Systems Coaching: A Qualitative Investigation of RtI Coaches’ Experiences

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Participant Learning Outcomes

After attending this session, participants will:

1. Gain a deeper understanding of the roles, responsibilities, knowledge, and skills required of RtI and systems coaches
2. Identify facilitators and barriers to successful RtI implementation with fidelity
3. Demonstrate understanding of strategies used to effectively support stakeholders during the RtI implementation process

http://www.floridartl.usf.edu/resources/presentations/index.html
Advanced Organizer

• Introduction
  – Coaching and Consultation in the Literature
  – Coaching for Change
  – Purpose of the Study

• Method
  – Participants and Sampling Procedures
  – Research Design
  – Research Team
  – Interview Protocol and Procedures
  – Data Analysis
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• Discussion
  – Explanation of Findings
  – Implications
    • Research
    • Practice
  – Limitations

• Q & A
Introduction

• Response to Intervention (Batsche et al., 2005; Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009)
  – Professional learning (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Learning Forward, 2011)
  – Coaching & school-based consultation (Erchul, 2015, Killion & Harrison, 2006)

• Coaching and Consultation in the Literature
  – Knowledge, skills, and attributes of coaches
  – Roles and responsibilities
  – Factors that impact coaching performance
  – Support for coaches and coaching practice
Coaches’ Knowledge, Skills, & Attributes Related to Effectiveness
(Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Knight, 2009; Marsh et al., 2008)

• Significant expertise in the area for which they are coaching (e.g., literacy, behavior, school improvement, RtI practices and adult learning processes) (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; King et al., 2004; Poglinco et al., 2003; West & Stab, 2003)

• Interpersonal attributes such as approachability, supportiveness, communication skills, flexibly, & strong relationship-building skills (Brown et al., 2006; Ertmer et al., 2005; Polinco et al., 2003; King et al., 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003)

• Data-related knowledge and skills, such as data analysis, problem-solving, and data management methods (Killion & Harrison, 2006; King et al., 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Shanklin, 2006)

• Leadership and team facilitation skills (Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Killion & Harrison, 2006)

• Beliefs and attitudes attuned to their work (Killion & Harrison, 2006)
Coaches’ Roles & Responsibilities
(Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Knight, 2009; Marsh et al., 2008)

• Modeling EBPs, observing educators implementing new skills, and providing feedback for ongoing improvement (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Killion & Harrison, 2006)
• Plan and implement professional learning activities (Learning Forward, 2011)
• Consult with principals and teachers (Costa & Garmston, 2002)
• Facilitate selection and implementation of curricular programs and instructional methods (Poglinco et al., 2003)
• Lead professional learning communities and study groups (Learning Forward, 2011; Walpole & McKenna, 2004)
• Analyze student data and facilitate instructional adjustments and intervention plans (Brown et al., 2006)
• Provide current evidence-based resources (Killion & Harrison, 2006)
• Facilitate problem-solving and MTSS implementation activities (Killion & Harrison, 2006; March, Castillo, Batsche, & Kincaid, 2016)
• Collaborate with school and district administrators on leadership tasks (Deussen et al., 2007; Killion & Harrison, 2006)
• Serve as liaisons between educators and administrators (Feger, Woleck, & Hickman)
Coaches’ Roles & Responsibilities, cont
(Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015; Knight, 2009; Marsh et al., 2008)

So, what does this mean?

• Coaching roles are complex, multifaceted, and dependent upon school context (Neufeld & Roper; 2003; Wong & Nicotera, 2006)

• Coaches often fulfill multiple roles simultaneously based on the needs of their schools (Neufeld & Roper, 2003)

• The variability of the culture, context, initiatives of priority, and climate at their sites necessitate differing roles across locations (Kowal & Steiner, 2007; Sims, March, Barrett, & Knotek, 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2006)
Factors that Impact Coaching Performance

**Administrator/Educator Buy-In**

- Support of principals and district administrators is necessary to enable positive coaching processes (Polinco et al., 2003; Trubowitz, 2004), and enhances educator buy-in and support for coaching practices (Batsche et al., 2005; O’Conner & Freeman, 2012)

- Establishing administrator and teacher trust and buy-in for coaching can be difficult and time consuming (Brown et al., 2006; Poglinco et al., 2003)

- Coaches report ongoing communication that fosters positive relationships with principals (Taylor, Moxley, Chanter, & Doulware) as well as informal conversations with staff are integral to gaining trust, buy-in, and support (Tung & Feldman, 2001)

