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The Effects of a Teacher Coaching Model on Preschool Suspensions and Expulsions

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Millersville University, 1999

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctorate in Education

Special Education

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Abstract

In early childhood centers, students with disabilities are being suspended and expelled, leaving them with no place to attend school to learn with their peers or to receive early intervention special education services. This study was designed to determine the effects of coaching on the number of suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities attending early childhood centers. The framework for this study was based on the theory of Conjoint Behavioral Coaching. The research question was: What are the effects of a coaching intervention by early intervention teachers to early childhood teachers on the number of suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities? A quasi-experimental design was used with data collected from a sample of 27 early childhood centers. The intervention consisted of pairing each early childhood teacher with an early intervention teacher to complete the coaching process. A *t*-test was utilized to determine a significant difference between pre- and post-suspension and expulsion data. A statistically significant difference was found in suspension and expulsion rates after the coaching intervention was utilized. The coaching appears to provide support for the early childhood teachers so that they are less inclined to suspend or expel students with disabilities from their classrooms. Implications for social change included reducing the high number of suspensions and expulsions in early childhood settings so that students with disabilities were able to remain in their educational setting with their peers who do not have disabilities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all of the early intervention students who work so hard every day to learn and grow. You belong, and you make me proud to be an educator. I learn from you.

I also dedicate this to my mom and dad. These two most wonderful people gave me the best and most important gifts ever. The love of learning, and the knowledge that I was strong enough to do whatever I thought I could do. This is for you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

A positive preschool experience may be one goal of families for their children before they begin kindergarten. The positive experience is true for parents of children who have disabilities as well as parents of children who do not have disabilities. One of the many features of a high-quality early childhood (EC) program is a program that accepts all children, no matter ability, disability, or difference in learning style. Unfortunately, many children in the United States do not have the opportunity to attend or remain enrolled in high-quality preschool programs due to a problem of EC suspensions and expulsions (SAE).

Too often, when a child has a different style of learning, has a behavior issue, or has a disability, a learning opportunity is stifled by suspension or expulsion from the preschool classroom. Suspensions and expulsions in EC settings are increasing (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2014), and one population of students who are often affected is children with a disability. These students are not being allowed to stay in their center to learn and develop academic and social skills alongside their peers. When time is missed from school due to suspension or expulsion, students are not present for learning activities, and as a result, special education services are not able to occur in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

In this paper, I examined the negative trend of EC SAE, particularly for students with disabilities. I attempted to determine if using a coaching model with EC teachers reduces SAE. The end goal was to have all children stay in the classroom, learning

together, with and from each other, which is a goal of the state of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, 2014).

In the first chapter, background information will be shared on the topic of the increasing problem of SAE in EC settings. The issue is gaining national attention from the U. S. government due to the large number of students being suspended and expelled from their EC settings. The problem will be more clearly defined and explained so that the reader can more clearly determine that this is a problem in society and that there is a gap in practice of how the problem can be solved. In this section, details of the current study will be delineated. Details will be shared on the question being studied to determine if there was an approach that may help in causing a decrease in the high number of SAE, and the study design will be shared. Other information about the study will be shared so that readers can more clearly understand terminology used, any assumptions that are made, and any limitations of the process. The end goal is that the reader will better understand the problem of EC SAE and learn more about one possible method to lower the SAE rate for young learners.

Background

Many groups, including various states and the Federal Government, are taking notice of the high levels of SAE in EC settings. Gilliam (2014) noted that 10% of all teachers reported permanently expelling at least one student in their classroom due to challenging behaviors. The U. S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014b) and the U. S. Department of Education (2014) agreed that students who have disabilities are suspended and expelled more often than students without disabilities.

After noting high numbers of students who were being suspended and expelled from EC centers, states and the federal government began to take notice and made recommendations to lower this high rate. Letters written for those who work with young children in education called Dear Colleague letters were developed (U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2016), and recommendations in the form of policy statements were distributed (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2014). Several groups recommended specific strategies for those working in EC programs to utilize in their settings. This list was comprised of the following strategies: collaboration and coaching, training, professional development, building workforce capabilities, creating SAE policies, supporting administrators, and strengthening family-school partnerships (U. S. Department of Education, 2014; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2016b). In addition, the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016) noted collaboration between systems and partnering to support EC teachers as they work with students and endeavor to keep them in school.

Work must be done to determine what changes, if any, these recommendations have made on the number of SAE of students with disabilities in EC classroom settings. Therefore, in this study I chose to carry out the ideas of the recommendations of coaching and teacher support by a crossover of systems because coaching was recommended numerous times in the literature and because there was already a crossover of systems in place as the students with disabilities in EC settings have EC teachers and are provided

early intervention (EI) services by EI teachers in those settings. The goal of work here was to determine if coaching of EC teachers by EI teachers would help to make a difference in lowering the number of SAE of students with disabilities in EC centers.

Problem Statement

There is a lack in both EC and EI special education practice in the use of effective strategies in dealing with preschool students' behavior problems (U. S. Department of Education, 2014). This gap has led to a disturbing problem in EC and EI where a large number of students are suspended or expelled from programs (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2014). The problem of a high number of SAE causes disruption of preschool education for children with disabilities. This disruption in EC education can have long-lasting effects (Vandenbroeck, 2015). For the purposes of this study, SAE was viewed as a single grouped variable.

Suspensions and expulsions are a widespread problem for both EC and EI education because it causes students in EC centers with disabilities to not be allowed to be present for essential learning in school. Researchers reported that nationally more than 8,000 students who attended public preschools were suspended from their EC center at least one time (Samuels, 2014). This number was based on the U. S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014b) which included over one million preschool students. From the population of students with disabilities, 19% have been suspended from EC centers one time, and 17% of those students have been suspended more than one time (U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014b). Another important

special education consideration is that young students are suspended and expelled even when special education supports are in place, and even if supports are increased or revised for greater effectiveness. When the students attending EC centers who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are suspended or expelled, they then have to receive their special education services in a different and often more restrictive location (U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2016).

State reports have noted this widespread problem of a high number of SAE in EC and are seeking potential remedies. In Pennsylvania, for example, the governmental office guiding EC and EI, known as the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), recently published an announcement that addressed the need for reducing SAE (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning [OCDEL], 2015). The state of Pennsylvania directed programs that serve young children, both with and without disabilities, to take specific steps to increase implementation of positive behavior support strategies and decrease SAE. First, programs were directed to develop written policies on positive behavior support strategies that are used in the centers, including steps to decrease the number of SAE. A second directive was to inform families of the policies that are implemented. Lastly, OCDEL recommended that trainings be provided that offer information on behavioral resources, which could include strategies, such as coaching, for staff and families as well as how to support students with varying needs.

In order to carry out steps such as those directed by OCDEL, EC staff needs to have support provided for them that helps to reduce the frequency of SAE. When asked

how inclusion could be improved, teachers noted that they would require additional training and support (Akalin, Demir, Sucuoğlu, Bakkaloğlu, & İşcen, 2014). Part of what national organizations such as the Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children and the National Association for the Education of Young Children noted is that supports for staff are needed for effective inclusion of all children (Barton & Smith, 2015). The supports and trainings that are provided for EC staff will help to make the written policies that are also recommended by OCDEL become effective. One professional development strategy is coaching, which supports teachers as they carry out strategies they have learned, provides a time for reflection on their work, and offers a chance for them to receive constructive criticism on their actions (Spillman, 2015). Coaching is an effective practice in helping staff to sustain their use of behavior strategies (McIntosh et al., 2013). Lane, Menzies, Ennis, and Bezdek (2013) recommended coaching as a form of professional development to help teachers who are not special education teachers to work with students who have behavior issues but may not be identified as having a disability. This often is the case in EI, where students may have behavior issues and have an exceptionality category of Developmental Delay, which notes that the child has a delay in an area of development, not specifically identifying Emotional Disturbance. Coaching as a support and professional development strategy may have an influence on the EC SAE rate.

Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the effects of an intervention, namely coaching, on the frequency of SAE of students with disabilities from EC centers. I investigated the effects of a coaching intervention by EI teachers to EC teachers to determine the effect on the number of SAE of children with disabilities from EC centers. Early intervention teachers supported and encouraged EC teachers as they utilize strategies rather than having a director dictate and evaluate them on their work with students because coaching is non-evaluative in nature (National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2014). Samuels (2014) reported that when EC teachers gained confidence and skills in working with students who are different learners or who have difficulties with social skills development, the SAE rate declined, so coaching may be one way to teach new skills. Early intervention teachers were a ready resource to serve as coaches, since part of their role is to support students with disabilities in their typical EC setting (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2015).

Research Question

The research question for the current study was as follows:

What are the effects of a coaching intervention by early intervention teachers to early childhood teachers on the number of suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities?

H_o: There is not a statistically significant difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions as a result of a coaching intervention.

H_1: There is a statistically significant difference in the number of suspensions and expulsions as a result of a coaching intervention.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the current study was based on the work of Sheridan, Kratochwill, and Bergan (1996) regarding their Conjoint Behavioral Consultation theory (CBC). The CBC theory is one that begins with work on helping families and schools to form partnerships to improve learning for their students. This theory is described as one that utilizes partnering within service delivery so that those involved in working with students can work in a collaborative fashion to meet learning needs of students as well as promote positive proficiencies of all who are working with the students (Sheridan, Clarke, Marti, Burt, & Rohlk, 2005). Sheridan, Clarke, Knoche, and Edwards (2006) have done work to show that CBC is specifically effective in EI. In CBC, there are specific steps that are followed by all involved in students' education. The overarching steps will be expanded upon in a later section of this paper.

In the current study, the partners of the coaching intervention were the EI and EC teachers working with students who have disabilities and attend EC centers. The two worked collaboratively through the steps of a coaching process in order to determine effective ways to more effectively teach students who have disabilities in EC centers. The EC teacher worked closely with his or her EI coach using prescribed steps of a coaching model in order to learn new skills that could then be used with the students in the classroom so that students were not suspended or expelled.

Nature of the Study

This current study used quantitative methodology. The design was a quasi-experimental design using a pre- and post-test method. The quasi-experimental design was chosen because complete random assignment was not possible due to the hiring positions and locations of the EC teachers and types of certifications -- an EC teacher must be paired with an EI teacher (Rumrill, Cook, & Wiley, 2011). A *t*-test was employed as one that analyzes a statistical difference between SAE data before and after the intervention (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) noted that when a *t*-test is utilized, the researcher is able to show a difference between two groups. A researcher also may choose to utilize a *t*-test when examining two samples that are independent of each other (Creswell, 2012). In the current study, the samples examined were the number of SAE from EC directors before coaching and the number of SAE from EC directors after coaching. If the researcher was able to demonstrate a significant *t*-value, there would be a true difference between the groups (Lodico et al., 2010). In the current study, I looked for a difference in the number of SAE before coaching (pre-test) and then after coaching (post-test).

For this study, data was collected from the work of 27 EC teachers and 11 EI teachers from the geographical service area of an education service agency in the northeast part of the United States as participants. The EC teachers worked at EC centers in the local area, and served children in the preschool age range of 3, 4, and 5 year olds. The EI teachers were itinerants who worked in the local education service agency in the same area. The education agency employs 11 itinerant EI teachers who practiced the

coaching techniques. Each EI teacher had more than one EC partner, but the coaching was done on a partner basis, so that there were 27 partner sets. The EC center teachers were chosen based on convenience sampling. The EC teachers received coaching from their EI partners. Pre-treatment data [overall number of SAE] was obtained by the education service agency from the EC center directors prior to the beginning of treatment. The education service agency gathered suspension and expulsion data a second time 8 weeks after treatment. I employed a *t*-test to check the significance of the results pre- and post-intervention.

Definitions

For the purpose of the current study, the reader should have definitions of the variables involved in the work. The following definitions will be helpful in this study:

Child with a disability – a child who has been evaluated by an education agency, has been given an exceptionality category, and who has an IEP.

Coaching -- in the current study was based on the CBC theory (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996) which was noted earlier; the EI teacher and the EC teacher working in a systematic relationship together in order to support teaching practices (Artman-Meeker, Fetting, Barton, Penney, & Zeng, 2015), working together in a cyclical fashion to plan goals, develop steps, carry out the steps under observation, and reflect and revise as needed, while providing feedback to each other on the process (The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2014). This was the independent variable in the current study.

Cross-systems approach – an intervention or process that is carried out with professionals from more than one area of expertise; in the case of the current study, the two systems were regular education (EC teachers) and special education (EI teachers)

Early childhood teachers -- teachers who teach in an EC center, in a classroom setting; in the state where the study took place, the teacher may have a Child Development Certificate or a teaching degree, either in Early Childhood Education or Elementary Education.

Early intervention teachers -- teachers of special education services, having a degree in special education, either a Bachelor's or a Master's degree.

Individualized education plan – the special education document developed for each child with a disability which contains educational information about the child's functioning levels, information about educational goals and any specially designed instruction, his or her special education services and supports, and the location of the special education services and supports

Least restrictive environment – a requirement stating that to the maximum extent that is appropriate for the child, the child should be educated with his typical peers.

Suspension and Expulsion – in the current study, this was the dependent variable, and notes the removal of a student from a program. A suspension is a removal for one to 10 days (OCDEL, 2015). An expulsion is the removal of a student from an EC program for more than 10 days or the termination of a student from an EC program (OCDEL, 2015).

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made within the current study so that the reader could be assured of the conclusions made at the end. The students upon whom the current study was focused were assumed to have had an identified disability and have had an IEP in place. Also, the researcher assumed that the EC teachers worked in the centers and had appropriate training and/or certification to teach there. Finally, the EI teachers involved in the coaching work were assumed to have a special education degree and certification in the state to teach special education with this age group. Finally, one other assumption for teachers was that the teachers would follow the treatment fidelity of the coaching intervention. All of the above assumptions had to have been made in order to meet the focus of the current study, which focused upon students with disabilities who attended the EC centers, their EC teachers, and the EI teachers who coached them. Also, if the teacher pairs did not follow the fidelity of the coaching intervention, the reader could not assume that the coaching was the factor that derived a change in the SAE rate. If any factor did not match the specified needs, the findings of the current study could not be assumed to be accurate.

Scope and Delimitations

The current study was focused on EC SAE of students with disabilities and the use of coaching. The focus on SAE was based on the fact that this rate in EC centers is high and is a problem (U. S. Department of Education, 2014; U. S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014b). Individual states, such as the state of Pennsylvania, and the Federal Government have addressed this issue with specific

recommendations (OCDEL, 2015; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2014). Every week, the education service agency at which I work receives multiple calls from family members who are very concerned because their child has been suspended or "kicked out" of an EC center, and often the child has been expelled from more than one EC center. Coaching was chosen as the focused approach for the current study for two reasons. First, coaching has been shown to be an effective practice that helps with implementation and carry through of practices that are effective with students (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015). Second, coaches and teachers form a supportive relationship that is not performance based; this is different than the relationship of a director and a teacher, which is performance based. The coach provided skills and strategies to help the teacher improve as she practices the skills and strategies (Spillman, 2015). The work was not to catch the teacher in what she was not doing well, but rather to help her to learn and use the skills in working with the students in her room.

