THE NOVICE LITERACY COACH: EXPLORING MOTIVATION AND PERSISTENCE IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGE

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THE NOVICE LITERACY COACH: EXPLORING MOTIVATION AND PERSISTENCE IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGE

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Abstract

Literacy coaching is complex and demanding. Charged with the responsibility of building teacher capacity, literacy coaches must not only have a sound understanding of the content of their coaching area, but must also work effectively within the domain of adult learning. Thus, for the novice literacy coach, the coaching role and context presents a range of challenges.   Framed within attribution theory (Weiner, 1985, 1986), this paper draws upon an exploratory study exploring the challenges experienced by novice literacy coaches as they begin their coaching work. Through the administration of an online reflective questionnaire and online focus group interview, a sample of novice literacy coaches working within independent schools across Queensland reported on the challenges they faced, their perceptions of attributed cause for these challenges, and the ways in which they were impacted by these challenges and perceptions. This study found that while attribution theory proposes that particular attributions to problems faced may negatively impact self-efficacy, motivation and perseverance, some participating coaches were still able to maintain their self-efficacy and motivation despite these negative attributions. It is proposed that growth mindset, proactive professional learning and high task value may act as moderating influences on the dysfunctional effects of negative attributions.

Introduction

This paper will report on an exploratory study undertaken in 2013 in Queensland, Australia, investigating the experiences of novice literacy coaches and the ways in which they respond to the challenges faced as they begin their work within this complex and demanding role (Toll, 2009). The purpose and aims of this study will be outlined at the beginning of this paper, and then a brief background to current understanding about literacy coaching as an approach to job embedded professional learning will be provided. The theoretical framework for this research will be then be outlined, followed by an examination of the findings with regard to contributions to the current understanding of the literacy coaching role and connected theory.

The literature attests to the fact that the role of the literacy coach can be overwhelming for the novice (Frost & Bean, 2006).   There is also an awareness that with the growth in advocacy for, and

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implementation of, the literacy coaching approach as a catalyst for literacy improvement, the number of novice coaches with limited or no coaching experience or understanding of adult learning, along with variable depths of understanding about best practice in literacy, is becoming more common (Frost & Bean, 2006; Gill, Kostiw, & Stone, 2010). While it is recognised that these literacy and coaching capabilities may be nurtured over time, the concern arises over the ability of novice literacy coaches to deal effectively with the challenges of the coaching context as they enter into the initial stage of this complex role (Frost & Bean, 2006).

There is an awareness that understanding the ways in which novice coaches deal with the challenges of the coaching role is important in order to maintain novices' self-efficacy and persistence in the role, along with their ability to manage emotionally and socially through the challenges they face (Bandura, 2001; Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott, & Rich, 2007; Lunenburg, 2011; Stajkovic & Sommer, 2000). The ways in which novice coaches manage challenges will determine their longevity in the role, impacting not only the opportunity to develop their experience and expertise, but also potentially compromising the return on the fiscal investment required for the literacy coaching process.

Background

The literacy coaching approach to professional learning has been widely adopted by educational organisations in the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia over the past decade. Beginning with the No Child Left Behind policy of 2001, the engagement of literacy coaches into schools across the this range of countries has increased in response to high levels of accountability and concern regarding the literacy levels of students (Frost & Bean, 2006; Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garnier, 2009; Otaiba, Hosp, Smartt, & Dole, 2008). Not only is literacy coaching "becoming both one of the main forms and purposes of in-service teacher education, and one of the main modes of professional learning employed" (Davey & Ham, 2010, p. 230), but also, according to Klein (2007), it will continue to expand its influence within the field of education.

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Far from the early responsibilities of the reading specialist to work with students in reading, the current literacy coach is now expected to: work with adult learners to improve literacy content knowledge of teachers; build a collaborative and cooperative school culture; facilitate the implementation of best literacy practice in classrooms develop reflective and problem solving capacities of teachers for sustained literacy improvement and provide relevant and differentiated support as teachers and schools increase their capacity to teach for improved literacy outcomes (Horn & Metler-Armijo, 2011; International Reading Association, 2004, 2010) The literacy coach is therefore required to work effectively on a cognitive, social and emotional level with adults to meet these role expectations.