- Appropriating adequate time for coaching activities is a major facilitator of effective outcomes (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Marsh et al., 2008)

**Continuity over Time**

- Frequent coach turnover and coaching assignments can undermine and fragment coaching results (McCombs & Marsh, 2009; Marsh et al., 2008)

- Coaching continuity has been found to positively relate to problem-solving implementation levels in an RtI model (March, Castillo, Batsche, & Kincaid, 2016)
Support for Coaches and Coaching Practices

Given the vast array of skills and competencies required of school-based coaches, the need for ongoing professional development for coaches is crucial (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Killion & Harrison, 2009). Recommendations include:

• Clear understanding of coaches’ role and function for coaches, educators, and administrators (Knight, 2009; Marsh et al., 2008)
• An external support system and forum for networking, collaboration, and ongoing communication among coaches (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; O’Connor & Ertmer, 2003; Kowal & Steiner, 2007)
• Time and focus to develop expertise in “what” they are coaching (Borman, Geger, & Kawakami, 2006)
• Opportunities for differentiated support for new and experienced coaches (Ricahard, 2003; Feger, Woleck, & Hickman, 2004)
• How to create and provide professional learning opportunities for others (e.g., teachers, administrators, school support personnel) to enhance skills required of the new initiative (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005)
Coaching for Change in the Literature

• *Change Coaching* addresses whole school organizational improvement *(Neufeld & Roper, 2003)*

  – *Coaching* or *facilitation capacity* refers to a system’s ability to organize personnel and resources for prompting and encouraging local school training and implementation efforts *(Sugai & Horner, 2006)*

  – Effective and linked *leadership* at every level (school, district, state) is key to the success of any systemic change, and systems change staff (i.e., coaches) have full-time responsibility for *guiding implementation processes* and support on-site change *leadership teams* *(Adelman & Taylor, 2007)*
Coaching for Change in the Literature, cont.

“School improvement will fail if the work of coaches remains at the one-to-one level. Coaches are systems leaders. They need development as change agents at both the instructional level and the level of organizational and system change. It’s time to recast their role as integral to whole-system reform.”

~ Michael Fullan & Jim Knight (2011)

“The word coach as a noun is very sensitive to external factors such as funding and leadership decisions. However, coach as a verb, is something all educators can do together.”

~ Christina Steinbacher-Reed & Elizabeth A. Powers (2011/2012)
What is Systems Coaching?

*Systems Coaching* (v.): application of a set of skills that builds the *capacity* of school/district leadership teams to implement MTSS aligned with the school/district improvement plan(s) in order to enhance student outcomes.

**What does this mean?**

- Systems coaching requires ongoing collaboration among school- and district-level administrators and educator leaders to facilitate implementation of EBPs with fidelity to improve student outcomes.
- Systems coaches support RtI through various activities such as
  - facilitating data-based problem-solving and action planning;
  - coordinating and using data to evaluate fidelity of educator practices;
  - developing protocols and procedures that communicate and facilitate implementation;
  - organizing school, district, and community resources to support student outcomes;
  - providing training, technical assistance, and other professional learning opportunities to enhance educator practices matched to student, school, and district need.

Purpose of Current Study

• To obtain a better understanding of the perceptions of RtI coaches regarding their roles and experiences in supporting RtI implementation through a systems coaching approach.

• Specifically, the researchers were interested in exploring the coaches’
  – roles and responsibilities
  – knowledge, skills, and attributes
  – experiences facilitating systems change
  – perceptions of facilitators and barriers to implementation, and
  – the support they were provided
METHOD
Participants and Sampling Procedures

• 10 RtI Coaches participated
  – 9 female, 1 male
  – Training and previous experience
    • 5 school psychologists
    • 5 teachers
  – Yrs of experience ranged from approximately 5 to 25+

• Coaches supported 34 schools across 7 districts in 1 southeastern state
Research Design

**Larger Project**
- Schools and districts participated in 3-year design research project
- 3 years of PD provided to SBLTs
- Coaches provided job-embedded PD to SBLT members’ and to the remaining instructional staff at the schools.
- Coaches participated in ongoing training, TA, and PLC activities

**Current Study**
- Focus groups at conclusion of 3-year project
- Exploratory
- Single-category approach (RtI Coaches)
Research Team

• Members
  – 1 school psychology faculty member
  – 3 school psychology doctoral students