The current study was focused upon data from specific students, teachers, and EC centers. The students were those who had a disability and had an IEP in place. This group in particular was chosen in order to focus upon one group that statistics show has an overly high number of SAE in EC centers (U. S. Department of Education, 2014). The EC centers were within a specific geographical area of service delivery of an education service agency in a northeastern state. The centers included were those that had students attending their centers who are preschool age students with disabilities. Specific EC teachers involved must have had students with disabilities in their

classrooms. Information was collected that was obtained from the center directors on the number of students who had been suspended or expelled from their centers by the local education agency. It is believed that the results of the current study are generalizable. Coaching is not limited to special education or to early childhood education. Coaching can be done in any classroom setting. Research done on CBC shows that it improves student outcomes in various settings (Collier-Meek & Sanetti, 2014). The work done in EC centers by the EI and EC teachers can help the students in the current study, but it can also be used to help other students because the teachers are learning skills that they are able to then practice as part of their daily classroom routine (Krick Oborn & Johnson, 2015). Teachers have noted that they would benefit from additional training and support, and they noted that on the job training was helpful to them (Akalin et al., 2014). Coaching by EI teachers fits this description, so the work can be utilized in working with many students.

Limitations

A few limitations may have been present in the current study. First, teachers were asked to participate fully in the study. However, the integrity of the information that they offer may not have been complete due to the fact that the center directors may not have reliably noted how many students were included in the SAE rate in their centers or classrooms. In order to address this limitation, data on the number of SAE were obtained from data that had been collected by the education service agency. Second, the way the pairs carried out the coaching intervention could have affected the results. In order to address this, all teachers were encouraged to follow the steps of the coaching intervention

by the EI teacher coach. Third, there may have been biases from either field, with EC teachers believing that they were doing everything they could and that they did not need more help. In contrast, EI teachers might have believed that the EC teachers were not trying to keep the students with disabilities in the classrooms. As the researcher of the study, my biases are formed from hearing about regular and frequent SAE in my local area. I started with a coaching plan that already was in existence to help to remove my biases and follow a prescribed set of steps. Even though the EI and EC teachers work together as the EI teachers come into the EC classrooms to work with students, the goal of the study was to take their collaboration one step farther. The coaching intervention allowed for additional conversation to take place between the pairs to show that the EC and EI teachers were working as peers to provide combined support to all students in the classroom, specifically the students with disabilities.

Significance

In the current study, I investigated whether or not an intervention of teacher coaching may have had an effect on the number of SAE in EC centers. Coaching is one effective form of improving academic and behavioral outcomes for students (McIntosh et al., 2013). Coaching was utilized in a cross-systems approach between EC and EI teachers working together to possibly reduce the number of SAE in EC settings.

Several groups of individuals may benefit from the work done in this study. First, EC centers and the teachers who work there may be positively affected by the experience of greater support and knowledge of coaches who can offer guidance on how to work with students who have learning and behavioral differences. Early childhood teachers

may suspend or expel students with disabilities less often because they have more effective methods and strategies to help students who have different learning skills in their classrooms. More effective strategies may ameliorate the problem of SAE in early childhood centers in the United States. Young children and their families may also benefit from this positive social change, because the student's disabilities can stay and learn in school rather than not being allowed to attend, and families do not have to spend the extra time and effort to locate a new center that is of high quality for their child. Finally, if the EC teachers are able to increase their skills to teach all children, regardless of disability, then families may have a greater number of quality early childhood centers in which they can enroll their children.

Summary

The problem of suspending and expelling children from EC centers is becoming more egregious in our country. Many states and even the Federal Government are taking notice of the problem, and they are working diligently to provide recommendations to EC centers in order to lessen the number of SAE. The current study focused on one particular group of students who are being suspended and expelled at a higher than average rate from EC centers, namely students with disabilities. When a student who has a disability is removed from his EC classroom, even for just a few days, he misses out on learning activities and skills that his other peers are receiving, he misses out on learning experiences with those peers, and he potentially misses out on his special education services in the LRE.

Coaching is one strategy that has been shown to be an effective form of improving academic and behavioral outcomes for students. In this current study, coaching by EI teachers to EC teachers was examined to determine if its use caused a reduction in the SAE rate in EC classrooms. The two types of teachers formed dyads and worked together through the coaching process, which was based on the theory of CBC. Data was collected before and after the coaching took place in order to note a change in the SAE rate. A goal was to have the teachers work purposefully together to learn new strategies to use when the EI teacher is not present in the EC classroom which will lessen the actions of suspending and expelling students with disabilities in the classrooms.

In order to form a basis for this current study, I examined several relevant elements. Information on these instructional programs formed a foundation for the coaching strategies that were shared with the EC teachers in working with their students with disabilities, as well as other students in their classrooms. In the next section of the current study, the literature review will provide the reader with more concrete information about the problem, why it is important, and the reason behind the study direction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

A serious problem in the domains of EC and EI is the large number of students who are being suspended and expelled from their EC centers. One reason that this problem exists is that there is a gap in how staff at EC centers is dealing with preschool students' behavior problems (U. S. Department of Education, 2014). Children in the EC centers who have disabilities are especially at risk for suspension or expulsion. When students with disabilities are suspended or expelled, they lose time of attendance in their classrooms where they can learn with their peers and where they are receiving their EI special education services. More alarming is that these SAEs are taking place even when special education supports are in place.

State and federal governments are beginning to take notice of this disturbing problem, and these groups are starting to promote action to make a difference in the high rate that is being reported across the country. In one state, Pennsylvania, the governmental leaders crafted and disseminated an announcement regarding SAE (OCDEL, 2015). Specific guidance was offered to programs to implement positive strategies in order to lessen the SAE rate.

In the current study, I considered the effect of coaching of EC teachers by EI teachers on the SAE rate. The EI teachers' coaching provided support and strategies to help the EC teachers as opposed to directives from EC directors. Early intervention teachers were chosen as coaches because they have expertise in working with individual

needs of learners and they are regular visitors in EC classrooms as they work with students who attend the centers.

As the literature was examined on SAE in EC settings, several themes emerged. First, information was noted showing the importance of quality early learning programs on young children. Next, many researchers have published information on the problem of the SAE rate among students with disabilities in EC centers. Also, many supports and instructional strategies have been examined in working with young children who are struggling in EC centers. Details will be shared about a few of these approaches and programs. Finally, coaching is one evidence-based practice that was shown to be an effective learning strategy. Coaching is an effective way to present the positive social strategies noted in the research to EC teachers as they worked with children who have special education needs in their classrooms. This is why it was chosen to be applied in the current situation examining EC SAE.

One strategy other than coaching that has been recommended to teachers working with preschool children is learning new strategies through professional development training (The Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, 2014; U. S. Department of Education, 2014; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2014; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2015). Professional development can take place before the teacher starts teaching, and it should continue as teaching happens so that new skills can be taught for working with all children. One drawback to professional development training is that a one-time presentation of information is

helpful, but ongoing support enables the teacher to continue to use the strategies and use them with greater fidelity (Fox, Smith, Hemmeter, Strain, & Corso, 2015; Snell et al., 2014). Longstreth, Brady, and Kay (2013) noted that training as well as supports is critical in helping teachers deal with student discipline. For this reason, coaching was chosen rather than professional development training alone for the current study.

In this chapter, I will present the literature to more fully understand the gravity of this problem of EC SAE, as well as define terms that will be used throughout the paper. Details will be presented on CBC, which was the supporting theory chosen in utilizing the coaching intervention with teachers in EC settings. Also, a thorough review of literature will be conducted, showing information on EC education, SAE, instructional strategies, and the benefits of coaching. This chapter will serve as the supporting evidence and knowledge required by the reader to more fully understand the current research study.

Literature Search Strategy

The following databases and search engines were employed for research on this study:

- Education Source
- ERIC
- Google Scholar
- Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL)
- PsycINFO
- U. S. Department of Education

- U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights
- U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
- U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families
- U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education
- Walden Library

The following search terms were used to research the topics for this study:

- Behavioral, Emotional, and Social Training: Competent Learners Achieving School Success [BEST in CLASS] (educational model to promote positive social behaviors)
- Coaching
- Coaching and Early Childhood Education
- Coaching and Early Intervention
- Conjoint Behavioral Consultation
- Conjoint Behavioral Consultation and Early Childhood Programs
- Conjoint Behavioral Consultation and Early Intervention
- Early Childhood Education
- Early Intervention
- Expulsions and Early Childhood Education

- First Steps to Success (educational model to promote positive social behaviors)
- Inclusion and Early Childhood Education
- Inclusion and Early Intervention
- PATHS (educational model to promote positive social behaviors)
- Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports
- Pyramid Model (educational model to promote positive social behaviors)
- School wide Positive Behavior Supports
- Social skills instruction
- Social skills instruction and Early Childhood
- Social skills instruction and Early Intervention
- Suspensions and Early Childhood Education

When searching for information on the topic of the current study, sources were used within the past 5 years, except for the work regarding the CBC theory. Older information was included for this so that a clear picture of what the theory involves, where it has been practiced, and all of the parts that are used for the current coaching intervention can be noted. Several areas of literature were examined, including government documents, educational sources, and information presented by educators who promote coaching. Government documents were searched due to the fact that SAE in EC settings are causing many in the United States to take notice and create documents to begin to change the tide in the rising number of SAE of young learners. Educational journals and sites were a primary source of research due to the fact that this issue is

occurring in schools and EC centers around the United States. Much work was found on the topics already noted in the introduction of this chapter. Finally, this researcher attended a training session on using coaching in EC settings, and some of the information presented there was found to be pertinent to the topic of this study. This researcher found a significant amount of information on the topic, showing that the issue of SAE is evident.

Theoretical Foundation

Coaching is currently a prevalent strategy used in many fields, such as sports, psychology, nursing, and law (Geber & Visser, 2012; Matamoros & Cook, 2017; Salter & Gannon, 2015). In the current study, coaching was the approach that was presented as a strategy that could make a difference in the number of SAE of young children with disabilities who attend EC centers. Conjoint Behavioral Consultation was the theory that was chosen as the basis for the coaching utilized in the current study.

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation was a theory that has basis in several theory backgrounds. One system from which CBC stems was the ecological-systems theory. CBC theory stated that positive systems plus positive interactions and relationships in those systems help to promote positive outcomes for children (Sheridan et al., 2012). The theory also had ecological, systems, and behavioral perspectives at its root (Sheridan et al., 1996). In addition, CBC had roots in school psychology, due to the fact that the interactions and collaborations of the teachers are built around the student's behaviors and actions, and this became part of what the teacher did to carry out her work with the

students (Sheridan, Clarke, Knoche, & Edwards, 2006). These fields are several that are employed in both EC and EI programs.

Two additional factors that formed a basis for CBC involve the way that services are delivered to students. The theory utilized a partnership model as service is presented to students (Sheridan et al., 2005). Also, CBC took other consultation models one step further by ensuring that services are offered to multiple environments and people in the student's life simultaneously (Sheridan & Colton, 1994). This is important for the current study in the fact that the skills learned can be carried out during EI service as well as in the regular EC classroom, as well as by any teacher who works with the student.

The CBC theory worked for the current study based on the fact that it focused on working with students, helping to identify and reform behaviors or actions that are challenging. These behaviors may be contributors to expulsion or suspension from an EC center. Also, the theory utilized work with partners, as well as systematic and simultaneous support. The EC teacher and the students were receiving support to help them effectively participate in the routine of the EC program. Finally, the work that resulted from the collaboration became what the EC teacher practiced as she worked with the student in question as well as all students in her classroom. For these reasons, CBC was an effective theory for the current study.

The CBC theory has been applied to early elementary grades as well as EC settings to show that it is beneficial to those working in the classrooms. One randomized study, completed by Sheridan et al. (2012) set out to determine if the process could be used to identify student concerns that were interfering with their learning, to build the

capacity of families and schools to support students in school, and to strengthen relationships between those who are supporting the students. There was a specific focus placed on disruptive behaviors in students who were between kindergarten and third grade age. The study results showed that the CBC work improved positive behaviors of the students, and this was reported by both the teachers and the parents of the students. The work especially helped by increasing positive replacement behaviors for the more negative ones that had been displayed in the classroom. Finally, the students also showed a positive improvement on the parent-teacher relationships as reported by the teachers of the students in the study. In this case, CBC was found to influence social and learning problems in a positive manner.

Two other studies focus the work of employing CBC at the EC level. Sheridan, Clarke, Marti, Burt, and Rohlk (2005) noted that the CBC theory helps to address social-emotional needs of students in classroom settings. They noted that CBC worked especially well in EI and EC settings, reporting on work that was done in a Head Start classroom. As a result of the work done by these researchers, it was noted that both parents and teachers felt that the program was "acceptable and effective" (Sheridan et al., 2005, p. 3). This theory was found to help to develop positive relationships in the Head Start setting between teachers and families. It was also found to help to develop positive outcomes across educational settings for the students who were involved in the process. Sheridan et al. (2006) used CBC to determine if there is a positive impact on behavioral concerns of students in EC settings. The researchers found that CBC helped to build positive relationships between systems, and that it also helped to provide continuity

across systems where children are participating. The results also showed that the work helped to promote smoother transitions for students as they moved from one environment to another. All of these studies help to show the impact of CBC in classroom settings.

The CBC theory was chosen for the present study based on its background and the fact that other researchers have found it to be effective in EC settings. Specifically, the following points also help to show the relation of CBC to the current work. In this study, the students were involved in both EC classrooms and EI services. The staff from each system worked together collaboratively in order to help the students learn, grow, and stay in the EC setting. The students' behaviors are affected by the environment where they are attending as well as by the EC teachers in that setting. The model can help to effectively structure interactions between the EI and EC teachers in order to better help the students learn in a positive fashion in the EC setting. Finally, the EI and EC teachers are working with the child at the same time, identifying behaviors and goals that can be worked on with the student in the EC classroom. The work in the current study related the use of CBC theory to supporting students and decreasing SAE in EC settings.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

This section will report on research that is available on the topic at hand regarding EC education, coaching, and the problem of SAE. Topics covered include details about the basis of the study, data regarding SAE in EC settings, a closer examination of coaching, an inspection of what has been done and areas that can still be studied, and a review of some studies done about coaching. The work is organized to show the reader that a problem exists and justification for choosing coaching as part of this study.

Students with Disabilities Require High Quality Learning Environments

Early childhood education is one critical element in preparing children for learning in later school years and in becoming a more productive citizen. Vandenbroeck (2015) noted that an essential mission of EC is to help to create a strong origin for a person's lifelong love of learning. Quality EC programs help to embed elements of school readiness into a student, and they also help to lessen the costs of special education in school age programming (Parker, Atchison, & Workman, 2016). The EC environment must be one of high quality in order to make a difference in student learning (Wechsler, Melnick, Maier, & Bishop, 2016). In addition, a student must be allowed to stay in the quality EC setting for the education to make a difference for that particular student.

