previously, this did not appear to seriously affect the outcomes, since in the interview sessions educators were willing to disagree with comments made by the supervisor. As well, almost all the supervisors interviewed spend some of their time working in the classroom alongside the educators, therefore
the hierarchical nature of supervisors and employees (found in many organizations) is less pronounced in these programs. During the interviews, the rapport between the interviewees, and their willingness to both agree and disagree with each other, appeared to indicate that this limitation had minimal impact on the interview findings.

Perhaps a bigger issue was the timing of the interviews. The interviews took place six months after the pilot was completed. This was done in order to determine if educators continued to work on quality improvements after the initial process had been completed and coaches were no longer available to support them. As mentioned earlier, during this time period there continued to be high staff turnover due to the implementation of full-day kindergarten. By the time of the interviews, many participants were no longer available. Could it be that less satisfied educators would have moved to the school board? If so, their interviews might have been more negative than the ones that were conducted, and the results would have been different. Even for educators remaining in the program, a break of that length could make it harder to remember specific challenges or benefits associated with the process or coaches. As a result, the interviewees may have focused on the larger challenges or benefits (e.g., time), since these would be easier to remember over an extended period of time.

5.7.8 Researcher Influence

My presence as the interviewer could also have influenced the participants’ answers. I have been a professor and the coordinator of the local college’s early childhood education program for more than twenty years and am known in the community. It is possible that the educators gave me the answers they thought I wanted to hear. However, if the interviewee was simply providing information they thought I wanted, one would not expect to hear high levels of enthusiasm and excitement in their voices. Although transcripts do not adequately bring in this element of an interview, on the recordings the interviewees expressed a level of excitement that would seem to indicate that their opinions—both positive and negative—were not unduly influenced by the background of the person interviewing them. Despite some evidence that the opinions expressed were genuine, research that utilized an interviewer unknown to the educators may not have resulted in the same findings. Future research should address this limitation.
Additional limitations could have been created due to researcher bias. I have been a member of the Quality Improvement Committee (formerly the Accreditation Committee) since it was established. I was involved in the initial investigation of available tools and the development and implementation of the quality improvement strategy and continue to be involved with the ongoing changes to the process; therefore, I may have had a vested interest in the success of the project.

The analysis of the data could have been influenced by my own perceptions of program quality improvements, the improvement process used, and the value of coaching. To help counteract possible biases when analyzing interviews and identifying emergent themes, rich detailed quotes are included so that the reader can ‘hear’ the interviewees and draw their own conclusions regarding the themes I drew from the statements.

When coding interview data from the interviews, having more than one person involved in the analysis can allow for multiple perspectives that can help reduce bias and ensure the codes and the emerging themes reflect the key ideas from the data. Because this research was a doctoral study, I was the sole analyst. My single perspective and possible biases add another limitation to the study. This is not a bias I could eliminate.

5.8 Conclusions

Educators, researchers, and policy makers know that the learning environments educators provide, and the types of interactions they have with children and families are crucial and affect children’s learning and development. While recognizing that quality programs can differ from community to community, research has provided some indicators of quality that should be present in any program for young children (Friendly et al., 2006; Ishimine, Taylor, & Bennett, 2010; Mathers et al., 2012).

In order to achieve program quality improvement, processes have been put into place in numerous jurisdictions, and many of these utilize coaches. While there is research indicating that coaching can help improve quality in preschool programs (Algozzine et al., 2011; Zan and
Donegan-Ritter, 2014), fewer research studies have examined whether coaching is necessary if a structured quality improvement process is in place. As the literature review indicated, there are also some mixed results regarding the usefulness of coaching to improve quality (Ackerman, 2008; Boller et al., 2015).

Because the utilization of coaches creates an additional cost for a quality improvement process, it is important to determine if coaching provides additional benefits to educators undertaking the process. Does coaching result in greater improvements than the process without coaching? Do coaches influence educators’ perceptions of the process in a positive way? What makes a coach effective as a supporter of quality change? Before spending money on a costly coaching program, research should address questions such as these. If the research indicates that the utilization of coaches will benefit educators and their programs, then the money will be well spent.