• Training
  – 3 doctoral student team members formally trained by Faculty Research Associate
  – Qualitative methodology
  – Coding techniques
  – ATLAS.ti.v.5.1
  – Ongoing TA and support provided
Interview Protocol and Procedures

• Coaches divided into 3 groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000)
• Semi-structured group protocol (Gibbs, 1997)
• Each group asked same questions

• Questions focused on:
  – Changes in implementation & outcomes
  – Factors that contributed to changes
  – Coaches’ roles & responsibilities
  – Support for coaches
• Focus groups approximately ranged from 90-120 minutes
Data Analysis

• Transcribed & uploaded into ATLAS.ti v.5.1
• Analysis approach
  – Constant comparative (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985)
  – Coupled with matrix analysis (Averill, 2002)
• Text broken into codes (units of information)
  – Set of 10 codes generated
  – Codebook created (code, its definition, and examples)
• Transcripts individually coded by dyads
  – Themes generated within each code
  – Inter-rater agreement procedures used (all disagreements addressed and consensus reached)
Validity

• Used Tracy’s (2010) universal criteria

• Particular attention to:
  – Worthy topic
  – Credibility
  – Resonance
  – Significant contribution
  – Meaningful coherence
RESULTS
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<th>Themes</th>
<th>Topics Addressed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaches</td>
<td>Coach Characteristics</td>
<td>Content Knowledge</td>
<td>school history, culture, resources; classroom teaching experience; MTSS theory &amp; application</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>differentiated PD; consultation skills; leadership and facilitation skills</td>
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<td>Personality Factors</td>
<td>positivity; people person; likeability &amp; credibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
<td>Participation at School &amp; District Levels</td>
<td>attending meetings; facilitating deeper district staff knowledge</td>
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<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>providing trainings &amp; technical assistance to SBLTs, school staff, &amp; district staff</td>
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<td>Build Capacity in Individuals</td>
<td>increasing staff capacity to implement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure Implementation &amp; Fidelity</td>
<td>use of data &amp; problem-solving when examining instruction/intervention; examining fidelity of problem-solving</td>
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Sample Quotes

• “I think you’ve got to have the depth of knowledge... you know people think they know RtI and it’s the tip of the iceberg. And so you have to help them kind of uncover the rest, and if you don’t understand that conceptual, abstract richness, it’s really hard to communicate that past practical helping them see how to implement, but we know that’s not sufficient...” *(Content Knowledge)*

• “... if you’re not liked you don’t get listened to, so I really think that that’s so critical and not necessarily measurable...” *(Personality Factors)*
Sample Quotes cont.

• “I think initially, um all the schools were in the same place, and that is that as I went in and talked with school-based intervention teams that I was a parrot, and I said, ‘The four steps of problem solving are problem ID, analyze the problem, intervention design, progress monitor.’ And we would go through that, week after week after week. And then we would talk about how to write a problem and how to look for a problem.” (Provide Training)

• When discussing how the role evolved, “…it definitely wasn’t the initial responsibility that I perceived, and now it’s moved in a direction of building capacity across the district.” (Building Capacity in Individuals)
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Change</td>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>facilitators; barriers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Capacity &amp; Infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>sharing successes; accessibility; meeting regularly; use of data and problem-solving; exposure to coach</td>
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<td>Evidence</td>
<td>personnel attitudes &amp; behaviors; frequency &amp; depth of conversations</td>
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<td>District leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>facilitators; barriers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td>impact of training; changes in types of assistance; coaching support impact</td>
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<td>Staff capacity</td>
<td></td>
<td>SBLT members; selected staff; facilitators</td>
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<td>Resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>scheduling; documentation; resource maps</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Implementation fidelity</td>
<td></td>
<td>implementation’s relationship w/capacity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoting Change continued</td>
<td>Implementati on Fidelity &amp; Student Outcomes</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>facilitators; barriers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaming</td>
<td>meeting regularly; scheduling</td>
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<td>Tier 1 Instruction</td>
<td>lack of emphasis on Tier 1; teacher resistance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>use of data and problem-solving to enhance outcomes</td>
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<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>staff examination of fidelity; coaches roles; tools &amp; strategies</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Student outcomes</td>
<td>data-based decisions; best practices; enhancing outcomes</td>
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Sample Quotes

• “If the administration believes in it, support it, and expect it, then their teachers will believe in it, support it, and expect themselves to follow through.” (Administration)

• “Consensus snowballs when it’s one teacher, one teacher has success with the RtI team and gets the support, and...that will trickle down to the entire staff because they talk, you know.” (Staff Capacity)
Sample Quotes cont.