In EC environments, the whole student is addressed, and learning looks very different from only having the student sit at a desk to participate in cognitive learning activities. A quality EC program will address all areas of development, not only cognition, but also motor, language, adaptive, and social-emotional skills (Parker et al., 2016; Vandenbroeck, 2015; Wechsler et al., 2016). The students are learning, but they are learning while moving, talking, playing, and building, to name just a few EC activities. Skill development in all areas beyond cognitive skills helps to promote later learning as the student continues both in school and beyond (Vandenbroeck, 2015). Researchers have noted specific positive benefits of quality EC education, reflecting learning in multiple developmental areas. High-quality EC education promotes positive cognitive and social-emotional skills; it helps to promote positive school performance throughout the entire span of the student's time in school; it produces higher graduation

rates for students; and it leads to more positive health as the student reaches adulthood (OCDEL, 2016).

In EC centers across the United States, a wide variety of learners are enrolled for high-quality learning experiences. In the state of Pennsylvania, there are four preschool programs funded by the state, including The Pennsylvania Four-Year-Old and School base Prekindergarten and Kindergarten programs, Ready to Learn Block Grant, Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program, and Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program (State of Preschool, 2015). In these programs, four percent of three-year-olds and six percent of four-year-olds attend (State of Preschool, 2015). Within the Head Start program, the programs are required to set aside slots for attendance for students with disabilities (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, n.d.). In 2015, the state did not report the number of regulated child care programs, and they note that a majority of the centers are in family child care homes. This did not allow for a very accurate picture of who was receiving EC education in the state of Pennsylvania, because neither faith-based nor family care programs data was reported (Child Care Aware, 2015). There are many students in EC settings who are students who learn in ways that are different from the norm and from expected guidelines, and who deserve a high-quality education.

High-quality EC education is vital in the ways already mentioned, but the fact is that all children are not able to receive the benefits of a high-quality education due to the fact that they are being suspended or expelled from these very programs that are designed to help them. Students who have special education needs or have behaviors that are at

risk for special education services are being suspended and expelled from EC centers. The high-quality factor of an EC center is a benefit for all students, but especially for those students who are living in or experiencing challenging circumstances (Vandenbroeck, 2015). For students who have particular educational needs, the high quality is essential for students who may have language delays. For children who have this qualifier of language delay by preschool age, if quality education is not provided for them by this time, they can develop a gap of language development by up to two years behind their peers by the time they reach age 5 (Parker et al., 2016). The Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children [DEC] (2014) noted that students who are receiving special education services or who are at risk require high-quality education and services so that they are able to "participate and engage meaningfully" (p. 1) in regular learning routines. Vandenbroeck (2015) went on to state that if a student who is receiving special education or is at risk does not have equal opportunities to participate in a high-quality EC program, this student will have a much higher chance of unequal social opportunities when he is older. High-quality education should be high-quality education for all students, regardless of life situation, learning skills, or behaviors. Suspensions and expulsions negate the whole concept of quality education for a student who is removed from that classroom setting.

Inclusion of students with special education needs in EC settings is possible, and some EC centers promote it and carry it out well. Others, however, do not, and this is part of the problem when it comes to EC SAE. Inclusion is more than simply something that should be done; it should be done with forethought and acceptance of the students

who are being included in the EC classrooms. According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education (2014), in their policy statement regarding inclusion in EC settings, inclusion meant that all young children were included, all were given high expectations, and all were encouraged intentionally to participate in programs; these things are done by offering accommodations to students as needed on an individual basis and utilizing practices that are evidence-based. This was backed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, even going so far as to say that young children should be included to the "maximum extent possible" with similar expectations for all students in the EC classroom (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 3). The document went on to note benefits of inclusion for all children, including, but not limited to helping students with special education needs to reach their full potential in learning, in benefits to society in general, in helping students to reach a greater level of productivity in adulthood, and in less funds needed for specialized services later in life. The teachers in the EC centers may have to make modifications or adaptations to their learning activities, but the same learning standards can be employed (OCDEL, 2014). One additional note about inclusion is that if students with disabilities are removed from the regular EC setting, they may not be able to receive the special education services as they are listed on their IEP (U. S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2016). A goal of inclusion is to provide the special education supports and services for which all students with disabilities are eligible in the least restrictive educational setting.

As previously noted, high-quality EC education covers all areas of development, not just cognitive skills. One area that is a high-risk area for EC SAE is that of behaviors and social-emotional skills. Even when inclusion is practiced, and EC teachers are adapting and modifying learning environments and activities, student problem behaviors are still a big issue in EC settings (Wood & Ferro, 2012). Meadan, Ayvazo, and Ostrosky (2016) defined challenging behavior as those which are repeated patterns of behaviors or perceptions of behaviors that interfere with learning and engagement in a classroom setting. It has been reported that four to six percent of all EC students have serious social-emotional behavior disorders, and 16-30 percent cause continual problems to their EC teachers (Preschool Development Grant Technical Assistance, 2016). Teachers have difficulties when the activities for which they have planned and modified so that all can participate are disrupted by behaviors in the classroom. These continual disruptions lead to SAE in the EC settings. Wood and Ferro (2012) reported data from Gilliam, who stated that when EC centers do not have support for behavioral issues, there is likely to be a higher number of SAE. Social-emotional skills play a role in learning in the high-quality EC classroom, so when support is provided for social-emotional skills, all other learning can be more effectively carried out.

A study conducted by Hart et al. (2016) reported on supports that EC centers receive to help keep students with delayed social-emotional skills and challenging behaviors in the classroom. In this case, the students were part of a summer Head Start program, in which all of the students were transitioning to kindergarten in the fall. These researchers reported on partnerships between EI and Head Start teachers working

together to help the students stay in the Head Start program. The EI teachers helped to support those students who were already showing significant behavior issues before even entering kindergarten. As a result of the partnership, the Head Start teachers made fewer disciplinary referrals and expelled fewer students. The work of providing supports to deal with social-emotional issues in EC settings has been shown to be one that has positive benefits.

The work done by EC teachers requires considerable effort as they present information based on the learning standards presented to them and work to make adaptations and modifications to help all of the learners in their classrooms. When appropriate support for the teachers is provided, all students, regardless of ability and skill, can be engaged in learning and can more fully participate in their classroom routine (DEC, 2014). As students enter EC classrooms with IEPs which may include behavior plans to deal with challenging behaviors, EC teachers need to know what their role is in carrying out the adaptations, modifications, and progress reporting of their students (U. S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2016). When partnerships can be formed for EI teachers to not only work with students, but also to provide support to EC teachers, more effective learning can take place, with all students remaining in the classroom and fewer SAE.

Approaching the Problem of Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion

In reviewing the information on how educators have approached the problem of SAE in EC settings, the information on the number of SAE was examined. Across the United States, 22% of the students in EC centers were noted as students who have identified disabilities (U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014a). The data from the U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014a) went on to show that of these students, 19% have received one suspension from their EC center, and 17 % have been suspended more than one time. The number of students with disabilities who are suspended from EC centers was twice as high of the number of suspensions of EC students who do not have disabilities (U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014b). In comparison to their school age peers, this number is higher; in school age programs 13% of students who have identified disabilities have been suspended from school (U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014b). These numbers show how much different the number of suspensions for students with disabilities was from those for students without disabilities, particularly in the preschool age range.

Expulsion numbers of students with disabilities of all ages are alarmingly high. The U. S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (2016) reported that during the 2013-2014 school year, 10% of students with disabilities between ages three and 21 were removed from their school setting for up to ten days. When examining expulsions in EC settings, Gilliam (2014) reported that 10% of all preschool teachers reported that they had enacted a permanent expulsion of a student from their EC

classroom, and "at least one child" (p.1) that was expelled was removed due to challenging behaviors that they displayed in the classroom. The number of expulsions of students in preschool was three times higher than that of school age programs from kindergarten through grade 12 (Frey et al., 2013). When the focus is placed specifically on child care settings, this number jumped to an elevated rate of 13 times higher than in school age programs (Gilliam, 2014). This number varies from state to state, with one state, Michigan, which reported that the expulsion numbers in preschool were 34 times the state numbers in school age programs (Allen & Smith, 2015). These expulsions removed students from school and from their peers, and also removed them from staff and interventions or services that could help them develop more positive skills (Hemmeter, Hardy, Schnitz, Adams, & Kinder, 2015). Expulsions break the positive exposure that students with disabilities have to learning and special education services.

There may be varied instances of removals of students from EC centers, so it should clearly be noted what was meant when the terms suspension and expulsion were used. The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (2016) noted that expulsion is "terminating the enrollment of a child or family in the regular group setting because of a challenging behavior or a health condition" (p.1). They went on to note that suspensions are any other reductions in the time the child is in the group, either by creating a break in the days attending or shortening the length of day the student is in the program. More specifically in the state of Pennsylvania, an expulsion is a removal of a student for more than 10 days of attendance or actual termination of attendance, and suspension is removal of the student for one to

10 days (OCDEL, 2015). One thing that is clear from reading all data about SAE in the literature is that it is a widespread problem, and it is removing students from the setting in which their families have chosen for them to attend in order to learn and grow before they begin school age programming. One other fact that is known about early expulsion in EC settings is that it begets more expulsion later on in the student's life (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). In this section of the paper, I have defined the problem of SAE in EC settings; I will now also examine long-term effects on students as a result of their removal from their EC settings.

The outcomes of EC SAE are both immediate and long-term. The consequences of SAE on students with disabilities include missing special education services and being excluded from a positive learning environment. There is also loss of family work time due to the fact that the child is no longer in school. Research has shown that there are other long-term effects of EC SAE as well, which I will delineate next. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (2016b) noted that some of the long-term effects include the fact that the student is 10 times more likely to drop out of school in high school, he is more likely to fail academically, he is more likely not going to like school, and he has a higher chance of ending up in jail. In addition, according to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (2016a) there are greater chances of decreased health when the student is an adult as a result of early SAE. Horowitz (2015) agreed with all of this, noting that students who are expelled or suspended in the EC years are more likely to have negative events occur in their later school years.

Agencies that have oversight of educational programs are beginning to take notice to the problem of the high number of SAE in EC programs. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education (2014) joined forces and created a statement on SAE in EC settings. This communication offered clear and specific recommendations to EC center directors that are aimed to lessen SAE at this age level. In addition, there were other recommendations for states to work toward program quality, to create state policy, and to work toward clear messages about SAE. This national message was set in place with directives to move toward helping this problem at a more local level.

In the state of Pennsylvania, OCDEL (2015) released its own announcement on reducing SAE in Pennsylvania EC centers. The document defined both suspension and expulsion and noted recommendations for helping to cut the rates of both. Some of the suggestions included creating a positive environment in the classroom, creating clear expectations as well as consequences, and making fairness a certainty in working with all students in the centers. One other step taken in this document was for centers to form collaborations with other agencies and create professional development and technical assistance in order to empower the teachers and lessen the need for SAE. This last recommendation is one reason that the current study is utilizing EI staff to coach and collaborate with EC teachers to learn positive new skills in working with students with disabilities and those at risk for disabilities.

Other agencies are offering detailed information and recommendations to reinforce the national and state policies that are being developed and put into place. The

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (2016) clearly noted what specific steps centers should take to lessen SAE. The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act specifically recommended training on behavior strategies, development of prevention policy, and utilization of coaching in a cross-systems approach (Preschool Development Grant Technical Assistance, 2016). The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the DEC also created specific policies in order to help EC centers reduce SAE (Longstreth, Brady, & Kay, 2013). As a result, directors and staff who work in EC centers were able to find support and specific steps on working to lessen their SAE rate.

Two articles noted work that has been done to carry out recommendations for reduction of SAE. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016) noted updates from states that have carried out the policy recommendations. The overarching themes that were mentioned in promoting successful reduction of SAE include use of data, development of local policy, support from state government, partnerships with other agencies, cross-system work, and increased support for teachers. Longstreth et al. (2013) reported on two studies that demonstrated successful SAE reduction. In the first study, a tool was created to evaluate EC discipline policies; from this, centers could examine what they did that was working as well as what they might be missing and could add. In the second study, the tool that was developed in the first study was used to evaluate EC centers in the state of Arizona. It was determined that none of the centers included addressed staff training and support. The researchers recommended that this support should be clearly noted in their policy. They noted that when teachers are trained and

supported, they more consistently implement the policy that is in place. Longstreth et al. (2013) noted that resources, supports, training, and teacher preparation are essential for helping to reduce SAE. The work has started, but more has to be done to help EC teachers, and to help them specifically to work with students with disabilities who attend their centers.

Several groups have begun to respond nationally to the problem of SAE in EC settings by applying the policy recommendations both nationally and in individual states. The work has started to show results in research and in everyday practice across the country. One state that has shown promise and shared their results is the state of New Jersey. The state governance strongly stated its stance on SAE, noting that students in EC centers are not to be suspended or expelled from programming (State of New Jersey, 1996-2014). The state created a team at the EC level called the Preschool Intervention and Referral Team. With this team, there was now a consistent and ready resource for teachers to learn how to modify behaviors, how to create professional development for staff, and how to coordinate services in a cross-system fashion for additional support. A broader statement of support and action came from several groups under the auspices of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2016). This group, which included over 30 organizations, drafted a document that reinforced the idea that students with disabilities are being suspended and expelled and that this is a problem in our society. The group reinforced the national policy on SAE and noted that it will support the creation of "safe space" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2016, p. 2) where all students are able to learn and grow together. These two statements

created a beginning point for the American society to take steps to create what is needed to help to decrease SAE in the EC environment.

Researchers have noted what is causing a higher number of SAE and conversely, what is needed to help to reduce the numbers. Gilliam (2014) noted that a few factors causing expulsion are overall program and teacher factors. Others have broken these factors down more specifically to note what is not happening or is not in place in centers where a higher number of SAE is occurring. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016) noted that in examining various states EC centers, they found that SAE seemed to arise from poor EC policy on discipline and inadequate staff training on how to work with students who have learning differences. McGoey, Rispoli, Schneider, Clark, and Portz Novak (2013) completed a study to examine SAE. They found that three things made a difference in finding a higher SAE rate. These included how behaviors are handled, lack of teacher training, and absence of legal mandates that support the process. Teacher training on how to deal with behaviors took place on a frequent and consistent basis until the teachers were able to display the strategies on their own, and then the time frequency of trainings lessened. As the teachers began to develop new skills, they felt that they could handle more, and as a result, behavior concerns lessened. These factors play a role in the increase of SAE, and work has also been done to note what is needed to decrease the rate.