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine the effectiveness of a quality improvement process and the ability of coaches to facilitate the process. As discussed earlier, there were various limitations to this study, and while understanding these limitations will benefit further research, there are a number of interesting (albeit conflicting) findings regarding the research questions.

The quantitative data failed to support the overarching research question, “Will a structured quality improvement process that includes coaching result in improvements to program quality and, if so, will these improvements be greater than those that might occur in programs with the structured process alone and/or programs without any structured process?” The quantitative data indicated that programs without coaches actually made more changes to program quality than programs with coaches. On the other hand, the qualitative data indicated that educators thought positive changes had occurred as a result of engaging in a quality improvement process and utilizing the support of coaches. Were the changes too small to be reflected in the ECERS-R evaluations? Were the changes ones that cannot be effectively evaluated using the ECERS-R? Or was it the sample size that resulted in the contradictions?
Contradictions also occurred within the quantitative data itself. The overall changes to mean scores indicated that programs that engaged in a structured quality improvement process without coaches showed the most improvement, but the list of the five programs with the most change (even though some changes were very small) was dominated by programs with coaches. What is happening that the results appear to be in conflict with one another?

Incongruities exist regarding research sub-questions as well. Although educators with coaches indicated that coaches can help clarify and provide insight regarding the process, educators without coaches indicated that the process was easier than those with coaches. What might explain these differences? Is it because educators with coaches had a better understanding of what the process actually required? Is it because the sample size is too small to get accurate results? Was something happening with coaches that led to a different understanding of “easy”?

One research sub-question where the findings did not tend to present inconsistencies was the educators’ perceptions regarding the usefulness of coaches. The results from both the post-pilot survey and the interviews clearly indicated that educators found coaches useful when completing the process. While the survey indicated that coaches were useful during different aspects of the quality improvement process, the interviews identified different ways coaches were useful. Four themes emerged from interviews with educators in both treatment groups. They were: 1) coaches provide resources, 2) coaches provide clarity/insight, 3) coaches act as mediators/facilitators, and 4) coaches help process completion. The strength of these themes indicate support for the inclusion of coaching as part of a quality improvement process and suggests that governments and agencies provide the supports necessary to include coaches. In addition, the themes also indicate that agencies should ensure that coaches have the skills necessary to provide the appropriate supports.

The research sub-question addressing the important elements of a quality improvement process also showed very consistent responses. The results for this question came from the interviews. Both a need for time and the importance of reflective practice were repeatedly identified as important aspects of the process. The frequency of these responses, along with the emphasis interviewees placed on them, indicates that when quality improvement processes are put into
place, these elements should be considered. While “reflective practice” has been identified in other research (Algozzine et al, 2011; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015), time has not been clearly identified as an important element of a quality improvement process. Due to the importance participants in the current study placed on the need for time, governments and agencies need to ensure that educators have time to implement all aspects of a quality improvement process and should provide funding where necessary. In addition, future studies should look at time in relation to a quality improvement process. Finally, the research provided results that produced inconsistent messages regarding the final research sub-question. While educators were able to identify a number of varied outcomes which should have been linked to program quality improvements, the results from the ECERS-R evaluations told a different story. Why is there a disconnect between the educators’ perceptions and the results of the quality assessments? Is this due to the sample size or something else?

The contradictions between different findings need to be studied more closely. The results provide a starting point for many discussions rather than providing clear answers to questions regarding the effectiveness of both the process and coaches. As educators strive to provide quality programs for children, they need to know that there are effective strategies to help them. They need to know if their efforts can be enhanced with the support of coaches and/or a process to help guide them—this requires more research.

While the study did provide some implications for governments and early learning agencies (e.g., the need to provide time to engage in process), the need for additional research is evident. Certainly, a larger quantitative study is needed to increase the likelihood of significant results and to better understand if coaches clearly help bring about quality improvements. In such a study, more than one tool needs to be used to help ensure different types of quality improvements are equally assessed. In addition, it is important to include qualitative research to answer questions a quantitative study can not effectively address -- questions that focus on issues such as: the behaviours coaches engage in that might support or hinder quality improvement, the skills coaches need to help educators develop, the role of coaches in motivating educators to complete the process, or the link between educators’ perceptions and real changes to quality.
In conclusion, it has been documented that the social and economic return on the investment of early childhood education is enormous—if the programming for the early years is of the highest quality. Choosing best measures, determining how best to hire and train educators, and how to effectively implement continuous quality improvement are all keys to the return on this investment. It is in this context that my research aspired to determine the effects of using coaching as part of this process. While it is difficult to control all of the key variables, the findings from this study point to the importance of further research. By examining both the study’s results and limitations, further multifaceted research can better address the varied and complex interactions present in studying coaching as a method to support quality improvements in early learning and care programs.
References