Given the social nature of the literacy coaching context, the literacy coach must also engage with this work within the socially interactive environment of the school to do the work necessary for change (Matsumura et al., 2009). In this way, challenges arise for the literacy coach as staff and leaders alike respond diversely to the expectation for change to practice. The coaching context can also be a source of barriers to the coaching work. These challenges have been the topic of both theoretical and empirical research. Issues of school and teacher response to change, along with leadership support, have been identified as challenges (Steckel, 2009).

While extant research assists in the understanding of the literacy coaching role, much of the reviewed research engages with coaches with a level of literacy coaching experience beyond that of the novice coach, and therefore may not describe the reality of the novice coach newly engaging with the role and with limited experience to draw upon when managing challenges or problems within their coaching environment. An exploration of the ways in which the novice literacy coach thinks about and responds to challenges in their literacy coaching role has not been undertaken. This study addresses this gap in the research.

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The exploratory study reported within this paper investigates the challenges perceived to be significant to the novice coach, and the ways in which the novice coach's thinking about these challenges impacts their self-efficacy, relationships and strategic responses. Through these coaching insights, ways in which to assist novice coaches to develop management strategies at a time of great challenge may be possible. Without functional responses to challenges and persistence in the literacy coaching role, expertise and experience cannot be developed and role continuance in school contexts may be compromised.

Theoretical Framework

Attribution theory provided the theoretical framework for the study reported within this paper. As a theory proposing that individuals seek understanding of events that lead to a subsequent response, this theory provides a useful framework within which to consider the responses of novice coaches to challenging events within their literacy coaching roles. Attribution theory has not been applied to the literacy coaching context previously.

Attribution theory proposes that when faced with an event, people will seek to attribute cause (Weiner, 1985, 1986). Attributional processing is most conspicuous when dealing with a negative, important or novel event whereby individuals are prompted to investigate causality (Coffee & Rees, 2009; Weiner, 1985, 2010). These conditions are present for the novice coach encountering new challenges within a role charged with significant responsibility. Attribution theory proposes that the ways in which individuals attribute causality for challenges impacts the way in which they respond emotionally, socially and cognitively (Weiner, 1985, 1986). Therefore, for the literacy coach, the attributions made with regard to a challenge may impact their emotional state, motivation to persist in the role and relational responses with others within the environment.

As the individual processes the information around an event, three primary attributional dimensions have been identified that influence the individual's understanding of, and response to, the event (Russell, 1982; Weiner, 2010): locus of causality, controllability and stability. Locus of causality