Positive factors have been noted to assist more students with disabilities to remain in their preschool settings. The Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (2016b) noted that the SAE rate decreased

when policy was put into place to support working with students who are learning differently than typical developmental guidelines and when support was provided to teaching staff in EC centers. Hemmeter, Hardy, Schnitz, Adams, and Kinder (2015) also added that EC teachers who had access to supports in dealing with problem behaviors were less likely to expel students from their classrooms. Finally, the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (2016) specifically stated that consultation with EI teachers was a positive way to help in dealing with students whose behavior is not readily or easily able to be supported in the classroom setting. These steps are positive elements that can be put in place to support teaching staff and to help students with disabilities stay in the classroom to continue to learn with their peers. This last element is a support in the choice of pairing EI and EC teachers in the current study. The pairs of teachers employed coaching, which has also been determined to play a positive role in working with staff and students in EC settings.

Justification for Coaching as a Variable in the Current Study

Coaching was the main approach that was chosen to be utilized in the current study. I hoped to find that after the coaching intervention had been practiced, there would be a lower number of SAE. Coaching was a recognized form of professional development, and the use of coaching has brought about measurable change in teaching and student outcomes (Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015). Coaching is a relationship-based process that is focused on a specific situation that works toward growth by setting and achieving goals in order to support teachers and help them develop new skills, practice, and confidence (Fenson & Steele, 2012; Jablon, Dombro, &Johnsen, 2016;

Snyder et al., 2015). When teachers participate in coaching, it has been shown that they carry out learning strategies more consistently, in a more profound way, and more often (Jablon et al., 2016). Coaching works when used in an educational setting.

Coaching is a process, not a "once and done" meeting between two teachers. Coaching includes several elements, mentioned by Fenson and Steele (2012) in their work on coaching in EI, and each can be related to the current study being described in this paper. First, coaching has a clear focus, which in this case was individualized to help EC teachers to develop skills in working with students who have disabilities in their EC classrooms. Second, there is a focus on relationships; here it was between EI and EC teachers. Coaching is a process, and the teachers who worked together in the current study met and communicated several times to develop a relationship and create a plan for working with the students. There is a set duration for the coaching process, and in this case, it was be for the duration of the current study. Also, the coaching delivery can take place in a variety of styles, and the relationship formation helps to determine what is best for the team. Coaching is a planned process that works to help a specific situation, and it can be repeated as often as needed or as new situations arise.

Coaching can be used in a positive way in the EC classroom setting. The use of coaching has shown improvements in situations in classrooms, according to Jablon, Dombro, & Johnsen (2016). One important part of coaching is that there has to be a shared language in the process so that the focus remains on helping the students (Jablon et al., 2016). Coaching in EI is different than direct service delivery to students. It is a combination practice of working with the adults and with the students, in order to help

the students (McWilliams, 2015). McWilliams (2015) also noted that collaboration from those other than supervisors or directors works more effectively; he noted that there is an agreed upon problem, solution, and evaluation of the solution. This accomplishes more than receiving a directive from an administrator, telling the teacher what has to be done, and then having the action or non-action be part of an evaluative process.

Coaching can come in various forms, and it is a process, not simply a task with a start and end point. Practice-based coaching was one form of coaching that has been used in school settings (The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2014). Snyder, Hemmeter, and Fox (2015) noted that practice-based coaching has been found to be effective in teaching social emotional skills and positive behavior support strategies. The process is cyclical, with steps taken for planning goals and action steps, engagement and observation, and reflection and feedback (The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2014; Snyder et al., 2015). The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (2014) noted that each step of practice-based coaching is reviewed on a regular basis to determine that the team is on the right track and continuing to work on the situation at hand. This group also added that practice-based coaching can be used in all teaching domains and with all teaching practices; it is not evaluative or judgmental, and the teacher and coach work together to develop steps to work through and with the situation. As noted earlier, the relationship between coach and teacher is developed over time, and the goal is to establish a rapport so that the work can be done effectively. Snyder et al. (2015) also noted that it is important that the coaching type used fits the goals of the partners.

Coaching was chosen for the current study because of its individual benefits to teachers, but also because it also has overall benefits for students and EC programs in general. The teachers learned new ways to approach situations, developed a relationship with another educator who has different experiences than their own, and had a consistent sounding board on which to entertain and discuss new ways of working with students. Coaches are a benefit to a director of a program who has many responsibilities in her position; the coach is able to work more directly with the teacher and provide knowledge and a varied set of skills in order to help her improve (Spillman, 2015). In addition, coaches can help to provide training, promote positive mental health activities and skills, help to prevent mental health challenges, and offer interventions for working with students (Hansen, Heavilin, & Walkley, 2016). Hansen, Heavilin, and Walkley (2016) noted that coaches help to bridge the gap between system groups. In the case of the current study, coaching between EI and EC helped to build bridges to lessen the gap between the two professional areas, with EC staff learning additional methods of working with students of varied learning abilities.

I have defined coaching, and now will elucidate benefits which can result from the use of this strategy. As previously noted, it has been shown that coaching is effective. Coaching shows benefits to both the teacher and the practice of teaching. For the teacher, coaching helps to increase knowledge, improve understanding of teaching practices, and provide opportunities for learning by offering feedback during practice of skills (Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Bezdek, 2013). In addition, teachers are also taught to reflect on their perceptions of student behaviors during the coaching process (Perry, 2014). From this,

teachers are able to increase their self-sufficiency and confidence, as well as learn to decrease negative behaviors in their classrooms (Perry, 2014). Teachers benefit from the coaching practice as they work with all students in their classrooms.

Research has also shown the benefits of coaching on the classroom and educational programs. Snyder et al. (2015) noted that coaching showed a measureable change in teaching and in child outcomes, and that the positive results were better sustained than with a one-time professional development session. Coaching helped to increase the fidelity of educational practice and helped to promote sustainability of evidence-based practice in the classroom (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015). In addition to promoting sustainability of specific practice, coaching has also been shown to increase the sustainability of educational programs (McIntosh et al., 2013). Coaching has been shown to improve teacher-student interactions in the classroom, decrease teacher burnout, and improve rates of teacher retention (Wechsler et al., 2016). Coaching is an important factor in many educational programs, in both school age and EC settings, and it promotes effective teaching practice at all levels for all students.

Coaching is a positive practice that has shown beneficial results in schools, and many organizations are recognizing this as they work with teachers around the United States. Both national and state agencies are recommending coaching as part of positive teaching practice in working with behaviors, SAE, and overall teaching practice. The United Sates Department of Health and Human Services (2015) specifically recommended the establishment of coaching models to reduce expulsions of students and to improve methodology of social-emotional skills instruction. Coaching was also

recommended by the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (2016b) to help EC teachers to decrease SAE. At a state level, Pennsylvania also recommended collaboration between agencies and professional development in working to decrease the SAE rate (OCDEL, 2015). Finally, DEC (2014) recommended coaching as a way to promote intentional instruction with all students, as well as collaboration among multiple disciplines in order to share knowledge to plan interventions and problem solve to help all children learn. Early childhood and EI administrators are seeing such recommendations to include coaching from many fronts as they plan on how to help teachers work together in teaching all students (Barton & Smith, 2015; DEC, 2014; Muccio, Kidd, White, & Burns, 2014; OCDEL, 2015; U. S. Department of Education, 2014; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2015).

When past practice has been reviewed, coaching is at times specifically mentioned as a potential method in promoting positive change and practice. Barton and Smith (2015) reported such information in their work. They noted that in comparing survey results from 20 years ago and in 2014, teaching challenges are very similar, with attitudes and beliefs about situations with inclusion being most frequently mentioned in both time frames. Inclusion rates have been shown to have changed very little in this timeframe as well. The researchers posited that something must be done differently to help to make changes in improving inclusion. They looked at national solutions suggested, and reported that access, participation, and support are highly recommended.

The team recommended supports that include coaching and ongoing support for teaming and went on to note that ongoing coaching is indispensable for continued improvement.

When one focuses specifically on the EC and EI environments, the teachers in these groups have heard much more about coaching as well. Coaching as a teaching support has shown positive outcomes in the preschool setting (Education Policy Center, 2016). Also, coaching to help with fidelity of practice was just as important as teaching the curriculum itself (Education Policy Center, 2016). A teacher must know how to use the curriculum, and a coach is able to show her with ongoing work how to use it well and in the fashion in which it was designed, and how to use it in her specific classroom setting with her individual students. This is essential in the EC setting where there are students with disabilities. The curriculum or program practice has to be used with fidelity to show if it is effective or not in helping students and to show if some additional accommodation may be needed for a student with a disability. Coaching is beneficial because of the work between two teachers collaborating, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (2016) clearly noted that consultation from an EI teacher for an EC teacher was of benefit. Coaching is able to help both teachers as they work to decrease SAE and practice positive discipline in general. Coaching in EC is a practice that is helpful to the teachers as they work with their students, employ their curriculum, and learn adaptations to help all learners in their classrooms.

Studies on Developing Positive Skills and Areas for Future Work

To this point, the importance of quality EC education has been presented, and information on clear statistics on the high numbers of and problems caused by SAE in EC years has been explained. Information about coaching as a possible practice to approach this problem has been offered. There is also much information on positively addressing social-emotional skills in EC classrooms, which is one area in which many EC teachers struggle when working with students with identified disabilities in their classrooms. Snyder et al. (2015) noted that coaching is one effective method for teaching social-emotional skills and using Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). In the next section, I will note additional information on studies that show work that has been done to help EC teachers to intentionally address social-emotional skills of all students in their classrooms.

It is helpful to more clearly understand what social-emotional development entails in order to address it, as well as how to help develop it in a child. It is also important that a teacher know and understand typical social-emotional development of a child, know that all children develop at their own rate, and understand that if a child is developmentally delayed, social-emotional skills may also be delayed or be different than those of his peers. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015) reported that social-emotional development is central to a student's overall development, and that it is strongly associated with learning, school readiness, and "long-term life outcomes" (p. 3). When surveyed, EC teachers responded that they did not have what they considered to be appropriate skills or knowledge regarding social-emotional skills and

development, even noting that very few of them had received any form of professional development on typical social skills development or how to help to promote it (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). These same teachers reported that dealing with behaviors is their most needed professional development topic. If teachers do not understand typical social-emotional development, it is not a surprise that they are suspending and expelling students who are showing skills that are different from their peers.

If social-emotional development is associated with learning and school readiness, then it could be posited that social-emotional skills programs would improve a student's academic development. Several studies have examined the teaching of social skills to students. Avcioğlu (2012) noted that self-management skills should be taught to students with learning disabilities. This same researcher also addressed the developmental level of the student, noting that this must be taken into account when a specific learning program is chosen. When students in Avcioğlu's (2012) study were intentionally taught self-management skills, they all fully reached their behavior goals that were set for them. This researcher also added that self-management strategies were one positive way to teach skill generalization. In another study, Stanton-Chapman, Walker, and Jamison (2014) reported from their work with Head Start classrooms that coaching the teachers on how to intentionally interact with their students helped to increase interactive play among the students. The scaffolded approach that they used helped to show the teachers that social skills instruction is important and that it was necessary for them to prompt the children to know how to play appropriately. The researchers also noted that it was

important to coach the use of strategies that were valued by the teachers, so they were more likely to use them. These works show that direct instruction is important; others also examined specific programs to teach social skills to students.

There are several examples of prepared programs for teaching social-emotional skills to students. A few studies showing the use of particular programs showed benefit to students. First, Vo, Sutherland, and Conroy (2012) examined the BEST in CLASS model in EC settings. They noted that negative behaviors at a young age impact later school performance and success in adulthood. They showed that the BEST in CLASS model helped teachers use positive practices and improved social-emotional outcomes of students. The study focused on teacher actions rather than direct work with student behaviors. The model was effective in increasing positive teacher-student interactions, increasing student engagement and learning, and decreasing problem behaviors in the classroom. The coaching involved in the model helped to make a change in teacher behavior. The PATHS curriculum (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) was studied by Hughes and Cline (2015). They noted that PATHS was better for older preschoolers than for three-year-olds, that it was able to help change students' thinking and reasoning skills, and that it could be adapted to be used with students with disabilities.

A few other models have also been researched. One model, the Training Opportunities for Tots and Staff (TOTS) model, was used by McGoey et al. (2013) in a private preschool setting. The researchers used consultants in 21 EC centers. The EC teachers reported that students had increased self-control, and that the behavioral

concerns decreased. Frey et al. (2013) used First Steps to Success to improve challenging behaviors. The researchers noted that an intervention such as First Steps to Success that is found to be socially valid was more likely to be used with fidelity in schools. In another study, Sam, Reszka, Odom, Hume, and Boyd (2015) studied several programs, including Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication-handicapped Children (TEACCH), Learning Experiences: Alternative Programs for Preschoolers and Parents (LEAP), and what they term "business as usual" (BAU) classrooms (p. 93). These researchers specifically examined the coding that teachers used in each of the programs. They noted that LEAP, then TEACCH, and BAU programs worked in their effectiveness levels in improving student social behaviors toward adults. They noted that TEACCH was less likely than the other two programs to improve social behaviors toward peers. Purposeful teaching of skills appeared to make a clear difference in social skills development.

In addition to created programs like the ones just mentioned, there were a few models or strategy approaches that had been noted to help to develop positive skills and decrease SAE. One model was a group of strategies known as PBIS or School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS). Another was teaching social-emotional skills using general strategies as well as writing functional behavior assessments.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports is used in many schools to help students at various levels of support. This is not a model as much as it is a grouping of strategies that is able to be used both with students who have disabilities and those who do not (Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support, n.d.). The strategies are used as part of

a predictable classroom environment in which positive behaviors are clearly stated and taught, where these behaviors are recognized with clear and consistent responses from the teachers, and where data is employed to note patterns in behavior and make decisions (Hancock & Carter, 2016). In their work, Allen and Smith (2015) noted that PBIS was one positive method in working with very young children on developing positive social skills. More specifically, it had been determined that PBIS is an effective choice in working with students with disabilities. These students may not have had appropriate behavior supports in place in a regular EC classroom and may have needed more focused help in developing skills as well as individualized needs (Fox et al., 2015; U. S. Department of Education and U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

Helping to make the PBIS model even more effective is the way in which it is used in EC settings. The DEC, National Association for the Education of Young Children, and National Head Start Association (2013) have noted that both EC and EI teachers should work together on PBIS strategies and develop joint professional development as a result of this work. As the groups work together, coaching could be used to help to more explicitly teach prevention of behaviors in the classroom, noting that the coaching helped with knowledge increase and offering feedback as the EC teachers practiced newly learned skills (Lane et al., 2013). McIntosh et al. (2013) also noted that coaching in SWPBS helps to support sustainability of the strategies in classrooms with young children. The use of the strategies, taught and supported by the use of coaches appears to make a difference in the teaching of positive behavior skills. This is a positive

skill for EC teachers to learn as they work with students with disabilities who may have social-emotional skill differences.