Arnett, J. (1986). Caregivers in day care centers: Does training matter?


doi:10.1177/0192636515576040


Appendix A: Research Project Request for Participation

Date:

To: Licensed Early Learning and Care Centres

From: Ontario Eastern Region Accreditation Steering Committee

Re: Request for Participation

We are asking for licensed child care centres with preschool programs to volunteer to participate in a pilot project regarding the implementation of the full accreditation process. Our goal is to determine the effectiveness of the entire accreditation process as a method of helping centres continue to improve the quality of the programs they provided to young children.

We are looking for a total of 30 centres to participate in this pilot project. If you agree to participate you will be randomly assigned to one of the following groups:

A) Control centres (10 centres)
   a. These centres will continue their current practices regarding quality improvements

B) Experimental group 1 (10 centres)
   a. These centres will be provided with training on how to use the revised *Quality Benefits Children* manual’s evaluation process, the action plan development, and the implementation of action plan goals. They will be expected to use the process and will have a third party assess the program at the end of 9 months.

C) Experimental group 2 (10 centres)
   a. These centres will have the same expectations as experimental group 1 and will also have ongoing involvement with a coach. The role of the coach will be to provide guidance and support to the educators during all aspects of the process.

All centres will be assessed using ECERS-R at the beginning of the project, 9 months later, and again in 15 months to see what changes have occurred.

All information regarding individual centres that is obtained during the research will remain confidential.

Overall general results will be shared at the end of the study with all the participants.
If you’re interested in participating or have any questions please contact:

Leslie Kopf-Johnson

Email: kopfjol@algonquincolllege.com

Phone: (613) 727-4723 ext. 5230

We look forward to hearing from you.
Appendix B: Informed Consent Documents

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document (Educator)

Date: May 2012

Study Name: The Effectiveness of Coaching as Part of a Program Quality Improvement Process

Researchers: Leslie Kopf-Johnson, coordinator of Algonquin College Early Childhood Education Program and PhD student OISE/U of T

1385 Woodroffe Ave
Ottawa, ON K2G 1V8
Phone: (613) 727-4723 ext. 5230

Hello,

I’d like to take the opportunity to thank you for your willingness to participate in the pilot project using the Accreditation Benefits Children manual along with third part validators and coaches. In the request for centre participation the goals and structure of the pilot project were outlined, however I would like you to review the process before signing the consent to participate.

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of the research is to determine if the use of coaches as part of a structured early learning program improvement process will result in significant improvements to program quality.

The questions I will address are:
Does the use of coaches as part of a program improvement strategy result in significant improvements to program quality?

Does a program improvement strategy that includes coaching result in greater improvements to program quality than the strategy without coaching?

Does the use of coaching results in sustained improvements?

Are there crucial elements in coaching that need to be included to support positive outcomes?

Do educators who participate in a process that includes a coach perceive the process to be easier than those who participate in the process without the support of a coach?

What other factors might influence the success of coaching?

By addressing the above questions the study may provide knowledge that can help municipalities in the Ottawa region shape future strategies for improving early learning programs and determine how to more effectively spend funding.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do as a Participant in the Research**

If you agree to participate your centre will be randomly assigned to one of the following groups:

A) Control group (group A) (10 centres)
   You will continue your current practices regarding quality improvements

B) Experimental group without coaches (group B) (10 centres)
   You will be provided with training on how to use the revised *Accreditation Benefits Children* manual’s evaluation process, the action plan development, and the implementation of action plan goals.