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refs to the identified source of the problem. The individual then perceives their level of control over the cause (controllability) and the extent to which the cause is something that can be altered over time (stability). In this way, individuals seek to fully understand the event, attribute cause and then respond (See Figure 1).
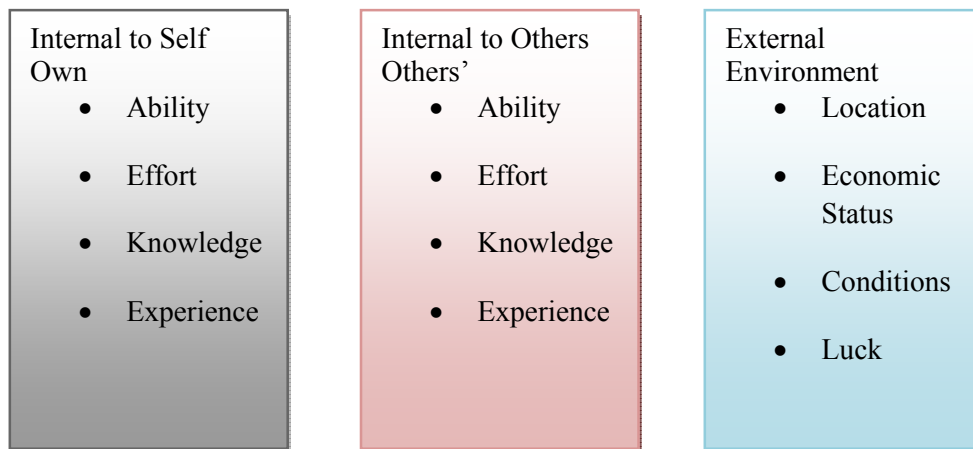
Figure 1:   A model of attribution theory (adapted from Weiner, 1985)
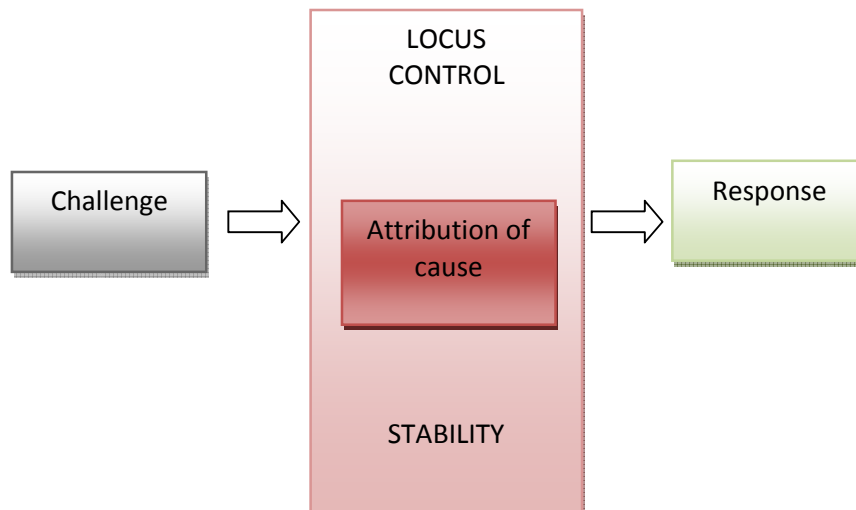
Importantly, locus of causality (see Figure 2) has been strongly linked with emotional responses affecting self-efficacy and relationships with others. For example, a literacy coach may feel frustration and anger when attributing cause for a problem to a lack of effort or resistance on the part of a teacher on staff or, alternatively, may suffer guilt and reduced self-efficacy if self-attributing cause to their own ability. According to Bandura (2001), perceived self-efficacy is significant to the perseverance of the individual in the face of challenge. For the novice literacy coach, an attribution of causality based upon a lack of personal ability could be expected to negatively impact their willingness to persist in the role, or lead to a reduction in effort.

Perceptions of controllability can influence task persistence and task satisfaction, with low controllability of cause contributing to low motivation, and high controllability increasing task persistence (Coffee & Rees, 2009). Controllability is a significant dimension for the literacy coach where agency and authority to demand change is limited (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011). According to Bandura (2001), individuals will avoid situations in which they feel they have little or no control. On

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Figure 2: Locus of causality

Internal to Self Own	Internal to Others Others'	External Environment
• Ability	• Ability	• Location
• Effort	• Effort	• Economic Status
• Knowledge	• Knowledge	• Conditions
• Experience	• Experience	• Luck

the one hand, the novice literacy coach may feel motivated to persist and actively engage in the coaching role in a school where they feel that they can influence how much time they have to work with the teachers in their classrooms. On the other hand, the novice coach may feel anxious and demotivated in an environment where they feel they are unable to influence teacher participation.

Within the dimension of stability, a perception of high stability with regard to the cause of a challenge creates an expectation of continued failure and feelings of hopelessness. As explained by Coffee and Rees (2008), motivation and task persistence is reduced due to the perception that improvement can never be realised. However, perceived instability of cause indicates a belief that change and improvement are possible, leading to an upward shift in expectancy for success in the future. As an example, motivation to persist is more likely for the novice coach who believes that teachers will, over time, come to participate actively in the change process, despite early resistance.

Based upon this model of attribution, it could be expected that novice literacy coaches within this study, faced with new challenges and barriers to their coaching work, may experience negative effects from the attributional decisions they make. Given that these novice coaches have limited coaching experience to draw upon, and are new to a demanding role, it could be expected that their self-efficacy, persistence and motivation to maintain active and ongoing engagement in the role could be

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tested by the challenges they face. However, as will be discussed, new understandings emerged within this study.