Students who attend EC centers benefitted greatly from intentional teaching of social-emotional skills. The work can be done with specific programs or groups of strategies. The important part was the intentionality of the work. In EC settings, social-emotional instruction helped to promote student self-management and improved student attitudes. When teachers taught positive social-emotional skills, they helped to ensure that students, no matter how young, were able to deal with demands put upon them in the classroom and helped them to benefit fully from the instruction presented to them (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). It is also important that the method used is an evidence-based practice. For social-emotional skills instruction to be most effective, the evidence-based practice must be presented with fidelity in the classroom, even though this may be a challenge in EC settings (Sutherland & McLeod, 2013). Young children of varying learning abilities and learning experiences may challenge fidelity, but effort must be put into following the practice with as much integrity as possible. Snell et al. (2014) worked in Head Start classrooms with the Universal Problem-Solving Approach and coaching to help monitor integrity of the practice. When this was done, all groups of students showed decreased aversive behaviors. More importantly, the teachers were not asked to use all of the strategies at once, but rather to choose the ones that mattered to what they were dealing with at the time. When this was done, the practices were followed more closely, and social skills improved. This work shows that random attempts at checking in on social skills or only

correcting negative behaviors are not as effective as well planned and purposeful, effective teaching to help students with social skills development.

One additional aid in helping to promote positive social-emotional skills and to decrease non-preferred behaviors that students with disabilities may bring to the EC classroom is the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). The FBA is an effective method for teachers to have help with each stage of dealing with the negative behaviors, and it also works individually and contextually with the student in his classroom setting (Chai & Lieberman-Betz, 2016). The FBA helped to create a plan that the teacher can understand and is willing to do in order to help the student. The use of an FBA also helped to keep students in their EC classroom rather than allowing for rapid expulsion or suspension (Wood & Ferro, 2012). The FBA helped a teacher to focus on the function of the student's behavior rather than the behavior, which helped them to then be able to determine a more positive social skill as a replacement behavior (Wood & Ferro, 2012).

Teaching positive social-emotional skills in EC settings is a challenge, which is recognized nationally. Teachers note challenging behaviors in students, and the students with disabilities may be showing these behaviors as part of their disability, or possibly as a result of generally delayed development. Suspensions and expulsions come about for many reasons, but there seem to be several reasons that cause these removals from the classroom setting. There may not be effective policy in place in the setting or there may be inadequate staff training (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Several clear challenges were noted by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education (2015), including lack of partnerships to

support teachers, lack of common knowledge between fields, lack of continued professional development for EC teachers, lack of collaboration in the classroom for continued support, and no clear or easy access to supports that may be available. These things are hindrances to helping EC teachers know what to do and how to help the students with disabilities in their classrooms rather than expelling or suspending them.

Members of the EC environment are becoming more aware of the problem of SAE, as well as what is needed to help to change the fact that too many students with disabilities are being suspended or expelled from EC centers. The U. S. Department of Education (2014) shared recommendations for centers, including the that it was best to start with a positive environment and prevention to help to keep students with disabilities in the classroom, that teachers should have clear and consistent behavioral expectations and consequences, that staff should be given trainings on specific strategies that are based on evidence-based practice, and that teachers should be intentionally teaching and promoting positive social-emotional skill learning. These actions can help to increase a positive approach and decrease the negative stance of SAE.

Various states and specific agencies within states are offering clear incentives and ideas to help to build skills and decrease challenges brought about by students showing a lack of positive social-emotional skills in EC classrooms. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016) highlighted practices in several states, and the common themes in work that is being done to decrease SAE include use of data, state support, partnering with agencies outside EC, system crossover work in the EC setting, and more supports for teachers. These factors can be used in combination with social-

emotional skills instruction in order to promote positive behaviors and keep students in the classroom with their peers. Also, Pennsylvania was one state that offered incentives in the form of grants to EI programs to encourage and allow them to partner with and support EC centers as they help to include and keep students with disabilities in the EC classrooms with their peers (OCDEL, 2015). I neither sought nor received a grant from any state or agency for this study. The combination of knowledge, recommendations, and incentives can be the change agent needed to stop the continued increase of the removal of students with disabilities from EC classrooms.

Studies Related to Successful Application of Coaching

Coaching has been used in several studies, especially at the EC level, working with teachers in various classrooms serving preschool students. Several studies will be examined here, highlighting coaching at various times and in various settings and methods. First, the benefits of coaching for pre-service for teachers will be shared. Next, studies will be presented that show how coaching is used as part of a specific teaching practice. Also, coaching will be presented as used in Head Start settings, then in various methods of coaching presentation. Finally, two studies that were done to focus more closely on SAE will be highlighted. It should be noted that no studies were discovered that examined coaching of EC teachers by EI teachers in order to determine a change in the SAE rate in EC settings for students with disabilities.

When a new teacher begins to work at an EC center, she has much to learn, not only about her students, but also about the center, her classroom, the curriculum, and how to help all of her students, including those with disabilities, to be successful learners.

Akalin et al. (2014) examined what teachers need so that they can feel more prepared to work with students with disabilities who are included in their EC classrooms. The teachers noted that they believed they needed more training and support as well as how they could better adapt to the program in which they were working. It was noted that on–the-job training was found to be particularly helpful. Akalin et al. (2014) provided two findings as a result of their work. First, more work should be done in schools to prepare teachers for working with students with disabilities. Second, there should be more consistent on-the-job training, such as coaching, to help the teachers once they have begun to work with all of the students in their classrooms. This shows that coaching is recommended to provide the ongoing support needed by new teachers as they learn how to successfully work with students of varying educational abilities.

Two studies were done using the BEST in CLASS program, which has a coaching component. Conroy, Sutherland, Vo, Carr, and Ogston (2014) examined BEST in CLASS in EC classes in two different districts. Teachers in the two districts used the model, including the coaching component. The researchers noted teacher use of the practice increased and was maintained, there was a slight increase in engagement, behaviors of students at risk for emotional disturbances decreased, teacher-student interactions were high and positive, and teachers found the program to be one of which they approved. Vo et al. (2012) also examined BEST in CLASS in a different set of EC classes. They showed that BEST in CLASS helped teachers to use the positive practices and improved social-emotional outcomes of students at risk for emotional disturbances. In their work in this study, the researchers focused on teacher behaviors with coaching.

They found increased teacher-student interactions, increased student engagement and learning, as well as decreased problem behaviors in the students. They added that coaching makes the greatest impact on teacher behaviors in the classroom, as it provides ongoing help, is specific to individual student needs, and offers more than just introducing new skills and leaving the teachers to carry out the practice on their own. Coaching as part of a program appeared to be effective in helping the teachers, which in turn helps the students.

Head Start classrooms are EC programs that accept and teach learners of varied abilities and social backgrounds. Head Start programs play a substantial role in educating students with disabilities, and they are mandated to have at least 10% of their enrollment to be students with disabilities (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, n.d.). In one study, Zan and Donegan-Ritter (2014) used the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) with Head Start teachers. They found that coaching plus a learning course on CLASS was more effective than the course alone in teaching literacy strategies to the teachers. They noted that coaching was found to be an effective follow-up for the teachers, and that the teachers who were coached were more likely to use the practices and use them appropriately. In their study, Muccio, Kidd, White, and Burns (2014) worked with teachers in Head Start programs who did not feel that they had enough resources to work with students with disabilities. They found that some sort of support, such as a coach, was needed for support of practices and professional development in order to increase teacher knowledge and skills. Stanton-Chapman et al. (2014) focused on social pragmatic skills of students in Head Start

classrooms. They provided a coach for each of the 10 classrooms participating, as well as coaching sessions and workshops. The coaching model helped to increase interactive play by providing scaffolding to the teachers. Finally, Snell et al. (2014) used coaching with the Universal Problem-solving Approach in six Head Start classrooms. The coaching included two workshops and two coaching sessions. The students' inappropriate behaviors decreased in all of the groups involved in the study. The coaching was noted to be helpful, and the coaching was individualized to not have all of the teachers use all of the practices, but rather use what applied to them in their individual classrooms. Coaching has been found to be a successful practice in working with classrooms where at least10% of students with disabilities are enrolled as part of the program.

Coaching can be face to face with meetings between coach and teacher, followed by additional meetings to check in and determine next steps. However, there are other methods of coaching which have been studied, some in classrooms and some with EI and families. In their study, Powell and Diamond (2013) worked with Head Start teachers comparing onsite and remote coaching. In comparing the approaches, they looked closely at the structure of coaching, the process of coaching, and the content of coaching. They found that each approach had its areas of benefits, and that a hybrid model of coaching may actually have been the best approach. In focusing on EI settings, Krick Oborn and Johnson (2015) coached families whose children were receiving EI services using feedback via email. The coaching with performance feedback approach combined supports with data that showed what and how much implementation was noted. Positive

information was shared first with the families, and then clear and constructive feedback followed next. Coaching produced changes in the families' practices. The researchers added that the teachers working with the families had to have an understanding of a range of strategies to teach students with disabilities in order to coach effectively. In another study, Ottley (2016) employed bug-in-ear technology for coaching in her study. The researcher using bug-in-ear technology involves a practitioner who wears an earpiece and a coach who provided feedback to the practitioner through that earpiece (Ottley, 2016). The process involved working directly with the adults concurrently as they worked with their children. This real time coaching allowed for suggestions and feedback to be offered while the teacher was observing the adult working with the child, and it promoted learning while work was being done with actual learning opportunities. The researcher noted that combining real time coaching with technology provided positive outcomes with fewer distractions as the adult and child interacted. Finally, Bishop, Snyder, and Crow (2015) conducted a study using video self-monitoring with three EC teachers to check for continued use of effective teaching strategies. Coaching was used to teach the teachers to self-monitor, and then also was used to provide feedback to them as they practiced using the new skill. Improvement was shown in two of the three teachers, but none of them continued to maintain their skills. The researchers noted that this shows that continued external support was needed, and that this type of coaching may have been positive due to the fact that face-to-face coaching was not always practical. These studies show that coaching, even via a variety of approaches, is still an effective way to bring about positive change in education.

Researchers have also done work to examine the effects of coaching on the increasing number of SAE. Hemmeter et al. (2015) used coaching to help skills generalization. They reported that teachers who have access to supports were less likely to expel students from their classrooms, and that coaching helped to change behaviors. The researchers noted that coaching during different times of the school day may have helped with generalization of skills. McGoey et al. (2013) used mental health consultants to help teachers to deal with negative behaviors in their classrooms. The coaching steps included building a relationship between coach and teacher, understanding the teacher's expectations, and using assessment to get a clear understanding of the student. Goals were created and work was done together to find and use strategies to meet the goals. The consultants used the TOTS program with the teachers, starting with weekly visits, and then decreasing to monthly coaching sessions when improvement was noted. As a result, the teacher ratings on aversive student behaviors decreased. The researchers noted that coaching was preventative, was able to be easily carried out, could help the students, could help the teachers learn how to help other students than only the ones in the initial coaching sessions, could be adapted easily, and was accepted by teachers. These studies show that coaching teachers to learn new skills can help to keep students in EC classrooms. It should be noted, however, that these two studies examined coaching and SAE, but only one looked at employing EI teachers as coaches, and neither measured the number of SAE before and after the coaching intervention. The current study built on work that has previously been done.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature showed that the situation of increasing SAE in preschool, specifically for particular groups of students such as those with disabilities, is a national problem. Several general themes were obtained from the research. First, there is a clear and growing problem of students with disabilities being expelled or suspended from their preschool classrooms. Second, agencies at the national, state, and local levels are beginning to make recommendations to address the issue. Third, intentional teaching of social-emotional skills to students, particularly to those students with disabilities who may not have age-appropriate skills, is important in helping to keep students in preschool. Finally, coaching is one approach that is showing promise in teaching social-emotional skills and in helping to decrease the number of students suspended and expelled from EC settings.

The problem has been more clearly stated, and research showed that coaching may be one way to help address the problem. In several studies, teachers noted that one element that they believed was lacking was supports for them as they work with students with disabilities (Akalin et al., 2014; McGoey et al., 2013; Muccio et al., 2014). They also noted that behaviors were a significant problem in their EC settings (Frey et al., 2013; McGoey et al., 2013; Wood & Ferro, 2012). Coaching is a practice that is a recognized form of professional development which has shown measurable change in teaching and in student outcomes (Snyder et al., 2015), and it has been showing positive outcomes in EC settings (Education Policy Center, 2016).

There is much information on the problem, on positive instruction to be presented to the students, and on the fact that coaching is a beneficial support for teachers. There has also been work on utilizing coaching to reduce SAE (Hemmeter et al., 2015; McGoey et al., 2013). There has also been mention of the importance of using peers, not administrators or supervisors as coaches (McWilliams, 2015). Gilliam (as cited in McGoey et al., 2015) noted that coaching from mental health consultants helped to decrease expulsions in kindergarten more than did coaching from other elementary school teachers who were available to help with classroom problems. No research was found on coaching from EI teachers to EC teachers and the benefit of the partnership on decreasing SAE in EC settings. This was the premise of the current study.

The current study aimed to pair an EI teacher with an EC teacher to help to teach strategies in working with the students with disabilities in the EC classrooms. There were more EC teachers than EI teachers, but there were 27 pairs in the current study. Each EI teacher had more than one EC partner. The EI teacher followed a set process of coaching, grounded in the CBC theory. The partners worked together to set goals for the individual needs in the EC settings, and instruction was shared on becoming more aware of social-emotional differences and teaching prevention skills to help increase positive actions and decrease negative behaviors. The goal was to help the teacher feel more supported in dealing with the students so that she was not as likely to expel or suspend them from the program.

In the next chapter of this paper, I will more clearly delineate the process of the study of pairing an EI teacher with an EC teacher to promote positive supports and

decrease SAE. I utilized a *t*-test to determine any significant differences in the SAE rate. In the area where the current study took place, EC teachers were familiar with EI teachers coming into the classroom to work with students; however, in this case, support in the form of coaching was also provided to the EC teacher. The goal was to provide more ongoing support so that the EC teacher is more comfortable with and knowledgeable about the students with disabilities in her classroom.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The intended purpose of the current study was to examine the effects of coaching on the number of SAE of students with disabilities in EC settings. The coaches in the current study were EI teachers. The EI teachers were a support to the EC teachers by helping them address issues with students and then helping them to develop effective and acceptable strategies to use in their classrooms. Samuels (2014) reported that if an EC teacher is able to gain new skills to use with the many different learners in the classroom, the SAE rate in the room tends to decrease. For this reason, coaching by the EI teachers was believed to be one way to help the EC teacher learn new skills and confidence in the teaching of students with disabilities, and to help to decrease the number of SAE of these students in EC classrooms.

In this chapter, information will be presented on the process of the work being done. The research design and rationale will be explained. Also, the reader will understand more about the methodology of the study taking place in the EC setting. Information will be shared about threats to validity as well as a discussion on ethics and how the work will be done in an ethical manner. The reader will be more clearly able to understand the steps that were taken in planning the study as well as the work that was done to determine results.