• “They struggle with data. They struggle with measurement and understanding measurement and how to...do [problem] analysis.” (Data-based Problem-solving)

• “Individual people that are key people on those teams, building their skills ...I think that as it’s ultimate goal would create sustainability at the end of the project...” (Infrastructure/Building Capacity)
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<tr>
<td>Key Stakeholder Involvement</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td>District level support</td>
<td>roles in influencing school implementation; behaviors that facilitated or hindered implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Active principal involvement</td>
<td>presence and involvement in trainings &amp; meetings; buy-in regarding RTI; facilitation of team meetings; selection of team members</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Personnel leadership</td>
<td>informal leaders role in facilitating implementation; time needed for key personnel to collaborate; resource to staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Administrative support</td>
<td>critical importance of administrative support to facilitating implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Scheduling issues</td>
<td>importance of finding time to work with itinerant support staff; isolation of coaches from other staff</td>
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<td>Alignment with key players</td>
<td>identifying key players and building relationships; use of relationships to positively influence practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>trust critical to success as a coach and of RTI practices</td>
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Sample Quotes

• When talking about the differences in leadership, a coach explained, “when I compare my three schools, they are the ones that are farthest behind in my opinion because they don’t have that administrative support, you know, uh about the project and thinking it’s important and making it a priority.” (Active Principal Involvement)

• “... leadership... is probably one of the biggest impacts of why all three schools look very different, and so I think that’s one of the biggest things that I’ve learned over the past three years.” (Administrative Support Key)

• “Fortunately, you know the psychologists are the keepers and you know being in that department it makes a little bit easier because...I have relationships with most of the people.” (Alignment With “Key Players)
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Support for coaches</td>
<td>networking with other coaches important; importance of training they received as coaches and access to resources provided; suggested</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project Support</td>
<td>Support for SBLTs</td>
<td>improvements (more frequent meetings, more training on specific topics, “coaching the coach” at school sites)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of</td>
<td>Training content and process</td>
<td>strengths of Project trainings (discussion and planning time, growth in knowledge and skills, increase in data-based decision making);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the Project</td>
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<td>needed improvements (more scaffolding during trainings, modeling by high functioning teams, continued support beyond 3 years); weaknesses</td>
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<td>(uncertainty of pilot project and for implementation targets)</td>
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<td>SBLT members wanted less theoretical information and preferred training content that was easier for them to relate to their own school</td>
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<td>contexts</td>
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Sample Quotes

• “The sharing out, even after our meetings we talk, you know...we’re constantly you now, ‘Well how do you do this, how do you do that?’” (Support for Coaches)

• “For me it was huge, was that binder...that talked about all the instruments where you know it may have been repetitive.” (Support for Coaches)

• “The trainings throughout the years to the SBLTs, like that’s a pretty big deal...a huge amount of support...like technical assistance has been strong.” (Support for SBLTs)
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<tr>
<td><strong>Barriers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Barriers</strong></td>
<td>Related to Implementation of RtI</td>
<td>lack of support at the school; lack of staff preparation; lack of effective data use</td>
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<td>Coaches Experience</td>
<td>lack of data access; lack of involvement in their schools; not feeling prepared; lack of support for coaches; conflicts that occurred</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Consensus</td>
<td>RTI not a priority; opposition to RTI; skepticism about data use; school and district leaders lack of buy-in or opposition</td>
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<td>Structure of Leadership</td>
<td>changes in leadership at schools; lack of distributed leadership; relationship difficulties; infrequent meetings</td>
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<td>Barriers continued</td>
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<td>Failure to Identify School-Wide Problems</td>
<td>ignoring of Tier 1 issues; teacher resistance to viewing problems as Tier 1 issues; eligibility mentality; difficulty obtaining &amp; interpreting school-wide data</td>
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<td>Staff Turnover</td>
<td>changes in leadership, key staff, coaches</td>
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<td>Lack of Resources</td>
<td>staff availability &amp; time constraints; coaches’ limited time &amp; scheduling conflicts; limited funds for material resources</td>
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<td>Over-Reliance on Coaches</td>
<td>staff inability to run meetings focused on RTI; lack of sustainability without coaches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Facilitators (Overcoming Barriers)</td>
<td>prior data use by schools; consistent leadership teams; district support; coaches being welcomed and valued; assessment systems for identifying Tier 1 problems</td>
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</table>
Sample Quotes