Method

This exploratory research aims to deepen current understanding of the novice literacy coaching experience in order to better understand how these coaches may be supported effectively to develop their skills and expertise. Through an investigation of the novice literacy coaching experience, and the impact of challenges upon their self-efficacy, motivation and persistence in the role, this research aims to develop an understanding of how novice literacy coaches can be supported to maintain positive self-efficacy, motivation and functional contextual relationships. In this way, novice coaches may be more likely to continue with their literacy coaching role to develop coaching experience and expertise across time.

The study to which this paper refers responds to the following research questions:

1. What do novice coaches identify as challenges within their literacy coaching roles?

2. How do novice coaches attribute causality for these challenges?

3. How do novice coaches respond to these challenges and perceived causes?

4. What influences the responses of novice literacy coaches to these challenges?

Participants

The study explored the experiences of a sample of novice coaches drawn from the Queensland Independent School Sector during 2013 within a literacy coaching initiative implemented by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ). In 2012, ISQ launched the Literacy and Numeracy Coaching Academy (LNCA), a coaching initiative to support the engagement of literacy and numeracy coaches across Queensland independent schools. This initiative provided the opportunity for independent

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schools, diverse geographically, socio-economically and culturally, to engage in coaching as an approach to professional learning. In 2013, 88 new coaches joined the LNCA, of whom 73 were literacy coaches. Of these 73 coaches, 70 were novices, indicating they had no previous coaching experience.

Data Collection

The qualitative design of this study was drawn from previous research undertaken relating to literacy coaching. A review of extant research in literacy coaching identifies a qualitative approach to exploring the role and experiences of the literacy coach as most valuable given the socially interactive nature of the coaching context (Gross, 2010; L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Smith, 2011). This research utilised both an open-ended online reflective questionnaire and online focus group interviews to collect data from the participant group.

The study began with the establishment of the coach sample based upon the coaching focus (literacy) and the participants' coaching experience (novice). The data to establish the study's sample group was obtained, with permission from ISQ, from the initial coach profiles provided to ISQ upon acceptance into the LNCA. The sample group of 70 coaches was then invited to participate in an online reflective questionnaire following a small trial.   The online reflective questionnaire consisted of 10 open-ended questions and was developed using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2013).   In the questionnaire, coaches were asked to identify successful and unsuccessful events in their coaching work since beginning in the coaching role. A generated link enabled the participants to submit their responses anonymously. Anonymity was an important ethical consideration in this study context, and a significant focus within the application for ethical clearance. Given that one of the researchers held the role of literacy mentor within the Literacy and Numeracy Coaching Academy, this anonymity was deemed as appropriate for voluntary participation and confidentiality. The survey return rate was 32.9%.

For the purpose of this study, the reflective questionnaire was utilised to establish trends and patterns with regard to the significant concepts and themes. The data collected from the reflective

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questionnaires were analysed using coding of high frequency themes, and the utilisation of descriptive statistics based upon the frequency counts of emerging concepts, to obtain a picture of the significant issues (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The data analysed pertained only to challenging, or problematic experiences, reported by the coaches. Given the parameters of time for this study, these data were selected as most relevant to directly meet the aims of the research.

These questionnaire data were then used to generate a semi-structured interview schedule for an online focus group interview. The focus group interview schedule consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions to encourage rich data and allow for unique understandings to emerge (Cohen et al., 2011; Punch, 2009). The ability for new concepts to emerge proved to be a significant aspect of this study. Having completed the questionnaire, coaches were then invited to participate in the online focus group interview. Using "Go to Training" as the online facility, a link enabled the coaches to join the focus group interview anonymously using a pseudonym. Five literacy coaches participated in the interview. The use of online facilities provided the opportunity for the coaches from across a large geographical area to participate anonymously.

For the purpose of transcription, the verbal discussion was audio recorded. The interview data were transcribed manually as part of the analysis process (Tilley, 2003) and pseudonyms were replaced with a numeric value. Key themes were identified and coded initially using a coding frame based upon concepts identified from reviewed attribution theory literature and codes identified from the questionnaire data.

Limitations

This exploratory study is not without limitations. Firstly, the participant sample, though purposive in that literacy coaches were identified from a cohort of novice coaches, was opportunistically recruited for accessibility for this research. In addition, the novice coaches were representative of only coaches from the 2013 cohort of literacy coaches within the Independent Schools Queensland LNCA.   A

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relatively small sample engaged in the focus group interview which provided a considerable amount of data for later analysis.