C) Experimental group with coaches (group C) (10 centres)
   The expectations for you are the same as those for experimental group B, but you will also have ongoing support from a coach.
At the beginning of the pilot your classroom will be assessed using ECERS-R. It will be assessed again at, approximately, 10 months and 16 months in order to determine if quality improvements have occurred. The two experimental groups will also have third party validators use the *Accreditation Benefits Children* manual to do a separate assessment on the program at, approximately, 10 months to determine if the manual assessment findings are similar to those of the ECERS-R.

As part of the project you will be asked to complete a total of three surveys which will focus on your perceptions of the project. One of the surveys will be completed at the start of the study; one will be completed at the end of 10 months and one at the end of 16 months. Each survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

In addition to the surveys, those of you who teach in a centre that’s assigned to either experimental group B or C will need to attend a workshop on the quality improvement process, and work with members of your team to complete the program evaluation manual, set an action plan, and implement the plan.

If you teach in a centre that has a coach assigned to it (experimental group C), you will have visits from the coach every other week for the first four weeks and then once per month until the centre has been evaluated by the third party validator. In addition to the coach initiated visits, you, your co-participants or the coach can initiate additional interactions, up to a maximum of 20 hours. These visits are designed to help you with the evaluations, setting your action plan and implementing the plan.

**Risks and Discomforts**

We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.
Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You

The Ontario Eastern region is committed to implementing a process to help educators continue to improve the quality of the programs they offer children. The pilot project will help determine if the locally developed process which incorporates the use of coaches supports program quality improvements. This in turn will provide knowledge that can help the local municipalities shape future strategies for improving early learning programs and determine how to more effectively spend funding. As an educator working in an early learning program it’s important to know that the processes being used by the municipality will support your efforts to provide quality programs for young children.

Confidentiality

All information you provide during the course of the study and the results from the ECERS evaluations and the accreditation evaluation will remain confidential and kept in a secure location. Overall general results from the study (e.g. individuals in centres with coaches found it easier to go through the process than individuals in centres without coaches) will be shared at the end of the study with all the participants and will be part my PhD dissertation. Upon completion of the study, your centre may request and receive the results of the ECERS-R and/or the accreditation assessment for your individual program.

Withdrawal from the Study

If you agree to participate in the project and you need to withdraw from the study part way through, you have the right to do so. However, the data collected will remain with the study; since it won’t be linked directly to you (e.g. no names will be used).
Questions about the Research

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact I’s supervisor, Dr. Charles Pascal either by telephone at (416) xxxxxx or by e-mail: charles.pascal@utoronto.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Ethics Review Board at the University of Toronto and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273.

Thanks,

Leslie Kopf-Johnson

Email: kopfjol@algonquincollege.com

Phone: (613) 727-4723 ext. 5230

Date: __________

I _____________________________________ have read the above information and agree to participate in the study.

Signature:________________________________________
Appendix B: Informed Consent Document (Supervisor)

Date: May 2012

Study Name: The Effectiveness of Coaching as Part of a Program Quality Improvement Process

Researchers: Leslie Kopf-Johnson, coordinator of Algonquin College Early Childhood Education Program and PhD student OISE/U of T
1385 Woodroffe Ave
Ottawa, ON K2G 1V8
Phone: (613) 727-4723 ext. 5230

Hello,

I’d like to take the opportunity to thank you for your willingness to participate in the pilot project using the Accreditation Benefits Children manual along with third part validators and coaches. In the request for centre participation the goals and structure of the pilot project were outlined, however I would like you to review the process before signing the consent to participate.

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of the research is to determine if the use of coaches as part of a structured early learning program improvement process will result in significant improvements to program quality. The questions I will address are:
Does the use of coaches as part of a program improvement strategy result in significant improvements to program quality?
Does a program improvement strategy that includes coaching result in greater improvements to program quality than the strategy without coaching?
Does the use of coaching results in sustained improvements?
Are there crucial elements in coaching that need to be included to support positive outcomes?
Do educators who participate in a process that includes a coach perceive the process to be easier than those who participate in the process without the support of a coach?
What other factors might influence the success of coaching?

By addressing the above questions the study may provide knowledge that can help municipalities in the Ottawa region shape future strategies for improving early learning programs and determine how to more effectively spend funding.