• “I was almost shut out of that school for the most part the first two years, you know, on the surface and in appearance I was there and involved, but not really, not in meetings that really mattered where decisions were actually being made and changes were actually happened.” (Barriers-Coaches Experience)

• “[she] cancels meetings left and right, it just doesn’t seem to be her priority” (Barriers-Lack of Consensus)

• “We’re doing a lot of wonderful things at all the schools, um, but I still feel ...if you don’t have the supplies, and you don’t have, you know, the basic foundations, we’re gonna struggle.” (Barriers-Lack of Resources)
DISCUSSION
Explanation of Findings

• Coaches’ perspectives illustrated importance of:
  – Consultation skills (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009)
  – Professional development principles (Learning Forward, 2011)
  – Relationship and capacity building (Brown et al., 2006; Neufeld & Roper, 2003)
  – Leadership (Learning Forward, 2011; Polinco et al., 2003; Trubowitz, 2004)

• Conversations reflected:
  – Systems change model on which they were trained (Kurns & Tilly, 2008)
  – Importance of attending to change principles (Curtis & Castillo, 2014)
  – Common barriers to change reflected in the literature (Fullan & Knight, 2011; Neufeld & Roper, 2003)
• Training and support desired by schools consistent with professional development principles (Learning Forward, 2011)
  – Clear implementation targets for practices (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Killion & Harrison)
  – Modeling and scaffolded practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002)
  – Explicit connections to their school context (Killion & Harrison, 2006; Neufeld & Roper; 2003)

• Coaches desires consistent with PLC literature (Learning Forward, 2011)
  – “Coaching of coaches” (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Killion & Harrison, 2009)
  – Networking opportunities (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; O’Connor & Ertmer, 2003; Kowal & Steiner, 2007)
Implications for Research

• More in-depth analysis of coaching practices needed
  – Other stakeholders
  – Individual interviews
  – Field observations
  – Document analysis

• Analysis of relations between specific coaching practices and targeted outcomes

• Analysis of roles of individuals responsible for content coaching given focus of improved instruction in RTI
Implications for Practice

• Coaches may need to navigate complex human and organizational issues to facilitate change (knowing the model may not be enough) (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Kowal & Steiner, 2007; Sims, March, Barrett, & Knotek, 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2006; Wong & Nicotera, 2006;)

• **Coaches as leaders** (Fullan & Knight, 2011; March & Gaunt, 2013)
  – Consultation and professional development skills critical (Erchul, 2015; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Killion & Harrison, 2006; Learning Forward, 2011)

• **Coaches need training, coaching, and networking support** (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; O’Connor & Ertmer, 2003; Kowal & Steiner, 2007)
Limitations

• Focus group did not allow for
  – More in-depth exploration of particular topics
  – Multiple stakeholder views
  – Multiple methods

• Focus group took place post implementation

• Generalizability vs. transferability

• Sample comprised of coaches trained using similar RTI and change models in one state
Questions & Discussion
Systems Coaching Survey:
Invitation to Participate in the National Pilot Study!

Florida's MTSS
A Multi-Tiered System of Supports
Systems Coaching Survey
Request for Participants!

Who should participate?
• District and school personnel who have the responsibility for facilitating MTSS/RtI/PBIS implementation
  – District Based Leadership Team Members
  – School Based Leadership Team Members
  – Behavior Specialists, Coaches, Content Area Specialists, Support Personnel, Teachers, Principals, etc.
  – Coaches, Coaching Cadres
• Participants may or may not be formally labeled a “coach”
• Familiarity with “systems coaching” is not required, but participants must have some prior knowledge of MTSS/RtI/PBIS.
Systems Coaching Survey

• **Survey Administration**
  – Contacts will receive brief training on how to administer
    the online survey with their participants
  – Survey will take no more than 20 minutes to complete

• **Data & Graphs**
  – SCS data will be *aggregated, graphed, and returned* to
    respective agency contacts for ongoing PD and coaching
    supports for MTSS/PBIS implementation
  – School demographic data will be submitted by participating
    educational agencies
Systems Coaching Survey
Contact Information

Timelines for Participation:
• Notification of interest to participate/Planning/Training for contacts: by March 2017
• SCS completion and data entry: April to May 2017
• School-level demographic data collection: April 2017 to August of 2017

Interested? What to learn more?
  – Contact Amanda March
  – amarch@usf.edu
  – 813-974-7451
  – http://floridarti.usf.edu/scs/invitation.html
Thank You!

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