Research Design and Rationale

The independent variable in the current study was the presence or absence of the coaching intervention. The EI and EC teachers were paired as coaching partners. The

dependent variable was the number of SAE of students with disabilities in EC settings. For the purposes of this study, SAE was viewed as a single grouped variable. The current study was done to determine the effect of coaching on the SAE rate in the classrooms involved in the study. The EI teachers participating in the study already go to the EC centers to provide direct special education services for the students who attend the classrooms. The EI supervisor agreed to have the EI teachers participate in the coaching. I provided information on the coaching steps to the EI supervisor for the EI teachers. The EI supervisor also provided information to each of the EC directors about the study, and about the fact that the EI teacher would provide coaching to their EC teachers in addition to working with the students with disabilities who attended their centers. She also noted that the EI teachers would support and lead the EC teachers through the coaching process. The EI supervisor did not note any unwillingness from any EC director who agreed to participate in the study.

The design of the current study was quasi-experimental. The number of SAE was assessed before and after the coaching intervention. A comparison of the number of SAE before and after the coaching intervention answered the research question by identifying the effect of the coaching intervention on the number of SAE of students with disabilities.

The time frame chosen for the treatment portion of the current study was 8 weeks; this was determined by the length of time needed for training sessions for coaching and the length of the coaching sessions. For the purposes of the capstone project, there was not a follow-up check at a set time period after the post-intervention data collection. The time frame allowed for coaching partnerships to be developed, coaching goals set, and

time allotted for carrying out of chosen strategies. The data collection post-intervention took place eight weeks after the intervention ended. The time frame was planned to help determine a one-time effect change determination.

The quasi-experimental design was intentionally chosen due to the nature of the EC educational environment. There was not the possibility for true and complete random assignment for several reasons. First, only EC centers who had enrolled students with disabilities in their schools would be able to participate in the study. Second, I was not able to hand-select EC teachers due to the fact that the selected EC centers had already hired their own EC teachers. Third, the EI staff was assigned to locations of EC centers based on EI supervisor assignment, which had been in place before the study began. I did not assign teacher locations for the purpose of this research study. Also, every EC teacher who had a student with a disability in her classroom had to be paired with an EI teacher, which also prevented random sampling and assignment. This was the primary reason for the choice of quasi-experimental design, and it is one that is often used in education.

Coaching was the intervention that was used in the current study. Coaching is an effective evidence-based practice, and much information has already been shared on its benefits. Research has been done to show effects of coaching between EC and mental health professionals (McGoey et al., 2013). The current study implemented the coaching intervention within the EC environment. Early childhood teachers and EI teachers commonly work together to help students with service delivery, so coaching from EI

teachers took an already familiar partnership and examined a new factor, which was reduction of the SAE in the EC setting.

Methodology

The population for the current study was EC and EI teachers in an education agency in a northeastern state. All schools and centers were located within the geographic four-county area which makes up the EI education agency. The data collected for the study was received from 27 EC centers. These 27 EC directors agreed to participate in the coaching intervention as part of the study. The EI supervisor collected the SAE data from each of the centers. Eleven EI teachers visit these centers, and the education agency collects data on SAE from the centers. The total number of teachers involved in the study was 38. Each EC teacher had at least one preschool student with disabilities in her classroom. The proposed sample size allowed for a potential small dropout rate of teachers.

As noted earlier, a quasi-experimental design was used in the current study. Convenience sampling was utilized by selecting teachers in the chosen geographical area. Teachers had to be EC and EI teachers, and the EC teachers had to have at least one student in their classroom with a disability. The teachers were chosen by utilizing EC centers in the education agency geographical region where there are students with disabilities enrolled. The local education agency then provided data on SAE that it collected from centers, and the director shared this sample of the data for the study. The data was collected from centers where the EI teachers are providing the coaching intervention to the centers.

The geographic boundaries of the EI education agency were the location for the recruitment area for EC centers in the current study. The agency covers an area of four counties in a northeastern state. A meeting with the local education agency supervisor took place in order to explain the qualification for including an EC center, which is that an EI teacher must visit the center to provide direct service to a child with a disability there. This individual has up to date knowledge of the EC centers in his area, and she also is the direct supervisor for the EI teachers who work in that education agency. Separate contact was made via the local education agency supervisor with the EI teachers with information on the current study in light of their role.

Information was disseminated and collected via email sent to the director of the education agency. Data also was collected in the same manner. Pre-intervention, the education agency director received a data sheet to determine information about the number of SAE in the center. Post-intervention, another data sheet was sent to the director asking for the number of SAE.

When the current study ended, a follow-up letter was sent to each EI teacher as an exit to the study. The letter thanked them for their participation. My email address was also included in the case of any follow-up questions the participants may have about the work. There was no additional follow-up to the current study.

The main intervention examined in the current study was the use of coaching. The coaching was delivered utilizing pairs of teachers, with an EI teacher partnering with an EC teacher. All EI teachers were assigned more than one EC teacher, but all coaching pairs only had one EC teacher. The EC teacher offered information about a student or

students in the classroom with whom there have been difficulties noted in the classroom. The EI teacher then worked with the EC teacher to set goals on items to address and to offer strategies to assist in working with the student or students in a more effective fashion.

The coaching model had its foundation in CBC (Sheridan & Colton, 1994). In this system, according to Sheridan and Colton (1994) there was a sort of service delivery in which partners worked and planned together to address specific learning needs of a student for whom both share some of the educational responsibility. This is why the partnership in the current study involved both EC and EI. The student with a disability was a regular student of the EC teacher, but because of the fact that he or she had an educational diagnosis, there also was a responsibility for the EI teacher or staff in his world.

The steps for the coaching process in the current study were based on work done by Artman-Meeker, Fettig, Barton, Penney, and Zeng (2015); Fenson and Steele (2012); Krick Oborn and Johnson (2015); The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (2014); Sheridan and Colton (1994); Sheridan et al. (2006); and Sheridan et al. (2012). These researchers utilized coaching in schools and with families, working to create partnerships to help students with educational concerns. Artman-Meeker et al. (2015), Fenson and Steele (2012) and Sheridan et al. (2006) focused more specifically on the EC setting as they developed and wrote about their coaching and consultation.

As the EC and EI teachers met for the coaching intervention, the teams followed these steps in the process. I shared clear information on the process and number of

meetings with the teams, but they carried out the entire coaching process with the written information given to them without input from me as the researcher. The teams met seven times during the intervention procedure to carry out the steps. First, a relationship was developed between the two teachers through meeting and talking to each other to learn about each other. Second, a problem was identified by the EC teacher, and the two then analyzed the details and assessed the current situation. Third, the teachers worked together to develop an action plan to address the problem and set mutually agreed-upon goals to begin the work. Fourth, the action steps were carried out by the EC teacher, with teaching and modeling by the EI teacher as needed in each particular situation. The aim was to have the EC teacher doing the actual work of the goal, with the EI teacher there to support and model so that the EC teacher has knowledge and confidence in doing the action. Finally, the EI teacher conducted a structured observation of the action and offered feedback. This timeframe allowed for three check-ins by the EI teacher. The EC teacher also was able to provide reflection on the work done. This was the last step for the study, but the coaching process is one that is cyclical, so the work could begin again based on changes that are decided upon in this last step. The teachers met at agreed upon times during the school day at a convenient location, dependent upon the step, and discussed or worked with the student or students.

During this study, I only gathered information on the data about the number of SAE before the intervention and after the intervention. Other than providing steps for coaching to the EI supervisor for her staff, I did not conduct any work on the coaching intervention. These numbers were obtained directly from the education agency

supervisor. No direct contact with the EC directors was made by anyone other than the EI supervisor.

The two variables in this study were coaching and SAE rate. The independent variable, coaching, was presented to the EC teachers by the EI teachers. The intervention work was led by the EI teachers, but the EC teachers played a main role in the partnership to identify relevant situations and problems, as well as to carry out the strategies offered, which should have been amenable to the EC teachers as part of their daily routine. The dependent variable, the SAE rate, was measured before and after the coaching intervention took place. Suspension and expulsion data was collected from the data held by the education agency prior to the beginning of the coaching intervention. Suspension and expulsion data was tabulated again at the conclusion of the coaching intervention. This was done by reviewing the number of SAE data collected by the education agency before and after the coaching intervention. Care was taken to check for data errors after each data collection. The number of SAE was depicted on a bar chart showing any difference before and after the coaching intervention takes place. The depiction represented the actual number of SAE at each data collection set, which were at the beginning and end of the study, eight weeks after the intervention ended. Specifically, as initial data was entered into the statistics program, a visual scan of the numbers and frequencies were taken to note that a number for SAE had been reported for each EC teacher. After the second collection after the intervention, I checked again for any missing data reporting in the numbers entered and frequencies displayed. Also, I was careful to identify and consider any rate that seemed out of the norm as potential outliers.

In order to conduct the statistical calculation for the *t*-test analysis of the data, software, specifically IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25, was used. In order to achieve 80% power with a significance level of 0.05 and effect size of 0.5, the sample size of 36 would be a minimum number to complete the study. The data collected from the education agency was entered into the system to complete the data analysis.

The research question and hypotheses of this study were as follows:

Research question: What are the effects of a coaching intervention by early intervention teachers to early childhood teachers on the number of suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities? Information from pre-test data will show the number of suspensions and expulsions before the coaching intervention, and post-test data will show the number of suspensions and expulsions after the coaching intervention.

H_o: There is no statistically significant difference between the number of suspensions and expulsions given by teachers after receiving a coaching intervention.

H_1: There is a statistically significant difference between the number of suspensions and expulsions given by teachers after receiving a coaching intervention.

In order to test the hypotheses, a *t*-test was used. This was chosen in order to determine significant differences in the number of SAE before and after the coaching intervention. A significance of 0.05 was considered as the standard for the current study. Pre-intervention data were obtained before coaching began, and post-intervention data were obtained 8 weeks after the coaching ends. Analysis was be done to determine if a significant difference existed in the results after the intervention had been conducted.

Threats to Validity

There were potential threats to validity in the current study. These will be broken into types, including internal, external, construct, and statistical conclusion. As for internal threats to validity, the first of the threats was accurate reporting of SAE data. Because center directors may not know the definitions of suspension or expulsion, there is a risk that they may minimize the actual number of SAE in their classroom settings. Also, directors may call suspensions or expulsions by different names, and again as a result, they may not be calculating every instance in their total tabulation. One example of this in my local area is using the term "furlough", and when asked, this center's director notes that she has not expelled any students in her center. In order to minimize this threat, I shared definitions of both suspension and expulsion, as noted by OCDEL in the agency's SAE announcement (2015) with the supervisor of the education agency to give to each EC director. Another threat was if the intervention pairs did not actually carry out the coaching intervention with fidelity. This would have made a difference in the result of the intervention in working with the student or students who have disabilities. There were check-ins by the EI teacher at each meeting of the coaching process to determine if strategies were being utilized during observations and through coaching conversations. Finally, the partnership of the EI and EC teachers posed an additional internal threat to the study. If the two teachers could not form a partnership or did not continue to meet and work through the process, there could have been different results. During the current study I received information about the meetings and how the

process was moving along with each partnership by checking in with the education agency supervisor.

One external threat involved generalization of the current study results. I collected data from the education agency from a large sample size of EC centers. This helped decrease attrition of participating teachers or students with disabilities in the classrooms involved in the study. This also helped to increase the chances of the result being able to be generalized to other centers that enroll students with disabilities.

The final threats involved treatment fidelity. First, the coaching process was clearly defined in the work, and the steps for the coaching process were made clear to all teachers involved at the beginning of the current study. When the coaching was clearly defined it was more likely to attribute a change to the SAE rate. Also, in order to minimize a threat to statistical fidelity, a large sample size was selected. This helped to ensure more accurate results in the statistical process.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures were followed throughout the process of the current study. I submitted the protocol for the current study to Institutional Review Board (IRB) to gain approval. I completed and received approval of the ethics pre-application and submitted the form for description of data sources and partner sites. Each participant was given a number to keep all identification confidential, and no other person has access to the data or participant information. I stored all data from each participant in a locked filing cabinet in my residence. I kept data in the locked storage filing drawer for five years after the current study ends. Conflicts of interest were minimized by having the study

take place in a neighboring work environment to me, rather than the education agency where I am employed. This ensured that the study was done outside of any affiliation that I had with any of the EC classrooms or EI teachers. This also addressed the fact that the work the study would not directly impact job evaluations of any of the subjects involved due to the fact that data was data were not shared with direct supervisors of EI or directors of EC settings. Finally, I was collecting data from the education agency from information that the supervisor gathered. I did not contact an EC teacher or center directly. Thus, no informed consent was appropriate for the study.

Summary

In summary, the current study was a quasi-experimental study examining if coaching affected the number of expulsions and suspension in EC classrooms. Coaching partnerships were formed between EI teachers and EC teachers. The teachers were working with preschool students in a northeastern state, and the EC teachers were in centers within the boundaries of the local education agency in which the EI teachers were employed. Each of the EC teachers formed a coaching partnership with an EI teacher, based on the model developed from research and based on the CBC theory. Data regarding the SAE rate were collected before the coaching intervention, and then again 8 weeks after the intervention was completed. I employed a *t*-test to analyze if there were a significant difference in SAE data. I hypothesized that a reduction in the SAE rate would be observed.

In the next chapter, results from the intervention with the EC and EI teachers will be reported to review the results of the coaching intervention on the number of SAEs.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the results of the study on the effects of coaching on SAE in EC centers. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of a coaching intervention on the frequency of SAE of students with disabilities who are enrolled in EC centers. The number of SAE is a set of data that is collected by the local education agency whose staff participated in the study. Data on SAE was collected both before and after the coaching intervention was introduced to the EC centers in the area where the education agency provides special education services. The specific research question that was asked was as follows: What are the effects of a coaching intervention by early intervention teachers to early childhood teachers on the number of suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities? The following hypotheses were presented for the study:

H_o: There is no statistically significant difference between the number of suspensions and expulsions given by teachers after receiving a coaching intervention.

H_1: There is a statistically significant difference between the number of suspensions and expulsions given by teachers after receiving a coaching intervention.

In this chapter, I will review the results obtained by using a *t*-test on the data before and after the coaching intervention. These results will be presented in a table as well. After the data from the *t*-test is presented, the data will also be displayed in bar charts. First, individual data on both suspensions and expulsions will be described and shown in bar charts before and after coaching. Additional information will show the data

separated into two charts to show the effects of the coaching intervention on suspension and then on expulsion.

Data Collection

To collect information for this study, I worked closely with the supervisor of the local education agency described earlier in this paper. The supervisor has access to data on SAE rates for the EC centers where the EI teachers provide special education services to children with disabilities. The recruitment for the EI teachers involved asking the EI supervisor for data on a set of centers. I am not aware of the total number of centers to which the supervisor sent information. As a result of sending out information about the coaching intervention, the EI supervisor received responses from 27 EC center directors. The EI supervisor provided data from 27 centers that have students with disabilities enrolled at the beginning of this school year. The EI supervisor was able to provide information from the same centers both before and after the coaching intervention.