The use of the online focus group interview was important in this study to enable geographically dispersed coaches to participate anonymously. However, as noted by Margado- Armentoros et al. (2012), online focus groups can create facilitator dominated conversations due to the difficulty with conversational turn taking and the lack of proximity of group members. In addition, data may be less rich due to the lack of facial and body language cues (Stewart & Williams, 2005; Murgado-Armentoros et al., 2012). Therefore, the impact of online limitations must be taken into account when considering the findings of the study.

Researcher familiarity may have also been a limitation within this study despite efforts expended through research design to provide anonymity to participant coaches both within the reflective questionnaire and online focus group interview stages of data collection. As a mentor within the LNCA, it could be argued that information provided by the participant coaches may have been influenced by the position of the researcher within the coaching initiative (Cohen et al., 2011).

Findings

Findings generated through data analysis of the questionnaire and online focus group interview utilised within this study will be presented in turn. Challenges, attributions of causality, the perceived responses of coaches to these attributions and influences on attributional decision making will be presented.

Reflective Questionnaire

Challenges

Challenges as reported by this sample of novice coaches were coded into four significant themes:

1.lack of leadership support 2.limitations on teacher contact 3. resistance by teachers to participate

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and 4. limited change in practice (see Table 1). Attributions of causality for these challenges were

then analysed.

Table 1: Perceived Challenges

	Frequency Count (FC)	% of FC
Leader Support	1	4.76
Teacher Contact	8	38.10
Teacher Resistance	6	28.57
Change in Practice	5	23.81
N/A Response	1	4.76
Total	21	100.00

Attributions of causality

The participant coaches within this questionnaire determined that they perceived themselves as most

likely to be the singular cause of an unsuccessful event (see Table 2). This finding is significant when

considering attribution theory proposes that internal attributions made to the self will result in lowered

self-efficacy. However, while perceived internal attributions pertaining to the coaches themselves

were significant, combined external attributions and those attributions internal to others in the

coaching environment exceeded this level. This finding is also important in that attribution theory

proposes that a locus of causality beyond the self may correlate with perceptions of low

controllability.

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Table 2: Perceived Causes for Challenges

	Frequency Count (FC)	% of FC
Teachers	6	25
Literacy Coach	8	33.33
Time	5	20.83
Leadership	2	8.33
Staff changes	1	4.17
No cause	2	8.33
Total	24	100.00

Attributional Response

In response to the perceived causes of coaching challenges identified in the questionnaire, the participating coaches reported a 100% negative emotional response to all causes of challenges, including internal to self, internal to others and external locus of causalities identified (see Table 3). Of the reported emotional responses, frustration, anxiety and lowered self-efficacy were significant. Of the coaches identifying external causes for the unsuccessful outcome or attributing cause as internal to others, coaches reported feeling frustrated, disappointed or devalued.

Interestingly, 29% of coded responses indicated that there was no perceived impact on the participants' relationships despite feelings of frustration and anxiety as identified in cross correlation of responses. This finding is contrary to attribution theory where blame attributions are associated with negative emotional relationships and severe responses (Weiner, 1995). This discrepancy was further explored through the focus group interview.

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Table 3: Emotional Responses

	Frequency Count (FC)	% of FC
Anxious	5	22.73
Frustrated	11	50
Reduced self-efficacy	2	9.09
Disappointed	1	4.55
Devalued	1	4.55
Challenged	1	4.55
No emotion	1	4.55
Total	22	100.00

Online Focus Group Interviews

Challenges

Rich data obtained through the online focus group interview indicated that the novice coaches within

this participating group found their initial work as a literacy coach very demanding and challenging,

as indicated by the following coach:

> I realised just how big a can of worms I was opening up and it affected me greatly and I
>
> had a couple of deep conversations with leaders and they pointed me in the right direction.
>
> But as I said, really hard, really challenging.

Understanding the slow momentum of the coaching process, and planning strategically within

realistic timeframes, was of particular concern.. As stated by one coach:

> I think probably the most significant (challenge) was trying to stretch it (coaching) across
>
> too many year levels, so maybe taking on too much too soon.