What You Will Be Asked to Do as a Participant in the Research

If you agree to participate your centre will be randomly assigned to one of the following groups:

A) Control group (group A) (10 centres)
a. You will continue your current practices regarding quality improvements

B) Experimental group without coaches (group B) (10 centres)
a. You will be provided with training on how to use the revised Accreditation Benefits Children manual’s evaluation process, the action plan development, and the implementation of action plan goals.

C) Experimental group with coaches (group C) (10 centres)
a. The expectations for you are the same as those for experimental group B, but you will also have ongoing support from a coach.

At the beginning of the pilot the participating preschool classroom in your centre along with administrative processes will be assessed using ECERS-R. It will be assessed again at, approximately, 10
months and 16 months in order to determine if quality improvements have occurred. The two experimental groups will also have third party validators use the *Accreditation Benefits Children* manual to do a separate assessment on the program at, approximately 10 months to determine if the accreditation manual’s assessment provides results similar to those of the ECERS-R.

As part of the project you will be asked to complete a total of three surveys which will focus on your perceptions of the process. One of the surveys will be completed at the start of the study; one will be completed at the end of 10 months and one at the end of 16 months. Each survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

In addition to the surveys, if your centre is assigned to either experimental group B or C you will need to attend a workshop on the quality improvement process, and work with members of your team to complete the program evaluation manual, set an action plan, and implement the plan.

If you supervise a centre that has a coach assigned to it (experimental group C), you will have visits from the coach every other week for the first four weeks and then once per month until the centre has been evaluated by the third party validator. In addition to the coach initiated visits, you, your co-participants, or the coach can initiate additional interactions, up to a maximum of 20 hours. These visits are designed to help you with the evaluations, setting your action plan and implementing the plan.

**Risks and Discomforts**

We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.
Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You

The Ontario Eastern region is committed to implementing a process to help educators continue to improve the quality of the programs they offer children. The pilot project will help determine if the locally developed process which incorporates the use of coaches supports program quality improvements. This in turn will provide knowledge that can help the local municipalities shape future strategies for improving early learning programs and determine how to more effectively spend funding. As an educator working in an early learning program it’s important to know that the processes being used by the municipality will support your efforts to provide quality programs for young children.

Confidentiality

All information you provide during the course of the study and the results from the ECERS evaluations and the accreditation evaluation will remain confidential and kept in a secure location. Overall general results from the study (e.g. individuals in centres with coaches found it easier to go through the process than individuals in centres without coaches) will be shared at the end of the study with all the participants and will be part my PhD dissertation. Upon completion of the study, your centre may request and receive the results of the ECERS-R or the accreditation assessment for your individual program.

Withdrawal from the Study

If you agree to participate in the project and you need to withdraw from the study part way through, you have the right to do so. However, the data collected will remain with the study; since it won’t be linked directly to you (e.g. no names will be used).
Questions about the Research

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact I’s supervisor, Dr. Charles Pascal either by telephone at (416) xxxxxx or by e-mail:
charles.pascal@utoronto.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Ethics Review Board at the University of Toronto and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273.

If you have questions concerning your rights as a participant, you can contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, or myself at the number below.

Thanks,

Leslie Kopf-Johnson

Email: kopfjol@algonquincollege.com

Phone: (613) 727-4723 ext. 5230

Date: ____________

I ________________________________ have read the above information and agree to participate in the study.

Signature:________________________________________
Appendix B: Informed Consent Document (Coaches)

Date: May 2012

Study Name: The Effectiveness of Coaching as Part of a Program Quality Improvement Process

Researchers: Leslie Kopf-Johnson, coordinator of Algonquin College Early Childhood Education Program and PhD student OISE/U of T

1385 Woodroffe Ave
Ottawa, ON K2G 1V8
Phone: (613) 727-4723 ext. 5230

Hello,

I’d like to take the opportunity to thank you for your willingness to participate in the pilot project using the Accreditation Benefits Children manual along with third part validators and coaches. Before signing the consent to participate, please review the purpose of the study and your role in it.

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of the research is to determine if the use of coaches as part of a structured early learning program improvement process will result in significant improvements to program quality. The questions I will address are:
Does the use of coaches as part of a program improvement strategy result in significant improvements to program quality?

Does a program improvement strategy that includes coaching result in greater improvements to program quality than the strategy without coaching?

Does the use of coaching result in sustained improvements?