The coaching intervention was provided by the EI teachers who are itinerant teachers in the local education agency. All teachers were familiar with the idea of coaching, so the main part of the intervention instruction was to instruct them on the order of the steps of the process. All teachers received the order of the coaching steps to follow as they worked with the teachers in the EC centers. The time frame of the coaching intervention steps was 8 weeks during the summer of 2019. The EI supervisor provided the pre-intervention data at the beginning of the intervention period, and the post-intervention data were provided one additional week after the conclusion of the intervention.

The EI supervisor was a main contact point between me and the EI teachers, and I took time to explain the process to her in great detail before the intervention was introduced to her staff and before any work was carried out. There was no issue with anonymity or confidentiality of centers due to the fact that the EI supervisor had all of the data and only shared numbers with me regarding the SAE frequencies. Even though coaching took place, I had no knowledge of which EC centers the EI teachers were visiting to provide the coaching.

In this study, my contact for data collection was an EI supervisor from a local education agency in a northeastern state. This particular agency has a group of 11 itinerant special education teachers who partnered with EC teachers in centers where they currently provide direct service for students with disabilities. The EI supervisor collected anonymous SAE data from the EC centers as part of regular information gathering, and this was shared with me for the purpose of the study.

Treatment and Intervention Fidelity

The intervention for this study was coaching by EI teachers to EC teachers. I shared directions for the coaching steps in two ways. First, I provided the steps in detail with the EI supervisor. She explained that the EI teachers were familiar with coaching, so the steps were familiar to her, and she thought that this would be the same for the EI teachers. I then shared the same steps via email with the EI teachers and the EI supervisor. The EI supervisor was prepared to forward any questions to me from the EI teachers. She received none to share. In a conversation with the EI supervisor after the directions and steps had been shared, I asked if there was any concern or confusion, and

she reported that all understood the steps and were going to carry them out. The intervention process began with the EC teachers in the centers.

During the time of the intervention, I checked in with the EI supervisor three times. I asked her specifically how things were going and if there were concerns or questions. She noted that one EC director noted that they did not want extra work of coaching, but she let them know that this was support, not extra work, and that the teacher was being guided by the EI teacher. The director did not add more concerns, and the EI supervisor noted that the coaching continued in that center.

Results

In this study, I examined the frequency of SAE of students with disabilities in EC centers. I employed a coaching intervention to determine if there would be an effect on the frequency of SAE. In order to examine the results, I utilized a *t*-test to determine if there would be a statistically significant change in the frequency of SAE for students with disabilities. In this section, I will share statistics to show the results of the study.

The EI supervisor provided data on SAE from 27 EC centers in her geographic area. An itinerant EI teacher provided service to a student with a disability in each center. I employed a *t*-test in two ways for the data I obtained. First, I examined the frequency as a combined unit of all suspensions and expulsions. A statistically significant difference was found before and after the coaching intervention. Next, although suspensions and expulsions have been noted as one unit in this paper, I examined the two separately for more specific results. I first examined data on suspensions and then data on expulsions. I wanted to determine if there was any

difference in the two, and if coaching had a more notable effect on either one. Using the *t*-test with 26 degrees of freedom and a 95% confidence interval, I found a statistically significant difference in frequency of suspensions before and after the coaching intervention. I also found a statistically significant difference in the frequency of expulsions; however, the difference was greater for suspensions than for expulsions.

In examining the results of the SAE frequency before and after the coaching intervention, I have shown in Table 1 that there is a statistically significant difference in the frequency of SAE (suspension and expulsion combined in one row) before and after the coaching intervention. This shows that the null hypothesis stating that there would be no significant difference can be rejected.

Table 1

SAE Frequency Pre- and Post-Coaching

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PreCoachingSAE – PostCoachingSAE	1.11111	1.33973	.25783	.58113	1.64109	4.309	26	.000

I also displayed the data results in a bar chart. When I note the results in this alternate fashion, the change in the frequency is shown before and after the coaching intervention. In Figure 1, I demonstrate on a bar chart the frequency of SAE before the coaching intervention as well as the frequency of SAE after the coaching intervention. In all cases, the frequency after coaching moved to zero; therefore, no Post Coaching SAE

bars (which would be shown in red if frequency was greater than zero) appear on the figure.

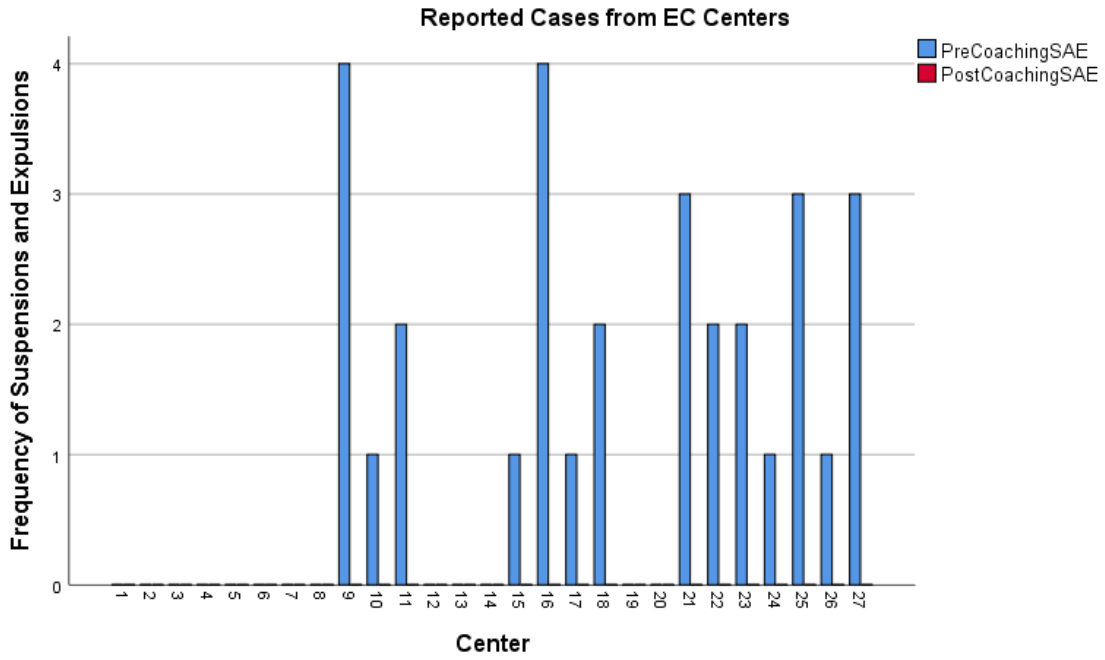

Figure 1. PostCoachingSAE bars are not visible due to the fact that all are zero.

To make a more specific analysis of the data, I also looked at each factor, suspensions and expulsions, before and after coaching. I utilized a *t*-test again, and in Table 2, I show that there is a statistically significant difference in suspensions and expulsions separately noted (suspensions in first row, expulsions in second row). For suspensions, there is no significant difference. The same holds true for expulsions, as a significant difference is noted here as well.

Table 2

Separated Frequencies of Suspensions and Expulsions Pre- and Post-Intervention

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	PreCoachSusp - PostCoachSusp	.96296	1.15962	.22317	.50423	1.42170	4.315	26	.000
Pair 2	PreCoachExp - PostCoachExp	.14815	.36201	.06967	.00494	.29136	2.126	26	.043

I also chose to display the results in a cluster bar chart. I determined that a cluster bar chart would show the frequency of suspensions in one case and the frequency of expulsions in the second case. In Figure 2, I am displaying the frequency of suspensions before the coaching intervention in comparison to the frequency after the coaching intervention. In Figure 3, I am displaying the same type of value, although Figure 3 shows the expulsion frequencies before and after coaching. In both cases, the post coaching data is zero in all cases; therefore, no Post Coach Susp bars (which would be shown in red if frequency was greater than zero) can be seen in the top figure and no Post Coach Exp bars (which would be shown in red if frequency was greater than zero) can be seen in the bottom figure. This demonstrates the difference before and after the coaching intervention.

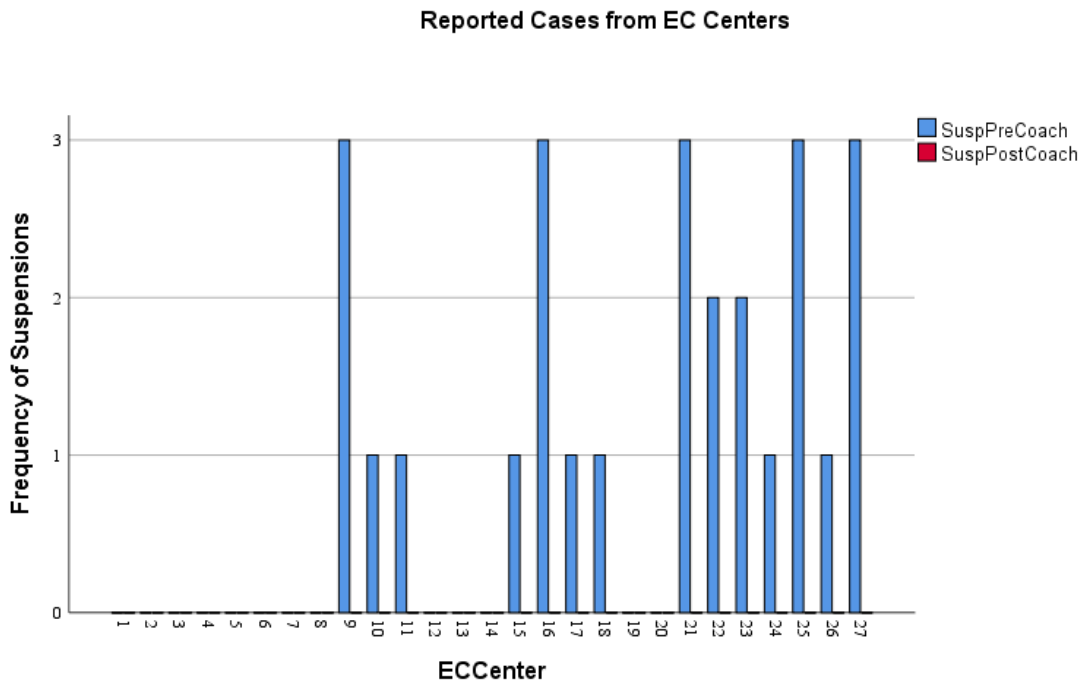

Figure 2. SuspPostCoach bars are not visible due to the fact that all are zero.

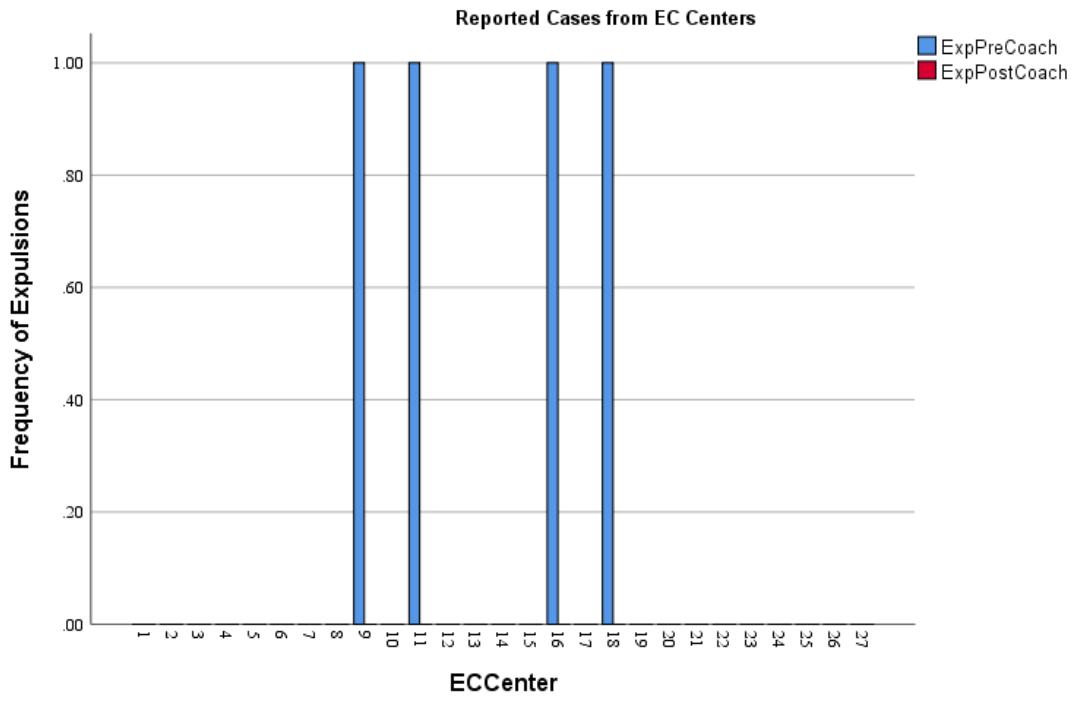

Figure 3. ExpPostCoach bars are not visible due to the fact that all are zero.

Summary

In this study on the effects of coaching on SAE of students with disabilities in EC centers, I proposed the following research question: What are the effects of a coaching intervention by early intervention teachers to early childhood teachers on the number of suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities? I have answered this question with significant results, and I am able to reject the null hypothesis proposed for the study. The coaching intervention provided by the EI teachers to the EC teachers showed a statistically significant difference in the SAE frequency. Thus, coaching is related to a reduction in both suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities in EC settings. In this chapter, I displayed the factual results of the study. In the next chapter, I will

discuss the implications of the findings. I will also note limitations, as well as direction for future work.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This study was intended to examine the effects of coaching on the rate of SAE of students with disabilities who attend EC centers. In this study, EI teachers paired with and presented a coaching intervention to EC teachers in order to change their approach and help them develop new strategies in working with students with disabilities in their classrooms. The goal was to determine if the rate of SAE would be lower after a coaching intervention was presented to EC teachers by EI teachers. The study was conducted using a quasi-experimental design and a pre- and post- test method. I utilized a *t*-test as the statistical test in order to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the SAE rate before and after the coaching intervention took place. In the study, I examined data from 27 EC centers. I used data that were collected from the local education agency on SAE in that area.

After the study was completed, I was able to reject the null hypothesis. I showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the SAE rate after the coaching intervention was completed. As a result of the study, it appears that coaching was related to a decrease in the rate of SAE of students with disabilities who attend EC centers.

Interpretation of the Findings

The results of this study helped to support several aspects of existing research on coaching and on SAE issues. In particular, the pairing of an EI and EC teacher to determine a change in the rate of SAE takes the current research one step farther. In this section, I will relate the current work on a coaching intervention and its relation to SAE

rates to existing literature. Also, I will note areas of extension of knowledge about the effects of coaching on SAE for students with disabilities in EC settings.