Teacher resistance was a significant challenge for these novice coaches, particularly where non-

participative teachers could undermine their efforts to build participation among their staff.

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> Some teachers can be quite dominant and voice their opinions quite loudly and that's an
>
> issue when you are trying to work with other teachers on getting them on board and they
>
> can throw a spanner in the works.

As in the questionnaire, the challenges of insufficient time and ongoing disruptions were considered significant. As one coach suggested:

> So I think there was a tendency of a few colleagues to think that a lot was being asked of
>
> them so time, giving people time to come to terms with things was really important.

Locus of causality

These novice coaches reported attributing some of these challenges to an internal locus of causality whereby the coach held themselves responsible for the problem, and other issues as internal to other staff members within the coaching process such as other teachers or leaders. Alternatively, external causes were identified whereby coaches perceived the school environment itself to be the locus of causality for a problem (see Figure 2).

In response to the challenge of setting realistic goals and timelines, coaches agreed that a lack of experience was a significant cause. As one coach illustrated:

> I think it was purely a lack of experience. I have never embarked upon a process like this
>
> before. I was just enthusiastic and I just wanted to make it all happen because that is what I
>
> like to do and I ended up turning myself in circles trying to make it work. I didn't have the
>
> data and I hadn't planned strategically because I didn't know the right place to start.

However, several coaches identified timeline issues to be caused by others in the coaching context, such as leadership placing pressure on the coach to move the process along, and a lack of value placed upon coaching time by others. These factors were perceived to impact upon the timely implementation of the coaching plan. As one coach stated:

> So many other things are thrown in and people have tended to forget that this is what is
>
> going on with the coaching so I would plan to do something and then all of a sudden a
>
> meeting gets taken over by something else.

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The majority of coaches felt that the issues with teacher participation were primarily external, identifying the school context or the teachers themselves as the cause of resistance:

> Coach 1: They feel threatened. It is as simple as that. Though the strategies I have put into place through the coaching role should maker their lives easier but I think their own resistance to change is the issue.

> Coach 2: There are just so many things going on at the one time that I feel the teachers go into overload.

Stability

Where attributions were considered to be beyond the self, either directly related to others' work behaviours within the coaching context, or the environmental context itself, stability was deemed to be high. That is, there did not seem to be any change that would occur to this situation in the near future. As one coach stated:

> There are always going to be issues that come up or people who have other agendas.

However, where an internal to self causality was applied, this group of coaches clearly perceived this situation to be temporary, or having low stability. The novice coaches expressed a belief that their role was that of a learner, and that their lack of expertise was simply a natural part of the learning pathway they were on.

According to one coach:

> I think that is the exciting thing about coaching. That you are always learning. That is what keeps you interested and engaged.

Controllability

Where causality was perceived to be internal to others or external in causality, controllability was considered low and beyond their circle of influence. In the case of teacher resistance, the following coach illustrated a perception of low controllability:

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> I think what they are doing is their own choice and it impacts what the school is trying to
>
> do but I can't control how they feel. I can't control what they think or what they put in or
>
> get out of it and that is purely down to them.

In contrast, where causality was attributed to the self, this group of coaches perceived that they could be proactive in changing their level of coaching ability, through seeking support and professional learning opportunities. These coaches took control of their own learning as illustrated in the following statement:

> I think at this point I didn't know what I was doing all the time. It wasn't a concerning
>
> thing, but it was more, OK, how do I find that information.

Attributional Response

The coaches within this focus group did report, however, that causes negatively impacting on the coaching work which were identified as beyond the self, did have a negative emotional impact for the coach. As stated by one coach in response to the issue of teachers choosing not to participate or work within the coaching process,

> I think I invest in my colleagues and to have people choose not to participate in things that
>
> I believe in is very hard to just put that aside and continue. You do take it personally.

Another coach also expressed the emotional toll of leaders or others in the coaching context impeding the coaching work:

> I think in every setting there are empire builders who can feel threatened by something new
>
> coming in (coaching) and might see it as detracting from what they are trying to do. That is
>
> one of the things that I had with other people taking away time from me with teachers
>
> because they had their own agenda and they had their own little empire building. This
>
> muscle flexing is not very nice.