Are there crucial elements in coaching that need to be included to support positive outcomes?

Do educators who participate in a process that includes a coach perceive the process to be easier than those who participate in the process without the support of a coach?

What other factors might influence the success of coaching?

By addressing the above questions the study may provide knowledge that can help municipalities in the Ottawa region shape future strategies for improving early learning programs and determine how to more effectively spend funding.

What You Will Be Asked to Do as a Participant in the Research

If you agree to participate you will be required to attend a coaches’ training session after which you will be assigned to five participating centres. You will work with the research participants in the centre (preschool teachers, supervisor/s) during the 10 months of the initial study. During this time you will provide them with various types of supports as they move through the program evaluation process, set goals for their program and work on implementing those goals. The supports you provide may include but are not limited to the following:

Conducting observations and providing feedback
Facilitating discussions
Facilitating the creation of solutions to challenges or problems
Providing explanations
Modeling quality practices
Providing resources or information on resources

Each of the five centres will be visited every other week for the first four weeks and then once per month until the centre has been evaluated by the third party validator (end of 10 months). In addition to the visits you initiate with each centre, you or the centre participants can initiate additional interactions up to a maximum of 20 hours. After each visit or interaction you will be required to complete a coach’s log using the template provided. The logs for each centre will be kept in separate and secure files to ensure confidentiality of the information. At the completion of the initial study the files will be turned over to I for analysis.

**Risks and Discomforts**

We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You**

The Ontario Eastern region is committed to implementing a process to help educators continue to improve the quality of the programs they offer children. The pilot project will help determine if the locally developed process which incorporates the use of coaches supports program quality improvements. This in turn will provide knowledge that can help the local municipalities shape future strategies for
improving early learning programs and determine how to more effectively spend funding. As an individual working with early learning programs, it's important to know that the processes being used by the municipality will support your efforts to provide quality programs for young children.

**Confidentiality**

All information you provide during the course of the study will remain confidential and kept in a secure location. Overall general results from the study (e.g. individuals in centres with coaches found it easier to go through the process than individuals in centres without coaches) will be shared at the end of the study with all the participants and will be part my PhD dissertation.

**Withdrawal from the Study**

If you agree to participate in the project, and you need to withdraw from the study part way through, you have the right to do so. However, the data collected will remain with the study.

**Questions about the Research**

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact I’s supervisor, Dr. Charles Pascal either by telephone at (416) xxxxxx or by e-mail: charles.pascal@utoronto.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Ethics Review Board at the University of Toronto and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273.

Thanks,
Leslie Kopf-Johnson

Email: kopfjol@algonquincollege.com

Phone: (613) 727-4723 ext. 5230

__________________________________________________________

Date: __________

I __________________________________ have read the above information and agree to participate in the study.

Signature:________________________________________
Appendix C: Accreditation Benefits Children

*Accreditation Benefits Children* was developed by Early Childhood Education professionals in Ottawa to be used by licensed early learning and care professionals as part of a quality improvement process. Because the document is 130 pages, the following URL provides access to the electronic version of the manual.

[www.qualitybenefitschildren.com](http://www.qualitybenefitschildren.com)

Educators in this study used the process outlined in this manual as they engaged in the quality improvement process. Coaches were very familiar with both the process outlined and the quality indicators identified in the manual.

The role of the coaches was to support the educators as they went through the process outlined in the manual. They ensured that educators observed the program, reflected on their observations, and met with other educators to discuss findings, etc. The coaches helped facilitate these discussions and added their insights on the topic.

Coaches were also required to participate in meetings where educators identified goals and determined their action plan. It was the responsibility of the coach to support their discussion and ensure that more difficult aspects of change as well as easy aspects were addressed. Some, but not all coaches, worked directly with the educators to create the environmental changes outlined in the educators’ action plan for their program. All coaches provided feedback regarding the changes educators had made.
Appendix D: Post-pilot Survey

Perceptions Regarding Program Quality Improvement Processes

The following survey is designed to gather information regarding your perceptions of the process that you were involved in. The request for the centre code is to help us understand how your perceptions link to other outcomes from the pilot project.

The following information needs to be completed by all participants.