In this study, a change in SAE rates was observed at the end of the coaching intervention. This supports the work of Snyder et al. (2015), in which coaching brought about a measureable change in teaching behaviors. The coaching intervention in this study brought about a statistically significant change in the SAE rate in the EC settings. When I examined the data individually, there was a significant change in both suspensions and expulsions after the intervention was completed by the EI teachers using the coaching model. The results also supported the work of Jablon et al. (2016), in which coaching was shown to improve specific situations in classrooms. The rate of SAE across all centers decreased after the coaching intervention so that those that had SAE cases pre-intervention had none post-intervention.

In this study, I examined the rate of SAE before and after a coaching intervention was put into place between EI and EC teachers. I used a *t*-test to determine if coaching was related to a change in SAE rates. Throughout the study, the teachers worked together as partners during coaching in order to help students remain in the classroom setting. An EI teacher was chosen as the coach in the study rather than another EC teacher so that the strategies used in special education practice could be introduced and modeled for the EC teacher. Fenson and Steele (2012) noted that coaching focuses on assisting students as well as promoting relationship building. The teachers in the coaching pairs partnered together with one EI teacher and one EC teacher to share information about a student challenge, came up with possible solutions and strategies,

and then practiced these together to bring about a positive change for the student and situation. The relationship was built over the meetings that were part of the coaching process.

In 2016, the writers of the Preschool Development Grant Technical Assistance wrote that states benefitted from receiving coaching in a cross-systems approach. In this current study, the cross-systems used were EI and EC. These two systems commonly intersect in the state where the study took place, and EI teachers work to provide direct special education services to students with disabilities in EC centers. This study extended the work of the EI teachers to provide coaching to the EC teachers in addition to directly working with students. Both the United States Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (2016) and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (2016) note that consultation to EC teachers from EI teachers is a benefit to working with students with disabilities and that support from EI teachers to EC teachers aids in effective adaptations and modifications when teaching students with disabilities. The teacher pairs in this study worked together to focus on a problem situation and then develop appropriate and effective practices to help the students with disabilities remain in the EC classroom with their peers.

In a few cases, the results of this study supported existing research, but also extended those findings. First, Hart et al. (2016) worked with Head Start and EI teachers and found that the EI teacher supports helped to decrease both discipline referrals and expulsions from Head Start classrooms. This study extended the partnerships to EC, not specifically Head Start, but rather to community centers and focused on suspensions and

expulsions. Suspension and expulsion rates were observed to be lower post-intervention. Second, the federal government encouraged cross-systems practices to decrease SAE. The work in the current study narrowed the coaching intervention to define the cross-systems as EI and EC. The coaching by EI teachers to EC teachers appears to be related to the significant decrease in SAE in the EC centers that participated in this study.

In addition to supporting the current literature, this study took the coaching intervention one step farther in several ways. In existing literature, more than one set of researchers noted positive results from training and supports to teachers, but not specifically for reducing SAE for students with disabilities. Longstreth et al. (2013) reported that training and support helped teachers to carry out policies that have been put in place. Also, McGoey et al. (2013) noted that offering trainings to teachers in order to confront negative behaviors in their classrooms helped to reduce SAE rates in their classes. The results of this current study demonstrated that coaching as a specific and planned support helped EC teachers to suspend or expel students with disabilities from their classrooms in a less frequent rate.

Previous researchers examined coaching, but not specifically to aid in reduction of SAE for students with disabilities. Four groups of researchers noted the following benefits of coaching for educators. First, coaching provides ongoing teaching support so that teachers are more readily able to learn how to more effectively educate students who have a range of abilities in their classrooms (Akalin et al., 2014). Second, coaching is specific to student needs; provides not only independent activities for a teacher to learn and carry out in her classroom; and is a help to the teacher, all of which directly helps the

students (Vo et al., 2012). Third, coaching interventions are individualized for a teacher and help to decrease inappropriate student behaviors in school (Snell et al., 2014). Finally, when coaching is combined with a behavior program, it is more effective than a behavior program presented by itself (Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014). The current study extended the results on coaching determined by each of these earlier researchers by applying it to EC settings and focusing specifically on how it can bring about a change in the rate of SAE of students with disabilities.

Two groups of earlier researchers reported details on studies that helped to make positive changes in classrooms. In 2016, the United States Department of Health and Human Services shared updates from states on activities that promoted positive results based on policy recommendations. The activities included partnerships, cross-systems work, and increased teacher supports. McGoey et al. (2013) reported that mental health coaches helped to improve teacher ratings on the numbers of adverse behaviors in their classrooms. The work in the current study took these ideas and work systems a step farther by collecting pre- and post-rates on SAE rates with the introduction and use of a coaching intervention.

The current study extended the work of researchers who specifically reported on cross-systems approaches to dealing with behaviors. The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (2016) reported that consultation with EI teachers was a positive method in dealing with student behaviors. Also, the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (2016b) recommended coaching as a way to decrease SAE. The work in this study

focused on coaching from EI teachers to EC teachers not only to decrease undesirable student behaviors, but also to promote collaboration between these two groups to reduce SAE of students with disabilities in the EC classroom.

I chose to utilize CBC as the theoretical framework for my study. The CBC theory formed the basis for the coaching intervention used by the EI teachers with the EC teachers. The work in the current study encouraged partnership building between professionals in two systems that work to provide education for preschool students in order to change the rate of SAE for students with disabilities. This is the basis of the CBC model, as stated by Sheridan et al. (2005). The EI and EC teachers worked together in determining an issue regarding a student with a disability in the EC classroom and then partnered to create strategies that would be used to work on changing student behavior and helping to keep them from being suspended or expelled. The use of the CBC model for the work in the current study built on the fact that CBC addresses students' social emotional needs, especially in EC classroom settings (Sheridan et al., 2005), which were the site for the study work. In the current study, the EI coaches reviewed the student actions, developed an action plan as part of the coaching partnership, and then the EC teacher was able to use the strategy directly to help the student with a disability remain in the EC classroom.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this current study, including integrity of the SAE data reported, accurate reporting of the coaching steps, and teacher bias. First, I had to accept that the data that were reported by the EC directors both before and after the

coaching intervention were accurate. Several EC directors reported no SAE before intervention; however, there is no accurate way to determine if these pre-intervention numbers were factual. For post-intervention data, all numbers from the EC center directors moved to zero for both suspensions and expulsions. I was pleased to note that no EC center showed an increase in the number of SAE post-intervention. To aid in reporting accuracy, the EI supervisor chose to give the state definitions of suspension and expulsion to the EC directors. Due to the focus from the state governmental agency that funds and promotes EI and EC services on SAE rates, the fact that a center would report an SAE is not looked upon in a positive fashion. Because of this, the centers may refer to suspensions or expulsions by a different name, which still removes the student with a disability from the classroom, but due to the different name, may not be reported as a suspension or expulsion. The data regarding SAE rates for this study were obtained from the EI supervisor based on information that she gathers from the EC directors. An additional challenge in accurate SAE reporting is that a parent may unenroll her child from a center if there are challenging behaviors. For example, a center director may talk to the parent about an upcoming suspension or expulsion, and the parent may in turn choose to proactively remove her child from attendance at that center so the event does not take place. This would change the reporting of data on SAE from that center director; if the child leaves the center due to parent choice, the EC director would not note the un-enrollment as an occurrence of SAE. These limitations show that even though the data in the current study appear to show a relation between a decrease in SAE and coaching, there is also an issue with the actual reporting of SAE in EC settings.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for future studies are provided as a result of this current study. Because there was only a group of 27 EC centers involved in the study, it would be of benefit to complete additional studies on a larger scale. With a larger group, the researcher would be able to more confidently generalize the results. In addition, no data on the population density of the physical address of the EC center was requested or reported. Significant results were obtained, but noting the work with a broader group of EC teachers in a range of urban, suburban, and rural areas would ensure more certainty of results. It would be prudent to conduct a similar study with data from a greater number of EC centers and also noting the population density and community type where the EC centers were located. This may result in a different amount of change in urban versus rural or suburban locations.

Additionally, future work could replicate the coaching intervention, while recording details about the coaching meetings. In this current study, partnerships were created, and steps were provided for the coaches to follow. Because the focus of this current study was on the data regarding rate of SAE, no details were requested on the coaching meetings such as, but not limited to, quality of conversations, a record of the amount of input from each partner, or the length of time of each meeting. I did not request a record of any additional conversations that took place between the formal prescribed meetings. The future qualitative study would examine not only the impact of a coaching intervention on the difference in SAE rates, but also describing how it made a

difference for the teachers in the partnerships. This qualitative work would describe the results of the coaching rather than only examining SAE numbers.

A study that monitors the coaching intervention over a longer period of time and with a check of SAE rates after the coaching ended would show that coaching is a strategy that is long-lasting in its effectiveness. In this study, I set an 8-week coaching intervention period, and I only collected post-intervention data on SAE one time. Future work could replicate the coaching partnerships, collect post-intervention and then collect the same data several weeks or months later. The researcher should report if the coaching partnerships that were set during the study continued or if they ceased at the end of the determined coaching period. It would be of benefit to determine if the changes noted after the coaching intervention ended remained in place. The aim of the study would determine if coaching has continuing effects on EC teacher practice of not suspending or expelling with students with disabilities in her classroom.

Implications

This section will discuss overall implications of the study. The findings of this study provide information, with some limitations, to several areas, including those for preschools, families, and students. Also, there is an additional application to coaching and its use in schools as it pertains to the rate of SAE of students with disabilities in EC settings. Finally, I will make recommendations that result from the current study.

There are several levels of influence from the coaching intervention in the study. First, a clear influence is that numbers of SAE were reduced, even to zero, in the classrooms in which the coaching intervention took place. This is a positive result in

light of the growing concerns about SAE in general in preschools, and in this particular focus about SAE for students with disabilities in EC classrooms. When a student who has a disability is allowed to remain in his classroom, he learns with his peers, learning the same information from the teacher, and also learning from his peers. The student is able to participate in his regular early childhood curriculum, and he also can receive his special education supports in the LRE. Another influence from coaching is that the EC teachers are able to learn new strategies from their EI partners to help keep the student with disabilities from being suspended or expelled from his classroom. This is a non-disciplinary approach to the issue because the partners are working together rather than following directives given by a director. The partners define the problem and formulate solutions that will work in that particular classroom with the individual student. In examining the influence on families, when their child is not suspended or expelled, they can then continue their daily routine without having to interrupt their lives to meet with teachers, find a new center, or arrange for a different location for the child to receive special education services. The family also knows that their child is welcomed and included in a classroom along with his peers. Finally, an influence to the student himself is that the EC school experience is more positive, with the teacher working with him to help him learn in the classroom alongside his friends. As noted by other researchers, the student will most likely stay in school longer, have a better chance of graduating, and perform better in school overall (United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2016b).

Several researchers have shown that coaching is a positive intervention in school settings (Akalin, 2014; Conroy, Sutherland, Vo, Carr, & Ogston, 2014; Powell & Diamond, 2013; Snell et al., 2014; Stanton-Chapman et al., 2014; Vo et al., 2012; Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014). In the current study, I placed a specific focus on the coaching partnership and also set an outcome for the work being done. In this study, I was able to show that coaching, when used in a cross-systems approach with EI and EC, was related to decreased SAE rates in EC settings for students with disabilities. This is a partnership that is practical in its creation in EC settings in order to help students remain in their classrooms due to the fact that EI teachers already support students with disabilities in these settings.

These implications lead to more specific recommendations as a result of the study findings. Government departments in charge of funding for EC and EI should examine funding allocations for EI teachers to not only provide direct service to students but also to provide coaching to the EC teachers of the students they serve. The coaching process is one that is ongoing and is in addition to direct student service delivery in which the EI and EC teacher identify a concern, the EI teacher provides suggestions and strategies and then coaches the EC teacher as she practices the skills, and then a transition takes place to shift to independent use of the newly learned ideas in her classroom. The EC teacher can also use the strategies for any child in her classroom for whom she believes there would be a benefit. The coaching provides support in a timely and positive fashion in order to help the staff learn effective methods for working with students who have disabilities in their classrooms. With available coaches in place, more effective support can be given

two ways. First, more direct and intensive support can be provided at first report of a suspension or expulsion. Second, as the support produces more informed teachers, the work can move into more of a maintenance practice to provide less frequent checks and visits from the support provider. The specific recommendation would be to provide the presence of an EI teacher on a consistent basis for more frequent coaching visits to the EC center, and then as the teachers feel more confident with the strategies provided, the EI teacher would continue to coach, but on a less frequent and possibly less direct basis. An additional recommendation that also involves funding is for EC centers to be provided the means to hire trained EC teachers to work directly in the center. In this way, the coach is onsite, ready to help in any classroom with issues with students with disabilities that may arise. When the EC staff is familiar with their own peer, they have someone to go to at any time, not having to wait for the EI teacher to come for the next scheduled visit for student service delivery to meet with them. Providing support in the form of consistent and present coaching is a proactive way to help and support EC teachers as they work with all students.

Conclusion

In America today, too many preschool students with disabilities are being suspended and expelled from EC centers. Students with disabilities are suspended or expelled at a higher rate than students without disabilities (U. S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014b; U. S. Department of Education, 2014). When a student with a disability is allowed to remain in his classroom to learn alongside his peers, he benefits from learning from his teachers and also from his peers. She is able to make

friends and learn positive social skills. She is able to receive special education services in the LRE, which follows the guidelines of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2015). Finally, the student is able to have a more positive school and learning experience in all areas of development (OCDEL, 2016). In the bigger picture, reduced SAE rates for students with disabilities lead to greater outcomes for the students throughout school and later in life, which benefits society overall (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and U. S. Department of Education, 2015).

Early childhood teachers are the leaders of the EC classrooms in which students of all learning abilities attend. These are the adults who work with the students and also who make the recommendations to suspend or to expel from their classes. These are the individuals who need support and strategies as they carry out their daily work of education to help them to keep all students in their classrooms. Hemmeter et al. (2015) reported that when EC teachers had supports in place, they were less likely to expel students. Coaching is a positive and ongoing process that is based on relationship building, setting goals and issues as a team, and creating a plan together to deal with the identified issues (Fenson & Steele, 2012). The current study examined the rate of SAE of students with disabilities in EC centers after the EC teachers participating in a coaching process using a cross-systems approach between EC and EI. When two teachers worked together in completing the coaching process, a significant change was noted in SAE rates for students with disabilities. Although this study was completed with a small group of EC centers, there is promise that coaching can make a positive impact on SAE rates.

Coaching appears to be one practice that can promote change and aid in reducing the current high rates of SAE of students with disabilities. When students with disabilities are not suspended or expelled in high numbers, then families can be more confident that their child who has a disability will be part of the EC program.

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