This perceived emotional impact confirms responses in the questionnaire data and aligns with findings in attribution research.

Influences

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Despite the emotional toll on these novice coaches, they also indicated an ongoing level of motivation and persistence despite the perceived negative emotional impact of some attributions. When asked if they felt that they would consider giving up the role, these coaches were unanimous in their intention to maintain their engagement. As one coach stated:

> The program is too important not to pursue and in terms of student learning and student achievement and student engagement- that's our core business- and that's why we are here. You can't give up on that.

Analysis of the data identified common characteristics among this group. Firstly, the coaches placed an extremely high value upon the coaching process within their schools. Secondly, as discussed earlier, these coaches all equated the coaching role with a growth process. Lastly, these coaches engaged proactively with the professional support available to them.

Discussion of Findings

Significantly, the findings from this study indicate that factors of growth mindset, task value and active engagement with available support mechanisms may moderate the potentially negative impact of attributional decisions, such as reduced motivation and decreased task engagement (see Figure 3). Findings indicate that, regardless of perceived locus, stability and controllability of cause for challenges, some coaches moderated their responses to the attributions made. That is, expected decreases in motivation and enthusiasm to engage in the coaching role did not occur for the coaches within the focus interview group. This was most evident in the case of external attributions, or attributions of cause to others, where novice coaches perceived controllability to be low and stability to be high, such as teacher overload and time constraints.

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Figure 3: Revised model of attribution theory
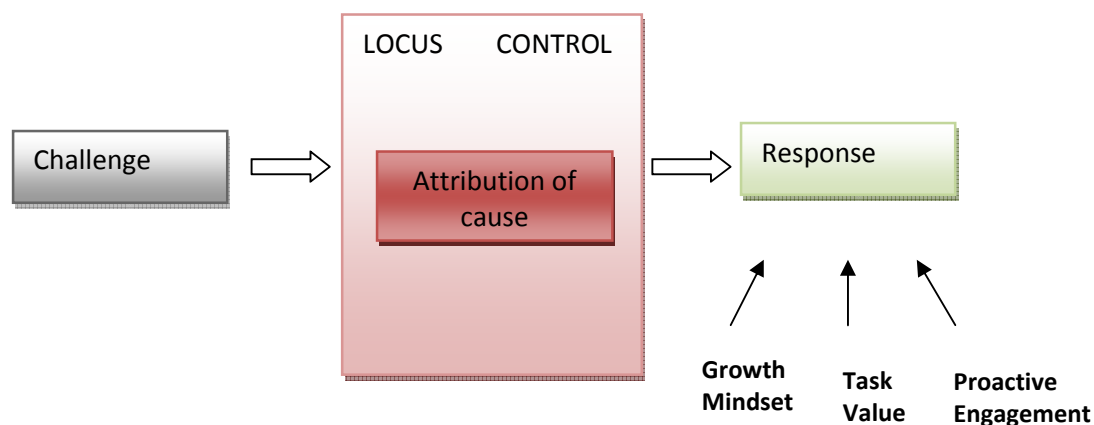
Stability has already been identified in attribution research as a significant influence upon attributional response (Russell, 1982; Oghojafor, Olayemi, Oluwatula, & Okonji, 2012). Where stability is perceived as high, motivation and hopefulness for change in the situation is low, resulting in reduced motivation and task persistence. This is problematic for literacy coaching given that perseverance in the role is required to build coaching and content capacity (Frost & Bean, 2006; Lynch & Alsop, 2007; Shaw, 2007; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). Alternatively, where stability is perceived as low, hopefulness for change is increased, and motivation and task persistence shift accordingly. Interestingly, for the novice coaches interviewed, motivation and enthusiasm were maintained where stability was perceived as low, such as their own experience, but also when perceiving challenges as very stable, such as the overload of change within schools.

The impact of perceived internal causality, in this context due to a lack of coaching experience and expertise, was moderated by the coaches' perception of themselves as learners within this process. This mindset is illustrated in the following coaches' statements:

> I think at this point I didn't know what I was doing all the time, but I kept coming back to
> what are the goals and what am I supposed to be doing and kept coming back to the stuff
> that we have been learning. It wasn't a concerning thing, but it was more, OK, how do I
> find that information.