Circle the category below that applies to the study group your program was in:

A. Control group
B. Program self-study and action plan with a third party validation
C. Program self-study and action plan with a coach and third party validation

Indicate the code for your centre: ______________

What have the educators in your program done over the past 6 months that you believe has resulted in improvements to the quality of the educational program provided?

Circle the answer that best describes for your center, who took on the lead role in facilitating and monitoring positive changes to the program? If none of them apply circle ‘Other’ and indicate why.

The supervisor/director
The head educator or the educator with the most seniority in the program.
Another educator in the program
Other:

What resources would help you implement changes to improve quality?
The following questions are to be answered only by educators who circled B or C in question 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How effective was the workshop training regarding the use of the program self-evaluation manual to assess your program?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Not at all effective</td>
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<th>How effective was the workshop training regarding the development and implementation of action plans?</th>
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<td>Not at all effective</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<table>
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<th>How useful was the manual in helping you identify your program strengths?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all useful</td>
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<tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>How useful was the manual for helping you determine which aspects of the program to improve?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all useful</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>How easy was it to determine your program goals?</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Not at all easy</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>How easy was it to develop an action plan for implementing changes?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>How easy was it to begin implementing the action plan you developed?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How easy was it to stay motivated to complete the action plan?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How successful do you think you were at improving the quality of your program?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In your opinion what would you have done differently?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you circled B in question number 1 go to survey question number 21.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you circled C in question number 1 go to survey question number 16.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How useful did you find the support offered by the coach during the program self-evaluation?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How useful did you find the support offered by the coach in developing your action plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How useful did you find the support offered by the coach during the implementation of the action plan?</td>
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</table>
The coaches met with the program a minimum of every other week. How important was this?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Any additional comments about the role of the coach?

The following questions are to be answered by educators who circled answer B or C in question #1.

What types of additional support would you have benefitted from as you went through the process?

What kind of support did you receive that you found you didn’t require?

Thanks for completing this survey, we’ll share the findings with you at the end of the research project.
Appendix E: Initial Survey

Thoughts on Participating in the Pilot Project on a Process to Facilitate Program Quality Improvements

Centre code: ____________

Thoughts on Participating in the Pilot Project on A Process to Facilitate Program Quality Improvements

This survey is designed to gather information regarding your thoughts about your program’s participation in the pilot project, and if you think there are any benefits or drawbacks to participating in the program. All information you provide will remain confidential and will not be linked back to you.

How did you come to be involved in the pilot project? (e.g. you heard about it and volunteered; you were told by your supervisor that you were participating)

What are your thoughts about this project?

What do you think are the potential benefits (if any) of participating in this project?

What do think are the potential drawbacks (if any) of participating in the project?

What do you think quality consists of in a full-day preschool program?

What do you do in your program to address/enhance quality?
On a scale of one to five how would you rate the current quality in your program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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Appendix F: Final Survey

Survey on Ongoing Quality Improvements

Survey on Ongoing Program Quality Improvements

The following survey is designed to gather information regarding your perceptions of what your centre has done during the past 6 months to improve the quality of the preschool program.

Please answer the following questions. All information will remain confidential.

Circle the category below that applies to the group your program was in:

A. Control group
B. Program self-study and action plan with a third party validation
C. Program self-study and action plan with a coach and third party validation

Indicate the code for your centre: ________________

1. Circle the answer that best describes for your center, who took on the lead role in facilitating and monitoring positive changes to the program or the last 6 months? If none of them apply circle ‘Other’ and indicate why.

The supervisor/director
The head educator or the educator with the most seniority in the program.
Another educator in the program
Other:

2. What have the educators in your program done over the past 6 months that you believe has resulted in improvements to the quality of the educational program provided? If you’ve identified that no improvements occurred explain why?
3. What resources have you been able to access during the past 6 months that have been useful for helping to create improvements in quality? If you accessed any resources please indicate how you initially learned of them.

4. Which resource was most effective? Why?

5. What types of additional support would you have benefitted from? Why?

6. Reflecting on the pilot, what was the most useful aspect of the process?

7. Reflecting on the pilot, what was the most difficult aspect of the process?

8. Reflecting on the pilot, what would you have done changed?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey, we will provide you with a general summary of the results of the second phase of the project.