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> That is why I did participate in the coaching, because I was feeling dry in my role, and
>
> really felt like I needed a challenge. And I have, I have, and it hasn't been easy but that is
>
> what a challenge is I guess. I needed a new challenge in my work.

As such, these coaches viewed their current lack of skill as temporary, demonstrating the presence of a growth mindset. According to Dweck (2013), a growth mindset permits the individual to see that learning requires challenge, and that ability can be developed over time. Those individuals with a growth mindset "view challenging work as an opportunity to grow and learn" (Dweck, 2010, p. 16). According to research into mindset theory, a growth mindset enables the individual to be more flexible in their problem solving and demonstrate greater task persistence (Suh, Graham, Kopeinig, Ferrarone, & Bertholet, 2011), along with greater resilience and stress management during setbacks (Dweck, 2010; Crum, Salovey, & Anchor, 2013). In this way, self-efficacy and motivation were preserved for the focus group coaches due to an ongoing perception of the low stability of their novice expertise.

However, the expected response of reduced motivation and enthusiasm to high stability causes attributed beyond the self, such as teacher refusal to participate, was only observed in the questionnaire participants. As one respondent wrote:

> I see the need. They don't want to see the need. They are comfortable where they are at in
>
> their careers… I was frustrated and annoyed.

In contrast, the novice literacy coaches within the focus group did not experience the same consequences of these negative attributions. When discussing these external attributions perceived to be stable and low in controllability, coaches reported that, despite feeling hurt and frustrated, the task value of literacy coaching within their schools was too significant to allow setbacks to compromise engagement in the literacy coaching process.

In essence, these coaches were able to justify the emotional discomfort of the challenge, and attributional impact of the identified cause, for the greater value of the task. According to Miller and

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Brickman (2004), tasks perceived to be instrumental to goal achievement are associated with high motivation and persistence. In the case of these novice coaches, their task value relating to the literacy coaching process could have moderated the anticipated negative impact of low controllability and high stability.

The availability of support mechanisms also seemed to be significant for these novice coaches faced with challenges where a cause, deemed as high in stability and low in controllability, has been attributed. As stated by Toll (2009), ongoing support is an essential component to the professional development of literacy coaches. This study suggests that the availability of support mechanisms, such as mentoring and professional learning, has impact when the coach proactively seeks assistance in a timely manner. At the point of need, these coaches ascertained that support was required and actively sought to attain assistance, either from within the school setting or externally through Independent Schools Queensland. According to Miller and Brickman (2004), the ability to be proactive as a problem solver and information seeker is necessary to develop pathways for goal attainment. The importance of looking proactively for support is demonstrated in this coach's comment:

> I think it is the fact that there are supports that are always available for our questions and I knew that if I couldn't find that information that I knew that I could contact you and find out that information.

Even in the face of a stable cause, such as the ongoing overload experienced within the school environment, or low controllability such as teacher resistance, these coaches proactively sought available support as a means of maintaining motivation and persistence.

Conclusion

This research proposes that given the presence of a growth mindset, high task value and active engagement with support mechanisms, such as mentor and collegial support, dysfunctional responses to attributions relating to challenges and negative events can be moderated. As a

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consequence, motivation and self-efficacy within the early stages of literacy coaching may be maintained. The novice coach who thinks that (a) literacy coaching is a learning experience, (b) literacy coaching is a valuable and worthwhile approach to literacy change, and (c) thinks about how to actively seek support, may be able to moderate the effects of attributions that would otherwise negatively impact upon effective engagement in the literacy coaching role.

Further studies will be required to confirm the generalisability of these findings across other cohorts of coaches. Given the scale of the research, and the timeframe for implementation, further research is required to confirm these findings. Further research is required to investigate how, or if, thinking may be developed among novice literacy coaches in ways that could support coaches to maintain positivity through challenging times.

Finally, this study has pathed the way for further research into the ways in which attribution theory and moderating influences may apply across alternative novice contexts, such as that of the beginning teacher. This area of research is currently being undertaken in a doctoral research study by the authors of this paper in which the influence of attributional processing of the early career teacher is being investigated as they set goals for professional learning within the context of the National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011).

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